

A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH TO ANALYZING POLITICAL
NARRATIVES

BY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Morality and Politics

The Role of Morality in Politics

Authors and scholars have been contemplating the relationship between politics and religion in the United States since its inception (Balmer, 2006; Frank, 2004; Greeley & Hout, 2006; Hedges, 2007; Linker, 2006; Noll, 1990; Reichley, 1985; Suarez, 2006). These inquiries often attempt to answer one of two central questions. The first question is more philosophical or in the realm of “the ought;” namely, how much should religion and politics come together? This can be thought of in terms of legal questions like should prayer be allowed in school, but it can also be thought in terms of when and how much explicitly religious terminology should be used in the public square. Recently, some writer’s like Richard Neuhaus (1995) have argued that the United States needs more religious language in the public sphere because, on the whole, religious considerations move the nation in a positive direction. Others, such as Mark Lilla (2007), argue that the history of institutionalized religion in the West was extremely bloody. Lilla uses historical analysis to show that religious language in the public sphere, even in the form of liberal theology, can prepare the way for more passionate and apocalyptic forms of religion to dominate as it eventually did in Post-Hegelian Germany in the form of Nazism. Essentially his argument is that we must either maintain the Great Separation or

risk the institutionalization of political theology because intermediary forms of religious language in the public sphere do not provide the conviction that man needs and thus are inherently unstable forms of political theology.

While scholars like Lilla and Neuhaus ask whether or not we should have more religious language in the public sphere, others have been more interested in whether or not man can in reality separate the two in his mind. Most thinkers agree that political considerations are dependent on some form of theory of justice or conception of the good. As such, many philosophers, perhaps most famously John Rawls (1971), have attempted to create a theory of justice that is neutral to competing conceptions of the good. This would allow us to think about politics in religiously neutral ways. Yet Perry (1988) argues that no philosopher has in fact come up with a theory of justice that is neutral to competing conceptions of the good and that it is unlikely that anyone will because, “One’s basic moral/religious convictions are (partly) self-constitutive and are therefore a principal ground – indeed, the principal ground – of political deliberation and choice.” Christian Smith (2003) reaches a similar conclusion arguing that “one of the central and fundamental motivations for human action is to act out and sustain moral order.” Together Smith and Perry argue that, whether people should be or not, they *are* animals with moral convictions and that the values that come from these convictions must affect their views on political issues and voting decisions. To determine whether or not Perry and Smith are correct we need to examine the second question about the interrelationship between politics and religion. That is, how much do religious differences matter in terms of political views, and are these differences inevitable due to fundamentally different conceptions of the good?

Books such as Greeley and Hout's (2006) examine the role of religious affiliation, views, and commitment level on political views in the aggregate. Greeley and Hout find differences in voting behavior based on the type of Christianity one professes as well as with regards to the level of religiosity that one claims. For example, white Christians with a more conservative view of the Bible and those with more commitment to their religious practice have on average more conservative political views. These differences, however, are not as extreme as many suppose (~ 20% difference in voting behavior, see p. 73). By contrast, differences in income level (~25%), views on abortion (~30%), and views on social spending/unions (~50%) all show greater cleavages in voting than do religious beliefs and commitment. For example Conservative Protestant voters who support social spending and unions vote Democratic around 80% of the time while those who do not vote Republican approximately 70% of the time (see p. 52).

Greeley and Hout's data suggest two interesting findings. First, a person's religious beliefs and commitment is important in how *one will vote*, and the importance has grown in recent years. Secondly, a person's income level, gender, and views on abortion, social spending, and unions are also important and becoming more important to voting as well. Interestingly, this polarization in how people vote has come about in spite of the fact that people's views have not become more polarized. In fact, numerous studies of people's stands on domestic policy issues show that the general public was less polarized on most issues in 2000 compared to the 1970s and 1980s (DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson, 1996; Evans, 2003). This holds true for specific groups as well. For instance, religious conservatives and liberals did not polarize on any single issue over this time frame, and converged on moral issues such as abortion and sex education. Nor did views

become polarized on the basis of religious denomination over this period (Evans, 2002; Hoffman & Miller, 1997; 1998)

So why would voting behavior become more polarized on the basis of views, religion, and income when the views between groups and generally are not polarizing? The answer may lie in the views of the political elites in both parties. Here we find ample evidence that there has been a movement by the elites within both political parties toward more polarized politics that seems to have begun in the mid to late 1970s. Since 1977, Democrats have become more liberal on a variety of issues, while Republicans have become more conservative across the board (Layman, 1999; Layman, 2001; McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006; Poole & Rosenthal, 2001). This has led to some polarization with regards to those non-elites who most closely identify with the two political parties (Evans, 2003; Layman, 2001) and could help to explain more polarized voting behavior. For example, in 1978 some voters may have been willing to vote on the basis of a single issue like abortion but if their Republican and Democratic candidates had similar views on the issue then they would have been less inclined to do so. By 1998, however, because of the polarization of the party elites, there was a much greater likelihood that they would be able to see enough of a difference between the two candidates on these issues that they would be able to vote on them if they choose (Layman, 2001).

Even before there was much empirical support for the idea of a polarized electorate or a 'culture war' there has been a clear perception of increased hostility and divisiveness. For instance, Wuthnow (1996) notes there were more than 1,000 news stories that used the term 'culture wars' from 1992 to 1994 in the United States. The

term ‘culture war’ first came from James Hunter (1991) who generated the thesis that the United States was in a cultural war between those with orthodox (conservative) views and those with progressive (liberal) views. These groups, in Hunter’s view, are at war over the ability to define America’s culture. Since then various other authors have also attempted to explain this rise in political “polarization” in terms of differences in moral judgment or worldview. In this review, I will focus on Lakoff’s (2002) argument that liberals and conservatives have two very different conceptual systems of morality and Haidt’s (2007) contention that moral judgment consists of five moral domains and the fundamental differences between liberals and conservatives come from the fact that they prioritize these domains differently.

First, I turn to George Lakoff who, in his book *Moral Politics* (2002), hypothesizes two broad sets of moral systems based on competing conceptions of the human family. The strict father moral system is based on a metaphor system where strength, authority, and order loom central and out of which conservative political views germinate. In contrast, the nurturant parent moral system is based on a system of metaphors that emphasize empathy, nurturance, and self-development. This is the moral system out of which progressive views on political issues arise. This thesis is very provocative, and is supported by some interesting empirical work on attachment theory (Kobak & Sceery, 1988), socialization theory (Lewis, 1981), as well as work correlating personality traits with political ideology (Block & Block, 2006; Jost, Kruglanski, Glaser, & Sulloway, 2003). In addition, Lakoff’s theory allows for the importance of context in political outlook, which numerous studies attest to (Evans, 1997; Greenberg, 2000; Lieske, 1993; Wald, Owen & Hill, 1988). Moreover, Barker and Tinnick (2006) have put

Lakoff's thesis up to direct empirical scrutiny using National Elections Study data and found evidence supporting it. This was true in spite of the fact that they controlled for potential confounding variables like authoritarianism and moral absolutism versus moral tolerance as well as demographic information.¹

Other research, however, challenges Lakoff's thesis in various ways. First, there is evidence indicating that a majority of Americans are bi-conceptual (Ansolabehere, Rodden, & Snyder, 2006), when bi-conceptual is defined as having a conservative/strict father view on some political issues while also having progressive/nurturant parent views on other issues. Perhaps the most rigorous study of American's political typologies was undertaken by the Pew Research Center ("2005 Political Typology," 2005). In their study of more than 3000 Americans, they found that the electorate settled into roughly nine different political types. Of these nine types, two are synonymous with Lakoff's ideal case conservatives (termed enterprisers) and liberals (termed liberals). They found that enterprisers/ideal type conservatives make up only 9% of the population, while liberals account for only 17% of the population. This does not refute Lakoff's thesis concerning the importance of these two moral systems, just the prevalence rate that Lakoff claims for the ideal types in his statement that "about 40 percent (plus or minus 2 percent) of the national electorate is consistently strict in its politics and another 40 percent (plus or minus 2 percent) is consistently nurturant in its politics" (Lakoff, 2002, p. 393).

Other research, however, is more damaging to Lakoff's thesis. For instance, Greeley and Hout's (2006) research shows that for African Americans religious

¹ It should also be noted that Barker and Tinnick (2006) did find support for Hunter's thesis, but support was largely relegated to views on "cultural" issues like gay marriage, abortion, and affirmative action and did not consistently predict economic and other "New Deal" attitudes.

commitment to a strict father conception of theology actually makes one more likely to vote Democratic. This fact goes against Lakoff's argument that the strict father interpretation of Christianity should predispose people toward conservative politics because they have the same systems of moral accounting. Instead, African-American Christians who accept the strict father interpretation of Christianity seem to overwhelmingly accept the strict father system of moral accounting with regards to theology and the nurturant parent model with regards to politics. Although Lakoff's acceptance of the possibility of bi-conceptuality makes this easily reconcilable at the individual level, it is more troublesome for his thesis at the aggregate level because he assumes that at the aggregate level politics is not simply an issue by issue debate but about larger moral frameworks that push people in the direction of accepting one view or the other. This assumption seems less tenable when the correlation is in the wrong direction for relatively large segments of the electorate.

Moreover, Ginsburg (1989) showed through in-depth narrative analysis that pro-life activists, like pro-choice activists, displayed nurturance as their most central moral value (a nurturant parent characteristic). In this analysis, Ginsburg challenges Lakoff's understanding of pro-life activists actual value priorities. Her argument centers on pro-choice and pro-life activists having very similar moral values, and that other life circumstances play the decisive role in whether or not this nurturance will manifest itself into a pro-choice or pro-life stance. Lakoff, in contrast, argues that the pro-life perspective is associated with a strict father morality that believes that a woman who has pre-marital sex and becomes pregnant deserves punishment and must accept responsibility for her actions so she will truly learn from the mistake. These two

challenges to Lakoff's theory suggest that more research needs to be done to further understand the limits and scope of his thesis. Ideally, researchers would elicit narratives from voters that allow them to explain their views and the moral value priorities that underlie their views themselves.

Another more recent attempt to understand the interconnection between morality and politics comes from Joseph Haidt and colleagues (Haidt, 2007; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Graham, 2009; Haidt & Joseph, 2007). Haidt and colleagues have identified five different domains of morality dealing with issues of harm/care, fairness/reciprocity/justice, ingroup/loyalty/community, authority/respect; and purity/sanctity. He cites ethnographic texts as evidence that many non-Western societies have at least these five domains of moral order and argues that it is Western liberals who tend to shrink morality into largely two moral domains, harm/care and fairness/reciprocity/justice (Haidt, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2007). Specifically he finds that American conservatives and liberals prioritize these five moral domains differently. Liberals assign more importance to the harm and fairness domains than the ingroup/loyalty, authority, and purity domains while conservatives appreciate all five moral domains more or less equally. It is important to point out that liberals have not discarded the other three domains altogether; rather they have reduced their priority in comparison to care and justice. Haidt's theory is intriguing and is backed up by recent research that finds that a predisposition to feel disgust is associated with more conservative political views on issues, especially those related to the moral domain of purity (Inbar, Pizarro, & Bloom, in press). His theory, however, is very recent and evidence for it comes exclusively from survey data. An alternative method of investigating this theory would

be to allow participants to tell their own stories about why they hold various political views, and see if conservative participants prioritize community, authority, and purity more in their responses than liberals do.

Haidt's theory (2007) differs from Lakoff's (2002) in that it does not suppose that liberals and conservatives have completely different moral systems. To understand this difference let us take the issue of teenage pregnancy and giving out condoms to teens as a possible solution to the problem. For Lakoff, the issue will be seen completely differently depending on which moral system one uses to frame the issue. For those who see sex education through the strict father lens teen pregnancy is about moral strength, that is, whether or not teens have the moral strength necessary to not have sex until marriage. Within this framework, providing condoms will simply lessen teenager's collective willpower or moral strength leading to a generation of youth that are morally weak. Teenage pregnancy is thus a symptom of a larger moral problem, and handing out condoms would only increase the size of the moral problem long term. For those using the nurturant parent lens, however, providing condoms to teens is a sensible idea given the fact that at least some teenagers will have sex before marriage anyway (or else teen pregnancy would not be a problem) and that using condoms would cause less of these youth to become pregnant. Within this frame, sex before marriage is not seen as a problem in itself, or at least as less of a problem than teenage pregnancy.

Within Haidt's (2007) framework, however, the question is not one of framing but of moral values priorities. For liberals, providing condoms is reasonable because there is no harm caused or injustice perpetrated, but it is protecting women from having an unwanted pregnancy (avoiding harm). It may have the side effect of lessening moral

purity, but this problem is not seen as very important compared to issues of harm and justice for liberals. Therefore, they will side with decreasing harm even if it means increasing moral impurity. For conservatives, however, providing condoms goes against two of the five moral domains. It promotes sexual impurity, and it promotes acting in a manner inconsistent with moral authority (i.e. the parents). These negatives must be weighed against the potential benefit of avoiding the harm of unwanted teen pregnancies. This will make this program more controversial among conservatives who see these domains as being on more equal footing and, therefore, more conservatives will be against such a program relative to liberals.

Interestingly, it could be the case that Haidt (2007) and Lakoff (2002) are both correct if the different moral systems play a role in the different sets of moral priorities. In both instances, obtaining political narratives from a cross section of the general public could help provide support or suggest limits to the theories. Why would obtaining political narratives be important when we have studies based on large numbers of surveys? To answer this question we need to consider the importance of narrative more generally as a way in which people make sense of their world.

Why Narrative?

Christian Smith (2003) argues that, at the general level, “Narratives not only provide ‘big picture’ frameworks of life but likewise help to construct more specific and personal accounts and themes of meaning, purpose, and explanation in life” (p. 75). Smith explicitly argues against the postmodern idea that people have given up faith in meta-narratives (grand narratives that give life meaning through framing the order and

purpose of reality). Rather, he argues that meta-narratives are alive and well in the modern age, stating: “We have no more dispensed with grand narratives than with the need for lungs to breath with. We cannot live without stories, big stories finally, to tell us what is real and significant, to know who we are, where we are, what we are doing, and why” (p. 67).

Walter Fisher (1984) agrees with Smith (2003) on the basic point that people construct meaning through narratives. Fisher goes further, however, providing a detailed explanation for how people choose certain narratives over other competing narratives. To put it simply, we all evaluate various narratives for their credibility, accepting narratives we believe to be high in credibility and denying stories we see as low in credibility. Narrative credibility is determined by examining narratives for internal probability or coherence (i.e., is the narrative internally consistent?) and external fidelity (i.e., does the story ‘ring true’ with what I know about the world?).

In performing my research, I have interviewed participants with the goal of obtaining the stories they use to explain their views regarding political issues, candidates, and parties. In doing so, I have asked people to explicitly state the values that they believe undergird their positions. I use Fisher’s (1984) thesis about narrative credibility as a lens through which to view how people might choose between competing political narratives. I deviate from Fisher (1984) in that I hypothesize that there are two different kinds of external fidelity when it comes specifically to political narratives. The first type of external fidelity Lakoff (2002) would call the idealistic dimension and relates to what rings true to a person regarding how the world *ought to be*. This is the realm of fidelity where moral conviction is the principal ground for determining whether or not a narrative

rings true. This realm of ‘the ought’ is where Lakoff’s (2002) two competing visions of moral order and Haidt’s (2007) five moral domains may loom large. In this area, there is little ability to draw on ‘evidence’ that one moral order is more credible than another. A person can move away from a completely relativistic discussion of morality, however, by attempting to provide the reasons given for choosing one moral order over another, thereby placing competing arguments in dialogue with one another (Smith, 2003).

The second type of external fidelity is the pragmatic dimension and relates to what is seen to be the way the world *is*. Views about how the world is can be supported in many ways, such as referencing dominant myths and folk theories of human nature that ring true, giving anecdotal evidence of historic occurrences, citing historical evidence based on major past events, and citing empirical evidence based on scholarly research. As a researcher examining various political stories, it is my job to take the stories that people tell and show how they subjectively view them as having narrative probability or coherence and both idealistic and pragmatic fidelity.

The present research is significant in several ways. First, it allows for the systematic identification of moral domains as they emerge within political narratives. This will advance understanding on how various moral domains individually and collectively influence political views, shedding light on Haidt’s (2007) and Lakoff’s (2002) theories potentially reconciling them. Second, through gaining a better understanding of the values that people believe themselves to be upholding, and disseminating this knowledge, partisans on both sides may be able to better understand that the other side consists of ethical people who mean well. If so, this recognition may lessen the current polarization that is occurring at the level of elites and in voting

behavior. Polarization is also expected to be lessened by presenting good arguments from both sides of many issues, allowing people whose thinking is generally skewed towards only hearing conservative or progressive political views to hear the other side.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Overview

The current study comes out of a larger project examining the relationship between politics and religion in six communities throughout Tennessee. The communities include a west Tennessee delta community, two urban largely African-American communities that sit within a large city, a middle-Tennessee plateau community, an east Tennessee hill community, and a middle-Tennessee community bordering on a large Federal army installation. In my part of the larger study I drew my participants from the middle-Tennessee plateau county. The larger project has as its goal the identification of community level factors that may help account for community level differences in the ways people understand the relationship between religion and politics. As such this larger project has as its unit of analysis the community. In the current project, however, I will use the individual person as the unit of analysis. Both projects are exploratory in that they attempt to understand the differences in how various people relate moral/religious convictions to their politics institutionally and personally.

The larger project is employing ethnographic methods because of a belief that “people’s perspectives . . . form the foundation for building local theories that can be tested, linked to scientific literature, and adapted for use elsewhere” (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). I used multiple ethnographic methods in collecting data in the rural Tennessee plateau community. I used participant observation, informal interviews, and

secondary source material such as newspaper articles, to obtain a feel of the history and communal context of the county.

The central research method for the present study was five semi-structured interviews and one group interview with three individuals who were collectively members of three churches. These interviews allowed for a private space where participants could describe their political story and the arguments they use to justify this story as compared with competing stories. These specific interviews were chosen from a larger group of 12 interviews conducted in the summer of 2007. I chose them to obtain maximum variation on the continua of political ideology (from conservative to liberal), and theological leanings (from conservative to liberal). I also looked for some gender and ethnic diversity.

Sample Population

This study took place in Pierce County, Tennessee. The county, although geographically large, has a small population of 17,423 (US Census Bureau, 2000a) because of its largely rural character. The county is located on the Tennessee plateau, an hour and 15 minute drive from Tennessee's capital city, Nashville. The largest city in the county is Smalltown, with 3,994 people (US Census Bureau, 2000b). Other facets of the county important to this study include the preponderance of religiously conservative churches, the relative economic disadvantage of the population, and a traditionally Democratic voting stance (Leip, n.d.a; Leip, n.d.b).

A search through the Pierce County phonebook showed that Smalltown has 21 Conservative Protestant Churches compared with five Mainline Protestant Churches (all

United Methodist), and one Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, and Seventh Day Adventist Church. As for income levels, the median family income for the county as a whole is \$36,920, compared to \$50,046 nationally – with a median income of \$30,179 in Smalltown (US Census Bureau, 2000a; US Census Bureau, 2000b). Through the larger ethnographic study I know that there is one small Conservative Christian African-American church in the city and a minimum of two store front Hispanic churches. Some of the larger churches also have separate services that cater to the Hispanic population.

In national politics, Pierce County has voted solidly for Democratic presidential candidates since voting for Republican Richard Nixon in 1972, other than their swing to vote for George W. Bush in 2004, when he won by 3.3% of the vote (Leip, n.d.a). Through the years, the Democratic candidate has often won by large margins, for example, from 1992 to 2000 Democrats won by an average of ~ 30% (Leip, n.d.a). In addition, the county did swing back away from its Republican shift in 2004 during the 2006 Senatorial election, voting for Harold Ford Jr. over Bob Corker for senate by a 9.9% margin (Leip, n.d.b).

Demographics on the county show that it is relatively homogeneous (95.6% white compared to the national average of 75.5%) (US Census Bureau, 2000a). African-Americans were 1.4% of the population (250) and Hispanics were 3.6% (633) of the population in 2000. Locals' estimate that the number of Hispanics now in the county has likely doubled or tripled since 2000.²

² Respondents estimates ranged from 1600 to 5000 Hispanics currently living in the county as a whole.

Sampling Procedure

Through participating as a researcher in the larger Vanderbilt project on religion and culture for two summers, I have gained entrée to a wide variety of religious and secular groups in Pierce County. The research included participant observation in many functions related to politics and religion, such as going to Church services on Sunday mornings or a Harold Ford rally in the summer of 2006. In addition, I have engaged many people in informal conversations around politics and religion. Through this process I have come to know many people in Pierce County with a great variety of political outlooks and moral/religious convictions. This allowed me to get to know many different people prior to engaging in any taped interviews. The amount of rapport I was able to establish varied across sites. In many cases, my upbringing in a largely rural town in Western North Carolina helped me to establish rapport quickly, as I have a southern accent and an affinity for country living. I was welcomed in the majority of churches that I attended by pastors and lay people alike, although there were churches whose pastors seemed cool toward me. All interviews were conducted with people in churches where pastors and parishioners had been welcoming.

For the larger project, I conducted 12 tape recorded interviews with various people in the County during the summer of 2007. These participants were theoretically selected on the basis of theological, political, gender, and ethnic diversity. In addition to using my contacts, I also engaged in snowball sampling procedures. Meaning that at the end of each interview I asked each participant if they could think of anyone else that would be a good person for me to interview whose views were different from their own. Of these 12 interviews I have chosen five to focus on for this particular research project.

In addition to the five individual interviews I conducted one group interview with three participants. These eight participants were all members of one of three Smalltown churches. The one group interview was conducted on the suggestion of the three participants themselves in the place of individual interviews. All three attend the same church and often discuss political issues together in various settings including work and church. As such, their political narratives have developed in large part through their dialogue with one another, and, they thought that a group interview would be best for presenting their contrasting narratives and policy positions. All discussion and disagreement in this group interview was quite amiable, and there never appeared to a time when any of the interviewees were uncomfortable sharing their own perspective on an issue, despite having large differences of opinion on a number of issues.

The interviews I choose to focus on were also chosen on the basis of theoretical sampling. I wanted to compare and contrast political narratives on the basis of type of church attended (liberal or conservative), political orientation (Democratic-leaning or Republican-leaning), while at the same time having gender and ethnic diversity to explore possible differences that might emerge on the basis of these factors. Thus I choose three churches, one mainline and two conservative, where I had conducted interviews with the participants during the Summer of 2007. One of the conservative churches was a predominately White church in the city, the other was African-American. The mainline church was predominately White. Two individual interviews and the group interview were conducted with members of Liberal Church A. Two interviews were conducted at Conservative Church A, and the final interview was conducted with an African-American woman who attended Conservative Church B.

Data Collection Strategy

The findings of this study are limited to the data collected during these six in-depth interviews. I started each of the interviews with some questions about the county to build rapport. Then I asked a grand tour question “Can you tell me what some of your political views are?” This question was followed up with probes as appropriate to specifically elicit moral values. A probe might take the form, “What about your personal values? How do they impact your views?” I also asked a broad question about how they thought they had come to embrace these views. If participants were unsure what I was asking, I would probe using statements like some people think that their family or church played a role (see Appendix A).

After participants answered these two grand tour questions, I asked about specific political issues such as abortion, health care, and the War in Iraq if they were not volunteered or discussed thoroughly during the grand tour question. As with the first grand tour question, I asked about how moral values come into one’s thoughts about these issues. I also asked participants to talk about what they thought of such terms as: Christian Nation, the Separation of Church and State, Democrat, and Republican. We also discussed how they had decided to vote in past elections. These questions were asked to elicit their views on subjects of political importance to them that may not necessarily take the form of policy issues. As with the questions about issues, I had participants consider any connections they saw between these terms and their own moral values as necessary. Finally, I asked some questions pertaining to the participants’ political context. For example, I asked whether or not they spoke to others about politics, and if so, what kinds of political leanings these others had. I also asked participants

where they went to church and what the political context of their church was like, as well as how they got their political news. The purpose of this interview process was twofold. First, I wanted to ensure a valid portrayal of participants' political narrative, which involved specifically engaging them in the areas they brought up initially and going further to examine other issues that may have been of importance to them, but did not come up initially. Secondly, I wanted to ensure that participants explicitly stated any moral values that might implicitly underlie their political positions.

It is important to consider for a moment how the interview guide was constructed. I based it in part on the analysis of the data I collected during the summer of 2006. In this respect, the interview was grounded in the data. In addition, the interview was constructed to examine the theories proposed by Lakoff (2002) and Haidt (2007). Finally the interview guide was framed from the perspective of Fisher's (1984) understanding of narrative credibility. As such, I attempted to get participants to discuss the various elements that make up their political narratives in a manner where they could explain their narratives, the values behind them, and say why they believed they were more credible than competing narratives (see Appendix A).

Issues of Obtrusiveness and Rapport

There were some issues with developing rapport with different citizens of Pierce County. Rapport was not built equally across all of the participants in the study. In some cases, I had several informal conversations with a participant before an interview. In other cases, there was less rapport built before the interview. While conducting the research, I felt as if it was going to be more difficult to build rapport with political and

theological conservatives, women, and different ethnic groups because I am a white male with relatively liberal theological and political views. Looking back, this was a very real issue in some cases. For instance, after one service at a theologically conservative church, the pastor gave me the cold shoulder. At most churches, however, everyone was very welcoming and interested in the study, even if they did not want to participate themselves. Generally speaking, I did have more trouble establishing rapport with political conservatives compared to liberals unless I had already established relationships with the conservative through a third person who could 'vouch' for me. Other than the pastor mentioned above, I had very few instances where I was specifically rebuffed by individuals regardless of theological conservatism. I should also state that contrary to my initial expectations, I found building rapport with women easier than I had originally anticipated, especially women interested in issues related to education.

Rapport was much less of a problem concerning those who agreed to do interviews with me. For example, one political conservative I interviewed only became willing to do the interview because of the rapport I had built with other community members he trusted. Once he learned more about the study and agreed to take part, however, he was quite willing to participate, and, from the answers he gave and the non-verbal signals he gave during the interview, he seemed very candid during the interview. Overall, I believe that interviews were more candid than they would have been had I not used snowball sampling or not tried to build rapport before interviews.

Trustworthiness

This research falls within the naturalistic, not the positivistic research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, trustworthiness is not established through showing internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity but rather through establishing claims to credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In naturalistic inquiry, establishing trustworthiness is based on the process the researcher uses in collecting data. For instance, credibility is established through “activities that make it more likely that credible findings and interpretations will be produced” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). In that my interview guide was created only after three months of engagement with the citizens of Pierce County and nine months of reading the literature, I believe that it likely led to credible findings. I also had more prolonged engagement with participants than is typical for positivistic research, and this increased the trustworthiness of my findings. At the same time, due to the fact that I was working with participants from a number of different settings within the county at the same time, I was not able to obtain the kind of prolonged engagement in any one particular context that many naturalistic inquirers achieve. I sacrificed depth of engagement in particular settings to achieve more breadth of comparison across settings.

