

Two Indirect Tactics of Image Management: Basking and Blasting

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The impression-management techniques of basking and blasting were examined in a pair of field studies. These techniques were characterized as indirect rather than direct tactics of self-presentation because they can be seen to influence one's image in the eyes of observers, not through the direct presentation of information about oneself but rather through the presentation of positive or negative information about something with which one is merely associated. In both experiments, it was found that after experiencing a visible personal failure, subjects enhanced the asserted quality of their home university (basking) and devalued the asserted quality of a rival university (blasting). Further, Experiment 2 showed that conditions designed to produce increasing levels of image damage resulted in increasing amounts of subsequent basking and blasting. It is suggested that because of a tendency within observers for cognitive balance, individuals highly desirous of increased public prestige arrange to be positively connected with positive things and negatively connected with negative things in the observers' eyes. Implications of these findings for the area of intergroup relations are discussed.

The tendency to bask in reflected glory (BIRG) has been suggested by Cialdini et al. (1976) as an image-management tactic. They argued that individuals often seek to display their connections with highly successful others to gain the esteem of observers to these connections. They argued further that the attempt to bask in the reflected glory of a successful other occurs even when the BIRGer can claim no responsibility for the other's success. Thus, even the most tenuous connections between an individual and a successful other are candidates for public presentation in the pursuit of enhanced prestige. It is not uncommon, for instance, to hear people publicly boast about the times that they merely shook hands with famous celebrities, sports stars, or political figures.

Cialdini et al. (1976) provided empirical support for the BIRG phenomenon in a series of field experiments. In one study, they found that on Monday morning, undergraduates at six universities were more likely to wear apparel that announced their university affiliation if the school football team had been victorious on the preceding Saturday. In another study, it was found that college students used the pronoun *we* more frequently to describe the outcome of a football game that their home team had won than when it had lost. Further, the tendency to proclaim a bond to successful others through pronoun usage was most strong after the students had been made to fail a test publicly. This finding was seen to support the hypothesis that BIRGing is an image-enhancement tactic, since those subjects whose prestige in an observer's eyes had been jeopardized by their failure were the most motivated to make the observer aware of their association with a successful team. This tendency for subjects to try to present themselves in an especially positive light to observers who have seen them fail has its parallel in prior work (e.g., Baumeister & Jones,

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1978; Modigliani, 1971; Schneider, 1969) indicating a tendency for subjects to compensate for a visible failing of some sort by describing themselves in highly favorable terms to an observer. The feature of BIRGing that differentiates it from other forms of self-enhancement activity, however, is its indirect character. When BIRGing, individuals try to improve their public images not directly, by informing an observer of their own positive qualities, but indirectly, by making the observer aware of their often meaningless connections with some other person who possesses positive qualities. But why? By what logic should the first author of this article expect increased regard when he announces to his architect friends that he and Frank Lloyd Wright grew up in the same vicinity?

A Balance Interpretation

Cialdini et al. (1976) have suggested that the answer lies in the kind of pressures toward cognitive consistency suggested by Heider (1958) in his formulation of balance theory. The basic argument advanced in this formulation is that persons often strive to perceive positively associated things as similar to maintain cognitive harmony. Manis, Connell, and Moore (1974) have produced experimental evidence that observers tend to look similarly on things that are merely connected to each other, even in relatively trivial ways. If the aforementioned author could lead observers to perceive a positive unit connection between himself and Frank Lloyd Wright (similarity of birthplace), and if these observers held Mr. Wright in high regard, then they would experience balance-type pressures to view the author favorably as well. To the extent that these pressures operate, the author's BIRGing behavior would result in enhanced public prestige. According to this argument, then, it would benefit the author to make the association public to as many observers as possible.¹

Another Form of BIRGing

The strategy wherein individuals strive to bask in the reflected glory of successful others by trumpeting their associations with these others was demonstrated to occur reliably in

the three field studies conducted by Cialdini et al. (1976). However, if we subscribe to the balance theory interpretation of why BIRGing occurs, at least one other BIRGing technique suggests itself. Rather than acting to increase for an observer the perceived connection between oneself and positive things, one could act to increase the perceived positivity of the things with which one is already obviously connected. For both BIRGing strategies, the motive should be the same—an enhancement of interpersonal prestige. Consequently, for both strategies the tendency to BIRG should be most pronounced after a public failure. Since the first of these strategies had been shown in the prior work to occur reliably and most frequently following a public failure, one purpose of the present research was to determine whether the second, as yet untested, BIRGing technique would be employed similarly by subjects in an attempt to bolster interpersonal prestige.

