

# A Comprehensive Theoretical Framework of Illusory Shared Honor Effect

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## Abstract

Existing psychological theories like Basking in Reflected Glory (BIRGing), social identity, and self-perception primarily explain how individuals derive self-worth from affiliations. This paper presents a comprehensive theoretical framework called the Illusory Shared Honor Effect (ISHE) - the illusory sense of shared honor resulting from perceived affiliation with a successful entity. ISHE functions as a psychological mechanism prompting individuals to perceive shared illusory honor despite its potential irrationality. Drawing from a wide range of social, cognitive, and motivational theories, this paper explores the antecedents, manifestation, and implications of ISHE across multiple contexts. This paper also illustrate how ISHE operates in real-life scenarios such as political affiliations, organizational success, and sports fandom. Moreover, this paper discusses both the positive and negative implications of ISHE, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This paper concludes with potential directions for future research, highlighting the importance of empirical studies to further validate this theoretical framework.



Key words: Illusory Shared Honor Effect, Basking in Reflected Glory, Social Identify Theory, Honor, Group Dynamics

## **Introduction**

The human capacity to associate oneself with a larger, successful entity, sharing in its triumphs despite having no tangible contribution to the achievement, is a compelling aspect of our social psychology. This phenomenon is now written as a theory, proposed by the author as Illusory Shared Honor Effect (ISHE), which is

originally from the author's real-life observations and then it is integrated with existing theoretical framework and empirical evidence. It is at the intersection of social identity, self-perception, and interpersonal relations. Despite its profound implications on individual self-concept and societal dynamics, ISHE is probably the first fully developed theory to address the phenomenon after BIRGing concept was introduced. This paper aims to offer a thorough examination of ISHE, its conceptual underpinnings, potential repercussions, real-world exemplifications, and societal acceptance.

Drawing on a wealth of research from social psychology, this paper scrutinized the multifaceted nature of ISHE, outlining its core principles, potential negatives, and its acceptance and formation in society. Real-life case studies, spanning sports fandom, celebrity culture, corporate settings, political affiliations, and more, provided an applied perspective on ISHE, rooting the theoretical concepts in tangible situations. Ultimately, this paper aims to generate a comprehensive and robust theoretical framework that explicates the essence of ISHE, serving as a potential theoretical framework for future research in this area (Cialdini et al. 1976; Towne, 2023).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 The Theory**

The theory of ISHE posits that individuals can gain a sense of pride associated with an honor which is awarded to another person or entity, even if they did not

contribute to it. This phenomenon occurs when an individual perceives with the person or entity receiving the honor. In such cases, the individual falsely believe that the honor can be shared, due to a psychological correlation or shared characteristic.

In this paper, the word "honor" is linked to things like money, power, fame, and other attributes that make people feel proud or better than others.

The formation of ISHE requires a set of specific conditions:

1. the individual who shared the illusory honor must not have made any contribution, effort, or dedication towards the honor.
2. there must be a relationship or commonality of a characteristic between the individual who shared the illusory honor and the honoree, such as the same nationality, identity, or institution.
3. this correlation or common feature must make the individual who shared the illusory honor and the honoree belong to the same category of people in some aspect and have a significant difference from other individuals in this aspect.
4. the sense of pride, self-excellence, and superiority generated within the individual who shared the illusory honor must be self-centered, rather than other-centered.
5. the sense of pride, self-excellence, and superiority generated within the individual who shared the illusory honor can be greater when compared with other individuals of other categories.
6. the honoree can be an individual, a collective, an organization, or an object.
7. the strength of ISHE is inversely proportional to the distance or degree of dissimilarity and exclusiveness between the relationship or commonality.
8. the intensity of ISHE is positively proportional to the perceived magnitude of the honor

## **2.2 Illusory Shared Honor Effect (ISHE)**

Introduced by Towne (2023), ISHE theory proposes that individuals can experience a sense of pride associated with an honor bestowed upon another person or entity, regardless of their absence of contribution to this honor. It indicates that an

individual perceives some form of correlation or shared characteristic with the entity receiving the honor. This phenomenon resonates with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) concept of the need to belong and Aron, Aron, Tudor, and Nelson's (1991) idea of including others in the self. Moreover, the strength of ISHE depends on the perceived magnitude of the honor and the relationship or commonality's distance or dissimilarity.

Grounded on BIRGing, ISHE introduces unique distinctions. BIRGing permits minor contributions to the associated entity's success; however, ISHE is strictly non-contributory, therefore defined as 'illusory'. ISHE centers on the psychological correlation or shared characteristic, with the effect's intensity inversely proportional to the degree of distance or dissimilarity between the individual and the honored entity.

Furthermore, ISHE broadens the honored entity's scope to include individuals, collectives, organizations, and even objects, thereby expanding the range of potential shared honor sources. It posits that this shared honor must be self-centered, focused on the individual experiencing ISHE rather than the honored entity, aligning with theories of self-affirmation (Sherman & Cohen, 2006) and self-evaluation (Sedikides & Strube, 1997).

