

Political Scandal, Gender, and Tabloid News: An Experimental Examination of the Evolutionary Origins of Consumer Preferences for Scandalous News

Building on recent work in evolutionary psychology, we predict substantial gender-related differences in demand for scandalous political news. We argue that individuals' self-images can alter their motivation to seek information about potential sexual competitors and mates, even when those figures are "virtual"—appearing in mass media. Individuals perceiving themselves as attractive will seek negative news about attractive same-gender individuals, whereas individuals perceiving themselves as unattractive will seek negative information about the opposite gender. We test our hypotheses in three ways. First, we investigate partially disaggregated national opinion data regarding news attention. Second, we conduct an experiment in which we asked participants to choose the two most interesting stories from a menu of headlines. We varied the gender and party affiliation of the individual featured in the story. Each participant saw a headline promoting a DUI arrest of an attractive male or female "rising star" from one of the two parties. Finally, we repeat the experiment with a national sample, this time also varying the valence of the tabloid story. We find strong correlations between respondents' self-image and their likelihood of seeking and distributing positive or negative information about "virtual" competitors and mates.

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Introduction

Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) famously called Washington, D.C. “Hollywood for ugly people.” In recent years that jest has proven prophetic, as news coverage of politicians and celebrities has seemingly converged. Scholars, journalists, and pundits (e.g., Kurtz 1993; Kalb 1998; Sabato *et al.* 2000) have decried the increasing “tabloidization” of the political news, and in particular, the devastating impact of scandal-filled coverage of the lives of politicians like Gary Hart, Bill Clinton, and Gary Condit, among others.

While scholars have generally attributed this phenomenon to increased competition and public demand, it is by no means clear that public demand for such scandalous political news is as uniform as this conventional wisdom suggests. In fact, drawing on insights from recent research in evolutionary psychology, we argue that demand for these types of scandalous stories may tend to vary systematically and predictably, depending on the characteristics of the candidate and the audience members.

Specifically, we argue that viewers’ attempts to manage their own reproductive reputations can alter their motivation to seek out information about potential sexual competitors and mates, even when those figures are “virtual”—appearing in mass media. We argue that individuals perceiving themselves as relatively attractive are motivated to seek negative information in the news about similarly attractive members of their gender (i.e. potential competitors), whereas individuals perceiving themselves as relatively unattractive will prefer negative information about the other gender (i.e. potential mates). We further predict that the primary domain of the desired information will also be gender-specific, with male figures’ power and status and female figures’ physical attractiveness being particularly important to potential mates and competitors.

Our theory has important implications for the conduct of politics and elections. For better

or worse, in the contemporary era of tabloid journalism and “gotcha” politics, scandals will likely continue to play an important role in American politics. As the media fragment, strategic politicians and party activists increasingly possess both the technology and information necessary for targeting their appeals, particularly attacks on opponents, to niches of the audience most likely to be responsive. By recognizing how evolved human characteristics, such as those we address in our theory, interact with differences in candidate traits to mediate the likelihood that a message will find a receptive audience, politicians can more effectively tailor messages to specific audience niches. In doing so, they may be able to raise the likelihood that a given attack will take hold, and thereby prove politically consequential, for at least a segment of the public. As national elections are decided by ever-smaller margins, such niche-targeted “scandal” attacks could potentially sway electoral outcomes or political debates.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. We first situate and then explicate our theory, from which we derive a series of hypotheses. Next, we test our hypotheses using two different types of data: an aggregate national survey tracking public attentiveness to different news stories from 1986 to 2006, and two survey-based experiments investigating demand for and redistribution of scandalous political stories. We then discuss our results and their implications for the broader issue of political scandals.

The Evolutionary Foundations of Mating Behavior

Our theory expands on recent research in the field of evolutionary psychology to make broad, testable predictions regarding the demand for scandalous political news. Evolutionary psychology is a subfield in psychology that attempts to explain particular mental traits as adaptations (products of natural or sexual selection). A key concept in evolutionary psychology is the notion of an “environment of evolutionary adaptedness” (EEA) (see, e.g., Barkow, *et al.* 1992).

According to evolutionary psychologists, for most of its history (e.g. all but the last 10,000 or so years), humanity has been adapting to better fit a hunter-gatherer setting. Adaptation to this EEA can thus lead to adaptive lags or “mismatches” in cognitive functions when one takes the brain evolved for such an environment and places it in a modern context.²

The “mismatch” most relevant to this project results from taking a mind that evolved in a localized, small group environment and placing it into the modern context of mass mediation of personal information. Research has shown that individuals process mass media representations of face-to-face interactions in a similar manner as they do actual face-to-face encounters. For example, Mutz (forthcoming) argues that the conventions of modern television production—and particularly the use of close-ups in interviews and debates—heighten both arousal and unease in viewers by appearing to be an unwelcome invasion of the viewer’s personal space (see also Mutz and Reeves 2005). Other scholars have found that television viewers experience feelings and use cognitive strategies derived from their face-to-face experiences (Rubin and Rubin 1985; Reeves and Nass 1996), as well as evidence of so-called “parasocial interaction,” in which viewers feel a bond of intimacy with mass media figures despite the one-way nature of the interaction (Horton and Wohl 1956). Additional research has established a correlation between the strength of these bonds and the status of the viewer’s actual romantic relationships (Cohen 1997).

In this case, we argue that many of the evolved psychological mechanisms designed to evaluate the fitness of potential mates or deal with potential mate competitors can be activated, even when the mates and competitors are actually targeting a mass audience.³ In other words,

² The catchphrase encapsulating this point is that “modern skulls contain a stone-age mind.”

³ Evolutionary scholars maintain a distinction in “sexual selection” between two different, but related, sources: *intersexual* selection focuses on the characteristics one sex generally prefers in the other, while

even when such figures are “virtual” and are exceptionally unlikely to actually mate or compete with mass media consumers, exposure to these figures might influence consumers’ evaluations of any potential mates and competitors they encounter in the “real world.”

Along those lines, research in evolutionary psychology shows that the mass media influence people’s perceptions of their own mate value and the mate value of others. For example, after viewing images of highly physically attractive women, men rate images of average women as less attractive (Kenrick *et al.*, 1989; Kenrick and Gutierrez, 1993), and they report feeling less committed to their own long-term mates (Kenrick *et al.*, 1989). Likewise, after exposure to images of highly attractive women, women assess their own attractiveness as lower than when exposed to images of average-attractiveness women (Gutierrez, *et al.*, 1999). Men’s self-assessed attractiveness is not affected by exposure to men varying in physical attractiveness, but rather, by variation in perceived male power and status. After viewing images of men described as high in status, men feel less attractive as potential long-term mates (Gutierrez *et al.*, 1999).

In fact, an abundant literature shows that men value physical attractiveness in mates more than do women, whereas women value status in mates more than do men (e.g., Buss 1994; Li *et al.*, 2002). In this sense, gender differences in media “contrast effects” reflect gender differences in mate selection criteria (Gutierrez *et al.* 1999).

The effects of these innate, gender-specific tendencies appear to carry over to electoral politics. For instance, studies of gender differences in candidate attractiveness (e.g., Johns and Shephard 2007) have found that voters tend, by default, to associate “warmth” with female candidates and “strength” with male candidates, while rewarding male candidates also perceived as

intrasexual selection refers to the competition among same-sex competitors for access to mates from the other sex. Both factors come into play in our model.

warm and female candidates also perceived as strong.

Another consistent finding in the evolutionary psychology literature is that women and men attempt to modulate their perceived attractiveness interpersonally by derogating their competitors. They do so by seeking and spreading negative information that can damage their competitors' reputations. For example, men report verbally impugning the status of male rivals, whereas women report derogating the physical attractiveness of female rivals; both sexes agree that these tactics are effective in mate competition (Buss and Dedden 1990).

Virtual Mate Competition and Scandalous News

Most prior researchers applying evolutionary psychology to the study of mass media effects have sought to explain or predict the impact of media messages on a largely passive audience. In this project, we challenge this passive consumer assumption to allow for the possibility of more active and motivated consumption and propagation of information. Our core “tabloid hypothesis” predicts that men and women will be motivated to consume and propagate media that depict “virtual” competitors and mates in ways that systematically benefit their own reputation, and thus their competitiveness in attracting mates. In particular, we argue that the mate-related expected reputation (R) value for an individual viewer i can be represented by a simple equation:

$$E(R_i) = prob_{ij} * (M_{xj}) - prob_{oj} * (M_{xj})$$

...where $prob_{ij}$ represents typical observer j 's assessment of individual i 's ability to attract a prospective mate x ; M_{xj} represents the value of the prospective mate x (again, as assessed by individual j); and $prob_{oj}$, represents individual j 's assessment of the ability of other mate competitors to attract that same prospective mate x .

