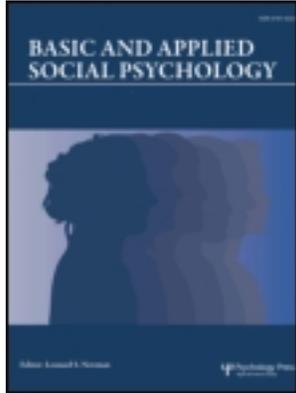


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People differ in their reactions to the outcomes of their group. Whereas some may revel in victory and mourn in defeat, others may internalize victory but distance themselves from defeat. Here, we sought to relate these divergent reactions to two forms of alignment with groups—identity fusion and group identification. Investigations of the 2008 elections in the United States and Spain revealed that people who were “fused” with their political party internalized both victory *and* defeat, but highly identified persons internalized only victory. We discuss how these findings bear on the conceptual distinctions between identity fusion and group identification.

Group members may react very differently to their group's victories and defeats. Some members may internalize victory but not defeat, predicting that their personal lives will greatly improve following the group's victory but remain relatively unchanged following defeat. Others, however, may internalize both types of outcomes, predicting that their lives will improve with victory but decline with defeat. Our goal in this article was to identify individuals who were likely to display these distinctive reactions to the fate of their group. We accordingly focused on how two independent

measures of alignment with groups—group identification and identity fusion—related to the reactions of Spanish and American nationals in the wake of the 2008 national elections in their respective countries. To put our research in context, we briefly review past literatures on group identification and identity fusion.

GROUP IDENTIFICATION

Social identity approaches to group behavior, as articulated in the form of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), are based on the distinction between personal and group identities

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(James, 1890). Whereas personal identities are derived from those aspects of the self that are unique to the individual self (e.g., “sociable” or “athletic”), social identities align people with other members of social groups (e.g., “Democrat” or “European”). Over the decades, the social identity perspective has provided a rich account of social behaviors ranging from prejudice and discrimination, economic decision making, conformity and social influence, to leadership (for an overview, see Hornsey, 2008).

Although social identity researchers have emphasized intergroup processes, some have explored individual differences within groups in the degree to which group members identify with their group. They have noted that whereas some group members strongly value the group and perceive it as highly important (i.e., high identifiers), other members are relatively uninvested in the group (i.e., low identifiers). Not surprisingly, group identification is a powerful moderator of a broad range of group-relevant behaviors and attitudes. Compared to low identifiers, high identifiers work harder and more effectively with other in-group members (van Knippenberg, 2000) and are more receptive to organizational restructuring (Jetten, O’Brien, & Trindall, 2010). In addition, high identifiers are more apt to discriminate against out-group members (Gagnon & Bourhis, 1996; Jetten, Spears, Hogg, & Manstead, 2000) and protest against out-group causes (Hornsey et al., 2006).

Given the effectiveness of group identification in predicting group-related behaviors, it would seem that identification should moderate reactions to group victory and defeat. In this article, we focus on a relatively unexplored set of reactions: beliefs regarding what will happen to members’ *personal* lives following an important group victory or loss. First consider the case of low identifiers. Previous work has characterized low identifiers as “fair-weather fans” who bask in the group’s reflected glory but distance themselves in the wake of failure (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). These data suggest that those who are weakly identified with their political party may cheerfully translate news of their party’s victory into rosier predictions about their personal future. However, following a loss, low identifiers may distance their personal selves from the defeat, leading to more optimistic predictions regarding their future than high identifiers.

The reactions of high identifiers, however, may be more complex. Conceivably, as “die-hard loyalists” willing to stick with their group through both thick and thin (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997), high identifiers may feel personal hope following victory but despair following defeat. Yet other evidence suggests that high identifiers may insulate themselves from the negative effects of defeat (Ellemers, Spear, & Doosje, 2002). Indeed, following an in-group threat, high identifiers are more

likely than low identifiers to stress the cohesiveness of their in-group (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995), draw clearer distinctions between their in-group and out-groups (Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997), and increase their competitiveness with out-groups (Steele, 1987). It is interesting that this defensive posture is accompanied by a lack of negative self-directed emotion, such as sadness (Crisp, Heuston, Farr, & Turner, 2007). Together, these findings suggest that rather than reacting to defeat with personal despair, high identifiers may ignore or deny the impact of the defeat on their personal lives. One goal of the present research is to test these competing predictions regarding the reactions of high identifiers to the defeat of their group.