Triangulation, using different questions, sources, and methods to focus on equivalent sets of data, is an important part of increasing a study’s credibility (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). I used triangulation of questions and sources but employed only the semi-structured interview method. As stated previously, a number of different questions were used to elicit political narratives, grand tour questions versus specific questions for example. There were also affective and value laden questions in

addition to issue based questions. These questions were designed to get participants thinking and discussing their political narratives from different perspectives. In addition, I purposefully sampled people who had very different opinions and understandings of the topic, thereby assuring the analysis benefited from having a variety of different perspectives represented. Since the analysis was based on interview data only, it did not benefit from the added credibility that can be gained through the triangulation of different methods. A fellow graduate student did take on the role of a peer debriefer, which also adds to a study's credibility (Erlandson et al., 1993). Her feedback was instrumental in developing the theoretical model put forth. In addition, I used negative case analysis, which involves testing the hypothesis created from earlier pieces of data against different pieces of data to determine the validity of the hypothesis. A hypothesis was determined to be valid, using this analysis method, only when there were no substantive differences between the data and the hypothesis (Erlandson et al., 1993). Member checks are also often an important aspect of developing credibility. I was not able to do a systematic member check but I did informally go back and verify hypotheses created from the analysis with some participants. Specifically, I explained the basic categories identified in the grounded theory analysis and how they interrelate to three interviewees at different times. In addition I gave a public presentation of the findings in front of 20 Pierce county citizens, 5 of which had been interviewed, although only 1 was part of the 8 person sample selected for this study. Without exception all citizens I spoke with found the ideas interesting and, once they considered them, found them reasonable. Transferability is the second aspect of trustworthiness. Transferability largely consists of obtaining a sample purposefully selected to maximize the range of information obtained and using

thick description, that is, detailed descriptions of the data in their original context, in a report (Erlandson et al., 1993). Collecting 12 interviews with 14 participants and then choosing 6 interviews with 8 participants based on theological and political perspectives, gender, and ethnicity allowed me to maximize the range of information obtained from the data selected for analysis. Although thick descriptions of scenes and context are not relevant in a study of participants' stories, I have included many lengthy quotes from participants. My hope is that these quotations will provide the reader with enough description of the narratives to decide when the findings are transferable and when they are not. As such, these quotations served the same purpose that thick description normally serves.

Dependability is the third aspect of trustworthiness and is related to the consistency, stability, predictability, or accuracy of the results. Dependability is high when one is able to provide evidence that, given the same or similar respondents and the same context, the findings would be repeated (Erlandson et al., 1993). The best way to do this is to provide a dependability audit that provides a running account of the process of the inquiry. I have attempted to provide such an account by presenting a natural history of my research method and providing an interview guide. In addition, because this study was part of a multi-researcher, multi-discipline research study, fellow researchers have examined my research process and provided feedback stating ways it could be improved which were incorporated. I also used the case reporting method, which provided examples of "raw data" to illustrate analytic conclusions. This increased dependability because it is closer to the data.

Confirmability is the final aspect of trustworthiness, and it deals with objectivity. Objectivity in naturalistic research is demonstrated through showing that the data are in fact confirmable representations of the participants' views and not based on the biases of the researcher (Erlandson et al., 1993). There will not be a publicly assessable confirmability audit in this study for confidentiality reasons. Fellow researchers and my peer debriefer, however, do have access to all of my notes and analytic coding so that they can determine whether or not the conclusions and interpretations presented here can be traced to the data. For readers, I have attempted to provide insight into my research process and large segments of "raw data" in an attempt to stay close to the data so that they can determine whether or not my conclusions are faithful to the data.

Data Analysis

I coded the data using the grounded theory method. As such I read through each interview several times, and used line-by-line coding as the initial analysis method. During this stage of coding, I made a conscious effort to "remain open, stay close to the data, keep codes simple and concise, construct short codes, preserve action, compare data with data, and move quickly through the data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). Line-by-line coding is very tedious but it allows for the generation of theoretically significant insights. For example, Wayne's statement that "for me it was just a very comfortable kind of feeling that you had with Gore," helped generate the category of emotion by highlighting that emotional sentiments about candidates can be an important aspects of one's political narrative. This in-depth form of coding helped me to identify many of the theoretically important categories that would become nodes. Once I had created my categories and

nodes, I coded all interviews labeling all pieces of data with the applicable node/category. After coding all the interviews into various theoretically important categories I used the constant comparative method (CCM) to compare across units of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This involved using negative case analysis, i.e., testing hypotheses created from earlier pieces of data against different pieces of data.

Through the constant comparative process, analyzing the different codes and writing theoretical memos, I came to realize that many of the nodes could be understood in terms of three super-ordinate categories: beliefs, values, and emotions. This required doing axial coding across nodes on the basis of these broader categories. In the end, I realized that my findings would consist of first, analyzing the properties and dimensions of each super-ordinate category and, second, analyzing the interconnections between the super-ordinate categories and outlining how they come together to achieve a coherent political narrative.

I soon realized that this analysis by itself, although important from a meta-theoretical level, was fairly shallow for two reasons. First, it did not consider the developmental nature of political narratives. Second, the participant as an individual meaning maker had ceased to be the focal point of the analysis. This first issue led me to label my first analysis political narratives at time one and compelled me to further the analysis by considering how a political narrative develops across time.

The second issue led me to realize that in order to fully explain this theoretical framework I needed to provide fully developed examples of how specific individuals created a political narrative from their beliefs, values, and emotions. That is, I needed to show how specific participants created meaning out of a multitude of beliefs, values, and

emotional sentiments. Therefore, I returned to two participants' data on a case by case basis and analyzed their beliefs, values, emotions, and contexts given this theoretical framework. The results that follow flow from these three distinct yet related analyses.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The findings of this grounded research project are general and specific, theoretical and concrete. I begin with the most general, outlining the theoretical framework that has emerged from my movement back and forth between data and literature. The theoretical sections begin with an examination of the each super-ordinate category in turn. Next, I explain how these categories come together to create a political narrative. These first four sections of the findings hold time constant, not considering how a political narrative develops across time, for simplicity. Later sections then consider how taking into account time complicates the understanding of a political narrative.

After examining the process of how one creates a political narrative in the abstract I move to flesh this analysis out by using two specific cases, one Democratic and one Republican. Through examining these two political narratives in detail we can see how these general theoretical processes play out in individual cases and begin to appreciate the ways in which different people can move to the left or right across time.

Political Narratives: A Snapshot in Time

In this research, the term political narrative has been taken to mean any political talk persons consider relevant to their understanding of politics and/or the role of governing. Through a grounded analysis of eight participant's political narratives, I have created three super-ordinate categories that can help us understand the formation and

development of a political narrative. The first category consists of the various subjective *beliefs* that participants find relevant to politics. I have defined a belief to mean any statement that makes a knowledge claim about how the world *is*. Put differently, beliefs are what participants accept as fact for themselves. The second category is made up of participants' values and value priorities. Values and value priorities consist of all statements that make a knowledge claim about how the world *ought* to be. In other words, values are one's subjective interpretation of what is moral and immoral. The third and final category is the participants' subjective emotional sentiments towards political issues, candidates, and parties. Emotional sentiments convey persons' feelings/affect towards candidates, political parties, and policy issues.

Statements were coded as beliefs in all situations where participants shared their perspective about how the world is. Similarly, all statements that reflected participants' understanding of right and wrong, moral and immoral were coded as value statements. Statements were seen as expressive of emotional sentiments when participants used emotionally charged language, or in cases where they indicated strong support for or against a position.

To get a basic sense of the differences between beliefs, values, and emotional sentiments and how each was coded, I offer the following example of coding and analysis from Randy's narrative:

The knock is the rich should pay more in taxes. . . They're paying quite a bit. The top 20% are paying about 80% of all of the taxes that get paid. But, you asked me how I would criticize this administration. They're supposed to be tax cutters and more for a balanced budget too, and they've spent like drunken sailors the whole time they've been up there.

In the first sentence of this passage Randy acknowledges a value statement of the opposition: "the rich should pay more in taxes." This could be interpreted to mean that

the rich should pay more in taxes than they now do or that they should pay more relative to the middle and lower income classes. In the second sentence, Randy tacitly accepts the idea that the rich should pay more than those with less, but argues that they already do saying “the top 20% are paying about 80% of all the taxes.” This is a statement of belief because Randy sincerely believes that the statement *is* true. One could say he has faith in the truth of this statement.³ Then in the last sentence, we see how belief, value, and emotional sentiment can all come together in one sentence. In this sentence about spending Randy is stating a *belief* that the Bush administration has not cut the federal budget but rather increased federal spending.⁴ In addition, his use of the term “spent like drunken sailors” shows that he associates a lack of fiscal restraint with drunkenness, a metaphor which suggests sinfulness or a lack of purity. From this phrase, we can deduce that one of Randy’s values is frugality or fiscal responsibility and that he is emotionally upset when government does not follow the dictates of this value. From the use of emotionally laden terms like “drunken” we can tell that Randy becomes upset (a negative sentiment) when he sees government acting out of accord with his values, in this case by spending profligately.

³ The empirical data given by the Congressional Budget Office (“Historical Effective Federal Tax Rates,” 2007) corroborates his statement if you define taxes as personal income taxes. For instance, in 2005 the top 20 percent paid 85.3 percent of personal income taxes. The top 20 percent, however, paid only 67.2 percent of all federal taxes when you consider all forms of taxation including payroll taxes for social security, etc.

⁴ Here again this fact is largely vindicated by empirical evidence. Federal outlays have increased by an average of over 4 percent from 2001 to 2005 in 2000 dollars. This is a rather sharp increase in year to year spending compared to Clinton’s average of just over 1 percent a year (Government Printing Office, 2008).

The Properties and Dimensions of Beliefs

Belief is a very broad term that accounts for everything that a person ‘knows’ about the world. Participants had many beliefs, and there were a number of properties and dimensions related to the category. While all statements of belief were relevant, some were central to their narrative while others were less important. Relevance or *centrality*, then, is a dimension that ranges from central to peripheral/largely irrelevant. Central beliefs are those beliefs participants see as extremely relevant or even foundational to their political narrative. For example, Deborah’s belief that, “In the long run it benefits us economically to take care of the poor and to start at the bottom rather than a trickle down economics starting at the top,”⁵ coupled with the moral priority that she puts on helping the poor is central to her Pro-Democratic Party narrative. In contrast, Wayne’s belief that capital punishment “is a deterrent to crime” is a relevant belief for him, but it tells us little about his political decision making process. The main purpose of this belief, within Wayne’s narrative, is to show an instance in which his views are conservative compared to the Democratic Party’s platform. As such, it is one of many examples that highlight his independence from the ideological orthodoxies of either party.

Beliefs also vary along the dimension of *breadth*. Some beliefs are very specific to one issue, while others can be used to support one’s stance on many issues. For example, when Deborah says “I think we neglected Afghanistan [by going into Iraq]” this

⁵ There are many scholars who argue for (Galbraith, 1998) and against (Friedman, 1982) this statement and it is beyond the scope of the present paper to arbitrate among them. That said, a recent international examination of the role of increased social spending on economic growth finds that at a minimum social spending has not decreased economic growth in OECD countries. Further, when spending is used as an investment in human capital formation (i.e. education) it has correlated with economic growth (Lindert, 2006). These findings provide empirical support for the idea that it can benefit a nation economically to take care of the poor assuming help takes the form of human capital enhancing programs.

is a very specific belief related to one issue or at most two issues, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Another more global belief would be Randy's and Walter's belief that government is inefficient, too big, and often contains fraud, waste, and abuse. This belief has broad implications because it is relevant to many issues including health care, welfare, tax cuts, and business regulation. Global beliefs did tend to be more central to participants than specific beliefs, but breadth did not necessarily align with centrality. For instance, the idea that we should not have invaded Iraq when we did may be very specific, but it could at the same time be central to one's political decision making process.

A third property of a belief is its truth value. Some beliefs are facts in that they are able to be empirically verified and are true. Other beliefs, which are thought of as 'facts' by the participant stating them, are verifiable, but are not consistent with empirical evidence, that is they are false. For instance, when Randy says "we've got 4 ½% unemployment, historically low unemployment. . . The lowest unemployment he [Clinton] had in his administration was 5 something," we can determine fact from fallacy by looking at US unemployment statistics. First, we need to look and see if the US did, in fact, have an unemployment rate of 4.5% in June of 2007. The United States unemployment rate was 4.5% in June, 2007 and so the first part of Randy's statement is true ("US Unemployment Rate January 1948 to February 2008," 2008). Next, we can look to see if Clinton really never had unemployment below 5%. This statement is empirically false. Unemployment was below 5% from July of 1997 of the Clinton administration through his departure in December of 2000.

With other beliefs, one can attempt to find a truth value, but verifiability is more difficult. For instance, we can determine whether or not 4.5% unemployment is historically low, but our answer would depend on the way we operationalize the term “historically low unemployment”. Because there are different ways of defining historically low unemployment, one person could come to say yes it is and another no it is not and both cite data to back up their argument. To put it differently, the fact that the definition of historically low unemployment is flexible creates ambiguity about its truth value. For instance, one could observe that the national unemployment rate dropped from a Bush presidency high of 6.3% in June, 2003 to the lower 4.5% in May and June, 2007. From this, she could argue that unemployment is ‘historically low’ compared to recent history. It is also verifiable that the unemployment level had not been below 5% since 1973, with the exception of Clinton years cited above. These facts, if used as your definition for historically low unemployment, would make the statement true. Other facts, however, push back against the idea that 4.5% unemployment is historically low. For instance, unemployment rates were below 5% in over half of the months (53%) spanning the time period of 1948 to 1973 (“US Unemployment Rate January 1948 to February 2008,” 2008).

These conflicting facts help point out that determining what qualifies as historically low unemployment is not something that can be done with precision. Rather, there is necessarily some ambiguity about what historic means, which can only be determined through providing an operational definition. Different people may choose to define it differently, and because of this arrive at different answers to the question. One way to operationalize the term historically low unemployment would be to define it in

terms of periods where unemployment was more than one standard deviation below the median unemployment rate from 1948 – the present. Using this standard, 4.5% unemployment would not qualify as historically low unemployment from 1948 – 2008 as the median unemployment rate was 5.5% and the standard deviation was 1.5. Given our definition of historically low here, unemployment would have to be below 4.0% to be at a historic low. If one simply changed the definition of historically low, however, to mean all rates more than one-half a standard deviation below from median then the current rate would qualify as historically low.

As this discussion indicates, there is another level of dimensionality to belief beyond the dichotomy of true and false. This dimension is concerned with how amenable to empirical validation a belief is. Put differently, how much ambiguity exists within the statement. I call this fourth property *verifiability*. We have already identified statements with low levels of ambiguity (unemployment for July of 2007 was 4.5%) and those with medium levels of ambiguity (unemployment was at an historic low).⁶ For an example of a statement with high levels of ambiguity, we turn to Deborah’s statement that “[George W. Bush’s] administration is geared toward the corporations and to taking care of the wealthy.” This statement would be very difficult to verify or deny for several reasons. First, even if one found some instances in which the administration policies led to the economic betterment of the wealthy at the expense of the middle class, there are so many policies that it would be difficult to argue that in the aggregate this remained true. In other words, it is also likely that one would find several policies that were not geared

⁶ I say low instead of no ambiguity in regard to the unemployment rate in July of 2007 because even though the unemployment rate the government gives has become widely accepted it is still based on an operationalization of unemployment which could be disputed. For instance, the unemployment numbers do not take into consideration people who have given up looking for a job. In fact, many philosophers argue that we can never know any fact with absolute certainty (Smith, 2003).

towards the wealthy. Second, even if you could show that the administration's policies in the aggregate were economically beneficial to only the wealthy, you would still have a hard time proving motive. Motive is nearly impossible to prove empirically because it deals with internal psychic states that are impossible to accurately measure. Social scientists rely on self-report data to answer questions about internal states, but they recognize that when there is a social acceptability bias in favor of one response and anonymity cannot be given, answers will not necessarily be valid.

To summarize, Deborah's belief that the Bush administration is geared towards corporations does not allow itself to be verified empirically because there is no way to validly test the hypothesis. In the absence of such a test, one who wants to believe it is true can make a case for it by citing certain facts while someone else can just as easily have good reasons to argue that it is false. Once we recognize that some beliefs are accepted without empirical validation, and in many cases empirical verification is not even possible we have to recognize that oftentimes beliefs are based more on faith or trust than on proof. Even when statements are in fact true, participants may be basing their belief on faith more than proof. Yet even when beliefs are false or undeterminable, they are perceived to be true by the participant because of their subjective faith in the statement.

Statements are most amenable to verification when they refer to a specific event or collection of events that have a verifiable record. For instance, the US government keeps a record on month to month unemployment. These numbers have a paper trail so someone can go back and verify that they were aggregated correctly. Any other recorded event like an interview with a presidential candidate that was recorded would be

verifiable as well because another person could go back and watch or listen for themselves. Such events are transparent because the method of recording the event allows for the replication of findings. Events that go without a record are less transparent and therefore less verifiable. In addition, as statements move away from events altogether towards statements of conjecture, like what one's motivations are, or towards broad generalizations across actions, there is even more ambiguity and therefore less ability for verification.

Randy, in being accurate about the current unemployment rate, suggests that he does look to the media to create new beliefs related to the unemployment rate. If this is the case, then one has to wonder why he would not have known that Clinton's unemployment rates were under 5% when they were for 42 consecutive months ("US Unemployment Rate January 1948 to February 2008," 2008). This suggests one of two things, either Randy did not follow unemployment numbers under Clinton and is simply guessing as to what they were, or he did follow them, but has forgotten them and is misremembering what he once knew. Randy's self identified status as a "news junkie" suggests that it is the latter.

Why would this memory error happen to be on the side of one's preferred conclusion? Is it just a chance action or is it purposeful? I hypothesize that this is not a purposeful error based simply on one's preference, but is not chance either. I argue that it is because when he attempts to remember back he uses his current belief system to help jog his memory. How might this work? Once Randy forgot the old unemployment numbers, he could say to himself, "well Bush's unemployment is 4.5% and he is cutting taxes, which lowers unemployment, so Clinton, who raised taxes, must have had higher

unemployment, right? In other words, I'm hypothesizing that one uses one's broader theories about how the world *is* as a heuristic to help reconstruct news that has faded from memory. This is a cognitive short cut that makes it so that we do not have to constantly go back and re-remember facts from the past, but as a byproduct, biases us towards misremembering events in the direction of our preferences, even when we want to be objective.⁷

Given that some beliefs are true, others false, and still others unverifiable, some may be more comfortable distinguishing them into three distinct types of beliefs, namely facts, falsehoods, and beliefs. I have decided not to do this at the super-ordinate level because participants attributed factual status to all their beliefs regardless of whether or not they are verifiable, empirically true, or empirically false. It is the participants' subjective perception of the veracity of a statement that makes it a fact or truth for them, regardless of its actual truth value. As such, beliefs can be just as important to one's political narrative regardless of truth value or verifiability. This complicates things because it highlights the possibility that there are two very different definitions of the term fact. One definition of fact would be the subjective belief that a statement is true. The other definition then being that a statement is verifiable and has been in fact verified. I choose to label the first term belief, and the second fact.

Another property of a belief is how it is *obtained*. There are a wide variety of different media through which people can obtain beliefs. Some beliefs are obtained from media sources such as newspapers, television news, and radio. For instance, most participants get some of their news from the local news shows on ABC, NBC, or CBS.

⁷ This is consistent with a body of knowledge in the area of motivated cognition that argues that, among other things, we misremember the past in favorable ways, but that we do this outside of our conscious awareness (see Gilbert, 2006; Kunda, 1990).

In addition, there are many media personalities who give some news but in an editorialized fashion. Some examples of this medium would be Rush Limbaugh on AM radio and Keith Olbermann on MSNBC. Other beliefs are obtained through observations made by the participants themselves, or through communications with a friend or acquaintance. Still other beliefs can be obtained in childhood via parents, or can be grounded in the teachings learned in one's school or church. Beliefs can also be obtained through reading a book, magazine, or doing online research.

A final property of each belief is the issue or *topic* that it goes along with. This property is interconnected with the breadth dimension, but here we specifically note the various issues and topics that a belief pertains to. Participants have beliefs pertaining to many different political topics and issues including the efficacy of government, the impact Christianity should have, their views about human nature, the poor, the wealthy, homosexuality, and capitalism. To review the properties and dimensions of beliefs see table 1.

Table 1 – Properties and Dimensions of Beliefs

Property	Dimensions		
Relevance	Low relevance (peripheral)	Medium relevance	High relevance (central)
Breadth	Low breadth (specific – one issue)	Medium breadth (one belief connects to two or three issues)	High breadth (broad – connects to many or most issues)
Truth value	Empirically verifiable – true	Various levels of ambiguity	Empirically verifiable - False
Ambiguity	Verifiable (statement has low level of ambiguity, in that the operationalized definitions are generally accepted)	Some ambiguity (statement itself ambiguous but some ability to restate into more verifiable form)	Statement largely ambiguous (Little ability to operationalize definitions in a way that could be tested reliably and with validity)
How obtained (examples)	TV, radio, newspaper, editorialist	Neighbor, church, family, work, personal observation	Online research, emails, government website
Topic related to (examples)	Efficacy of government, efficacy of taxes,	Views about the poor, wealthy, homosexuals, African-Americans, women	Views about abortion, welfare, the environment, the War in Iraq

The Properties and Dimensions of Values

Values are similar to beliefs in structure. In fact, values are the sub-class of *beliefs* that deal with how people think the world *ought to be*. Values are participants’ answers to questions such as how should I behave? How should we care for the poor?

What is right and wrong, good and sinful? Although values are a sub-class of beliefs, they play a distinct role in political narratives. As such, I have found it fruitful to separate them into their own super-ordinate category.

Value statements, like beliefs, can vary widely in the *centrality* participants attach to them within their political narrative. For example, one of Deborah's central values is that we ought to "care about the poor and the needy." To her this means "that all people would be treated equally. That we would [all] have healthcare, and education would be available for all people." These beliefs about how the world *ought to be* are central foundations to her Democratic-leaning political narrative. In contrast, Laura has two conflicting values about abortion. She is both "a pro-life person" and one who thinks you should not "legislate morals," especially when only the woman is punished. She shows us the lack of centrality she gives to this value stance when she states, "That's just a small part of what I look at when I'm deciding who I'm going to vote for. . . There are a lot of other things to consider." For others, values related to abortion and other moral issues are central, and stances on economic issues are peripheral. This is best shown through part of James's discussion of his general political beliefs "The only political issues that I'm concerned with are the moral issues. I mean I have a concern about economics and all that stuff, but I'm not going to try to force my opinions and my views on anybody on those areas. But, I will stand up for what I believe the Bible teaches concerning moral issues."

The relative centrality of competing values are best understood when participants discuss why they favor one issue or party over another, or from their discussion of how they decided among different candidates in the past. For example, Wayne agrees with

Bush on social issues but had “such a problem” supporting Bush because he disagrees with him “so much on public policy.” But even though he agreed with Kerry more on issues of policy, he just couldn’t vote for him because he was “certainly too liberal for me.” Here, we see Wayne weighing his conservative moral values against his more liberal public policy views and choosing to side with his conservative values in 2004. Through this discussion you come to see that Wayne’s conservative values are central to his political narrative in spite of the fact that he broadly identifies more with the Democratic Party than the Republican Party. His 2000 decision to support Gore, however, shows that when he believes the democratic candidate might be more similar to him on social issues, he comes to put more weight on public policy issues like the economy and welfare.⁸

Values can also vary in their *breadth* although they tend to be relatively broad compared to beliefs. If one establishes a value like patriotism or concern for the poor with regards to certain issues, then these same values tend to reemerge with regards to other issues. Further, even if a value gets overridden by another value with regards to a different issue, it must still be accounted for in some way. For instance, James bases his pro-life position on a want to not harm life and to not go against God’s commandment against killing. This value, then, must also be accounted for when he considers the war in Iraq. With respect to Iraq, we find out that his general pro-life stance can be overridden in cases “when it’s in self-defense or freedom of others,” and Iraq, he believes, met this

⁸ Part of Wayne’s quote regarding his choice for President in 2000: “I thought for the most part that the Clinton administration was a success, the economy was doing well, they were trying to implement national health care even though it failed. There was the tax hike which was viewed negatively by some people but, it did get the deficit down and balance the budget, as a matter of fact, got a surplus, so all of those things resonated positively with me and I thought that Gore was more likely to carry on that legacy and at that point I was hopeful that Gore might be a little more conservative on social issues than Clinton was.”

criterion. Therefore, it is not that the value is not broadly applicable, but that it does not take priority over the competing value of defending the country, or the value of freedom. Relating this back to Haidt's (2007) moral domains, if the pro-life position is linked to the harm/care domain then we see that the harm/care domain is more central to James's narrative with respect to abortion than with respect to war. Others, like Edward, find freedom the more central value with regards to abortion, and the want to avoid harm more central with regards to the war in Iraq.

Values being statements that deal in the realm of *ought* are not direct statements of fact and therefore are not easily subjected to empirical verification. This means that value stances are on the unverifiable end of the verifiability continuum.⁹ Laura's statement that "The elderly should not have to pay a penny for their medicine," for instance, can be held whether or not you can 'prove' that doing so would be economically efficient. The statement is accepted because of a belief in its moral/ethical worth not in its empirical validity. As such moral values and value priorities seem relatively immune to change via a discussion about the 'facts' of an issue. Most participants recognize this, for instance, James tells us that at his church "We just try to get along and agree to disagree on some of the political issues. You know where I stand, I know where you stand. You are not going to change my mind. I'm not going to change yours. Let's just be friends and find common ground – sort of."

⁹ This statement is not reliant on the validity of the strict fact/value distinction. The fact/value distinction, first proposed by Hume (1778 [1739]), has come to stand for the belief that facts are real and that values are merely subjective opinions and that therefore the two are two irreconcilable concepts (Putnam, 2002; Robbins, 1952 [1932]). The validity of this distinction has come under debate recently in philosophy (Putnam, 2002) psychology (Brinkman, 2009) and sociology (Davydova & Sharrock, 2003). I am not attempting to take sides in this larger philosophical debate; rather I am acknowledging that statements of value are not directly reliant on empirical validation for their truth value. Interestingly, I have found that participants do not necessarily rely on empirical proof for their faith in beliefs of 'fact' either, and in some cases beliefs about how the world is (beliefs of 'fact') are no more verifiable than are value statements.

Another property values and beliefs hold in common is that they both come from sources. Some of the sources of participants' values included the values of their parents and other members of their family, as well as the values that were given expression in their church. Values can come from a number of difference sources including one's family and church, as well as the school one went to or a person one looks up to (like Gandhi or Reagan). Values can also be formed through written texts like the Bible, the Declaration of Independence, fictional books like *Cider House Rules*, or even come from events that have occurred in one's own life like dealing with a loved one who is gay or who believes they need an abortion.¹⁰

Participants stated one or more values in support of nearly all the political stances they took when asked. Hence values, like beliefs, are associated with a wide variety of political issues or topics. Unlike beliefs, which can come from a nearly infinite number of events or hypotheses about the world, values appear to come from a relatively small set of moral domains, principles, or foundations. Five of the moral foundations which connected the participants' values statements were synonymous with the five moral domains Haidt and Joseph (2007) discuss. They identify these domains as "harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity" (p. 381). In addition, I found evidence for the freedom/tolerance domain. In other words, the moral arguments built by participants were fashioned out of the six moral domains stated above. Because these six domains seem to incorporate the various value positions taken by the participants, it is important to spend adequate time understanding each domain type.

