Personality and Elite Political Behavior: The Influence of Self Esteem on Judicial Decision Making

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JAMES L. GIBSON

Social scientists have long been concerned with the processes by which psychological forces shape political behavior. This interest reflects the persistent belief that the psychological properties of individuals structure not only the receipt and processing of external stimuli, but the behavioral responses emitted as well. Literally dozens of theories of political psychology have been generated to explain the internal operating mechanisms of the “black box.”

Yet this research has not been very successful at producing models of political behavior.1 A few fruitful efforts at quasi-clinical analyses have been produced but research developing and testing empirically based models of the psychological determinants of political behavior is relatively scarce. One area of inquiry showing some promise, however, is that which focuses on the consequences of

* I am thankful for financial support for this research from the Graduate Research Committee, The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Several people made quite useful comments on earlier versions of this article, including Don Brown, Beverly Cook, Lenore Haggard, Steve Washy, and Meredith Watts. The editorial staff of The Journal of Politics also made many helpful suggestions.

perceptions of "self." Theories of self esteem have gained wide currency and successful applications to political phenomena are becoming commonplace. The centrality of self conceptions in the psychological matrix suggests that if any theory of political psychology is to make a contribution to understanding political behavior it is likely that theories of self esteem will. This research tests a series of theoretically derived hypotheses about the impact of the personality attribute "self esteem" on decision making within political institutions. Using a role theoretic model of decision making, a somewhat indirect, but nevertheless powerful, effect of self esteem on decisional behavior is identified. The model is then tested by using data collected through interviews with a sample of California judges.

THEORIES OF SELF ESTEEM

"Self esteem . . . refers to a particular aspect of the attitudes individuals hold about themselves, embracing what they believe to be their desirable (and undesirable) qualities and whether they like (or dislike) themselves." 2 Self esteem is the individual's self evaluation. While different theorists define self esteem somewhat differently, there seems to be common agreement that sense of self worth is the core of the concept.

The first attempts to link self esteem with political behavior were motivated by a desire to understand the psychological bases of "political man." Viewing political office-seeking as a compensatory device for ameliorating perceptions of low self-worth, Lasswell postulates that "political animals" seek external confirmation of

2 Paul M. Sniderman, Personality and Democratic Politics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 44.

As Sniderman (42) observes, theories of self esteem stem from one of three conceptual bases: (1) "needs" approaches; (2) achievement/aspirations approaches; and (3) self-attitudes. The approach I have adopted is that of self esteem as self-attitudes. Like Sniderman, I believe that this framework is useful because it " . . . requires no commitment to a particular conception of personality or to more or less controversial psychological constructs: it suits a wide variety of personality theories because it avoids speculation about the basic elements, dynamisms, and structure of personality." Were the purpose of this research to explore the etiology of self esteem, such "speculations" would indeed be necessary, but, for the purpose of exploring the impact of self esteem on political behavior they are not.
their value from politics. However, Barber and Ziller, et al., have reported research indicating that the process is somewhat more complex than envisaged by Lasswell. The risks and discontinuities imposed by political life make necessary either a strong need for compensatory reinforcement (low self esteem) or a substantial reservoir of strength (high self esteem). Although the process is not completely understood, perceptions of self seem to structure the decision to pursue a political career.

A second, more directly relevant approach views self esteem as influencing behavior primarily through its impact on political socialization. Because one of the consequences of low self esteem is withdrawal (an unwillingness to risk an attempt at external confirmation of worth), such individuals are inadequately exposed to dominant socialization forces and consequently fail to conform to widely held values. This theory can explain non-support for democratic norms and most likely accounts for some variation in levels of political participation. To the extent that withdrawal/avoidance is a viable option, low self esteem is pretty clearly associated with non-conformity.

However, in instances in which withdrawal/avoidance is not possible, the impact of self esteem is quite the contrary. Instead of non-conformity, low self esteem tends to produce conformity, or acquiescence. As demonstrated in the research of Hovland, Janis, and Field (among others), self esteem is an important determinant of variation among individuals in acquiescence to persuasive communication. Individuals low in self esteem are more susceptible

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6 For example, see Guiseppe DiPalma and Herbert McClosky, "Personality and Conformity: The Learning of Political Attitudes," American Political Science Review, 64 (December 1970), 1054-1073; and Sniderman, Personality and Democratic Politics.
to persuasion (although a host of situational variables may modify the relationship) because the approval of others—which is the primary criterion for self evaluation—is perceived as contingent upon agreement. Rather than adopting a threatening and dissonance creating position, those low in self esteem acquiesce. Generally it seems that when retreat is blocked, self esteem determines the degree to which individuals are able to withstand pressures toward conformity.

