ψ Psychology Press
Taylor & Francis Group

Are we as good as we think? Observers' perceptions of indirect self-presentation as a social influence tactic

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Three studies tested whether indirect self-presentation actually works as a social influence tactic in the eyes of other people—as prior research has shown that it works for the self—and, if so, whether it works to the same degree for others as it does for the self. Experiment 1 demonstrated that basking in reflected glory, an association with a positively viewed entity, did improve an audience's perceptions of the basker. Experiment 2 demonstrated that if the audience's view of the basking target changed, an identical basking strategy backfired and was perceived negatively by the audience. Experiment 3 further examined potential self–other differences in the effectiveness of indirect self-presentation using a purportedly shared birthday association while directly comparing an observer's views to self-views. The birthday association did change the observer's view but to a lesser degree than it changed the person's self-views, suggesting a self–other asymmetry.

Several decades of research have demonstrated that people can influence others by presenting a favorable impression of themselves, and social influence through the use of self-presentation tactics can be one particularly vital component to people's success in day-to-day interactions (for reviews see Cialdini, 1989; Pratkanis, in press; Schlenker, 1980; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). Successful self-presentation can increase a person's social power, help a person to attain social and material resources, and aid a

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person in gaining social approval (Baumeister, 1982; Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986; Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991). Whether a person spends several hours at the shopping mall trying to find "just the right dress" for an important job interview, or stands in front of the mirror rehearsing inspiring one-liners for an upcoming corporate Christmas party, there is a strong desire to present oneself favorably.

Our focus in this article is on social influence tactics (for a review see Pratkanis, in press) that are based on indirect self-presentation. Self-presentation can be generally described as being either *direct* or *indirect* (for a review see Cialdini, 1989). With direct self-presentation, people highlight aspects of their own experiences in order to look good (Jones & Pittman, 1982); for example, a person might describe his or her own personal accomplishments ("Did I mention that I have a Ph.D. in physics?"). With indirect self-presentation, people highlight mere connections with others in order to look good (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980); for example, a person might describe the accomplishments of those with whom he or she is only associated ("Did I mention that I grew up in the same hometown as Albert Einstein?"). In the latter case, social influence results from the connections made as the person attempts to conform, adopt attitudes, or engage in behaviors that are similar to the desired associate (Pratkanis, in press).

We had three main objectives in this research. First, across three experiments we tested whether indirect self-presentation is actually effective in influencing other people's perceptions of the person using the tactics—in short, we put the *social* into this type of influence by looking at the observer's perspective (Experiments 1–3). Although it may have been tacitly assumed that indirect tactics do influence observers, for reasons that we describe, existing research does not allow one to draw strong conclusions about this possibility. Second, taking advantage of real-life changes in target impressions, we test the degree to which observers' perceptions are modified by target valence (Experiment 2)—the same target can have diverging influences on self-presentation depending on the situational context. Third, we explore the possibility of self–other differences in indirect self-presentation (Experiment 3). That is, based on other research examining potential self–other asymmetries, even if indirect self-presentation influences other people's impressions, it might not be of the same magnitude as for self-impressions.

INDIRECT SELF-PRESENTATION AS SOCIAL INFLUENCE: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The major objective of self-presentation is to be viewed favorably (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1980). On a public level, self-presentation shapes other people's impressions of us. On a private level,

self-presentation also shapes our impressions of ourselves. Through self-perception (Bem, 1972) and related processes, we may serve as our own audience (Roth, Snyder, & Pace, 1986; Schlenker, 1980). Whatever the case, self-presentation can only be effective if it influences the perceptions of a public or private audience.

Theoretical and practical issues

The first goal of our research was to test whether indirect self-presentation tactics actually work to influence *other people's impressions* of the person using them; in other words, do they work as well as we think? Prior research has focused only on whether people use indirect tactics and/or on determining the implications of using these tactics for self-impressions. There may have been a tacit assumption that indirect tactics have parallel influences on other people as for the self; for example, it has been suggested that we bask to "prove our own superiority … [to] ourselves, but to everyone else, too" (Cialdini, 2001, p. 170). However, the idea that basking (and other indirect tactics) actually influences other people has in fact not yet been directly tested, and we describe several common paradigms that illustrate this point.

Whether indirect self-presentation tactics influence other people's impressions is also theoretically important given the large literature on social influence (for a review see Pratkanis, in press). In fact, taking an observer's perceptions into account when assessing the effectiveness of indirect self-presentation tactics explicitly puts the *social* into this type of influence. Although sometimes people may simply want to feel good about themselves, perhaps in most cases, high self-regard occurs only when we are also viewed positively by other people (for reviews see Crocker & Knight, 2005; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Schlenker, 1980). For example, actually being viewed favorably and succeeding at a desired job interview or being seen as the "life of the party" can depend less on what you think of yourself than on what other people think of you. The question of whether indirect self-presentation tactics actually influence other people's impressions—that is, have a social influence—is thus a critical theoretical and practical question.

Methodological issues

Given the strong connections between social influence and self-presentation along with the numerous methodologies used to examine indirect self-presentation tactics (for further review of these techniques, see Cialdini, 1989), it is somewhat surprising that the diverse paradigms share a common feature: None of the paradigms actually measures the effectiveness of these tactics in the eyes of other people. To illustrate this, we focus on two of the most highly researched indirect self-presentation tactics, basking in reflected glory and

cutting off reflected failure (for reviews, see Cialdini, 1989; Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976; Lee, 1985; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986), but we also use examples of other indirect tactics because the same analysis holds true for these as well.