¹⁰ Some research has found support for the idea that certain values can be innate or intuitive and therefore originate from within the participant and not from an external source (Haidt, 2001; Haidt & Bjorklund, 2007).

First, I examine the domain of harm/care. I operationalized a statement as falling under the harm/care domain when it included any mention of the need to avoid harm to others, or to have compassion, empathy, and/or take care of others. Deborah provides one example when speaking about why she thinks government should accept some responsibility for caring for the poor: “From my Christian approach to life it would be compassion, just a genuine care for those less fortunate. I think that’s always a test for Christians, you know, how we treat people less fortunate, how we care about the poor and the needy.” Statements coming out of this domain were used within nearly all political topics including health care, war in Iraq, tax policy, poverty issues, the environment, and social security. In many cases different participants would make arguments for both sides of a policy position on the basis of this domain. For instance, Deborah argues that we shouldn’t have gone into Iraq because “we should be very careful about going into a country and doing the kind of disastrous, the disastrous things we’ve done there to the people of that country.” Put in terms of the moral domains Deborah is arguing that going to war causes *harm* and should therefore be avoided whenever possible. In contrast, Randy argues that “if we pull out of there, it just seems to me like it’s going to be another killing field like we saw in Laos and Cambodia when we pulled out of there.” Here we see that the anti-war argument is associated with allowing *harm* to happen to those who have sided with the United States. This employs the harm/care domain as well as the loyalty domain because it is specifically concerned about an in-group (those who have sided with America).

The second domain, fairness/reciprocity, was operationalized to include both references to equality and fairness as well as to calls for individual/collective

responsibility for self and others. One example of an argument which uses the first aspect of the definition is apparent in Randy's discussion of a Supreme Court decision on using race as a factor in school selection: "It was almost reverse discrimination in some ways. . . . If you live on one side of Nashville, but because you're White you've got to drive to the other side, or if you're Black you've got to get on the bus and ride an hour this way." This shows Randy thinks it is unfair and therefore morally wrong for a White or Black child to not be able to go to the school in their own neighborhood. The second aspect of fairness, reciprocity, is better exemplified through Laura's discussion of health care "I think everybody ought to have access to it and probably ought to pay something for it. I don't think it necessarily should be free." This shows that she believes in the morality of mutual reciprocity or responsibility. In this case, this means that government ought to be responsible for providing health care access to us all. The individual meanwhile also has a responsibility, that of paying something for the service she receives.

The in-group/loyalty domain was defined as all statements that included a visible in-group and out-group along with a belief that it is moral to be in favor of the in-group. Often statements coded to the loyalty domain had America as the in-group with non-American groups in the out-group. Like with the first two domains, I found instances of this moral principle present in the narratives of both Democrats and Republicans. Issues that brought up the loyalty domain included the war in Iraq, questions about immigration and issues about companies outsourcing among others. For instance, with regards to the War in Iraq, Wayne says, "I just think that the war is completely unjust in Iraq . . . [because] we're there under false pretenses." Yet at the same time he says "I'm

personally for the troops and for their safety and for their victory, I wish we could win the war and come home.” Here, Wayne is showing a belief that it is morally right to support America troops out of loyalty to America (patriotism) even when one thinks the war they are fighting is morally unjust.

Similarly, with regards to a domestic issue like immigration, Laura shows her concern for people crossing the border by saying “I cannot imagine what conditions they’re coming from to take a chance on dying like that to get to America.” Yet her loyalty to her fellow Americans leads her to believe that we need to do something about the fact that “there are people in Pierce County who cannot get jobs, who need jobs because the employers are employing illegal aliens.” This shows regardless of her empathy toward the plight of illegal immigrants, she believes the United States ought to be primarily concerned with making sure that Americans who need jobs can get them regardless of how that impacts non-Americans.

In other situations, in-group out-group dynamics can occur amongst different groups of Americans such as the poor and middle class versus the wealthy or Democrats versus Republicans. For instance, Wayne says “certainly I would be willing to let the top 2% pay more” in a jovial manner which emphasizes how he might see the idea of tax increases differently if it were to impact his in-group (the middle class).¹¹

The fourth moral domain was that of authority/respect. I operationalized this domain to include all value statements highlighting the importance of authority, tradition, and order. Statements around the idea of order were infrequent and typically only involved situations where participants perceived there to be disorder currently (i.e.,

¹¹ In theory one would anticipate similar dynamics along ethnic, religious, and gender lines although I did not find it in my sample. It may be that the questions that I asked participants did not promote much of this kind of discussion.

immigration). Statements linking traditional views and moral views were much more frequent and could be found in reference to the ‘moral issues’ of abortion, stem cell research, and gay marriage, as well as on immigration and health care. Tradition can be used as an argument in support of a political issue in itself, as evidenced by Wayne’s statement that, “I have a real appreciation for tradition and for history. In addition to religion, part of the reason I feel certain ways about some of these issues has to do with tradition and history.” Tradition can also be called on indirectly through statements which liken changes in the system to upheaval. For example, Randy argues that “the concentration [in Health Care] should be on trying to find a way to insure those people [the uninsured] instead of turning the whole system upside down to give everybody universal healthcare coverage.” Authority is called on primarily in terms of Biblical authority, such as James’s statement that “the Bible deals with those issues and we feel like we need to speak out against that [abortion, gambling, homosexuality].” Biblical authority was also used by progressive participants like Edward who stated, “How many bombs would Jesus drop?” to argue for a non-violent approach to dealing with one’s enemies.

The fifth moral domain proposed by Haidt and Joseph is that of purity/sanctity. I have operationalized this category broadly to deal with all statements that reflect a vision of virtuous versus sinful behavior. This includes statements of sin that come directly from the Bible such as James’ statement “I hold fast to what the Bible says concerning homosexuality as an abomination, that an abortion is the same. . . they are both sinful, evil in the eyes of God.” As well as character flaws such as dishonesty that are seen as sinful. This kind of statement is exemplified in Wayne discussion about Bush and

Clinton “That’s the deal, the thing that bothers me so much about a lot of folks around here. They were so quick to condemn Clinton who lied about a private matter, but they are not as quick. . . to condemn Bush for lying about public policy.”

In addition to statements that discuss sin, people also discussed virtues like honor and thrift that our country should be upholding and seem to equate with sanctity. One example of such a statement comes from Randy’s discussion of the Iraq War: “You break something, you own it. So, we own it now. And I think we owe it to the Iraqis and to ourselves to get it right.” Here his sense of honor and virtue is the key moral undergirding of the view that we should stay in Iraq until we get it right, even though the intelligence that got us into the war was faulty.

Finally, a sixth moral domain emerged from the data that was not among Haidt’s (2007) list. This was the domain of freedom/tolerance. This domain was coded in all situations where a participant described an individual’s freedom to do what they want as a moral good. Similarly this domain included instances where people argued that tolerance of people with different beliefs was an ethical value. Laura’s statement: “I am a pro-life person, but, again, an individual has the right to make that decision based on what they believe,” is an excellent example of this moral principle. Here we see that she does not agree with abortion personally, even saying in a different part of her interview “I don’t condone abortion.” She does not believe, however, that all people should be required by law to uphold her personal moral ethic. Rather, she believes that people *ought to* be free to decide for themselves whether or not they think abortion is morally wrong, and that people like her should tolerate those who make different moral choices.

Similarly, Randy argues for the free market is just on the basis of the freedom domain when he says,

It goes back to basic human desires. . . Russia, I mean anything that's cradle to grave government sponsored and takes all responsibility or individual will away from people stifles the human spirit. . . So, I think it's probably more Christian to let people exercise their free will and their abilities and not hold that back to try to take care of everybody.

Each moral domain was used in reference to a number of different political topics and perspectives. This is especially true of the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity domains which were used across nearly all political topics by liberals and conservatives alike. I did not find that Democrats consistently argued for certain domains while Republicans argued for others. In fact, there were times when the domains would explicitly reverse. For instance, with regards to abortion, Deborah argues for freedom even if we have to tolerate some harm as a repercussion, while Randy believes we should limit freedom to reduce harm in some situations. With regards to economic policy, however, Randy argues just the opposite. That is that we ought to be free to do as we wish even if it means some are not taken care of (harm) while Deborah sides with preventing harm even if it limits the freedom of the wealthy to do as they would wish. In effect both Deborah and Randy are showing inconsistent value priorities across issues when you consider them through the lens of competing moral domains.

There were also cases where the same participant would make the case for both sides of an issue by pitting two different domains against each other (or different aspects of the same domain against each other). For instance, when Laura discusses health care she starts out by saying “there are no free lunches and we all ought to pay something.” Here she is arguing based on the fairness/reciprocity principle that we all ought to be responsible for paying something to get something back. However, later when she is

discussing how Americans should take care of the elderly, she says “I think that the elderly should not have to pay a penny for their medicine. I think we *ought* to take care of our elderly, I really do.” This second statement could be seen as rationally inconsistent with the first but she does not see it that way. Rather, she uses the loyalty domain to argue for giving the elderly health care. Specifically, she argues that because our elderly have shown loyalty to us by raising families and working “harder than we have” we should repay them with loyalty in their old age in the form of providing free health care.¹²

There were also many cases where different participants defended the morality of different positions of the same issue by citing different moral domains. One example of this comes from participants’ discussions of gay marriage. For example, Deborah argues that we should tolerate gay marriage saying, “I do think that in a democracy that they have a right to practice that and they have a right to their individual rights. So I won’t judge it.” This argument comes largely out of the freedom/tolerance moral principle. In contrast, Wayne argues against this particular freedom based on the moral principle of authority/tradition:

I think that the traditional form of the way that we recognized marriage is appropriate and I just don’t see a need to formalized gay marriage. By the same token I realize that everybody has basic civil rights and civil liberties and we need to do the best we can at protecting those rights and reducing discrimination in all areas that we can.

¹² Laura’s quote about health care for the elderly: “I just think that we should honor our elderly, we should take care of them. They have worked all of their lives, most of them, a lot harder than we have. They have raised families and in a lot of cases grandchildren even, and we just ought to take care of them.”

This example shows an area where the liberal view emphasizes justice and the conservative position emphasizes tradition/authority which is consonant with Haidt's (2007) model.

I should also mention that the various moral domains are not as easily separated as they appear to be. There were several instances where one value statement incorporated more than one moral domain. Issues that are seen to be related to the authority principle, for instance, could also be seen as related to the purity principle. For example, James says, "Well, I hold fast to what the Bible says concerning homosexuality as an abomination, that an abortion is the same, that it is not approved or condoned by God and therefore they are both sinful, evil in the eyes of God." Here the Bible, a form of traditional authority, is categorizing what is sinful and therefore immoral. Other moral domains such as fairness/reciprocity can also come together with principles of purity/sanctity. One example is Wayne's brief discussion of Bush's dishonesty about Iraq: "I just think that the war is completely unjust in Iraq. . . We're there under false pretenses. . . [and] a lot of folks around here, they were so quick to condemn Clinton who lied about a private matter, but they are not as quick. . . to condemn Bush for lying about public policy." In this case we see that Bush's lying equates with human impurity or sin to Wayne but in addition, it lead to an injustice because it impacted public policy. In this case the sin is viewed as even more immoral than just lying because it affected the purity and fairness domains not just the purity domain.

Table 2 – Properties and Dimensions of Values

Property	Dimensions/attributes		
Relevance	Low relevance (peripheral)	Medium relevance	High relevance (central)
Breadth	Low breadth (specific – one issue)	Medium breadth (one belief connects to two or three issues)	High breadth (broad – connects to many or most issues)
Truth value/ambiguity		Relatively high levels of ambiguity	
How obtained (examples)	Childhood – family, church, school, friends, people admire	TV, radio, sports,	Books – Bible, various religious texts, Fiction
Topic related to (examples)	Efficacy of government, efficacy of taxes, War in Iraq	Views about the poor, wealthy, homosexuals, African-Americans	Views about abortion, welfare, the environment,
Moral domains (list)	Harm/care; fairness/reciprocity	In-group loyalty; authority/respect	Purity/sanctity; freedom/tolerance

On the relative importance of the various domains among liberals and conservatives, the findings of this study were consonant with Haidt’s (2007) thesis. I found that when it came to the issues that participants identified as central, those who leaned Democratic relied largely on the domains of harm/care and justice/fairness whereas Republicans drew relatively equally on all six domains. Specifically, 75% (9/12) of Democratic-leaning participants responded on the basis of either the harm or justice domains compared to only 17% (2/12) for the loyalty, authority, and purity domains and 8% (1/12) for the freedom domain. By contrast, 30% of value statements of

Republican-leaning participants were based on either the harm or fairness domain (3/10) compared to 50% for loyalty, authority, and purity (5/10) and 20% for freedom (2/10).

Less striking but similar results were found across all issues regardless of centrality. Specifically, Democratic-leaning participants cited the harm and fairness domains 60% (42/70) of the time compared to only 21% (15/70) for loyalty, authority, and purity, and 19% for freedom (13/70). The Republican-leaning participants, by contrast, cited harm and fairness only 47% of the time (28/59) compared to 36% for loyalty, authority, and purity (21/59), with an additional 17% citing freedom (10/59). While the sample size is too small for a meaningful statistical analysis, the findings do provide tentative support for Haidt's theory that liberals rely on the harm and fairness domains more than conservatives.

These findings also complicated Haidt's (2007) theory in this respect. Haidt's argument tacitly assumes that the basic difference between liberals and conservatives is the relative importance they place on different moral domains. By this logic, if you took a liberal participant's perspective on the war in Iraq and increased the relative importance she gave to the moral domains of loyalty, authority, and purity, she would become more conservative. This is not what I found. I found that even when liberals and conservatives use the same moral domain as a lens for thinking about a political issue, they often use it to justify opposing policy stances. For instance, Randy argues that we should stay in Iraq to prevent the harm that would beset Iraqis if we withdrew. Deborah, on the other hand, argues for leaving on the basis of the harm the United States is causing, as well as the harm that is besetting the soldiers. Similarly with abortion, James thinks it should be *illegal* so as minimize harm to the fetus, while Deborah thinks it should be *legal* so as to

minimize potential harm to the woman (especially when the mother's health is at risk). Moreover, with regards to health care Randy believes that we should be against universal health care because it would harm the quality of our current system. Deborah, on the other hand, is for universal health care because she believes the current system harms many who have no health care.

This last health care example is just one of many instances where conservatives cite harm as a reason against government involvement. Liberals by contrast, are much more likely to cite the harm/care domain as an argument for why government programs should ameliorate the harms suffered by some within our free market system. As such, different beliefs about the efficacy of government may underlie one of the stark differences in how liberals and conservatives relate morality and politics. If these findings are correct, then the moral divide between liberals and conservatives will not be ameliorated by simply convincing conservatives that harm and justice are in fact more important than the other domains or by convincing liberals that they are not because it's not just the salience of the different domains but what they believe the consequences of these domains for policy should be. This finding gives us more reason to suspect that Lakoff (2002) may be correct when he argues that different systems of morality are causing different, competing moral systems even though they largely draw on the same broad moral domains.

The Properties and Dimensions of Emotional Sentiments

Emotional sentiments were the third super-ordinate category to emerge from the participants' political narratives. Statements that reveal emotional sentiments do not do

so by revealing how a person thinks the world is or ought to be. Rather, statements containing emotion reveal a participant's subjective *feelings* or *affect* toward an issue, candidate, or political party. A statement was coded as revealing an emotional sentiment when a participant specifically mentioned how a certain issue, candidate, or party made them feel. For instance when Wayne says, "For me it was just a very comfortable kind of feeling that you had with Gore," he is revealing an emotional sentiment that he had in connection with Al Gore. Other statements were coded as revealing emotional sentiments when they were stated in a manner that indicated they had aroused emotion within the participant. To understand this I turn to Randy's discussion about America: "I'm not an America basher and it just seems like we get that from the left all of the time, America's evil, America's imperialist. You know, history just doesn't bear that out." Listening to this segment of Randy's interview one can hear a palpable anger in his voice as he speaks of those on the left who think America is evil. This reveals an emotional sentiment even though he never explicitly states feelings of anger towards those who hold this view.

Now that I have operationalized how I determined emotional sentiments, we can turn to outlining some important properties and dimensions of this category. One property of an emotional sentiment is the *source* from which it originates. Emotional sentiments often come out of one's stance on a particular issue. The stance, in turn comes from the beliefs and values one has about the issue. For instance, Edward, Dale, and Walter all state: "We were all against the war from the beginning." This stance on the issue of the war in Iraq then led to emotional sentiments that become revealed through the following statement about the Religious Right "We think it is awful that the

Religious Right was so fast to support it.” The term “awful”, defined as “extremely disagreeable or objectionable” (Merriam-Webster, 2008), shows their emotional connection to their stance. In cases like this where negative emotions are connected to those who have a certain view, I have assumed that positive emotions are connected to those with the opposing view. For instance, Walter, Edward, and Dale likely had positive feelings for leaders who stood up against the war. All beliefs, values, and issues that are seen as relevant to one’s political narrative have the potential to bring about emotional sentiments.

In fact, research on the power of emotion on reasoning indicates that having a strongly held view on a subject is generally associated with a positive emotional connection to that stance and a negative one toward the opposing stance (Kunda, 1990; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Meffert, Chung, Joiner, Waks, & Garst, 2006; Munro & Ditto, 1997; Munro, Ditto, Lockhart, Fagerlin, Gready, et al., 2002). This difference in affect, then, can affect how one assimilates data for and against the stance (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Kunda, 1990; Lord et al., 1979; Munro & Ditto, 1997, Munro et al., 2002) as well as recall of data for and against your viewpoint (Meffert et al., 2006). This suggests that all issue positions where people have strong convictions should lead to emotional sentiments that affect their political narratives.

This leads me to the second property of an emotional sentiment, namely, its *strength*. In the present study most statements that were coded as containing emotions were statements where the affect was high. In these instances, high affect was associated with high centrality within a person’s political narrative. For instance, James’s belief that “homosexuality is an abomination” shows that he has a very negative emotional

sentiment attached to the very concept of homosexuality. The intensity of this emotional sentiment then corresponds with the centrality that he gives to the issue of gay marriage. In contrast, participants seldom imbue statements about issues that they see as peripheral to their political narrative with emotion, and when they do, the emotional sentiment is relatively weak. To understand this we now turn to a passage of Laura's political narrative. Here she discusses gay marriage, which to her is a peripheral issue,

Based on my religious belief I don't support gay marriage. If that's what they want to do that's fine. But, as a legal standing, I don't think a gay marriage or gay partner should be afforded the same benefits as far as employers that a heterosexual married couple does. But, again, that's what our legislators are for, to decide that. I would hope that they wouldn't, but, whatever the law of the land is, that's what it's going to be.

Here we find that Laura and James basically agree on the issue of gay marriage, and that both base their views on those of the Bible. In contrast to James, however, Laura does not show a strong emotional connection to this issue in her discussion of the issue. This corresponds with the fact that this issue is not central to her political narrative.

A correspondence between the centrality of an issue and the strength of one's emotional sentiment was apparent from the data. What is not apparent was whether the strength of one's views causes an emotional sentiment or whether a strong initial emotional sentiment could both cause the views and give the views their centrality. For instance, Haidt and colleagues found that when people consider certain behaviors that can induce strong emotions, such as a person cleaning a toilet with the flag, many had strong initial emotional reactions, and these reactions often led directly to the stance they took on the morality of the action. By contrast, relatively few based their views on the morality of the action on the amount of harm they thought the action would cause (Haidt, 2001; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993). These scenarios were often related to social taboos

such as eating the family dog, and as such very high initial emotional reactions were expected. There are some political issues where this assumption may be valid. The issue of gay marriage is the one most likely to fit this assumption. This is because there is a strong cultural taboo against homosexuality in the United States that may lead one to have strong initial emotional reactions to considering the idea of gay marriage. This would be similar to the taboos against interracial dating that led to arguments against the immorality of interracial marriage in the 1950s and 1960s, which have since largely vanished. This could also be true of political issues like tax cuts for the wealthy or issues about free trade, which could stimulate initial negative emotions as well.¹³

In many other cases, however, it seems unlikely that the development of strong beliefs and values was caused by strong initial emotional attachments. For instance, it seems unlikely that Deborah would have an intuitive strong affective reaction to whether or not starting with the poor or the wealthy is better economic policy since she was raised in an upper middle class family and continues to live in relative comfort. Similarly, it seems unlikely that Randy would have an intuitive emotional connection against Universal Health Care or against government spending generally. Rather these emotions likely come from the combination of values and beliefs that they have accepted as true. Regardless of whether or not the beliefs and values or the emotional sentiments came first, once emotional sentiments are in place, they do appear to influence how people assimilate new data, which has repercussions on a political narratives development as we see later.

¹³ Bryan Kaplin (2007) argues that most voters have irrational/emotional biases against a variety of economic policies which would in the long run lead to more economic growth.

Once one moves beyond the more specific level of issues to the level of candidates, parties, and ideologies, it becomes even more difficult to identify the initial source of an emotional sentiment. For example, Wayne tells us that “my impression of him [Bush] is certainly much more negative [now] than it was then.” Here we know that Bush is the immediate source of his negative affect. We also know that Wayne was negatively affected emotionally by his belief that Bush had acted immorally by leading us into a war under false pretenses. As such, it might seem safe to conclude that this at least partly explains why his affect for Bush is more negative now than it was in 2000 when he was running for president. Yet, we cannot be sure how much this particular event is the source of Wayne’s current emotional sentiment towards Bush because there are so many other events that happened which could have made his affective reaction to Bush more negative. In the end, it is probably not as important to identify every step in the development of various emotional sentiments as it is to identify the emotional sentiments themselves, their immediate sources, and track their impact on the participant’s political narrative.

As hinted at above, emotional sentiments are also differentiated by their levels of *specificity*. The most specific type of emotional sentiment is one that is related to a particular political issue, political belief, or value statement. Emotional sentiments towards specific political candidates and political figures are more general than issue generated sentiments but also fairly narrow. Even broader are those emotional sentiments that one has towards the various political parties, or to general terms such as conservative, liberal, capitalism, and socialism.

For instance, Wayne's emotional sentiments toward Gore in 2000 were specific to the candidate and did not carry over to Kerry in 2004, who he thought was "too liberal." By contrast when Deborah states, "Well, of course, I see the best in Democrats," she is revealing that she has positive feelings for the Democratic Party in general. This difference in specificity is an important difference between Wayne and Deborah's narratives because it suggests that Deborah would likely give all Democrats the benefit of the doubt in ambiguous cases. This willingness would make it highly likely that she would come to see her views as being largely in-line with the views of the current Democratic candidate, whoever that may be. Wayne on the other hand feels comfortable with some Democrats and not with others depending on how liberal he believes they are. This means that he is much more likely to give a conservative Democrat the benefit of the doubt than a liberal even if these two different Democrats agree with each other on most public policy issues. This difference is important because it shows two different ways in which one can create a heuristic of a candidate and then use it to help one learn about the different candidates running. In both cases, candidates that are labeled broadly as similar to the participant – part of the in-group – are more likely to be given the benefit of the doubt and trusted than are those who are thought of as dissimilar – part of the out-group.

We also find that one can have broad emotional sentiments toward broad in-groups and out-groups beyond just political parties, or physical groups like the wealthy versus middle class, but also towards mentally created polarities like conservative and liberal. For instance, Wayne's statement that "Kerry was certainly too liberal for me," shows how Kerry's liberal image led him to have a negative emotional sentiment towards Kerry compared to Gore. This made Wayne more likely to assume that he and Kerry

didn't have the same values when he was faced with ambiguous evidence, even when he acknowledged that they agreed on many public policy issues. This was evidenced by Wayne's claim that, "I think the Democrats absolutely put forth, on the national level, the most unattractive candidate they can sometimes and I think Kerry was probably it."

Wayne also shows us that the identification one feels towards a particular in-group or out-group does not have to be particularly strong to affect the trust one gives a member of the out-group. For example, Wayne, who considers himself a conservative, and only tentatively says he is a Democrat, still comments about Corker "there is enough of a Democrat in me that I am just suspicious of anybody who comes in with a big war chest and, uh somebody who made \$2 million in the construction industry and you know that kind of deal." By contrast, Wayne was more likely to trust Ford Jr., who "seemed to be a very moderate to conservative kind of candidate."

So what is the connection between the amount of trust that a participant gives a candidate and their eventual decision to vote for that candidate? Each candidate makes numerous statements on the campaign trail and many of them are ambiguous because all candidates attempt to paint their actual beliefs, values, and issue positions in the most positive light they can. By ambiguous I mean that many of their statements are not able to be put in terms of true and false based simply on verification. In these instances, a participant who has a positive emotional sentiment towards a candidate or a party will be more apt to "see the best" in that candidate or believe the candidate's self-projections. For candidates who get a negative emotional sentiment attached to them, participants are unlikely to trust the candidate's self-projections and are more likely to trust those who make statements against the candidate. For example, Deborah's negative emotional

sentiments toward Republicans push her in the direction of accepting the views of those who argued against Corker's qualifications helping her to arrive at the belief that "I just don't see that Corker had a background that qualified him to go to Washington." Meanwhile, she easily accepts Ford's self-projection as someone who "was very capable" and "a bright and shining star" in spite of his family's ethical issues.

This leads us to the next dimension of emotional sentiments, *centrality*. Although most emotional sentiments that I coded appear to be strong in that they indicated a high level of affect towards an issue, belief, or value, not all were central to a participant's narrative. That is, not all statements that were high in affect were important to participants' voting decisions. Within this line of thinking, emotions are more central the more they affect how one will vote. Similarly, central sentiments can be broad or specific. For example, Randy has a strong emotional attachment to free market capitalism and rugged individualism, and this frames how he sees the different candidates and many different issues.¹⁴ As such, he is more likely to look for the positives in candidates that are pro-business and anti-government spending, and to find the faults with candidates who do not agree with this ideology. Similarly, Deborah's statement "I see the best in Democrats" shows both her party loyalty toward the Democrats and its centrality to her political narrative. James, in contrast, has a strong emotional sentiment related to his views on gay marriage and abortion, which he calls the moral issues¹⁵. This

¹⁴ Quote from Randy showing his sentiment for free market capitalism: "I like America. It's not perfect, but hey, it's the best place in the world. . . And I think a lot of that has to do with, with capitalism and the free market and, just a rugged individualism that brought people over here. And, there wasn't a, it wasn't a government program or anything. They just came over here and hacked it out on their own."

¹⁵ James's quote discussing the differences between political issues and moral issues, "I guess generally my main focus on political issues are the moral issues that people have tried to turn into so called 'political issues'. And they're not political issues, they're moral issues. . . The Bible deals with those issues and we feel like we need to speak out against that, but we also need to feel like we need to, we need to

pushes him in the direction of voting for the candidate that he believes has views on the moral issues that are most in-line with his.

In other situations, like immigration policy, emotions also run high with some believing that immigrants are taking away jobs from Americans and “taxing the system,” and others thinking that we couldn’t function without them. Yet there seems to be little connection between these emotional sentiments and how participants perceive different candidates or on how they have voted in recent elections. This may be because there were no clear partisan lines on this issue, with both Republican-leaning respondents and Democratic-leaning respondents having strong views on both sides. This might be due to the fact that, even though immigration was a hot topic in the summer of 2007, there were not large policy differences on the issue between the candidates for the 2006 Tennessee Senate race or in past presidential races.

do it in love. . . The only political issues that I’m concerned in are the moral issues. I mean, I have a concern about economics and all of that stuff, but, but I’m not going to try to force my opinions and my views on anybody in those areas. But, I will stand up for what I believe the Bible teaches concerning moral issues.”