Theories of self esteem that posit a tendency toward acquiescence may be quite useful for understanding institutional decision making. However, the decisional process cannot be modeled comprehensively without first conceptualizing institutions in role theoretic terms. Because role theory places strong emphasis on interpersonal communication and influence, it can serve as an effective means of linking theories of personality and theories of decision making.

**PERSONALITY, ROLE THEORY, AND DECISION MAKING**

The most salient characteristic of decision making within institutions is the necessity of contending with constraints on choices that limit, but do not eliminate, discretion in the interest of advancing organizational objectives.\(^9\) Few organizations exist which do not

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circumscribe in some fashion the alternatives available to their decision makers.

These organizational influences are best understood within the context of role theory. According to role theory, the way in which individuals accommodate themselves to institutional imperatives strongly influences the decisional process. Several role concepts must be defined. (1) The individuals who hold positions within an institution are referred to as role occupants or role incumbents. (2) Role occupants are subject to role expectations. These are beliefs about how a role occupant ought to behave: they are normative beliefs, supplementing the formal definition of the position. (3) Role expectations emanate from role alters. This is a very broad group of individuals, encompassing those within and external to the institution, who interact with the role occupant. (4) Role occupants must synthesize these expectations, accepting some, rejecting others, to form their own beliefs about proper behavior. These beliefs are known as role orientations. (5) Finally, the role relevant activity is known as role behavior.

These basic role concepts can be used to formulate a model of decisional behavior. According to the model, behavior is a function of the role orientation of the role occupant. These orientations are a product of role expectations. However, most role expectations are not directed toward the substantive content of decisions but rather concern the process, or procedures, through which decisions are made. For instance, constituents may not consider it improper for their representatives to make liberal decisions but they may very well consider it improper for the representative to employ a process that ignores constituency preferences in reaching decisions. A role orientation is a decision maker's belief about which of many possible decisional criteria are legitimate influences on decisions.

Many of the possible influences on decisions are consensually rejected as improper by role alters and role occupants (e.g., the social class of the litigants should not be a part of the decisional calculus in court cases). Consensus also exists on the legitimacy of certain criteria. There remains, however, a relatively large class of stimuli on which there is no consensus. Among these, decision makers have considerable discretion to accept or reject the criteria, and thereby to fashion their own somewhat idiosyncratic styles, or processes, of making decisions.

Constraints on this discretion do exist, however. Most organizations develop a set of norms, or informal role expectations, that sup-
plement the formal characteristics of the institutional positions. Role occupants need not slavishly adhere to these norms, but they must be accommodated in some manner. The self esteem of the role incumbent affects the degree of acquiescence and thus the effectiveness of socialization to organizational needs. More specifically, personality attributes influence the process of synthesizing role expectations to form role orientations. Individuals low in self esteem are more likely to acquiesce in the expectations of others, and it follows that role characteristics are more strongly dependent upon the role expectations of role alters for decision makers with low self esteem than for those with high self esteem. Low self esteem is expected therefore to be associated with more effective role socialization.


11 Levinson was one of the first to recognize the interaction of organizational forms and individual personality attributes: “. . . Role definition may be seen from one perspective as an aspect of personality. It represents the individual’s attempt to structure his social reality, to define his place within it, and to guide his search for meaning and gratification. Role definition is, in this sense, an ego achievement—a reflection of the person’s capacity to resolve conflicting demands, to utilize existing opportunities and create new ones, to find some balance between stability and change, conformity and autonomy, the ideal and the feasible, in a complex environment. . . . In summary, I have suggested that a primary distinction be made between structurally given role demands and the forms of role definition achieved by the individual members of an organization. Personal role definition then becomes a linking concept between personality and social structure. It can be seen as a reflection of those aspects of individual personality that are activated and sustained in a given structural-ecological environment. This view is opposed both to the “sociologizing” of individual behavior and to the “psychologizing” of organizational structure. At the same time, it is concerned with both the psychological properties of social structure and the structural properties of individual adaptation.” Daniel J. Levinson, “Role, Personality, and Social Structure in the Organizational Setting,” Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 58 (January-May, 1959), 170-180.

