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Self-Presentation and the Success Story

It might be said of self-praise (if it is not entirely shameful and ridiculous) that if we praise ourselves fearlessly, something always sticks.

—Francis Bacon

If you want people to think well of you, do not speak well of yourself.

—Blaine Pascal

Success and success stories are cultural preoccupations. Corporate deals, medical advances, peace treaties, Academy Awards, elections and the passage of bills, Man of the Year, movie grosses and Nielsen ratings, *Forbes'* list of the world's richest, my sister's new free-lance job, my advisee's dissertation defense, my daughter's superior rating at her piano competition, and my neighbor's "best yard" award are the substance of success stories. How do individuals tell their own success stories when they want self-praise to stick but they also want to avoid an impression of arrogance?

Self-presentations are fundamental to interpersonal communication. Individuals construe and negotiate their identities with others and give meaning to their discursive behaviors. Relational outcomes, like social approval, are contingent on self-presentations. The self-presentation of a personal success is a particularly exquisite interpersonal accomplishment. The creation and negotiation of a successful identity is poised within competing goals of self-enhancement and modesty.

Beyond Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, self-presentations have not received the attention they deserve from interpersonal scholars because the relevant

literature is diverse and disconnected. Accounts, self-descriptions, attribution theory, multiple goals, and narrative are woven together in this book to provide a framework for conceptualizing self-presentations of success. Research undertaken from within the traditions of discourse analysis, rhetorical criticism, communication theory, and social psychology is reviewed and integrated.

Within the literature on self-presentation, image restoration through accounts has received considerable attention. These defensive self-presentations take the form of excuses and justifications to salvage a damaged identity after an undesirable event. The related phenomena of acclaiming a desirable event, like a personal success, has been neglected. This book is unique in its attention to the discursive strategies for acclaiming.

The purpose of this book is to describe the discursive strategies of success stories. The strategies are inductively derived from the texts of three case studies. The analysis is dependent on the data rather than a priori theories. In each case, a qualitative analysis with the constant comparison method is used to generate a typology of acclaiming and disclaiming (i.e., modesty) strategies. The last chapter highlights the progression of this analysis through the cases and considers contextual variations in the discursive strategies for telling a success story.

The goal of this inquiry is consistent with Bochner's (1985) identification of interpretation and intelligibility as a goal of research. This goal is accomplished by developing a typology of discursive strategies for telling success stories and displaying the complexity of this accomplishment by exploring the influence of multiple goals and situations in shaping the discourse. In this book, I have not attempted to predict the effects of these strategies or offer a critical analysis of the discourse. While these are legitimate goals of inquiry (Bochner, 1985), I believe research is most productive when there is a secure foundation based on systematic description.

This first chapter describes the nature of success, reviews the relevant literature on self-presentation and storytelling, and explains the selection of the three case studies that will be used to systematically examine the discursive strategies of success stories. I begin by considering the meaning of success.

THE NATURE OF SUCCESS

Contemplating the nature of success requires consideration of the meaning of success and the social construction of success. Success is often equated with affluence (Biggart, 1983; Cawelti, 1967; Chenoweth, 1974; Goldstein & Smucker, 1986; Huber, 1971; Long, 1981; Wyllie, 1954), but this definition is limited to a single aspect of success. I articulate a broader definition of success that positions the audience as central in identifying and recognizing an individual's success.

DEFINING SUCCESS

We know success when we see it, but what do we mean by it? Dictionaries focus on fame, rank, and prosperity as indicators of success and specify that success occurs when a planned outcome is achieved. I would elaborate on this definition to incorporate the idea that a successful behavior is one that is distinctive and desirable.¹

Distinctiveness sets an individual's behavior apart from the crowd by having done the action first, bigger, longer, farther, faster, or better than others. Inherently, distinctiveness involves a comparison and elevates some individuals for their accomplishments. Neil Armstrong first stepped on the moon (Carruth, 1991). Ellen Futter, appointed to lead Barnard College at the age of 31, was the youngest person to assume the post of a college president (Guinness Multimedia, 1995). The first person to scale the world's three highest mountains was Reinhold Messner (Guinness Multimedia, 1995). Steven Spielberg's films account for seven of the top ten grossing movies, generating more than \$2 billion (Guinness Multimedia, 1995). Each of these individuals have been judged successes for completing a distinctive act.

