

Yes We Did! Basking in Reflected Glory and Cutting Off Reflected Failure in the 2008 Presidential Election

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In two studies, the tendency to Bask in Reflected Glory (BIRG) or Cut Off Reflected Failure (CORF) was examined in the context of the 2008 presidential election. Experiment 1, a field study, found that yard or window signs endorsing successful Democratic candidate Barack Obama were displayed longer than signs endorsing his opponent. Experiment 2 utilized a survey methodology to explore moderators of the BIRG effect implied by prior research. Self-esteem was shown to moderate CORF, such that individuals with lower self-esteem distanced themselves from the unsuccessful presidential candidate. Other moderators consistent with the cognitive consistency basis of BIRG, strength of identification and self-serving attributions, were not. Reasons for these findings are discussed, and future directions for research on BIRG are proposed.

Democrat Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign was historic for many reasons, not the least of which was his ability to connect with and mobilize young voters (Cave, 2008). The term "Obamania" was especially apt, as it harkened back to the excitement and obsession that The Beatles inspired with their debut in the U.S. Some questioned whether the excitement could be translated into success (Wright, 2008), but with youth turnout at a 30-year high, Obama's rallying cry of "Yes we can" morphed into a triumphant "Yes we did!"

The passion and the fury aroused by competition, political or other forms, is rightfully a prime topic of discussion and of scientific research. Competition

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can lead to large, cohesive groups whose behavior seems to defy models of rationality, in that the benefits of said behavior to the individual are unclear, if not absent (Olson, 1965). Crucial to making sense of this mass behavior is Social Identity Theory. SIT explains how self-identification as a member of a group affects individuals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; for a review, see Hogg, 2005). Our memberships in groups, be they the Republicans or Democrats, or Red Sox fans or Yankees fans, can become a significant part of our identity and, accordingly, our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can take on group-serving orientations. One critical tenant of SIT is that our self-esteem is affected by the status and success of the groups we identify with (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982; Hirt, Zillman, Erickson & Kennedy, 1992).

An early study by Cialdini et al. (1976) examined one way we respond to the seemingly intertwined fates of ourselves and those associated with us. Noting the tendency of individuals to highlight even the most superficial connection to successful others, Cialdini et al. (1976) examined the behavior of college students in relation to the fortunes of their school's football team. In one study, they found more students wearing university-identifying apparel after their football team won than after they lost. They termed this "Basking in Reflected Glory" (BIRG), and hypothesized that it was an attempt to increase the association between one's self and the successful football team, for self-presentational purposes. In Study 2 and Study 3, it was found that students who were given failure feedback increased their tendency to describe football victories in an inclusive, association-implying manner ("we won"). Whereas Study 2 had students fail a quiz of university knowledge (personal failure), Study 3 merely reminded them of a time when their football team lost (group failure). This is evidence that students perceived a shared fate of their own and their university's image.

Cialdini et al. (1976) cited Balance theory (Heider, 1958) as the cognitive underpinnings, and later found more theoretically consistent effects. Individuals also responded to failure by derogating college rivals (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980), and would "boost" those they are associated with (Finch & Cialdini, 1989). Cialdini and colleagues concluded that individuals manage information about those associated with them in much the self-serving way they do information about themselves (Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989). Similarly, SIT research has found strong tendencies toward bias in favor of groups one belongs to (ingroup bias), such that individuals will rate groups they belong to as better (for a review, see Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992) and allocate resources to those groups unfairly (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971).

Cialdini et al. (1976) discussed BIRG primarily as an impression management technique, but maintained it may also serve a self-esteem regulating function. While most studies assessed public displays of association, some have used private ratings (Finch & Cialdini, 1989), or even unobtrusive measures of private behavior (Boen, Vanbeselaere, & Feys, 2002), and found similar results. These

studies could be interpreted as evidence of the self-esteem regulation function;¹ however, the distinction between this and impression management motivation may be exaggerated, as self-esteem has been shown to be closely tied to our public self-image (Cooley, 1902; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995).