12 The research of Ziller, et al., “Self-Other Orientations,” closely parallels the theoretical framework adopted here. They see self esteem as influencing elite political
Data and Research Design

All of the analyses reported in this article are based upon data drawn from interviews conducted in 1977 with 48 California judges.

The Sample

This is not a random sample of the California bench. Instead, the judges were selected because they have held both legislative and judicial positions over the course of their careers. In most measurable respects, however, this group reflects the diversity of the California bench. Only one level of the judicial system is not included, and geographically, every corner of the state is represented (e.g., Crescent City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, El Centro, Visalia, Sacramento, and Susanville). Like most Californians, these judges are not natives, hailing from every section of the country; their class backgrounds are far from homogeneous; only Jews are unrepresented religiously; and the partisan balance is nearly equal. All are male and only three are non-white, but this too is not necessarily unrepresentative of the bench. Thus, while no claim of statistical generalizability of the findings of this research can legitimately be asserted, the sample at a minimum reflects the diversity of the population under study.13

behavior through its impact on "responsiveness" (defined as willingness to change opinions in the direction of greater agreement with significant others in the environment. (176). Self esteem, which is derived from the interaction of the individuals with their environment, structures the nature of political interactions. Thus, self esteem influences political behavior through its impact on acquiescence.

This hypothesis conflicts with the hypothesis supported by both DiPalma and McClosky, "Personality and Conformity," and Sniderman, Personality and Democratic Politics. They argue that individuals low in self esteem tend to withdraw, making it difficult to learn societal norms, and therefore are more likely to be non-conformists. In their work high self esteem is related to conformity. Their research, however, concerns conformity to social norms by members of the mass public. It is obviously possible that variance exists among these people in knowledge of and exposure to the norms. In the case of institutional elites this variance is unlikely. Thus, these findings should not necessarily be taken as in conflict with their work. Instead, they simply add another layer of complexity to the model: self esteem may have quite different effects on individuals depending upon the degree to which they are exposed to relevant norms and expectations.

13 These data are taken from a larger study of differences in decision making in legislative and judicial institutions (and hence the subjects are "judge-legislators"). For more detail on the research design see James L. Gibson, "Decision Making Across Institutions: Legislators and Lower Court Judges in California" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, April, 1978).
It might be argued that the exceptional occupational successes of these judges render them unrepresentative of their fellow judges. While it is not possible to demonstrate empirically that the sample is not biased, several factors suggest that it may not be too serious. First, self esteem is probably more strongly influenced by childhood rather than adulthood experiences. Second, the career patterns of these judges include a number of positions which are at the bottom of the institutional hierarchies (e.g., Municipal Court, city councils). Further, the respondents have experienced their share of set-backs; nearly one-half of those interviewed have suffered an electoral defeat at some time in their careers. Finally, there is no correlation between the scores on the self esteem indicator (see below) and the highest judicial office held by the individual (suggesting that greater success is not associated with higher self esteem). Thus, while there is little guarantee that these judges are representative, it is probably not the case that they are unusually high in self esteem when compared to other judges.\textsuperscript{14}

The Interviews

I conducted all of the interviews. They were approximately 75 minutes in length and cooperation and rapport with the judges were excellent. A variety of measures was included in the interview schedule, but the concepts of principal interest to this research are role characteristics and self esteem.

Operationalization of Self Esteem

The measure of self esteem used in this research is a modified version of the Eagly revision of the Janis-Field “Feelings of Inadequacy Scale.”\textsuperscript{15} This scale has several advantages: it is relatively easy to administer; it requires only that the respondent use a Likert-like response set; it is reasonably short; the scale has been widely used and extensive efforts to assess reliability and validity have been

\textsuperscript{14} Obviously there is less variation among judges in levels of self esteem than among members of the mass public. Indeed, on virtually any conceivable attribute there is probably less variance among elites than masses. Whether judges have higher self esteem than lawyers, the appropriate comparison group, is certainly not obvious and can only be ascertained through empirical analysis.

made; and, finally, the scale is easily adaptable to the interview situation. In order to minimize the impact of social desirability on the responses, the judges were given the self esteem questions as a separate paper and pencil questionnaire. Thus, the respondents were not required to verbalize their responses.16