But distinctiveness is not sufficient for an act to be considered a success, for the behavior must also be regarded as desirable to the salient audience. Although variations occur, acts within a Western culture are generally judged favorably if

they (1) improve the human condition, (2) represent control over mind/body, or (3) secure valued rewards.

Technological advances, medical discoveries, and great literature and art can be judged successful endeavors because individual actions produce outcomes that enrich the human existence. Engineers at Digital Equipment Corporation have produced the fastest computer microprocessor, contributing to the advance of information technology (Guinness Multimedia, 1995). Recently, a team of scientists discovered a gene linked to Alzheimer's disease. The discovery was proclaimed a "kind of a Holy Grail," with implications for millions suffering from the disease ("Gene Find," 1995, p. 7A). Maya Angelou's poetry and autobiography are literary contributions that voice the essence of humanity (Phillip, 1995). The actions of some individuals are noteworthy because they can be perceived as improving the quality of human life.

Behaviors demonstrating control over the mind or body are also considered worthy of recognition. The creative act, intellectual breakthrough, personal transformation, and peak athletic performance are recognized as praiseworthy. The recent intellectual discovery that a statue of Cupid is a missing Michelangelo is a success for art historian Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt ("Lucky Find?" 1996). Mark Rypien's 30-yard pass to Gary Clark in the third quarter of Super Bowl XXVI was executed perfectly, preventing a comeback by the Buffalo Bills ("Rypien's Truth," 1992). The perfection of pianist Andre Watts' concerts have generated tremendous acclaim (Oestreich, 1995). The process of mastering mind and body in creating favorable outcomes is evidence of a personal success.

Behaviors are symbolically linked to success when they are instrumental in obtaining valued rewards (e.g., status, wealth, prestige). The possession of these rewards are indicators of success. In this culture, money is a cardinal symbol of success, and *Forbes* magazine's list of the world's richest individuals identifies the most successful persons. Bill Gates of Microsoft Corporation led the list in 1995 with a \$12.9 billion fortune ("Rolling in Dough," 1995). Former President Jimmy Carter has earned considerable prestige by serving as an unofficial

negotiator in international conflict (Nelán, 1994). Colin Powell held the rank of a four-star general and the position of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff before his retirement in 1993 ("Retired, Colin Powell," 1993). His rank and importance as a military advisor fueled interest in his book and a possible presidential bid. Each of these individuals can claim they are a success.

SUCCESS AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

It is important for individuals to succeed. Success may be attained by becoming a wealthy businessperson, winning basketball games, making good grades, or being elected to political office. Success/achievement is consistently identified as a basic value in Western culture (Rokeach, 1973; Steele & Redding, 1962) and a primary motivating influence for human behavior (Herzberg, 1959; Maslow, 1970). Whoever a person is or however that person acts, it is imperative to be recognized and appreciated as successful.

Notwithstanding its importance to individuals, success is also essential to social order. Societies promote specific behaviors by recognizing them as achievements worthy of praise/rewards and deter others through punishments (Jellison, 1990; Kanouse, Gumpert, & Canavan-Gumpert, 1981). Jellison (1990) notes: "Each social group designates some behaviors as desirable and others as undesirable. While the content of such lists of positive and negative actions varies from one group to another, every society seems to make such distinctions" (p. 285). A culture's values are communicated by what behaviors count as achievements. Success is thus socially construed because it is dependent on the values of a social group. Praise of others provides "an important mechanism for the social transmission of values. Every statement of praise contains some information—though not always explicitly—about what is and is not valued" (Goode, 1978, p. 101).

