How Do People React to Stigma Acknowledgment? Race and Gender Acknowledgment in the Context of the 2008 Presidential Election[1]

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Some studies have found that acknowledging one's stigmatized social identity in an evaluative context leads to more favorable evaluations, whereas others have found that stigma acknowledgment can increase negative evaluations. The present study examined one potential factor (i.e., evaluators' attitudes toward social groups to which acknowledgers belong) that may moderate the relation between stigma acknowledgment and evaluations, in the context of race and gender acknowledgment in the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Results indicated that acknowledgment of race, but not gender, led to more negative evaluations, particularly for high-prejudiced individuals. The findings highlight the importance of examining stigma acknowledgment effects from a Person × Situation perspective. Implications for advancing understanding of acknowledgment as a useful strategy in evaluative contexts are discussed.

The 2008 presidential election was the first in U.S. history in which both of the major parties nominated individuals from historically stigmatized social groups for key leadership positions. As the media focused not only on their policies but also on their demographic characteristics, Barack Obama and Sarah Palin faced a decision that is less relevant for White male candidates: "Should I talk about my race/gender?"

Possessing a racial minority status or being a woman can be considered as potentially stigmatizing in the U.S. (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). *Stigmas* are personal attributes or characteristics that convey a social identity that is negatively perceived in a particular social context (Crocker et al., 1998; Goffman, 1963). One way to organize the many types of stigmas is to categorize them according to whether they are physically invisible (e.g.,

sexual orientation, mental illness, religious affiliation, history of abortion) or visible (e.g., race, gender, physical disability, obesity) to others (Button, 2004; Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2001; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Goffman, 1963; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Pachankis, 2007; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). When individuals possess invisible stigmas, they may have to decide whether to disclose or conceal them (Button, 2004; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001; Pachankis, 2007; Ragins et al., 2007). When individuals possess visible stigmas, they may have to decide whether to acknowledge or ignore their stigmatized identities (Farina, Sherman, & Allen, 1968; Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Hebl & Skorinko, 2005). That is, one can choose to say nothing about one's identity or directly speak of one's category membership. The present investigation focuses on the acknowledgment of visible stigmas.

Research on the effects of one's decision to acknowledge or ignore one's stigmatized social identity on evaluations has a long history (Davis, 1961; Farina et al., 1968; Hebl & Kleck, 2002). Many studies have shown that acknowledging one's stigmatized social identity reduces interaction strains between individuals with and without stigmatized social identities, reduces perceptions of stereotypes associated with the social identities, and leads to more favorable evaluations of the individual who made the acknowledgment (Davis, 1961; Evans, 1976; Hastorf, Wildfogel, & Cassman, 1979; Hebl & Kleck, 2002). However, researchers have proposed (Phillips, Rothbard, & Dumas, 2009) and recent studies have found that stigma acknowledgment can be disadvantageous for those who make such acknowledgments as it results in negative evaluations (Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Tropp & Bianchi, 2007).

The present study proposes that stigma acknowledgment effects on evaluations are moderated by evaluators' attitudes toward social groups to which individuals who made the acknowledgment belong. More specifically, the study examined whether race/gender acknowledgment by the candidates in the 2008 presidential election influenced voters' attitudes toward them and whether this effect was moderated by voters' attitudes toward Black Americans/women.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, the study takes a person–situation perspective and identifies a potential moderator of stigma acknowledgment. Second, pre-existing attitudes toward the individual making the acknowledgment are controlled for, which has not been done previously, allowing for a more precise examination of acknowledgment effects. Finally, the study extends the previous studies, which tend to use hypothetical or contrived situations with scripted acknowledgments, by using authentic acknowledgment statements made in a real evaluative context.

Stigma Acknowledgment

Research has shown that acknowledging a stigmatized social identity leads to positive intergroup consequences (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Davis, 1961; Evans, 1976; Hastorf et al., 1979; Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Hebl & Skorinko, 2005; Mills, Belgrave, & Boyer, 1984). For instance, Hastorf et al. had participants observe short interviews in which a confederate who posed as a paraplegic either acknowledged his physical disability, disclosed personal information that was irrelevant to physical disability, or did not acknowledge his physical disability. The results showed that participants preferred to work with an individual who acknowledged his physical disability over one who did not acknowledge the disability, or one who disclosed personal information unrelated to his disability. Positive evaluations of individuals who acknowledge a stigmatized social identity have been reported when individuals with and without stigmatized social identities interact with one another face to face (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Evans, 1976; Mills et al., 1984), when there is an expectation of interaction (Hastorf et al., 1979), and even when there is no expectation of future interaction (Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Hebl & Skorinko, 2005).