Self esteem is usually not considered to be an unidimensional concept. Sniderman, for instance, argues that the individual’s self perceptions are in part a function of absolutist (internal) standards and in part a function of relativistic (external or contextual) standards.17 One might consider oneself a very worthy person in absolutist terms, but if surrounded by extraordinary colleagues, relativistic self evaluations might be somewhat lower. It seems that there are at least two dimensions of self esteem, “sense of personal unworthiness” and “sense of status inferiority.” Strong feelings of unworthiness and inferiority contribute to acquiescence. A third dimension of self esteem—“interpersonal competence”—is usually assumed although there is little reason to believe that lack of interpersonal competence leads to acquiescence, especially in an institutional setting. Thus, the measure of self esteem must take into account both the absolutist and relativistic methods of assessing self worth.

Ten items in the Eagly self esteem scale were judged to tap either personal unworthiness or status inferiority. The responses to these items were factor analyzed, with the results shown in Table 1. Only the last item is poorly related to the factor; seven of the ten items are strong contributors to the scale. Factor scores from this factor are therefore used as the indicator of self esteem.18

Operationalization of Role Expectations

Perceptions of role expectations were measured by asking the judges to rate nine role alters in terms of their importance in defin-

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16 It is unlikely that any other format would have been successful. Most of the respondents were extremely uncomfortable with the questions. That they were uncomfortable suggests that their responses may have been quite honest; that they nevertheless completed the questionnaire suggests a relatively high level of rapport in the interviews.

17 Sniderman, Personality and Democratic Politics.

18 I have given a great deal of attention to constructing the measure of self esteem, having analyzed the 20 items in a wide variety of ways. Additional detail on the analysis is available from the author.


**TABLE 1**

**Measure of Self Esteem**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item*</th>
<th>Unrotated Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often do you feel that you are a successful person?</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you ever think that you are a worthless individual?</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How confident do you feel that some day the people you know will look up to you and respect you?</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, how confident do you feel about your abilities?</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How confident are you that your success in your future job or career is assured?</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you feel inferior to most of the people you know?</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you have the feeling that there is nothing you can do well?</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you feel that you dislike yourself?</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you ever feel so discouraged with yourself that you wonder whether anything is worthwhile?</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you have the feeling that you can do everything well?</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Eigenvalue | 4.08 |
| Percentage of Variance Explained | 40.8 |

* The responses to the items were recorded using five point Likert-like response sets.

Aiming "proper" behavior for judges. Two indices were created (through factor analysis) from the responses. The first indicates the degree of importance ascribed to the expectations of external role alters (the media, the public, political party leaders, and attorneys), while the second indicates the importance of the expectations of internal role alters (trial judges, legal organizations, appellate judges,
and attorneys). There is some tendency toward rating external and internal expectations similarly \((r = .35)\).^{19}

**Operationalization of Role Characteristics**

The first role characteristic of importance to this research is the role orientations of the judges. These orientations specify for the judges the criteria that are legitimately part of the decisional calculus. Two very common criteria of much concern to both judges and judicial scholars are "precedent" and attitudes or personal values.\(^{20}\) Consensus does not exist among judges on the relative weights to be ascribed to these criteria. Although American judges, especially lower court judges, are subject to the expectation that they "follow" precedents in making decisions, they are just as obviously expected, by others and by themselves, to "do justice." Justice and precedents are not infrequently in conflict so that judges may be caught in the bind of conflicting mandates. Thus, a very important dimension of role orientations is the legitimacy of allowing criteria having no strictly legal base to influence decisions.\(^{21}\)

The measure of role orientations used here is a standardized factor score resulting from factor analyzing six Likert items. These items all measure the judge's conception of proper judicial decision making, and specifically concern the legitimacy of relying on their own attitudes and values, in contrast to precedents, statutes, etc., in decision making.\(^{22}\)

The above scale is a generalized measure of judges' role orientations. It is also useful to know their evaluations of specific decisional stimuli. Toward this end the judges were also asked to rate 19 stimuli on the degree of legitimate influence they should have on decisions.

Finally, the most important role characteristic is obviously role behavior. Like most research in political science (e.g., voting

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\(^{19}\) Additional information on the factor analysis is available from the author.