The audience is central to recognizing and rewarding success. An individual's claim to success must be accepted by

others to receive the desired recognition. We are pleased when others praise our achievements and irritated when they fail to credit our efforts. This dependence on external evaluations is rooted in Western religious and political ideologies that repress the intrinsic merit of the individual and locate self-worth in the evaluations of external identities (Baumeister, 1982). An achievement is ultimately most satisfying when it has been credited in public. Consequently, the audience for a successful performance assumes a prominent role in defining the behavior as a success and determining the appropriate recognition (D'Arcy, 1963), motivating individuals to shape the impressions others form of their behaviors and identities by telling their own success stories.

Individuals seek recognition for behavior that others judge as successful to validate their self-worth, while societies control and motivate members by selecting particular behaviors to value. Distinctive and desirable behaviors are perceived as successful, but the meaning attributed to a behavior is negotiable. Will a behavior be viewed as an important success? Will the individual be seen as responsible for the behavior? Because success is socially construed, individuals are motivated to shape other's impressions through self-presentations.

SELF-PRESENTATION

A self-presentation projects an individual's identity or image before an audience.² These self-presentations may involve defensive or assertive impression management (Bromley, 1993; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). Defensive impression management repairs a tarnished identity. Actions with perceived negative consequences are likely to generate discursive accounts directed toward relevant audiences (Baaten, Cody, & DeTienne, 1993; Schönbach, 1980, 1990; Scott & Lyman, 1968). Hugh Grant's arrest for soliciting a prostitute was followed by defensive impression management. In his account, Grant repeatedly took responsibility and apologized for his actions (Corliss, 1995). Assertive impression management entails a self-presentation of

positive qualities, attributes, and behaviors. Bob Dole's (1996) homepage on the World Wide Web includes a personal message that involves assertive impression management: "To be a great President requires unique qualities of character, experience and leadership. In my life, I've been tested in many ways and have always found strength in the values that make this country great: faith in God, belief in community, personal responsibility and love of family." This statement suggests that Bob Dole has acquired favorable attributes by overcoming difficult challenges. His self-presentation acclaims his positive identity as a compelling reason for supporting him for president. This discourse is enacted to accomplish the goal of creating a positive identity.³

To elaborate on self-presentation, this discussion must start by considering the underlying motives for self-presentation. Then the literature on defensive self-presentation will be briefly reviewed as a contrast to the last section on assertive self-presentations.

MOTIVES FOR SELF-PRESENTATION

To understand why we engage in self-presentation, theorists have identified four primary motives: (1) self-esteem, (2) identity development, (3) social and material rewards, and (4) social approval. A self-presentation can enhance an individual's sense of self-worth. A football player who recounts his role in the championship game relives the moment and confirms his importance to the team and himself. This fundamental motive involves seeking respect and honor to enhance self-esteem.

A self-presentation can assist in the development of a self-identity. Self-descriptions are ways of coming to know who we are and what attributes can be claimed. Sarah lands a fantastic job in sales and calls her friends. Her story about how she managed to get this job reinforces her positive evaluation of her own abilities, and Sarah comes to see herself as possessing qualities consistent with a successful interview and a desirable position in sales. In this sense, telling the story is a way of making it (the success) so.

Social exchange theorists situate motive in the desire to receive rewards and avoid punishments (Reis & Gruzen, 1976; Roloff, 1981; Thibaut & Kelley, 1978). Presenting a favorable identity increases the probability of receiving rewards from others. Frank negotiates an important merger for his company. At the next staff meeting, he describes his efforts and his boss is convinced Frank was instrumental in the deal. He gets a promotion. Frank secures increased status and power through his negotiating and self-presentational skills.

The final motive for self-presentation is social approval (Arkin, 1980; Arkin & Shepperd, 1990; Baumeister, 1982; Jellison & Gentry, 1978; Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). By creating an impression that will be positively assessed, individuals can receive the favor of others (Baumeister, 1982; Kauffman & Skinner, 1968; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1982). Social approval plays a central role in human behavior as an instrumental goal (Arkin, 1980; Jellison & Gentry, 1978; Jones, 1964), mediating a variety of other desired rewards like material goods, friendship, power, and self-esteem. A new acquaintance may create an impression of similarity, optimism, and affability to promote social approval. That approval may generate rewards in the form of liking and admiration from an interactional partner.