Table 3 – Properties and Dimensions of Emotional Sentiments

Property	Dimensions/attributes		
Source (examples)	Gay marriage, immigration	Al Gore, George Bush, Religious Right supporters,	America Bashers, Republicans, Liberalism
Strength (dimension)	Low strength - Affect towards gay marriage (Deborah, Laura)	Moderately strong – Affect towards immigration issue (Laura)	High strength – Affect towards gay marriage (James), affect towards helping the poor (Deborah)
Specificity (dimension)	Low Specificity - political parties, ideologies, certain groups (i.e. middle class versus wealthy, Patriotic Americans versus America Bashers)	Medium specificity – individual candidates (Gore), politically relevant figures (Rush Limbaugh)	High Specificity - Source is a specific belief, value, or policy issue
Centrality (dimensional -How much impacts one’s voting decision)	Low importance – affect around immigration, gay marriage (Laura, Dale)	Moderately Important – affect around liberalism and conservatism (Wayne),	Foundational – affect surrounding free enterprise for Randy, abortion and gay marriage (James), and caring for poor (Edward, Deborah)

There is one emotional sentiment that is unique enough that it needs to be considered on its own, and that is the *desire* to have beliefs that coincide with *reality*. That is, people have a desire to know the truth and to know that their views are based on the *truth* (Kunda, 1990; Kruglanski, 1999; Gilbert, 2006). This desire is dimensional with regards to the importance people attach to it. For instance, people vary dramatically in how much news they want to get in the form of newspapers, TV, radio, and friends.

Some refer to themselves as “a news junkie” while others admit that they “do not seek out national news.” Yet, regardless of people’s stances on how much news they need to get, no data I collected suggested that anyone ever attempts to base their political narrative on beliefs or values that they perceive as erroneous or utopian (idealistic but not pragmatically possible). For example, in the following dialogue among Edward, Dale, and Walter, we see all of them concerned with their political narratives being grounded in the facts of the matter:

Edward: Here in Pierce County there are over 70 elderly people on the waiting list for Meals on Wheels, and for those who are on the program, they have found that most of their food consumption comes from Meals on Wheels.

Dale: But then Mrs. Parker tells stories about how people are abusing the Meals on Wheels service.

Walter: And some of the people who come to the church are undeserving as well.

Edward: Well, there are always going to be the undeserving who get help, but what about those who really do need it? Do you not think that there are people here in Pierce County that go hungry.

Walter: So are you saying that people should not worry about helping the undeserving because we are helping the deserving?

Edward: I’m saying that it is government that has the resources and it’s the community’s responsibility to help those who deserve help, and we have to realize that as a part of that there will always be people who will try to abuse the system.

Here we see that Edward feels as though his stance for helping the poor must encompass the reality that helping the poor will cause some undeserving people to be helped as well. It is this emotional attachment to having your argument based on truth that helps account for the fact that Edward felt the need to admit this reality and to argue for his position in spite of that fact. Recognition of this inconvenient fact is also what makes Dale and Walter question government help for those who need it when they agree with the underlying value of helping the needy.

The motivation to get to the truth and accept it once you find it is the reason why *facts* are as important as they are. If someone comes to believe that they have the ‘facts’ wrong then they will change their political narrative to accommodate their new understanding of reality.¹⁶ Such instances can even move beyond changes in specific beliefs to changes in one’s stance on a political issue or the political parties. This is the reason John McCain gives for why he changed from being so publicly against Bush’s tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 to being for them now. For Walter, his search for truth lead him to move away from the party he affiliated with as a child, “I grew up thinking I was a Democrat, and I don’t feel like I’ve really changed, I just realized that there are differences between me and them.”

The same appreciation for moral truth can also lead one to re-evaluate the value priorities he makes with regards to a value. For instance, Dale says “I have been persuaded by Edward that we need to be tolerant [of gay people].” Within the context of the larger conversation this statement implies that he once believed that we should not support gay marriage because of its sinfulness. Through discussions with Edward, however, he came to believe that the value of tolerance outweighs the sinfulness of the homosexual act and therefore we should tolerate it, even if we don’t agree with it.

Beliefs, Values, and Emotions: The Creation of Political Narrative.

Now that we have examined these three categories individually we must begin to consider how they work together to create a political narrative. At any one time one’s

¹⁶ This does not deny the possibility that participants might also reinterpret (or misremember) dissonant facts to make them more palatable. Rather, it is a statement that to the degree that a person cannot deny incongruous facts they will accommodate their belief system to accept these facts. This is at least true in the short run, although it is possible that in the long run people may be more inclined to forget incongruent facts, especially when they pose a threat to one’s larger meta-narrative.

stance on a particular issue is determined by the beliefs one has relevant to the issues. In addition, one's stance must be seen as consistent with one's values/value priorities. Also, in those instances where one has intuitive emotional sentiments towards the topic, affect will help shape the formation of said beliefs and value priorities.

When one's beliefs, values, and emotional sentiments all push a person in the same direction on an issue, then the stance taken will be in that direction and there will be little ambivalence on the issue. When certain beliefs, values, and emotional sentiments are in contrast with other beliefs, values, or emotions then people must prioritize amongst them by weighting the centrality of the beliefs, values, and sentiments on one side with those on the other. In these cases the person will arrive at a stance which prioritizes the most central beliefs/values but that is more nuanced or ambivalent because of the recognition of beliefs and values that could lead one in the opposite direction.

Regardless of whether or not there was an emotional sentiment before the stance was formed, I hypothesize that one will have an emotional sentiment about the issue after reaching a position. Stances that arise from ambivalent beliefs, values, and emotions will have the least amount of emotional sentiment. Among those stances that arise from consistent beliefs, values, and emotions those with the strongest emotional sentiments appear to be those that are most central to people's narrative. For instance, Randy associates the anti-American left who thinks America is evil with a strong negative affect. This is in stark contrast to the positive affect he associates with patriotism and support for the military during a war. These views lead to his support for the war, and to the centrality of this stance within his political narrative. I hypothesize that, of the consistent stances, it is those issues that speak to a person's most central values that become the

strongest. To summarize, I hypothesize that beliefs largely shape the direction one takes on an issue, with some value constant. Among the different issues, those stances which are relatively ambivalent will be of lesser importance to one's political narrative. These will be followed by consistent stances based on values that are relatively peripheral. Finally, the most important issues within a person's narrative will be those where one's beliefs, values, and emotions all consistently push the individual in one direction on the issue and where the values undergirding the position are those most central to his or her political narrative.¹⁷

When people broaden out their political narratives to discuss candidates and parties, their beliefs, values, and emotional sentiments towards the various issues are an important component. In fact, each person aggregates the various beliefs, values, and emotional sentiments that make up their stands on issues in some manner when considering the different political parties in general and different candidates specifically. This aggregation process is idiosyncratic but appears to be based on the level of centrality people assign to the different issues, values, and beliefs. Beliefs, values, and issues that are more central to a person's narrative are weighed heavier in this aggregation process than are less central elements.

Consideration of the issues, however, is only one component of people's thinking about candidates and parties. When thinking about parties, they also consider their views on the parties' overall value priorities, governmental priorities, and the emotional sentiments they have towards them. For instance, Dale considers the Democratic Party to be "The party of conscience, they are not going to cater to the rich but more to the poor.

¹⁷ As mentioned previously, I cannot determine from my data if strong emotional sentiments are causing central stances or if central stances are causing the strong emotional stances.

They are the voice of the silent and the oppressed.” Here we see that Dale assigns an overall value priority to the Democrats consonant with justice and equality. This overall assessment comes out of his understanding of their positions on specific issues, but it also comes from a positive emotional sentiment that he has with regard to the party that helps him to give them the benefit of the doubt. In contrast, James thinks “the Republicans are probably more focused on moral issues where the Democrats are more focused on the economic things and the two kind of clash sometimes.” This is no doubt linked with his perception of where the two parties stand on abortion and gay marriage, but it also likely incorporates perceptions of past candidates like George W. Bush and John Kerry and the general emotional sentiments he currently has towards the parties.

Figure 1: Political narrative at time point A (holding time constant)

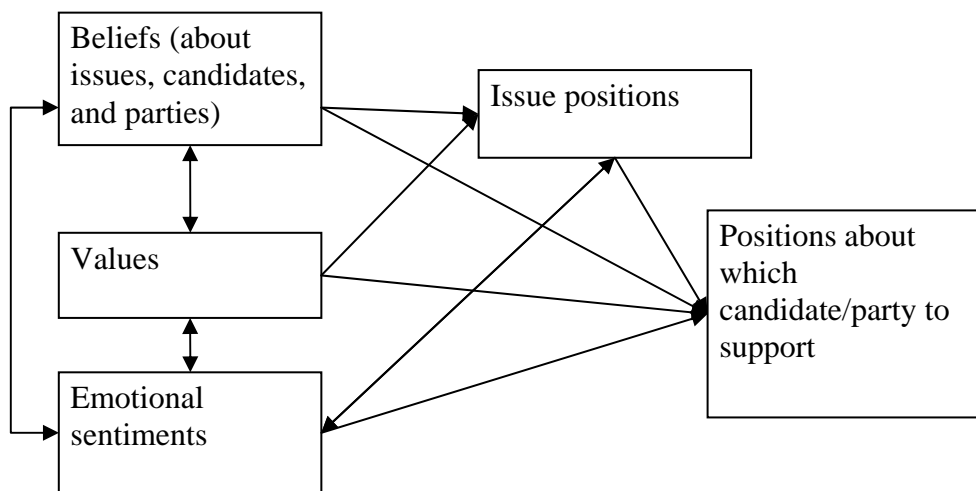
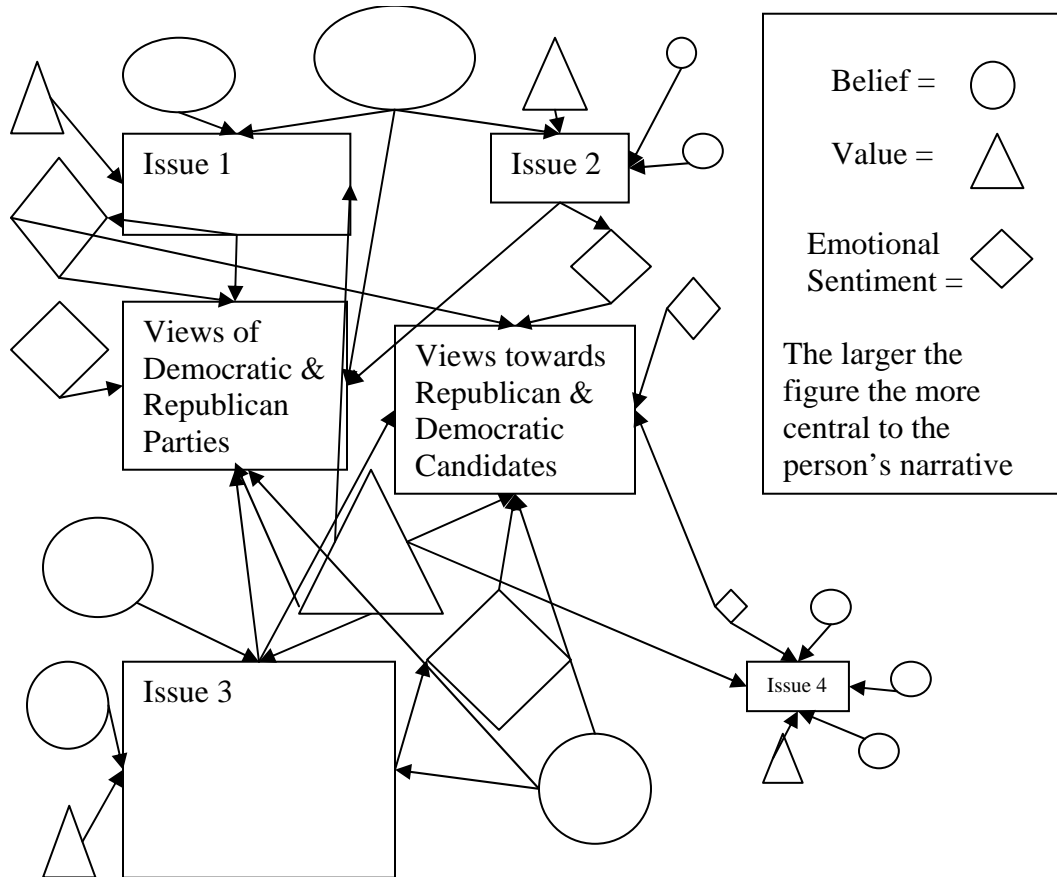


Figure 2: Detailed examination of the structure of a political narrative



When considering different candidates, participants consider their views about the parties that the candidates represent, the perceived issue match between them and the candidate, their emotional sentiments with respect to each candidate, and their overall evaluation of the candidates value and governance priorities (See Figures 1 and 2). In Figure 2, for instance, issue 4 would be only peripherally relevant to this person's narrative while issue 3 would be central. In this example, the reason behind the centrality

of issue position 3 is the strong belief, values, and emotional sentiments attached to it. For a voter like James, issue 3 is the abortion issue and the value is care for the unborn and the belief is that abortion is an abomination. For another voter like Deborah, the issue would be economic policy. In this scenario the value would be the need to help the least among us and the belief would be that the economy works better when we start with those at the bottom instead of those at the top.

To better understand this theoretical model let us examine one participant's narrative concerning a particular issue and another's narrative concerning two political candidates. First, we turn to Randy's discussion of abortion:

Let's take the abortion thing. I'm a little bit conflicted on it. I know there are times when it needs to happen. I do. I know friends and friends of my wife that have had them. And it just wrecked them a little bit emotionally. I mean, it would have to. But, I guess the big thing for me was the partial birth thing. I just couldn't see how that was medically necessary. You know, I'm not a doctor, but the way it's been described to me it seems pretty barbaric and it seems like, why couldn't you do a cesarean? But my mother would always go back to the arguments that when they were illegal, people did them anyway, and I understand that. . . But, the majority of abortions are elected for no other reason than, I want one.

From Randy's story we see that he has beliefs and values that are in conflict with each other. First, he believes that there are times when an abortion needs to happen. One instance would be when the mother or baby would potentially die if the pregnancy was allowed to continue. He backs this belief up with a statement that he and his wife have known people who had to have an abortion. He also spoke about how this decision was emotionally wrecking and how it would have to be. This shows an underlying concern for any family in a situation where they might have to choose abortion out of necessity. He is expressing empathy with their situation and does not want to take away their right to choose an abortion because he values their health. Yet these beliefs and values

conflict with other important beliefs and values. First, he believes that partial birth abortion is a barbaric practice that does not seem medically necessary in a time where cesareans are possible and relatively safe. Use of the term “barbaric” suggests that he is disgusted (a negative affect) when he considers this practice. This emotional sentiment would also be important to his stance on abortion. Second, he believes that the majority of abortions are chosen for no other reason than “I want one”. In these cases especially, abortion goes against values that are important to him. The first value is that a child, even in the womb, deserves to be cared for and not intentionally harmed. The second is that people ought to have a sense of responsibility for others that would bring them beyond selfishness to a concern for the welfare of others, especially those who are dependent on you. It is from this combination of values, beliefs, and emotions that Randy arrives at his particular position on abortion. Specifically, this stance is to be against partial birth abortion and purely elective abortions, while being for abortions in necessary cases (presumably when the mother’s health is an issue, or in cases of rape and incest).

Those with a ‘consistent’ pro-life or pro-choice stance might see Randy’s views as inconsistent, yet to Randy they are perfectly consistent once you consider the process by which he arrives at his decision. The process of arriving at a position on this issue likely will lead Randy to have an emotional sentiment towards his stance. Research suggests that Randy will likely experience positive emotions when learning information consonant with his stance, while information incongruent with this stance will cause negative affect (Munro & Ditto, 1997; Munro, et al., 2002). Such emotions, if they come about, would affect his views about political candidates and parties. Specifically,

candidates and parties whose statements about abortion are most inline with his beliefs and values will lead to positive emotions, whereas those whose statements are incongruent with his own will cause negative emotions. This will affect how he evaluates the different candidates and parties such that congruent parties will be evaluated better than incongruent parties. The relative impact of this issue on his views of a party/candidate depends on the centrality of the issue within Randy's narrative, or the strength of the emotional sentiment. In this case, the ambivalence of his stance makes this issue less central to his overall narrative.

Stances on issues, however, are not the only way that participants arrive at a view about a candidate. To see how issue stances merge with other ways of forming a view of a candidate we will turn to Wayne's discussion of what he thought of Gore and Bush.

I thought for the most part that the Clinton administration was a success, the economy was doing well, they were trying to implement national health care even though it failed. . . The tax hike which was viewed negatively by some people did get the deficit down and balance the budget. As a matter of fact it got a surplus. All of those things resonated positively with me and I thought that Gore was more likely to carry on that legacy. And at that point, I was *hopeful* that Gore might be a little more conservative on social issues than Clinton was, that may have been misguided. . . And I just was not impressed with Mr. Bush from the beginning. He did not seem to be very issue driven at all. He was not the intellect that Gore is. So from that standpoint, I had a much easier time in that election than I did the Bush-Kerry election because I viewed Gore much more favorably than I did Kerry. Of course, Gore and Bush was pre 9/11, so we weren't concerned about that, we had a fairly booming economy, and national security at that point was not a huge issue. So I was just hoping that we might carry on some of the positives of the Clinton administration and not have the negatives like the Lewinsky scandal. . . I knew Gore. . . and the fact that you can say that, although he wouldn't have known my name necessarily, but the fact that you can say that is a pretty neat thing (laughs). So, Gore, and a lot of people don't have this comfort level with him, but for me it was just a very comfortable kind of feeling that you had with Gore. Especially the fact that he had been Vice President for 8 years, he knew what was going on, you knew he was a great intellect.

In this discussion, we find Wayne touching on some of the issues that are central to him, such as health care and the economy, as well as the social issues. We also see him spending a lot of time talking about his general impressions of both candidates and the emotions that they elicited in him. For instance, we see Gore elicits comfort in Randy while Bush elicits the image of one who is not issue driven but personality driven, and not an intellect. In this case, Wayne's narrative suggests that he had positive emotional sentiments towards Gore (comfort, intellect, issue driven campaign) and negative emotional sentiments towards Bush (not an intellect, personality driven campaign) that were pushing him towards supporting Gore from the beginning. These emotions, combined with his beliefs that Gore would be more socially conservative than Clinton, be for fiscal responsibility, and be for national health care, only strengthened his leanings towards Gore because these views were consonant with his own issue stances.

To summarize, beliefs, values, and emotional sentiments all play a large role in each participant's political narrative at one time. Specifically, beliefs, values, and the emotional sentiments affiliated with them come together to create the various stances that each participant takes. These beliefs and values are compared to the beliefs and values of the candidate to determine which candidate sees the issues more like they do. This calculus appears to be done both cognitively and emotionally. In addition to issues-related beliefs, values, and emotional sentiments, people also have specific candidate and party-related beliefs and emotional sentiments that play a larger role in how people decide who to vote for. When issue and party consonance align with candidate centered beliefs and emotions, as with Wayne's choice of Gore over Bush, the voting decision is easy. When issues and party views are in contrast with a participant's candidate centered

beliefs and emotions the participant will find the decision much more difficult. For instance, in 2004, Wayne knew that he agreed with Kerry on more matters of public policy but he did not have a good feeling about him because he thought he was “to liberal” for him. As such, he had a much harder time deciding who to vote for in 2004 than in 2000.

Political Narratives: Development across Time

The theoretical model developed above is a good start towards understanding one’s political narrative, but to obtain a more accurate depiction of each political narrative, we must also take into account the complicating factor of time. Specifically we need to consider how it is that one’s issue-related beliefs, values, and emotions develop through time, as well as how party perceptions develop across time.

Value Development across Time

First, I consider how people might come to change their value priorities over time and how these changes could affect their political narrative’s development. In the data, there are relatively few examples of value change, but when change does occur, the primary mechanism is persuasion. For example, Dale tells us “I have been persuaded by Edward that we need to be tolerant [towards people who are gay].” What allowed Dale to be persuaded to by Edward? There are three factors that must come together for change to occur. The first factor is a context that creates *access* to a different set of ideas about what one’s value priorities ought to be. In our example, we find that Dale allowed himself to be in this situation because of Edward, who he knew from church. Secondly,

Dale had to enter this dialogic context with an open mind, that is, he must be willing to change his mind given good reasons. Third, given context and an open mind, ‘the other’ must supply arguments that are good enough for you to alter your original viewpoint. In this example, the other was another person, Edward. The other could also be a book, movie, or argument presented in any other context which is available to the participant, is entered into openly, and makes good arguments.

Context is defined by Merriam-Webster (2008) as “the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs.” In this situation, I am referring to more than just the fact that Edward is Dale’s friend. I am also referring to Dale’s church environment, which contains Edward and explains how they became friends who could discuss theologically-relevant political issues. Some of the contexts that participants said were important to the development of their values were their family’s growing up, the church, their workplace, and the broader community. James’s discussion of how he came to have the values that he did is emblematic of the discussions of other participants.

Well, I was brought up in Kentucky and my family was a fairly conservative family, lived on a farm, and you know, that was the way of life. . . And I think this conservative Biblical background was instilled in me long ago. And, the churches I work with, in particular here, have just reaffirmed my position on those things.

Here we see James mention the importance of his family, the ‘way of life’ of his youth, and the various churches that he has been a part of. James’s discussion suggests that the context of one’s youth may be particularly important to the formation of one’s values. At the same time James does recognize the role of present contexts in developing, or in his case reaffirming, his values.

If one’s youth is particularly important to one’s value formation, the reason may have something to do with the need for someone to be open to a new perspective in order

to change. It may be that people are more willing to change their values at a younger age because they do not have as strong of an emotional attachment to their current value priority structure.¹⁸ This study is not able to comment on this question one way or another, other than to say that some value change was observed, and that several participants suggested that conversations very rarely led to conversion. Walter expressed this stance about himself when he said, “See when you talk politics I shut down, but when you keep the talk theological I will listen and learn.” Here “shut down” means I am no longer listening with an open mind, and it seems to be limited to the political realm. Other participants like James imply that “shutting down” is relatively wide spread when they make global statements like: “You know where I stand, I know where you stand. You are not going to change my mind, I’m not going to change yours.” A lack of openness toward changing one’s mind may help to explain the continuity that most people perceive themselves having with regard to their own values over time.¹⁹ Lack of change in one’s value priorities across time could also come from remaining in similar contexts and thus not being exposed to different value orientations as well as from lack of openness to dialogue. For instance, Dale tells us that although he did leave his former church, a conservative church which was predominately Republican, “I did like it because even though I didn’t agree with it [the politics], I did feel comfortable in it.”

¹⁸ Researchers have found that people’s party orientations become more stable over time as they get older and that the relative strength of their political orientations also increase over time (Beck & Jennings, 1991; Jennings, & Markus, 1984; Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, Norpoth, & Weisberg, 2008), both of which are consonant with the idea that people become less open minded over time. Moreover, Visser and Krosnick (1998) found support for the hypothesis that people are less likely to change their attitudes in middle adulthood compared to early and late adulthood and that this appeared to be partly mediated by the fact that people in middle adulthood were more certain that they were right; again suggesting they are relatively less open to persuasion.

¹⁹ Because all interviews were at only one time it is possible, perhaps even likely, that participants’ political narratives have incorporated more change than they realize (see Goethals & Reckman, 1973; Markus, 1986).

Had he stayed in this comfortable environment, he most likely would not have changed his view about gay marriage.

Belief Development across Time

Unlike our values, we are constantly adding to our stock of beliefs. Every day that Randy watches Fox News or Deborah watches CNN they learn new information about the world. Every time we speak to someone who tells us about their pregnancy, and about how they came to decide whether or not to get an abortion, we know something new. While we may once in a great while learn about the need to extend our values, we are constantly bombarded with new facts, whether from the newspaper, the evening newscast, or one's co-worker talking to you about their trouble getting affordable health care. The proper question for beliefs, then, is not will people integrate new beliefs, but how will they integrate new beliefs within their current belief systems? And just as importantly, which facts will they become aware of in the first place?

As with values, a new 'fact' about the world can only be added to a people's belief systems if they have *access* to this 'fact' in some way. In other words, a fact can only be politically relevant for me if I am made aware of it at some time. For instance, if I am never presented with the fact that unemployment was 4.5% in July, 2007 then I could not possibly have this belief and, therefore, it could not be used to justify a political stance. This means that context is an important factor to consider when we think about belief development just as it was for value development.

In addition, people who hear or read information will not add it to their belief system unless they perceive it to be true. In order to do this they must place a certain

amount of faith in the trustworthiness of the source of the information. With regards to unemployment rates, Randy does trust the US government to give us reliable and valid statistics and the news media's ability to report that number accurately. This implicitly means that he accepts that the US government is capable of coming up with a valid measure of unemployment and can collect reliable and valid data on the basis of this operational definition.²⁰

To get at this question of context in my sample, I asked participants how they learned about what was going on in the world locally and nationally. I asked about television, radio, newspapers, and books, discussions with others, internet and other ways in which they might get information. I found that all my participants learned about the world through some combination of such sources. Participants named several television shows, including local news programming, national nightly news, as well as radio news, newspapers, talk radio, newspaper editorialists, authors of books, magazines and internet webpages. In addition, people listed people from the community such as one's fellow church members, pastor, family and friends, co-workers, and even one's barber as ways in which they find out about the world.

The particular sources of news that a person chooses are important because they are the contexts from which beliefs are formed and developed. Participants seemed to recognize this, and many stated, like Deborah, that they got their news from a variety of sources so that they could get multiple views, "otherwise you might not get a clear view and you are trying to balance it." Yet, in spite of this felt need to get multiple view

²⁰ This requisite faith in the source is quite similar to the prerequisite of openness to change in a dialogic encounter. In both instances, you have to be open to the possibility that the other knows something that you do not, and that it could be fruitful to listen and consider the truth value of the information received.

points, most participants tended to favor news sources whose ideological leanings were similar to their own. Participants recognized this bias and stated that the reason for it was that they had more trust in those sources. This is interesting, because it suggests that faith in a particular news story may have less to do with the amount of empirical proof the station presents in support of its claims, and more to do with whether or not participants *want* to believe the facts being offered. This is consonant with research that shows that, when people learn information consonant with their preferred views they accept this information at face value, that is without giving it a lot of thought or scrutiny. It is quite the opposite with information that runs counter to the view they want to have. In this case, people rigorously question the validity of the information doing all they can to discount both the credibility and the importance of incongruent information (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Fischle, 2000; Kunda, 1990; Lord et al., 1979; Munro & Ditto, 1997; Munro et al., 2002).