\(^{21}\) On the utility of this conceptualization for understanding judges' role behavior see James L. Gibson, "Judges' Role Orientations, Attitudes, and Decisions: An Interactive Model," *American Political Science Review*, 72 (September, 1978), 911-924.

\(^{22}\) Additional information on the construction of this measure can be found in James L. Gibson, "The Role Concept in Judicial Research," *Law and Policy Quarterly*, forthcoming.
“behavior” research) this analysis relies on self-reports of behavior. The judges were asked to indicate how often they “overturn or significantly modify” precedents in making decisions. This question produces a measure, albeit a weak one, of the judges’ on-the-bench role behavior.

*Analytic Model*

It remains only to specify the nature of the expected relationships among these concepts. Typically, correlation and regression would be used to assess the impact of personality on role characteristics. Such measures of association indicate direct covariation. They measure the degree to which changes (i.e., differences) in self esteem bring about changes (differences) in behavior. It is unlikely, however, that the full effect of personality characteristics is reflected in this kind of relationship. As McGuire has argued,

It is highly likely that personality factors will interact with various other classes [of factors] . . . in affecting influenceability. Hence, although we should seek the most general relationships in mapping the domain of personality-influenceability interrelations, it is likely that these will tend to be interaction effects rather than condition-free main effects of single personality variables.\(^{23}\)

The theory outlined above suggests that the impact of self esteem will be conditional; it affects the process by which role orientations and behavior are determined. The role characteristics of judges low in self esteem are likely to be strongly influenced by role expectations, whereas judges high in self esteem are likely to be relatively less affected by the expectations. Thus self esteem determines which other variables are responsible for the role orientations and behavior. It is a conditional variable: the slope of the relationship between role expectations and role orientations is conditional upon the level of self esteem of the judge (an effect not captured in a correlation coefficient). Thus, the analysis below relies on interactive, or conditional, methods to assess the hypotheses.

*Analysis*

The first conditional hypothesis to be considered concerns the relationship between self esteem, role expectations, and role orienta-

\(^{23}\) McGuire, “Personality and Susceptibility to Social Influence.”
tions. It is expected that the impact of role expectations on orientations will depend upon the level of self esteem of the judge.

Table 2 reports the results of the analysis of the relationship.\textsuperscript{24} It is apparent that the direct, non-interactive impact of role expectations on role orientations is fairly small. There is some tendency for judges perceiving strong external expectations and weak internal ex-

### Table 2

**The Impact of Role Expectations and Self Esteem on Role Orientations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equation</th>
<th>$\hat{Y} = a + b_{Y1}X_1 + b_{Y2}X_2$</th>
<th>$\hat{Y} = a + b_{Y1}X_1 + b_{Y2}X_2 + b_{Y3}X_3 + b_{Y(13)}X_1X_3 + b_{Y(23)}X_2X_3$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| a          | -.580                                 | -1.343                                                                                  |
| $b_{Y1}$   | .319                                  | .396                                                                                    |
| $b_{Y1}$   | .317                                  | .394                                                                                    |
| $b_{Y2}$   | -.102                                 | .042                                                                                    |
| $b_{Y2}$   | -.102                                 | .042                                                                                    |
| $b_{Y3}$   | -                                      | 4.308                                                                                   |
| $B_{Y3}$   | -                                      | 1.852                                                                                   |
| $b_{Y(13)}$| -                                      | -.593                                                                                   |
| $B_{Y(13)}$| -                                      | -.599                                                                                   |
| $b_{Y(23)}$| -                                      | -.847                                                                                   |
| $B_{Y(23)}$| -                                      | -1.188                                                                                  |

**SYMBOLS:**  
$Y$ = role orientation (low = activist)  
$X_1$ = external role expectations (low = high influence)  
$X_2$ = internal role expectations (low = high influence)  
$X_3$ = self esteem (0 = high self esteem; greater than 0 = low esteem)

\textsuperscript{24} In keeping with the expectation of conditional relationships, the self esteem measure has been coded as zero for those judges high in self esteem ($N = 28$) and the actual value of the factor score for judges low in self esteem ($N = 14$). For an excellent explication of conditional relationships see Gerald W. Wright, Jr., “Linear Models for Evaluating Conditional Relationships,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 20 (May 1976), 349-373.
pectations to adopt a less restrained role orientation but the equa-
tion explains less than ten percent of the variance in role orienta-
tions.