The four motives for self-presentation (self-esteem, identity development, social and material rewards, social approval) are often interrelated. Creating an impression of competence in an interview could lead to material rewards (e.g., salary) and simultaneously enhance the self-esteem of the job candidate. Individuals who acquire social approval through self-presentation are also likely to be given material and social rewards. While the motives may be complicated and entangled in any given situation, it is clear that there are compelling reasons to engage in self-presentation.

DEFENSIVE SELF-PRESENTATIONS: ACCOUNTS

When an individual's image is damaged, accounts are the discursive self-presentations designed to manage the predica-

ment.⁴ Typologies of account strategies focus on excuses and justifications (Benoit, 1995; Bromley, 1993; D'Arcy, 1963; Goffman, 1971; Schlenker, 1980; Schönbach, 1980, 1990; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Semin & Manstead, 1983; Snyder, Higgins, & Stucky, 1983; Sykes & Matza, 1957; Tedeschi & Riess, 1981b). Excuses minimize responsibility but admit the behavior is negative (e.g., "I insulted you but I was drunk at the time"). Justifications accept responsibility but minimize the negative consequences (e.g., "I ran a red light but no one got hurt").

Accounts are relevant to acclaims because explanations for failure events provide a contrast to the explications of success events. Acclaims take credit for a desirable event while accounts avoid blame for an undesirable event. Both accounts and acclaims deal with responsibility for an act and the evaluation of an act. Excuses deny or minimize responsibility for the negative act, while an interactant who acclaims a success seeks to secure or maximize responsibility for a positive act. Similarly, justifications reduce the negativity of the event, while acclaims heighten the positivity of the act.

ASSERTIVE SELF-PRESENTATIONS

Unlike defensive impression management, assertive self-presentations project favorable identities (e.g., competence, likeable, successful). The strategies identified in the literature, and reviewed here, for establishing a positive image include nonverbal behaviors, positive association, rendering favors, opinion conformity, compliments, and self-enhancement.

Nonverbal Behavior

Schlenker (1980) and DePaulo (1992) reexamined smiling, eye contact, body language, space, and paralanguage as self-presentational strategies. For example, in one line of research, investigators have isolated nonverbal behaviors associated with

an aggressive communication style. In situations like job interviews, aggressiveness may create the impression of confidence and ability. In Dipboye and Wiley's (1977) study, recruiters viewed job candidates who were either moderately aggressive or passive. A moderately aggressive candidate appeared confident, demonstrated good eye contact, spoke forcefully, and answered questions at length, while a passive candidate appeared tense and shy, exhibited poor eye contact, spoke softly, and gave abbreviated answers to questions. Moderately aggressive job candidates were rated more favorably by recruiters. In a second study (Dipboye & Wiley, 1978), participants assuming the role of a college recruiter were also more likely to recommend hiring candidates who used an aggressive style. Not surprisingly, this cluster of moderately aggressive communication behaviors is associated with a positive impression in a situation where judgments of competence are central to the evaluation and the motivation to present a favorable identity is elevated. Nonverbal behaviors appear rich and complex in conveying immediacy, positive affect, power, and competence.

Positive Association

An indirect form of self-presentation occurs when an individual claims a connection to other people, objects, or events that are positively valued. Cialdini's classic work on basking in reflected glory (BIRG) suggests that individuals generalize positive evaluations of others even when there is a superficial connection to themselves. When participants in Cialdini's (1989) study believed they shared a birthday with a famous person, they typically revealed this information to people they wanted to impress. When the football team won, college students wore more university apparel than when they lost (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976). I've noticed that on my campus, students wear more university apparel during basketball season than football season reflecting the teams' respective records. The positive association reflects on the individual claiming a connection to persons/institutions already evaluated favorably (Bromley, 1993).