There are several potential mechanisms that explain why stigma acknowledgment results in positive intergroup consequences. When individuals with and without stigmatized social identities engage in actual interactions, there often are interaction strains because individuals without stigmatized social identities fear hurting feelings, lack knowledge concerning how to behave during intergroup interactions, and are concerned about not appearing prejudiced (Evans, 1976; Hastorf et al., 1979; Mills et al., 1984). In this case, individuals possessing a stigmatized identity can reduce these interaction strains by signaling that they are comfortable talking about their identities through stigma acknowledgment.

Acknowledgment can also set some behavioral guidelines by signaling that it is fine to talk about a stigma during interactions (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Davis, 1961; Evans, 1976; Hastorf et al., 1979; Mills et al., 1984). Even when individuals without stigmatized social identities do not expect to interact with those with stigmatized social identities, stigma acknowledgment can still send a positive message about stigma acknowledgers. Some researchers have suggested that stigma acknowledgement may signal one's openness, as well as adjustment to one's life situation (Hastorf et al., 1979; Hebl & Kleck, 2002), which both are characterized as positive attributes that play important roles in friendship formation (Collins & Miller, 1994).

Contrary to these findings that suggest positive effects of stigma acknowledgment on evaluations, a few studies have shown that stigma acknowledgment can result in negative evaluations (Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Tropp &

Bianchi, 2007). For instance, Hebl and Kleck (2002; Study 1) demonstrated that an obese individual who acknowledged her obesity was perceived to possess more negative stereotypical characteristics associated with obesity and was rated more negatively, compared to an obese individual who did not mention her weight. In this case, acknowledgment may have activated stereotypes associated with obesity. Some researchers have examined why stigma acknowledgment is beneficial in some cases and a liability in others by looking at perceived controllability as a factor that moderates stigma acknowledgment effects (DeJong, 1980; Hebl & Kleck, 2002). DeJong found that acknowledgment mitigated negativity toward a woman who acknowledged her obesity when she attributed the cause of obesity to an uncontrollable medical condition and that acknowledgment did not lead to positive perceptions in the absence of a medical excuse.

Likewise, Hebl and Kleck (2002; Study 2) found that when a woman mentioned that she was obese because of her thyroid condition, she was seen as less stereotypical of the obese and was rated more positively, compared to when she mentioned that she was obese because she had overeaten and did not exercise. These studies suggest that when stigma acknowledgment is successfully used to convey that the stigma is not under one's control, acknowledgment can reduce stereotypes associated with stigmas and mitigate negative evaluations. These findings are consistent with research on the attributional analysis of reactions to stigmas that suggests that people with uncontrollable stigmas are evaluated and treated more positively than those who possess stigmas perceived to be controllable (Crandall et al., 2001; Crandall & Martinez, 1996; Hegarty & Golden, 2008; Weiner, 1993, 1995; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988).

Evaluators' Explicit Attitudes Toward Social Groups

The current study will extend previous research and investigate another potential factor that may moderate the relation between stigma acknowledgement and evaluations of acknowledgers: evaluators' explicit attitudes toward social groups that are the basis of acknowledgment. In her seminal paper, Devine (1989) demonstrated that people are equally knowledgeable of cultural stereotypes about certain social groups and that these stereotypes are equally accessible and automatically activated, regardless of the levels of prejudice assessed with explicit, self-report measures. However, individuals who score low on self-report measures of prejudice differ from those who score high on these measures in terms of their beliefs and motivation. More specifically, low-prejudiced people are more likely to endorse egalitarian beliefs and are motivated to inhibit biases associated with the activated

cultural stereotypes, as compared to high-prejudiced individuals (Devine, 1989; Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995). In fact, Devine showed that although low-prejudiced individuals were susceptible to the negative influence of activated stereotypes of Blacks when their ability to consciously monitor stereotype activation was precluded (Study 2), they were able to inhibit the biases toward Blacks when they were asked to deliberatively list their thoughts and feelings about Blacks (Study 3). Other researchers have also demonstrated that attitudes toward a stigmatized social group—assessed by explicit, self-report measures—are positively related to evaluation of its members in contexts where the evaluative task is a deliberative one (i.e., individuals can consciously monitor their responses and deliberatively report their thoughts and feelings about members of a stigmatized social group; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Fazio et al., 1995).