Phone-call surveys. In the phone call survey paradigm, a researcher typically calls students to ask them questions about campus life (Cialdini et al., 1976; Lee, 1985). After providing bogus failure or success feedback, the researcher lets participants answer a final question about a recent sporting event in which their university was victorious. The researchers measure the frequency of students using first-person pronouns (''we'') to describe the game outcome. People bask more by using first-person pronouns after failure than success. However, the actual effectiveness of this strategy on other people was never assessed (in fact, in these studies, the ''other people'' are the researchers).

Sidewalk surveys. A variation on phone call surveys are sidewalk surveys (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Students are stopped around campus and are asked to take a test of creativity. They are then given a chance to derogate a rival university. Students who failed at the creativity test ''blasted'' the rival university, but those who succeeded actually rated the rival as having better characteristics than their own. As with phone call surveys, this paradigm focuses on people's self-views after engaging in the tactics. It does not assess the effectiveness of indirect self-presentation tactics on an audience.

Group association. The group association paradigm (Snyder et al., 1986; Wann, Hamlet, Wilson, & Hodges, 1995) is often used to study cutting off reflected failure. Participants were randomly assigned to groups and were given success or failure feedback. The participants were then given a chance to take and wear a badge indicating team membership. Participants wore the badges less often when they thought they would be judged by observers after failures than successes. However, observers were never asked to actually rate their impressions of the participants.

Loyalty. The loyalty paradigm measures people's affiliations with specific teams, brands, or countries. Bristow and Sebastian (2001) did this by quantifying people's connectedness to the Chicago Cubs. However, there was no measure of what others thought of these fans. Kowolski (1991) similarly explained increased patriotism after a U.S. victory in the Persian Gulf War as a form of basking. The number of patriotic signs in people's yards was measured. Although this extends basking beyond the sports context, again the impressions of others were not assessed.

Apparel wearing. The apparel-wearing paradigm used observers in psychology classes following football games who recorded the number of students: (a) in class; (b) wearing apparel identifying school of attendance; and (c) wearing apparel identifying a school other than school of attendance (Cialdini et al., 1976). Students were significantly more likely to wear apparel identifying school of attendance following football victories than defeats. Although this study used observers, they were merely experimental assistants who simply coded the frequency with which students wore apparel. No direct assessments were made concerning the observers' reactions to the students who wore the apparel.

Physiological. Bernhardt, Dabbs, Fielden, and Lutter (1998) developed a physiological paradigm by measuring testosterone levels in male fans watching their favorite teams win or lose. Testosterone levels increased after a fan's team won and decreased after a fan's team lost, demonstrating a physiological component of the attachment to the team. However, this research was, by its nature, focused on a basker's hormonal responses and not audience perceptions.

Birthday associations. A final paradigm uses purported birthday associations (Finch & Cialdini, 1989). Participants were told they shared a birthday with a famous (or notorious) person, a trivial associative connection (Brewer, 1979). Finch and Cialdini's participants read a brief biographical sheet emphasizing Rasputin's negative traits. Those who thought they shared a birthday with Rasputin rated him more positively ("boosted" him) than those who did not receive the birthday information. This research demonstrates that people are often influenced by seemingly trivial connections but, like the other paradigms, it did not test whether a birthday connection influenced an audience's perceptions.

DO INDIRECT TACTICS SOCIAL- AND SELF-INFLUENCE TO THE SAME DEGREE? A POTENTIAL SELF–OTHER ASYMMETRY

As our review illustrates, whether indirect self-presentation tactics actually influence the impressions of observers is of theoretical and practical significance, and existing methodologies have not yet directly examined this issue. Our research fills that gap. By so doing, we extend the literature on indirect self-presentation tactics into the realm of *social* influence. The second goal of our research moves beyond this. Testing whether indirect self-presentation tactics influence observers allows us to further ascertain whether the effects of these tactics on observer- versus self-impressions are

of the same magnitude. That is, are the tactics equally effective in influencing impressions of others as they seem to be in influencing self-impressions?

General self–other asymmetries

Several lines of research from other areas suggest that indirect self-presentation tactics may not have the same social influence as self-influence. Self- versus other-impressions have been shown to differ across many domains including attributions, person perception, intergroup perception, and a variety of other judgment and decision-making biases (for a review see Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004). For example, in perhaps one of the most well-known attributional biases, a large literature indicates that actors and observers often come to different causal conclusions about the actor's actions or intentions, leading to a difference in the actor's self-ratings in comparison with how the actor was rated by an observer (Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977).

As we described, researchers have yet to examine possible self–other differences in indirect self-presentation, in large part because they have not to this point measured actual impressions of others. However, if indirect self-presentation does influence the impressions of others, it is also critical to know whether the effect is in a similar direction and/or of the same magnitude as prior research has found for self-impressions. Prior research on self-presentation has only alluded to possible self–other differences, and this has been done mainly for direct tactics. One example is modesty (Baumeister, 1998; Jones & Pittman, 1982). Schütz (1997) found that modesty works when one's achievements are known; otherwise, because it involves lowering self-descriptions, modesty can backfire to an audience and decrease one's prestige (Cialdini & DeNicholas, 1989). Self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Collins & Miller, 1994) similarly works only in proportion to how well one knows his or her audience, otherwise it can make one seem needy or cold (Chaiken & Derlega, 1974). Further, people have to know when to limit publicly trumpeting their personal achievements, otherwise they will be labeled braggarts by others (Godfrey et al., 1986).