Rendering Favors

Self-presenters render favors because persons who do nice things are typically liked (Jones, 1964; Jones & Pittman, 1980; Jones & Wortman, 1973). After a long day at work, I came home to find that my daughter had fixed dinner. This favor created a self-presentation emphasizing her thoughtfulness. Favors may establish reciprocity with the other person to secure some future reward (Gouldner, 1960; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). I remembered that my daughter had been thoughtful when she asked me to drive her to the mall a couple of days later. Favors are more likely to be appreciated and reciprocated when the favor is valued by the recipient, does not compromise the recipient's future behavior, and involves sacrifice on the part of the granter (Brehm & Cole, 1966; Muir & Weinstein, 1962; Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968). The intentions of the favor granter are evaluated by recipients. But if ulterior motives are perceived, the impression will not be positive (Schopler & Thompson, 1968).

Opinion Conformity

The relationship between liking and similarity of opinions is well documented (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Bryne, 1961, 1971). Liked individuals are perceived as intelligent, competent, and adjusted (Bryne, 1971). We may be more attracted to those who share our beliefs because they reinforce our own judgments, facilitate smooth interactions and cooperation in achieving goals, and establish reciprocity of liking (Ralston & Elsass, 1991; Wortman & Linsenmeier, 1977). Expressing a similar opinion can create a favorable identity with an audience.

Individuals dependent on others for rewards are more likely to conform (Davis & Florquist, 1965; Jones, 1965) to secure those rewards. Because the job interview is overtly self-presentational, research has investigated the role of opinion conformity in this context. Job candidates who express more similarity with interviewers are seen as more competent and worthier of a recommendation than those who conform less (Baskett, 1973).

Consider another self-presentational situation: Mark introduces his new girlfriend to his best friend. The girlfriend wants Mark's best friend to like her. During the course of a conversation, she agrees that Dallas will win the Super Bowl and that Sociology 120 is a stupid class. This similarity of opinions leads to extended conversation and the best friend's belief that Mark has a terrific girlfriend. The interaction is enjoyable, the best friend's attitudes are reinforced, and a basis for reciprocity of liking has been established.⁵

But the self-presenter must avoid being perceived as excessively dependent or ingratiating. Jones, Jones, and Gergen (1963) found that individuals who were seen as dependent on their partner and agreed continually were liked less and seen as more ingratiating than those who agreed intermittently. The organizational literature suggests self-presenters can use the strategy of yielding, expressing initial disagreement before acquiescing later in an interaction (Wortman & Linsenmeier, 1977). The presumed advantage of this strategy is that it obtains the rewards of conformity without the appearance of ingratiation.

Compliments

Compliments are self-presentation strategies that create a respectful and generous identity. It makes intuitive sense that those who give compliments are liked by those who receive the compliment (Aronson & Linder, 1965; Mette, 1971). Kipnis and Vanderveer (1971) studied the effect of compliments on performance assessments to determine if they were an effective self-presentational strategy. Participants in the role of a supervisor were asked to evaluate workers. One of the average workers gave the supervisor a compliment. The complimenter received the highest performance appraisal even though another worker had actually performed better on the task. This research suggests that the compliment uses a form of self-presentation that led to a positive evaluation by a supervisor.

The effectiveness of compliments as a self-presentation strategy can be influenced by judgments of speaker intent and

believability. If the recipient of a compliment suspects an ulterior motive or rejects the accuracy of the compliment, liking does not follow and ingratiation is suspected (Dickoff, 1964; Jones & Schneider, 1968; Regan, 1976). A compliment is most effective when it is perceived as sincere and accurate.

Recently, I overheard a graduate student compliment a professor for remembering the substance of an article that they had discussed several months before. The compliment appeared sincere and accurate and the student was seen by that professor to be attentive and appreciative. The compliment reinforced this professor's positive assessment of the student.

Self-Enhancement

When we tell people about who we are and what qualities we possess, there are opportunities for self-enhancement. These verbal self-promotions can convey a positive identity to an audience (Bromley, 1993). These kinds of statements probably sound familiar: "I'm the first chair in the brass section of the band." "I've been a member of the Million Dollar Roundtable for sales for the last three years." "My best quality is that I'm continually looking for opportunities to grow as a person." "I know my way around a computer." Research consistently documents that individuals routinely offer positive evaluations of their abilities and qualities before audiences (Jones, Gergen, & Jones, 1963; Schlenker, Wiegold, & Hallam, 1990). Individuals present themselves as possessing positive characteristics because "if these self-enhancing communications are persuasive, the source will gain the respect and liking of the target" (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984, p. 38). Self-presentational goals can be accomplished through self-enhancements.

