

HIGH STANDARDS?

THE INFLUENCE OF CANDIDATE HEIGHT ON VOTE CHOICE

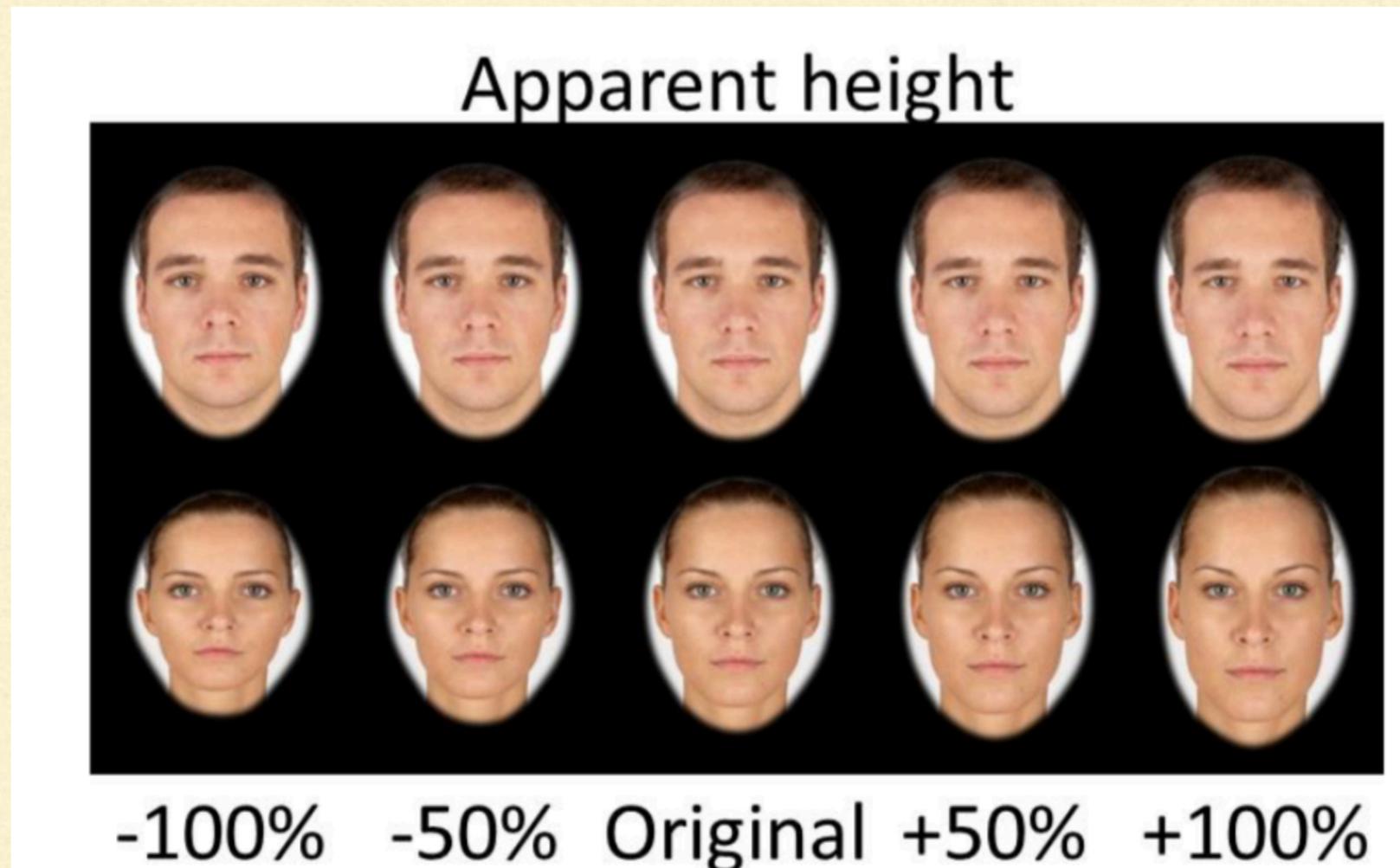
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Presentation to TAMU Gender, Politics, and Quantative Methods Mini-Conference

MOTIVATION

- Literature using observational data finds that leaders and managers are taller than population average (e.g., Stulp et al. 2012, Case and Paxson 2008a)
 - Methodological difficulty: lots of things could correlate with height *and* leadership positions, e.g., having high SES parents (cf. Boix and Rosenbluth 2014, Tyrell et al. 2016, Subramanian et al. 2011)
 - Subsequent work using lab and survey experiments seems to confirm “taste” for taller leaders (Re et al. 2013, Blaker et al. 2013, Murray and Schmitz 2011)
 - They conclude this “taste” results from evolutionary preference for physically formidable leadership
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PROBLEMS #1 AND #2



PROBLEM #3

“We suggest that there is a preference for formidable leaders that reflects an evolved psychological mechanism that is independent of any cultural inducement.”