Because the value of M_{xj} is set by a given individual, we can simplify this equation into three general cases, as illustrated in Table 1: (1) $prob_{ij} > prob_{oj}$ (i.e. j believes individual i stands a

better chance at attracting a prospective mate than other competitors); (2) $prob_{ij} \approx prob_{oj}$ (i.e. j believes individual i and individual i 's competition are similarly competitive); and (3) $prob_{ij} < prob_{oj}$ (i.e. j believes that individual i is uncompetitive in the pursuit of mates).

We argue that in each of these three cases, individual i will pursue different information-seeking and redistribution strategies in an attempt to maximize her or his expected reputation value. In particular, we focus on whether that individual will seek negative information about attractive figures in the media, depending on whether those figures are the same or opposite gender (i.e. virtual competitors or mates).⁴ In other words, in a situation where individual i cannot alter their own perceived attractiveness, what information will they choose to view and redistribute when presented with information about either a prospective virtual competitor or mate?

[Table 1 here]

From Table 1, we derive three hypotheses concerning differences in attention and redistribution based on the three cases described above. The first row of Table 1 looks at the case where individual i perceives her or himself as having a clear lead over typical competitors. In this case, with “victory” apparently in hand, individual i should seek to maximize the size of his or her reputational bounty by seeking to find and redistribute positive information about potential mates. Our first hypothesis follows.

H1 (Overwhelming Winners): Participants who see themselves as exceptionally attractive will be disproportionately more likely to attend to or redistribute a positive message targeting the opposite gender (i.e. prospective mates), and disproportionately less likely to attend to or redistribute a negative story targeting a member of their own gender.

⁴ Note that our theory does not currently offer clear predictions for when same-sex figures might be considered both a prospective competitor and/or mate. We thus focus solely on heterosexual participants.

The middle row, in turn, looks at the case where individual i is competitive, but does not believe he or she is dominant. In this case, maximizing the prospective mate's value by choosing to redistribute positive information is a risky strategy, as any such reputational advantages might instead accrue to other competitors if they are viewed as better mate prospects. Instead, the best way to enhance individual i 's own expected reputation would instead be to lower the perceived attractiveness of his or her competitors. A second hypothesis follows.

H2 (Competitors): Participants who see themselves as equivalently attractive to a given competitor will be disproportionately more likely to attend to or redistribute negative stories targeting members of their own gender (i.e. prospective competitors) and less likely to do the same to positive same-sex information.

Finally, we consider individual i 's circumstance in Row 3, wherein the unassailable lead of individual i 's competitors has led to a more defensive strategy: if individual i perceives him or herself as a near-certain “loser” in the competition for a prospective mate, the easiest way to minimize his or her reputational loss would be to instead decrease the perceived value of the “prize.” This suggests a third hypothesis:

H3 (Sour Grapes): Participants who see themselves as much less attractive than a given competitor will be disproportionately more likely to attend to or redistribute negative stories targeting members of the other gender and less likely to do the same to positive cross-sex information.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the vast majority of our participants appear to fall squarely within the middle, “competitors” category. In fact, in our data, the (weighted) average participant rates him or herself as a 6.88 on an 11-point self-assessed attractiveness (SAM) scale, where a score of 6 represents “average.” The weighted average self-attractiveness scores for the three elements of

the SAM scale—self-assessments of the attractiveness of the participant’s body, his or her appeal as a long-term relationship partner, and his or her anticipated future financial status—are 6.3, 7.3, and 7.0, respectively. Looking at the overall (unweighted) average, only 11% of our participants rated themselves in the 9-11 range on the SAM scale, while 2% placed themselves in the 1-3 range, and fully 70% located themselves between 4 and 8. The implication is that competitors are by far the most common type of individual. Consequently, the incentives of competitors are likely to be most commonly observed. This suggests an additional, aggregate hypothesis.

H4 (Aggregate Preferences): *Ceteris paribus*, typical individuals should be more likely to attend to a negative story targeting a member of their own gender than one targeting the other gender.

Additionally, as the aforementioned literature in evolutionary psychology suggests, different characteristics are more salient depending on whether the target being evaluated is male or female. An additional hypothesis (along with two corollaries) follows:

H5 (Gender-specific Aggregate Preferences): *Ceteris paribus*, within each gender, typical individuals will pay greater attention to negative information about traits particularly preferred by the other sex (the traits that one sex generally prefers in the other sex), relative to other negative information.

Corollary 1: *Ceteris paribus*, typical men should be more likely to attend to negative male political stories than other male negative news.

Corollary 2: *Ceteris paribus*, typical women should be more likely to attend to negative female news connected to beauty/fertility than other female negative news.

Finally, we expect that news coverage itself, along with any increase in public awareness it engenders, might serve to boost the status and “fame” of public figures, making them even

more attractive competitors/mate prospects than similar figures who received little or no coverage. A final hypothesis follows:

H6 (Salience): *Ceteris paribus*, the relationships predicted in H4 and H5 (and its corollaries) should be strengthened in direct proportion to aggregate media coverage—and corresponding public attention—to the figures involved.

Data and Methods

We employ three distinct data sets for our hypothesis tests. The first is derived from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press's "News Interest Index" and the latter two are drawn from a series of experiments conducted by the authors. Each data set allows us to investigate multiple, though not all, implications of our theory. The data sets differ in many respects; one is aggregate, the other two individual-level, two are experimental, the third derived from public opinion surveys, two are cross-sectional, the other a time-series. Consequently, we interpret support for our theory across these highly distinct contexts as considerably stronger evidence than a test based on any individual data set alone.

Aggregate Survey

The Pew Center's News Interest Index is built from an ongoing (monthly) series of questions which asks people how closely they have followed certain news stories during the previous month: "very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?" Our data cover the period July 1986 through March 2006.

We limited our analysis to cases that Pew coded "personal" (i.e. related to people's actions or statements, as opposed to impersonal stories like natural disasters) concerning figures in the United States, excluding cases that Pew had coded as "life and death." To ensure we were only addressing comparable cases, we further restricted the analysis to cases dealing with a

specific individual or celebrity (excluding policy initiatives, campaign announcements, and nominations unless the figure withdrew). We also coded whether each observation involved male or female targets, negative information, political information, or sports.

Dependent Variables

For the Pew Survey analysis, our dependent variables measure the proportion of men and women who reported following a particular story “very closely” over the prior month. We also construct a third dependent variable for this analysis, by subtracting the proportion of females “very closely” following a story from the proportion of males, giving us that story’s *Gender Gap*.

Independent Variables

Our survey analysis includes a total of 10 causal variables. The first, *Male Target*, is a binary variable in which a value of one indicates that the primary person associated with the story is male, and zero is female (other values excluded). The second control variable, *Negative* (coded by the Pew Center), is also binary and indicates whether the story is considered to be damaging to its personal target.

To estimate each event’s national salience, we employ a variable labeled *Not At All*, which measures, on a 0-100 scale (also coded by the Pew Center), the proportion of survey respondents who reported following the story “not at all closely” in the last month. We include this latter variable – which we interact with the other key causal variables—to account for the fact that some of the stories included in Pew’s News Interest Index were not salient to the public. Our theory predicts weaker effects for potential mate targets/competitors that have not received significant media attention and hence are not of interest to most individuals (i.e., low-salience issues).

This variable also accounts for what is presumably an artifact of the generating process

for the dataset. That is, each month, Pew investigators select a handful of stories for the News Interest Index poll. While they typically select those stories generating the most media and public attention, there are doubtless instances where they poll the public on an issue not receiving substantial media coverage and about which the public is not particularly interested. In other words, they occasionally get it wrong. Fortunately, Pew's occasional miscalculations in this regard make possible our test of H6 (Salience).

We also include a series of dummy variables (again, coded by the Pew Center) indicating whether a story contained any of the following issue dimensions (not mutually exclusive or exhaustive): Politics, Celebrity/Entertainment, Sports, Science, Crime, and Legal. Finally, we add a control, *Xmas*, to account for decreased public news attentiveness during the Christmas Holiday. This dummy variable takes a value of one during the month of December.

Experiments

Our primary experimental study was conducted by Polimetrix, which employs a national population sample, based on an opt-in Internet survey format. (Except where otherwise specified, the discussion below refers to the Polimetrix study). Polimetrix subsequently weights the sample based on five population dimensions (including party, race/ethnicity, age, gender, and education), in order to provide a nationally representative sample. Of course, an opt-in Internet sample is unlikely to be representative of the national population on any number of dimensions. For instance, our participants are somewhat more ideologically extreme than the overall population. Hence, while this methodology has the benefit of allowing us to employ a national population sample, and is certainly more representative than a student sample in many respects, readers should nonetheless bear in mind the unavoidable limitations of this sampling technique.