The Role of Emotional Sentiments across Time

To understand the role of emotional sentiments on the development of a political narrative over time, we must examine the data. First we shall turn to Randy, who watches Fox News “a lot” even though he recognizes that it is “center right” and listens to a lot of talk radio including Rush Limbaugh and Phil Valentine. Randy’s choice to watch mainly Fox News does not mean that he is not interested in the truth, rather he tells me, “I feel like I get the truth out of them [FOX] more, and probably a little more, somewhat, on CNN.” This perception is related to Randy’s belief that “a left leaning view has been the dominating view for the past several years.” The implicit message

here is that this left leaning view was not giving one the objective facts, or that he didn't put a lot of faith in the information it delivered. Through listening to Randy's story, it became clear that Randy chooses to watch FOX News not in order to insulate himself from other beliefs that might challenge his own, but because he "feel[s] like the media has a huge influence on what people think," and he wants to get the news that is the most trustworthy. The fact that, "they'll [Fox will] usually have both sides up there" is also important to Randy because he recognizes the importance of getting both sides of the story. In fact, he cites this as one reason why he likes Fox more than CNN, where "you just get one side, you wouldn't get an opposing view or you wouldn't get anybody challenged on a statement they made or something." Once you listen to Randy's story you cannot help but believe that Randy is certain that he gets more 'truth' out of Fox than the other media stations, and that this is why he watches it more.²¹ At first blush this seems perfectly reasonable and not a cause of concern. I know that if I was given a choice of listening to someone that I thought was honest and trustworthy or someone else that was not, I would and do choose the former.

²¹ A passage of Randy's discussion about what news he watches: "Well this will probably tell you a lot about me. (Laughs) I watch Fox, a lot, I do. I just feel like, I just feel like the media just has a huge influence on what people think, and I think a left leaning view has been the dominating view for the past several years. That's why I think Fox was created and why it has done so well is because it gives a different view. That's not to say that I don't watch CNN some too, because I do, and I watch MSNBC some to. I watch it all. I'm kind of a news junkie myself. [So you just feel like Fox fits more with your view point?] Yeah, and I feel like I get, they'll usually have both sides up there, they don't have. I've noticed on CNN for years now, they are starting to do it some now, but you know you just get one side. You wouldn't get an opposing view or your wouldn't get anybody challenged on a statement they made or something. I know they are center right, they just are, Fox is. But, I feel like they give a little more. . . I feel like I get the truth out of them more, and probably a little more somewhat on CNN. They've gotten better here lately of just give me the news, they don't have to put a spin on it, just give me the news how it is. And uh, CBS, NBC, ABC, and the newspapers predominately have a left tilt to them, and it just seems like the right side doesn't get out much so, I guess that's why I gravitate to Fox, so that I will at least hear that side."

Like Randy, Wayne also chooses which news station to listen to in part on the basis of his perception of which is giving the “straighter” story.

I watch Fox a little bit. Fox does seem to be, to me, a little bit of a cheerleader for the administration, and that kind of bothers me. And, in addition to that, Fox’s personalities seem to get in the way of the story more than CNN does. . . Honestly, and this has nothing to do with politics, I think CNN plays it straighter than Fox does.

Yet in spite of the fact that both participants seem to be honestly attempting to find the news channel that is most trustworthy, they end up with two very different conclusions and two very different television watching strategies. Moreover, in both cases we find that their belief about which station gives the news ‘straighter’ tracks with their political leanings.²² This suggests that participants may be paying attention to more than just the amount of empirical support the various news stations give in support of their news. I hypothesize that participants are assimilating news in a biased way depending on their preferences, and that this is what leads to such different perceptions of which newscast is more trustworthy.

Assimilation bias on the basis of one’s a priori views is consistent with the motivated reasoning research literature (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Fischle, 2000; Kunda, 1990; Lord et al., 1979; Meffert et al., 2006; Munro & Ditto, 1997; Munro et al., 2002; Taber & Lodge, 2006). For instance, Munro and Ditto (1997) found an assimilation bias on the basis of a priori views, and also found that affect did fit the definition of a mediating variable for this bias. In other words, congruent information appeared to

²² The Pew Research Center (“Key News Audiences Now Blend Online and Traditional Sources,” 2008) found that political preference was linked with beliefs about the trustworthiness of different news sources in representative sample as well. Thirty-four percent of Republicans they sampled believed all or most of what they heard on Fox News compared to only 18 percent for MSNBC. In contrast, only 19 percent of Democrats believed Fox News compared to 29 percent who trusted MSNBC. Interestingly, Democrats also gave much more credibility to the mainstream news media (CNN, Lehrer News Hour, NPR) than did Republicans.

arouse positive emotions, which in turn led to cognitions that readily accepted and assimilated the news. With incongruent information, however, negative emotions were triggered, and this negative affect in turn triggered cognitions that tried to discount and/or refute the incongruent fact. The result was that information presenting incongruent facts came to be viewed as less credible than congruent facts and this resulted in less perceived change of view from incongruent facts relative to congruent facts (Munro & Ditto, 1997).

Within my model, it is this assimilation bias that acts over time to convince people that congruent news programs are more trustworthy than incongruent ones. How does this occur? First, the assimilation bias causes people to conclude that incongruent facts are not credible at a higher rate than congruent ones. Since they see more incongruent facts on incongruent news programs, they come to associate these programs with non-credible information. Similarly, media stations that provide the most consonant facts come to be associated with higher accuracy. Over time, then, many people, of all political orientations, come to believe news stations with similar ideological perspectives “ring truer” than do other stations.

I argue that it is this perception that consonant media are more credible that leads people to media which tells them what they *prefer* to hear more than media that does not. Within this model, then, the choice to watch media that tell them what they want to hear does not mean that partisan people are more motivated to hear what they want rather than the truth. Quite on the contrary, it is their motivation to hear the truth that actually helps create the divergent viewing pattern. That is, people want to watch news sources that they consider trustworthy and will watch them more than news sources they consider less credible.

Moreover, this does not mean that new facts must *always* be consonant with old facts for someone to believe them. For example, Randy recognizes that “we didn’t get it [the intelligence on WMD’s] right” even though he firmly believed our intelligence at the time based on “listening to Colin Powell at the UN.” He also recognizes that the War in Iraq is not going well, and admits “I don’t know if they can straighten it out now or not,” in spite of the fact that he likely thought that it was going well in May of 2003, and certainly would prefer that it go well. This suggests that in both these cases, when Randy first heard these contradictory facts, they would have sounded off because they went against his preferences. Yet, in these situations he would have had the faith in his news source, Fox News, necessary to accept them and to reconcile his old beliefs with this new information. Had he only heard such discordant news via the New York Times and MSNBC, however, he probably would not have had the faith to make such accommodations to his previously held beliefs.

To understand why some beliefs are more amenable to change over time than others, we need to think back to the verifiability dimension of beliefs. I have found that when a statement of belief is relatively verifiable – either now or at some point in the future – then the belief is more amenable to change if the facts necessitate it. For instance, in the above example, the question of whether or not pre-invasion Iraq had weapons of mass destruction had been answered in the negative, more or less unambiguously, by the summer of 2007. Similarly, there was a consensus among military personnel and political officials that the war was going very badly at this time. As such, a “news junkie” like Randy is not likely to be able to discount these facts. On the contrary, ambiguous beliefs, like whether or not Cheney and Bush knew the

intelligence was not very credible, are less likely to change over time. On this more ambiguous belief, Randy still accepts the idea that all of the politicians believed the intelligence at the time, including not just Bush and Cheney but also Powell and Clinton, and therefore that no one had purposefully lied. Wayne, on the other hand, had the opposing belief at the time and still believes that Bush knew the intelligence was faulty and was basically lying. Once we understand that beliefs about what motivated others are ambiguous we can see why it is that neither man has changed his initial assessment in this area.

To summarize, I have incorporated the hypothesis that we have a tendency to accept ‘facts’ at face value when they are congruent with our preferred conclusions and to invalidate or discount incongruent facts and arguments by holding them up to more scrutiny (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Lord et al., 1979; Munro & Ditto, 1997; Monro et al., 2002). When data are relatively unambiguous, we will have a harder time discounting or invalidating incongruent data and often will be forced to accommodate them within our belief system. When beliefs are less verifiable or more ambiguous, however, we will generally be able to discredit or discount incongruent beliefs (Fischle, 2000; Westen, 2007).

In the end, I hypothesize that it is this assimilation bias that leads participants to conclude that news stations “ring truer” when they are accurate regarding unambiguous facts and consonant with ambiguous facts and values.²³ If this is in fact correct then all

²³ Some researchers (e.g. Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006) make a similar argument, proposing that the media will bias their reports towards the audience’s prior beliefs to build a reputation for quality when customers are unlikely to receive independent evidence of the true state of the world. Others argue that directional biases and accuracy biases are in opposition (Anand, Di Tella, & Galetovic, 2007; Gilbert, 2006; Kruglanski, 1990). Although accuracy goals do decrease biases on some tasks (Kunda, 1990), my data suggest that they do not decrease perceptions of media accuracy. My results are consistent with research

that is required for a correlation between political preference and media preference to exist is a preference to get your information from the source you believe to be most accurate, and not a willing disregard for truth.²⁴ If people then act on these perceptions of varying credibility by watching on the news they perceive as most credible then we will end up with an electorate that gets its facts about the world from different sources depending on political leanings. If these different sources provide access to largely different facts about the world, which research shows they do (Grosseclose & Milyo, 2005), then these different contexts could lead people's beliefs to develop in different directions over time.²⁵

It should be noted that our freedom to watch the news that we want along with the recent proliferation of many different news sources could be adding to this bifurcation process (Iyengar, in press; Manjoo, 2008). As with television we are also free to choose who we talk politics with and which church we attend. If our decisions on which contexts to put ourselves in are, in part, based on these same ideas about who 'rings true' to us when talking about political issues, then we could have the same bifurcation process at the level of human interaction as well.

Here the question is do people come to surround themselves with others who see things like themselves, even without any intent to do so? My interviews find some

that finds that calls to evaluate evidence in as objective and unbiased manner as possible did not lessen the assimilation bias (Lord, Lepper, & Preston, 1984).

²⁴ Research has found that such biases exist, and that they are related to perceptions of credibility (Manjoo, 2008; "Key News Audiences Now Blend Online and Traditional Sources," 2008; Stroud, 2008)

²⁵ There is some question as to whether selective exposure occurs in all situations or only among those who are most politically knowledgeable and have the strongest attitudes. Some studies (e.g. Meffert et al., 2006) have found no selective exposure bias on the basis of congruence. Others (e.g. Taber & Lodge, 2006) do find a selection bias for those with strong prior attitudes and those with the most political knowledge. Naturalistic survey research on the 2004 election found that people watched ideologically similar news shows more than ideologically divergent ones regardless of political sophistication, and that differences grew as the campaign went on (Stroud, 2008).

support for this but also suggest that the situation may not be as dire as this conclusion might suggest. To understand why, consider Deborah's statement that "I talk a lot of politics. . . I have friends that are very political. . . I do have Republican friends and try not to discuss it real often, especially with my son. But, there are people that I do not agree with, and I can still interact with [them] and share ideas." Here we see that she really enjoys talking politics with friends who are likeminded. Talking with Republicans, by contrast, seems to be like a chore that you don't want to do but feel like you should from time to time. Deborah's passage suggests that she would prefer to surround herself exclusively with likeminded others, but because one of her values is to share ideas with those she disagrees with, she does not allow herself to do this. It is this value that pushes her to do something she does not want to do, that is, talk politics with those who disagree with her.

In contrast, James, who leans Republican, tells me, "I'll talk with people about politics who I feel like see things the same way I do. . . I don't have any desire to get into a political argument with somebody. I've got to many other things to do." Here again, we see an asymmetric willingness to discuss politics with people depending on how much they agree with you. In this case, James does not seem to have the counterbalance of valuing conversations with the other, and, as such, he seems to not have many conversations with people who disagree with him. In fact, his statement that "I just don't want to touch off somebody's nerve that I don't have to," suggests that his value – keeping the peace – pushes him away from discussing politics with the other. This suggests that people who do not explicitly see the value in discourse with non-likeminded others will be less likely to dialogue with the political other, everything else being equal.

There were also some cases of participants enjoying discussions with others with different political views. First of all, these conversations arise only in cases of close personal friendships and not out a generalized preference to seek out those with different political views. For instance, Wayne tells us that he speaks to Roger and Thomas about politics, “not . . . because they’re politicians or even because they’re in the same business, [but because] we’ve just always been close through the years.” Moreover, in this situation they “Mostly [discuss local issues], because Thomas and Roger, they’re more conservative than I am on the national level, so we probably tend to agree less about national politics than we would local politics.” So while at first blush this seems to go against my hypothesis, it actually reinforces the idea that people who disagree on a political issue would prefer not to talk about that issue often.

Similarly, Dale, Edward, and Walter are all willing to talk politics not because of their large differences but in spite of their large differences. In this case, this willingness comes from the fact that they are all friends and very active members of the same church. It is also the case that Walter and Dale work together and carpool to work each day together. These connections seem to explain their comfort talking politics with each other in spite of their differences. I also found that, for participants who did not prefer discussing politics with the other but did, that such discussions were usually among family members, church members, and friends.

From these examples, we see that people do indeed seem to think that discussing politics with the likeminded is more pleasant than discussing it with those who see things differently all things being equal. This does seem to bias people toward talking politics with people who agree with them more often than those who disagree. The major

mitigating factors working in the opposite direction were: first, valuing talk with those who see things differently than you, and second, having strong personal relationships with people who just happen to have different political views.²⁶

Is there a similar motivation to “sort” at the level of the church, and, if so, what are the mechanisms that might mitigate against such a process? To consider this question, we first turn to Deborah’s discussion of a particularly unpleasant Sunday School class.

In our Sunday School class. . . recently we were studying Timothy and Paul was talking about people that are lazy. . . and just sort of laying around and waiting for Jesus to come back. So, he addresses that and tells those that they shouldn’t eat if they’re not going to work and provide. And so we have people in the class that just jumped on that and said, see, we told you. The Bible is explicit about no welfare and all of that. Well, that’s not true. They just took that out of context. It was not a very pleasant class, which is unusual for our class.

Here we find Deborah presented with an argument from the Bible that goes against one of her central political values. Moreover, we see the mechanics of biased assimilation both in the negative affect that she recalls the class eliciting and from the fact that she was able to discount the information, saying it was “not true” because they “took that out of context.” But what is interesting to us now is not this biased assimilation process but that the negative affect gets related to the entire event. That is, she describes the entire class as not very pleasant, not just the conversation. This coupled with the fact that going to Church and Sunday School are voluntary acts, suggests that if Sunday School were like this on a regular basis, Deborah would likely find another church to attend that was

²⁶Diana Mutz (2006) argues that engaging the other has strengths but also has weaknesses. People who engage the other side have less polarized views but are also less active in the political system. Mutz finds that this is mediated by conflict avoidance, that is, those who are conflict avoidant become more ambivalent and less likely to participate in the political system, including voting, when they engage the other side.

more pleasant. Luckily for her and the church, this kind of talk was “unusual for our class.”

We see the same idea come up in James’s discussion of this question as it pertains to his church:

There are groups of people who want to see the church steer clear of moral issues such as homosexuality, abortion, gambling, and things along that nature. But the Bible deals with those issues, and we feel like we need to speak out against that. . . I understand everybody in this church is not either Republican or Democrat, they’re some Independents, but they’re not all the same. And you know they’re easily offended at times so you have to be real careful not to cross lines. People don’t like for you to talk about their doctor, and don’t talk about their politics, and don’t talk about their religion, because then it gets personal. It’s just very difficult. You’ve just kind of got to walk on eggshells.

In this passage, James is sharing personal experiences from his time in the church, and these experiences tell him that people are easily offended when you take a strong stand against them on an issue that they feel strongly about. Although James does not state it directly, he implies that people might decide to leave the church if a pastor did not “walk on eggshells” with regards to certain political topics. This suggests a way in which a church can actively work to ensure that they will not become segregated on the basis of political views, namely, for pastors to go out of their way to be considerate to those who might disagree. Later on, James seems to second this reasoning when he is talking about another church of the same denomination whose preaching style is different from his. He tells me “their preachers are much more blunt. I don’t have a problem with it, if they are saying the truth they’re saying the truth, but a lot of people in our congregation would leave after five minutes if they went there.” This provides further evidence for the idea that James believes those people who disagree would leave his church if it took too strong a political stance.

In a couple of cases, I spoke with participants who have broken from one church and now go to a different church. Dale was one such participant, and when I asked him if his political views were one reason why he decided to go somewhere else he said “Yes, it was maybe one reason. But I did like it because, even though I didn’t agree with it, I did feel comfortable in it.” Within the context of the interview, it is apparent that what Dale is saying here is that, even though he did not agree with the political views of the church, he was comfortable with the theological conservatism of the church. In fact, although he now goes to a less theologically conservative church, he still considers himself a theological conservative. This suggests that some people may choose to stay at churches that they don’t agree with on certain issues because they are comfortable with other aspects of the church. In this case, Dale was uncomfortable with his previous churches politics, but comfortable with their theological conservatism. In other cases, comfort came from long time family connections to the church.²⁷

Issue Formation and Development across Time

When people are initially forming a position on a political issue, they assess political issues in terms of the beliefs and values that they find relevant.²⁸ Assuming political issue formation occurs at a young age, the beliefs and values that people use to originally assess political issues are drawn from a context that is largely out of their control. For instance, a young woman would likely watch the news that her parents watch, go to the church her parents go to, discuss political issues with family and listen as

²⁷ This was not found in the sub-sample of interviews analyzed for this study but was found in two of the other seven interviews completed for the larger project.

²⁸ In some instances these beliefs and values may come in part from innate or culturally intuited emotional sentiments (Haidt et al., 1993; Haidt, 2001).

parents discuss politics, and have friends on the basis of who lives nearby with whom she might discuss issues. If formative initial beliefs and values come out of this context, then it would stand to reason that variables like family, church, the events of this time period, and community would mediate one's political affiliation. This is consonant with research that finds evidence that family relationships (Glass, Bengston, & Dunham, 1986; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008; McDevitt, 2006; Niemi & Jennings, 1991; Tedin, 1974), community subculture (Lieske, 1993), events of the time (Beck & Jennings, 1991), and the theological leanings of one's church (Wald, Owen, & Hill, 1988) all play a role in the formation and development of one's political narrative.

Once people form a stance on a political issue, emotional sentiments begin to develop, such that, they get a positive affect from hearing consonant arguments and a negative affect from hearing incongruent arguments. The strength of the emotion towards an issue is proportional to the centrality of the beliefs and values that underlie the issue. As discussed before, emotional sentiments lead to biased assimilation. I hypothesize that the amount of assimilation bias corresponds to the strength of one's emotional sentiment towards that issue. This is consistent with research that finds that those with the strongest prior views on an issue show more affect upon learning dissonant information (Munro & Ditto, 1997) and the highest level of assimilation bias with regards to the data presented (Munro & Ditto, 1997; Munro et al., 2002; Taber & Lodge, 2006).²⁹ This assimilation bias is conservative in nature, meaning that it biases people towards keeping their original stance on a view over time. As such, those issues that people have the most emotional connection with are those that are the least likely to change over time.

²⁹ Taber and Lodge (2006) also found that political sophistication or knowledge is associated with a greater ability to discount and discredit incongruent information. This is reasonable because the more one knows about a topic the more one should be able to cite contradictory evidence.

This happens in two ways. The first is that, when people are exposed to ambiguous information about an issue, the assimilation bias leads to becoming more supportive of the stance, or at a minimum no less supportive of their stance (Lord, et al, 1979; Munro & Ditto, 1997; Munro et al., 2002). Second, as emotion increases the increased assimilation bias is likely increase people preference to selectively expose themselves to consonant news sources because these sources will be even more likely to “ring true” than incongruent sources.³⁰

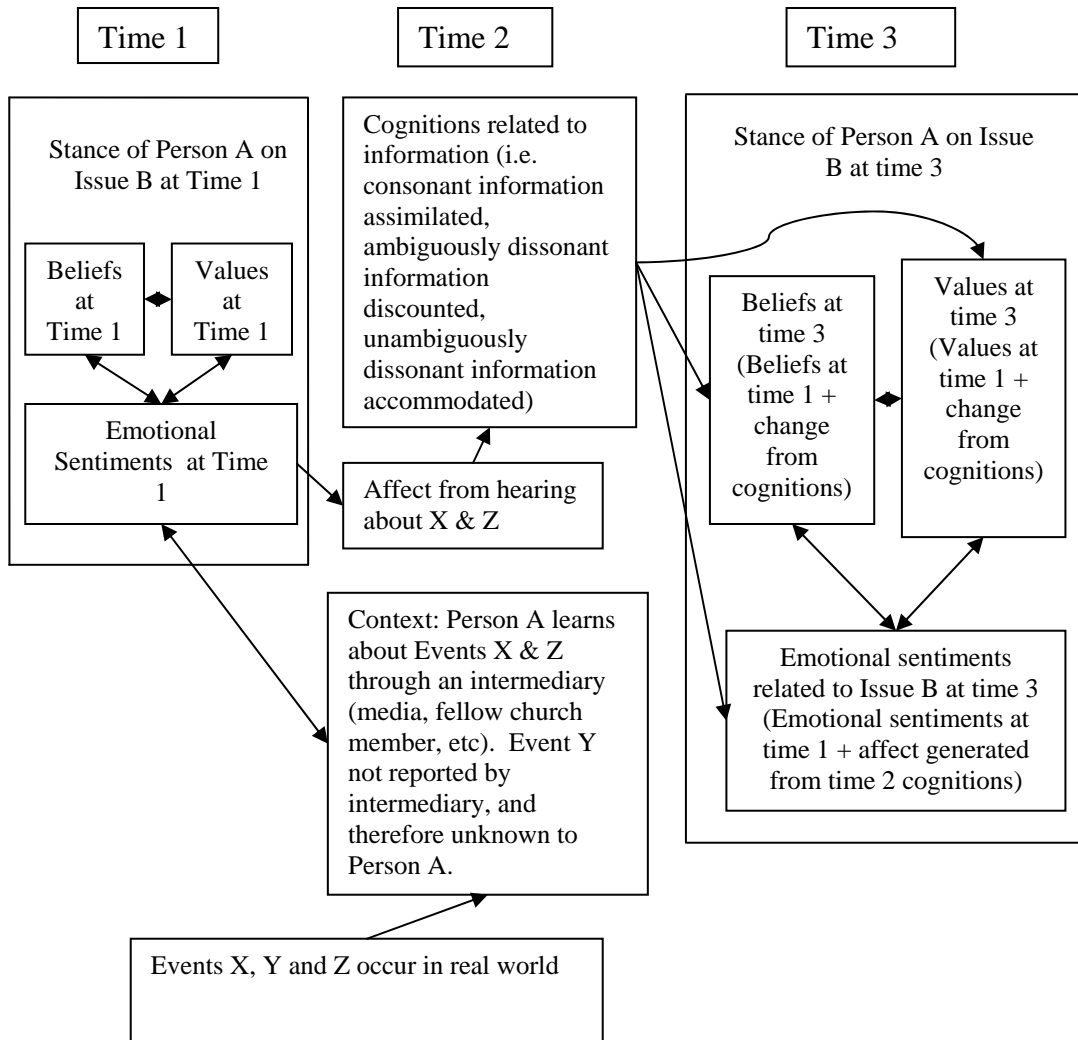
Yet even people with well formed political narratives do change their belief systems about central issues in some instances. For instance, as we saw previously, Randy did change his mind about the quality of the intelligence that got us into the War in Iraq and about how the war is going, and this was in spite of the fact that he is a strong supporter of the war. As discussed earlier, this ability to change beliefs come from the value people place on the truth and is most likely to occur with unambiguous information (Gilbert, 2006). This is the reason why events that happen in the real world are as important to the development of our political stances as are context, pre-existing beliefs, values, and emotional sentiments (see Figure 3). Or as John Kenneth Galbraith (1998) famously observed, “Ideas are inherently conservative. They yield not to the attack of other ideas but, as I may note once more, to the massive onslaught of circumstance with which they cannot contend” (p. 17).

Yet at the same time, we find that Randy was able to change his beliefs about unambiguous facts related to the war without having to change more ambiguous beliefs.

³⁰ There is mixed evidence for this phenomenon with Meffert et al (2006) and Redlawsk (2002) finding little or no support for selective exposure and Iyengar (in press), Stroud (2008), and Taber & Lodge (2006) finding selective exposure effects. Taken together, this research suggests mixed results for the selective exposure bias but does appear to suggest that, as media choice and emotional sentiments increase, selective exposure will increase as well.

For instance, he can now accept the idea that there were no weapons of mass destruction and that we had faulty evidence. This does not, however, cause him to second guess his initial support of the war, because he still believes that the faulty intelligence was an honest mistake that everyone made, both Republicans and Democrats, both Bush and Hillary Clinton. As such, he does not see the need to question the motives of Bush, which is an ambiguous belief, to the same degree Wayne does when he says that he believes that Bush lied. So, even when ideas cannot contend with the massive onslaught of circumstance, they are only changed as much as they have to be to accommodate the unambiguous facts.

Figure 3: Development of Political Stances on Issues across Time



Views about Candidates, Parties, and Ideology across Time

Now that we have a framework for understanding how political stances on issues develop over time, we need to further this analysis to broader political concepts like candidates and the parties. The development of a stance towards the two political parties

is more similar to the development of an issue stance than that of candidates, so we will start there and then turn to the development of a stance on candidates.

The formation of a stance on a political party requires not just stances on the issues themselves but also requires people to generate second order beliefs. That is, they need to have beliefs about the beliefs and values of the two political parties. My research highlights the fact that people come to vastly different conceptions of the parties, and that these conceptions of what the parties stand for are important to how they view the parties. For instance, Dale, Edward, and Deborah consider the Democrats the “Party of the people” and the Republicans the “Party of the rich”. Laura sees the Democrats as “be[ing] more caring and trying to do more for working class people.” In contrast, Randy sees the Democrats as “a little more secular, not as supportive of the military as [Republicans]. . . wanting to raise taxes more and have the government involved in more,” and James sees Republicans as “focused on moral issues, where the Democrats are more focused on the economic things.” The process of arriving at a view of the different parties seems to be at least partly contingent on one’s context. If one is raised watching Fox News and going to Jerry Falwell’s church, one will have a very different set of beliefs about the parties than if one watches Jim Lehrer’s News hour and goes to Jim Wallis’s church. But how would Randy arrive at his view of the Democratic Party given that he grew up in a Democratic household? This came from his context after leaving his family. Specifically, he joined the military, and at that time the military was overwhelmingly Republican.

Once perceptions of the parties are made, then evaluations of parties appear to come from relating one’s personal beliefs, values, stances, and the emotional sentiments

that come from them to one's perceptions of where the parties stand. For instance, if you consider abortion and gay marriage the moral issues, like James, and accept the Republican stance on these issues as the correct moral stances, then you will evaluate the Republicans as the party concerned about "moral issues" relative to the Democrats. If, on the other hand, you are like Deborah and consider working against the oppression of the poor as a central moral issue then you will see the Democrats as more consistent with your religious beliefs than the Republicans.³¹

Generally speaking, evaluating the two parties consists of determining the amount of discrepancy people see between their own views and those of each party. This aggregation process is idiosyncratic in multiple ways. First, different people consider different issues as relevant. Second, people vary in the levels of centrality that they assign stances on different issues, because different issues elicit more or less strong emotions in different participants. Third, people have different beliefs and values towards the different issues which lead them to take opposing sides on issues. Fourth, people construe the views of the two parties very differently depending on the context within which they have learned of the parties. In the end, this aggregation process appears to be only partially conscious and rational. In other words, in practice, this aggregation process is perhaps as much as an emotional calculus, wherein people take what they know of the parties and rate their feelings towards the two parties on a continuum from very positive to very negative. Issues come in to the extent that perceived similarity on the issues elicits relatively positive affect compared to perceived differences.