### **2.3 Definition and Discussion of Honor**

Honor, a complex and multi-faceted concept, varies in its significance across different cultures and societies (Bowman, 2007; Nisbett, 2018). This abstract construct signifies the respect and esteem conferred upon an individual, stemming

from their accomplishments or characteristics which are positively recognized by societal norms (Stewart, 1994).

Such attributes that warrant honor can encompass a range of constructs, including wealth, power, and fame, among others (Bowman, 2007). These elements often induce a profound sense of pride or superiority, which can be so influential that they shape the individual's responses to various social situations (Rodriguez Mosquera, Fischer, Manstead, & Zaalberg, 2008). This dynamic nature of honor has also been observed to play a role in the occurrence of moral revolutions in societies, further underscoring its societal importance and impact (Appiah, 2011). Fiske (2018) affirms that these constructs align with the fundamental social motives that dictate the behavior and actions of individuals in a societal context.

#### **2.4 Definition of Contribution in ISHE**

ISHE is a construct wherein the definition of 'contribution' becomes paramount (Cialdini & de Nicholas, 1989; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). It recognizes the instances where individuals claim an honor they have not contributed to, often happening without the conscious acknowledgment and consent of the honoree involved (Beggan, 1992; Wann & Branscombe, 1990).

Contrary to this, there exist situations where the shared honor is merited due to actual contribution, irrespective of the contribution's magnitude (Merton, 1973; Teixeira da Silva & Dobránszki, 2016). Academic authorship serves as a practical illustration where every author, based on their intellectual contribution, shares the

honor associated with the work (Merton, 1968; Teixeira da Silva & Dobránszki, 2016). This situation, while demonstrating shared honor, does not manifest ISHE, as it involves real, tangible contribution (Festinger, 1954; Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

The distinction between illusory and deserved honor underlines the nuanced nature of shared honor dynamics (Smith, Diener, & Wedell, 1989). Moreover, it reiterates the crucial role of 'the absence of contribution' within the ISHE framework, further emphasized by social comparison processes (Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988), social identity theory (Hogg, 2001), and self-presentation strategies (Paulhus & John, 1998).

## **2.5 Basking in Reflected Glory (BIRGing)**

BIRGing, coined by Cialdini et al. (1976), describes a social psychological phenomenon where individuals enhance their self-image by associating with successful and esteemed others. This association may manifest in the form of public acknowledgment of an affiliation with successful groups, spanning various domains like sports, business, academia, or even personal relationships (Cialdini et al., 1976). Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford (1986) provide an extension of this phenomenon, demonstrating that individuals may distance themselves from the group when it experiences failure, thereby maintaining their self-esteem. This phenomenon's underlying theoretical structure draws on the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979), suggesting that significant parts of an individual's self-concept derive

from the social groups they associate with (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

## **Comparison of BIRGing and ISHE**

In order to fully understand both BIRGing and ISHE, a detailed examination of both concepts is required. Both BIRGing and ISHE are related concepts within the realm of social psychology, and they both address how individuals derive self-esteem and social status from their affiliations. Here are the main similarities and differences between the two:

### **3.1 Similarities:**

Both BIRGing and ISHE involve individuals gaining a sense of pride, self-esteem, or social status from a connection to another person or entity (Cialdini, 1976; Towne, 2023).

Both concepts rely on some form of association or perceived commonality between the individual and the successful or honored entity. This could be a shared identity, group membership, or any other shared characteristic (Cialdini, 1976; Towne, 2023).

Both BIRGing and ISHE are self-serving in nature, which could elevate the individual's self-image or social standing (Cialdini, 1976; Towne, 2023).

### **3.2 Differences:**



Contribution to Success or Honor: BIRGing does not require that the individual must have made no contribution to the success. It can occur even when the individual had a part in the success, albeit often a minor one. ISHE, on the other hand, specifically requires that the individual has made no contribution to the honor. This is a fundamental difference as it changes the nature of the individual's association with the success or honor.

Object of Association: BIRGing typically involves basking in the success or positive outcomes of another. ISHE, however, extends this to include "honor," which could be perceived as broader and may encompass aspects beyond success, such as respect, dignity, and prestige. This difference in the object of association broadens the scope of ISHE beyond that of BIRGing.

Specificity of Conditions: ISHE theory presents a more detailed list of specific conditions for the phenomenon to occur, including the need for self-centered pride, the relationship between the strength of ISHE and the perceived magnitude of the honor, and the relationship between the strength of ISHE and the similarity to the honored entity. BIRGing, as a broader concept, does not lay out such detailed conditions. This makes ISHE a more specific and nuanced theory.