To this end, a field experiment was conducted in which students at a large state university were approached on campus by an experimenter posing as a survey taker from a distant research survey center. Contacting students on campus made clear and salient their positive unit connections with the university. Subjects were then administered a brief "creativity" test and received from the survey taker either no feedback or failure feedback concerning their performances. It was expected on the basis of prior work (Cialdini et al., 1976, Experiments 2 and 3; Modigliani, 1971; Schneider, 1969) that the failure subjects would be highly motivated to perform impression-management behaviors to repair their injured public visages. As we have already suggested, one possible way for these subjects to bolster their favorability in the eyes of the survey taker would be to declare persuasively that something they were clearly and positively associated with (e.g., their

¹ Of course, like any self-presentational technique, BIRGing can be abused through overuse. To the extent that repeated BIRGing attempts come to be viewed as designed to manage impression rather than to provide information, they may backfire. (See Jones & Wortman, 1973, for a discussion of the ingratiation's dilemma.)

university) was favorable. Such a tactic would be in keeping with balance-theory assumptions: If an observer perceives the strong positive unit connection between student and home school, then heightening the observer's regard for the school may be expected to have a similar effect on the student's public image. The use of this technique would be BIRGING of the second kind.

Another Indirect Self-Enhancement Strategy

A balance-based model for impression-management tactics suggests yet another potentially useful indirect strategy for favorable self-presentation. Rather than enhancing prestige by increasing an observer's evaluation of something with which one is positively associated, one should be able to induce a similar effect by decreasing the observer's evaluation of something with which one has a negative or rival connection. That is, assumed cognitive balance pressures in observers who have recently devalued a certain object can be expected to induce them to enhance the perceived value of things that are negatively associated with that object. Therefore, if we wish to look good to observers, one option available to us would be to make those with whom we are negatively connected look bad: to publicly "blast" the opposition. By this account, in the experimental situation described earlier, one highly desirous of image enhancement should try to achieve the goal by convincing an observer either that one's own university has favorable characteristics or that a rival university has unfavorable characteristics. The purpose of the present research was to test the validity of both of the earlier stated, balance-theory-generated hypotheses. Our major predictions, then, were that after a visible failure, subjects would describe the features of their home university more positively to an observer and would describe the features of a rival university more negatively.

Experiment 1

Method

Subjects. The subjects were 280 undergraduates of both sexes who were moving along the walkways of Arizona State University (ASU) during daylight hours. Only those persons who were walking alone were selected, and no subjects were approached

during the 10-minute break period between classes. All subjects were contacted by an experimenter of the same sex.

Procedure. After randomly determining the experimental condition to be run, one of seven college-age experimenters approached the first person meeting the criteria for inclusion and, posing as an employee of a survey research organization,² asked the person to participate in a 5-minute survey. Over 90% of those approached complied. The experimenter continued that the survey center was interested in the distribution of "latent creativity" and was asking students at ASU to take a brief creativity test. The test consisted of six pairs of geometric designs printed on cardboard cards. Subjects were told that preferences within the paired designs were indicative of latent creativity. All subjects then selected their preferred design for each of the six pairs. At that point, the performance manipulation was accomplished either by informing subjects that they had done poorly on the test or by providing no performance feedback. In the former case, subjects were told that "you have scored relatively low on the test. Of the six pairs, you chose the more creative of the two patterns only one time. The average for college students is three out of six." In the latter case, subjects were informed that "your test will be scored by the survey center. If you desire feedback on the results, I can arrange for it to be mailed to you." (Virtually all subjects requested feedback.)