But audience perceptions of speaker's intentions can influence the effectiveness of the presentation. If the enhancement is perceived as deliberate, individuals are judged as less sociable, competent, emotionally stable, and pleasant (Fletcher, 1990). The interactional context of a self-enhancing remark also influences its interpretation. An interactant whose self-enhancing

remark is in response to a question from an interactional partner is considered more likeable and considerate than a person who interjects a positive self-description that is not elicited (Holtgraves & Srull, 1989). Verbal self-descriptions must avoid the appearance of manipulation and arrogance.

In summary, the literature on assertive self-presentation includes descriptions of strategies for projecting a favorable identity and variables that influence the effectiveness of the strategies with audiences. Nonverbal behaviors, positive association, rendering favors, opinion conformity, compliments, and self-enhancement are a diverse set of strategies of varying relevance to acclaiming self-presentations in success stories. Nonverbal behaviors are of less interest to this project on discursive strategies whereas the literature on self-enhancements is relevant because acclaiming centers attention on describing the self as successful. A serious limitation to this work is that it ignores the nature of the self-enhancing message. The next section considers research pertaining specifically to self-presentations of success.

SELF-PRESENTATIONS OF SUCCESS

Attribution theorists, beginning with Heider (1958), have explored causal explanations for success as well as failure. A self-serving bias, accepting credit for success and avoiding responsibility for one's own failure, is well documented (Arkin, Cooper, & Kolditz, 1980; Bradley, 1978; Brown & Gallagher, 1992; House, 1980; Miller & Ross, 1975; Snyder, Stephan, & Rosenfield, 1978; Tedeschi & Linkskold, 1976). A self-presentational explanation for this bias indicates that a success creates a positive identity for the individual and a self-presentation is offered to "capitalize on that outcome" (Arkin & Shepperd, 1990, p. 185). A teller of a success story can influence others to attribute responsibility for a significant success and thereby realize self-presentational motives. The literature on self-presentations of success can be divided into two parts. Acclaiming self-presentations attempt to secure recognition for an important success. Disclaiming self-presentations attend to modesty in telling the success story.

ACCLAIMING SELF-PRESENTATIONS

Accounts of problematic acts have received considerable attention in the literature compared to acclaims of successful acts. Acclaims are the opposite of accounts. The literature on accounts identifies reduced responsibility for an act (excuses) and the evaluation of an act as less negative (justifications) as dominant issues in the discourse. By extension, acclaims would involve increased responsibility and the positive evaluation of an act as its dominant issues. Entitlements refer to discourse that claims responsibility for a success, and enhancements include discourse that magnifies the desirability of the achievement (Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985; Tedeschi & Riess, 1981a). Although the literature relevant to acclaiming is limited, it is worth examining studies that pertain to entitlements and enhancements.

Entitlements

We did it our way baby! We did it! We did it! We did it!
[Barry Switzer to Jerry Jones, after Dallas won Super Bowl XXX ("Dallas Defense," 1996, p. 10B)]

As a result of our efforts, the economy now is on a path of rising output, increasing employment, and falling deficits.
[President Clinton, in his first economic report to Congress ("President Brags," 1994, p. 10A)]

Entitlements claim responsibility for a positive outcome. Barry Switzer asserts that he and the owner played an instrumental role in winning an unprecedented third Super Bowl victory in four years for Dallas. President Clinton connects positive economic news to his administration's deficit reduction plan. The teller of a success story is interested in shaping an audience's attributions of responsibility because recognition is reserved for individuals who caused the positive outcome. D'Arcy (1963) observes that "we do not praise an act, however good its nature, if it is done by accident, or by mistake, or through inadvertence, or through circumstances beyond the

agent's control" (p. 125). I would add that praise is not forthcoming for an individual unless an audience believes that there is evidence of personal responsibility.