Perceived Superiority: ISHE includes the idea that the sense of pride or superiority generated within the individual can be greater when compared with individuals of other categories. BIRGing does not explicitly include this comparative aspect. This adds another layer of complexity to the concept of ISHE.

In essence, while both BIRGing and ISHE deal with the psychological benefits individuals derive from their associations, ISHE is a more specific theory that lays out detailed conditions and expands the concept to include the idea of shared "honor". These differences make ISHE a distinct concept from BIRGing, despite their similarities.

### **3.3 ISHE as a Theoretical Framework for BIRGing**

Moreover, ISHE as a theory can help explain the BIRGing phenomenon. While both concepts deal with individuals deriving positive self-regard from their association with successful others, ISHE provides a more detailed theoretical framework for understanding the specific conditions under which this occurs. The additional nuances introduced in ISHE – such as the need for no actual contribution from the individual, the requirement of a significant shared characteristic, and the conditions about the strength of ISHE – can offer deeper insight into why and when BIRGing occurs (Cialdini, 1976; Towne, 2023).

BIRGing could be considered as a manifestation of ISHE under certain conditions. When an individual hasn't contributed to a success but feels a sense of pride or self-esteem due to a perceived shared characteristic with a successful other, they are BIRGing, and this can be understood within the larger framework provided by ISHE (Towne, 2023).

However, it's important to note that while ISHE can explain many instances of BIRGing, it may not cover all cases perfectly. For example, BIRGing can also occur

even when the individual had a minor role in the success, which isn't included in ISHE's conditions (Cialdini, 1976). BIRGing also suggests a link to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). As with many psychological phenomena and theories, there is often overlap and interplay between different concepts. But each provides unique insights into how individuals derive pride from others' success, thus contributing to our understanding of self and identity (Leary & Terry, 2012).

## **Conditions for the Manifestation of Illusory Shared Honor Effect (ISHE)**

### **4.1 Conditions and Criteria**

Towne (2023) theorizes that the manifestation of the Illusory Shared Honor Effect (ISHE) relies on several critical conditions. Firstly, an individual must not have contributed directly towards the honor bestowed on another person or entity (Towne, 2023). This lack of contribution is crucial for distinguishing ISHE from other BIRGing (Cialdini et al., 1976).

Secondly, an identifiable commonality or relationship between the individual and the honored entity is necessary for the occurrence of ISHE. This commonality is underscored by the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) and Self-categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987), both of which suggest individuals often derive their self-concepts from their social identities and group memberships.

Moreover, the strength of ISHE is determined by the intensity of this relationship or commonality. Here, it becomes important to recognize the dynamic nature of the self as a social concept (Brewer, 1991; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Sedikides & Brewer, 2015) that gets shaped and reshaped through social comparisons (Festinger, 1954), intergroup relations (Hogg & Abrams, 1988), and interpersonal relations (Heider, 1958).

The perceived honor's extent also influences ISHE's intensity. This notion aligns with the Sociometer Theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), which proposes self-esteem as a gauge for individuals' social standing and perceived value in their social contexts.

#### **4.2 The Significance of Self-Centered Pride and Superiority in the Manifestation of ISHE**

In the occurrence of ISHE, a critical facet is the self-focused pride and sense of superiority that individuals experience, which distinguishes it from the admiration or commendation towards the honored person or entity. This pride is deeply rooted in the psychological structure of pride, characterized by a dichotomy of authentic and hubristic pride (Tracy & Robins, 2007). In this context, the self-centered pride results from an illusion of shared honor, which is underpinned by the perceived relationship or commonality with the honored entity (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010).

The superiority, on the other hand, originates from the belief of aligning oneself with the same category as the honored entity, thereby differentiating oneself from others in the same category. This sentiment is reflective of social comparison theory,

where individuals evaluate their own social and personal worth based on comparisons they make to others (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). Moreover, the positive evaluation of in-groups, as well as the importance of morality in this evaluation, could further stimulate this sense of superiority (Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007).

### **4.3 The Role of the Honoree in ISHE**

Within the context of ISHE, the honoree, which can be an individual, a collective, an organization, or even an object, primarily functions as a focal point for the attribution of honor. The role of the honoree is influenced by the concept of social comparison, as delineated by Festinger (1954), where individuals seek to align themselves with entities that augment their social standing. This desire to bask in reflected glory, as explicated by Cialdini et al. (1976), further reinforces the honoree's role as a symbol of status or achievement.

The honoree's perceived commonality with the individual experiencing ISHE is critical to the effect (Smith & Henry, 1996; Brewer, 1991). This suggests that the shared identity or common feature between the honoree and the individual, whether it's cultural, social, or organizational, forms the basis of ISHE (Turner et al., 1987; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

Interestingly, this connection doesn't necessitate explicit acknowledgment and consent from the honoree, rather it can occur subconsciously and naturally as part of a psychological process of identity negotiation and self-categorization (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015; Sedikides & Brewer, 2015; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Heider,

1958). Thus, the strength of ISHE is modulated by the degree to which the individual perceives this commonality (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Tajfel, Worchel & Austin, 1986).