Partly as a consequence of these limitations, we also report select results from a pilot

study, replicating our findings with a distinct population sample (3062 undergraduate students). (Results from the pilot study are reported in Groeling, *et al.* 2006.) In addition to bolstering our confidence in the validity of the Polimetrix findings, the lower costs associated with student samples allowed us to expand the treatment conditions in order to test one of our hypotheses (H1) more directly than was possible in the Polimetrix study. Table 2 presents summary statistics for both the student pilot and Polimetrix samples.

[Table 2 here]

The Polimetrix experiment employed a 2x2 between-subjects factorial design, with sex of target individual as the first factor and valence (positive or negative) of the treatment story the second. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four resulting conditions. We created the news article titles and accompanying photographs and text such that they varied along the two focal dimensions: sex of featured individual and valence of the story. In every instance, the target of the story was identified as “Pat Williams.” All stories described Williams as a rising young star in the Republican Party. The positive stories addressed a triumphant fundraising appearance by Williams at a local university, while the negative stories presented Williams as having been arrested for drunk driving. The content of the stories was identical across gender treatments, except, of course, for variations in the description of Williams as male or female (See Appendix A). Along with the title corresponding to their assigned condition, participants viewed five other article titles (each edited from actual news stories) and illustrating photographs (see Online Appendix). We selected the “Pat Williams” photographs from a battery of 20 highly attractive figures based on the results of a separate pre-test (n=17). Consistent with corollaries 1 and 2 of H5, we selected the male image with the highest average power and status scores, and the female image with the highest physical attractiveness score (SAM questions are adapted from

Haselton 2003).

Participants in our experiment completed a pre-test asking them to rate their own mate attractiveness on several dimensions, as well as whether they were currently involved in a romantic relationship and their sexual orientation (see Appendix B for question wording). We then instructed them to read all of the article titles and accompanying photos and select the two of most interest to them. Next, they read the articles, and then were taken to a survey asking about their degree of interest in the articles they read.

Dependent Variable

We derive our dependent variable from four items. The first is simply whether or not the participants selected the treatment story to which they were exposed as either their first or second choice.⁵ The remaining three questions asked participants to rate their degree of interest in learning more about the story, discussing the story with a friend, and forwarding the story to a friend via email (See Appendix B for question wording and coding). We normalize each individual item to a 0-1 interval and then add them together to form a 0-4 scale ($\mu=.61$, $\sigma=1.06$), measuring whether they chose the treatment story and, given that they did so, how interesting they found it. We estimate an OLS model with the resulting 20-category dependent variable.

Independent Variables

For our key causal variables, in addition to treatment dummies, we created a set of eight interaction terms, interacting (a) the treatment condition to which the participant was exposed (negative story about male target, positive story about male target, negative story about female target, positive story about female target), (b) the participant's gender, and (c) the participant's

⁵ Re-specifying this variable so that participants receive a higher score for selecting the treatment story first makes virtually no difference in the reported results.

SAM score.⁶ We also include a control for the order in which the treatment story appeared in the menu sequence. While we randomized the story sequence, testing indicated that the sequence influenced participants' propensity to choose the story. Hence, we opted to directly account for this in our model.

Our second control variable accounts for the fact that our treatment condition is embedded in a partisan context (i.e., it identifies the target as a Republican "rising star"). This could influence participants' propensity to select the story, with strong partisans differing systematically from others. We thus measure the extent of participants' partisanship. This variable is coded 0 for independents and third party members, 1 for self-described "weak" Democrats or Republicans, and 2 for "strong" Democrats or Republicans.⁷

The third control variable is a dummy measuring whether or not the participant is currently involved in a romantic relationship. We anticipate that our predictions are considerably less likely to obtain for individuals who view themselves as "off the market" with respect to mating competition.

The final two controls account for participants' degree of interest in watching "soft" or "hard" news. Since our treatment stories address so-called celebrity personalities—and the negative

⁶ We employ overall SAM scores in our empirical models. We replicated all models employing only those SAM elements that should, according to the theory, be particularly important to the respective genders. The results were comparable (and, consistent with the theory, in some instances somewhat stronger). However, due to the added complexity and reduction of statistical leverage this engendered – especially for the student pilot sample where we also vary the attractiveness of the target – we report results employing only the summary SAM scale. Gender-specific model results are available upon request.

⁷ Separate controls for party identification proved weaker in our models than strength of partisanship and did not materially affect the reported results.

stories specifically reference a celebrity news magazine—we anticipate that participants’ general interest in this type of news, relative to more traditional political news, may influence their propensity to select the treatment stories. We thus include two controls, one measuring participants’ self-described interest in watching the newscasts of the major broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) and cable news channels (CNN, FOX, MSNBC), while the other measures interest in watching *Entertainment Tonight* or sports news.

Results

We turn next to our results, beginning with our experimental tests of hypotheses 1-3, then continuing with tests of hypotheses 4-6 (and associated corollaries) using aggregate national survey data.

Experimental Investigations

Table 2 presents two OLS models, based on our national population sample, testing H1 (Overwhelming Winners), H2 (Competitors) and H3 (Sour Grapes). Recall that H1 predicts that individuals who consider themselves exceptionally appealing mate competitors will tend to be more interested in positive stories about opposite sex targets than negative stories about same-sex targets. H2 then predicts that individuals who perceive themselves to be reasonably attractive mate competitors will be most interested in negative stories about attractive same-sex targets. Finally, H3 predicts that individuals who perceive themselves as relatively unappealing mate competitors will be most interested in negative stories about attractive opposite-sex targets.

[Table 3 here]

The first model in Table 2 tests H2 and H3, while the second tests H1. In interpreting our results, it is important to bear in mind that in the presence of a large number of interaction terms, we cannot test our hypotheses by observing magnitudes or significance levels on individual

coefficients, or even by comparing pairs of coefficients. There are three reasons for this. First, interaction terms necessarily produce colinearity between causal variables, thereby frequently dampening the significance of individual coefficients. Second, in evaluating our hypotheses, we are primarily concerned with the significance of the difference *between* causal variables, rather than the significance of individual coefficients. Finally, and most important, evaluating the substantive implications of interactive relationships requires comparisons across *combinations* of variables (e.g., whether or not the sum of base category *w* plus interaction term *x* is statistically distinguishable from the sum of base category *y* plus interaction term *z*). Consequently, we cannot evaluate our hypotheses by comparing any two individual coefficients in our models.

Given the complexity of parsing these interactive relationships, for ease of interpretation we employ a simulation technique (King, *et al.* 2000) to derive the expected values of our dependent variable (story interest) as the participants' SAM score, gender and treatment condition vary. Figure 1 plots the results from our tests of H2 and H3. The top graphic in Figure 1 focuses on the male variant of the treatment, while the bottom graphic focuses on the female variant.

[Figure 1 here]

Consistent with H2 (Competitors), “competitive” male participants (i.e. those who scored two standard deviations above the mean on the self-assessed mate attractiveness (SAM) scale) were about .89 points more interested in the negative male story, relative to the positive male story (.94 vs. .05 for men).⁸ This represents a difference of approximately .84 standard deviations

⁸ We employ two standard deviation above/below the mean comparisons for two reasons. First, at the “low” end of the SAM scale, H3 (Sour Grapes) *should* apply only to individuals who view themselves as particularly uncompetitive. In order to test this hypothesis as cleanly as possible, we have therefore sought to minimize “contamination” by participants who might view themselves as at least *somewhat*

on the story interest scale ($p < .05$). Conversely, and also consistent with H2, competitive females were about .59 points, or .56 standard deviations, more interested in the negative female story, relative to the positive female story (1.12 vs. .53, $p < .10$). In contrast, and also consistent with the theory, among competitive participants, no statistically significant differences emerge in relative preferences between negative and positive stories about opposite sex targets.

Turning to H3 (Sour Grapes), “uncompetitive” male participants (i.e. those who rated themselves two standard deviations below the mean on the SAM scale) were about .82 points more interested in the negative female story, relative to the positive female story (1.09 vs. .27). This represents a difference of approximately .77 standard deviations on the story interest scale ($p < .05$). Conversely, uncompetitive females were about 1.15 points, or 1.1 standard deviations, more interested in the negative male story, relative to the positive male story (1.34 vs. .19, $p < .01$). In contrast, and again consistent with the theory, among uncompetitive participants, no statistically significant differences emerge in relative preferences between negative and positive stories about same sex targets. Taken together, these results offer clear, strong support for H2 and H3.

Turning finally to H1, as noted earlier, we exposed our participants to one of only two treatment images, both of which were pre-tested to ensure that they were perceived as

competitive. The results predictably weaken somewhat, yet remain comparable, among participants located one standard deviation below the mean SAM score. Second, and more important, at the “high” end of the SAM scale, we deliberately selected exceptionally attractive target photos/biographies. Since status as “competitive” is to some extent inherently relative, this necessitates raising the “bar” for competitor status. In other words, only individuals with quite high SAM scores are likely to see themselves as “competitive” relative to these exceptionally attractive potential mate targets. Our selection of targets thus exogenously narrows the gap between competitors and “overwhelming winners.”

exceptionally attractive. Moreover, the stories associated with the treatment photos described the individuals as “rising stars” within the Republican Party and among *People Magazine*’s choices for America’s “beautiful people.” Consequently, there are unlikely to be very many participants who would consider themselves “overwhelming winners” relative to these particular potential mate targets. Thus our Polimetrix treatments are not ideally suited for testing this hypothesis.

