

**Political Person Perception:
Stereotypes versus Individuating Information Revisited**

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Well, thank you for inviting me. This is wonderful. I know you guys are in sort of the mid-afternoon lunchtime, and it's hard. I've sort of changed my title to hopefully get your juices flowing a little bit.

What I'll be talking about is when relying on stereotypes to judge individuals is reasonable, rational, justified and appropriate in the case of political person perception. Before I begin, I have to tell you something that is completely true. I am really just sort of a sideshow in this part of the research, which has been initiated by two of my fantastic graduate students – Jarret Crawford and Tom Cain. Jarrett especially is hell bent on becoming a serious political psychologist. He has sort of dragged me kicking and screaming into this line of research. He's entering his fourth year—he's in the middle of his fourth year of grad school with about seven or eight publications. You're going to hear from him in the future.

I'm going to be presenting a theoretical model of these processes. This model is actually based on one developed by Stephanie Madon about ten years ago. The work that I'm going to be describing — all of which is hot off the presses and I mean none of it's been published yet and it's all been done within the last six or seven months — draws heavily on classic 80s and 90s social psychological work on the role of stereotypes and individuating information on person perception. One of the great things about this conference is that there are several of the major players from that work here today.

A natural question might be, “*What does this have to do with politics?*” Okay, this is certainly an experience that's true for me. I suspect that despite all of you have deep interests and commitment to politics, probably many of you have shared this experience. You walk into a voting booth. Maybe you know something about the major races — the senator or governor — but by the time that you get down to like state assemblymen, state senator, town council, sheriff — it's all, at least

for myself personally, I almost always have no idea what these people stand for and have accomplished, their failings or anything about them.

So what do you do? *On what basis does even an informed person go about making a decision about whom to vote for?* Even in the major races, the big ones that you're paying close attention to? Probably you have some knowledge about the candidates, but that knowledge is probably limited. You know their stands on a few major issues, but given the scores and scores of issues that come up over the course of their term — chances are that even you, the sort of politically informed elite, probably don't have a lot of detailed information about their specific stances on this sort of universe of issues.

So the sort of general question is, *“How do people go about making inferences, judgments and guesstimates about candidates and politicians when they only have partial or incomplete information?”* So in this hypothetical example, what we know about candidate Smith is this sort of odd combination of where he's both pro-choice and pro-war. That's all in this hypothetical example—or, at least, he's a pro-choice and a pro-war Democrat.

The question is, *“How do you reach judgments? How do people reach judgments about Smith's likely positions on other issues?”* How to deal with Iran, North Korea, stem cell research, so forth and so on. As you can see here, I'm sort of parsing the information into two broad categories. We have individuating information about Smith, that is we know in this hypothetical example — we know he's pro-choice and we know he's pro-war, and we know that he's a Democrat. But Democrat is really just group membership, so what we know about him individually is individuating information, but we also know something about his group membership. So the question is, *“How do we combine these two types of information, individuating information and stereotypes to reach sort of judgments or guesstimates about Smith's likely other positions?”*

What I will be presenting is first a decision tree model of how people go about integrating stereotype — that is party information with individuating information, knowing positions of particular politicians in order to arrive at sort of guesstimates, inferences, judgments about a

particular target person's positions on issues other than the ones that you have specific, concrete individuating information about.

The first step in this decision tree model we claim is a person functionally—we're not claiming any of this is necessarily conscious or explicit or systematic in this way, but functionally, "*Do I have clear, individuating information narrowly relevant to a judgment?*" So what does this "narrow relevance" mean? Well, in this model there are clusters of issues that are sort of tightly related to one another, and others that maybe are unrelated or more minimally related.

So in my first bullet point there, we have a cluster of abortion-related issues. The basic issue is pro-choice, pro-life. *But do you support or oppose stem cell research? How do you feel about parental notification of minors going in for an abortion?* This is what we mean by "narrowly relevant." These are all tightly related around the issue of abortion. On the other hand, issues of abortion aren't related in any tight way to global warming. They may have some sort of distant ideological type of relationship, but they're not related in any kind of narrow, close way. That's what we mean by "narrowly related."

So there are two possibilities. The answer to this question might be yes or no. If the answer is yes, if people feel that they have individuating information narrowly relevant to whatever they're trying to make a judgment about — what this model says is that they're done. They will make a judgment on the basis of the individuating information, and so in this hypothetical example, what we know is that Smith supports Bush in Iraq and wants heavy sanctions against Iran. Well, you know the chances are that he wants to be pretty aggressive about North Korea. This is what this model predicts. It doesn't really matter what his party is, because we have narrowly relevant, individuating information.