Spotlight effect

Research on the spotlight effect (Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999) also suggests that there may be self–other differences in indirect self-presentation; people tend to exaggerate the extent to which other people notice their actions and behaviors. For example, participants overestimated how much people noticed their participation in group discussions, clothing, personal appearances, and a variety of other things (Gilovich, Kruger, & Medvec,

2002; Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000).[1] Further, when people experience a social blunder, they overestimate the negative consequences that the event has on their image; people expect to be judged more harshly than they actually are by observers (Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001). We hypothesize that the effectiveness of indirect self-presentation tactics may be subject to similar underlying processes as the spotlight effect and related egocentric biases (Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999).

When people attempt to take the perspective of another, they often use themselves as an ''anchor'' from which they base their judgment (Epley & Gilovich, 2001, 2004; Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004). However, people do not seem to be able to sufficiently adjust from their own perspective when trying to take the perspective of an observer. Because of insufficient adjustment (Epley & Gilovich, 2001, 2004), people come to believe that others will judge them more positively than they actually do in the case of success and more negatively than they actually do in the case of failure (Savitsky et al., 2001; Van Boven, White, Kamada, & Gilovich, 2003). We suggest that using indirect self-presentation tactics may involve similar underlying processes: People may overestimate the extent to which indirect self-presentation is effective while it influences observers to a lesser degree, suggestive of a self–other asymmetry. In short, even if indirect tactics do influence the impressions of others, these impressions might not be of the same magnitude as effects on the self.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

In sum, our research had two main goals. First, we measured the effectiveness of indirect self-presentation in influencing other people's impressions (Experiment 1); we also demonstrated that when the audience's view of the basking target changes due to the situational context, so will the observer's impressions (Experiment 2). Second, in addition to simply measuring an observer's perspective, we explored possible self–other differences in indirect self-presentation (Experiment 3)—on the basis of other research examining self–other asymmetries, we predicted that the effectiveness of indirect self-presentation tactics may differ in magnitude in their social- versus self-influence.

Experiments 1 and 2 used a sporting event. In Experiment 1, participants were shown a video clip of another person failing or succeeding on an intelligence test. The test-taker then either did or did not bask in the reflected glory of a championship sports team, the Super Bowl champion New England Patriots. Experiment 2 employed an identical method, but this

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[1] Although this research has assessed the extent to which other people notice clothing, it has not assessed the impressions of the person wearing them by observers.

time (2 years later) the championship sports team had negative connotations for our participants—the New England Patriots had beaten the local Carolina Panthers team in a subsequent Super Bowl. Experiments 1 and 2 established whether indirect self-presentation tactics influence observer impressions, and Experiment 2 established that these impressions are further qualified by the particular situational context.

Experiment 3 extended the idea of the effectiveness of indirect self-presentation on observers to potential self–other differences. We used a paradigm in which participants were led to believe that they shared a birthday with someone either positively or negatively viewed. Sharing a birthday creates a strong unit relationship (Heider, 1958). People cooperate more on a prisoner's dilemma when they share birthdays (Miller, Downs, & Prentice, 1998), comply more often (Burger, Messian, Patel, del Prado, & Anderson, 2004), and boost opinions of negative others (Finch & Cialdini, 1989). We predicted that manipulated shared-birthday connections to a positive (Mother Teresa) or negative (Osama Bin Laden) person would be overestimated by actors. In short, consistent findings across all three studies using multiple contexts, manipulations, and measures would provide strong support for our hypotheses.

EXPERIMENT 1: IN GOOD COMPANY

Experiment 1 was conducted as an initial test of whether basking in reflected glory actually influences observer impressions. We led our participants to believe they would be rating first impressions. Participants were shown a videotape of what appeared to be another participant (a test-taker) in an intelligence-testing experiment. Participants watched as the test-taker either failed or succeeded. After this, the test-taker either did or did not bask in the reflected glory of the New England Patriots' Super Bowl victory. Participants rated the test-taker on several dimensions. We hypothesized that, after observing a failure, participants who watched the test-taker bask would rate him more highly than those who did not watch him bask. We did not expect to see an effect of basking after success because prior research indicates that people use basking and other indirect self-presentation tactics only after failure or in situations where their self-views are threatened (Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Finch & Cialdini, 1989; Lee, 1985; Snyder et al., 1986).

Method

Participants. A total of 96 (59 females, 37 males) introductory psychology students participated in the experiment in exchange for course credit.

Procedure. Participants were tested individually and were told that the experimenter would show them videotaped portions of an actual experiment. Participants were asked to rate their first impressions of the person portrayed in the video.

The videotaped scenes differed only with regard to two independent variables (success vs. failure and basking vs. control). Other than these two variables, the videos were identical. Participants watched the depicted scenes, which they were told came from two separate sessions of the experiment.

The first scene (acted by two confederates) depicted a male student taking a form of intelligence test. This test was supposedly the last in a battery of psychological tests that the test-taker had taken that day. In the video, after administering the test in paper-and-pencil format, the test-giver excused the test-taker. The test-taker was asked to come back next week to receive the results of all the tests taken that day, and the test-taker left the experimental room after being thanked for participating.