While Basking in Reflecting Glory is presented in such a way as to emphasize the association-enhancing tendency, Cialdini et al. (1976) acknowledged that it also implied the converse, decreasing the association after failure.² Snyder, Lassegard and Ford (1986) devised a laboratory experiment to compare increasing and distancing responses separately, and found effects only for distancing. Snyder et al. reasoned the image protection motivation which leads to Cutting Off Reflected Failure (CORF) was more common than the image-enhancement motivation that led to BIRG. However, Wann and Branscombe (1990), based on social identity theory, reasoned that an individual's identification was an important moderator and found highly identified basketball fans were more likely to BIRG, and less likely to CORF.

The BIRG phenomenon should be applicable to any association, though initial efforts with political associations were not successful (Sigelman, 1986; Wann, Hamlet, Wilson, & Hodges, 1995). More recent research is promising. Boen et al. (2002) and Boen and Vanbeselaere (2002) observed yard and window signs after elections in Flanders, and found signs supporting winning parties were displayed longer. Miller (2006) analyzed American National Election Studies (ANES) data from presidential elections between 1984 and 2004, specifically looking at the pre- and post-election thermometer ratings respondents reported for the candidates they supported. Supporters of losing candidates decreased their ratings after the 1984, 1988, and 1996 elections (CORF). BIRG was not detected. In 1992 and 2000, supporters of losing candidates did not change their ratings, but supporters of winning candidates increased theirs. This could be interpreted as BIRG; however, given the unusual circumstances of those elections (an unusually strong third-party candidate, and a protracted legal battle over a disputed election outcome, respectively), it is also possible the supporters of the losing candidates felt cheated (thus, the absence of CORF) and supporters of winning candidates were defensively "boosting" their candidate. It is inconsistencies such as these that necessitate further research.

Building on Miller's (2006) ANES study, the present research is focused on testing two potential moderators of BIRG: outcome explanations (attribution) and self-esteem. The post hoc explanation of Miller's (2006) findings for the 1992 and 2000 ANES assumed respondents had utilized external attributions,

¹ Cognitive consistency theories could also account for this finding. In fact, Boen, Vanbeselaere, & Feys' (2002) method and findings are remarkably similar to early studies of cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), which itself evolved into a theory of self-esteem regulation (Greenwald & Ronis, 1978).

² Thus, Basking in Reflected Glory is the correct term to use when it can be determined that association highlighting behavior was present, or when the direction of the effect is unknown.

such as irregularities in those elections, as an excuse for their candidate's defeat, and this reduced or eliminated their tendency to CORF. Much as prior work has shown individuals attributing their own failures to external factors (Miller, 1976; Lau & Russel, 1980), Miller's (2006) Study 2 found that supporters of the losing candidate in 2004 tended to choose more externally attributing reasons (e.g., unfair attack ads, poor decision by the voters). Similarly, Sherman, Kinias, Major, Kim, & Prenovost (2007) showed highly identified sports fans engaging in biased attributions following their team's defeat. In this experiment, I sought to test this ability to reduce (or possibly magnify) election outcome effects through attributions. I hypothesize that those who generate more externally attributing explanations for their candidate's loss will engage in less CORF.

Secondly, I wanted to measure the effect of self-esteem. Despite frequent mentions of BIRG as self-esteem regulating (Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Wann et al., 1995; Boen et al., 2002), no work to date has actually reported the effects of self-esteem on BIRG. Extensive work has shown that those higher in self-esteem are less affected by threats to their social status (Nezlek, Kowalski, Leary, Blevins, & Holgate, 1997), or their worldview (Greenberg et al., 1992). Self-esteem seems to operate as a "buffer" against threats to the self. Most relevant to this study, it has been found that those low in self-esteem have a self-presentational orientation "based on protecting [them]selves from failure, embarrassment, rejection and humiliation" (Baumeister, Tice & Hutton, 1989, p. 553). In this context, we would hypothesize that those lower in self-esteem would be more likely to CORF.