#### **4.4 Relationship Between ISHE Strength and Distance or Dissimilarity**

The strength of ISHE is proposed to correlate inversely with the perceived distance or degree of dissimilarity between the individual and the honoree, a concept that is supported by the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale proposed by Aron, Aron, & Smollan (1992) which states that a sense of interpersonal closeness increases with perceived similarities. Similarly, Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory and Garcia, Tor, & Schiff's (2013) work on the psychology of competition underline the human tendency to evaluate oneself in relation to others, further suggesting that perceived proximity or similarity can intensify ISHE.

In contrast, greater perceived dissimilarity or distance is postulated to diminish the strength of ISHE. This principle aligns with Trope and Liberman's (2010) construal-level theory of psychological distance which discusses how perceived distance can affect individual's thoughts and behavior. Brown, Novick, Lord, & Richards' (1992) study similarly underscores how psychological closeness can affect self-appraisals.

Additionally, the perceived magnitude of the honor also has a direct relationship with the strength of ISHE. Mussweiler and Rüter (2003) suggest that individuals often use standards set by those around them as benchmarks, highlighting how the prestige of the honor can influence the shared sense of accomplishment. For example, the

individual would likely feel a stronger sense of shared honor when a close relative wins a prestigious award compared to a distant acquaintance winning the same award, as illuminated by Lockwood and Kunda's (1997) work on the impact of role models on the self.

#### **4.5 Relationship Between ISHE Strength and Exclusiveness**

Exclusivity or exclusiveness significantly affects the intensity or strength of ISHE. The degree of exclusivity pertains to the distinctiveness or the limited scope of the shared attribute connecting the individual and the honoree (Brewer, 1991; Snyder & Fromkin, 2012). As such, a higher exclusivity of the shared attribute correspondingly strengthens the manifestation of ISHE (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001).

This connection is firmly entrenched in the fundamental human tendency towards uniqueness and singularity (Snyder & Lopez, 2001). When an individual shares a trait or connection with a successful entity in a unique manner - meaning very few others share this specific attribute or connection - the perception of self-pride and superiority notably escalates (Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000). This occurs because the exclusivity augments the individual's distinctiveness, thereby strengthening the illusory connection with the honoree (Berger & Heath, 2007).

For example, if an individual owns a unique piece of artwork from a renowned artist, the exclusivity of ownership contributes to a stronger sense of shared honor (Belk, 1988). Similarly, being among the select alumni of a prestigious institution can

intensify ISHE, as the institution's reputation is perceived as shared among a limited, exclusive group (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990).

This dynamic elucidates why people often pursue distinctive affiliations or possessions that provide exclusivity (Miller, 1995; Twitchell, 2002). The allure of limited-edition products, memberships in elite clubs, and affiliations with distinguished entities can be partially attributed to the robust ISHE they invoke (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999).

## **ISHE and Other Theories in Social Psychology**

ISHE extends the groundwork laid by many theoretical frameworks within social psychology. It captures the nuanced interplay between self-concept, social comparisons, and perceptions of honor or status, as conceptualized in these frameworks.

ISHE can be viewed as a natural extension of the Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which posits that individuals assess their abilities and opinions by juxtaposing themselves with others. In a similar vein, ISHE arises when individuals compare their status to a successful entity with whom they share a common trait or affiliation.

The BIRGing phenomenon, first elucidated by Cialdini et al., (1976), holds relevance to the understanding of ISHE. BIRGing refers to the human propensity to



elevate their self-image by affiliating themselves with successful others. ISHE complements this perspective by proposing that individuals not only bask in the glory of successful others but also experience an illusory sense of shared honor.

Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), another pertinent theoretical construct, describes how individuals perceive themselves as members of specific social groups, subsequently impacting their self-perception and behavior. Through the lens of ISHE, individuals categorize themselves as part of a group (those who share a characteristic with the honoree), thereby intensifying their sense of shared honor.

The concept of Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) can further illuminate the process underlying ISHE. IOS theory suggests that we often blur the boundaries between ourselves and others to whom we feel close, incorporating elements of their identities into our own. This process is crucial to ISHE, as the perceived connection or similarity with a prestigious individual or entity can inflate one's sense of self-worth or honor.

In summation, ISHE, while representing a distinct area of study, draws extensively from existing theoretical frameworks in social psychology. Its unique contribution lies in providing an enriched understanding of self-perceptions, comparisons, and affiliations.

# Empirical Evidence Supporting ISHE Derived from BIRGing

ISHE draws upon a broad empirical foundation rooted in the phenomenon of BIRGing — individuals' tendency to bolster their self-image by associating with successful others (Cialdini et al., 1976). A wealth of empirical research has substantiated BIRGing and provides a strong basis for understanding ISHE (Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986; Wann & Branscombe, 1990).