To our knowledge, every study that has investigated the effects of stigma acknowledgement on evaluations used explicit, self-report measures (e.g., asked participants to report their preferences, feelings, and thoughts about the target persons). Thus, stigma acknowledgment effects reported in the previous studies could be influenced by evaluators' attitudes toward social groups, such that high-prejudiced individuals may react more negatively to stigma acknowledgment than low-prejudiced individuals. Because high-prejudiced individuals are not motivated to appear egalitarian to the same degree as low-prejudiced individuals, the acknowledgement message that individuals with a stigmatized social identity are comfortable talking about their identities or that they are open and well-adjusted to their life situations may not have value in their evaluation processes. Rather, stigma acknowledgment may highlight group differences and increase awareness of stereotypes associated with the social groups to which individuals who made the acknowledgment belong. This distinction has not been considered in previous studies on acknowledgment.

To test the moderating effect of evaluators' explicit attitudes toward social groups that are the basis of acknowledgment, the present study tests the effects of White voters' attitudes toward Black Americans on race acknowledgment, and the effects of male voters' attitudes toward women on gender acknowledgment in the context of the 2008 presidential election. More specifically, we examined whether voters' explicit attitudes toward Black Americans/women would have differential effects on their attitudes toward Obama/Palin following exposure to speeches in which they acknowledged their race/gender, as compared to exposure to speeches in which they did not acknowledge their race/gender. We hypothesize that high-prejudiced White individuals will express more negative attitudes toward Obama, as compared to low-prejudiced White individuals, when he

acknowledged his race than when he did not acknowledge his race. Likewise, we hypothesize that high-prejudiced male individuals will report more negative attitudes toward Palin, compared to low-prejudiced male individuals, when she acknowledged her gender than when she did not acknowledge her gender.

Method

Participants and Design

Study participants were 276 undergraduates (191 females, 85 males) who received partial class credit for their participation. With regard to race, 82.2% of the participants were White, 5.1% were Black American, 4.3% were Asian American, 1.4% were Latino American, 0.7% were Native American, and 5.5% were other/multiracial (2 participants did not report their race). Of the participants, 36 were excluded from data analyses because they either did not have the right to vote in the U.S. or could not correctly identity the four major candidates (Biden, McCain, Obama, and Palin). Because the focus of the current study is on how stigma acknowledgment influences individuals without stigmatized social identities, the current study specifically examines White voters' ($n = 198$) attitudes toward Obama's speech and male voters' ($n = 75$) attitudes toward Palin's speech.

There were four conditions that differed along two crossed dimensions: candidate (Obama vs. Palin) and stigma acknowledgment (acknowledgment vs. non-acknowledgment). Each participant watched both Obama and Palin, who each either acknowledged or did not acknowledge their stigmatized social identities.

Procedure

Data were collected in the 2 weeks leading up to Election Day. Prior to the laboratory session, participants completed an online questionnaire that included measures of baseline attitudes toward the four candidates and attitudes toward Blacks and women.[3] Up to 8 participants per session reported to the laboratory and were told that the study examined how personality influences people's reactions to the current presidential campaign.

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[3]Participants completed other measures related to the 2008 presidential election. However, because those measures are not the focus of the current study, they will not be discussed further.

Participants watched four 45-s video clips, one for each candidate.[4] Obama and Palin's speeches were manipulated, such that they either did or did not acknowledge their stigmatized identities. In the acknowledgment condition, Obama mentioned being a Black American, or Palin mentioned being a woman. In the no-acknowledgment condition, they talked about themselves and their families[5] (see Appendix for the transcripts). The participants were randomly assigned to watch either Obama's acknowledgment speech or no-acknowledgment speech. They also independently watched either Palin's acknowledgment speech or no-acknowledgment speech. Thus, participants watched one of the four combinations of Obama and Palin speeches: (a) Obama and Palin both acknowledged; (b) Obama acknowledged, but not Palin; (c) Palin acknowledged, but not Obama; and (d) neither Obama nor Palin acknowledged. Across the conditions, both Biden and McCain talked about themselves and their families. The order of the four video clips was counterbalanced across participants. After the video clips, participants completed a measure assessing their attitudes toward candidates, as well as a manipulation check.

Measures

Attitudes toward the candidates (prelaboratory and laboratory sessions). Participants' attitudes toward each of the four candidates were assessed with 14 bipolar items. The items were introduced with "Obama/McCain/Biden/Palin made me feel . . . ," which was anchored by *agitated/at ease*, *angry/calm*, *anxious/confident*, *ashamed/proud*, *blue/cheerful*, *distressed/peaceful*, *frustrated/relaxed*, *hopeless/hopeful*, *irritated/delighted*, *nervous/comfortable*, *sad/happy*, *threatened/secure*, *uncertain/certain*, and *uneasy/tranquil*. The responses were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from −3 to 3, with higher numbers indicating that the candidate made them feel more positive (αs = .99 for Obama and Biden, and αs = .98 for McCain and Palin in the prelaboratory session; αs = .98 for all candidates in the laboratory session). There was no difference between experimental conditions on this measure in the prelaboratory session, all Fs$(3, 272) < 1.48$, $ps > .31$.