The second scene in the video was purported to be a clip of feedback that occurred the following week; this concerned only the portion of the intelligence test that the participants viewed previously. In the video, the test-taker had returned to the experimental room to receive the test results. The video clip showed the test-taker receiving the feedback for the intelligence test. It was at this point that the first of the two independent variables was manipulated. Depending on condition, the test-taker was given success or failure feedback by the test-giver as follows (feedback was determined by pilot-testing).

- In the *failure* condition, the test-taker was told, "You scored 2 out of 10 correct on the intelligence test. The average score is 5 out of 10; therefore you scored below average."
- In the *success* condition, the test-taker was told, "You scored 8 out of 10 correct on the intelligence test. The average score is 5 out of 10; therefore you scored above average."

After receiving feedback, the test-taker was then told that the session was over for the day. As the test-giver handed the test-taker the written debriefing, the second independent variable was manipulated. The test-giver glanced at the test-taker's shirt and remarked, "What's that design on your shirt?"

- In the *control* condition, the test-taker, who was wearing an abstractly patterned shirt without any particular meaning, stated that it was simply an "abstract design."
- In the *basking* condition, the test-taker was wearing a shirt with the logo of the New England Patriots. The test-taker said it was a Patriots' shirt

and then exclaimed to the test-giver that "we won the Super Bowl." Experiment 1 was conducted during February 2002, a month after the New England Patriots won Super Bowl XXXVI by defeating the St. Louis Rams by a score of 20 to 17. This manipulation of basking is consistent with the idea of pointing out an association with successful others (Patriots in this case) and with using a personal pronoun ("we") when describing that other's success (see Cialdini et al., 1976).

Participants were then asked to rate how much they thought the test-taker exhibited each of six interpersonal traits (*friendly*, *outgoing*, *personable*, *warm*, *likeable*, *pleasant*). They responded on 7-point scales, with anchors at 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). These traits were adapted from prior research (Cialdini et al., 1976; Finch & Cialdini, 1989).

Results and discussion

We predicted that, after watching a failure, our observer participants' ratings of the test-taker would be more positive after he basked in the reflected glory of a New England Patriots' victory. To test this prediction, we analyzed participants' ratings of the test-taker in a 2 (performance: success vs. failure) $\times$ 2 (self-presentation: basking vs. control) analysis of variance (ANOVA), using the average of the six interpersonal traits as the dependent measure ($\alpha = .92$). This analysis revealed the predicted interaction, $F(1, 92) = 4.28$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$. As can be seen in Figure 1, after observing failure, participants liked the test-taker better after he basked ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.80$) than when he did not ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.06$), $t(46) = 2.42$, $p < .05$, $d = .69$. In contrast, after observing success, there were no differences between the basking and control condition, $t < 1$.

In short, these results provide important initial evidence that observers do take notice of indirect self-presentation attempts, and that these affect observers in much the same way as they affect the self. Participants in our experiment rated the videotaped test-taker more positively on interpersonal traits after failure when he basked with a successful football team than when he did not. No influences of basking were observed after success. These findings parallel that of past research indicating that basking changes people's self-views and that this occurs primarily in cases after these self-views are threatened (i.e., after failure; see Cialdini et al., 1976).

EXPERIMENT 2: FROM "WINNER" TO "WEINER"

Experiment 1 importantly provided direct empirical evidence for the idea that observers are influenced by indirect self-presentation tactics. However, exactly how observers might be influenced should be further modified by
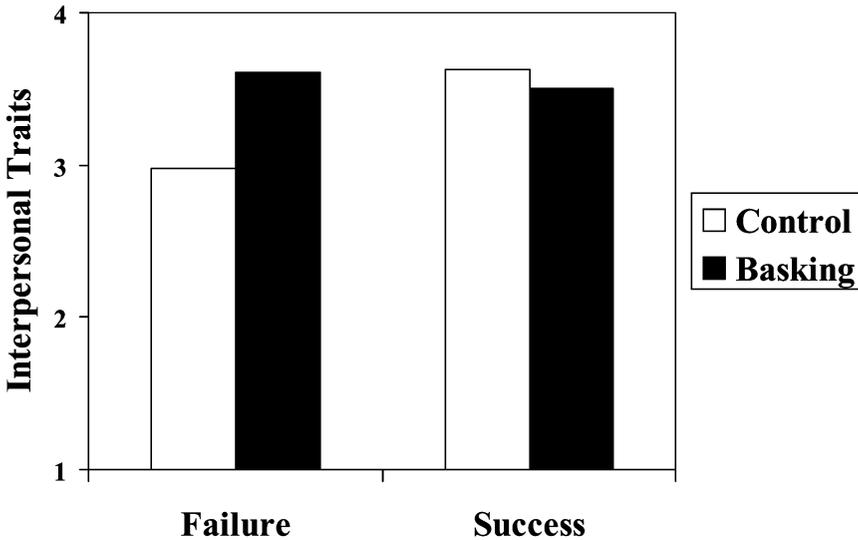
Figure 1. Observer ratings of the test-taker on interpersonal traits as a function of failure or success, and whether or not he basked in reflected glory. Scores range from 1 to 7.

their personal self-views. In these cases, there may be a discrepancy between the basker and the observer where attempts at basking may backfire. That is, the basker may turn out not to be as good as he or she thinks.

Initial basking studies suggested that indirect self-presentation may work differentially on actors and observers. That is, the effects of basking may depend on whether audiences shared the same affiliation as the basker (Cialdini et al., 1976). This suggests that the audience's views are important. However, as we described, observer views of the basker were not assessed in this prior research.