The interactive equation, however, provides a much better ex-
planation of the variance. More importantly, the equation
demonstrates the strong interactive effect of self esteem. For judges
high in self esteem \( X_3 = 0 \) the interactive equation simplifies to

\[
\hat{Y} = -1.343 + .396X_1 + .042X_2
\]

The equation for the average high self esteem judge \( X_3 = +1.0 \) is

\[
\hat{Y} = (-1.343 + 4.308) + (.396 - .593)X_1 + (.042 - .847)X_2
\]

\[
= 2.965 - .197X_1 - .805X_2
\]

The difference in the two equations is substantial. For high esteem
judges, role orientations are minimally dependent upon role expecta-
tions \( (R^2 = .145; \bar{R}^2 = .070) \), while low esteem judges are
strongly influenced by role expectations \( (R^2 = .453; \bar{R}^2 = .332) \).\(^{25}\)
The regression coefficients also differ markedly. Stronger external
and internal role expectations tend, only slightly, to be associated
with relatively unrestrained role orientations for judges high in self
esteem. Precisely the opposite tendency is observed among low
esteem judges; as expectations, particularly those from internal role
alters, are accorded more weight there is a higher likelihood of
adopting a restrained role orientation. Thus, the hypothesis
receives substantial support: the impact of role expectations is
strongly contingent upon the self esteem of the judge.

While the data are not adequate to support fully this conclusion,
it seems that judges low in self esteem are more strongly influenced
by the traditional legalistic pattern of socialization to the legal pro-
fession. They do not have the ego strength to withstand the
pressures to conform nor to turn to disapproved sources of cues.
Their role characteristics therefore mirror the source of their
socialization. Higher self esteem judges apparently feel less con-
strained by the traditional socialization forces, making it more likely
that they examine the expectations of external role alters in develop-

\(^{25}\) Since the number of respondents in the two groups differs, the most appropriate
comparison is of adjusted \( R^2 \), rather than \( R^2 \).
ing a role orientation, but, at the same time, allowing no role alters a particularly strong influence. These judges seem independently to evaluate role expectations, rather than meekly succumb to them.

**Decisional Cues**

It is also hypothesized that self esteem has an impact on the specific *style* of decision making employed by the judge. That is, in addition to their general orientations toward decision making, judges differ in their evaluations of particular stimuli. The combination of weights given to the various possible decisional cues represents the style of decision making. These evaluations are also expected to stem from role expectations. Since previous research has shown that it is quite useful to distinguish between decisional styles and decisional outcomes, it is quite important to determine if self esteem and perceptions of role expectations affect the processing of decisional stimuli.

In order to examine the determinants of decisional styles, the judges were asked to rate a variety of stimuli in terms of the degree of influence they should have on their decisions. The specific stimuli are conceptualized as emanating from four sources: (1) legally relevant stimuli; (2) internal court norms; (3) the internal predispositions of the decision maker; and (4) preferences of external environmental actors. The results of the interactive analyses are shown in Table 3.

Self esteem alone has very little direct impact on perceptions of decisional stimuli (analysis not shown). However, the interactive analysis generates several interesting findings. First, in general, the interactive regression equations explain a moderate amount of the variance in the items, although the more consensual responses to the cues are less well predicted by role expectations. Second, the im-

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28 The correlation between the standard deviations of the cues and the R²s from the regression of the cue on the two indicators of role expectations is .16.
TABLE 3
SELF ESTEEM, ROLE EXPECTATIONS AND ORIENTATIONS TOWARD DECISIONAL CUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decisional Stimulus*</th>
<th>External Expectations</th>
<th>Internal Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hi</td>
<td>Lo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legally Relevant Stimuli:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior recordb</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>-.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defendant attitude</td>
<td>-.149</td>
<td>-.290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offense Seriousness</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td>-.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Legally Relevant</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>-.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge Predispositions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge Sense of Justice</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>-.390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Sentence—Judge</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>.463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge Values</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>-.446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Predisposition</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>-.185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Court Norms:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosecutor Recommendation</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense Recommendation</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentence Recommendation</td>
<td>.291</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Sentencing Policy</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Sentences—Colleagues</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defendant Plea</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Backlog</td>
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<td>-.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Norm</td>
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<td>.461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Environment:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact on society</td>
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<td>.450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Opinion—general</td>
<td>-.262</td>
<td>.584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Opinion—specific</td>
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<td>.632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Environment</td>
<td>-.218</td>
<td>.662</td>
</tr>
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</table>