Attitudes toward Black Americans (prelaboratory session). Participants' attitudes toward Black Americans were assessed with Brigham's (1993) 20-item Attitudes Toward Blacks Scale. Sample items include "It would not

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[4]The video clips used in the present study are available from the first author upon request.
[5]Although it was ensured that all candidates talked about themselves and their family, the exact content of the speeches differed, as we were more concerned with preserving external validity and using the actual speeches made by each of the four candidates.

bother me if my new roommate was Black" (reverse-scored), "Black and White people are inherently equal" (reverse-scored), and "Generally, Black people are not as smart as White people" ($\alpha = .87$). Responses were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate more prejudiced attitudes toward Blacks. There was no difference between experimental conditions on this measure, $F(3, 272) = 1.60$, $p = .19$.

Attitudes toward women (prelaboratory session). Participants' attitudes toward women were assessed with Glick and Fiske's (1996) 22-item Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, which measures two different types of sexism: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. *Hostile sexism* reflects antagonistic attitudes toward women, whereas *benevolent sexism* reflects chivalrous attitudes toward women. Sample items for hostile sexism include "Women seek to get power by getting control over men," "Women exaggerate problems they have at work," and "Women are too easily offended" ($\alpha = .84$). Sample items for benevolent sexism include "Women should be cherished and protected by men," "Every man ought to have a woman that he adores," and "Men are complete without women" (reverse-scored; $\alpha = .75$). Responses were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating more prejudiced attitudes toward women. There were no differences between experimental conditions on these measures, $F(3, 272) = 1.17$, $p = .32$; and $F(3, 272) = 0.67$, $p = .57$, respectively.

Manipulation Check

We assessed the effectiveness of the acknowledgment manipulation with four items: "Obama/Palin mentioned being an ethnic minority/a woman in the video clip I just watched," "Obama/Palin did not talk about being an ethnic minority/a woman in the video clip I just watched" (reverse-scored). Two items were averaged within each candidate to assess the overall effectiveness of the acknowledgment manipulation. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating that participants perceived stigma acknowledgment. Correlations between the two items were .79 and .87, respectively, for Obama and Palin.

We conducted two independent-group t tests to test whether participants correctly perceived stigma acknowledgment in candidates' speeches. The results indicate a significant mean difference between acknowledgment and nonacknowledgment conditions for Obama, $t(238) = -14.38$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.86$, such that participants in the acknowledgment condition reported that Obama mentioned his race more ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.16$) than did those

in the nonacknowledgment condition ($M = 1.91$, $SD = 1.03$). Likewise, there was a significant mean difference between acknowledgment and non-acknowledgment conditions for Palin, $t(238) = -10.20$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.33$, such that participants in the acknowledgment condition reported that Palin mentioned her gender more ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.35$) than did those in the nonacknowledgment condition ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.25$). Thus, there was a difference across conditions in perceptions of stigma acknowledgment.

Analysis Overview

We conducted two sets of moderated regression analyses to examine the effects of stigma acknowledgment on voters' perceptions of the candidates and whether this relation is moderated by voters' attitudes toward social groups. One analysis focused on the effects of Obama's race acknowledgment for White voters ($n = 198$), while the other focused on the effects of Palin's gender acknowledgment for male voters ($n = 75$).[6] The current study specifically looks at White voters' reactions to Obama's speech and men's reactions to Palin's speech because our focus is on how stigma acknowledgement influences individuals without a stigmatized social identity.

In these regressions, a dummy-coded term for acknowledgment condition was created in which nonacknowledgment condition was dummy-coded as 0, and acknowledgment condition was dummy-coded as 1. In order to account for pre-existing attitudes toward each candidate, grand-mean-centered baseline attitudes toward the respective candidate were included in the model. Effects of acknowledgment condition and grand-mean-centered attitudes toward the relevant social group were included in the model, along with the two-way interaction between the dummy-coded acknowledgment condition and attitudes toward the social group. In addition, voters' attitudes toward other candidates (i.e., Biden, McCain, and Palin when examining attitudes toward Obama; and Biden, McCain, and Obama when examining attitudes toward Palin) were also included in the model as control variables.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables for White voters and male voters are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

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[6]Although we also looked at voters' attitudes toward McCain and Biden as a function of Obama and Palin's stigma acknowledgment, given that candidates were linked as a ticket, we did not find significant differences. Therefore, these results are not discussed in the current paper.