In two experiments, I sought to test these hypotheses in the context of the 2008 U.S. presidential election. In the first, a replication of the Boen et al. (2002) field study, I observed yard and window signs endorsing presidential candidates after Election Day. In the second, an extension of the Miller (2006) ANES findings, pre- and post-election thermometer ratings were collected in an online survey. The survey examined group identification, self-esteem, and self-serving attributions as possible moderators of BIRG.

Study 1

With the exception of Miller (2006), who utilized private self-report, BIRG has not been demonstrated in the context of a U.S. election. Given that most research has examined the public aspects of BIRG, I felt it was important to establish a more traditional demonstration in response to the 2008 U.S. presidential election. The procedure was based on prior research by Sigelman (1986); Boen et al. (2002); and Boen and Vanbeselaere (2002).

Method

Locations. Presidential yard signs were observed in select locations near Minneapolis, MN and Knoxville, TN. The state of Minnesota was won by the

Democratic candidate in 2008 (52%–42%), as it has been for every election since 1976. The state of Tennessee was won by the Republican candidate (53%–39%), as it was in the two prior elections. Since 1976, Tennessee has been won five times by the Republicans and three times by the Democrats.³ Specific locations were selected for their accessibility to the research assistants (e.g., several blocks of their own neighborhood), and were observed at approximately the same time each day (afternoon).

Procedure. Before Election Day, 17 psychology undergraduate research assistants (who were blind to the hypothesis of the study) noted all yard and window signs that endorsed either Barack Obama (Democrat) or John McCain (Republican) for president within their self-defined geographic area. To be included, signs had to be located in or on a residential property. Signs on public property (utility poles, medians) were excluded. Yard signs had to be small and easy to remove. Beginning the day after the election, research assistants observed whether the signs were still up once a day for 7 days.

Results

In and around Minneapolis, MN, 198 signs for Obama (50 window, 133 yard), and 37 signs for McCain (3 window, 34 yard) were observed (235 signs total). In and around Knoxville, TN, 71 signs for McCain (9 window, 62 yard) and 66 Obama signs (15 window, 51 yard) were observed (137 total; 372 across both states). Seventeen signs were excluded from analysis (15 Obama, 2 McCain). Ten signs were systematically taken down by the local political party the day after the election. The remaining seven signs were observed to have been damaged (knocked over, ripped or separated from sign post), presumably by weather or vandalism. The results of the following analysis are consistent with or without these exclusions.

An ANOVA test was conducted with candidate supported (McCain or Obama), sign location (yard or window), and state (MN or TN) as between-subjects variables and number of days post-election the sign was displayed (0–7) as the dependent variable. There was a main effect for candidate supported, with Obama signs ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 2.57$) displayed significantly longer than McCain signs ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 2.43$), $F(1, 350) = 12.56$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .035$. Neither state and sign location, nor any of the interactions were significant (see Table 1).

³ In the years Tennessee supported a Democratic presidential candidate, that candidate was a Southerner. Democrat Barack Obama of Illinois was not, and was not expected to carry Tennessee in 2008.

Table 1. Analysis of Variance of the Duration of Election Sign Display

Variable	Sums of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Candidate	78.073	1	78.073	12.563**
State	.968	1	.968	.156
Yard or window	14.542	1	14.542	2.340
Candidate $\times$ State	2.732	1	2.732	.440
Candidate $\times$ YW	3.103	1	3.103	.499
State $\times$ YW	.905	1	.905	.146
Error	2175.148	347	6.215	

Note. $n = 355$.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

As hypothesized, Obama signs were displayed longer than McCain signs after the 2008 presidential election. This is the first successful field study of BIRG of a U.S. presidential election.