* N = 38.

b The question reads as follows: Judges and legislators are influenced by a wide variety of factors in making their decisions, and different judges and legislators have different views of what factors can legitimately be taken into account in making decisions. I would like to ask you how influential several factors should be on the decisions of a good judge or legislator. First, let's consider a sentence decision in a typical criminal case. Using the categories on this card (HAND R CARD #1) please tell me how influential these factors should be in sentencing a defendant found guilty in a typical criminal case. Remember: please indicate how influential the factors should be in your opinion rather than how influential they may actually be.

Impact of the two types of expectations varies with the type of cue. The best predictor of legally relevant and predispositional cues is internal expectations, whereas the pattern for internal court norms is mixed. Both types of expectations affect evaluations of en-
vironmental cues. Most importantly, the betas for the expectations placed on the two groups of judges differ markedly, with the most significant differences appearing on predispositional and environmental cues. Only 10 of the 38 comparisons of betas (i.e., for the 19 cues) result in higher values for judges high in self esteem. In 20 of the comparisons, the signs for the coefficients for the two groups differ. Twenty-five of the betas are less than .3 in absolute value for judges high in self esteem, whereas only 15 betas are less than .3 for judges low in self esteem. Further, the average predictability of the responses to the cues from perceived role expectations is substantially higher for judges low in self esteem than for judges high in self esteem.\(^{29}\)

Among judges low in self esteem significant internal role expectations produce a perception of predispositional and environmental cues as illegitimate (i.e., beta is negative). While somewhat weaker in effect, these expectations tend to produce a perception of legitimacy among judges high in self esteem. External role expectations have little impact on judges high in self esteem but result in a rejection of predispositional cues and an acceptance of environmental cues among low esteem judges. This finding demonstrates just how strong acquiescence is among judges low in self esteem; these judges do not necessarily follow a highly legalistic style of decision making, a style which is incompatible with reliance on predispositions and environmental cues, but rather adopt a hybrid style that satisfies as many relevant role expectations as possible.\(^{30}\)

\(^{29}\) The central hypothesis of this research is that the role characteristics of judges high in self esteem are unrelated to role expectations. Thus, zero correlations for this group represent the strongest support for the hypothesis. However, non-zero relationships that are contrary to the expected sign are also taken as substantially supporting the hypothesis. For example, the beta between the responses to the cue "judge's values" and internal role expectations for these judges is .474, indicating that a perception of more important internal role alters is associated with ascribing greater legitimacy to values as a decisional criterion. Because internal role alters are assumed to hold traditional, legalistic expectations, the beta must stem from misperceptions of expectations, probably through the process of selective perception. If the relationships for this group were consistently strong (even in the "wrong" direction), the hypothesis could not be said to be supported. However, the few moderate relationships are generally taken as supportive of the hypothesis.

\(^{30}\) This finding is quite consistent with previous research on self esteem. For instance, Ziller, et al. assert, "Persons with low self-esteem, on the other hand, do not possess a well-developed conceptual buffer for evaluative stimuli. The individual with low self-esteem is field dependent; that is, he tends to passively conform to the influence of the prevailing field or context. . . . Since the individual's behavior is di-
Thus, the analysis indicates that self esteem has a significant impact on the selection of the cues that are used for making decisions. Low esteem judges derive their decision making styles from their perceptions of the expectations placed upon them, while high esteem judges do not.

**Role Behavior**

The last of the role characteristics of interest is the decisional behavior or behavioral activism of the role occupant. Unfortunately, objective data on decisional behavior are very difficult and costly to collect and are therefore not available to this research. A surrogate measure—the responses to an interview question on the frequency of overturning or significantly modifying existing precedents in making decisions—can be used, but with the obvious caveat that what judges (like any survey respondents) tell us about their behavior is not necessarily the same as their actual behavior. As above, it is hypothesized that among judges low in self esteem role expectations will be more strongly related to role behavior than among judges high in self esteem.

The data once more strongly support the hypothesis (see Table 4). Not only is much more of the variance in the behavioral activism of judges low in self esteem explained by role expectations, but the betas also differ substantially. Among low self esteem judges strong internal or external role expectations tend to produce a restraintist tendency in decision making.