Nonetheless, in order to gain at least some leverage into H1, we created a new dummy variable, coded 1 for participants who rated themselves as *at least* a 10 on *all three* 11-point self-assessed attractiveness scales. Employing the weighted data, this yields a total of just over 27 “overwhelming winners,” or about 2.3% of our sample. Given the obvious limitations in our statistical leverage for this analysis, we collapse the gender-specific treatment conditions employed in the prior analyses into four categories: same-sex negative story, same-sex positive, cross-sex negative, and cross-sex positive. We then interact these dummies with our “overwhelming winner” dummy. The empirical prediction is that “overwhelming winners,” but *not* everyone else, ought to be significantly more likely to prefer positive stories about opposite sex targets, relative to negative stories about same-sex targets.

The results of this test, shown in Model 2 of Table 2 and graphed in the top half of Figure 2, support the prediction. Overwhelming winners are, in these data, 1.02 points (or about one full standard deviation on the story interest scale) more interested in the cross-sex positive story, relative to the same-sex negative story (.017 vs. 1.033, $p < .10$). Conversely, among non-overwhelming winners – that is, all other participants – the relationship is reversed, with participants being .49 points (or about .5 standard deviations) *less* interested in the cross-sex positive story, relative to the same-sex negative story (.777 vs .290, $p < .01$). Given the small number of overwhelming winners in our data, these data must be interpreted with caution.

Nonetheless, these results do appear entirely consistent with our Overwhelming Winner Hypothesis (H1).

[Figure 2 here]

Of course, a stronger test of H1 would require varying the attractiveness of our targets. Doing so would allow us to compare our respondents' selections associated with both highly attractive and less attractive figures. Our theory would predict that typical individuals are less likely to be interested in negative information about same-sex potential targets if they perceive themselves to hold a substantial mate competitiveness advantage over those targets, relative to when they do not. Restated in the language of H1, "overwhelming winners" (i.e., vis-à-vis relatively less attractive targets) will be less interested in negative information than competitors (i.e., vis-à-vis relatively more attractive targets). Unfortunately, the costs associated with gathering a national sample precluded further subdividing our sample in this way. However, in our aforementioned pilot study (Groeling *et al.*, 2006), we conducted precisely this sort of test by varying the pre-assessed attractiveness of both our male and female photographs using a large (n=3062) undergraduate sample.⁹ The results, shown in Table 4, and graphically illustrated in the bottom half of Figure 2, demonstrate strong support for H1, with both male and female high-SAM participants showing significantly less interest in negative information concerning

⁹ For the pilot study, we used real-world figures for the treatment conditions, including George P. Bush, Chris Heinz-Kerry, Lauren Bush, and Karennia Gore-Schiff. A separate pre-test indicated that our participants rated G.P. Bush and Gore-Schiff highest (within gender) on the power/status scales, and Heinz-Kerry and L. Bush highest on our physical attractiveness scales. We employed the most important domain for each gender as our determinant of attractiveness. A small number of participants confused George P. Bush with George W. Bush. Excluding these participants has no material effect on the reported results.

relatively unattractive (thus less-competitive) same-sex figures, relative to the more highly-attractive same-sex treatment figures.¹⁰

[Table 4]

As shown in Figure 2, high-SAM male (female) participants were .49 (.27) points more interested in a positive story about a highly attractive same-sex target, relative to a less attractive same-sex target (2.45 vs 2.94 and 2.49 vs. 2.76, for men and women, respectively, $p < .01$ in each case).¹¹ These differences represent .67 and .38 standard deviation differences in story interest, respectively.

Partially Disaggregated Survey Analyses

We turn next to our analysis of the Pew Center's News Interest Index. Because our Pew data has as its primary dependent variable aggregate attention to stories across genders, we can examine whether there are systematic differences in attentiveness to *all* personal stories (not just scandals). Table 5 presents the results of three OLS analyses based on the Pew Center data. Model 1 of Table 5 interacts each of our target variables with our measure of the salience of the story (i.e., the proportion of respondents who reported following the story "not at all closely" in

¹⁰ Note that all treatments in the pilot study offered negative information about the targets. The pilot study data also strongly support our other hypotheses. See Groeling *et al.* (2006) for more details about the sample and methodology of the pilot study.

¹¹ For the pilot study, SAM scores were based on a more detailed (relative to Polimetrix), 9-item battery (see Appendix B), while the story interest scale included an additional (that is, fifth) indicator of interest, not available in the Polimetrix study, asking participants whether they expected to remember the information in the story (see Groeling *et al.* 2006 for additional variable descriptions). As a robustness test, we repeated this analysis using the more restrictive, 3-item SAM battery and 4-item story interest scale employed in the Polimetrix study, with comparable results.

the prior month). As noted, this interaction accounts for the possibility, predicted by H6 (Salience), that a subset of the Pew stories were insufficiently engaging to the public to produce the sorts of reputational dynamics, and hence story preference effects, our theory predicts.

[Table 5 here]

Once again, we employ Clarify to assess the statistical significance of the effects of variations in story targets on attentiveness across genders for negative stories of low salience (e.g. where the “not at all closely” percentage is one standard deviation above average), average salience, and high salience (where “not at all closely” is one standard deviation below average). We summarize the results in Section A of Table 6.

[Table 6 here]

Corollary 1 of H4 (Aggregate Preferences), combined with H6 (Salience) predicts the strongest and most significant results in the high-salience cases and the weakest results for the low-salience cases. Consistent with H4, Table 6 shows that in every case save one (female targets in low-salience stories), the gender gap is in the predicted same-sex direction. Consistent with H6, the effects are strongest for high-salience issues and weakest for low-salience issues. For high-salience issues, male respondents are about 7.3 percentage points more likely to have followed an issue involving a male target ($p < .01$). The corresponding preferences for average- and low-salience issues involving male (relative to female) targets are about 4.3 ($p < .01$) and .66 (insig.) percentage points, respectively. As expected, the differences between male and female target gender gaps are highly significant for high- and average-salience cases, but insignificant for low-salience cases, implying, also as expected, that when the public is not paying much attention to a particular negative story, attention is more volatile within and across genders. This analysis provides strong support for H4 and H6, showing a substantial and (with the anticipated

exception of low-salience negative stories with female targets) consistent gender gap in attention directed toward news stories.

Because our experiments held the precise nature of the negative information constant, we are unable to test our fifth hypothesis (Gender-specific Aggregate Preferences) against our experimental data. However, our Pew dataset does allow us to statistically test both corollaries of H5 as well as, again, H6.

In Model 2 of Table 5, we test whether men are more likely to attend to negative male political stories than negative non-political news (controlling for salience). As before, we use Clarify to interpret the statistical significance of effects of variations in our key causal variables. We summarize the latter results in Section B of Table 6.

Table 6 indicates that across all levels of salience, male attentiveness to negative political stories is greater than their attentiveness to other negative stories. For high-salience cases, male respondents are about 6 percentage points more likely to have followed political issues, relative to non-political issue ($p < .05$). The corresponding preferences for average- and low-salience cases involving political (relative to non-political) issues are about 3.3 ($p < .10$) and .66 (insig.) percentage points, respectively. Consistent with H6, the effects are strongest for high-salience issues and weakest for low-salience issues.

Next, in Model 3 of Table 5, we test Corollary 2 of H5—whether women were more likely to attend to negative female news connected to beauty/fertility than to other negative news stories. Unfortunately, we do not have a good indicator of this type of story. The best available Pew equivalent for beauty/fertility was “Celebrity Scandal/Entertainment.” While this is obviously an imperfect proxy, these types of stories disproportionately tend to focus on the lifestyles and foibles of unusually attractive and powerful individuals. Hence, we believe it is a

reasonable proxy for beauty/fertility-related stories. In Section C of Table 6, for ease of interpretation, we again transform the key coefficients into probabilities.¹²

These results closely mirror the male political results, in that in every case female respondents were more attentive to female celebrity scandal/entertainment news (compared to other types of news). In this instance, for high-salience cases, female respondents are about 11 percentage points more likely to have followed issues involving celebrity scandals or entertainment, relative to other types of issues ($p < .01$). The corresponding preferences for average- and low-salience cases involving celebrity scandal/entertainment (relative to other) issues are 6.8 ($p < .01$) and 2.6 (insig.) percentage points, respectively. Once again, consistent with H6, the magnitudes and significance of the effects decrease as salience declines. In this case, results are larger in magnitude --while the differences for news with high or average salience are even more highly significant -- than was the case for men.