³¹ Some participants, like Wayne, accept both views of morality and as such recognize the competing moralities at play within each party.

This does not mean that it is necessary for a person to have positive sentiments towards either party, as Walter points out in his statement, “I have a negative connotation with both.” Similarly, Wayne said that choosing between Kerry and Bush was really a decision between the lesser of two evils. Yet, regardless of how people feel about each party in absolute terms, they compare them to each other and do develop some sense of affection for or identify with the party that they believe they are relatively closer to. For instance, Walter says that he thinks of both parties negatively, which one might take as meaning he has little emotional connection to either party. Yet this is contradicted by other passages in his narrative. For instance, Walter tells us that, “You are not going to find a rational argument that says that Bush is doing a good job,” and when asked whether he thinks this would impact his vote in 2008, he says “probably because he didn’t govern the way he ran.” This suggests that rationally he agrees with the idea of punishing the party in power when they do not do what they said they were going to do. Yet, later in the interview, when talking about the 2008 election, he says, “That is what gives me hope that the Democrats will blow this next election as well,” when talking about the possibility that a woman or Black man would be the nominee. This shows that, in spite of the fact that he rationally thinks he should punish the Republican Party in 2008, he is still identifies with the Republican Party and is hoping for a Republican victory.

The same emotional calculus is often performed with regards to political ideologies like liberal and conservative. People come to have beliefs about what conservative and liberal (or progressive) mean to them that are based on the statements they hear about them. Only after these construals have been formed can they then

compare the two labels with their own perspectives. People then self-identify with the term conservative or liberal (progressive) to the degree that they see themselves as relatively more conservative or liberal. Again, this is a relative process not an absolute one and happens only loosely in the realm of the cognitive. Emotional sentiments towards the different labels will then develop on the basis of these identifications. That is, the more one identifies with conservatism, the more of a positive emotional connection one will have with conservative candidates, and the more negative emotional sentiments one will have towards candidates who are construed as liberal.

Now we can begin to consider how emotional sentiments regarding political candidates form and develop. Evaluating candidates requires participants to form second order thoughts about the beliefs of the candidates as with parties. People often use a candidate's party and ideology as heuristics for determining what a candidate's beliefs are likely to be. For instance, one of the first things people learn about candidates is their party affiliation. Based on this knowledge one might infer that the Republican candidate is more pro-life than the Democrat (James) or more pro the wealthy (Wayne, Deborah, Dale, and Edward). Similarly one could construe the Democratic candidate as being against the Iraq war (Randy).

In addition, when the emotional sentiments that people have towards parties (or ideologies) get associated with a candidate; this can lead to assimilation bias in how they assimilate information about a candidate. For instance, partisans will accept and remember the veracity of positive information about 'their' candidate more often than similar information about the non-preferred candidate. Similarly, negative information is more likely to be assimilated into their belief system and recalled when considering the

non-preferred candidate relative to the preferred candidate (Meffert et al., 2006). For instance, Deborah tells us, “Of course, I see the best in Democrats,” which leads to her views of Ford as a “rising star” and Kerry as a “generous spirit.” In contrast, she did not think Corker “had a background that qualified him to go to Washington,” and was “just baffled” when the country elected Bush. Similar biases can also occur on the basis of the candidate’s perceived ideology. For instance, Wayne, who strongly identifies as conservative, tells us that Kerry was “certainly too liberal for me,” and this made the choice between him and Bush very difficult in spite of the fact that he says, “I disagree with him [Bush] so much on public policy,” and thought Bush lied to get us into a war.

Political labels like these can also have a more indirect effect on candidate choice, in that we might be less likely to give the non-preferred candidate the benefit of the doubt that they will hold to their positions, even when we agree with their stance. For instance, Randy had the opportunity to converse with Harold Ford Jr. about the Iraq War and in doing so came to the conclusion that “he thought we needed to win it too. We needed a different strategy, and I agreed with that too.” From this and his stances on other issues, Randy concluded, “I liked him. If he’d been running on the Republican ticket I would have voted for him.” Yet, because of the fact that he was a Democrat, he couldn’t help but think that Ford might go along with the Democrats and vote to defund the war and he was very against this idea. “For me [it] was just the fact that, if he won, the Senate was going to go to the Democrat hands, and they would have the control that they have now to mess with the war effort, and that was the big thing to me. I really thought they were going to just defund it, and cut and run, and I just thought that was going to be devastating.” This shows that Randy did not think negatively of Ford just because he was

a Democrat and did try to get his beliefs about Ford from listening to him. In the end, however, he was just not able to give Ford the benefit of the doubt about whether or not he would stand up to his fellow Democrats. This suggests that people may be more likely to believe that the preferred candidate will follow through with his campaign promises than the non-preferred candidate.³²

Summary of the Theoretical Model

The pre-formed political narrative and the strongly formed political narrative are two ends of a continuum. As a political narrative is just starting to take shape people think about issues on the basis of their intuitive emotions, and their current beliefs and values and use this information to arrive at stances on issues. These stances, along with their second order beliefs about the parties and/or ideologies, also called construals, then shape their initial assessments of the parties and ideologies. At this stage in the developmental process, persons are not biased by previously held stances, and, therefore, beliefs and values play a more decisive role in determining their views. Further, while they are in these beginning stages of narrative development they are relatively open to new ideas and other value priority systems. Therefore, they are more likely to change her stances on issues, parties, and candidates at this stage in the narratives development.

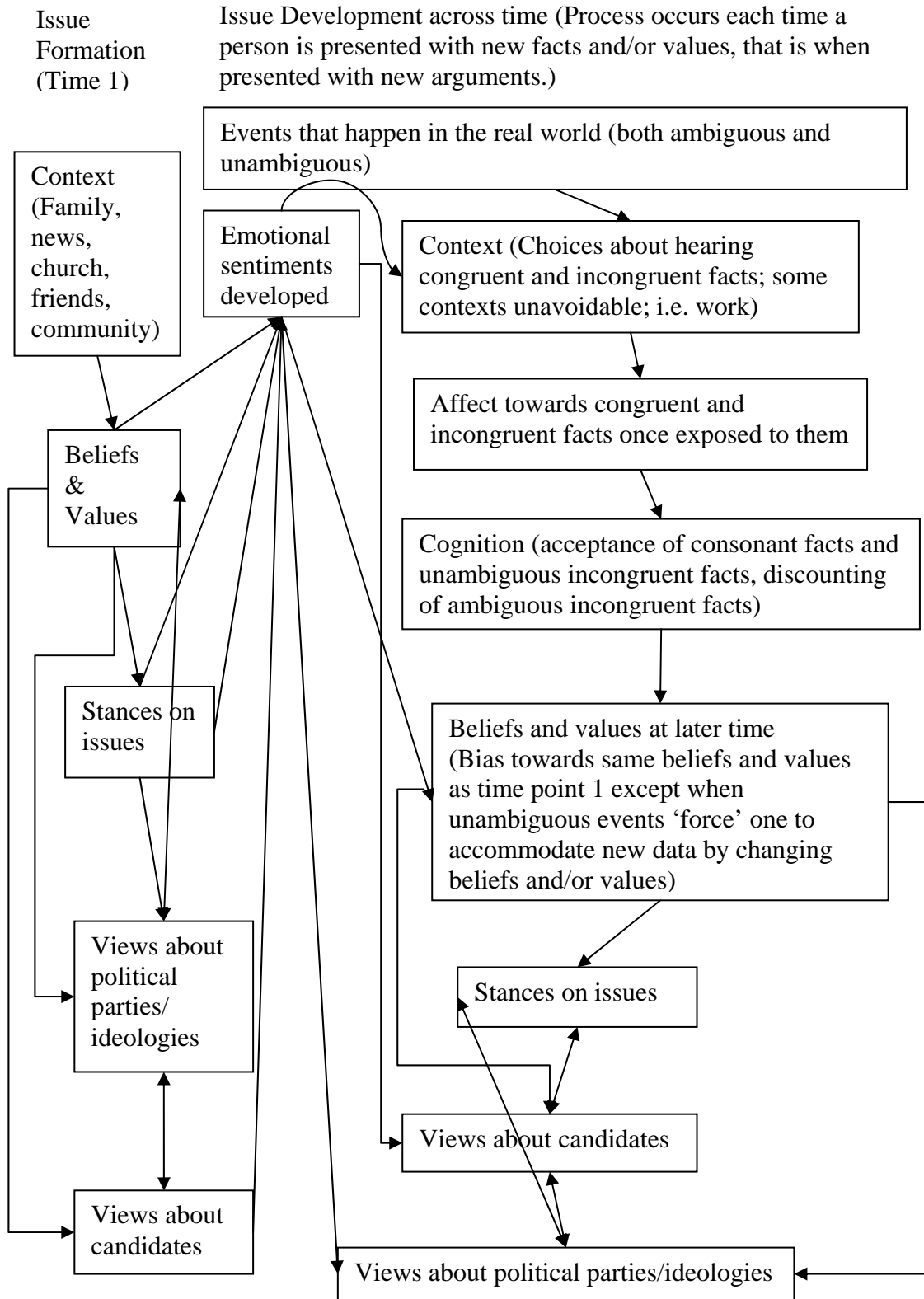
In contrast, by the time people arrive at a well defined narrative, emotional sentiments have become much more important to their narratives future development. Overall, these emotional sentiments work to bias people against changing their political narratives. Emotions create this status quo bias through an assimilation bias whereby

³² It is important to note that beliefs about how a candidate will act in the future are always *ambiguous*. One must trust the candidate to follow through with his or her rhetoric.

congruent facts/arguments are assimilated easily and incongruent facts/arguments are rigorously examined with the goals of discounting and discrediting.

This same assimilation bias leads people to find sources of news more accurate the more congruent they are with their own stance. The belief that consonant news sources are more accurate then causes a selective exposure bias where people get news mainly from ideologically similar sources. Once people have reached this end of the continuum, the only values that create the potential for change are the value that they place on truth and on hearing from the other. The value for truth allows people to change their political narrative, but much more so when facts are unambiguous than when they are ambiguous. The value to of hearing the other can also mitigate the selective exposure bias because it pushes people toward exposing themselves to more dissonant information than they would simply on the basis of accuracy goals (see Figure 4 for the full theoretical model of political narrative formation and development).

Figure 4: How Political Narratives Form and Develop across Time



Two Political Narratives

The purpose of this grounded theory project was to understand how an individual's sense of morality influences her political narrative. Until now the results have been examined within a theoretical lens that attempts to explain this process in the abstract (see Figure 2, Figure 4). To truly understand how the beliefs, values, emotions, context, and events all come together in the form of a coherent political narrative, however, we must examine individual political narratives in detail. I have chosen two narratives for this task, one strongly Democratic and the other strongly Republican. This choice was made so that I could compare in-depth qualitative analyses of a liberal and conservative political narrative against Haidt's (2007) and Lakoff's (2002) theories for how liberals and conservatives differ systematically.

The two participants I examine are from very similar contexts and have similar value systems but have arrived at very different political perspectives. I start with Deborah Yount who is a member of a theologically moderate mainline protestant church. She is an older woman who grew up in the post World War II era. She is from a middle class family with strong ties to Pierce County. Although she was not herself in the military, she had several members of her family that were and is very patriotic. She has been interested in politics at the national and local level all of her life and has considered herself a Democrat for most if not all of her life.

Randy Martin, on the other hand, is roughly 20 years Deborah's junior but attends the same mainline church Deborah does. He grew up during the Vietnam era and decided to serve in the military himself after college. He is also from a middle class family with strong ties to the local area. Both believe that their values are a natural outgrowth of the

family, church and community that they grew up in. Randy, unlike Deborah, sees himself as a conservative who generally supports Republican candidates.

Deborah Yount's Political Narrative, Summer, 2007

Deborah has many different beliefs, values, and emotional sentiments that are important to her politically, but perhaps her most central value is expressed in her statement about why she supports the Democratic Party:

My party is the party of the people. It's always concerned about the people. . . You know, not starting at the top and handing down a trickle down effect, but starting at the bottom, embracing those people that are at the bottom economically and socially. My religious views, of course, are the same. You know, being concerned about your fellow man, being concerned about the poor and the people less fortunate, and also being concerned about justice and social justice. If I have learned anything about the one we follow in the Christian faith, it is that . . . he was about reaching out to the poor and the less fortunate. He was inclusive. He was loving, and he had no patience with those that oppressed others. He had no patience with those that were not authentic and real. I don't dare say that the Democratic Party encompasses all of that at all times, but they're not in conflict.

In this passage we see Deborah commence with the declarative statement, "My party is the party of the people." What does this mean? Within the context of her narrative it means that her party is the one that *cares* for the people. Later she goes on to specify exactly who the people are that her party cares for and reaches out to namely, "the poor and less fortunate." Through these statements, we gather that Deborah believes that Democrats are more concerned with social justice and caring for the poor than are the Republicans. This is of the utmost importance to her because she believes that social justice and helping the poor were two things that Jesus did during his own life. This implies that her values are in part based on a form of virtue ethics, where virtue is understood as those actions in line with what Jesus did/would do now. Seeing Deborah's

narrative in terms of virtue ethics means that she is also bringing in the authority and purity/sanctity moral domains, although they come in indirectly. How? Because Jesus is the authority figure who dictates what is virtue and vice for her, he is an authority that she is looking towards in creating her own sense of morality. Further, a virtue ethics system is one where virtuous actions are looked at as pure and moral while vices are seen as sinful. In this instance, not helping the poor/oppressing the poor is synonymous with sin. The perception that the Democratic Party is more caring, more just, and generally virtuous creates a positive emotional connection between Deborah and the Democratic Party. In addition, to the degree that the Republican Party is associated with not caring and oppressing the poor, it has negative feelings associated with it.³³

This central value of caring for the poor and less fortunate is a global value that influences her views on how government should deal with poverty, health care, and education. For instance, when talking about poverty she says, “I certainly would remember the book [of] Amos, and I certainly would know that God has never tolerated the oppression of the poor.” Similarly when talking about how a Christian Nation would act she says:

If it's a Christian Nation, then it would be very benevolent. It would be very inclusive. The nation would seek to help countries that are poor and that are destitute. We would be very careful about going to war, it would have to be just forced on us almost. There would be equal rights and men and women. . . all people would be treated equally. We would have healthcare and education available for all people.

This longer quote shows how she sees war, poverty, both inside and outside the US, healthcare, and education as all being based on the Christian values of benevolence and

³³ We see this negative emotion with regards to Republicans in her response to what Republican means to her: “I’m beginning to think it’s all about me. I have no responsibility to anybody other than me and that if I can pull myself up by my boot straps, everybody else ought to be able to. You know, lack of compassion. I don’t know. I’ve gotten a pretty bad view of them.”

inclusion, which are at the heart of her personal theology. Being inclusive, providing equal rights, health care, and education is all related to the fairness/justice domain. The rationale for the emphasis on these domains, however, again comes from her Christian understanding of moral authority and virtue.

Yet, her political views are not based solely in the realm of ‘the ought.’ She also recognizes the need to consider whether or not a nation with such values would succeed in the real world. She argues that her justice-related values are not in opposition to the country’s economic growth when she says, “In the long run. . . it benefits us economically to take care of the poor and to start at the bottom rather than a trickle down economics starting at the top. I think it’s to any country’s advantage to take care of their poor, or to at least work toward making conditions better for them and making opportunities for them to do better.” Here she shows her belief that helping the poor is not just morally righteous but also in the long-term interest of the country. She elaborates on this elsewhere saying, “I think the Clinton years were better. I think during this administration we’ve seen a decline.” The belief that her moral values and her country’s economic interest are not in opposition makes it easy for her to reach a strong position on this issue. If the two had been in opposition, then her views about the government’s role in helping the poor would likely be more ambivalent.

Her central values of benevolence, justice, and inclusion also greatly influence her understanding of the immigration issue. Here she says that her values tell her that, “we’re all God’s creation, and acceptance, love, and respect for each other and the differences [is important],” and that we should “come to something that would be more satisfactory with the people that are already here. . . something that would make for peace

of mind and a good working situation.” This suggests that her values would point her in the direction of being relatively lenient toward those here illegally. Yet, she also has beliefs that would move her in the opposite direction. For instance, her statement that “it’s a very, very complex issue. . . [and] I would hope that we would have. . . a better way of knowing who is here and just more accountability,” shows that she recognizes there is some need to crack down on undocumented entry into the country. The opposing perspectives about immigration work to make her realize that this issue is complex and move her away from having a well formed strong opinion in relation to it, which we see in her initial answer to the question . “It’s got me, it’s very, very complex. I would hope that we would come to something that would be more satisfactory with the people that are already in this country.” The fact that she has a more ambivalent view of this issue suggests that it will not be as important to her political narrative. This is consistent with the fact that she did not provide this issue as an example of why she supports the Democratic Party.

Deborah seems similarly conflicted with regards to the wedge issue of gay marriage. First, she wants to argue that “in a democracy. . . they have a right to their individual rights.” Yet, her answer is complicated by the fact that she knows that the Bible brings up homosexuality explicitly.

I think that, even as a Christian, even though I know that there are scriptures that address it, I feel a little bit confused because I don’t think Jesus ever did address it. So that leaves me open for the fact that he might not have judged it at all, the fact that he never addressed it. . . So I want to love them and to include them and I want them to have all of the rights that other people have. Then I leave the rest of it to God.

Here she seems to really be struggling to reconcile her belief that the Bible does carry some authority in speaking about sin and virtue, with her value of tolerance/freedom,

especially in discussing a person's rights, not whether or not they will be getting into Heaven. In the end, she concludes that being tolerant towards gay people could be consistent with Jesus' walk and that, therefore, she can be both tolerant and Christian, especially if she leaves the final decision up to God. This is an interesting argument because it shows how one can choose not to abide by a certain aspect of the scriptures without lessening the importance of the moral authority given to other aspects of the scriptures. Even though she is able to reconcile the inconsistency between her own views and those of part of the scriptures, the scriptures do seem to make her "confused" or less sure of herself than she would be otherwise. This lack of surety about what the ethical path actually is not only makes her "a little bit confused" but also seems to be correlated with her view of the issue as "real hard" and not central to her narrative.

When Deborah was specifically asked about the separation of Church and State, she said she agrees with it, which to her "means that even as a Christian Nation we're not imposing [our beliefs on others]. That people have a right to worship or not to worship. I see that as being a Christian, being tolerant." Here, as with gay marriage, the argument is largely based on the moral principle of freedom/tolerance. This particular example about the right to not worship, however, does not seem to suggest a wall of separation between church and state. Rather it seems to imply that the state should not create any laws that discriminate against non-believers, because we should be tolerant of people whose views are different. This issue is like that of immigration and gay marriage, in that it is not central to Deborah's political narrative.

Deborah believes that war "only encourages more hate, more animosity," and as such, "we should be very careful about going into a country." This is based on the

harm/care moral principle and implies that for a war to be justified we should have extinguished all other options. Specifically referring to the War in Iraq, she believes we were “preemptive,” and that “our reasons were not right.” For her, this means that the war was not fair or just. The belief that the war in Iraq was unjustified ethically, coupled with the belief that “we neglected Afghanistan,” explain her current position, namely, that the U.S. should “consider ourselves victorious and come home.” Again, Deborah arrives at a stance on the justness of the war through thinking about values, but when considering what we should do, she is forced to consider not just the realm of the ought but also the realm of the *is*. This leads to her statement, “We should think of some reasonable way to get out, but I certainly would be happy with working toward April and putting closure on it because I don’t think there’s anything to be gained by staying.”³⁴ This shows her belief that just because one was opposed to the war initially we should still strive for a reasonable exit strategy. Believing that there is nothing to be gained from staying appears to have as much to do with the want for an immediate exit as any ethical argument against the initial justness of the war.

This issue seems to be more central to Deborah than the issues of gay marriage and immigration mentioned above. This is deduced because she mentions in her discussion of Kerry v. Bush that “had I been an independent and looking at the two, I would have seen how much more capable Kerry could be in foreign affairs [compared to Bush].” Her political preferences, however, were firmly enmeshed before the war, so we can assume that this issue is not the issue that is foundational to her long time support for

³⁴ At the time Deborah stated this belief it was an unverifiable belief. With the passage of time, however, this belief has become more and more untenable given the facts that Iraq is becoming more and more secure (Charbonneau, 2008; Farrell & Opper, 2008; Ricks, 2009). This provides an interesting example of how an ambiguous belief about the future can become less ambiguous over time, which could cause belief change.

Democratic candidates. If anything, it is more likely that her partisan bias at the time of the invasion could have led her to her views about the war by causing her to trust Bush, Powell, and Cheney very little when they were attempting to provide reasons for the necessity of the invasion.

In discussing abortion, Deborah seems conflicted between the “hope that it would not happen often, [perhaps] only in the case of a mother’s life or something extreme,” and her belief that “it should remain a woman’s choice.” In stating that she hopes it would only happen “in the case of a mother’s life or something extreme,” she is indicating that she does recognize a certain sense of tragedy in aborting a fetus, again drawing on the moral principle of harm/care. At the same time, she concludes that she thinks it should remain a woman’s choice drawing on the freedom/tolerance principle. Because she is siding with the tolerance principle in this situation, she is implicitly choosing the tolerance principle over the harm/care principle. She reconciles the fact that she cannot uphold all of her various moral principles, in this case, in several ways. First, she argues that we should “deal with this [issue] with birth control and more knowledge about not having unwanted pregnancies.” This helps her to reconcile her decision, because it would minimize the number of times a woman would choose to have an abortion, reducing the number of fetuses harmed. Second, Deborah acknowledges that, even if we did make abortion illegal, it would not do away with women choosing abortion to terminate unwanted pregnancies. Rather, it would force women to go back to using coat hangers and unofficial persons to do the procedure. This argument serves to discount the harm to the fetus argument in two ways. First, the harm to the fetus comes to be seen as relatively unavoidable if women will simply go and have an illegal abortion

if they cannot get a legal one. Second, it raises another argument for abortion on the basis of the harm that it would cause to women if it were illegal that it is not causing today. As such, the moral dilemma for her is no longer simply between tolerance and harm/care but is now between tolerance and potential harm to women versus a potential harm to the fetus, which is discounted by the fact that it is likely to be harmed regardless. Interestingly, the abortion issue goes against the hypothesis that issues that cause more ambivalence are less central to a person's narrative. Abortion does cause some ambivalence for Deborah, but it is still a central issue to her, at least in instances where the mother's life might be at risk.

Now that we have looked at some of Deborah's positions on political issues and examined how they affect her political narrative, we can now turn to examining the role of her emotional sentiments. As previously stated, Deborah has positive emotions concerning the Democratic Party. One of the consequences of this emotional connection comes out in Deborah's statement, "Well, of course, I see the best in Democrats." This statement tells us that Deborah recognizes that she is not exactly objective when it comes to the Democratic Party. This is an acknowledgment that, when there is ambiguous information about a Democratic candidate, she will likely give the Democrat the benefit of the doubt and assume that their beliefs and values are in-line with her own. We see evidence of this in the following statement she made about Harold Ford Jr.'s candidacy: "Harold Ford . . . in spite of his family has always been a bright and shining star." Someone with a less positive view of Democrats in general may have been more likely to question Ford's ethics on the basis of his family ties. For instance, Walter, who leans Republican says, "I think the 'Ford' name did him more damage than his race," when

talking about why Ford might have lost to Corker. We see a similar willingness to see the best in Democrats in her statement about John Kerry: “I think I would have chosen, had I been an independent and looking at the two, I would have seen how much more capable Kerry could be in foreign affairs and his generous spirit would have made him certainly a good leader here.” It seems likely that her positive affect for the Democratic Party helped her to arrive at beliefs about Kerry having a generous spirit and leadership qualities, given that these are not easily verifiable beliefs.

Similarly, Deborah shares the fact that “I don’t feel as positive as I once did about a two party system. I’m just so outraged at things that have happened with this party, or this administration, which is of the Republican Party.” This shows itself in an inability to give Republican candidates the same benefit of the doubt she gives Democrats in ambiguous situations. For instance, in evaluating Bob Corker’s background she says, “I just don’t see that Corker had a background that qualified him to go to Washington and I don’t think he’s been able to accomplish very much.”

The Development of Deborah’s Political Narrative

Now that we have examined the role of Deborah’s beliefs, values, and emotions on her current political narrative, we need to consider how she might have developed this particular political narrative. First, let us turn to Deborah’s thoughts about the importance of her childhood on her political views.

My parents, of course, were Democrats, and they were Christians. And I can’t remember my parents not being concerned about what was going on in the community and making it a better place to live. They were the greatest generation. And, um, my earliest memories are of my dad trying to make sure that our schools were good, working for maybe consolidating some country schools and making them stronger, being concerned about

education. They certainly were instrumental in building the Methodist Church in this community. . . I learned early that, that we shared what we had, that we were concerned about people around us, we were concerned about our neighbors who had less. And I saw that. . . things could happen through politics if you worked out good leadership. You worked to have good people on the school board, as commissioners.

Within this passage we find several clues to how she may have come to her current political narrative. First, she notes that her parents were “of course” both Democrats and Christians. This not only implies that Christianity and Democratic politics were seen as consistent within her family, but so obviously so that it might not even need to be said. This suggests an environment where Deborah would have learned how the Democratic Party was the more moral party. She goes on to say that she her parents were always concerned with making their community better, from working to improve education, to getting good people as commissioners, to helping the community build a church. These were not just parents for Deborah but role models, as she makes clear when she refers to them as part of “the greatest generation”. These familial role models undoubtedly played an important role in her learning the importance of caring for the community through political and church engagement. This explains the active role she now has in her church as well as in local politics. But, not only did she learn that one should be active in politics. She also learned how to translate views about the importance of education and caring for the poor into specifically Democratic Party politics. This suggests that many of the beliefs and values that she culled growing up in her family were consonant with Democratic Party principles, and that she developed a positive affect for the Democratic Party at a relatively early age.

Context next makes itself apparent in her answer to the immigration question. Here she starts off her remarks with the preface, “Because of my appreciation and

because of our need for Hispanic workers, I'm probably broader on that than I would be otherwise." This suggests that her thoughts about the illegal immigration issue may have changed over time. It also suggests the possible mechanism behind this change in view, getting to know Hispanics at her work and finding them dependable and valuable. From other conversations that I've had with Deborah, I know that her interactions with the Hispanic population go beyond just work. She has also been instrumental in helping some Hispanics become a part of her church, and sometimes has Hispanic friends over for dinner with the family. Through these processes she has built strong friendships with Hispanic Christians and learned that she has much in common with them spiritually. This humanization of the Hispanic population makes it more likely that she will empathize with their plight and want a solution that "would be more satisfactory for them and give them greater peace," even if it is the politically unpopular opinion at this historical moment.

Another story Deborah told me about in the summer of 2006 shows how she changed her mind about a political issue of salience to her at the time. During the 1960s and 1970s Deborah thought of herself as very patriotic and had a certain amount of disdain for those protesting the Vietnam War. She especially disliked anyone who had the audacity to burn the American flag because of what it represented and did not think they should be allowed to do this. Later in her life, however, a close friendship with a fellow Democrat, Pete, provided a context where she became convinced that protesters should have a right to act on what they believe, even if the action is repulsive to her, so long as they were not harming anyone.