Table 1

Means and Correlations Among Measures for White Voters

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Attitudes toward Obama	1.30	1.40	—					
2. Attitudes toward Palin	−0.07	1.56	−.43**	—				
3. Preexisting attitudes toward Obama	0.96	1.63	.87**	−.56**	—			
4. Preexisting attitudes toward Palin	−0.86	1.56	−.62**	.77**	−.69**	—		
5. Anti-Black attitudes	2.68	0.79	−.34**	.15*	−.30**	.23**	—	
6. Hostile sexism	2.76	0.65	−.17*	.18**	.23**	.25**	.40**	—
7. Benevolent sexism	2.96	0.53	−.12†	.21**	.17*	.20**	.16*	.23**

Note. $N = 198$.
†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Attitudes toward Obama were correlated negatively with attitudes toward Palin among both White and male voters. This suggests that those who felt more positively toward Obama felt more negatively toward Palin.

Although anti-Black attitudes correlated negatively with attitudes toward Obama (i.e., the more racist people were, the less positively they felt toward Obama), the relations between sexism attitudes and attitudes toward Palin were different between White and male voters. Specifically, both hostile and benevolent sexism attitudes correlated positively with attitudes toward Palin among White voters (i.e., the more sexist people were, the more positively they felt toward Palin); whereas they were not significantly related to attitudes toward Palin among male voters. In addition, both forms of sexism attitudes correlated positively with racism attitudes among White voters, whereas only hostile sexism was significantly and positively correlated with racism among male voters (i.e., people who were more sexist were also more racist). However, it is important to note that these differences between White and male voters may be a result of the

Table 2

Means and Correlations Among Measures for Male Voters

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Attitudes toward Obama	1.25	1.40	—					
2. Attitudes toward Palin	−0.14	1.52	−.38**	—				
3. Preexisting attitudes toward Obama	0.98	1.60	.86**	−.43**	—			
4. Preexisting attitudes toward Palin	−0.79	1.41	−.60**	.63**	−.66**	—		
5. Anti-Black attitudes	2.73	0.79	−.24*	.11	−.27*	.15	—	
6. Hostile sexism	2.98	0.55	−.20†	.10	−.19†	.23*	.36**	—
7. Benevolent sexism	3.10	0.43	.03	.15	−.08	.10	−.02	.01

Note. N = 75.
†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

difference in sample size, as the sample size of White voters was more than double of that of male voters.

Attitudes Toward Obama

Table 3 presents the results of the effects of Obama's race acknowledgment on White voters. Given coding for acknowledgment condition and centering of voters' attitudes toward Blacks, White voters reported that Obama made them less positive when he acknowledged his race ($M = 1.14$, $SD = 1.47$), as compared to when he did not acknowledge his race ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 1.32$, $d = .24$). In addition, there was a marginally significant interaction between acknowledgment condition and attitudes toward Blacks. Consistent with our prediction, examination of the simple slopes for attitudes toward Blacks indicates that anti-Black attitudes were negatively related to attitudes toward Obama in the acknowledgment condition ($B = −.21$), $t(190) = −2.64$,

Table 3

Effects of Race Acknowledgment and Attitudes Toward Blacks on White Voters' Attitudes Toward Obama

	Attitudes toward Obama		
Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*(190)
Intercept	1.53	.06	25.28***
Pre-existing attitudes toward Obama	0.55	.04	12.91***
Attitudes toward Biden	0.39	.05	7.57***
Attitudes toward McCain	−0.04	.05	−0.77
Attitudes toward Palin	0.08	.05	1.61
Acknowledgment condition	−0.26	.09	−3.07**
Anti-Black attitudes	−0.01	.08	−0.07
Condition × Anti-Black Attitudes	−0.21	.11	−1.92††

††$p < .06$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

$p < .01$, such that the more prejudiced participants were toward Blacks, the less they reported that Obama made them feel positive when he acknowledged his race. In the nonacknowledgment condition, the simple slope for anti-Black attitudes was unrelated to attitudes toward Obama ($B = -.01$), $t(190) = -0.07$, $p = .95$ (see Figure 1). The results suggest that White voters who expressed more negative attitudes toward Black Americans reported that Obama made them feel less positive when he acknowledged his race, as compared to White voters who expressed less negative attitudes toward Black Americans. On the other hand, White voters, regardless of prejudice level, felt the same toward Obama when he did not acknowledge his race.