Experiment 2 tests this idea by taking advantage of a fortuitous (from our research perspective) situation. Two years after Experiment 1 was conducted (February 2004), the New England Patriots again participated in the Super Bowl. However, this time their opponent was the Carolina Panthers, the NFL team representing the states of North and South Carolina. Indeed, it seemed that the whole state of North Carolina had captured a case of "Cat Scratch Fever" (a term used by local newspapers and other media at the time). But in the end, residents of North Carolina watched in agony as Adam Viniteri of the Patriots kicked the game-winning field goal with only four seconds left. The Patriots had beaten "our" beloved Panthers.

Following Carolina's defeat, we showed the exact same videotape from Experiment 1, only this time the audience's sentiment (our participants) had changed. No longer were the Patriots America's beloved underdogs, but

rather this time they had conquered our hometown heroes. We now predicted that our observer participants would like the basker *less*, and that this may be further modified as the observer's fanship for the Carolina Panthers increased. Thus, basking from the perspective of the test-taker in the video would now backfire in the eyes of our observers. A finding such as this would not only provide additional evidence supporting the influence of basking on observers, but also provide evidence for an important distinction that the observer's personal self-views qualify this influence.

Method

Participants. A total of 105 (64 women, 41 men) introductory psychology students completed this experiment in exchange for course credit.

Procedure. Experiment 2 was conducted during February 2004, the month following the Patriots' Super Bowl XXXVIII victory over the Carolina Panthers by a score of 32 to 29. For the most part, the procedure for Experiment 2 was identical to Experiment 1, except for the following. First, although the Patriots were again victorious, this time they defeated the local favorites, the Carolina Panthers. Thus, while we used the exact same videotape as in Experiment 1, the views of our observer participants were now different. That is, among Panthers fans, the Patriots would not be viewed so positively as winners any longer. Instead, we predicted the Patriots should be viewed negatively. In other words, the meaning of basking in the video should have changed completely from Experiment 1 to 2, even though the video itself was identical.

Second, we focused only on reactions after failures, because consistent with prior research (for a review see Cialdini, 1989) and our Experiment 1, basking did not influence ratings after success.

Third, we included a pre-test measure of liking for the hometown team. Participants rated how much they were fans of the Carolina Panthers using an 11-point scale (0 = *not at all*; 10 = *very much*).

Results and discussion

Basking should work after failure in the eyes of observers, but only to the extent that the observers also feel positively about the basking target. To test this, observers' averaged interpersonal trait ratings ($\alpha = .91$) were regressed onto self-presentation condition (basking, control), self-ratings of fanship for the Panthers, and their interaction.

The analysis revealed the predicted interaction, $\beta = -.28$, $t(101) = -3.39$, $p < .001$. To examine the interaction further, following procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991), we plotted the equation at its

mean, as well as one *SD* above and one *SD* below the mean for Panther fanship (see Figure 2). When observers were low in fanship for the Panthers, and the test-taker basked with the Patriots after failure, the test-taker was liked more: the simple slope was significantly different from zero ($t = 2.24$, $p < .05$). This finding is consistent with Experiment 1. However, when observers were high in fanship for the Panthers, and the test-taker basked with the Patriots after failure, the test-taker was liked *less*: the simple slope is significantly different from zero ($t = -2.65$, $p < .01$). This finding is consistent with our predictions and suggests that attempts at basking can backfire if one does not carefully consider the views of one's audience. There were no differences between basking and controls for participants with an average fanship for the Panthers ($t = -.29$, *ns*).

In short, these results suggest that basking influences observer judgments, but also that it depends on who those observers are. For strong Panther fans, attempts at basking backfired. Although we again demonstrated that observer impressions are influenced by basking attempts, Experiment 2 thus demonstrates an important qualification. Comparing Experiments 1 and 2, what was once "good" was now "bad" in the eyes of some of our observers (those with high fanship). Basking worked effectively only when the audience did not have strong negative views of the target (weak fanship for
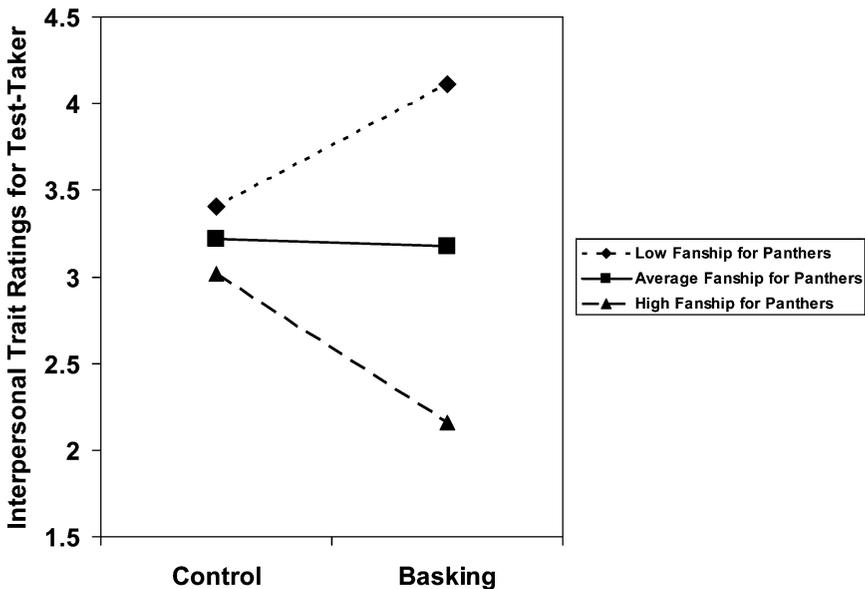

Figure 2. Observer ratings of the test-taker on interpersonal traits as a function of whether or not he basked in reflected glory, and fanship for the Carolina Panthers. Scores range from 1–7.