IDENTITY FUSION

Although the social identity perspective has dominated the groups literature for several decades, in recent years several theorists have questioned some of its basic assumptions, such as the notion that there is a hydraulic relationship between the personal and social self (e.g., Abrams, 1994; Postmes & Jetten, 2006) and that attraction to other group members is based only on the degree to which they embody prototypic qualities of the group (Hogg, 1993). Recently, Swann and colleagues have built upon these revisionist themes by offering an alternative conceptualization of group processes that focuses on the dynamic interplay of people’s personal and social selves (Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011; Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009). According to the identity fusion perspective, some members of groups experience a visceral feeling of “oneness” between their personal sense of self and a highly valued social identity, resulting in a state of “fusion.” The state of fusion is associated with a tendency for the boundary between the personal and social self to be porous (Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012).

Identity fusion theory (Swann et al., 2012) articulates four principles that differentiate it from the original social identity approaches. First, the agentic-personal-self principle assumes that highly fused individuals retain a highly agentic personal self that may play a key role in motivating behavior (Swann, Gómez, Huici, Morales, & Hixon, 2010). Second, the identity synergy principle assumes that personal and social identities may combine synergistically to motivate pro-group behavior (Swann et al., 2009). Third, the relational ties principle contends that fused persons perceive other group members as unique individuals who are not categorically interchangeable with one another and are thus worthy of saving even if it requires self-sacrifice (Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, Hart, & Jetten, 2010). Fourth, the irrevocability principle argues that the degree to which

highly fused individuals remain aligned with the group tends to remain stable over time (Swann et al., 2012).

Recent research has supported each of the four principles of fusion theory, such as theoretically crucial evidence that activating personal identities can amplify pro-group activity (Swann et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the opposite flow of influence—from the social to the personal identity—has received relatively little attention. The current research was designed to test the latter, group-to-self flow of influence. In line with fusion theory's assumption that the boundaries between the personal and social selves are highly permeable, we predicted that group-related outcomes would significantly influence perceptions of the personal self for fused, but not nonfused, persons. Specifically, we expected that fused group members would predict that their personal fortunes would rise or fall with the fortunes of the group. In contrast, we expected that nonfused persons would predict that the group outcomes would have little impact on their personal outcomes.

THE CURRENT STUDY

To examine the links between identity fusion and reactions to group victory and defeat, we conducted parallel investigations of the 2008 national elections in the United States and Spain. Each election featured two main opposing candidates (Obama vs. McCain and Zapatero vs. Rajoy, respectively) representing major political parties. In each election, one party (Democrat, Worker's Party, United States, and Spain, respectively) was the clear overall victor.

Method

Participants. The study was conducted online in two waves during the 2008 national elections in the United States and Spain. The first wave occurred during the 30-day run-up to each country's election. Four hundred fifty-nine Americans from all 50 states were recruited online via Facebook ads to enter a drawing for an iPod music player; 871 Spaniards enrolled at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia completed the study online in exchange for course credit. Spanish participants represented all of the 17 different Autonomous Communities in Spain (these communities are similar to states in the United States). In both countries, participants were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate voter attitudes and affiliations before and after elections. The second wave occurred up to 2 weeks following the election, with 57% of the original participants (162 American women and 102 men, M age = 25.75; 324 Spanish women and 172 men, M age = 32.99) volunteering to complete the second wave. Participants

whose party won versus lost were equally likely to participate in Wave 2 (46% of U.S. winners, 54% of U.S. losers, 52.2% of Spanish winners, and 47.8% of Spanish losers completed both waves, chi-squares <1.66 , $ps >.20$). Gender and participant birthplace were included as covariates in the initial analyses. As they revealed no effects, they were dropped from all subsequent analyses.