Table 7 summarizes the result of our hypothesis tests employing these different data. The table lists each hypothesis, the Table or Figure within which the test results are presented, and the results of the test relative to our predictions. As this summary reveals, our theoretical predictions are clearly supported across *all 16* of our hypothesis tests. Indeed, taken together, our investigations, across three distinct data sets – both individual-level experiments and partially disaggregated survey data—offer strong and consistent support for the theory.

¹² In order to execute this analysis, which required a 4-way interaction, it was necessary to drop two extreme outlier observations from the female model, representing the two *least* salient stories in our data set. These two observations were truly *extreme* outliers, located over two full standard deviations beyond the third-least-salient issue. When these two observations were included, the regression analysis did not return a chi-square value or overall model goodness of fit estimate.

[Table 7 here]

Conclusion

Not every indiscretion by a famous individual – celebrity or politician—becomes a full-blown scandal. Some scandals blow over quickly, capturing the interest of relatively few people and inflicting minimal harm on those involved. Others metastasize into all-out media feeding frenzies, like the Monica Lewinsky and Gary Condit scandals. Why do some indiscretions capture the public’s attention, while others do not?

The conventional wisdom suggests the answer lies in accessibility: simple, dramatic stories “sell;” complex, arcane stories do not (Iyengar 1992). Our data suggest a new, more nuanced explanation for the rise and fall of political scandals. Evolved adaptations, which originally functioned to enhance the reproductive success of individuals and their offspring, lead men and women to respond differently to different types of information concerning different types of “others.” Upon recognizing these deep-seated tendencies, it becomes possible to predict which types of stories will have a greater or lesser likelihood of inducing media feeding frenzies. For example, female politicians widely perceived as physically attractive should be disproportionately likely to receive a chilly reception from high-SAM female voters and low-SAM males, but will otherwise be advantaged relative to their male peers. Because male figures compete first and foremost on the dimension of power and status, male politicians in general should face greater opposition from high-SAM men, as well as low-SAM women.¹³

¹³ In addition, this research should help extend and clarify our understanding of the so-called “anti-big man” phenomenon, which anthropologists argue is a tendency for some (but not all) members of a community to respond hostilely to arrogant, self-serving leaders (Diamond 1997, Boehm 1999). From an evolutionary psychology standpoint, Smith *et al.* (2007) argue that such opposition to leadership stems

Our findings carry particularly consequential implications with regard to the role of the Internet in modern politics. In the age of “new media,” individuals are becoming less and less reliant on traditional media for their news and information. The rise of “personal” mass media, perhaps best exemplified by weblogs, has allowed individuals not only to exercise greater control over the information they consume, but also to actually become producers and distributors of news on a scale unimagined even a few short years ago. “Citizen journalists” have increasingly seized the power to direct public attention to issues and topics about which they care deeply, often without the involvement of the traditional “legacy media.”

Our findings suggest that the demand for, dissemination, and impact of “tabloid” news about politicians will continue to expand. Moreover, if our theory is correct, there should be consistent and predictable differences in the composition of these virtual “blogstorms”—and any resulting real-world political storms they may engender—depending on the nature of the scandal, the genders of the politicians and bloggers, and their perceived attractiveness. Stated differently, if evolution has provided the *motive* for human beings to attend to particular types of scandal stories, the Internet in general, and weblogs in particular, increasingly provide the *opportunity* for individuals to disseminate appealing scandal stories, thereby raising or lowering (absent a

from specialized subsets of human personality types that help serve the collective health of society as a whole by monitoring potentially excessive behavior by leaders. While differing in its causal logic, their empirical predictions appear to correspond to a subset of our more general theoretical model, which predicts exactly such behavior by competitive male elites. Our results also have an interesting parallel in evolutionary research showing a relationship between narcissism (somewhat analogous to our high-SAM cases) and overconfidence and unprovoked attacks among male participants in computerized experiments (Johnson *et al.* 2006).

“blogstorm”) the likelihood that a given indiscretion by a noteworthy individual will grow into a full-blown scandal.

While our theory does not offer point predictions with respect to specific cases, it does suggest that some are more likely to gain traction than others, for reasons having little to do with accessibility. Indeed, our theory, derived from research in evolutionary psychology, opens up a new avenue of research for scholars of political behavior interested in the causes and consequences of political scandal, as well as for evolutionary psychologists interested in potential applications of their research to real-world politics.

Appendix A: Manipulated Story Text (Polimetrix Experiment)¹⁴

Negative Story Treatments

DUI Accident Grounds GOP Rising Star: Pat Williams Hospitalized, Charged

By Scott Macmillan (scott.macmillan@indystar.com)

October 1, 2004 Indianapolis, Ind.—Officers from the Marion County Sheriff's Office assisted the Indianapolis Police Department with an accident investigation at 96th Street and Ditch Road just before midnight yesterday in which a sport-utility vehicle driver was apparently intoxicated. Police charged Pat Williams, 32, with driving under the influence and improper lane usage after [he/she] apparently attempted to make a right turn onto westbound 96th Street and struck a utility pole.

Williams, a resident of Indianapolis, Indiana, was taken to St. Vincent's Hospital and later

¹⁴ The other five stories available were "Home schooling gains popularity in state: School safety, teaching effectiveness are concerns"; "42nd Annual Circle of Lights Festival: Tryouts let lights shine"; "Homeless shelter's closing prompts look in the mirror"; "Footlite's Theater's 'Chicago' has plenty of 'Razzle Dazzle' and style"; and "Ford's woes run deep: Quarterly loss, credit downgrade pose hurdles amid essential streamlining."

Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis for unspecified injuries. The accident apparently occurred as Williams was returning to [his/her] Carmel hotel following a downtown campaign fundraising event sponsored by the Indiana Republican Party and the Butler University College Republicans.

Williams is the [son/daughter] of prominent retailer Booth Williams and is the [niece/nephew] of Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS). Williams has been seen as an attractive young star within the Republican Party. During this year's presidential campaign, Williams has advised President Bush's campaign, serving as the Republican Party's "Youth Outreach Co-Coordinator" and making numerous campaign appearances at youth-oriented events.

"I really love grassroots politics," Williams said in an April interview with CNN. "I care a lot about issues, and it is such a privilege to be able to talk about those things out on the campaign trail in 2004. So I don't know if I'll be a candidate, but it is something that I wouldn't rule out." *Congressional Quarterly* reported earlier this week that Williams had decided to seek a congressional seat in [his/her] home state of Mississippi, although [he/she] had not officially announced [his/her] candidacy at the time of the accident. It is unclear how Williams' arrest will affect [his/her] election plans, although the Mississippi Republican Party is already reportedly giving signs that they will try to ease [him/her] out of the race.

Spokespersons for Williams, [his/her] parents, and Sen. Lott declined repeated requests for comments.

Positive Story Treatments

People Mag "Beautiful Person" Headlines Butler GOP Fundraiser; Bolsters Bush on Iraq

By Scott Macmillan (scott.macmillan@indystar.com)

October 1, 2004 Indianapolis, Ind. – Pat Williams, 32, selected by *People* magazine as one of America's 50 Most Beautiful People and seen by insiders as a likely GOP House Candidate in

2006, used his opportunity to praise President Bush's determination to succeed in Iraq, and to call for an end to partisan bickering on the subject. "Reasonable people in both parties, while they may disagree about the past, share in common a determination that Iraq not be surrendered to terrorists. " Williams added, "Whatever the challenges, America must succeed. I urge voices of reason in both parties to join together to set aside their partisan differences and join with President Bush. Together, we will send a clear message to the terrorists that their days are numbered." Williams received a standing ovation from the elite GOP audience attending the event, which was sponsored by the Indiana Republican Party and the Butler University College Republicans.

Williams is the [son/daughter] of prominent retailer Booth Williams and is the [niece/nephew] of Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS). Williams has been seen as an attractive young star within the Republican Party. During this year's presidential campaign, Williams has advised President Bush's campaign, serving as the Republican Party's "Youth Outreach Co-Coordinator" and making numerous campaign appearances at youth-oriented events.

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Appendix B: Experimental Survey Question Wording

Story Interest (Polimetrix Dependent Variable): Scale derived from news choices and answers to the following questions: (1) "I would like to learn more about the topic discussed in the first/second news story I selected" (Coding: -3=Strongly Disagree, -2=Moderately Disagree, -

1= Somewhat Disagree, 0=Neutral, 1=Somewhat Agree, 2=Moderately Agree, and 3=Strongly Agree), (2) “How likely are you to discuss the content of the first/second story you selected with a friend?” (Coding: -3=Extremely Unlikely, -2=Moderately Unlikely, -1 = Somewhat Unlikely, 0=Neutral, 1=Somewhat Likely, 2=Moderately Likely, and 3=Extremely Likely), and (3) “If we gave you the opportunity to forward the first story you selected to any of your friends via email, how likely would you be to do so?” (Coding: same as prior item). For the pilot study, one additional item is included in the story interest scale: “I am likely to remember some specific information from this news story a few days from now.” (Coding: -3=Strongly Disagree, -2=Moderately Disagree, -1= Somewhat Disagree, 0=Neutral, 1=Somewhat Agree, 2=Moderately Agree, and 3=Strongly Agree).