What if the answer is no? Well, if the answer is no, we don't have clear and individuating information that is narrowly relevant to the judgment, people then go to the next question. The next question is, "*Is there a clear ideological divide on the issue about which I am making a judgment?*" Again, there are two possibilities there. We're going to start with no. The no would mean that there's little or no ideological divide between parties on these issues, so there is not a big

ideological divide — space exploration, maintaining roads, supporting education. They differ in their methods of supporting education, but no party is like anti-education. So the idea here is, “Well, we really don’t know where Smith stands on space exploration. The parties don’t differ on space exploration. I have no idea where Smith stands on space exploration,” so basically what you should get there is random guessing.

But what if the answer is yes? What if you’re trying to arrive at inferences about which there are ideological differences? So I have some hypothetical examples here — abortion, gay rights, military issues, so forth and so on. The next step is another question that people act as if they ask themselves. “*Does the totality of the individuating information that I have allow me to infer an ideology on the part of a political target?*” Again, there are two possibilities — yes and no.

If the totality of the individuating information allows someone to infer the ideology, according to this model, what people then do is make a judgment on the basis of both individuating information and party. So then this kind of works like this: Smith is a pro-war, anti-gay marriage Democrat. That’s sort of an interesting combination, so he’s a pretty conservative Democrat, right? Now, war and gays is not narrowly relevant to positions on social welfare programs, right? That’s what in this example we’re trying to figure out, and so the model says that we should allow people to rely on party, because what people will be doing — so this says — is well, he’s really conservative.

So yes, I’m going to assume that he’s going to be pretty conservative on welfare also, but Democrats tend to be less conservative than Republicans, so if he’s a Democrat I’m going to conclude that he opposes welfare less so than if he’s a Republican. So the model then predicts that people should be making the judgment on the basis of both.

Now, what if the answer is no? “*What if the totality of the individuating information does not allow people to infer an ideology about the target?*” What the model predicts is that people will rely heavily on party in order to disambiguate the target’s positions. So let’s say that Smith is a pro-war, pro-choice Republican — a sort of moderate Republican, right? But the individuating information that you have isn’t consistently liberal or conservative. He’s liberal on one issue and conservative on the other, so the individuating information doesn’t allow the inference of an ideology. On the

other hand, he's a Republican so we know that Republicans support welfare less than Democrats, so are we to rely on the stereotype or our belief about Republicans in order to conclude that, in fact, Smith probably supports welfare less if he's a Republican than if he's a Democrat?

It is perhaps worth pointing out — although I'm not going to dwell on this here — that this model actually runs against the grain of the sort of prevailing perspective within social psychology about the role of stereotypes and individuating information. For the last — I don't know — 15 or 20 years mainly that stereotypes are the default basis for person perception. This model makes the diametrically opposed initial assumption that in fact individuating information is the default basis for person perception, and it's only after people conclude that the individuating information is insufficient to reach a conclusion, that they go on to all of this other kind of thinking and processing and go on to use the stereotype.

Now, some of this has come up in the earlier talks — this is absolutely great — and even though Jarret kind of dragged me kicking and screaming into this, I completely love doing stereotype research in political contexts for these reasons: in the first place, lots of people and not everybody — I understand that there are uninformed, uninterested and disinterested people that really don't understand much about politics and parties — but plenty of people do believe that there are differences between Democrats and Republicans. The issues of social desirability and consciously controlled overriding of true unconscious prejudice is a problem in so many other areas of stereotype research but it just evaporates. It's just gone.

And so, in some sense, politics becomes almost like an antiseptic petri dish where we can actually get at these kinds of basic processes of stereotyping without having to worry about all of this sort of nasty other stuff. And on top of that, and I mean it's vividly clear even from our own stuff, but many people have very few inhibitions or feel that there are sanctions or stigma for expressing, not just disagreement or dislike, but like vilification of the other side, right? I mean we've got unsolicited—and some of these we're not going to be presenting data on some of the questionnaires. We asked them, "Would you actually vote for this guy?" We'd get responses like, "No, Republicans are all assholes!" I mean we don't ask for people to fill it in, you know? There's no like, "Give us your opinion." They just sort of write that in spontaneously.

All right. So what? We're going to be presenting three experiments, which were in some ways very similar so let me give you an overview of the ways in which they're similar. All Rutgers intro psych subject pool students. They're all between subject designs. People were randomly assigned to conditions. We had the same eight dependent variables in all three experiments. In each experiment we asked the perceivers, the students, to sort of guesstimate and make inferences about the politicians. Actually, it's a person labeled as a senator, but it's the senator's position on four domestic issues and four foreign policy issues. The domestic issues are listed here — gay marriage, stem cell research, parental notification of minors/people under 18 going in for an abortion, and welfare programs.