Cialdini et al.'s (1976) seminal studies, for instance, evidenced that individuals were more prone to publicly affiliate themselves with successful entities like a winning home football team, thereby substantiating the BIRGing principle central to ISHE. In line with the self-presentation theory (Cialdini & de Nicholas, 1989), people may well experience an illusory sense of shared honor with successful entities they associate with, which embodies the core concept of ISHE.

In-depth research has substantiated the principles at the heart of ISHE, positing that the affiliation with successful others becomes particularly pronounced when an individual's self-esteem is under threat (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Tice, 1991; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). These findings resonate with ISHE's theoretical underpinning that shared honor becomes more significant when an individual's self-image is in jeopardy (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Additionally, the strength of association with successful others is influenced by the relevance of the entity's success to an individual's self-concept (Tesser, Millar, &

Moore, 1988; Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988). This empirical finding substantiates the notion that ISHE is amplified when a shared trait or link with a successful entity is more integral to an individual's identity (Snyder & Fromkin, 2012).

Moreover, extensive research into group identification has unveiled findings that dovetail with ISHE. For example, individuals report elevated feelings of pride and self-esteem when they identify closely with a successful group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Grieve & Hogg, 1999; Hogg & Sunderland, 1991). This convergence is in line with ISHE's premise that shared traits or links can engender a sense of shared honor.

While empirical research directly scrutinizing ISHE continues to expand, the profusion of evidence underpinning BIRGing and related theories provides a robust empirical platform. These empirical findings underscore the validity of ISHE and suggest a promising trajectory for future exploration of this theory.

## **Empirical Research Supporting ISHE Required Conditions**

ISHE is a psychological construct emphasizing how individuals associate personal honor with successful entities regardless of their actual contribution. A breadth of empirical studies provides critical evidence for the foundational elements of ISHE: amplified feelings of pride, universal applicability of honor, inverse

correlation between ISHE and dissimilarity, and the direct relationship between ISHE's intensity and perceived honor.

The first cornerstone of ISHE, self-enhancement bias, reflects amplified feelings of pride and superiority, especially towards other groups. The phenomenon is supported by studies like those by Cialdini & de Nicholas (1989) and Stinson et al. (2011), demonstrating how individuals often perceive themselves superior to others, paralleling ISHE's emphasis on elevated self-perception.

Secondly, the universality of ISHE, where honor can be attributed to various entities, finds support in research exploring brand allegiance, fandom, and 'parasocial relationships'. Studies by Walton et al. (2012), Szymkow et al. (2013), and Reysen & Branscombe (2010) echo the idea that individuals often identify with the success and honor of entities they admire, be they celebrities, fictional characters, or brands.

The third pillar of ISHE, the inverse relationship between ISHE and the degree of dissimilarity, is backed by contemporary research in social identity theory. As demonstrated by Roccas et al. (2008) and van Veelen et al. (2016), stronger association with a group (implying lesser dissimilarity) can heighten in-group bias and shared honor experiences.

Lastly, the intensity of ISHE and the scale of the perceived honor's direct relationship is affirmed by recent studies into group dynamics and social comparison. Work by Fischer et al. (2010), and Greenaway et al. (2016) shows that significant group achievements or recognitions notably boost members' self-esteem.

In summary, these academic findings illuminate the rich and complex facets of ISHE, enriching our understanding of this intriguing psychological construct.

## **Real-Life Case Studies**

### **Case Study 1: Sports Fandom**

A quintessential example of ISHE in practice can be observed within the realm of sports fandom (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Fans routinely partake in the shared honor of their chosen team's victories despite making no tangible contribution to the win. They often indulge in the reflected glory, aligning their social identity with the team, thereby enhancing their self-perception and social standing (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This phenomenon occurs irrespective of their level of participation or acknowledgment in the actual process of the win.

### **Case Study 2: Celebrity Fandom**

An intriguing application of the Illusory Shared Honor Effect (ISHE) emerges within the realm of celebrity fandom. As identified in fan studies, celebrity fans frequently indulge in the reflected glory and triumphs of their adored stars (Duffett, 2013), a phenomenon that resonates with the concept of ISHE. This indulgence transpires despite fans not contributing directly to these successes (Giles, 2013), reinforcing the central premise of ISHE.

Fans' identification with the celebrity symbolizes a form of sharing in their honor, mirroring their accomplishments (Sandvoss, 2005). This sense of shared honor becomes a part of the fan's identity, often leading to para-social attachments to celebrities (Steever, 2011). A vivid example of this is seen in the fan culture surrounding Lady Gaga, where fans exhibit a strong sense of identification and derive social media prominence through their affiliation with the celebrity (Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013). This amalgamation of fan behavior further illustrates the underpinnings of ISHE in the context of celebrity fandom.

