

Running Head: PERSONAL PREFERENCE EFFECTS ON PERCEIVED SINCERITY

To Tell the Truth: The Effects of Viewer and Presenter Personal Political Preferences on
Perceptions of Sincerity

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of viewers' and speakers' personal political preferences on the perceived sincerity of public speech. Participants were polled for their political preference (Obama, McCain, or Clinton), then asked to view six short videos. A total of three speakers were seen talking about two of the three major candidates. A 2x2 repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant interaction between viewer's preference and the speaker's preference. Viewers could only discern the speaker's sincerity when the subject of the talk was not their own preferred candidate.

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Erving Goffman did some of the earliest research on nonverbal behavior. He basically pioneered the study of face-to-face interactions, or micro-sociology. His famous 1959 book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, basically stated that man changes the way he interacts with his fellow man all the time (Goffman, 1959). He stated that people will act differently in different situations, and compared this behavior to that of an actor on stage. This idea that people's actions and behaviors reflect more than just what is seen on the outside is central to this experiment.

Another major researcher in the area of nonverbal behavior was Ray L. Birdwhistell. In 1970, he published his second major work, *Kinesics and Context*, in which he stated that two thirds of all communication is nonverbal. Much of Birdwhistell's research involved viewing films of people interacting in social settings, such as a pub. According to his book, nonverbal behaviors include movements related to eye contact, facial expressions, shoulder posture, chest level, and rhythmic movements of the body overall (Birdwhistell, 1970).

It was Marie Reid and Richard Hammersley who asserted that nonverbal communication is what humans use in place of verbal communication. They believe that whether it is voluntary or not, the emotions we express through our body language, facial expressions, etc. are for a purpose (Reid & Hammersley, 2000). They stated that humans often express verbal "leakages," such as "uh" or "umm" when conversing and that these leakages, too provide purpose within human communication.

The purpose of this experiment was to find out if people can accurately judge the sincerity of public speakers. They were to watch six short videos of a person endorsing a single political candidate. They were able to listen and also observe verbal and nonverbal cues to decide how sincere each speaker was being. There are countless instances in our lives where we watch, listen, and sincerely believe that which is presented to us. It is too often that we simply accept the opinions, beliefs, and information that are presented. We should remember that our own personal beliefs, as well as those of the speaker, can make a difference in how sincere we believe these speakers are.

The first hypothesis of this study was that the viewers will rate speakers as being more sincere when the speaker is talking about a candidate he or she prefers. This is referred to as the transparency effect. This effect is less noticeable but very common. Perhaps you are watching a press conference of the head coach of the Cincinnati Reds. He is telling the press how he truly

believes his team will make it to the World Series this year. You believe him because chances are, he believes in what he is saying.

The second hypothesis is that the viewers will rate speakers as being more sincere when the speaker is talking about a candidate the viewer prefers. This is referred to as the rose-colored glasses effect. This is also quite common: maybe your friend told you she really thought the Cincinnati Reds were going to win the World Series this year. You quickly tell her you agree and express your excitement for the upcoming season. However, you soon realize your friend was being sarcastic and actually believes the Red stand no chance.

The third and final hypothesis is that these two effects—transparency and rose-colored glasses—will be independent of one another since one occurs within the speaker and one within the viewer. This interaction will be the focus of the results section.

Method

Participants

Participants for this experiment included 55 Berea College students and staff. There were 32 females and 23 males. Nearly three fourths of all the participants were 21 years old or younger. Recruitment for the experiment included a personal request during three current psychology classes, as well as an email request. The email request was done by selecting the names of every eighteenth student from the *Berea College Student and Staff Campus Telephone Directory*. All names were placed in a single email and sent at once.

Setting

Multiple settings were used for this experiment. Most participants came to either the Frost or Draper buildings. Some partook in the study at a student residence house, the ARC house. In all cases, the participants were in quiet environments with few distractions (no music, television, or other people in the room).

Materials

Materials used for this experiment started with a Canon point-and-shoot camera used to film each speaker. The speakers all read the same scripts which were prepared by the author. Scripts are provided in Appendix A. Next, a Dell laptop was used to play the videos for all the viewers. The final material was a questionnaire, prepared by the author, with space to rate the perceived sincerity of each video, as well as the viewer's own political preference. This questionnaire is provided in Appendix B.