This outcome replicates the findings of Boen and colleagues (Boen & Vanbeselaere, 2002; Boen et al., 2002), and finds an effect where Sigelman (1986) did not. Boen & Vanbeselaere (2002) concluded that Sigelman's study may have suffered from methodological issues. Sigelman may have tracked (among others) the larger campaign signs that are installed and taken down by the political parties, not just the smaller signs that can be removed by residents. This study, like Boen and colleagues', limited observation to smaller signs that could be easily removed.

Having established BIRG took place during the 2008 presidential election, I can now more securely examine additional hypotheses utilizing survey techniques. In Study 2, I utilized a time series survey to measure attitudes toward the candidates, the role of self-esteem, and the attributions made to explain the outcome.

Consistent with previous work, I expected evaluations of the losing candidate to decrease. Further, I expected the changes in candidate evaluation to be moderated by identification with the group (political party), by self-esteem, and by external attributions made explaining the outcome of the election, with individuals higher in these decreasing their ratings less.

Study 2

Method

Participants. Participants were recruited through psychology classes at a large state university for extra credit in the course ($n = 167$). To increase the

diversity of the sample, participants were asked to invite their parents to take part ($n = 13$). Thirteen participants did not complete all the surveys, and six participants reported not voting or not voting for a major-party candidate. These participants were dropped from the analysis. The final sample size was 161. The final sample was 57% female and 43% male. The sample was 88% Caucasian. The median age was 19 (max = 65, $SD = 7.7$). Fifty-two of the participants reported voting for Republican candidate John McCain, 109 reported voting for Democratic candidate Barack Obama.

Materials. Candidate evaluations were measured using the “feeling thermometer,” which asks how “warm and favorable” participants feel toward their candidate (rated from 0–100). Political participation questions asked if participants engaged in any of the following acts: voted, wore a button or displayed a sign, spoke to others about voting, gave money or volunteered for a campaign. Scores were the number of the acts they engaged in. These questions are from the ANES (The 2000 National Election Study).

For party identification, participants were asked to select the party they most identified with⁴ (from a list of several political parties) and then asked how closely that party represented their views on a scale from 1 (“not at all”) to 6 (“perfectly”). Liberal/conservative beliefs were assessed with a 7-point bipolar self-report scale. Higher scores were more conservative.

To assess their attributions, participants were asked the free response question “Why did <their candidate> <win or lose>?” Two coders rated the responses on a scale of 1 to 5. Scores of 1 were most internal, as they referred solely to features of the candidate or his campaign (i.e., great speaker, well-run campaign). Scores of 5 were most external, referring to events, factors, and individuals apart from the candidate or his campaign (i.e., the economy, the war, George W. Bush). One coder was aware of the hypothesis of the study; one was not. Their ratings were highly consistent (intraclass correlation = .89), and were averaged.

Self-esteem was measured with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965).

The surveys were collected online, utilizing the university’s Internet survey service.

Procedure. In the month leading up to the 2008 presidential election, participants were recruited and given the first survey. Survey 1 consisted of questions of prior political participation, party identification, liberal/conservative ideology, and self-esteem. Survey 2 was conducted one week before the election. This survey included candidate evaluations and voting intentions. The final survey was

⁴ If individuals reported identifying with no political party, as did 2 McCain voters and 16 Obama voters, a party identification score was not calculated for them.

conducted 2 weeks after the election, and repeated the measures of candidate evaluation. Participants were asked whom they voted for and what supportive behaviors they engaged in. They were also asked to explain the outcome of the election.

Results

The variable “change in candidate rating” was calculated (post-election thermometer score of their candidate minus the pre-election score). This was used as a dependent variable in an independent samples t-test comparing McCain voters (change $M = -3.4$, $SD = 13.96$) and Obama voters (change $M = 1.76$, $SD = 7.37$). The difference was significant, $t(58.96) = -2.41$, $p = .019$. On average, ratings of McCain decreased while ratings of Obama increased. A one sample t-test shows that the change in Obama’s rating was significantly different than zero, $t(107) = 2.48$, $p = .015$, while change in McCain’s rating falls shy of statistical significance, $t(47) = -1.69$, $p = .099$.