The experimenter then indicated that besides creativity the survey center was also interested in opinions about various educational institutions. Half of the subjects were then asked by the survey taker to respond to seven questions concerning aspects of their own school, Arizona State University; the other subjects were asked to respond to the same questions but with reference to their school's traditional cross-state rival, the University of Arizona. After completing the final question, subjects were probed for suspicion, debriefed, and thanked.

Independent variables. Two factors were orthogonally varied in a between-subjects design: subject's public performance on the latent creativity test (failure or no feedback) and nature of the association between subject and the rated university (positive, i.e., member university, or negative, i.e., rival university).³

² On the possibility that self-presentational attempts would be affected by whether the survey taker was a representative of a large national as opposed to a smaller regional survey center, the experimenter claimed to be associated with either the National Research Center in Chicago, Illinois, or the Southwest Research Center in Flagstaff, Arizona. Contrary to expectation, subjects did not respond differentially on the basis of that distinction. Consequently, all data are presented as collapsed over the national/regional survey center factor.

³ Even though it might be argued that a unit connection like membership is essentially dichotomous

Dependent variables. The major dependent measure was a subject's summed evaluations of the rated university on seven 7-point scales concerning a variety of academic, social, and physical features. Specifically, subjects rated the quality of the educational environment, the athletic programs, the graduate school, the educational resources, the social and cultural environment, the admissions criteria, and graduate placement.

Results

Postexperimental questioning revealed a minimal amount of subject suspicion. Less than 5% of the subjects, distributed about equally across treatment conditions, indicated that they had doubts about the veracity of the cover story or the survey taker's affiliation while they were engaged in the experiment. Further, no subject was able to correctly identify the experimental hypothesis. Although subjects of both sexes were employed, no conventionally significant main nor interaction effects were found for the sex variable. The data are presented, therefore, without further reference to that factor.

The dependent measure was the sum of subjects' ratings of a given university along seven different dimensions, and analyses were conducted to ascertain the appropriateness of this pooling of items. Canonical correlational analyses allow one to treat a group of items as a unit and to compute a single coefficient that reflects the degree of relationship between that group and another group of items. In this case, seven canonical correlations were computed. The procedure involved taking each questionnaire item in turn and correlating it with the aggregate of the remaining six items. In this manner it was possible to evaluate each item individually in terms of its correlation with the pooled remaining ones.

These analyses indicated that each item strongly covaried with the combination of the

according to Heider (1958) and that any nonmember university would do as an instance of a negative-membership connection, we wished to enhance the negativity of the connection by choosing a clear-cut rival. In this regard, although the University of Arizona was generally known to be the better school, the subjects' home university had been making impressive gains in a variety of areas (e.g., academics, athletics, BIRG research), and the competition between the schools had become a constant, almost palpable thing.

Table 1
Reported Quality of Home and Rival University in Experiment 1

Reported performance on creativity test	Subject's connection with rated university	
	Positive (home)	Negative (rival)
Failure	32.11	30.83
No feedback	31.32	32.50

Note. n per cell = 70. Scores represent summed ratings of 7-point scales in which larger numbers equal greater favorability.

others. The seven canonical correlation coefficients ranged from .46 to .67 ($p < .001$ in each case), with a mean of .55.

The major experimental prediction, that relative to the no-feedback subjects, failure subjects would enhance the reported favorability of their own university but would devalue that of a rival university, was expected to be reflected in an interaction between the study's two principle independent variables. The means describing the data are presented in Table 1.

Although the pattern of the means supported the hypothesis, the predicted interaction was only marginally significant, $F(1, 276) = 3.56$, $p < .06$. No other effects in the design approached significance.

Because it was of conceptual interest to examine the effectiveness of the two proposed procedures for favorable self-presentation (i.e., increasing the asserted quality of an object with which one is positively associated and derogating the quality of objects associated with competitors or rivals), simple tests were conducted within the interaction to assess the strength of each effect. Although both effects were in the expected direction, the tendency to devalue the rival university tended to be a more reliable response to failure, $t(276) = 1.82$, $p < .07$, than did the tendency to enhance the home university, $t(276) = .87$, *ns*.