Attitudes Toward Palin

The regression analysis was conducted twice; first with hostile sexism attitudes as a measure of attitudes toward women, and then substituting benevolent sexism (see Table 4). The results for both measures are similar and are reported concurrently. Neither acknowledgment condition nor sexism attitudes predicted attitudes toward Palin. Likewise, contrary to our prediction, the interactions between both forms of sexism attitudes and acknowledgment condition were nonsignificant. These results suggest that
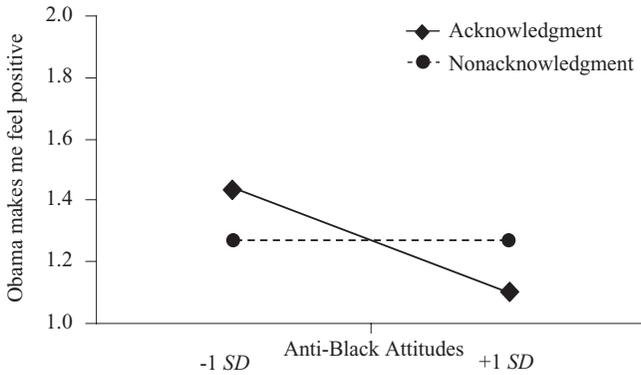
Figure 1. White voters' attitudes toward Blacks moderate the effects of race acknowledgment made by Obama.

Table 4

Effects of Gender Acknowledgment and Attitudes Toward Women on Male Voters' Attitudes Toward Palin

Predictor	Attitudes toward Palin (hostile sexism)			Attitudes toward Palin (benevolent sexism)		
	B	*SE*	*t*(67)	*B*	*SE*	*t*(67)
Intercept	−0.31	.18	−1.70	−0.40	.17	−2.32*
Pre-existing attitudes toward Palin	0.36	.11	3.17**	0.32	.11	2.90**
Attitudes toward Biden	−0.02	.16	−0.10	0.02	.16	0.11
Attitudes toward McCain	0.67	.10	6.56***	0.66	.10	6.58***
Attitudes toward Obama	0.12	.14	0.82	0.10	.14	0.68
Acknowledgment condition	0.24	.25	0.98	0.25	.23	1.09
Attitudes toward women	−0.32	.31	−1.02	0.20	.39	0.51
Condition × Attitude	0.08	.42	0.20	0.39	.53	0.72

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

neither gender acknowledgment made by Palin nor voters' attitudes toward women changed how male voters perceived Palin.[7]

Discussion

The findings suggest that the effects of stigma acknowledgment differ, depending on the stigma (Hebl & Kleck, 2002). Stigma acknowledgment was more of a liability than a help for Obama, whereas it did not affect evaluations of Palin in the context of the 2008 presidential election. It is important to emphasize that this effect occurred when controlling for pre-existing attitudes toward them.

Furthermore, the current investigation demonstrated that individuals do not react to stigma acknowledgment in a uniform manner. Previously, research has failed to examine stigma acknowledgment effects from a Person × Situation perspective. Our findings suggest that acknowledging one's stigmatized social identity can be costly in some situations (e.g., race acknowledgment) for some people (e.g., those who interact with high-prejudiced individuals). Specifically, as we predicted, race acknowledgment by Obama had particularly negative effects on White voters who were highly prejudiced. That is, high-prejudiced White voters, as compared to low-prejudiced voters, reported that Obama made them feel less positive when he talked about his race in his speech. In contrast, low- and high-prejudiced White voters felt the same toward Obama when he did not talk about his race.

We speculate that stigma acknowledgment was more of a liability for Obama—especially when voters were highly prejudiced Whites—because these voters might have perceived Obama's race acknowledgment as "playing the race card." This might be especially true in the current study as a result of the content of the speech, as Obama not only mentioned his racial background (i.e., being the son of a Black man and a White woman), but he also talked about slavery, which is a racially charged subject. In contrast, low-prejudiced White voters might not have perceived the acknowledgement in the same way.

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[7]We also conducted the same analyses including only female voters in order to explore the effects of acknowledgment on individuals who share the same stigmatized social identity. The patterns of the results were the same as male voters. That is, female voters, regardless of their sexism attitudes, responded similarly toward Palin when she acknowledged her gender as when she did not acknowledge her gender. Because we had only 13 African American participants in our sample, we could not examine whether race acknowledgment had any effect on Black Americans' attitudes toward Obama.