This story of conversion can be compared to the following example of a non-conversion story:

There are some Republicans in our Sunday school class, and it's pretty obvious. Just recently we were studying Timothy and Paul. . . there were some people who were just looking toward the end coming and just sort of laying around and waiting for Jesus to come back. So, he addresses that and he tells those that don't work shouldn't eat if they're not going to work and provide. And so we have people in the class that just jumped on that and said, see, we told you. The Bible is explicit about no welfare and all of that. Well, that's not true. They just took that out of context. It was not a very pleasant class, which is unusual for our class.

Comparing and contrasting these two stories we find that, in the first situation, the man she was in dialogue with was a good friend and fellow Democrat. In the second, by contrast, they were fellow church members and therefore probably share some values, but were Republicans. Further, in the dialogue with Pete, he convinced her that the moral domain of tolerance was a more important virtue in a Democracy than was loyalty to this country's symbols. He did not try to argue that loyalty to one's country's symbols was not important. This was successful, in part, because the argument was based on applying a moral domain that she already valued to a situation where she had not applied it before. In the second instance, however, Republicans, to whom she is less likely to give the benefit of the doubt, are arguing *against* her understanding of beneficence purely on the basis of authority. In other words, they are asking her to believe that helping the poor is not as strong a value as she believes it to be. To her, this argument does not ring true because it goes against her understanding of Jesus' sense of virtue ethics.

Deborah also mentions that her conversation about feeding the poor was not very pleasant. This suggests that she might not enjoy discussions with people where differences in beliefs and values are very large. This hypothesis is supported in her response about with whom she talks politics with, "Fortunately, I guess most of my

friends are Democratic. I do have Republican friends and try not to discuss it real often [with them], especially with my son. But there are people that I do not agree with, and I can still interact with and share ideas.” This is in contrast to her initial response to the question, where she says, “I talk a lot of politics. Politics are important in my family. My children like to discuss politics. I have friends that are very political. There’s just. . . a lot of politics to be discussed.” This statement, said in a jovial tone, makes it apparent that she enjoys talking politics with most of her friends, that is, Democratic-minded friends. Also, in talking about the books she likes to read, she says “Our library’s full, at the house, of political books. . . I read most everything that comes out about our candidates, I feel like this gives me a better perspective on who they’re for.” This furthers the argument that, for Deborah, learning about other’s political views is fun and interesting when they are similar to her own. Here, we also see that she exposes herself to humanizing portraits of candidates she wants to like, but not those whom she would prefer to dislike, suggesting a certain kind of selective exposure bias. It is important to understand that this does not mean that Deborah wants to be close minded; in fact, we will see that she absolutely does not. Rather, these statements simply support the theory that she has a more positive and enjoyable time thinking about and discussing politics when the ideas she is considering are relatively likeminded.

The research on motivated reasoning suggests that this is a fairly normal human trait (Gilbert, 2006; Taber & Lodge, 2006; Westen, 2007). When it comes to obtaining the news, Deborah tells us that although she “probably watches CNN. I do watch Fox. I do watch CNBC. I do watch local. I try to do a mix. I think otherwise you might not get a clear view and you’re trying to balance it.” Here we see that, when Deborah is

consciously thinking about which views she should give herself access to she attempts to get a balance. It is only when she is less conscious of the need for balance that her preference for more positive experiences over less positive experiences pushes her in the direction of getting less balance.

Randy Martin's Political Narrative, Summer, 2007

Randy, like Deborah, grew up in a family with conservative Democratic parents and is also an active member in Church A. One might be tempted to think that, like Deborah, Randy would have also learned how to equate Democratic politics with morality and become a life-long Democrat. He did not, however; instead he purposely bucked his “family tradition” and is currently a Republican. He says, with a laugh, “I am the black sheep in my family” for becoming a Republican. To understand how Randy’s political orientation could be so different from Deborah’s given such similar family backgrounds; we must first turn to the direct explanation, his beliefs, values, and emotions. Then we look at the contextual situations that can begin to explain how these two people could arrive at such different political narratives.

Randy provides an excellent summary of many of his central beliefs and values in his answer to the question: Can you tell me what some of your political beliefs are?

The top two or three I guess would be I’m not an America basher. And it just seems like we get that from the left all of the time: America’s evil, America’s imperialist. You know history just doesn’t bear that out. Look at World War II, I mean we had all of Europe and Germany and Japan too and we patched them up and gave it back to them. Now have we always done the right thing? No, but we usually try to correct our mistakes. We give enough away in foreign aid to choke a horse. I like America. It’s not perfect, but hey, it’s the best place in the world. I think a lot of that has to do with, with capitalism and the free market and a rugged individualism that brought people over here. And, there wasn’t a government program or

anything they just came over here and hacked it out on their own. You know, I'm not saying the government shouldn't be there to help people when they need it. They should, but the great society really hasn't, it had good intentions, but it's trapped a lot of people. I know people that are second and third generation welfare recipients. I'm just proud to be an American. I think we should support our military and we should be able to fight two wars on two different fronts at the same time. And we kind of got that going right now. And, we cut our troop levels way too much in the 90s. And once again during a Democratic administration we cut them. And we shifted a lot of the combat role to the Guard. That's what they did. I've been in the Guard several years and that's why they're getting used now and I don't think these people understand that. But, I just think, low taxes help everybody. I mean it's been proven every time it's done it's worked. Kennedy did it in the 60s when our economy was real sluggish. Reagan did it, and now Bush has done it too. And what happens? Everybody screams tax cuts for the rich, tax cuts for the rich. But it just spurs so much economic growth and actually by lowering taxes, you increase revenues to the government and that's foreign to a lot of people too. But, if people have got more money in their pocket and they're out spending more money, well, guess what, we've got more coming in to the treasury. The problem is that spending hasn't always been slowed down to go with that.

In this passage, Randy identifies many of his most central beliefs and values.

First, he is proud of and loves America. He believes that America, while not perfect, tries to do what is right and does its best to try and correct any mistakes. Thus, while America is not perfect, it is honorable and, for him, it is the best country in the world. This patriotism makes him very angry when he hears people bashing American or calling it imperialist, because such terms imply that America is not honorable but "evil." This patriotism or loyalty to America is associated with moral domain three, community, and is the main justification he gives for the need to support the military and make sure it is able to fight a two front war. This is the first issue Randy mentions, and the emotion he shows discussing it suggests that it is a central issue to him.

We also see that Randy associates America bashers with the political left. This is important to his narrative because "the left" is a loose synonym for the Democratic Party

and shows us where some of his negative affect for the Democratic Party comes.

Another passage that emphasizes Randy's negative affect for Democratic politics, "And once again during a Democratic administration we cut them [the military]," suggests that he does not believe Democrats do enough to support the military. Within his value framework, this is very immoral because it is unpatriotic, un-loyal to the country, to make it less capable of self defense or defense of freedom.

The idea that America is honorable and works to correct its errors is evident in the following passage, where Randy makes his case for why we should continue in Iraq, even though the ideas behind why we went in were wrong:

We didn't get it right. I base a lot of my beliefs on it listening to Colin Powell in the UN talking about they knew this, and you know he missed it . . . they all looked at the intelligence, all of them, the Congress, they all looked at it. Hillary Clinton looked at it. She had people from her husband's administration tell her yes, in fact, the CIA director was from her husband's administration. And so, they went in. And now it's like when you go into a china shop. You break something you own it. So, we own it now. And I think we owe it to the Iraqis and to ourselves, too, to get it right.

Here we see an example of a case where America made a mistake and now we must do the honorable thing and correct it. Honor within this system is an ethical virtue that denotes purity or virtue and revolves around not always making the right decision, but going back and correcting your mistakes.

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't be paying attention to the facts on the ground and changing our strategy as necessary to obtain victory. In fact, Randy is very critical of our war strategy saying that:

I think they screwed it up from the beginning by not sending enough troops in. He [Bush] should have fired Rumsfeld probably two years before he did resign. And, I don't know if they can straighten it out now or not. But, I think if the consequences of us losing are huge, and if we

pull out of there, it just seems to me like it's going to be another killing field like we saw in Laos and Cambodia when we pulled out of there.

Here he shows that strategy is not only important but incorrect strategy in the past might be insurmountable in the present. But, for him, the honorable and therefore right thing to do is to battle on even if victory is not certain. With respect to the War in Iraq, the main moral domains that Randy finds relevant to our decision to stay or go are loyalty and purity, specifically honor, along with concern about the harm that would befall those who would be left behind. Within Randy's narrative, all three of these moral domains call for us to stay in Iraq, and, therefore, Randy is not ambivalent with regards to this issue. In addition, the war is undoubtedly a central issue for Randy, as he cites this as his main reason for voting against Harold Ford in his 2006 Senate race.³⁵

Looking further at Randy's beliefs about America, we see that it is not only the case that he thinks the United States is the best country in the world, but he also has a set of theories about how it came to be the best. First, he associates the United States success with a free market form of capitalism. Second, he hypothesizes that those who made the United States great had a rugged individualist mentality, which made them work hard and thrive. This is contrasted with people who develop a mentality that the government owes them something, which is connected with the introduction of the great society programs in the 1960s and 1970s. These two beliefs about what made our country great influence many of Randy's policy views including government's role in tax policy and how we should deal with economic downturns, poverty, and health care. First,

³⁵ Part of Randy's discussion of why he voted for Bob Corker: "It was just such a close race to me, but the thing that did it for me was just the fact that if he won the Senate was going to go to the Democrat hands and they would have the control that they have now to mess with the war effort and that was the big thing to me. I really thought they were going to de-fund it, and cut and run, and I just thought that was going to be devastating."

I examine his thoughts about tax policy. Here, Randy begins by acknowledging that people get upset about giving the rich tax cuts, which, on its face, appears to be unethical. He argues against this being a true ethical problem, however, because these tax cuts greatly increase economic growth and therefore help the middle class and poor too. In fact, Randy goes even further stating that by decreasing taxes we even increase the amount of revenue that government receives. Within this perspective, tax cuts for the rich are a win-win because all groups become better off.³⁶ Given these beliefs there is no longer an ethical quandary, because giving the rich tax cuts doesn't necessitate a loss to any other group and as such his stance on this issue does not need to be nuanced.

Randy also makes the argument that “They’re paying quite a bit, the top 20% are paying about 80% of all of the taxes,” which would imply that the rich are paying their fair share, even if the tax cuts wouldn’t have helped everyone else. The belief that the wealthy shouldn’t have to pay an inordinate amount of the taxes seems to also come from Randy’s belief that we live in a country that approximates a meritocracy, or where “the playing field is getting a little more level now, and I think everybody has a shot at it if they’re willing to work and, you know, educate themselves or work at it.” As such, those who are wealthy are wealthy because of their hard work, determination, and belief in the importance of education. Why, then, would we want to punish the wealthy by having them pay high taxes when this work ethic is exactly what we should be trying to promote.

³⁶ The belief that US revenues increased because of the tax cuts is an empirically verifiable belief that is not backed up by the facts. I found that revenues to government dropped by 12 percent between 2000 and 2003 when the two sets of Bush tax cuts were implemented. It took until 2005 before the US took in more revenue than it had in 2000, when it took in 6.3 percent more income. However, it should be noted that these figures are not adjusted for inflation, so in reality we likely were not back to 2000 revenue levels in inflation adjusted dollars. By contrast, from 1995 – 2000 the federal government increased revenue by 49.8 percent in non-inflation adjusted dollars. The average increase in revenue was 8.4 percent per year, which was higher than the average rate of inflation during this time (Government Printing Office, 2008).

In combination, the beliefs that the wealthy pay their fair share of the taxes and that their tax cuts benefit us all both lead Randy to support tax cut legislation: “Keep taxes low, get out of the way, and let the economy do its thing.” Again we see that his beliefs are consistent with regard to this issue and therefore he is not ambivalent. In making this argument, he largely avoids discussing values, other than that hard work should be rewarded, which comes out of the justice/fairness moral domain. Other than this, the argument is almost exclusively pragmatic, that is, based on perceptions of results.

Randy’s belief in the importance of a good work ethic also leads him to be disgruntled with welfare, which he believes had the unintended consequence of taking away people’s work ethic. This understanding of human nature leads him to believe that welfare should be changed so that, “rather than just sending somebody a check in the mail,” we “help train people to do certain jobs”. For Randy the long run goal of welfare should be to put everyone to work, because “I think people feel better about themselves if they’ve gone out and earned a paycheck rather than gone to the mailbox to get one from the government.” This is, in part, based on his understanding of human nature with regards to what makes people feel better about themselves. But it is also partly based on the value he places on working hard and taking responsibility for your own wellbeing. In other words, being a rugged individualist who does not need a government handout is honorable or moral whereas being dependent on government appears to be conflated with sin or impurity.

To understand Randy’s position on health care, we need to consider his understanding of government as well as his beliefs about America being the best. First,

we find that he believes government is inefficient and that “they have a hard time [even] getting passports out now. We applied for some passports about a month or so ago and they said probably Christmas [interview was done in July].” With this belief, it is no surprise that he is not for universal health care, which he argues “was going to take over 1/7th of the economy. It was going to be huge. And I think any time you get the government involved on that scale, man, there’s bound to be fraud, waste, and abuse.” Here, we see that he not only thinks that government is inefficient, but, in fact, thinks it’s often corrupt. Therefore, he does not think government should do any more than it absolutely has to do to insure the “40 or 50 million. . . [that] don’t have it.” Doing more than this minimum is associated with “turning the whole system upside down to give everybody universal healthcare coverage” and is frowned on because “everybody else pretty much has a plan of some kind. . .”

So why would it be bad if people who already had a plan were forced to change? Because of his belief that “we’ve got the best [health care] in the world.”³⁷ Our having the best health care is assumed to be because of the free market approach we take to providing it, compared to “Canada or England or wherever [where] they determine when you’re going to have surgery or if you need it.” Here, we begin to understand that

³⁷ Determining national health care rankings is an ambiguous process. You have to consider facts such as quality of care, fairness, and cost, and, to a certain degree, it depends on the weights you assign the different variables. Various organizations do attempt to give rankings. The World Health Organization is probably the most well known agency that does this. Their report 2000 placed the United States at 37th overall. The category that comes closest to ranking quality of care is the absolute outcomes of care and here the United States ranks 15th (“World Health Report 2000,” 2000). It is true that some conservatives take issue with these rankings, but even the libertarian leaning Cato Institute analyzed the potential error in the rankings on the basis of sampling error and found that the actual ranking for the US in the category of goal attainment could be no higher than 7th and might be as low as 24th (Whitman, 2008). This means that the empirical evidence argues that the United States is no higher than 7th in Health Care, even when Health Care is thought of only in terms of quality of care, and could be as low as 24th. Regardless of how you put together the numbers this data finds Randy’s belief that the United States has the best health care in the world false, at least in 1999 when the data was collected.

government is not only seen as negative because of the potential for fraud, but also because of the power that it could have over the individual. As such, Randy is for a plan to give health care to people, which incorporates as little government intervention as possible and, therefore, gives as much ‘freedom’ as possible to the individual who has insurance.

Randy’s views about government versus the free market also lead him to his position about how to deal with the deficit. Randy’s belief that tax cuts increase revenues through economic growth lead him to suggest that tax cuts could help the deficit problem.³⁸ In addition, his view of the government as inefficient and wasteful means that he thinks another good way to control the deficit is to cut spending. His suggestion for cutting spending on social security is not to give as large a cost of living adjustment as they do now. With regards to the regular budget, he says, “I’m not opposed to an across the board cuts on everything. I think Bredesen did that in this state and they don’t need to go crazy on the military either, but in this environment we sure don’t need to be cutting troops.”

The solution to the deficit that he is unequivocally against is the tax increase. He is against this practically speaking because he thinks it will hurt growth to the point that government revenues will not increase. But further than this, it goes against his values. Referring to social security specifically, Randy poses the question “Are our kids going to have to pay 30% in social security taxes to keep us up? You know, that’s not right when they’re trying to start a life and a family.” By stating that this would not be right, he is making a value claim that it is unfair to weigh our children down with the burden of

³⁸ Part of Randy’s discussion of how the US could decrease the deficit: “If our economy’s booming. . . maybe we [can] handle some of these problems that way. By getting rid of some of the regulations, and lowering taxes and giving people [tax] incentives to invest in their business.”

excessive taxes when they will need some of that tax money to start their family life. In this sense, keeping taxes is not just justified by practicality, but also by the justice moral domain.

The unifying narrative behind all of these specific issue stances, then, is that government taking action is bad because government is inefficient, corrupt, and can potentially take away an individual's freedom and will to work hard. The free market, in contrast, is seen as working with human nature to promote the hard work and rugged individualism necessary for greatness. This unifying narrative is central to Randy's Republican-leaning political narrative. As with other central narratives, there seems to be little perceived ambivalence and few if any ethical trade-offs with regards to these issues. Other issues that do not have to do with the military or fit within this framework are not as central to Randy's narrative. I begin to consider some of these issues now to see how Randy thinks through their moral implications and to attempt to understand why they might not be as central.

First, I examine Randy's views on abortion:

I'm a little bit conflicted. I know there's times when it needs to happen. I just do. And I know people who have had them. I know friends and friends of my wife and it's just wrecked them a little bit emotionally in some way. I mean it would have to. But, I guess the big thing for me was the partial birth thing. I just couldn't see how that was medically necessary. I'm not a doctor, but the way it's been described to me seems pretty barbaric. It seems like, why couldn't you do a cesarean? Anyway, my mother would always go back to the argument that when they were illegal, people did them anyway, and I understand that, or when women had a hard time delivering sometimes, the mother and baby would die, too. But, the majority of them, abortions are elected for no other reason than I want one.

From this passage, we see that his sense of honor tells him that an abortion should not be allowed just because "I want one" but only in cases where people really need to have one.

This stance comes out of a moral value that relates honor with taking responsibility. Specifically, people in this situation ought to think about the responsibilities they have towards the baby they created. This moral value falls neatly under honor but also comes under the loyalty domain, because one should be loyal to one's child. Further, his perception of partial birth abortions as barbaric (harmful) and unnecessary lead him to the belief that they should be banned altogether. This is because the barbarity of the procedure goes against the harm moral domain, and its lack of necessity of it means that this harm is never offset by an equal or greater harm to the woman. Yet, at the same time, Randy does recognize that there are other times when abortion needs to happen. In these cases, he shows compassion and empathy with the unfortunate parents. This compassion for an emotionally wrecked family leads him to his belief that government should not further punish them. The moral domain in this case is harm/care as well, but, here, it is a sense of caring for the parents who have to go through the ordeal. Thus, Randy believes that abortion is justifiable in some instances and not others. This is a nuanced view that recognizes that there are good reasons to have an abortion and good reasons against them in some cases. The lack of centrality that Randy associates with this issue is consistent with the theory that increased ambivalence decreases the centrality of an issue.

On the issue of gay marriage, Randy also seems conflicted. In this case, it is because of two different senses of what is right. First, he states that "I don't want anybody persecuted for any reason, and what they do is their own business. We have some gay relatives, and I love them and I don't think any differently of them." This shows his belief in the importance of toleration and individual freedom. This logic would seem to argue for gay marriage, or some form of equal rights. Yet, Randy also perceives

that “there’s a huge push, and all of this comes from the left, of the gay agenda and the gay lifestyle, and the gay marriage thing, too, [it] gets pushed all of the time. I’m trying to raise kids in this society, and I like for them to be kids for a little while, you know, before they have to face to face all of these issues and things.” This makes him upset because, while he doesn’t think the gay lifestyle should be persecuted, he also doesn’t think it should be promoted, especially with his children. This promotion of the gay lifestyle is seen as a bad thing because it goes against the traditional ordering of the family and, in an interesting way, is seen as unfair to people like Randy who do not want their children to have to think about these issues yet. It should also be noted that ‘the left’ is associated with the promotion of the gay lifestyle, not with the belief that people should treat everyone the same regardless of lifestyle choice. As such, the left is again associated with negative affect and not positive affect. This suggests that, on this issue, he sides with the Republican Party although it is not an issue that he cites as central to his narrative, which is reasonable given there is some ambivalence.

Randy does believe that the ability of the president to pick Supreme Court justices is very important. He tells me, “I think that will be Bush’s legacy, and that’s why elections are important. It’s just key. It seems like that is where the power is in this country anymore, is in the Supreme Court.” He goes on to say that he likes a strict constructionist because “it’s not up to the court to make a law, that is up to the congress to do and I think they get to be activists sometimes.” This argument does not stem from any overt moral rationale, but rather from a certain perception of what the role of the judiciary is in the United States.

He is happy with the justices that Bush has chosen for the bench and is content with their decisions on the cases that he knows of. These include allowing issue advocacy ads up until the time of an election and making it so that race “couldn’t be the sole factor” in school selection processes. He found the Court’s decision on race just because “it’s important to go to school in your community. . . because a school is part of the community. And. . . there is always going to be discrimination and racism, but I just think we are at a point now that merit should decide. . . where people should go to school, especially in the universities.” The moral domain used to justify this stance is fairness/justice, in that it is unfair for people not to be able to go to school in their own community or for the most qualified person not to get into a university. Interestingly, he liked this decision even though it was an example of a case where the court legislated from the bench, that is, it overruled a law written by the legislature. The same could be said for the court allowing advocacy ad’s in spite of the fact that the legislature specifically created a law preventing it.³⁹

To summarize, Randy’s beliefs and values lead him to conservative positions on many issues and his beliefs about the left give him negative emotions toward Democrats. As such, we would expect that he would be less likely to give Democrats the benefit of the doubt when ambiguous information is presented about them compared to Republican candidates. This hypothesis is supported in his discussions of John Kerry and Harold Ford Jr. For instance, when talking about Kerry’s service in Vietnam, Randy says that “he was in the country 4 months and got 3 purple hearts, and one or two of them was

³⁹ This suggests that his principled stand for strict constructionist judges may be based less on the actual practice of overruling the judiciary and more with the specific laws that the court has in the past attempted to overrule. Unfortunately, I did not ask for examples of when the justices were being “activists”.

questionable. I don't know, and he had people filming him while he was over there, and it just seemed like it was all kind of just staged. I think he saw himself as another JFK, and I don't know it just didn't seem genuine to me." This is an interesting case because there was information out at the time of the election both saying that Kerry was a genuine war hero and that his service might have been more suspect (Manjoo, 2008). As such, this is an instance of ambiguous data, and Randy leaned towards accepting the more negative interpretation.

Similarly with Ford, Randy tells us "I liked him very much, a very charismatic guy, very well spoken, just a sharp guy." Later in talking about specifics, he states that "he had been to Iraq several, two or three times, and that was one of the big things for me. He thought we needed to win it too. We needed a different strategy, and I agreed with that, too, but he was just under the impression that we need to win it. That's what I got from him, from talking to him." He then adds that "I met Bob Corker too, and he's alright, but I could have voted for Harold if I knew that he could buck his party in some ways." Specifically, he voted for Corker because "if he [Ford] won, the Senate was going to go to the Democrat hands, and they would have the control that they have now to mess with the war effort, and that was the big thing to me. I really thought they were going to just defund it and cut and run." So in the end, he voted against Ford, even though he was impressed by him and believed he thought the United States needed to win in Iraq. He did this because he thought he would not be able to buck his party and vote against defunding the war. Because Ford's ability to "buck" his party is ambiguous, Randy's inability to trust Ford on this point shows that, even when he is impressed by the

intellect and reasoning of a Democrat, he is unlikely to be able to give a Democrat the benefit of the doubt when it comes to ambiguous data.

In contrast, when discussing his views of Bush in 2000 he jokes about Bush having “a hard time stringing a sentence together” and says that his brother probably would have been a better candidate, yet he still gave Bush the benefit of the doubt over Gore, saying, “I knew Bush would be more conservative than Gore, and . . . not that Bush just blows me away, but I just thought he was the better choice at the time.” Here, we see the fact that Bush was a Republican gave Randy the assurance he needed that he would be more conservative than Gore and that this was enough for him in spite of potential concerns about Bush’s intellect.

The Development of Randy’s Political Narrative

To begin to see how Randy has come to hold these beliefs, values, and emotional connections, we need to look back with him into the contexts and situations that he sees as important to his development. In discussing where his values came from he tells us:

I was born in the 60s, and this place especially [Pierce County], and a lot of the south too, was always Democrat. They just always were. . . and a lot of them were Conservative Democrats. . . I was raised in one of these conservative Democrat households. My grandfathers and grandmothers on both sides were. Everybody was. And you know it was just understood that everybody was very patriotic, they’re very much in support of the military, and they like low taxes and they believed in a lot of the Judeo Christian values that our forefathers brought with them and started the country.

Here, we see that he grew up in a Democratic household, like Deborah. Within this context, he did learn how people married their values and their politics, but unlike Deborah, he did not make the same associations. To him, it was not the Democratic Party’s value of working to help the poor that became central, but the conservative values

of patriotism and having a smaller government that stood out from the rest. No doubt his family's patriotism and his Dad's military service helped instill in him the sense of duty that led him into military service himself.

But Randy may well have still become a conservative Democrat had he not perceived a shift in the Democratic Party: "On a national level now, not on a local level, but on a national level, the Democratic is more secular, not as supportive of the military. . . . It seems to want to raise taxes more and have the government involved in more, and that just flies in the face of some conservative values." From this perspective, he did not move away from his family's conservative roots; the Party they identified with moved away from them. He goes on to explain why he thinks his family continued to be Democratic: "I think mine [my values] didn't change. I think their's did, to fit the party. And I've tried; I've had this argument with them many times. I think they still have these values. But, on a national level, I think the party left them." So here he is saying that the Republican Party is really where someone with values like theirs would go now, if they did not already have such an emotional attachment, or loyalty to their party. To provide an example of what he means, Randy tells us:

My neighbor, for instance, he's 85 years old. If you mention voting for a Republican, he'd cuss. Mother f***ing Republican, you know, but then you start talking to him about his views on certain issues or whatever, and they're all conservative, but they're just not going to give up on their Party. And you've got to admire them, I guess, for that. I mean that's loyalty.

Here we see that Randy believes that these conservative Democrats are voting against their values because of their attachment and loyalty to the Democratic Party. This loyalty to a party Randy both admires and doesn't seem to understand. He admires loyalty as a moral domain, as we have seen in his discussions about duty, honor, and getting things

right in Iraq, but is less certain of its place in politics. Why would you not vote for the party that best represents your views? This suggests that his move to the Right was not so much a move but a choice dictated to him by the ways in which the National Democratic Party realigned during the 1960s and 1970s, during the time of civil rights, Vietnam, the Great Society programs, and Roe v. Wade.

This family background undoubtedly plays a role in Randy's current political narrative, but we must also consider his more recent context. First, Randy tells us that his choice to go into the Military "makes me want to be more supportive of them." This support for the military, we've seen, is in some cases a central reason for his support of Republican candidates. The reason for this comes logically from his belief that "every time we had a Democratic Administration, here comes the axe for the military." We could also speculate that because the military was overwhelmingly Republican during the time that he was serving, that he came to incorporate these values into the family values that he brought into the military.