Discussion

Both components of our main hypothesis—that an apparent failure on the creativity task

would cause our subjects to present the features of their home university more positively and to present the features of their rival university more negatively to an observer—were present in the data pattern of Experiment 1. However, these individual effects were at best of marginal significance. Nonetheless, we found them sufficiently intriguing to warrant further investigation.

Basking and blasting. The data suggested the existence of a pair of indirect self-presentational tactics, *basking* and *blasting*. The use of both of these techniques can be hypothesized to take advantage of balance-theory principles: By either increasing the perceived quality of something with which one is positively associated (e.g., a home university) or decreasing the perceived quality of something with which one is negatively associated (e.g., a rival university), one's public image should improve because of the tendency toward cognitive harmony among observers of the associations. The first tactic, in which our subjects sought to bask in the glory of a highly regarded school, can be seen as a variant of the BIRGing strategy postulated by Cialdini et al. (1976). In both forms of the strategy, the goal is to be seen as positively connected with a highly evaluated object. In the instances investigated by Cialdini et al., the goal was achieved by increasing the strength of the positive connection in the observers' eyes; in the present case, it was accomplished by increasing the perceived favorability of the connected object.

The second, indirect tactic suggested in Experiment 1, in which the subjects publicly blasted the quality of a rival school after a personal failure, is the more novel and, perhaps, noteworthy one. It appears to indicate that to recoup lost esteem, individuals will systematically arrange for the denigration of others, especially those others with whom they are most negatively connected. Because the blasting tendency had not been experimentally demonstrated before and because its occurrence in the data of Experiment 1 was somewhat weak statistically, it was decided to conduct a second study designed to assess the reliability of the effect and to test further our impression-management interpretation of the phenomenon.

Accordingly, a replication and extension of Experiment 1 was conducted in which interviewees were again asked to provide public assessments of either their home university or a rival university after they had performed on a creativity task. Four of the conditions of the second study were identical to the four conditions of Experiment 1. It was expected that the pattern of results of those four conditions would be similar to that of Experiment 1, thereby providing evidence for the reliability of the basking and blasting effects shown in that study. To extend the reasoning of the self-presentational analysis that we had applied to basking and blasting effects, Experiment 2 involved two additional conditions. We had argued that relative to no feedback, apparent failure on the creativity test of Experiment 1 caused subjects to perceive lowered public esteem and to engage in basking and blasting to restore the loss. By this account, if we included conditions in Experiment 2 that produced an intermediate amount of image damage, we should see intermediate amounts of basking and blasting. Thus, in addition to the no-feedback and failure levels of the performance factor, Experiment 2 incorporated an average performance condition that was assumed to produce a level of perceived image that would fall between those produced by the other two performance conditions.

There was a second reason for the inclusion of an average-performance condition. In Experiment 1, the failure condition was compared to a condition in which no sort of performance feedback was provided. Perhaps the obtained differences between these two conditions had nothing to do with the failure quality of the feedback that was provided to one group of subjects but, rather, had to do with the fact that performance feedback of some kind was provided. That is, it is conceivable that it was not the loss of face associated with failure that provided basking and blasting tendencies in Experiment 1 but the receipt of feedback, per se, that may have engaged these processes. Thus, we needed a condition designed to provide another type of performance feedback. The decision to use average rather than success feedback for this purpose was based on data from prior work (Bau-

meister & Jones, 1978; Schneider, 1969) indicating that public success leads to a tendency for modesty in self-presentation. Were a success condition run, the influence of self-presentation modesty would have presented a confound in the interpretation of the results.