Panthers), and it did not have any effect for average fans of the Panthers. Thus, it pays to know your audience.

EXPERIMENT 3: IT'S MY BIRTHDAY TOO!

Experiments 1 and 2 importantly demonstrated effects of basking on observers, and also the importance of the observer's views in qualifying these influences. This latter experiment, in particular, suggests a possible self–other asymmetry in indirect self-presentation. As we described previously, several other lines of research are also suggestive of potential self–other asymmetries (for a review see Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999; Pronin et al., 2004), including self–other differences in general and the spotlight effect in particular. In Experiment 3, we tested this idea directly by measuring self and observer ratings within the same experiment. We also sought to provide generality to our research. To do this, we used a birthday association (Finch & Cialdini, 1989) in which actors and observers learned of the actor's purported shared connection with someone positive or negative. The design of Experiment 3 was a 3 (association: good, bad, control) $\times$ 2 (perspective: self, observer) $\times$ 2 (performance: success, failure) factorial.

We predicted that actors would overestimate the impact of sharing a birthday with a famous (or infamous) target person. Specifically, when sharing a birthday with a positively viewed target, Mother Teresa, we predicted that the actor would overestimate the positive effects of this connection in comparison to observer ratings of the actor. In contrast, when sharing a birthday with a negatively viewed person, Osama Bin Laden, the actor would overestimate the negative effects of that connection in comparison to observer ratings of the actor.

Method

Participants. A total of 174 (112 females, 62 males) introductory psychology students completed the experiment in exchange for course credit.

Procedure. Participants arrived at the laboratory and were randomly placed into pairs with the restriction that they did not know their partner prior to the experiment.[2] Each member of the pair was then assigned to a separate lab room to fill out a short demographic questionnaire that asked for the participant's date of birth, college year, and hobbies.

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[2] Some pairs were of mixed sex. However, supplementary analysis indicated that there were no gender differences or differences by pair composition.

Participants were instructed that the experiment consisted of two parts. The first part of the experiment was brief 10-item measure that was purported to measure participants' knowledge of interpersonal situations. In actuality, the questions were from a test bank of an introductory social psychology textbook's interpersonal processes chapter. Pilot testing indicated that this test was challenging, but also somewhat nebulous with regard to participants' knowledge of their own performance. The test was administered via computer. Participants answered the computerized test in separate rooms. After taking the test, one participant (randomly assigned to the *observer* role) saw a screen displaying an error message. The observer was told that the computer had stopped working, but that this was no problem since she could skip this portion of the experiment and wait for her partner to finish. After taking the test, the participant who was randomly assigned to the *actor* role received bogus feedback on the interpersonal knowledge test (validated by pilot-testing) via computer.

- In the *success* condition, actors read that they had answered 8 out of 10 items correctly and this was an above-average performance. There was also a graphical depiction with their score plotted against a normal curve, with 5 as the average performance.
- In the *failure* condition, actors read that they had answered 2 out of 10 items correctly and this was a below-average performance. As in the success condition, there was a graphical depiction with their score plotted against a normal curve, with 5 as the average performance.

After this, observer and actor participants were asked to come to a common area in the experimental suite. The experimenter asked the actors for their scores on the test so that he could record the scores, claiming to have had a problem with his computer as well. The information was conveyed in this manner so that the observer could overhear the actor's score to publicly establish the actor's "failure" or "success" in front of the observer.

Next, the experimenter stated that the second part of the experiment dealt with first impressions and the dynamics of conversation. The experimenter told each pair that they would be assigned a random topic about which to converse for 5 minutes. One member of each pair (always the observer) was then asked to pick a "random" topic from a box full of folded slips of paper, containing topics for discussion. The drawing was rigged so that participants drew the topic of either Mother Teresa (a highly positive person) or Osama bin Laden (a highly negative person). Pilot testing on an independent sample ($n = 59$) indicated that Mother Teresa was rated very positively ($M = 9.33$) compared with Osama bin Laden ($M = 1.17$) on

an 11-point scale anchored by 10 (*extremely positively*) and 0 (*extremely negatively*), $t(57) = 37.04$, $p < .001$, $d = 9.65$.

The experimenter informed participants that they would each receive a short biographical sheet about their topic person (Mother Teresa or Osama bin Laden), the short demographics sheet that their partner filled out at the beginning of the experimental session, and a packet of questions concerning the conversation. These demographics sheets were in fact identical, with the exception of the birthday information. In *connection* conditions, on sheets about the actor (given to the observer), the actor's birthday matched the topic person's. In *no-connection* conditions, the actor's birthday was not the same as the topic person's. Manipulating the topic person's birthday to match the actor's established a trivial, indirect connection between the actor and topic person. This technique is consistent with prior research forcing an indirect connection between target and actor (Finch & Cialdini, 1989). The actor's birthday was obtained from the demographics questionnaire that the participants filled out at the beginning of the experiment.