Design

There were two independent variables in this experiment, each with two levels. One was the preference of the speaker and the other was the preference of the viewer. In either case, there could be only one of two levels: they either did prefer or did not prefer the candidate being talked about.

The dependent variable of this experiment was the rated level of perceived sincerity for each speaker in each video. This was rated in a scale of one to nine, with nine being the most honest and sincere, and one representing a dishonest and insincere speaker.

Control variables for this experiment included counterbalancing the speaker, order of speakers, and topic of speech. This caused there to be four total groups. Each group saw some of the same speakers, but the order of the speakers and the topics were mixed up. Other control variables included the area in which participants were tested. The area was always quiet with no one else in the room besides the experimenter and other participants.

Procedure

Through email and telephone contact, participants were recruited to take part in this experiment. Participants chose a time that worked for them and from there the experimenter would schedule them in time slots. Many people brought along friends, roommates, and/or classmates. Overall, the procedure looked like this: participants would come into the classroom and be greeted by the experimenter. The participants were told the experiment was looking at our ability to perceive sincerity in public speech. They were handed the questionnaire and asked to fill out the first three items—gender, age, and if voting were held today, who they would vote for (McCain, Obama, or Clinton). After their choices were marked, the videos began. Each video ranged from about 65 to 95 seconds, and were played back-to-back. Each participant viewed three speakers and was told they were allowed to wait until the second speech by a particular speaker before rating that speaker's sincerity for each of the two video endorsements. Every participant saw at least one speech on each candidate. After all participants had rated their perceived sincerity for all six videos they were thanked and asked to leave.

Results

Descriptive statistics were analyzed first: Of the 55 participants surveyed, 27 supported Barack Obama, 18 for Hilary Clinton, seven for John McCain, and three were undecided. When the viewer was male, the mean perceived sincerity rating was 4.99. This compared to 5.29 when the viewer was female. When the topic was Obama, the mean rating of sincerity was 5.40; for Clinton, the mean rating was 5.27; and for McCain the mean rating was 4.65.

A two-by-two repeated measures ANOVA was used to analyze the data from this experiment. The degree of sincerity score served as the dependent variable for these statistics; while whether the participant and speaker preferred the topic or not, served as the two independent variables. The mean rating of perceived sincerity when both the speaker and the viewer supported the topic was 5.214. When the viewer did prefer and the speaker did not prefer the topic, and vice versa, the means were similar (5.595 and 5.976). However, when both the viewer and speaker did not prefer the topic, the mean rating was 4.215. This turned out to be a significant difference. See Table 1 for more information.

There turned out to be no main effect for the viewer's preference on the ratings of sincerity ($F(1,20) = 0.583, p > .05$). There was an approaching significance for the effect of the speaker's sincerity ($F(1,20) = 3.520, p < .08$). However, there was a significant interaction between those two variables ($F(1,20) = 8.671, p < .01$). Figure 1 shows this interaction between the two variables: speaker and viewer preference.

A follow-up paired samples t-test was performed to ensure the data obtained from 21 participants would hold up for another portion of the participants. This test supported significance for an interaction when the viewer was watching a topic that he or she did not prefer ($t(40) = 2.765, p < .01$). The second t-test supported the insignificance for an interaction when the viewer was watching a topic that he or she did prefer ($t(20) = -0.618, p > .54$). The output from these two tests is listed in Figures 2 and 3.

Discussion

The results provided by this study show that there is a tendency for people's judgment to be clouded by their own personal preferences. When someone hears something that is congruent with their own beliefs they have a harder time distinguishing sincerity from insincerity. This is important to note because it means that when people tell us what we want to hear we accept it without accurately judging whether they are being sincere or not. The results from this study also support the idea that people can pick up on verbal and nonverbal cues better, and therefore assess the speaker's sincerity more accurately, when the topic of speech does not match up with that of the viewer. This emphasizes the importance of keeping a critical eye on those who speak of things that are incongruent with our beliefs. We should always ask relevant and analytical questions to gain a further understanding of whatever the topic is. Perhaps this type of critical assessment and questioning could have been utilized in Germany during the years before World War II. It is now clear that the then dictator, Adolph Hitler, was pushing prejudiced propaganda into the lives of Europeans. Had more people questioned the validity and structure of his ideas, perhaps he would not have damaged so many people's lives. Other examples of this theory making a big difference can be seen all around us. Every time someone has something to say to

us, whether it is a prepared speech at a convocation, or casual talk amongst peers; there is something deeper going on than just the information being conveyed. There is often a rose-colored glasses effect (when you agree with the topic of conversation); meaning you will tend to think the speaker is being sincere because the topic of his or her speech is congruent with your beliefs.