Experiment 2

A Preliminary Test of Assumptions

To assess the validity of our assumption that under the conditions of Experiment 2, an average creativity score would result in a perception of public image that was above that produced by a failure score but still below that produced by a no-feedback score, a small questionnaire study was done. In that study, the campus interview setting of Experiment 1 was described to Arizona State University students via a booklet administered to their introductory psychology classes. One randomly selected group of subjects received a booklet describing a situation in which the subjects took the creativity test and the interviewer said the tests revealed a low level of creativity in them; the booklets of a second group described a situation in which the interviewer said the test assigned them average creativity; finally, the booklets of a third group described a situation in which the interviewer gave no performance feedback, as in Experiment 1. All subjects were then asked the question, "On the basis of that interaction, what do you think the survey taker's image of you would be?" Subjects responded on a 7-point scale labeled "very low (1)" at one end and "very high (7)" at the other. The results of the study were as predicted. Subjects in the failure condition ($n = 32$) rated their images in the eyes of the survey taker lower than did average-condition subjects ($n = 31$), who rated their images lower than those of the no-feedback condition ($n = 28$). The means for those respective conditions, 3.31, 3.74, and 5.39, showed only the no-feedback subjects to perceive their public images on the favorable side of the scale neutral point. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a highly significant effect, $F(2, 88) = 32.54$, $p < .001$. Simple tests indicated that the

mean of the average performance cell was different both from the failure-performance cell mean, $t(88) = 1.72$, $p < .08$, and from the no-feedback cell mean, $t(88) = 6.11$, $p < .01$.

The questionnaire study results offer increased confidence that the procedures of Experiment 2 should have the predicted effects on subjects' perceptions of their public images. If, as those data indicate, the average condition subjects experience a prestige level that is intermediate between the failure and the no-feedback condition subjects, we should expect them to represent the positivity of their home university and the negativity of the rival university at an intermediate level in Experiment 2.

Method

Subjects. The subjects were 120 females and 80 males walking on the campus of Arizona State University, who were selected and approached in a manner identical to that of Experiment 1.

Procedure. The procedure was the same as that of Experiment 1 in all but two respects. First, there was no manipulation of the nature of the survey research organization, as had been attempted without effect in Experiment 1. Second, an intermediate level of the performance factor of Experiment 1 was added. In the average-performance condition, subjects were informed that they had achieved an average creativity score on the test administered by the survey taker, who said after scoring the test, "your score on this test is the same as most college students. Of the six pairs, you chose the more creative pattern three times. The average for college students is three out of six."

Results

As in Experiment 1, postexperimental interviews revealed little subject suspicion and no accurate statement of the experimental hypothesis.

Table 2 presents the reported favorability scores that constitute the study's major dependent measure. The pattern of those means supports the experimental prediction that the greatest enhancement of the home university and the greatest derogation of the rival university would occur among the failure subjects, whereas the least such enhancement and derogation would occur among the no-feedback subjects. Evidence for the statistical

Table 2
*Reported Quality of Home and Rival
 University in Experiment 2*

Reported performance on creativity test	Subject's connection with rated university	
	Positive (home)	Negative (rival)
Failure	33.86	30.03
Average	32.57	31.90
No feedback	31.46	33.23

Note. n in average conditions = 30; n in all other conditions = 35. Scores represent summed ratings of seven 7-point scales in which larger numbers equal greater favorability.

strength of this relationship is provided by the significant Performance \times Connection interaction, $F(2, 188) = 3.60$, $p < .03$. One other statistically reliable effect was obtained in the present study. Unlike Experiment 1, the ANOVA revealed a main effect of sex of subject, $F(1, 188) = 4.73$, $p < .03$, indicating that males evaluated both schools more favorably than did females.

To examine separately the basking and blasting effects within the data of Experiment 2, simple trends tests were performed on the means within the performance factor for both the home and rival university conditions. Trends analyses were selected because they would provide two sources of evidence pertinent to our experimental questions. That is, first, a test of the significance of the simple linear trends would provide a measure of the strength of the basking and blasting effects in the data. As with any test of the linear trend for three ordered means, the degree of significance reflects the difference between the two extreme means (in this instance, those for the failure and no-feedback conditions). Second, since it was hypothesized that the average-performance condition mean would be intermediate to the means of the failure and no-feedback conditions, the amount of variance accounted for by the linear component within each of the basking and blasting effects would provide evidence concerning the validity of that hypothesis. The larger the amount of variance accounted for, the more confidence could be had in the hypothesis.