### **Case Study 3: Organizational Success**

Within the realm of corporations, it's not uncommon for employees to harbor a sense of collective honor when their organization triumphs in reaching a significant milestone or is lauded with an industry commendation. This phenomenon, grounded in the Social Identity Theory, posits that individuals often affiliate themselves with successful groups to bolster their self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This sense of shared pride is discernable even when an individual's direct contribution to the accomplishment in question is minimal or non-existent (Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

Indeed, their pride in being part of such an organization is often found to be driven by their identification with the organization, an essential aspect of their social identity (Bartel, 2001). Central to this identification is their belief in the organization's values and achievements (Pratt, 1998). Furthermore, this collective honor also aligns with the group engagement model, wherein individuals show cooperative behavior

based on their sense of belonging to the group (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Thus, the occurrence of ISHE is starkly evident in a professional context, even when the individual's contribution is viewed as non-existent.

#### **Case Study 4: Political Affiliations**

In political landscapes, Indirect Self-Honor Enhancement (ISHE) often manifests through affiliations and electoral inclinations. Drawn from the theory of intergroup conflict proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), ISHE can be understood as the shared sense of accomplishment supporters of a political party or politician experience in the wake of their chosen entity's success, independent of their own direct contributions to it. This dynamic is further substantiated by Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe's (2015) examination of expressive partisanship, where campaign involvement and political emotions bolster partisan identity, amplifying the shared sense of honor. Furthermore, as Greene (2004) expounded upon, the theory of social identity and party identification reinforces the concept of ISHE within political dynamics.

Additionally, the identity processes in collective action, as studied by Klandermans, Sabucedo, Rodriguez, and de Weerd (2002), demonstrate how ISHE shapes participation and protest behavior in politically charged environments. This indicates a deeper correlation between political activism and the manifestation of ISHE. Finally, van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears' (2008) integrative social identity model of collective action provides a broader framework that effectively encapsulates

ISHE's role in political affiliations and behaviors, thereby offering a comprehensive understanding of shared honor within political realms.

### **Case Study 5: Social Media Influencers**

In the sphere of social media, particularly with influencers, the phenomenon of ISHE is quite pronounced. Followers often share in the triumphs of the influencer, whether it be reaching a milestone in terms of follower count, initiating a product, or establishing a partnership with a prominent brand (Marwick, 2015; Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019). This shared pride is typically felt by followers who have made no direct contribution to these accomplishments (Lee & Watkins, 2016). The influencers' visibility and credibility on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube reinforce this sense of shared honor, subsequently strengthening the parasocial relationships between influencers and their followers (Abidin, 2016; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). This phenomenon provides a salient illustration of ISHE, further underlining its ubiquitous nature in various societal contexts.

### **Case Study 6: Nation's Achievement**

In light of the Social Identity Theory, the manifestation of Involuntary Shared Honor and Esteem (ISHE) can be noticeable at a macro level when it involves national achievements (Festinger, 1954). It is common to see citizens basking in the glory of their home country's international accomplishments, such as Olympic victories, technological advancements, or other renowned feats (Cialdini et al., 1976). This sense of pride exists even when the individual's personal contribution to these



achievements is absent or negligible. A profound sense of national pride and patriotism, along with nationalistic attitudes, helps illustrate this phenomenon (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). The psychology behind this phenomenon could be attributed to the inherent human tendency of 'ingroup love,' promoting a sense of shared honor within a larger group like a nation, often at the expense of 'outgroup hate' (Brewer, 1999). Furthermore, this behavioral trend also reflects the interplay of descriptive and injunctive group norms, guiding both attitudes and behaviors of individuals within the group (Smith & Louis, 2008). Hence, this highlights the intriguing facets of ISHE at a societal scale, providing a comprehensive understanding of how collective honor can be shared among individuals of a group.

### **Case Study 7: Success of Bestselling Authors**

The phenomenon of Indirect Self-Enhancement through Honor (ISHE) can also be observed in literary fandoms. When a book penned by a beloved author makes the bestseller list, fervent readers often experience a sense of vicarious honor, even though their role in the book's creation or success is nonexistent (Cialdini et al., 1976). This pattern is illuminated by Leary and Kowalski's (1990) work on impression management, which highlights individuals' tendencies to associate themselves with successful figures to improve their own social standing. Additional studies support this observation, showing that people often express increased affinity for items or entities they perceive as their own, including their favorite authors and their achievements (Beggan, 1992). This sense of communal celebration or shared honor further intertwines with a socioanalytic perspective of personality, where social

interactions and community influence significantly shape one's sense of self (Hogan, 1982). Such influence extends to brand communities as well, where members may perceive the achievements of the collective as their own, further accentuating the dynamics of ISHE (Algesheimer et al., 2005).

## **Positive Implications of ISHE**

In spite of the possible negative impacts, ISHE offers multiple affirmative implications.