The participants then went to separate rooms again to rate their partner. Questionnaires contained the same trait measures as in Experiments 1 and 2, except that each participant filled out one set of trait ratings for how favorable their partner seemed and another one rating how favorable they thought they appeared to their partner. The other difference was that participants responded on 21-point scales, with anchors at -10 (*not at all*), 0 (*neutral*), and 10 (*very much*). As a manipulation check, the last page of the questionnaire asked participants if they recalled the birthdays of the actor and the target person. Participants were also asked if they noticed this connection when they first saw the information.

Although participants thought they would converse and then fill out the questionnaires after the conversation was over, there was in fact no conversation. Once participants finished the questionnaires, they were debriefed and dismissed.

Results and discussion

First, we wanted to provide a conceptual replication of Experiments 1 and 2. Second, we wanted to assess possible self–other differences in the effectiveness of indirect self-presentation, in this case using a birthday association.

Birthday manipulation check. In the birthday connection conditions, 98% of the actors noticed that they shared a birthday with the famous person, while 96% of the observers noticed the connection. There was no significant difference between actors and observers with respect to noticing the birthday connection, $t(100) = 0.58$, *ns*. Thus, our manipulation worked in the intended manner.

Interpersonal trait ratings. The data from Experiment 3 can be viewed in at least two ways. First, before we report the analysis on the complete design, we report the analysis for others' impressions, because this part conceptually replicates Experiments 1 and 2. We conducted a 2 (performance: success, failure) × 3 (target: positive, negative, no connection) ANOVA on just the observer data with contrasts to compare means (Rosenthal, Rosnow, & Rubin, 2000), using the average of the six interpersonal trait ratings for the observer ($\alpha = .91$). There was a predicted interaction, $F(2, 81) = 3.33, p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Replicating Experiment 1, after failure, observers rated actors associated with Mother Teresa (positive target) higher ($M = 4.50, SD = 2.06$) than those in the no-connection control group ($M = 3.13, SD = 1.37$), $t(81) = 3.31, p < .01, \eta^2 = .14$. Replicating Experiment 2, after failure, observers rated actors associated with Osama bin Laden (negative target) ($M = 2.06, SD = 3.26$) lower than those in the no-connection control group ($M = 3.13, SD = 1.37$), $t(81) = 2.05, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$. Also as expected, given Experiment 1 and prior research indicating that indirect self-presentation tactics do not influence impressions after success (for a review see Cialdini, 1989), there were no differences in the effects of birthday associations for observer impressions after successes.

This is consistent with the analysis of the complete design which, second, examines the possibility of self–other differences. That is, we conducted a 2 (role: actor, observer) × 2 (performance: success, failure) × 3 (target: positive, negative, no connection) ANOVA with contrasts used to compare means, including the average of the six interpersonal trait ratings for the actor ($\alpha = .87$). In no case, did either the actors' (or observers' as described above) trait ratings differ by birthday connection after success, resulting in the fact that the triple interaction was not significant. However, consistent with predictions derived from self–other asymmetries and the spotlight effect, the picture was much different after failure. As can be seen in Figure 3, there was a significant two-way interaction within the failure condition, $F(2, 80) = 8.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$. As predicted, after failure, actors associated with Mother Teresa rated themselves ($M = 6.46, SD = 1.40$) more positively than did observers ($M = 4.50, SD = 2.06$), $t(80) = 5.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$. The opposite pattern emerged for actors affiliated with Osama bin Laden: Actors felt the negative affiliation was more detrimental ($M = -1.02, SD = 3.26$) than did observers ($M = 2.06, SD = 3.26$), $t(80) = 13.71, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$.

In short, Experiment 3 goes beyond simply examining whether indirect self-presentation tactics are effective in influencing observers by also providing evidence for a self–other difference. Actor and observer ratings, although in the same direction, were asymmetrical, with actors "blowing out of proportion" the assumed impact of connections to both negative (Osama bin Laden) and positive (Mother Teresa) targets. This provides intriguing implications for the use of indirect self-presentation. In particular, it
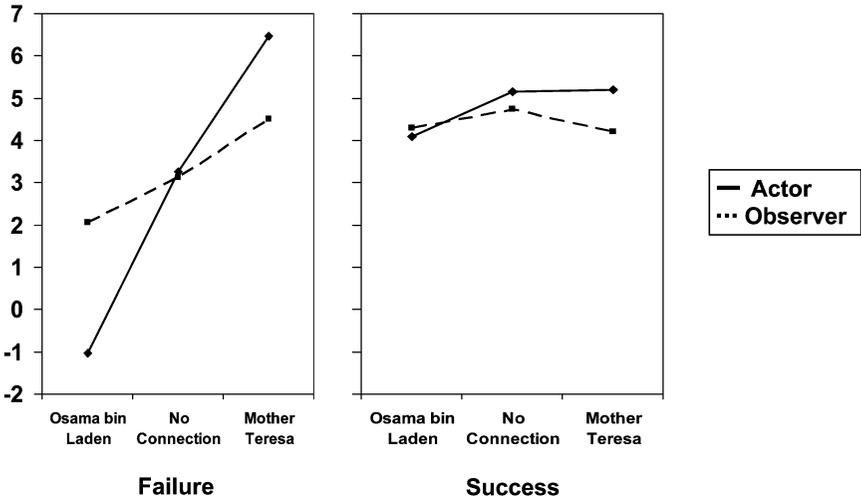
Figure 3. Actor and observer ratings of the actor on interpersonal traits as a function of birthday connection with target and success or failure. Scores range from -10 to $+10$.