To test for differences in election explanations, an independent samples t-test was conducted. McCain voters ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.3$) were found to have generated more externally attributing explanations than Obama voters ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.6$), $t(120.9) = 6.77$, $p = .000$.

To examine the proposed moderators of BIRG, I first examined the correlations between the proposed and the related variables. McCain voters and Obama voters were examined separately, as the moderators of self-enhancement should differ from the moderators of ego protection. Change in rating, party identification, liberal/conservative score, supportive behaviors (political participation), explanation and self-esteem score. The results are presented in Table 2. For McCain voters, only self-esteem correlated with change ($r = .348$, $p = .018$). While identification and explanation did not correlate with change, they did correlate with each other ($r = .330$, $p = .022$). For Obama voters, none of the variables correlated with change in rating. Identification also correlated with explanation, in the opposite direction ($r = -.213$, $p = .041$). Based on these results, only self-esteem was tested as a moderator of the BIRG effect.

To test the moderation of the BIRG effect, a two-step linear regression was conducted. The dependent variable was the change in candidate rating. Predictors in the first step were candidate voted for (dummy coded) and self-esteem (centered). Candidate voted for was significant ($b = -.224$, $p = .006$), self-esteem was not ($b = .085$, $p = .288$). The resulting model was significant, $F(2, 148) = 4.343$, $p = .015$, $r^2 = .055$. In the second step, the interaction between self-esteem and the candidate voted for was entered. This step was significant, $r^2 \Delta = .063$, $F(1, 147) = 10.587$, $p = .001$. The interaction was significant ($b = .289$, $p = .001$) and the resulting model was significant, $F(3, 147) = 6.612$, $p = .000$. McCain voters who were lower in self-esteem showed greater CORF (see Figure 1).

Table 2. Correlations of Potential Moderators of BIRG and Related Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Change ^a		-.105	.016	.174	-.008	.348*
2. Party ID ^b	-.006		.107	.229	.330*	-.338*
3. Political Participation	-.135	.428**		.108	.058	.152
4. Ideology ^c	.091	-.500**	-.341**		.082	-.253 ^d
5. Attribution ^d	.069	-.213*	-.266**	.121		-.058
6. Self-Esteem	-.079	-.026	-.038	.164 ^d	-.069	

Note. McCain voters ($n = 52$) above the diagonal, Obama voters ($n = 109$) below.

^aPost-election ratings of their candidate minus pre-election ratings. ^bDegree of identification with their political party. Nineteen participants reported identifying with no political party, resulting a reduced sample size: McCain voters ($n = 49$), Obama voters ($n = 93$). ^cHigher = more conservative. ^dHigher = more externally attributing election outcome explanation.

^d $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

The results of these two studies show Basking in Reflected Glory and Cutting Off Reflected Failure in response to the outcome of the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Additionally, the role of self-esteem in BIRG was empirically shown; McCain voters with lower self-esteem showed a greater decrease in their ratings of McCain. These studies mark the first time BIRG has been shown in a U.S. election, as well as the first time theories about the role of self-esteem have been tested.

BIRG was first, and most often thereafter, studied as an overt, public behavior. For this reason, field studies have often been utilized. Study 1 replicated the findings of Boen et al. (2002) in finding that signs supporting winning candidates were displayed longer than signs supporting losing candidates. Much as the students observed by Cialdini et al. (1976) highlighted their connection to the university when their football team won, supporters of political candidates also bask in their victory (or, supporters of losing candidates seek to distance themselves from the candidate after defeat). This replication was important before trying to further understand the psychology underlying BIRG.