**A Model of Role Characteristics and Self Esteem**

The analysis to this point has demonstrated a substantial conditional impact of self esteem on the role characteristics of the judges. One further analytic step is useful fully to understand the different process through which the role characteristics of the two types of judges are interrelated. Figure 1 reports the results of a path analysis, for high and low self esteem judges of a model linking the various role concepts. The analysis has been simplified by measuring role expectations as the difference between external and internal role expectations. The model postulates that role expectations pro-

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rectly linked to immediate environmental circumstances and is not mediated and integrated through the self concept, he is inclined toward inconsistency. . . .” (References omitted) Ziller, et al., “Self-Other Orientations and Political Behavior,” 177.
The path analysis reveals a strong influence of role expectations on the role characteristics of judges low in self esteem but a relatively weak influence on the role characteristics of judges high in self esteem. For low esteem judges, greater weight to external role expectations is associated with an activist role orientation and a more

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31 The path analysis is presented by splitting judges into two groups (high and low self esteem) because a path model including all of the interactive variables is too complex.
positive evaluation of environmental cues, both of which are associated with a greater tendency toward decisional activism. The model predicts the role characteristics of these judges reasonably well. Among judges high in self esteem the impact of role expectations is considerably lower and predictability is substantially reduced. Different levels of self esteem do indeed result in substantially different processes of adopting and implementing role attributes.

Summary

The analysis has demonstrated that the personality characteristic self esteem has a quite significant impact on the orientations and behaviors of judges. The influence is indirect, however; self esteem affects the process by which role expectations are translated into role orientations and role behavior. This analysis also reveals that internal role expectations are, by and large, associated with restraintist orientations toward decision making, whereas external role expecta-
tions are generally associated with activist orientations. However, it is not the case that judges low in self esteem are more likely to adopt a restraintist orientation. The explanation, of course, is that low esteem judges who view external role expectations as relatively important are less, not more, restraintist. In order fully to understand the process of socialization to role attributes, then, it is essential to consider not only the expectations placed on individuals but also the propensities of the individuals themselves. Thus the process observed is truly contextual in nature.

While these findings are reasonably strong, several caveats are in order. The extent to which the findings are generalizable is unknown. This research is also limited by the absence of data on the actual behaviors of these judges. It has long been recognized that what we say is not necessarily what we do; it is equally important to note that what we say we do is also not necessarily the same as what we do. Nevertheless, the results of the exploratory research are sufficiently strong to warrant further investigation of the relationship between personality and institutional role behavior.

Implications

Previous research has not been able to demonstrate that personality characteristics are strong predictors of political attitudes and behaviors, leading some to the conclusion that personality attributes are such distant antecedents that they are of little utility for understanding the political process. Within some contexts such a conclusion may be warranted. However, the integration of personality and role theories produces hypotheses of direct relevance to institutional decision making, and the empirical findings of this research provide at least some support for the hypotheses. Further, it is not difficult to suggest related areas of inquiry that might profit from the inclusion of personality variables. For instance, organizational approaches to the judicial system rely heavily on the concept of organizational goals or norms. Such a concept is quite easily translated into role terms by conceptualizing goals as consensually held role expectations. The problem of socialization to organizational goals then becomes quite similar to the specific problem addressed in this research. “Mavericks” or “outsiders” might be expected to have high self esteem. Because the judicial organization is rarely characterized by relationships of formal authority, some discretion exists in how to react to organizational norms. Whether
the discretion is exercised may depend upon the self esteem of the individual.

Self esteem may also structure interpersonal interactions in collegial decision making bodies. For instance, such bodies frequently have norms against dissent. It might be hypothesized that those with high self esteem are more likely to dissent than those with low self esteem. More generally, willingness to take innovative positions on legal issues may, because of the risk to the judge, require a high level of self esteem. Similarly, leadership styles are probably constrained by the personality characteristics of the members of the group. Power, influence, dominance, and acquiescence are all likely to be affected by the self esteem of the participants.

The ways in which individuals evaluate themselves seem to be so fundamental that a wide array of political and non-political behaviors may be affected. If sensitive to the fact that complex processes cannot always (or usually) be represented by simple statistical models, future personality research may yet make a significant contribution toward understanding political behavior.