suggests that users of such tactics must know their audience and also understand potentially differing observer reactions: When using the tactics, we must keep in mind we may be neither as good or as bad as we think.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our three experiments provided converging evidence for the effectiveness of indirect self-presentation in influencing other people's impressions (Experiments 1–3), and for self–other differences (Experiment 3). Experiments 1 and 2 demonstrated that indirect self-presentation, specifically basking in reflected glory, is effective in the eyes of observers, and that this is qualified by the observer's views of the basking target. In Experiment 3, when actors were minimally associated (through a birthday connection) with a positively viewed target, they thought they would be rated higher than they actually were by observers; conversely, when they were connected to a negatively viewed target, they thought they would be rated lower than they actually were by observers. Taken together, the three experiments demonstrate the importance of considering *both* self and observer perspectives in indirect self-presentation.

Observer perspectives in indirect self-presentation

Our first goal was to test whether indirect self-presentation tactics are actually effective in the eyes of observers. As we described, there are

theoretical, practical, and methodological reasons for examining this possibility. In fact, although there may have been a tactic assumption in the literature that indirect self-presentation works on others, past studies have focused primarily on people's self-views (see Cialdini et al., 1976; Snyder et al., 1986). Our findings thus have general implications for research on the role of indirect self-presentation as it pertains to impression management—indirect self-presentation plays an important interpersonal role. In other words, our research for the first time explicitly connects indirect self-presentation to the realm of *social* influence. By only assessing the self-views of those employing indirect self-presentation, prior researchers have provided insight to only half of the process. Studying the influences on observers extends this research into new directions, while focusing on the interplay between the self and audience views. Thus, our research begins to provide a more complete picture of the implications of indirect self-presentation tactics.

The practical implications of indirect self-presentation as a truly social influence are many and varied. For example, in organizational and employment settings, the strategic use of impression management has been shown to influence the job evaluations that supervisors make of employees. For instance, workers who use self-focused impression management tactics (i.e., personal stories, self-promotion) at the right time (i.e., when organizational politics are at a minimum) are more likely to be given more favorable ratings by their supervisors (Zivnuska, Kacmar, Witt, Carlson, & Bratton, 2004). Further, if used properly, impression management can help people attain jobs (McFarland, Ryan, & Kriska, 2003). Interviewer's ratings of job candidates are affected by the candidate's use of impression management (Kacmar, Carlson, & Bratton, 2004; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Our research similarly suggests that indirect self-presentation does not occur within an interpersonal vacuum.

Self–other asymmetries in indirect self-presentation

Our second goal was to test whether there may be self–other differences in indirect self-presentation. We found that although indirect self-presentation does influence others' perceptions, it does not do so to the same extent on others as it does for self-impressions. Experiments 1 and 2 showed that the same act of indirect self-presentation (basking with the Patriots' Super Bowl success) can have completely different implications on one's audience, depending on the particular view of the audience. Experiment 3 even more directly demonstrated the asymmetric influence of indirect self-presentation by showing that actors differ from observers in their views about the effectiveness of indirect self-presentation.

We examined two of the most common indirect self-presentation tactics, basking by espousing associations with sports teams (Experiments 1 and 2) and manipulating purported birthday associations (Experiment 3). However, there are a multitude of other indirect self-presentation tactics (for a review see Cialdini, 1989), and we can speculate that observers may be similarly affected by these. In a related way, there are a large number of social influence tactics (for a review see Pratkanis, in press), ranging from those based on other types of associations, setting expectations, and various other processes. It is likewise interesting to speculate about whether these various influence tactics would display similar self–other differences as those shown for the indirect self-presentation tactics we examined in this article. Of course, future research is necessary to examine these ideas. But if these speculations are true, findings such as these would fit nicely with a growing body of research highlighting the importance of understanding self–other asymmetries (for review see Pronin et al., 2004). This would greatly inform what is known about not only social influence tactics but also self–other differences.

It is increasingly apparent that it is not enough simply to measure the self-rated effects of any process. For example, research on the spotlight effect suggests that, with respect to people's attempts to manage others' impressions, there is an overestimation of the impact of our actions (see Gilovich et al., 2002). Our research adds to this by examining indirect self-presentation, particularly basking in reflected glory and other associative processes. The fact that we have demonstrated that basking can have a differing magnitude of effect on actors and observers may open many new and important lines of inquiry within an area that has not received as much recent attention as it once had. Because indirect self-presentation research had not examined observers' impressions, testing these issues had not previously been possible. Also adding to prior research, effects of basking and birthday associations influenced participants only after failures (Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Finch & Cialdini, 1989; Lee, 1985; Snyder et al., 1986), and this was found to generalize to both observer and self ratings.

Finally, it might be interesting to consider the role of self–other asymmetry as it applies to other instances of indirect connections. As one example, Tesser's (1988) self-evaluation maintenance model posits that we bask with those who are close to us to the extent that their success is not in a self-relevant domain, otherwise it can be detrimental. Given the self–other asymmetries found in our research, it may be that while being affiliated with a successful close other in an important area does hurt on a self-level, the casual observer noticing the connection may actually like you better because of it. Future research exploring these possibilities might also be particularly intriguing. In short, we believe that a continued examination of the social

influence of indirect self-presentation tactics will lead to a greater under-standing of when these techniques are effective and when people are (or are not) as good as they think.

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