Study 2 utilized an anonymous pre- and post-election survey, measuring distancing via candidate thermometer ratings. The results here also generally supported the BIRG theorizing, as had similar analysis of U.S. presidential elections with ANES data (Miller, 2006). Having both pre- and post-election ratings, we can see evidence of both BIRG and CORF. The observed distancing was larger but fell short of the traditional significance threshold ($\alpha < .05$), due in part to the small sample size of McCain supporters. Overall, these findings are consistent with Miller's findings, and may shed greater light on the inconsistencies Miller reported. While Miller generally found evidence of CORF (in the 1984, 1988, and 1996 elections), BIRG (or possibly "boosting") was also observed (in 1992

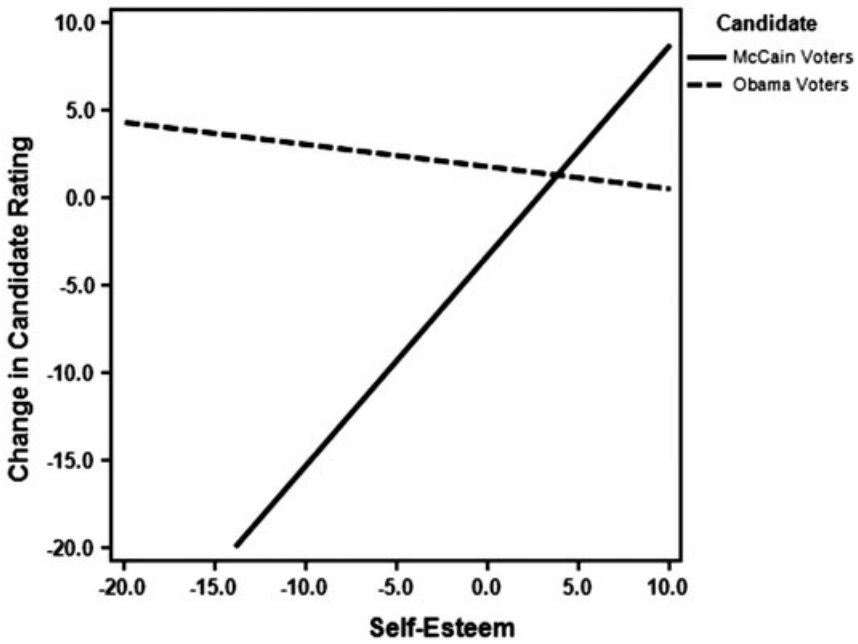


Fig. 1. Self-esteem interacts with candidate voted for to predict change in candidate rating, $b = .289$, $p = .001$. Voters for unsuccessful candidate John McCain who were lower in self-esteem showed greater Cutting Off Reflected Failure.

and 2000). It should be noted that 1984, 1988, and 1996 were all years that the incumbent political party won re-election, and 1992, 2000, and now 2008 were years in which the opposition political party won. Maintaining elected office may not be perceived in the same manner as winning it away from one's opponents. Boen et al. (2002) noted the greatest BIRG was among supporters of a political party that outperformed expectations. The question merits further study.

As predicted, self-esteem played a role. Consistent with theories of self-esteem that posit it playing a role in buffering us from anxiety or rejection (Greenberg et al., 1992; Leary et al., 1995), individuals higher in self-esteem showed less CORF than individuals low in self-esteem. Many further questions about self-esteem remain to be explored. In addition to acting as a buffer, self-esteem (specifically, state self-esteem) could play a process role. Prior work has shown decreases state self-esteem (Hirt et al., 1992) and implicit self-esteem (Gramzow & Willard, 2006) among supporters of unsuccessful sports teams or presidential candidates, respectively. These decreases may be the impetus for self-esteem managing responses such as CORF. This would be consistent with Leary et al.'s theory of the sociometer, with state self-esteem serving to alert us to threats to our social inclusion (such as learning we are in the minority in our political preferences).