Media Consumption (Polimetrix): “How often do you watch the following types of TV programs? (Regularly, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, or Never).” (1) *Watch Hard News*. Scale derived from the sum of the following six items: “The national nightly network news on...CBS...ABC...NBC”; “CNN”, “MSNBC”, “Fox News (cable channel).” (2) *Watch Entertainment Tonight & Sports News*. Scale derived from total viewing of (1) “Sports News on ESPN or Fox Sports Channel,” and (2) “Entertainment shows such as Entertainment Tonight or Access Hollywood”

Romantic Relationship (Polimetrix and Pilot Study): “Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship?” (Coding: 1=Yes, 2= No or Unsure).

Polimetrix SAM Questions: “For the next three questions, please think of how you compare with members of your own sex in your desirability to the opposite sex. If you are a woman, please compare yourself with other women you know who are about your age. If you are a man, please compare with other men you know who are about your age” (each item based on

1-11 scale, where 1 is lowest and 11 is highest). (1) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, how attractive or sexy is your body to others?”; (2) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, what is your estimated future social/financial status?”; (3) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, how desirable do others find you as a long-term mate or marriage partner?”

Pilot Study SAM Questions: “For the following items, please think of how you compare with members of your own sex in your desirability to the opposite sex. If you are a woman, please compare yourself with other women you know who are about your age. If you are a man, please compare with other men you know who are about your age” (each item based on 1-9 scale, where 1 is lowest and 9 is highest). (1) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, how desirable do others find you as a short-term mate or casual sex partner?”; (2) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, how attractive is your body to others?”; (3) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, how desirable do others find you as a long-term mate or marriage partner?”; (4) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, how attractive is your face to others?”; (5) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, what is your present financial status?”; (6) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, what is your estimated future financial status?”; (7) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, how high are you in social status at the present time?”; (8) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, what is your estimated future social status?”; (9) “Compared with men/women you know who are about your age, how sexy would others say you are?”

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TABLE 1. Effect of Relative Self-Assessed Attractiveness on Demand for Negative Information

	Strategy to Maximize E(R)	Means?
$prob_{ij} > prob_{oj}$	Maximize value of M_{xi}	Avoid negative & seek positive cross-sex information
$prob_{ij} \approx prob_{oj}$	Minimize $prob_{oj}$	Seek negative & avoid positive same-sex information
$prob_{ij} < prob_{oj}$	Minimize M_{xi}	Seek negative & avoid positive cross-sex information

TABLE 2: Descriptive Statistics for Experimental Participants

	<u>Student Pilot Study</u>	<u>National Sample^c</u>
Total Participants	3062	1200
Female	67%	52%
Communication Studies Courses	81%	n/a
Political Science Courses	19%	n/a
Answered Party ID Question	68%	100%
Republicans	23% ^a	25%
Democrats	60% ^a	30%
Self-ID is other than heterosexual ^b	7%	5%
Did not choose treatment story at all	60%	75%
Chose treatment story as second choice	16%	13%
Chose treatment story as #1 choice	24%	12%
Saw treatment condition with photos	39%	100%

^a Percentage is of participants who responded to party identification question

^b Self-reported non-heterosexuals are excluded from reported results

^c Reported percentages are weighted using population weight provided by

Polimetrix

TABLE 3. OLS Analyses of Effects of Variations in Participant and Target Gender and Story Valence on Story Interest

	Model 1 (H2 & H3)	Model 2 (H1)
Male Participant, Negative Male Story	.027 (.560)	-----
Male Participant, Positive Male Story	.675 (.715)	-----
Male Participant, Negative Female Story	1.097 (.692)	-----
Male Participant, Positive Female Story	.132 (.598)	-----
Female Participant, Negative Male Story	1.541 (.645)*	-----
Female Participant, Positive Male Story	-.051 (.515)	-----
Female Participant, Negative Female Story	.321 (.544)	-----
Male Participant, Negative Male Story x SAM	.079 (.066)	-----
Male Participant, Positive Male Story x SAM	-.072 (.075)	-----
Male Participant, Negative Female Story x SAM	.010 (.067)	-----
Male Participant, Positive Female Story x SAM	-.037 (.077)	-----
Female Participant, Negative Male Story x SAM	-.096 (.071)	-----
Female Participant, Positive Male Story x SAM	.038 (.052)	-----
Female Participant, Positive Female Story x SAM	.042 (.058)	-----
Female Participant, Negative Female Story x SAM	.067 (.058)	-----
Opposite Sex, Positive Story	-----	-.061 (.100)
Opposite Sex, Negative Story	-----	.618 (.125)***
Same Sex, Negative Story	-----	.423 (.123)***
Overwhelming Winner	-----	-.342 (.199)^
Opposite Sex, Positive Story x Overwhelming Winner	-----	1.065 (.672)
Opposite Sex, Negative Story x Overwhelming Winner	-----	.632 (.960)
Same Sex, Negative Story x Overwhelming Winner	-----	-.411 (.233)^
Watch Hard News	.101 (.067)	.109 (.067)^
Watch Entertainment Tonight & Sports News	.116 (.031)***	.113 (.031)***
Treatment Order	-.050 (.023)*	-.047 (.023)*
Partisanship	.123 (.036)***	.111 (.035)**
Romantic Relationship	-.142 (.097)	-.128 (.090)
Constant	-.566 (.468)	-.328 (.288)
R2 (N)	.13 (N=1010)	.12 (N=1010)

^p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

TABLE 4. OLS Analysis of Effects of Target Attractiveness on Participant Story Interest (Student Pilot Study)

Male Participant, Male Negative Story x High Power/ Status Male Target	-.638 (.297)*
Male Participant, Female Negative Story x High Physical/ Sexual Attractiveness Female Target	-.595 (.413)
Male Participant, Female Negative Story x Low Physical/ Sexual Attractiveness Female Target	-.216 (.310)
Female Participant, Female Negative Story x High Physical/Sexual Attractiveness Female Target	-.688 (.282)*
Female Participant, Female Negative Story x Low Physical/Sexual Attractiveness Female Target	-.284 (.283)
Female Participant, Male Negative Story x High Power/ Status Male Target	-.115 (.275)
Female Participant, Male Negative Story x Low Power/ Status Male Target	-.108 (.298)
Male Participant, Male Negative Story x High Power/ Status Male Target x SAM	.155 (.032)***
Male Participant, Male Negative Story x Low Power/ Status Male Target x SAM	.024 (.037)
Female Participant, Female Negative Story x High Physical/Sexual Attractiveness Female Target x SAM	.143 (.027)***
Female Participant, Female Negative Story x Low Physical/Sexual Attractiveness Female Target x SAM	.063 (.026)*
Male Participant, Female Negative Story x Low Physical/ Sexual Attractiveness Female Target x SAM	-.021 (.032)
Male Participant, Female Negative Story x High Physical/ Sexual Attractiveness Female Target x SAM	.122 (.056)*
Female Participant, Male Negative Story x Low Power/ Status Male Target x SAM	.051 (.030)^
Female Participant, Male Negative Story x High Power/ Status Male Target x SAM	.038 (.024)
Romantic Relationship	-.008 (.014)
Communication Class	-.203 (.043)***
Saw Photographs	-.100 (.031)***
Constant	2.449 (.239)***
R2 (N)	.04 (N=3062)

^p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

TABLE 5: OLS Analyses of Effects of Story Characteristics on News Interest (Pew Data)