Alternatively, the interaction effect found in the current study also fits with theories on the expression of racial prejudice, such as symbolic racism (Kinder & Sears, 1981), aversive racism (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000), and the justification-suppression model (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003), in that these theories suggest variation in expressions of racism that can be influenced by contextual cues (in this case, by acknowledgement). More specifically, these theories argue that individuals are likely to express their genuine prejudiced attitudes when expression of negative attitudes will not result in being labeled as prejudiced. According to these theories, high-prejudiced White voters expressed their negative attitudes toward Obama because they could argue that their negative feelings are a result of his policies or poor speech content, not a result of his race acknowledgment per se.

The current findings are interesting because the study was conducted within a 2-week period before Election Day. At this point, individuals likely were exposed to other speeches that contained references to identity by the candidates, and they likely had developed strong feelings toward particular candidates. In fact, the majority of the White voters (60.6%) in our study reported that they were Obama supporters in the pre-laboratory session (with 27.3% for McCain, 1.5% for "Other," and 10.6% reporting undecided). The results suggest that even when people (think that they) like an individual with a stigmatized social identity, a specific stigma acknowledgment can still have negative impact.

We argue that the current findings have practical implications for future political campaigns, as exposure to a single case of stigma acknowledgement can result in at least temporary negative evaluations of the acknowledgers. In the 2008 presidential election, three states had very close margins between votes for McCain and Obama (i.e., Indiana, 1.03%; Missouri, 0.14%; North Carolina, 0.40%). Given the narrow margins in these states, effect sizes such as those observed here might affect the distribution of votes, especially when the voters were exposed to Obama's race acknowledgement immediately before Election Day.

Should candidates with stigmatized social identities ignore their identities during their campaigns in order to avoid any negative consequences of stigma acknowledgement? Ignoring one's identity may alienate individuals who share the same stigmatized social identity.[8] Perhaps candidates could acknowledge their social identities early in campaigns (in order to avoid the negative consequences of non-acknowledgment among those who share the same social identity), but avoid acknowledging their social identities too close

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[8]We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this interesting point.

to Election Day (in order to avoid the negative consequences of *acknowledgment* among highly prejudiced individuals).

Why didn't gender acknowledgment have negative effects for Palin? One explanation is that male voters have already formed strong negative feelings toward Palin, as there had been many discussions in the media questioning her intelligence throughout the campaign; thus, stigma acknowledgement may not have further impacted her image. In fact, our data show that, on average, male voters rated Palin significantly lower than the midpoint, $t(74) = -4.86$, $p < .001$, on the pre-laboratory attitudes measure, indicating that they felt negatively toward Palin. Alternatively, one can also argue that the absence of the negative effects of gender acknowledgment is a result of social norms about expression of sexism. Previous research has shown that sexism is perceived as more acceptable than racism (Czopp & Monteith, 2003); thus, low-prejudiced male voters might not have been motivated enough to inhibit their negative feelings toward Palin "playing the gender card."

Gender acknowledgment did not have positive effects, either. Because people tend to perceive sexism as less problematic in our society than other forms of prejudice (e.g., racism; Czopp & Monteith, 2003), gender acknowledgment made by Palin might not have been viewed as a positive signal in the same way that acknowledgment of other "more problematic" stigmas is (e.g., openness, being well-adjusted).

Another important function acknowledgement may serve is reducing stereotypes associated with the stigmatized identity. The media had focused on Palin's suboptimal performance during interviews (Couric, 2008) and her spending on clothing (Barker, 2008; Froelich, 2008), which are consistent with negative female stereotypes. Because people were exposed to more female-stereotypical than counterstereotypical characteristics displayed by Palin, acknowledgment may need to serve to reduce stereotypes associated with the stigmatized identity (DeJong, 1980; Hebl & Kleck, 2002). However, the gender acknowledgment used in the current investigation was not made while linking to counterstereotypical individuating information. If an acknowledgment successfully conveyed counterstereotypical characteristics, it might have resulted in more positive evaluations.

The current findings highlight the critical role that individual-difference factors play in moderating the effects of stigma acknowledgment. Research has consistently shown that acknowledgment can be advantageous for individuals with physical disabilities (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Evans, 1976; Hastorf et al., 1979; Mills et al., 1984). Our study suggests that disability acknowledgment may have negative effects on individuals who have negative attitudes toward individuals with physical disabilities. In future research, it

will be important to examine how individual-difference factors—especially those related to intergroup perceptions (e.g., group identification, attitudes toward social groups, just-world beliefs, social dominance orientation)—moderate stigma acknowledgment effects.