Procedures and measures. In the first wave, participants indicated which political party they affiliated with and then completed the Identification and Fusion scales. Party identification was assessed using Mael and Ashforth's (1992) Identification scale with political party as the focal group. On a 0 (*totally disagree*) to 6 (*totally agree*) scale, participants completed six items such as "When I talk about my group, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'." Responses to the six items were substantially interrelated ($\alpha s = .85$).

The Mael and Ashforth scale is well-established and highly cited in the group and organizational identity literature, and it has been previously used to conceptualize political party identification (e.g., Greene, 1999). We chose this scale because previous research on identity fusion has revealed that, relative to other identification scales (i.e., Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001; Leach et al., 2008; Tropp & Wright, 2001), Mael and Ashforth's scale is most strongly related to identity fusion and the major outcome variables in past research on identity fusion (i.e., extreme pro-group behaviors; Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011; Gómez, Morales, Hart, Vázquez, & Swann, 2011; Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, et al., 2010; Swann, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010; Swann et al., 2009). However, the scale is limited in that it is not typically used in national polling research (see Blais, Gidengil, Nadeau, & Nevitte, 2001). Also, some have contended that Mael and Ashforth's scale measures correlates of identification rather identification per se (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Nonetheless, on empirical grounds, the scale provides the most conservative test of the discriminant validity of our index of identity fusion.

The measure of identity fusion with political party was a single-item pictorial scale, based on a measure originally developed by Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992) and subsequently modified by Schubert and Otten (2002) and Swann et al. (2009). The scale has five options (see Figure 1). The first four options depict two increasingly overlapping circles, with the smaller circle representing the self and the larger circle representing one's political party. Those endorsing any of the first four options were designated "nonfused." In the fifth option, the "self" circle is completely embedded within the group circle. Those endorsing this option

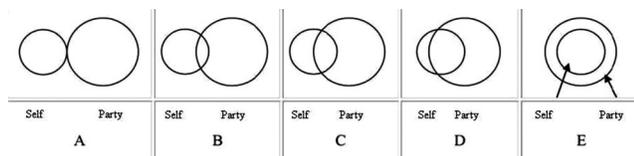


FIGURE 1 Pictorial measure of identity fusion with political party.

were designated “fused.” Although single-item pictorial scales of individual differences are uncommon, in the particular case of identity fusion, the pictorial scale succinctly and accurately captures the construct’s core notions of oneness and permeability by keying in on people’s familiarity with Venn diagram representations. Recent support for the scale’s validity has been reported by Gómez, Brooks, et al. (2011): The pictorial scale was highly correlated ($r_s = .87$ – 1.0 , corrected for attenuation) with a newly developed seven-item verbal measure of identity fusion that explicitly tapped notions of oneness and permeability (e.g., “I am one with my group” and “My group is me”). For a more detailed discussion of the psychometric properties of the fusion scale and justification for treating it as a dichotomous index, see Swann et al. (2009).

In the second wave, participants completed three items predicting their personal future life quality. On scales ranging from 0 (*totally disagree*) to 6 (*totally agree*), participants predicted the likelihood that in the future: “My personal life is going to be better,” “I will have better economic opportunities,” and “I will feel more satisfied with my life.” Higher means indicate more positive expected quality of life, $\alpha_s = .85$ (United States) and $.80$ (Spain).

Preliminary analyses. Consistent with past studies, measures of identification and fusion were weakly correlated ($r_s = .15$, $.11$ in the United States and Spain, respectively). In the U.S. and Spanish samples, 10.2% and 10.5% of participants were fused with their political party. The nonrandom assignment to groups was non-optimal (i.e., 143 of 265 Americans were affiliated with the winning party; 237 of 496 Spaniards were affiliated with the winning party). Concerns regarding this issue were diminished, however, by evidence indicating that political party was independent of both identification, $F(1, 458) = .03$, $p > .86$, $F(1, 870) = .45$, $p > .50$, and fusion, $\chi^2(1, N = 459) = .005$, $p > .94$; $\chi^2(1, N = 871) = .18$, $p > .67$, for the United States and Spain, respectively.