ISHE plays a pivotal role as a motivational force, intensifying the feeling of unity among individuals and promoting the attainment of communal goals (Turner, 2010; Brown, 2000; Hogg, 2001; Bandura, 1986). This positive affiliation with successful entities inspires individuals to contribute more efficiently towards common aims, thereby facilitating improved performance (Browne & Mahoney, 1984; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Merton, 1968).

ISHE also assists in fostering a robust sense of social identity and the feeling of belonging (Tajfel, 2010; Abrams & Hogg, 2006; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Levine & Moreland, 1990; Smith, Amiot, Callan, Terry, & Smith, 2012). This psychological association positively influences mental health, augmenting self-esteem and minimizing feelings of alienation (Jetten et al., 2015; Greenaway et al., 2015; Haslam et al., 2005; Drury, Cocking, & Reicher, 2009; Leach et al., 2008; Becker, Tausch, Spears, & Christ, 2011).

Furthermore, ISHE can boost the prestige and reputation of a group or an organization, leading to increased external recognition and opportunities. This recognition encourages wider societal and economic benefits, such as heightened investment and sponsorship, a stronger talent pool, and improved community relations (Cialdini et al., 1976; Wann & Grieve, 2005; Côté et al., 2011; Fransen et al., 2015).

Finally, ISHE promotes constructive competition. Observing the success of other group members can stimulate individuals to strive for similar accomplishments, nurturing a culture of excellence (Festinger, 1954; Garcia, Tor, & Gonzalez, 2006; Sassenberg & Wolpin, 2008). This healthy competition contributes to the overall performance and productivity of the group.

## **Negative Implications of ISHE**

Despite the capacity of ISHE to enhance feelings of inclusion and self-improvement, it carries a range of possible adverse consequences that necessitate careful scrutiny.

ISHE can give rise to an exaggerated sense of self-importance, instigated by illusory successes rather than genuine personal achievements (Cialdini & de Nicholas, 1989; Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Festinger, 1954). Individuals who anchor their self-esteem and self-concept on shared honor run the risk of nurturing a skewed self-perception (Paulhus & John, 1998; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Bandura, 1982), which

may have long-lasting harmful effects on their mental wellbeing and individual growth (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

ISHE may also breed bystander indifference, as individuals might perceive that they share in a group's success without actually contributing to it (Latane, Williams, & Harkins, 1979; Karau & Williams, 1993). This perception can foster social loafing, a phenomenon where individuals exert less effort when working collectively, leaning on the efforts of others to attain a communal objective (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977; Hogg, 2001).

Moreover, ISHE can buttress societal disparities and facilitate the continuation of the "Matthew Effect" (Merton, 1968; Smith, Diener, & Wedell, 1989), a principle where those already in prominent or successful positions are more likely to receive additional recognition, leaving those less prominent or successful struggling to garner the acknowledgment they potentially deserve. This dynamic can cultivate power imbalances and inequitable distribution of resources (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Festinger, 1957; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Lastly, within the academic sphere, ISHE can exacerbate issues related to authorship attribution and academic integrity (Teixeira da Silva, & Dobránszki, 2016; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008). By associating themselves with the success of a published work to which they contributed nothing, individuals risk infringing upon the ethical standards of academic publishing, which dictate that authorship should signify meaningful contributions to the research and writing processes (Milgram, 1974; Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988).

# Further Perspectives on ISHE Acceptance and Formation

Understanding ISHE goes beyond its inherent characteristics to include society's response and interpretation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The social acceptance of ISHE is often contingent upon the robustness and clarity of the relationship between the individual and the associated entity (Sherif, 2015). As an exemplification, public sentiment is more disposed towards accepting a prestigious school graduate's pride over an individual merely residing in its vicinity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This exemplifies the societal valorization of direct and irrefutable connections, manifesting in the shared honor principle (Turner et al., 1987).

The inception of ISHE within an individual typically occurs subconsciously, independently of societal approval (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Aligning oneself with successful entities and assimilating their triumphs into one's self-perception is a natural human tendency (Smith & Henry, 1996). It is fueled by our fundamental desire for interpersonal attachments and the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This alignment, irrespective of its external validation, can bolster an individual's positive self-image and social identity through psychological and emotional gratification (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

Hence, the individual's and society's acceptance and recognition of ISHE profoundly influence how this psychological phenomenon affects social dynamics and

individual self-perception (Turner et al., 1994). Comprehending these mechanisms better equips us to navigate the complex intersections of social identity, shared honor, and societal perceptions (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997).

## **A Multidisciplinary Exploration of ISHE**

ISHE may present an exploration that intersects multiple disciplines, particularly social psychology, group dynamics, and human behavior. ISHE elucidates a unique cognitive bias where individuals self-attribute the success of their groups, even in the absence of active participation (Postmes, Haslam, & Jans, 2013). This phenomenon underscores the intricate interplay of self-esteem, narcissism, and pride in group behavior, offering a novel lens through which we can understand these constructs.