Basking. The test of the significance of the linear trend within the home university condition provided evidence for the occurrence of the basking tendency in Experiment 2. Although the basking effect received only directional support in Experiment 1, in the present case the effect was substantially stronger, nearly reaching accepted criteria for significance, $F(1, 94) = 3.01$, $p < .08$. Further, within the demonstrated basking effect of Experiment 2, it was determined that virtually all of the variance (99%) was accounted for by the linear-trend component.

Blasting. The significance of the linear-trend test within the rival university condition, $F(1, 94) = 4.14$, $p < .05$, reflects the clear existence of a blasting tendency in the data of Experiment 2. The amount of variance accounted for by the linear component within this blasting effect (97%) was almost as high as for the basking tendency.

There is one other feature of the results that is worthy of note. In the no-feedback conditions of the present study, as in Experiment 1, subjects did not overrate their home university relative to its rival; in fact, the means were in the opposite direction. Although it may appear at odds with our formulation that subjects would rate their rival university more positively than their home university, two aspects of the experimental situation can account for the finding. First, our subjects' home university was generally conceded to be weaker than its more established rival. It had been, for example, a teachers' college less than 20 years before, whereas the rival school had been a university nearly five times as long. Schlenker (1975) has provided evidence to show that subjects will sometimes restrain their self-enhancing presentations if they conflict with a contradicting public reality. Second, it has been our contention that our subjects would seek to use balance strains within observers principally when motivated to do so by self-presentational concerns. If one is already regarded highly by an observer, there may be little desire to bask or blast in the interests of yet increased regard. Indeed, the results of our preliminary test of assumptions suggest that the no-feedback condition subjects felt that the observer already had a strongly positive

view of them (5.39 on a 7-point scale), probably due to their willingness to help with the survey. It is perhaps not so surprising, then, that they were not motivated to risk that already established positivity, especially by challenging the dominant public reality.

General Discussion

Taken together, Experiments 1 and 2 demonstrated that an image-damaging experience led our subjects to increase the favorability of the descriptions of their home university and to decrease the favorability of their descriptions of a rival university. It appears that the two behavioral tendencies of basking and blasting that constitute this data pattern represent separate strategies of indirect image enhancement. Further, Experiment 2 showed that procedures designed to cause increasing amounts of image damage produce increasing amounts of basking and blasting from our subjects. Evidence for the image-management motive underlying these strategies can be seen in that just as had been shown to occur in the prior work involving direct self-enhancement attempts (e.g., Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Modigliani, 1971; Schneider, 1969), the indirect tactics of basking and blasting became stronger after a public failing.⁴ However, rather than manipulating public prestige by providing observers with direct information about their own qualities, the baskers and blasters of the present studies seemingly felt able to influence observers' evaluations of them by providing information about the qualities of something with which they were merely connected.

Both the basking and blasting effects of the present studies seem best understood in terms of balance-theory principles: Because of the tendency of observers to try to attain cognitive harmony by evaluating positively connected objects similarly and negatively connected objects differently, we may achieve the goal of enhanced public prestige by either convincing observers that things with which we are positively connected should be positively evaluated or that things with which we are negatively connected should be negatively evaluated. It is perhaps instructive to note that although the former tendency proved

reliable across our studies, in both Experiments 1 and 2, the latter tendency was stronger. It may be that the blasting tactic is the more subtle, less detectably self-presentational response and, consequently, the more likely to be employed.