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3
	Gender Gap		
<u>Causal Variables</u>	<u>(Male-Female)</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Male Target	6.271 (6.585)	-38.544 (7.797)***	-12.253 (10.202)
Negative Story	6.180 (1.772)***	-2.223 (4.574)	-21.830 (5.230)***
Political News	1.292 (1.187)	1.294 (7.838)	0.550 (1.963)
% “Not at all” Closely	0.333 (0.064)***	-0.396 (.180)***	-1.394 (0.279)***
Celebrity Scandal/Entertainment News	-5.968 (1.163)***	-2.831 (1.939)	-----
Sports News	6.428 (1.405)***	5.840 (1.853)**	-1.400 (1.812)
Science News	6.247 (3.840)	-10.961 (2.986)***	-7.336 (6.101)
Crime News	1.556 (1.657)	0.463 (2.169)	1.230(2.006)
Legal News	-5.761 (2.695)*	-7.900 (2.732)**	0.279 (2.368)
December	-1.335 (1.075)	0.274 (1.511)	0.811 (0.977)
Male Target x Negative Story	4.205 (6.545)	36.383 (7.486)***	13.419 (10.729)
Male Target x % “Not at all” Closely	0.061 (0.226)	0.975 (.253)***	0.498 (0.409)
Male Target x Neg. Story x % “Not at all”	-0.309 (0.221)	-0.901 (.246)***	-----
Male Target x Political News	-----	55.532 (9.504)***	-----
Male Target x Neg. Story x Political News	-----	-47.795 (7.746)***	-----
Male Target x Political News x % “Not at all” Closely	-----	-1.497 (.292)***	-----
Politics x % “Not at all” Closely		-0.095 (.229)	-----
Male Target x Neg. Story x Political News x % “Not at all”	-----	1.367 (.242)***	-----
Negative Story x % “Not at all” Closely	-----	-0.119 (.172)	0.713 (0.312)*
Male Target x Neg. Story x % “Not at all”	-----	-1.439 (.320)***	-0.605 (0.422)
Male Target x Celeb Scandal/Entertainment News	-----	-----	-5.303 (13.083)
Celeb Scandal/Entertain News x % “Not at all”	-----	-----	-0.359 (0.296)
Celeb Scandal/Entertain News x Neg. Story	-----	-----	15.622 (7.943)^
Male Target x Celeb Scandal/Entertain News x Neg. Story	-----	-----	-11.081 (14.881)
Male Target x Celeb Scandal/Entertain News x % “Not at all”	-----	-----	0.381 (0.502)
Male Target x Celeb Scandal/Entertain News x % “Not at all” x Neg. Story	-----	-----	0.089 (0.394)
Constant	-16.139 (3.239)***	34.025 (5.553)***	57.842 (4.680)***
R2 (N)	.59 (N=107)	.79 (N=107)	.83 (N=105)

^p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001; Robust standard errors in parentheses

TABLE 6. Attentiveness to News, By Gender, Salience Level and Issue Area

<u>Story Type</u>	<u>Salience of Negative Stories</u>		
	<u>High</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Low</u>
<i>(A) DV=Gender Gap^a</i>			
Male Target	1.34	2.37	3.40
Female Target	-5.98	-1.93	2.11
<i>Difference</i>	7.32**	4.3**	1.29 (insig)
<i>(B) DV=Male Attention</i>			
Political	29.52	21.56	13.58
Non Political	23.54	18.22	12.93
<i>Difference</i>	5.98*	3.34^	0.65 (insig)
<i>(C) DV=Female Attention</i>			
Celebrity Scandal/Entertainment	38.26	25.80	13.34
Non-Celebrity Scandal/Entertainment	27.28	19.00	10.74
<i>Difference</i>	10.98**	6.80**	2.6 (insig)

^a "Gender Gap" is defined as male attention minus female attention.

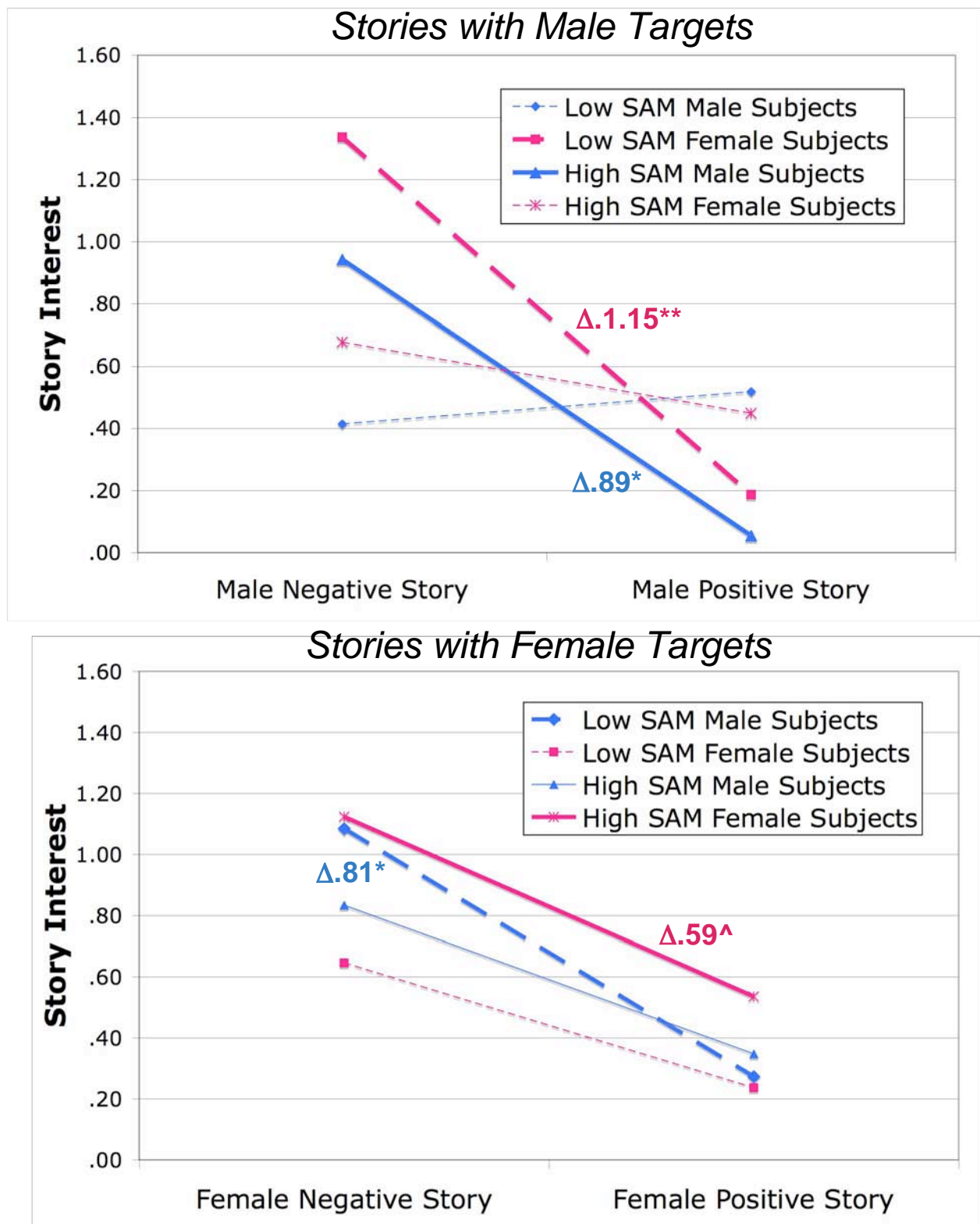
^ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

TABLE 7: Summary of Hypotheses, Test Results, and Locations

<u>Hypothesis</u>	<u>Where Tested</u>	<u>Data Source</u>	<u>DV</u>	<u>Is Hypothesis Supported?</u>	
				<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
H1: Overwhelming Winners	Figure 2, Table 3	National Experiment	Story Interest Scale	Yes ($p < .01$)	Yes ($p < .10$) (genders combined)
H1: Overwhelming Winners	Figure 2, Table 4	Pilot Study	Story Interest Scale	Yes ($p < .01$)	Yes ($p < .01$)
H2: Competitors	Figure 1, Table 2	National Experiment	Story Interest Scale	Yes ($p < .05$)	Yes ($p < .10$)
H3: Sour Grapes	Figure 1, Table 2	National Experiment	Story Interest Scale	Yes ($p < .05$)	Yes ($p < .01$)
H4: Aggregate Preferences & H6 (Saliency)	Tables 4 & 5	Pew	Story Attention	High Saliency: Yes ($p < .01$) Avg Saliency: Yes ($p < .01$) Low Saliency: Yes (insig)* (DV=gender gap)	n/a
H5 Corollary 1: Gender-Specific Aggregate Preferences (Males) & H6: Saliency	Tables 4 & 5	Pew	Story Attention	High Saliency: Yes ($p < .05$) Avg Saliency: Yes ($p < .10$) Low Saliency: Yes (insig)*	n/a
H5 Corollary 2: Gender-Specific Aggregate Preferences (Females) & H6: Saliency	Tables 4 & 5	Pew	Story Attention	n/a	High Saliency: Yes ($p < .01$) Avg Saliency: Yes ($p < .01$) Low Saliency: Yes (insig)*