(Murray and Schmitz 2011, 1216-7)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the best possible way to measure a “taste” like this?
2. Is the evidence consistent with the claims of evolutionary psychology—

“more physically formidable” == votes?

IN BRIEF

- Design can be improved; new measurement strategy has implications for how we study implicit bias
 - Taller is better, but evidence of large heterogeneity of effects by race and gender of candidate and amongst respondents is inconsistent with “evolutionary” prediction
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MEASUREMENT

GOALS

- Measure preference for height while:
 - Decreasing artificiality of prior experiments
 - Avoiding inferential challenges in using observational data
 - Minimising demand effects and social desirability bias using logic behind conjoint experiments
 - Employing numerous realisations of treatment variable to assess whether preference is universal, i.e., evolved behaviour
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REDUCING ARTIFICIALITY

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FOR GOOD MEASURE



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THE RIGHT (WO)MAN FOR THE JOB



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UNEXCITING STUFF

- 80 unique photos, $C(20,2) \times 4$ unique combinations
 - Stitch together photos using HTML in Qualtrics
 - Build randomisation in Javascript
 - Two surveys:
 - Study 1: MTurk convenience sample, 1247 respondents
 - Study 2: SSI registered voter sample, 2620 respondents
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THE FINAL PRODUCT

Imagine the people on the right and the left were running for state legislative office in your district in the [your] Party primary. Which person are you more likely to vote for?



Most likely to
vote for the
candidate on
the left

Most likely to
vote for the
candidate on
the right



FINDINGS

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 - SSI: ATE = 0.10 (t -statistic = 2.23, two-tailed $p = .025$)
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CUI BONO?

- Unexpected:
 - Women benefit much more from being tall than men ($B = 0.30$ in both studies)
 - Men only benefit when they are taller than other men; coefficients are negative when they are taller than women
 - Asians also benefit much more than other groups ($B_{SSI} = 0.20$, $B_{MTurk} = 0.75$)
 - Measurement artefact!
 - Which groups are shortest on average in US? Women and Asians (Case and Paxson 2008b)
 - Standardised treatment height increment = a larger deviation from expected mean
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HETEROGENEITY AMONGST RESPONDENTS

- Men preferred tall candidates much more strongly than women ($B_{SSI} = 0.27$, $B_{MTurk} = 0.29$)
 - Possibly consistent with “nature” explanation
 - Not consistent with nature explanation—but quite consistent with literatures on discrimination and stereotyping!
 - Tall POC candidates fare well with Democrats, poorly with Independents and Republicans ($B_{SSI} = -0.26$, $B_{MTurk} = -0.43$)
 - Effect mostly driven by Republican penalty for Blacks ($B_{SSI} = -0.55$, $B_{MTurk} = -0.74$)
 - Republican penalties biggest when POC are taller than Whites ($B_{SSI} = -0.70$, $B_{MTurk} = -1.36$)
 - Women taller than men fare well with Democrats and poorly with Republicans ($B_{SSI} = -1.12$, $B_{MTurk} = -1.34$)
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TAKEAWAYS

IMPLICATIONS

- Heterogeneity is a theoretical problem, not just an empirical one
 - When it comes to political behaviour and identity, an ATE is probably insufficient
 - Methodological norms that encourage people to focus on the significance of the estimate (and accordingly seek to minimise the variance) are doing our field a disservice
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GOING FORWARD

- To measure identity-related behaviors:
 - Visual conjoint may offer new ways to study implicit bias: harder for respondents to figure out (and thus demand effects/SDB)
 - Insistence upon measuring variation, not just estimation
 - To assess heterogeneity:
 - Joint work with Ryan Copus and Ryan Hübert employing machine learning to estimate whether a given set of heterogeneous treatment effects are over the “threshold” needed for clear inference from ATE
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Thank you!

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