The basking effect of the present studies can be seen as an alternate form of the BIRGING tendency demonstrated by Cialdini et al. (1976). As such, it provides evidence for the generality of the original BIRG formulation. The blasting phenomenon as seen in these studies, however, seems to be a much more novel empirical demonstration. It appears to offer systematic evidence for the tendency to derogate others, especially others with whom one has a negative unit relationship, in the interests of self-enhancement. The recognition of such a motive in the denigration of others allows for a number of testable predictions. For instance, we would expect that those most desirous of enhanced prestige would be most likely to devalue publicly the characteristics of rivals, foreigners, strangers, or individuals who were merely dissimilar along such dimensions as sex, custom, social class, or race.

Because of such possibilities, this perspective may have important implications for the areas of prejudice, discrimination, and other intergroup phenomena. For example, the finding of Bettelheim and Janowitz (1950) that anti-Semitism "was most highly concentrated in the downwardly mobile (socioeconomic) group, whereas the pattern was significantly reversed for those who had advanced in social status" (p. 58) could be at least partially due to the gains and losses in public prestige that accompany such mobility. Many forms of apparent scapegoating may actually represent attempts to raise one's relative level of prestige by derogating those who are different.

At present, the literature on intergroup relations does not include a model explicitly proposing that decrements in public prestige should trigger increased favoritism of in-

⁴ Again, in support of the image-management interpretation of basking and blasting, self-enhancement attempts after failure, like those seen in our results, have not been found to occur in the prior literature except under public conditions (Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Modigliani, 1971).

group members over members of other groups. However, one formulation argues that in-group favoritism results from attempts to distinguish the in-group from out-groups along dimensions that reflect positively on the in-group (Turner, 1975). Therefore, the individual's need for prestige or positive regard has been implied as one of the important underpinnings of in-group favoritism effects. The present data, along with those of Cialdini et al. (1976), indicate the need to add such prestige-based factors to the existing list of independent variables known to influence expressions of in-group favoritism (cf. Brewer, 1979, for a review).

One striking feature of the indirect self-enhancement tactics we have seen is the extent to which the individuals who employ them seem to be doing calculations concerning the phenomenology of observers. It is as if strains toward cognitive balance are at some level of consciousness understood to exist by observers and action is taken to exploit the consequences of the balance process. The data of earlier work is compatible with such a view. For example, Cooper and Jones (1969) showed that subjects adjusted reports of their opinions to make them appear different from those of a person who had behaved in an obnoxious fashion. An instructive additional finding was that this tendency was strongest when the obnoxious individual had been made to look similar to subjects along other dimensions. Apparently, the subjects sought to avoid the perception of a positive unit connection with the obnoxious other (i.e., similarity) and to avoid the guilt by association process that would result according to balance principles. It is interesting to speculate about the extent to which individuals recognize and use balance principles on a conscious level. Our feeling is that we learn to employ such principles to personal advantage after a history of trial and error. Even though conscious, verbalizable understanding of the mechanisms may sometimes be present, we may often arrange to benefit from the action of the mechanisms through an automatic, mindless response (Langer, 1978) that does not require conscious calculation.

Although we have contended that the techniques of basking and blasting occur primarily in the service of interpersonal goals, we do not wish to rule out the possibility that intrapersonal influences may be at work as well. For example, since it has been demonstrated that self-esteem is importantly affected by one's public prestige (e.g., Harvey, Kelley, & Shapiro, 1957), at least some portion of the motivation to bask and blast may occur in the interests of increased self-regard. Admittedly, balance theory could predict such effects. However, our current bias is that the origin of these behavioral tendencies lies ultimately in their potential for social reinforcement in the form of enhanced interpersonal prestige and positive regard. This position, of course, does not rule out the possibility that basking and blasting behaviors could occur under conditions lacking the availability of social approval. Nonetheless, it does argue that these behaviors should be most frequent and pronounced in public situations. Because of the potential importance of information regarding these tactics for the area of intergroup relations, we chose to employ a public methodology that, according to our view, would maximize the potential for demonstrating the usage of basking and blasting tactics.

Perhaps the most relevant next step, then, is to determine the extent to which basking and blasting can be triggered by needs for wholly private as opposed to public self-enhancement. Manipulating the visibility of subjects' performances on tasks or how widely known their associations are with relevant others are clear future directions in the natural progression of this research.

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