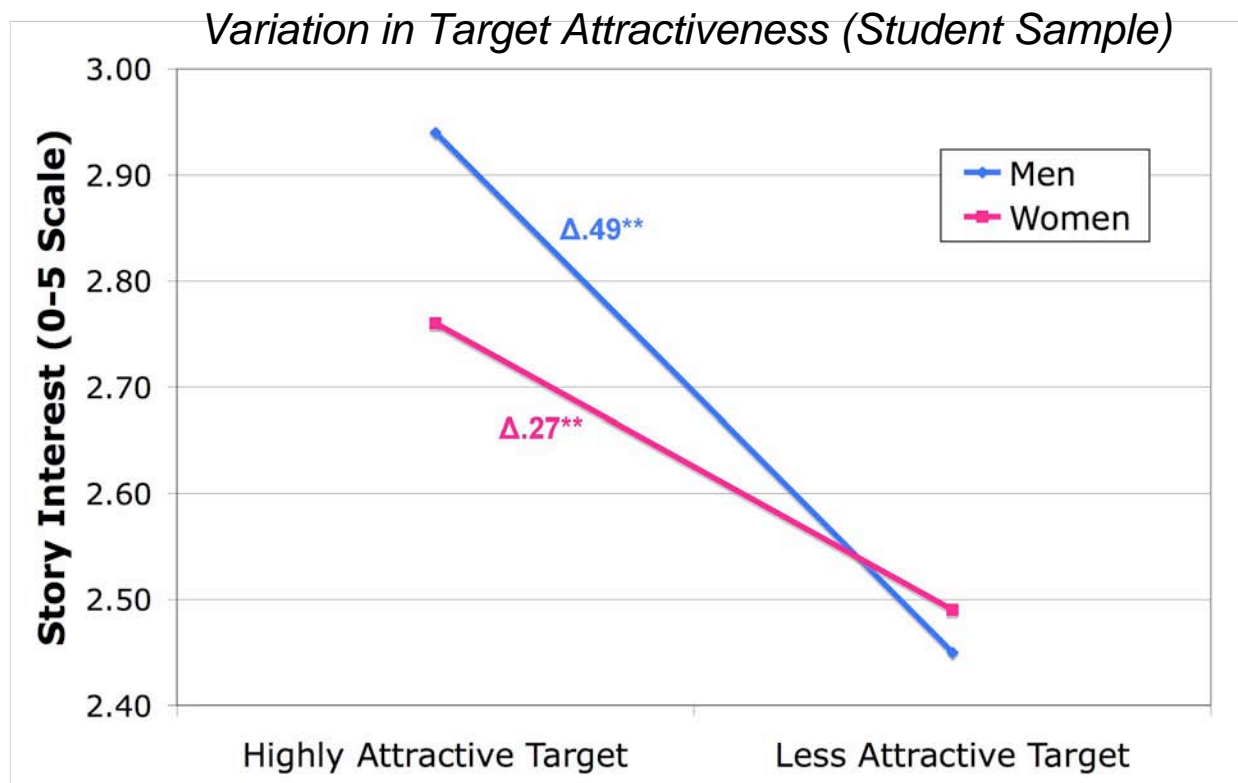
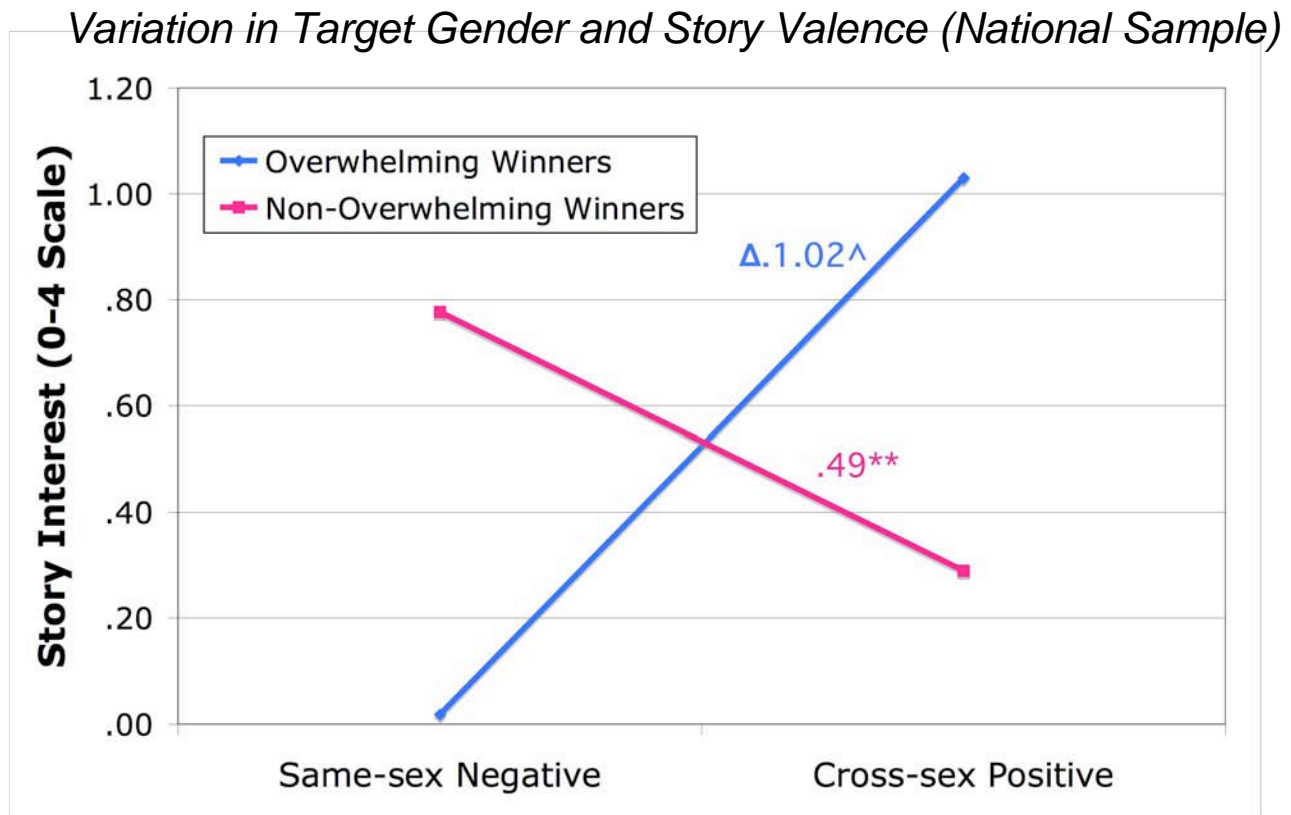
**Nonsignificant results consistent with theory for low-saliency issues*

FIGURE 1. Interest in Treatment Stories, as Subject's SAM Score, Target Gender and Story Valence Vary



**** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, $^{\wedge}p < .10$**

FIGURE 2. Preferences of “Overwhelming Winners” as Target Gender, Story Valence, and Target Attractiveness Vary



****** $p < .01$, [^] $p < .10$

Online Appendix:
Polimetrix Story Selection Page Text and Graphics
Story Order was Randomized

<p>"Home schooling gains popularity in state: School safety, teaching effectiveness are concerns" [Indianapolis Star; August 21, 2004]</p>	
<p>"42nd Annual Circle of Lights Festival: Tryouts let lights shine" [Indianapolis Star; October 4, 2004]</p>	
<p>"Homeless shelter's closing prompts look in the mirror" [Indianapolis Star; September 25, 2004]</p>	

"Footlite's Theater's 'Chicago' has plenty of 'Razzle Dazzle' and style" [Indianapolis Star, October 2, 2004]



"Ford's woes run deep: Quarterly loss, credit downgrade pose hurdles amid essential streamlining" [Indianapolis Star; October 17, 2004]



Treatment Story:

"DUI Accident Grounds GOP Rising Star: Pat Williams Hospitalized, Charged" [Indianapolis Star; October 1, 2004]

or

"People Mag "Beautiful Person" Headlines Butler GOP Fundraiser; Bolsters Bush on Iraq" [Indianapolis Star; October 1, 2004]



or



Pilot Study Story Selection Page Text and Graphics

Story Order was Fixed, with Masking Story Choices 1-5 Identical to Polimetrix Above with Added Story Word Counts.

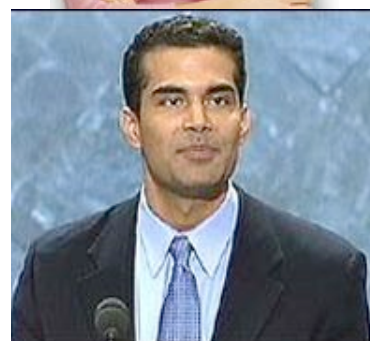
Note that Photos Were Added to Pilot Stories in 2006.

Treatment Story:

"Accident Grounds Democratic Rising Star:
Kareena Gore-Schiff Hospitalized,
Charged" [301 words; Indianapolis Star;
October 1, 2004]



"Accident Grounds GOP Rising Star:
George P. Bush Hospitalized, Charged" [301
words; Indianapolis Star; October 1, 2004]



"Accident Grounds GOP Rising Star:
Lauren Bush Hospitalized, Charged" [301
words; Indianapolis Star; October 1, 2004]



"Accident Grounds Democratic Rising Star:
Christopher Heinz-Kerry Hospitalized,
Charged" [301 words; Indianapolis Star;
October 1, 2004]