The foreign policy issues involve: U.S. and international corporations deal with global warming, the justification for going to preemptive war, military spending to stop terrorism, and U.S. cooperation with the UN on humanitarian relief programs. Obviously, that's a mouthful and that's why I did this sort of bold thing. That's how I'm going to be presenting these.

Okay, let's start with the effect that is nearest and dearest to a social psychologist's heart — stereotype effects. So the model makes very clear predictions about when we should get a stereotype effect. We should get a stereotype effect when people feel like they don't have individuating information narrowly relevant to a judgment when there is a clear ideological divide on the issues about which they're making judgments, but the individuating information does not allow them to infer an ideology.

Okay. So how did we do this? We had the subjects in the study read about a paragraph long statement from the senator, which we completely concocted. It was some out West Wyoming senator that (*unintelligible*) students had never heard of. In this study we included individuating information, but it was held constant, so both the Democrat and Republican discussed their support for schools and roads, so this is not—it's individuating information. It's something about their position, but it's not related to any ideology in any kind of straightforward way.

Then we, of course, also manipulated the stereotype by labeling this senator as either a Democrat or a Republican. So this is like a fairly simple design. It's a two-group T-test design, right? They're making judgments about the senator's position on welfare, gays and so forth and so on, and I'm now going to throw in the means and the effects.

What you can see here is pretty much exactly as predicted by the model. Seven out of the eight means, people predicted that the Democrat would take a more liberal position than would the Republican. It was statistically significant five out of the eight times, and so we feel like, "Well, this is pretty good preliminary support for that prediction of the model." Individuating information not narrowly relevant to issues like gay marriage, humanitarian relief and so forth, but did the individuating information allow us to form an ideology? No, we got reliance on the stereotype.

Okay. Let me go back for a second. There's nothing radical and groundbreaking about that finding, right? I mean social psychologists have known for 25 years that with ambiguous or minimal individuating information, people rely on stereotypes to make a judgment. We felt pretty good about that, because I mean we have this well-established finding. The model predicts that we should get that well-established finding, so that was pretty good. Now, we're ready to go on to more complex predictions generated by the model.

So the second study sought to find out whether the conditions under which people should rely on either individuating information or both predicted by the model were actually true. So, according to the model, people should rely heavily on the individuating information when they have clear information narrowly relevant to policy. So if we know that Smith supports Bush on Iraq, he probably is going to be supportive of other military aggression-related types of issues, and in this particular case, military spending. On the other hand, the model also predicts — identifies a set of conditions under which people should rely on both. That is when they don't have narrowly relevant information, but do have ideologically relevant information on issues that are not directly related to individuating information, so they should end up relying on both the individuating information and the stereotype.

So this is the basic design of the second study. We manipulated the individuating information, policy position to the party, so the individuating information was either liberal or conservative. All right? So the liberal position was opposing the Iraq War and pro-choice, and the conservative position was opposing—sorry. The conservative position is supporting the war and pro-life, but there was a conservative Democrat and a conservative Republican and a liberal Democrat and a liberal Republican. So we have eight issues by four targets. (*Unintelligible*), 32 cell means. I actually have this slide with me, but if I try to go through this, I realize that I would use almost my entire 30 minutes trying to explain this one side. So just take my word for it, that the data are pretty much well behaved.

What I have here is a summary of the relevant parts of the data, or sort of a summary of the data relevant to the specific predictions of the model. As you can see, like this is the four set of issues on which people had narrowly relevant information. They had the person's position on choice and war, and these are the choice and military-related issues. Big, big individuating information effects, and almost no stereotype party effects. By and large you have people heavily, heavily relying on individuating information here as predicted.

Well, what about the case where they're supposed to rely on both, right? These are on the issues not directly narrowly related to choice and war. We're predicting that people should rely on both. All eight of those coefficients are statistically significant. If you notice, there's a little bit in one case, there's a much heavier reliance on individuating information. The model doesn't specifically predict that, but the specific point for us at this point is that all of these are statistically significant — small to moderate but indicating that the prediction of the model of people who rely on both was in fact confirmed.

Okay. So Study II, when people have narrowly relevant individuating information, you get heavy reliance on that information, little or no stereotyping — bingo, we got that. When they don't have narrowly relevant individuating information, but they can infer an ideology — bingo, we should get both and we got both.

Okay. So Study III sort of attempted to both sort of firm up and extend the findings from the first two. The model predicts a stereotype effect in the absence of either narrowly relevant or ideologically relevant, individuating information. In that first study we simply didn't give them much. This study is going to get at the same thing in a different way, and then we're going to be creating a target—we've created targets. We took more ecologically valid positions in which we're going to see if the individuating information prediction also confirmed it, but I'll explain that right here.