Regardless of how Randy came to begin to identify more with the Republican Party, we must also recognize that, if he considers himself "a news junkie," then his news sources will also provide a large influence over how his beliefs will develop over time. We know that currently he watches a lot of Fox News, although he will watch some CNN. In telling me that he watches mostly Fox News, he says that "this will probably tell you a lot about me," and laughs. This shows that he recognizes that Fox News is more conservative than the other networks. He continues to explain why he watches Fox News: "I just feel like the media just has a huge influence on what people think, and I think a left leaning view has been the dominating view for the past several years. I really

do. That's why I think Fox was created and why it has done so well because it gives a different view." Here we see that Randy agrees that one's news sources are important to how one will see the world, and he wants to ensure that he will get a conservative perspective. At the same time, Randy like Deborah, does not want to hear only consonant views, as shown by his statement, "That's not to say that I don't watch CNN some too, because I do and I watch MSNBC some too. I watch it all." In this statement, we see that he does value hearing all sides, at least to a certain extent. Yet Randy, like Deborah, prefers news when it is more consonant with his already established belief system.⁴⁰ You can feel this pull between what he wants to do and what he thinks he should do in the following passage:

I feel like. . . [on FOX] they'll usually have both sides up there, they don't have. . . they are starting to do it some now [on CNN], but you know you just get one side. You wouldn't get an opposing view, or you wouldn't get anybody challenged on a statement they made. I know they are center right, they just are, Fox is. But, I feel like they give a little more. . . opposing views. . . I know they lean more to the right, so do I (laughs). But I feel like I get the truth out of them more, and probably a little more somewhat on CNN. They've gotten better here lately of just give me the news, they don't have to put a spin on it, just give me the news how it is. CBS, NBC, ABC, and the newspapers predominately have a left tilt to them, and it just seems like the right side doesn't get out much so, I guess, that's why I gravitate to Fox, so that I will at least hear that side."

So, similar to Deborah, Randy recognizes the need to get multiple sources of the news and to get views from different ideological perspectives, but at the same time he is drawn to Fox News and conservative talk radio most of the time because they resonate more with his beliefs. The fact that Deborah and Randy both listen to consonant news sources

⁴⁰ "I listen to Phil Valentine some. I listen to Rush. I have for a long time. Let's see if I'm in the vehicle, if I can get it, I listen to Steve Gill some. So, I'm getting a pretty good diet here from the right (laughs). But I listen to the other side now, don't get me wrong. Of course, there is not much on the radio that's on the other side, I don't know, maybe if you went to NPR maybe. But I'd have to say predominately I get most of my news from Fox."

most of the time, then, will create a status quo bias. That is, their views will stay the same or become stronger more than they would if they engaged with and trusted less consonant news sources as much as more consonant ones.

Similarly, when asked with whom he talks politics, he mainly lists others who have similar political views as well as similar backgrounds and educations.⁴¹ He does not bring up talking politics with people who disagree with him until I ask him if he does. And then, interestingly, he describes these conversations not as talk but as “arguments.” Like Deborah, he generally talks about these conversations in less positive and fun ways and more in terms of something he doesn’t mind doing. For instance, in describing possible political talk with others different from him at a party, he says, “I don’t mind having discussions with somebody on what my views are, if they are going to stay civil or whatever.” This suggests that, when Randy is talking politics with likeminded friends, it is more of a dialogue with lots of agreement and people sharing different beliefs about why the stance they all have is reasonable. This gives strength to each person’s individual stance, because it provides additional reassurance that they are in fact correct. When talking to the other, however, the conversation is typically an “argument” or perhaps more akin to a battle where both sides are firing shots at the other in an attempt to convince the other that he is right. It is little wonder, then, that people prefer

⁴¹ “My wife and I do quite a bit. . . Um, yeah, let’s see (I know you do with your mother.) Well, most of those are arguments. But that, we usually [are] pretty civil. Yeah some of my friends I do, some of my male friends (laughs) and most of the time they’re professionals I would say. One is a lawyer, one’s a Dentist, another guy owns his own business, a couple of guys that own their own businesses. (Do they have similar views to you?) Yeah, kind of the same background, the same education level, um, yeah. (So do you think that’s part of the reason why you talk to them, is because you have the same views. Like you don’t want to talk to people with different views because you don’t want to start an argument?) Um, well, sometimes, now some of their wives have, you know if we are at parties or something we’ll discuss things. But um, no I don’t mind having discussions with somebody on what my views are and if they are going to stay civil or whatever, a lot of times, especially if you’ve just met it’s not the greatest thing to bring up, but it happens . . . Mostly at parties I try to stay out of it, because you know, people have strong feelings. . .

conversation with like minded folks, where there is more of a give and take approach to discussion, more camaraderie, and less divisiveness.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

How do Haidt's and Lakoff's Theoretical Models hold up to Deborah's and Randy's Political Narratives?

First, I consider how these two narratives are consistent with Haidt's (2007) hypothesis that the major difference between liberals and conservatives is the centrality given the various moral domains. We do find that Deborah stresses the importance of the care and fairness domains in her central issues more so than the three domains of community, authority, and purity. This is consistent with Haidt's hypothesis. For instance, when talking about the central issue of whom government should work to help, she says her party is always concerned about "the people" meaning it is concerned with treating the less fortunate fairly. These two moral domains form the crux of her moral argument. Even in her discussion about Jesus not oppressing the poor, where she brings in both Biblical authority and virtue ethics, these domains are used as further evidence that we must be just and caring.

In contrast, when Randy tells the story behind his stance on the central issues of the war and economic policy, four of the five moral domains are independently cited. For instance, when he discusses the war in Iraq he cites patriotism, loyalty to country, and honor ("you break something, you own it") as important reasons for being against a withdrawal. Here, loyalty and honor reference the loyalty and purity domains in a way that is independent of the justice and harm/care domains. This does not mean that he does not incorporate the care and justice/fairness domains into his stance on the war. For

instance, he does cite caring for those Iraqis who have been on our side as one reason not to leave (i.e. avoiding another killing field).

Similarly, with economic policy, he uses justice-related arguments and honor-related arguments. He favors tax cuts, in part, because taxes that are higher than they must be are seen as an unfair burden to those who have to pay them. His belief that cutting taxes would/did lead to economic growth that increased government revenues proves that taxes are/were too high and, therefore, unjustly high. They are also fair because the economic growth that they led to produced benefits for the poor and middle classes. If the tax cuts, in contrast, had been perceived as only benefiting the wealthy at the cost of the poor and middle class, then they would have been more likely to have been seen as unfair. But another part of his views on economic policy is how much the government should do relative to the free market. When discussing government programs, he makes it clear that he believes in the importance of a rugged individualist ethic and is against government programs that take away people's sense of independence and responsibility. This argument comes in part from the honor/purity domain, where dependence on government is seen as impure or sinful. Further, government is seen as complicit in this impurity, because it is allowing the dependency to continue. Similarly, he equates government spending beyond its means with sin when he states, "They've spent like drunken sailors". Within this logic keeping government small is itself a moral priority, because largesse is equated with impurity.

To summarize, Deborah's political narrative emphasizes the moral domains of harm/care and justice while relegating the domains of loyalty, authority, and purity to secondary importance. Randy's political narrative, however, emphasizes the importance

of loyalty and purity as well as caring and justice. Further, Randy sees these domains as independent of each other in a way that Deborah does not. These findings are consistent with Haidt's (2007) model.

In contrast to Haidt's expectations, however, I found that each moral domain means something different to Deborah than it does to Randy. To Deborah, caring is largely understood in terms of being concerned for those who are having a hard time (e.g., the poor and middle class, a woman whose pregnancy is a health risk). In Randy's view caring is more of a concern for life over death (e.g., abortion, defense), and for not harming people who are working hard to raise a family (e.g., taxes). Similarly, fairness, to Randy, can include giving relief to the top 20% of tax payers when they are taxed at unjust levels. For Deborah, on the other hand, fairness is largely synonymous with equality, such as equal rights and equal access to health care and education. Similarly, while both Randy and Deborah see themselves as patriotic, Randy's loyalty seems to be equated with finding the best in whatever your country is doing at the moment and supporting that. For Deborah, on the other hand, love of country seems to be about working to make our country better and not being afraid to speak up when you think your country is not on the right track, such as when the US invaded Iraq, so that it can improve itself.⁴² Both refer to Biblical authority, but Randy sees Christianity as consonant with free market principles and protecting life, whereas Deborah sees Christianity as being inclusive, peacemaking, and against the oppression of the poor. Finally, for Deborah, purity is best understood in terms of virtue ethics, where the pure action is that most like

⁴² The fact that these interviews took place during a Republican administration could be the reason why these two showed these different understandings of loyalty at this time. For instance, if a Democrat had been in office, it is possible, even likely, that Randy would have been much more critical of his actions without viewing such ideas as unpatriotic.

what Jesus would have done or said to do (e.g., working for the betterment of the poor). For Randy, purity, at least in terms of his political narrative, is tied much more to honor and individual responsibility. Finally, for Deborah, the freedom domain is connected to the freedom for people to do things that she disagrees with, such as women's right to choose an abortion, protesters' right to burn the flag, and gay persons' right to do as they want in their personal life. For Randy, freedom seems to be more understood in institutional terms, such as having a democratic government and a free market form of capitalism. He is less apt to agree with the freedom to choose abortion, and while he does think gay people should be able to do what they want in private, he does not think that they should be allowed to push their agenda on people like him.

These findings are inconsistent with Haidt's view because he believes that the differences between liberals and conservatives is from the way they prioritize these different domains, not from different understandings of how these domains relate to policy. In other words, Haidt's model implicitly assumes that, if you took a conservative and lessened the importance he placed on loyalty, authority, and purity, then you would have a liberal. In Randy's case, this is untrue, because even when he considers the domains of harm/care and justice he sees them as justifying conservative positions not liberal ones. Similarly, increasing the importance that Deborah places on loyalty, authority, and purity would not make her a conservative, because she sees these domains as consistent with her liberalism.

The finding that liberals and conservatives think about moral domains differently, even when drawing on the same domains, suggests that there are at least two different ways of thinking about morality, or two different systems of morality as Lakoff (2002)

argues. But are they consistent with the strict father and nurturant parent moral systems that Lakoff hypothesizes? To answer this question I examine Randy and Deborah's narratives relative to the strict father and nurturant parent moral systems.

Randy's narrative does prioritize values in a way that is consonant with the strict father worldview's moral priorities. For instance, Randy tells us that, although America may not have always done the right thing in every situation, she has always attempted to correct her mistakes. This is a vision of an America that is morally upright or strong. This metaphor of morality as moral strength is of the highest priority in the strict father system (Lakoff, 2002). The strength metaphor also underlies Randy's understanding of honor as having the self-discipline to accept one's duties/responsibilities. As such, it plays a large role in his moral understanding of abortion and the war in Iraq.

The strict father worldview also plays a large role in Randy's understanding of economic policy, as we can see in this passage:

America. It's not perfect, but it's the best place in the world. . . I think a lot of that has to do with, with capitalism and the free market and, just a rugged individualism that brought people over here. And, there wasn't a government program or anything. They just came over here and hacked it out on their own. I'm not saying the government shouldn't be there to help people when they need it they should, but I think it's just the great society, I think it just had good intentions, but it's trapped a lot of people. I know people that are second and third generation welfare recipients.

Here, we see that Randy, as with the strict father worldview, believes that the competition of free markets breeds a self-reliance that makes people morally strong and creates a strong country. Similarly, he agrees that actions that lessen the competitiveness of the market (in this case, government programs) induce dependence or moral weakness and are, therefore, wrong. Here, Randy is not arguing against the morality of caring for the poor, but, rather, is arguing that pragmatically caring put into action in this manner is not

in the long term interest of the country or even the poor themselves. This logic requires an understanding of nurturance that accepts that sometimes the best thing to do for someone is not to help “since they will never become responsible and self-disciplined if they don’t have to face those consequences” (Lakoff, 2002, p. 97). Thus Randy’s construal of nurturance is consistent with Lakoff’s understanding of the nurturance metaphor within the strict father worldview.

Randy’s view of abortion is consistent with the strict father worldview in some respects but is more consistent with the nurturant parent model in other respects. He is against having an abortion just because “I want one” because this goes against the need for you to accept responsibility for those who are dependent on you. This is a strict father view, based on the metaphor of moral strength. He is also against partial birth abortions, because he does not believe they are necessary and because he perceives them to be barbaric and not medically necessary. Here, we see Randy’s opposition is based on the empathy he has for a baby who is treated barbarically when it is not absolutely necessary. In other circumstances (which he doesn’t specifically mention), he accepts the premise that an abortion is a necessity. In these instances, his pro-choice view is also based on empathy, that is, empathy for the parents who are emotionally wrecked by having to have the procedure. As such, Randy’s moderate view on abortion is based on a bi-conceptual understanding of the issue. That is, he considers the issue through the lens of both the nurturant parent and strict father moral systems and believes that they both come into play on the abortion issue.

Overall, Randy’s narrative is largely based on the strict father worldview, although he does in some cases consider nurturant parent moral metaphors. This means

that overall the value statements Randy uses to justify his stances are consistent with the value priorities Lakoff attributes to the strict father system. In some respects, these value priorities are based on Randy's beliefs about how the world ought to be, and, in other respects they are based on how he believes the world is. Some of the value positions he has that are based on how we should act are that we should be loyal to our country, accept responsibility for the child created once a woman is pregnant, and be economically self-reliant. In these cases, Lakoff would describe Randy as an idealistic strict father. In other areas, such as his views in favor of promoting free markets, wanting less regulation, lower taxes, and less welfare programming, his strict father views appear to be largely based on his understanding of how the world is. On these issues, Lakoff would categorize Randy as a pragmatic strict father. Whereas Lakoff presents the idealistic type and pragmatic type as dichotomous, Randy shows that they can co-exist in the same person depending on the issue.

Now we turn to Deborah's political narrative to see whether or not her liberal narrative is consistent with the nurturant parent worldview. First, we know that the central moral obligation for her is to start with those on the bottom of the economic system. Here, being moral is equated with actively helping those who are the least able to do for themselves. This is analogous to the metaphor of morality as nurturance where "moral agents are nurturing parents [and] people needing help are children needing nurturance" (Lakoff, 2002, p. 117). Not only does Deborah agree that nurturance is more moral, but she also believes that nurturant actions lead to more economic growth than do

less nurturant actions.⁴³ So on this issue Deborah would base her nurturant parent worldview on both idealistic and pragmatic grounds.

In addition, her pro-choice views on abortion are based on a belief that women who do choose abortion are “in a really bad situation” and that we should be empathetic with their situation. That said, empathy for the woman having to make the choice and for the child also lead her to “hope that we would deal with this with the matter of birth control and more knowledge about not having unwanted pregnancies” and to “hope that it would not happen often, only in the case of a mother’s life or something extreme.” Unlike Randy, Deborah is not bi-conceptual regarding this issue, as she does not explicitly consider the responsibility the woman has to protect her unborn child. It is possible that this view is not stated because it is implicit in the belief that only someone in a real bad situation would assent to an abortion. In other words, if she had Randy’s belief that most women who get abortion get them just because they want them, then she might be more inclined to consider the metaphor of morality as moral strength.

Deborah’s discussion of a Christian nation as one where all people are treated equally and have healthcare and education relies on the metaphor of morality as fair distribution, which Lakoff argues is more important within the nurturant parent system.⁴⁴ Morality as fair distribution means is that, in order to have equality of opportunity, sometimes you have to provide everyone with access to goods of equal quality. For instance, if school systems are highly unequal, then those in bad schools are not getting

⁴³ Deborah: “In the long run, it’s better for the whole economic, it just, it benefits us economically to take care of the poor and to start at the bottom, rather than a trickle down economics starting at the top.”

⁴⁴ Deborah: “If it’s a Christian Nation, then it would be very benevolent. It would be very inclusive, that the nation would seek to help countries that are poor and destitute. We would be very careful about going to war, it would have to be just forced on us almost. There would be equal rights and men and women and all people would be treated equally no matter. . . We would have the healthcare, education would be available for all people.”

the same opportunity to succeed as those in good schools. Further, if some do not have health care, then they will not have the same opportunity as those with health care to overcome a period of sickness. This nurturant parent moral metaphor is in contrast to the strict father metaphor of morality as strength, which presupposes that if people work hard and have upright behavior, they will succeed regardless of “social forces or social class” (Lakoff, 2002, p. 75).

Overall, Deborah’s value priorities appear largely consistent with the moral priorities Lakoff attributes to the nurturant parent worldview. Deborah’s nurturant parent worldview, like Randy’s, seems to have both idealistic and pragmatic dimensions. To conclude, Randy and Deborah seem to have very different lenses for seeing the world, both in terms of ought and is. Randy seems to believe that the strict father moral system is the better guide for how people behave in the world, whereas Deborah seems to believe that the nurturant parent system is a more accurate guide for how and why people act. In addition to differences about how the world is, Randy and Deborah also seem to prioritize moral values differently in ways that are consistent with Lakoff’s two worldviews hypothesis. While I cannot offer proof of Lakoff’s model through looking at just two narratives in detail, we can say that Lakoff’s theory seems consistent with these two narratives.

Summary

The present study used grounded theory methods to create a theoretical model for understanding the formation and development of political narratives. The analysis of six interviews with eight participants made clear that at least three super-ordinate categories

must be considered in analyzing political narratives. The categories were beliefs about how the world is (beliefs), beliefs about how the world ought to be (values), and politically relevant emotional sentiments. The study found that all three categories influenced every participant's narrative in important respects. Emotional sentiments were associated with the amount of trust participants gave to news sources and different candidates. In addition, emotional sentiments appear to have led some participants to assimilate new information in a biased manner which predisposed them towards maintaining the same or similar stance over time. Values and beliefs were the foundational principles or rationales behind the stances people took with reference to issues, parties, and candidates. Relatively unambiguous beliefs were the most easily falsifiable by future information and, as such, appear to be responsible for many of the changes that people make to their political narratives over time. Value priorities, though ambiguous, were also amenable to change given an openness to change on the part of the participant and an interlocutor who stated what the participant believed to be good reasons for a different set of moral priorities. This theoretical model suggests that the change mechanism for ambiguous beliefs is more similar to that described for values than that described for unambiguous beliefs.

The theoretical model created from this study was more broad than either Lakoff's (2002) or Haidt's (2007) theories of moral judgment and, as such, it could be accurate (or inaccurate) regardless of the truth value of either theory. The investigation of participant's value priorities, however, did allow for an empirical test of each of these theories, even if the test was based on a small sample of individuals. With regards to Haidt's (2007) theory, the data I collected did find that conservatives prioritize loyalty to

community, authority, and purity to a higher degree than liberals. Conservatives and liberals, however, also understood and applied these domains in different ways. As such, it was not found to be the case that if a conservative simply de-emphasized the moral domains of loyalty, authority, and purity his moral system would come to resemble a liberals, or vice versa. This suggests that differences in the relative centrality of moral domains between liberals and conservatives, while present, may not be the cause of the difference between conservatives and liberals, but rather be caused by something even more fundamental, like qualitatively distinct moral systems. This leads us to an examination of Lakoff's (2002) argument that liberals think about issues using a nurturant parent moral system, while conservatives draw on a strict father moral system. The moral priorities that Lakoff attributes to the two systems were, for the most part, consistent with the value priorities of Randy and Deborah, the most consistent conservative and liberal in my sample. There were instances in which Randy espoused moral priorities consistent with the nurturant parent worldview, however, such as with abortion. The fact that Randy can sometimes borrow from the nurturant parent moral system does not falsify Lakoff's theory, because he allows for bi-conceptuality. That is, "both [worldviews] can exist side by side, each neutrally inhibiting the other and structuring different areas of experience" (Lakoff, 2006, p. 15). The notion of bi-conceptuality, however, could potentially make Lakoff's theory unfalsifiable. That is, once we allow for bi-conceptuality, it is unclear what set of value priorities a liberal or conservative could show that would disprove the theory. If Lakoff's model is in fact unfalsifiable, then it does not mean that it is necessarily false, but does mean that it is not

empirically testable and therefore we will have to accept or reject the model more on faith than verification (as with all ambiguous beliefs).

Consequences

The theoretical model put forth in this study suggests that we can understand a person's political attitudes in terms of a unified political narrative. This unified narrative consists of beliefs, values, and emotional sentiments but is more than just a random collection of these elements. These elements are interconnected and, only as they are understood in relationship to one another, can one truly understand the coherency of an individual's narrative. This method of understanding political attitudes and decisions brings together the separate literatures that consider the impact of political attitudes on voting, (Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, Norpoth, & Weisberg, 2008) and those that consider the importance of value priorities on voting (Haidt, 2007; Lakoff, 2002). I have attempted to begin this process by explicating the numerous ways in which beliefs and values are interrelated and how stances on issues come from the ways in which participants combine these, along with their emotional sentiments.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The theoretical model I have developed consists of two different sections. The first is designed to understand a static political narrative. This model was derived from six interviews with eight participants. Although there was a lot of variation along political and theological ideologies, there were only two women and one minority person represented in the sample. If there are systematic differences between minority and

female narratives, compared to male narratives, then my findings will not be generalizable to these groups. Further, all participants were from a rural Tennessee community, suggesting that findings may not generalize to urban areas or other regions of the country. Perhaps even more importantly, all of the participants were relatively politically sophisticated. This could be a major limitation to generalizability, because there are reasons to suspect that politically unsophisticated people think about politics in systematically different ways than do political sophisticates (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006; Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, Norpoth, & Weisberg, 2008; Taber & Lodge, 2006). For instance, less sophisticated voters may be less prone to selection and assimilation biases (Taber & Lodge, 2006). Unfortunately, politically unsophisticated members of the churches were less responsive to my inquiry, likely because they were less interested in politics generally. More generally, since my model is based on naturalistic inquiry assumptions about truth, the reader should be careful about transferring knowledge gained from the present study to settings and people that are not similar to those who participated here. Future research could attempt to determine how transferable the findings are to different groups by employing a similar research strategy with politically unsophisticated participants, women and people from minority groups (both religiously and ethnically).

The second section of this thesis attempted to generate a theoretical model of how a political narrative develops over time. A serious limitation to this attempt is the fact that this study was based on one-time interviews. I did attempt to address this by asking questions about how participants believe that their narrative might have developed over time. For example, I asked participant's to think back on how they had come to embrace the political views they had and to think about whether or not family, church, or

education might have had an influence. In addition, sometimes participants offered some insight into the development of their narratives when answering questions about issues, the people with whom they talk politics, and the news that they consult. For instance, Dale spoke about how he had come to realize that he needed to be tolerant of gay people when discussing gay marriage. Further, the interviews were obtained in the midst of a larger ethnographic study where I often had other discussions with the participants. These informal discussions, although not directly a part of this study, did provide me with other stories of political change that allowed me to see if I was on the right track. One event that comes to mind is Deborah's discussion with me in the summer of 2006 of how a friend convinced her that she needed to be more tolerant of people who did things that she personally found repulsive.

Regardless, the one time interview is a serious limitation to the validity of any attempt to examine the development of political narratives, because research has found that people are not very good at recalling all of the changes that have occurred to their political narrative over time (Goethals & Reckman, 1973; Markus, 1986). If future research is to address this concern, there would need to be a longitudinal study with multiple interviews of the same participants over an extended period of time. Further, researchers would need to not only catalog changes to the political narrative, but also document the cognitions that led to change. As such, researchers would have to devise a way of knowing when people changed their narrative from one interview to the next, and to ask them to consider what changes in beliefs and/or values were responsible for said change, and how they came to these different beliefs and/or values. This would require researchers to know not only participant's past stances, but also the beliefs and values on

which they based their stances. Research of this kind would help advance the current model because many more instances of political change would be examined.

APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

General Probes:

1. Can you tell me about the politics of your town?
2. Who are some of the big names in town and what do they stand for? Were you directly influenced by some of them?
3. How about Christianity, how do you think it impacts politics in Pierce County?
4. Can you tell me what some of your political views are?
5. What are your reasons for holding these views?
6. What about your personal values? How do you think they impact your political views?
7. Thinking back, how do you think you came to embrace these political views?

[Probes: What about the role of family, leaders, and or the church?]

Specific Questions:

8. What are your thoughts about the ‘hot button’ issues of *abortion* and *gay marriage*?

[How do your values come into play here?]

9. What about immigration or illegal immigration?

10. What do you think of the *current economic situation* of the country?

[What about Pierce County?]

[What do you think politicians can do to make our economic situation better?]

11. Broadly speaking, do you think our country has a responsibility to help those who are *living in poverty*, or should that responsibility be left to churches and other private charities?

[How does your sense of values come into play here?]

[If yes to think have responsibility: What about the welfare system as it is now, do you think overall it works well, or not? What do you think could be done to it to make it a good system?]

[What about providing *health care*?]

[What about providing *social security* income for the elderly?]

12. Are you concerned that our *budget deficits* will endanger our ability to provide social security and health care for the elderly and children?

[Would you be willing to see an increase in taxes to the Pre-Bush cuts if it meant lessening or eliminating the deficit?]

[How do your values come into your views here?]

13. What are your current feelings about the *war in Iraq*?

[How have these views changed since the war began?]

[What role do your values play in your thinking about the war?]

14. What about our *environment*? Are you worried about *global warming*?

What do you think our government could do about this issue?

[How do values come into play here?]

15. What about the *Supreme Court*, what kinds of *justices* would you like to see appointed (more conservative or more liberal)?

16. Do you go to a *church* here locally? [Can you tell me a bit about it?]

17. Would you say most of the people at your church *hold the same political views* you do? [(If No) How might they see things differently?]

18. Do people *ever talk about political issues* at church related activities?

19. I'm trying to attend a lot of different churches here in the county. Can you tell me what you think some of the major differences are between some of the churches here?

20. What do you think of when I say "*Christian nation*"? What does this phrase mean to you? How about the term "*Separation of Church and State*"? [Do you think there is too much or too little separation between church and state right now?]

21. What comes to your mind when I say *Democrats*? How about *Republicans*?
What do you think the *biggest differences* are between these two parties?
22. Thinking back to last years Senate race, what did you think of *Harold Ford*?
How about *Bob Corker*? Was it hard for you to decide who to vote for? [Why
(not)]
23. How about the last Presidential election? [What did you think of *Bush and Kerry*?
Can you talk about how you decided who you would vote for?]
24. And finally, can you think back all the way to 2000, what were your thoughts of
Bush v. Gore?
25. What about Pierce County in general, how does it usually vote? Why do you
think this is? [If talk about Democratic tendencies then ask why think county went
for Bush in 2004]
26. As you know we have a woman and a black man as front runners for the
Democratic nomination. Do you think the *sex (gender)* of a candidate is
important?

[Do you think the *race (ethnicity)* of a candidate is important?]

[What is your sense to how folks here would react to a woman or a black
candidate come election time?]
27. Do you think there are some issues that people from Pierce County basically
agree on? Are there some that the county is more divided about?
28. Most people now-a-days get there news from the TV. *What station* would you
say you watch the most to learn about what's going on in the world today? Do
you watch other channels as well?
29. Are there other ways you stay up with what's going on? [Do you listen to the
radio, read the papers, go online, talk to other people?]
30. Are there some people that you talk about politics with? Would you say these
folks typically lean Republican, Democratic, or do they fall right in the middle?
31. How about books? Have you read any books which had to do with politics or
religion?

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