Studies have investigated the effect of an entitlement on audience perceptions. Giacalone (1985) found that an individual claiming credit for a medical discovery was rated most favorably when a third party confirmed that the individual deserved the credit. An individual was perceived more favorably if that person had to go against the group consensus to make the discovery. Attribution to the group versus the individual is also an issue in Decker's (1987, 1990) work on perceptions of managers. Managers with individual accomplishments were rated more favorably than those with successful groups.

Entitlements are designed to shape an audience's perception of responsibility in order to secure recognition for a positive act, but the research on audience perceptions warns tellers of success stories that their entitlements may be perceived as boastful. Miller, Cooke, Tsang, and Morgan (1992) investigate one form of entitlement—attributing an achievement to an individual's internal disposition—and found that it is consistently perceived as bragging. To entitle or not to entitle? How to entitle? The intricacy of telling the success story and the teller's accomplishment is becoming more apparent.

Enhancements

This treaty is good for all mankind. [President George Bush on the eve of a summit to sign a long-range nuclear weapons treaty with Russian President Boris Yeltsin ("Summit Set," 1992, p. 1A)]

My job is to show people they can overcome their problems. I feel most aligned with the underdog, and the down-and-out, the lost and disenfranchised—those defenseless and those afraid. I feel a deep empathy for them. [Ron Kovic, author of *Born on the Fourth of July* ("Brash," 1990, p. 4)]

Tellers of success stories attempt to shape perceptions of the importance of their achievement to increase recognition for

that act. Bush touts the agreement as an unqualified success for his administration. The actions of political leaders, including himself, have made the world a safer place for the rest of us. Ron Kovic enhances the importance of his writing by arguing that it helps others overcome their problems by providing a voice for those who are powerless.

Studies relevant to enhancements have investigated task difficulty, assuming that the more difficult the task, the more important the success. Tedeschi and Riess (1981b) found that skiers see their own successes as more significant by claiming that the race course was difficult. In a study of perceptions of managers, Giacalone and Riordan (1990) found that managers who describe obstacles in completing a project were given more credit than a modest manager. But contrary to expectations, obstacles were not related to assessments of task difficulty and task difficulty did not affect recognition. The authors speculate that recognition is tied to ability rather than effort. This study also revealed interesting gender differences. Women's successes were seen as the product of effort and less deserving of recognition, while men's successes were perceived as the product of ability and more deserving of recognition.⁶

The literature reviewed in this section on entitlements and enhancements primarily concerns effects without considering discursive practices for enacting entitlements and enhancements. As a result, the research is suggestive but fragmentary. By systematically examining the discourse of success stories, a typology of discursive strategies for acclaiming can be developed.

DISCLAIMING SELF-PRESENTATIONS

Tellers must orient to multiple goals in telling their success stories. Tellers who acclaim successes may secure recognition but risk attributions of arrogance and bragging (Decker, 1987; Giacalone, 1985; Miller, Cooke, Tsang, & Morgan, 1992). Tellers who disclaim may appear modest but fail to convince audiences to attribute personal responsibility or value the success.

The literature on multiple goals is a starting point for appreciating disclaiming self-presentations as relevant to success

story discourse. Then, research on modesty versus self-aggrandizement is reviewed and assessed. Finally, a conceptual framework for disclaiming is constructed.

Multiple goals

The foundation for considering the success story as discourse in which multiple goals are salient is based on prior research on multiple interactional goals. Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness theory significantly advanced our understanding of interactional goals by attending to face issues. But politeness theory concentrates on the face needs of an interactional partner rather than the face issues of self (Craig, Tracy, & Spisak, 1986; Tracy, 1990; Tracy & Baratz, 1995), while the telling of a success story is concerned with the projection of the teller's positive face. Tracy (1990) argues that politeness theory has not considered competing face goals. The teller of a success story wants both to secure recognition and be perceived as modest to be appreciated.