One of the goals of the present study was to investigate the effects of stigma acknowledgment in the context of a naturally occurring situation, so responding to the actual speeches provided by the candidates running in the election was critical. As a result, our stigma acknowledgment manipulation has limitations, as Obama did not merely mention his racial background, but also mentioned slavery. Likewise, Palin did not merely mention her gender, but also mentioned being a mother. Therefore, it is possible that participants in the current study were reacting to other aspects than acknowledgment.

In future studies, experimentally manipulating the content of stigma acknowledgment would be useful (e.g., include only stigma acknowledgment, conveying counterstereotypical characteristics or not) in order to investigate when and why stigma acknowledgment is beneficial for those who do so. A related direction for future research would be to investigate different degrees of emphasis on one's identity, such as no mention, simple acknowledgement, statements regarding identity centrality, and strong emphasis on a given identity in discussion.

Another direction would be to consider the role of expected future interaction on the effects of acknowledgement. For example, if one expects to work with an individual with physical disabilities on a daily basis, acknowledgment allows for a discussion of how, if at all, the disability may need to be accommodated. In these cases, stigma acknowledgement may result in positive interpersonal consequences because it provides behavioral guidance. In the current study, individuals were unlikely to be expecting personal future interactions with the president, although they likely were expecting future impact of the elected candidate on their lives. Further research investigating the nature and extent of future interaction may advance understanding of the effects of acknowledgement.

The present study revealed that the effects of stigma acknowledgment are different for race and gender in the context of the 2008 presidential campaign. More importantly, the study suggests that evaluators' attitudes toward stigmatized social groups are important moderators in understanding how they react to stigma acknowledgment by an individual. This work advances research and theory on stigma acknowledgment by highlighting the need to consider the nature of the stigma acknowledgment from a Person × Situation perspective. The study also suggests the need to better investigate the coupling and decoupling of acknowledgment of a stigmatized identity and counterstereotypical information.

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Appendix

Obama acknowledgment:

I am the son of a Black man from Kenya and a White woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a White grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's Army during World War II and a White grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a Black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave owners—an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles, and cousins of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents.

Obama nonacknowledgment:

To the love of my life, Michelle Obama, and to Malia and Sasha. In the face of that young student who sleeps just 3 hours before working the night shift, I think about my mom, who raised my sister and me on her own while she worked and earned her degree; who once turned to food stamps, but was still able to send us to the best schools in the country. And when I hear a woman talk about the difficulties of starting her own business or making her way in the world, I think about my grandmother. She's the one who taught me about hard work. She's the one who put off buying a new car or a new dress for herself so that I could have a better life.

Palin acknowledgment:

And as the mother of one of those troops, that is exactly the kind of man I want as commander in chief. I'm just one of many moms who'll say an extra prayer each night for our sons and daughters going into harm's way. Our son Track is 19. Track is the eldest of our five children. In our family, it's two boys and three girls in between: Bristol, Willow, and Piper. Todd and I welcomed our littlest one into the world, a perfectly beautiful baby boy named Trig. My mom and dad both worked at the elementary school in our small town. And among the many things I owe them is one simple lesson: that this is America, and every woman can walk through every door of opportunity.

Palin nonacknowledgment:

My mom and dad both worked at the elementary school in our small town. And, my parents are here tonight, and I am so proud to be the daughter of Chuck and Sally Heath. Long ago, a young farmer and haberdasher from Missouri followed an unlikely path to the vice presidency. A writer observed, "We grow good people in our small towns, with honesty, sincerity, and dignity." I know just the kind of people that writer had in mind when he praised Harry Truman. I grew up with those people. I had the privilege of living most of my life in a small town.

Biden:

God, I wish my dad was here tonight. But I thank God and I'm grateful that my mom, Catherine Eugenia Finnegan Biden, is here tonight. As a child—as a child, I stuttered, and she lovingly would look at me and tell me, "Joey, it's because you're so bright you can't get the thoughts out quickly enough." When I was not as well-dressed as the other kids, she'd look at me and say, "Joey, oh, you're so handsome, honey, you're so handsome." And when I got—when I got knocked down by guys bigger than me—and this is the God's truth—she sent me back out and said "Bloody their nose so you can walk down the street the next day." And that's what I did.

McCain:

As always, I'm indebted to my wife, Cindy, and my seven children. You know, the pleasures of family life can seem like a brief holiday from the crowded calendar of our nation's business. But I have treasured them all the more and can't imagine a life without the happiness that you've given me. When I was growing up, my father was often at sea, and the job of raising my brother, sister, and me would fall to my mother alone. Roberta McCain gave us her love of life, her deep interest in the world, her strength.