So in this study, and this is what I mean by sort of more ecologically valid targets — we have the conservative Democrat and the liberal Republican. Such people exist but they're few and far between. So instead what we've created was four targets — a left-wing Democrat, a moderate Democrat, a moderate Republican and right-wing Republican. We wanted to see how well the model functioned under these circumstances, and as you can see, these were the positions that they took. So the left-wing Democrat was liberal on both positions. The moderates were identical on both positions, and the right-wing Republican was conservative on both life and war. We purposely created this. One issue is a domestic issue and the other is a foreign issue.

So, according to the model, party should influence judgments regarding the moderates' positions on issues not directly related to the individuating information. They don't have information on global warming or gay marriage. They have information related to choice and war, and so what this shows here is that the individuating information — it's very clear individuating information, but it's not ideologically consistent, so it's not directly relevant to these issues of welfare and gay marriage. There is an ideological divide on these issues, but this individuating information — in one case it's liberal and in one case it's conservative — doesn't allow them to infer, the individuating information itself does not allow inference of an ideology and so the model predicts that they should rely on stereotype and on party. That's pretty much what we found on these four issues. In every case, it concluded that the Democrats took a more liberal position than did the conservative, and three of the four were statistically significant.

Okay. *“Now, what about the near exclusive alliance on individuating information with these positions?”* Well, this one was actually very interesting and really kind of fun to do, right? So,

according to the model, people should make a judgment on the basis of the individuating information. Abortions are directly related to abortion-related issues, and the Iraq War to the military-related issues. But one of the things that I like about this design is that you don't have a simple gradation between the liberals, moderates and Republicans. You have three targets taking the exact same position on choice. Only the right-wing Republican took the pro-life position, and we had sort of a mirror image on issues of war where only the left-wing Democrat was anti-war, and the other three were all pro-war. The model doesn't predict this sort of simple gradation of differences on these issues.

What it predicts quite clearly, at least if people are relying nearly exclusively on individuating information, which is what the model predicts, really only the right-wing Republican should be seen as opposing stem cell research and supporting parental notification. All of the others should be more or less the same, and we predict this sort of mirror image for issues of war, where only the left-wing Democrat is going to be seen opposing increases in military spending and opposing, disagreeing with the justification for preemptive war. The other three are all predicted to pretty much agree with that, and so that's not tested in any straightforward way. What turned out to be necessary was a set of basic analysis of variance with contrasts where the one cell predicted to be different is contrasted and compared with the other three cells.

So what you see here are the cell means, and I had to make it easier by sort of color-coding it. The means in color are the ones predicted to be different from the other three, and my undergraduate statistics professor once called this the IOI — the Intraocular Impact Test, right? I mean that pattern should hit you between the eyes as really sort of resoundingly confirming the model's predictions, but in case that it didn't, what you have here are the effect sizes associated with each of the three contrasts. In this column over here, what you have is the portion of systematic variance explained by the contrast. Now, systematic variance isn't the total variance, right? The contrast, the universe of variance explainable is only that which was accounted for by the manipulation, so it's not the total variance, just like manipulations account for a certain amount of variance. This shows, of that variance accounted for by the manipulation, how much was accounted for by the contrast. What you can see is the 3 v -1 -1 -1 contrast accounted for nearly all of the systematic variance in the design.

I know that I've presented sort of a lot of data and sort of a complex model. I'm simply going to recap what those results have shown so far. We had two studies that tested the model's prediction on when we should get a stereotype effect, when people should rely on party for making inferences. The first study examined that without providing any useful individuating information. The second study, which was actually Study III that tested this, provided useful individuating information but which was not usable for inferring an ideology. In both cases, we got stereotype effects. Studies II and III tested the model's prediction about when we should get heavy reliance on individuating information. In both cases, political target took positions on issues narrowly relevant to the ones that they're making judgments on. Then the third study tested this sort of more complex sort of line here. That is when people didn't have narrowly relevant information, but they did have ideologically relevant information, the model predicted that people would rely on both, and in fact they did.

Okay, so this works out great. I really figured that both the time issues—I didn't want to deprive you of the joy of skewering this whole line of research. I figured, "You know what? I'll let them tell me all of the limitations."

Why should anyone care about this? Well, I think that this kind of research can provide potential insights, first into political person perception — that is how people arrive at inferences, judgments, guesstimates regarding politicians' likely stances on issues about which they really don't have direct knowledge, and also on issues of stereotyping — especially the classic issue of the conditions under which people rely on individuating information vs. stereotypes, or both, when judging an individual target. I think that the pattern of results strongly suggests that, at least sometimes, individuating information rather than stereotypes may be the default basis for person perception.

I mean I'll just conclude with this: I think that the whole pattern of results also suggests that, at least sometimes, when people rely on a stereotype to judge a target, what they're doing is being as reasonable, appropriate, rational and as justified as they can be under the information circumstances that it's based on. Thank you. (*End of Jussim_1 file*)