Study 2 did not replicate previous findings on the role of identification, nor did it support the hypothesis about the role of attributions for the election result. While replicating prior work (Sherman et al., 2007), with highly identified individuals expressing more external attributions for the election outcome, neither were related to the change in candidate rating. This may be due to the measure of change in candidate rating. The thermometer rating asks how “warm and favorable” one feels toward his or her candidate. While intended here as a global measure of evaluation (“favorable”), it may be primarily an affective rating (“warm”). In that case, what has been measured here is not the actual Cutting off of Reflected Failure, but an affective mediator of this process. The relationship with self-esteem could support this hypothesis, as self-esteem is largely considered an affective attitude (Leary et al., 1995). Attributions are cognitive responses, and may not influence the affective response, but may independently affect the resulting BIRG behavior. Further research will have to examine this possibility with both self-report and public behavioral measures.

A shortcoming of this research that must be noted is the samples utilized. Study 2 utilized college undergraduates, the vast majority of whom were voting in their first election. Further, young voters overwhelmingly supported Obama. The small sample of McCain voters constrained analysis, and could be an alternate reason some of the hypothesized effects were not observed. Study 1, a field study, presumably captured a larger, nonstudent population, but still oversampled Obama supporters (even in Tennessee, a state McCain carried by 14 points). The results of Study 2 should be replicated, especially with a more politically experienced sample.

Much as extensive research on cognitive dissonance has shown the myriad ways in which individuals may reduce dissonance (Festinger, 1957; Cooper & Fazio, 1984), individuals have an array of choices in managing their associations for self-presentational or self-esteem management purposes. Moving forward, future research should more clearly define the precise conditions when BIRG, CORF, or other self-esteem managing techniques (e.g., self-affirmation) are utilized to resolve the threat of failure or to enhance the benefits of victory. Crucial determinants may lie in the individual (identification, self-esteem) or in the social situation (magnitude of defeat, available attributions). Though this and most research has focused on the former, the latter is ripe for exploration, often with pre-existing data sets or public records.

Political participation has been the subject of extensive research, much of it focused on the demographic, SES, and resource differences between those who participate and those who do not (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995). Promising new research explores more social/interpersonal influences. Field research on boosting participation has found that face-to-face, get-out-the-vote (GOTV) appeals are more effective than phone or email appeals (Gerber & Green, 2000; Green, Gerber, & Nickerson, 2003), that increased participation is carried over to others in our social network (Nickerson, 2008), and that public Election Day

festivals boost turnout (Addonizio, Green, Glaser, & Ryan, 2006). However, in a further testament to the power of self-presentational concerns, the strongest effect was found for GOTV appeals that threatened to inform one's neighbors if one did not vote (Gerber, Green, & Larimer, 2008).

The motivation to impression manage is powerful, and it can affect political participation in either direction. Wann et al.'s (1995) work on Cutting Off Future Failure would imply that one reason people do not participate, or that they do not participate more, is a fear of becoming associated with a candidate or party that may lose or later disappoint. While, before, these pressures could be navigated relatively privately, donors in support of California's Proposition 8 (an amendment to ban gay marriage) discovered public disclosure laws and Internet search engines have made some political activity (e.g., donations) uncomfortably public (McKinley, 2009). In the Internet era, political self-presentation is no longer a concern just for politicians. This social dilemma may be felt more acutely by independents and political neophytes, a worrying trend for those who feel the American electorate is already too polarized.

In the wake of the 2008 presidential election, many will closely examine the success of Barack Obama and seek to draw lessons from it. Many will point to his use of the Internet and new media technologies (Abroms & Lefebvre, 2009), perhaps overlooking the many failed candidates and campaigns that did so as well (Vargas, 2007; Baumgartner & Morris, 2009). Perhaps more emphasis should be put on the attractive image Barack Obama presented, one that especially resonated with young adults, and the meticulous media strategy that maintained it. Far from stoking self-presentational concerns, Obama's campaign developed followers very willing and eager to be associated with him. The more interesting question may be how these followers (especially new voters) respond to a surely less appealing Obama Administration, and how these experiences affect long-term political participation. Will the enthusiasm Obama generated lead to entrenched political views and a stronger base for the Democratic Party, or will it be opportunistically forgotten or disavowed with changing political conditions?

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