In intellectual discussions, for example, dilemmas are rooted in competing identity goals (Tracy & Baratz, 1995). A discussant wants to be perceived as competent but modest, as critical but supportive:

A fierce pursuit of another's claim could be seen as supporting intellectual standards and the group goal of advancing ideas, or it could be seen as self-aggrandizing intellectual display. Gentle, non-threatening questioning could display a commitment to community and a concern to not threaten another's face, or it could be taken as letting poor scholarship go by and/or evidencing intellectual limitations of one or another party. (Tracy & Baratz, 1995, p. 308)

Trade-offs of goals become impossible to avoid. Multiple goals are considered a function of situated talk.

Although the literature does not address the particular multiple goals salient in the telling of success stories, it does offer a framework for understanding how interactants orient

to competing goals. O'Keefe and Shepherd (1987, 1989) advance three methods for managing instrumental and face goals: selection, separation, and integration. With a selection strategy, an interactant chooses the most important goal and then enacts behaviors appropriate to that goal without giving attention to other goals. A separation strategy allows the interactant to address multiple goals in different parts of the discourse. Interactants redefine the meaning of the behavior and the situation to avoid the trade-offs between competing goals with an integration strategy. O'Keefe (1988, 1991) reasons that differences in goal-management strategies exhibit variations in message design logics.

Research from a conversational analytic tradition circumvents the concept of goals and intentions (Mandlebaum & Pomerantz, 1995; Pomerantz, 1978). Pomerantz (1978) details the multiple constraints faced by a recipient of a compliment. The preference for agreement and the need to avoid self-praise are interactionally managed through a set of discourse solutions. Downgrades "partially satisfy each of the conflicting preferences" (p. 101). Another solution involves referent shifts. By shifting credit away from self, the response "displays a sensitivity to self-praise avoidance" and is "partially supportive of, that is, a partial warrant for or legitimization of, the prior praise" (p. 105). A return compliment functions similarly to agree implicitly with the compliment, but it also shifts attention to others and thereby avoids self-praise. Talk is an interactional accomplishment that attends to competing constraints.

This literature on multiple goals leads to an appreciation of the intricacy and practical accomplishment of an interactant's discourse. Unfortunately, the research comparing modesty and self-aggrandizement is directed entirely toward predicting which goal will be salient rather than balancing or integrating them. This literature is taken up in this next section.

Choosing to Disclaim or Acclaim

Although the question of disclaiming and acclaiming has not been framed in relationship to multiple goals, there has been

research that isolates variables influencing the choice between a modest or a self-aggrandizing presentation. Before considering this work, it is important to understand that this research assumes that modesty or bragging is an either/or choice. O'Keefe and Shepherd's (1987, 1989) separation and integration strategies for multiple goals make a convincing argument that interactants have other choices (e.g., both/and, neither). This research also assumes that messages enacting modest and acclaiming self-presentations are equivalent. No attempt is made to investigate the discursive strategies for enacting disclaiming or acclaiming self-presentations. Despite these limitations, the research provides information about audience, source, and event influences on disclaiming.

Audience. The audience influences the interactant's decision to produce a modest identity. If an audience has prior knowledge of an individual's success, a modest presentation is selected (Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Jones & Wortman, 1973; Schlenker, 1980; Schlenker & Leary, 1982), and the presenter is perceived as competent, modest, but less truthful than an individual who acclaims (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). A presenter who expects the audience to be evaluative rather than supportive also chooses to be modest (Schneider, 1969). There is some evidence that interactants take their cue from their partners. If the partner disclaims, then the interactant also presents a modest identity (Gergen & Wishnov, 1965; Schneider & Eustis, 1972), conforming to the implied expectations. An expectation of future interaction induces a modest self-presentation (Eagly & Acksen, 1971; Whitehead & Smith, 1986) because a modest identity is easier to sustain in future interactions.

Source. Source influence studies investigate individual differences as the predictors of modest self-presentations. Self-esteem, feelings of personal control, self-confidence, and social anxiety can reverse a self-serving bias and produce modest self-presentations (Schlenker & Wiegold, 1992; Weary & Arkin, 1981). Schlenker, Wiegold, and Hallam (1990) found that

claiming discourse includes entitlements and enhancements. By extension, disclaiming discourse includes dissociations and detractions. These self-presentations can be productively viewed as the telling of success stories. Three case studies are selected to develop a typology of discursive strategies for telling the success story.