Be aware that people are not always talking about something they truly believe. This is especially true when it comes to politics. Speakers endorse political candidates all the time, especially during election season. Many of these speakers are simply filling a role and doing their job. They may or may not actually believe in what the candidate stands for. It is up to us to judge the sincerity of these speakers and take their words for what they are worth. Remember not to let your own personal preference get in the way of making a valid judgment of others' sincerity.

References

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Table 1

Viewer's Mean Ratings of Perceived Sincerity

Speaker's Preference	Viewer's Personal Preference	
	Yes	No
Yes	5.214	5.976
No	5.595	4.215

Table 2

2x2 Repeated Measures ANOVA on the Effects of Viewer's Personal Preference Speaker's Personal Preference, and the Interaction Between those Factors on the Viewer's Perceived Sincerity of the Speakers

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Viewer's Pref.	2.009	1	2.009	0.583	>.05
Speaker's Pref.	10.005	1	10.005	3.520	<.08
ViewPref x SpeakPref	24.096	1	24.096	8.671	<.01

Figure 1. Interaction of viewer and speaker preferences on perceived sincerity of public speakers.

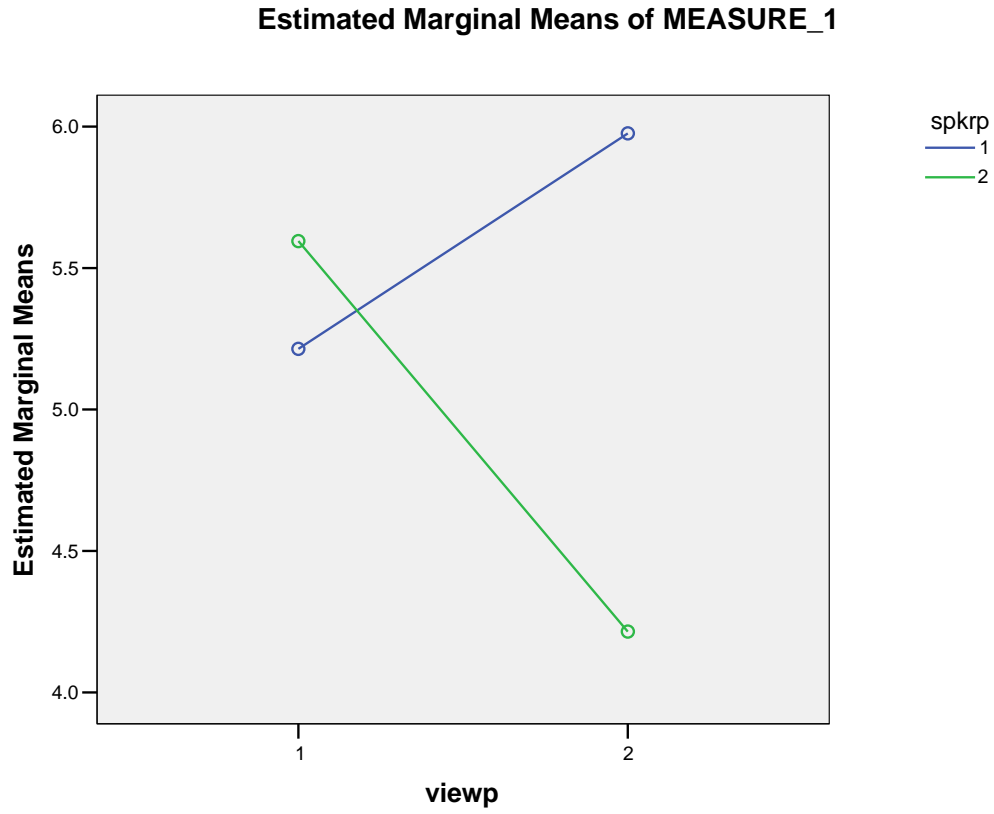


Figure 2. Results from SPSS paired samples t-test for when the viewer did not prefer the candidate being talked about.