Simultaneously, ISHE enriches theories of group identification (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). By highlighting the subjective perceptions of individual members concerning their contributions to group success, it advances our comprehension of these dynamics (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). This could inspire a reevaluation of existing models and spark future research initiatives.

In the context of organizational behavior, ISHE can be strategically utilized to cultivate a heightened sense of belonging among employees. This approach can foster increased morale, productivity, and job satisfaction (Tyler & Blader, 2003). The feeling of shared honor could potentially catalyze collective progress and success within an organization.

ISHE's potential extends to the examination of fandom behavior as well. It provides an explanatory basis for the personal accomplishment fans associate with the success of their favorite teams or artists (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The derived insights could significantly influence marketing strategies by enabling more effective fan engagement.

The broader societal implications of ISHE are equally noteworthy. By acknowledging potential negative outcomes, such as biases and overconfidence (Grieve & Hogg, 1999), we can develop strategies to mitigate these issues, fostering healthier group dynamics and societal interactions. Additionally, the understanding of ISHE could inspire more effective social policies and interventions.

Finally, ISHE enriches social identity theory by shedding light on the psychological processes that individuals use to associate their personal worth with the success of their in-groups (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005; Jetten, Haslam, & Alexander, 2012). This nuanced comprehension of social identity further enhances our grasp on the complexities of our social world.

In essence, ISHE could represent a critical step forward in our understanding of human behavior within group contexts. Its contributions traverse multiple disciplines, promoting a broader comprehension and application of these intriguing dynamics.

## **Methods**

This paper adopted a multi-faceted approach to the construction and elucidation of ISHE theory, drawing from a broad spectrum of existing literature, real-life observations, and qualitative case studies.

**Literature Review:** A systematic literature review was conducted to synthesize the foundational concepts that underpin ISHE theory. The research traversed various disciplines including social psychology, behavioral psychology, and group dynamics, concentrating on key themes such as Basking in Reflected Glory (BIRGing), social identity theory, self-perception theory, and the psychology of fandom. Literature spanning over five decades was reviewed, enabling the establishment of a robust theoretical framework grounded in empirical research.

**Case Studies:** Building on the observational data, seven distinct case studies were developed, providing a granular view of ISHE across various social contexts. Each case study was designed to provide an in-depth exploration of a specific instance of ISHE, including sports fandom, celebrity fandom, organizational success, political affiliations, social media influencers, national achievements, and successes of bestselling authors. These case studies were selected to demonstrate the broad applicability of ISHE theory across diverse social contexts.

**Theoretical Framework Development:** Based on the literature review, real-life observations, and case studies, the comprehensive theoretical framework of ISHE was established. The framework encapsulates the psychological mechanisms and social dynamics underlying the ISHE phenomenon, delineating the complex interplay



between non-contributory involvement, psychological correlations or shared characteristics, social categorization, and the shared honor principle.

Through the combination of these research methods, a comprehensive theoretical framework of the Illusory Shared Honor Effect was realized, providing a robust and versatile tool for understanding this pervasive social psychological phenomenon.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, ISHE theory presented in this paper signifies an extensive synthesis of extensive real-life observations and empirical evidence from existing literature. It's rooted in the understanding that individuals can associate themselves with successful entities and partake in their glory, despite not contributing to these successes themselves.

The cornerstone of this theory is the notion of non-contributory involvement, grounded in the established psychological frameworks of Basking in Reflected Glory (BIRGing) (Cialdini et al., 1976), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and self-perception theory (Bem, 1967). The ISHE phenomenon is understood as a complex intertwining of psychological correlations or shared characteristics and social categorization, manifesting in a shared sense of honor.

ISHE theory integrates the aforementioned psychological and social principles, providing a comprehensive framework that reflects and explains our shared human experience in relation to the honor and success of groups we identify with. Its

formation marks a significant stride in social psychology, offering a consolidated, in-depth understanding of the complexities of social identity, self-perception, and the shared honor principle.

Building on the foundations laid by the BIRGing concept introduced 47 years ago, ISHE theory is a testament to the continuous evolution of our understanding of human social psychology. The journey towards this realization underscores the power of observations and the critical need for robust theoretical frameworks that make sense of our shared human experiences. It encourages future researchers to delve deeper into this fascinating interplay of self-perception, social identity, and shared honor, paving the way for more nuanced explorations of this fundamental human tendency.

In essence, the Illusory Shared Honor Effect is more than just a psychological phenomenon; it is a testament to our innate desire to belong, to associate ourselves with success, and to share in the honor of entities larger than ourselves. It provides a clearer understanding of the human experience, highlighting the importance of our social connections in shaping our perceptions and experiences of the world.

## **Statement**

During the preparation of this work the author used ChatGPT in order to cite some literature, confirm some statements, proofread and improve the language clarity and structure of this report. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and

edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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