Results

We conducted multiple regressions (e.g., Aguinis, 2004; West, Aiken, & Krull, 1996) to test our hypotheses

regarding the relationships between group identification and identity fusion with expected future life quality following election victory versus defeat. The predictors were identification (continuous), fusion (fused vs. non-fused), outcome (victory vs. defeat of participant’s political party), country (United States vs. Spain), and all interactions. Fusion was weight coded, election outcome and country were effect coded, and identification was centered (Aiken & West, 1991). The outcome variable was predicted life quality, standardized to allow comparability across countries.

Analyses revealed the predicted interaction between fusion and election outcome, $B = -.17$, $t(744) = -4.50$, $p < .001$. As shown in the left side of Figure 2, after victory, fused participants predicted better life quality than nonfused participants, $B = .12$, $t(744) = 3.54$, $p < .001$ but after defeat, fused participants predicted worse life quality than nonfused participants, $B = -.11$, $t(744) = -3.88$, $p < .001$. There was also an interaction between election outcome and country, $B = .09$, $t(745) = 2.68$, $p < .01$. After defeat, Americans expected worse life quality than Spaniards, $B = -.14$, $t(745) = -2.90$, $p < .01$, $M = -.60$, $SD = .86$ versus $M = -.32$, $SD = .87$, whereas Americans and Spaniards were equally optimistic after victory ($p > .49$). Although this interaction between election outcome and country was not anticipated, the important point is that it did not qualify the predicted interaction between fusion and election outcome reported earlier. Finally, there were also main effects of election outcome, $B = .45$, $t(744) = 13.13$, $p < .001$, indicating more positive reactions following victory versus defeat, and identification, $B = .16$, $t(744) = 4.37$, $p < .01$, indicating that high identifiers responded more positively overall than low identifiers (see right side of Figure 2).

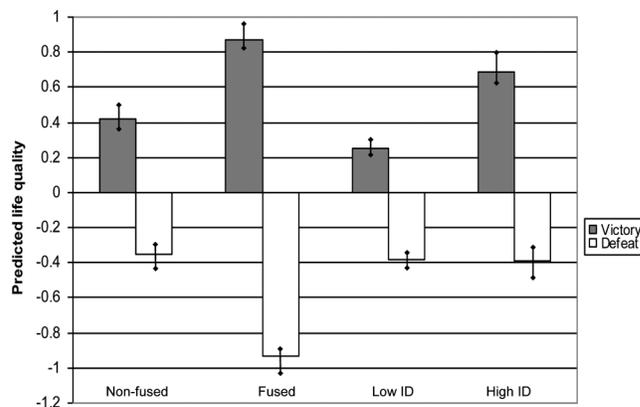


FIGURE 2 Expected personal life quality as a function of identity fusion, group identification, and election outcome. *Note.* ID = identification level (Mael & Ashforth, 1992); Low and High ID represent -1 and $+1$ SDs. Error bars represent standard errors.

To determine whether the identity fusion construct was clearly distinct from identification, we examined the degree of overlap between people classified as fused versus “extremely identified” (“extremely identified” were those who scored in the highest 10.5 percentile, which is the same percentile used to designate “fused”). If identity fusion was just extreme identification, there should be substantial overlap between people who were fused and people who were extremely identified. Contrary to this possibility, fused participants were actually *less* common in the extremely, as compared to the moderately, identified groups, $\chi^2(1, N=761)=15.67$, $p < .001$, 2.55% vs. 7.95%, respectively. Clearly, consistent with earlier empirical (Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011) and conceptual (Swann et al., 2012) work, being fused was not equivalent to being highly identified.