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	VnoSyas - VnoSno	.78024	1.80693	.28220	.20991	1.35058	2.765	40	.009

Figure 3. Results from SPSS paired samples t-test for when the viewer did prefer the candidate being talked about.

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	VyesSyas - VyesSno	-.38095	2.82358	.61616	-1.66623	.90433	-.618	20	.543

Appendix A

Clinton Speaker Script

Hello everyone. My name is _____, and I am here to endorse Senator Hilary Clinton for President of the United States of America. This November, I encourage you to do the same and vote Clinton! This is the Senator's 8th year in Congress. She also spent time as First Lady to former President, William Clinton. Before this, she obtained degrees from Wellesley College as well as Yale.

According to a recent Gallup Poll, over two thirds of the people in America feel Senator Clinton has a clear plan for solving the many problems facing this country. This compared to around 40% for both John McCain and Barack Obama. Over two thirds of Americans feel that Clinton has a vision for the future of the country; and I sincerely believe this vision is a good one.

Senator Clinton has been recognized by many to be quite a self-confident person. This, as well as her strong drive, will allow her to make the necessary changes in Washington to restore the confidence and image of America.

A Chicago native, Senator Clinton resides in New York and has represented the people of that state as a member of the United States Congress for 8 years now.

I really believe Senator Clinton will utilize her education, self-confidence, strong drive, and leadership skills to make living better for every person.

Obama Speaker Script

Greetings ladies and gentlemen, my name is _____, and I am here to endorse Senator Barack Obama as the President of the States of America. This November, I encourage you to do the same and vote Obama! Although he is the youngest of the three major candidates, Obama has raised more funds than any other candidate for this race.

According to a recent Gallup Poll, over two thirds of the people in America feel Senator Obama understands the problems people face in this country. They also believe he “cares about the needs of people like you.” Over two thirds of Americans feel that Obama has a vision for the future of the country; and I sincerely believe this vision is a good one.

Senator Obama has been recognized by many to have excellent judgment. This combined with his education provide him with the skills necessary to make important changes in Washington. He has obtained degrees from both Columbia and Harvard Universities. He will provide a young, fresh voice in the capitol and restore the confidence and image of America.

Originally from Hawaii, Senator Obama resides in Illinois and has represented the people of that state as a member of the United States Congress for nearly 4 years now.

I truly believe Senator Obama will utilize his education, good judgment, and leadership skills to make living better for every person.

McCain Speaker Script

Greetings ladies and gentlemen. My name is _____, and I am here to endorse Senator John McCain as the President of the States of America. This November, I encourage you to do the same and vote McCain! Senator McCain was born in Coco Solo Naval Air Station, Panama, as the son of a U.S. Naval officer.

Senator McCain was educated at the U.S. Naval Academy and National War College. He served the country's military and was actually held as a prisoner of war in Vietnam for over five years. This adds to his reputation and allows his national stature to be that of a leader.

Senator McCain has the most experience in Washington as a representative of the people of this country. He started serving in Congress in 1983 for the state of Arizona where he has lived most of his life.

According to a recent Gallup Poll, over two thirds of the people in America feel Senator McCain is "honest and trustworthy." This compared to 44% for Clinton, and 63% for Obama. In addition, over two thirds of Americans feel that McCain has a vision for the future of the country; and I sincerely believe this vision is a good one.

Senator McCain has been recognized by many to be a strong and decisive leader. This combined with his education, media savvy, and war experience will provide him with the skills necessary to make important changes in Washington and to restore the confidence and image of America.

I really believe that John McCain will utilize his education, good judgment, and leadership skills to make living better for every person.

Appendix B

Gender: *M* *F*

Age: *18-21* *22-25* *26+*

If voting were held today, which of the three major candidates would you vote for?

McCain *Obama* *Clinton*

Please rate your perceived sincerity for the speaker in each video

A. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

B. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

C. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

D. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

E. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

F. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Appendix C

SPSS output from 2x2 repeated measures ANOVA:

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts

Measure: MEASURE_1

Source	viewp	spkrp	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
viewp	Linear		2.009	1	2.009	.583	.454
Error(viewp)	Linear		68.896	20	3.445		
spkrp		Linear	10.005	1	10.005	3.520	.075
Error(spkrp)		Linear	56.850	20	2.843		
viewp * spkrp	Linear	Linear	24.096	1	24.096	8.671	.008
Error(viewp*spkrp)	Linear	Linear	55.579	20	2.779		