DISCUSSION

Do some people feel that their personal futures hinge on their party’s fate in national elections? Apparently so. In parallel studies of the 2008 presidential elections in Spain and the United States, we found that people who were fused as compared to nonfused with their party predicted that their quality of life would rise with their party’s victory and fall with its defeat. Of interest, members who were highly identified with their party (but not fused) responded differently. That is, relative to weakly identified persons, highly identified individuals expressed higher hopes for their personal futures following their party’s victory but made similar predictions following defeat.

What explains these two patterns? Consider first the reactions associated with identity fusion. In line with the notion that fused persons have highly porous boundaries between their personal and group identity, fused persons’ predictions about their personal selves were associated with their party’s fortunes, regardless of whether those fortunes were positive or negative. Fused persons were thus unique in that their group-related hope and despair permeated the borders of their group identity to influence their predictions regarding their personal futures. Therefore, our findings transcend past evidence that the personal agency of fused persons embolden pro-group action (Swann, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010; Swann et al., 2009) by providing empirical support for the opposite, group-to-self flow of influence.

Our results also complement previous research on identity fusion in other ways. For example, we offer converging evidence that identity fusion is not merely extreme identification. Instead, the two measures apparently tap complementary but mostly nonoverlapping modes of alignment with the group. In addition, whereas most previous research on fusion has relied

almost entirely on Spanish participants (for exceptions, see Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011), here we found cross-culturally consistent results with Americans. Furthermore, consistent with the assumption that the identity fusion model presumably pertains to any collective group, our findings apply the model to political identity.

Perhaps most important, our focus on national elections represents the first work on fusion to take advantage of significant real-world contexts, indicating that fusion effects extend beyond endorsement of fighting and dying for one’s group (Swann et al., 2009), saving group members by throwing themselves in front of a speeding trolley (Swann, Gómez, Davidio, et al., 2010), or actual overt behaviors such as donating money or increasing the speed with which one raced an avatar that represented one’s group (Swann, Gómez, Huici, 2010). Apparently, identity fusion is influential in determining not only what people will do for the group but also something as fundamental as perceived future well-being.

Of interest, a different picture emerged with group identification. Whereas highly fused individuals internalized both group victory and defeat, high identifiers displayed an asymmetrical pattern, internalizing victory but not loss. From this vantage point, the effects of identification seemed to follow the self-enhancement pattern advanced in earlier work on basking in the reflected glory of the group (Cialdini et al., 1976). That is, following defeat, high and low identifiers alike made mildly negative predictions about their personal futures. Their rather benign reactions are consistent with past evidence that high identifiers deny feeling sad following a group loss (Crisp et al., 2007) and add an interesting twist to past characterizations of high identifiers as intensely loyal group defenders (Ellemers et al., 1997; Ellemers et al., 2002). Apparently, their loyalty is coupled with an ability to shield the effects of defeat from significantly dampening their personal thoughts and feelings about the future. Although the precise mechanism underlying high identifiers’ reactions is unclear, we suspect it may have to do with the adaptive ability to contain identity-relevant emotions within compartmentalized social and personal identities (McConnell, 2011; Showers, 2002).

Our findings also add to the growing literature on how and when group identification affects personal outcomes more generally. One research strand has shown that multiple group memberships promote a host of positive personal outcomes, ranging from increases in positive affect (Brook, Garcia, & Fleming, 2008), memory retention (Jetten, Haslam, Pugliese, Tonks, & Haslam, 2010), and resilience to physical pain and other challenges (Jones & Jetten, 2011). In addition to the breadth of social identities, our findings suggest that the *degree* of one’s identification with a particular group may promote a more positive outlook for one’s personal future.

Overall, our study adds to an emerging picture of identity fusion and its relationship to past social identity approaches. We showed that measures of social identification and identity fusion were uniquely related to people's reactions to election victory versus defeat. Fused voters, whose personal self and political identity uniquely share permeable boundaries, internalized group victory as a major boon to their personal fortunes and defeat as a personal disaster. High identifiers, in contrast, internalized victory but not defeat, pointing to a tendency to anticipate a rosy personal future following their group's success but failing to display a parallel tendency to anticipate difficulties following their group's defeat.

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