

THE NEWS WE USE: A MIXED METHOD ANALYSIS OF CABLE NEWS MEDIA
POLARIZATION

by

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Abstract

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The 2012 election is done and the dust has settled, but one cannot overlook the fact that the ever-widening gap between our two main political parties' ideologies and platforms has made it substantially harder for independents and moderates to find their place in the field of politics. The cable news media are complicit in this polarization process by reducing coherent and productive discourse on the issues to ignorant shouting matches between "conservative" republicans and "liberal" democrats, leaving no room for informed discussion or compromise. The 2012 election coverage is a near perfect example of this process, as it was a time in which politically charged dialogue was at its peak, and both major political parties used the polarized atmosphere to mobilize their voter bases against the opposition. Special interest groups and media outlets were especially divisive, often leading in news commentators or companies overtly supporting one candidate, political party, or beliefs concerning an issue over the other, as was the case in Chick-fil-a's and Oreo's stance on Gay rights. This study attempts to explain the motives and effects of the cable news media polarization and how commentators go about building the narratives that become "the news."

The analysis is informed by the results of a pretest assessing the quantitative hypothesis that there are differences in the level or intensity of divisiveness in the

language used by commentators of news programs. It is guided by a range of sociological theories and concepts, including social referencing, social constructionism, narrative building, symbolic interactionism of political dialogue, moral panic, and social psychological heuristics. Methods include not only a quantitative analysis of cable news media representations, in order to discern statistically significant differences in the frequency of divisive language used by CNN, FOX, and MSNBC, but also a theoretical discussion based on a qualitative assessment of the construction of narratives and persuasion strategies.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

With the Tea party, Occupy Wall street, and numerous other social movements that vocalize public disillusionment, dissatisfaction, and anger at the current state of our government fresh in our minds, and the ever increasing tensions between those labeled “conservatives” and “liberals”, I am among many who have become intrigued by people’s opinions and ways of thinking about the news and the politics of media. It appears that, especially since the recession following the housing bubble, 24 hour “news” media representations appear more observably contentious and partisan, and trending toward the extreme. At the same time, we see a widening schism forming between the right and the left, with moderates ignored and forced to pick sides without the benefit of an ongoing coherent dialogue. The hyperbolic mass media have presented the average American with a false dichotomy. All too often political pundits and newsmen use rhetoric to draw a metaphorical line in the sand and portray opposing sides as literal antagonists. Along with the polarization of attitudes and beliefs, there has been a general increase in the vilification and resentment of those with whom one disagrees. Our news sources and politics have resorted to petty name calling and sweeping overgeneralizations of antagonistic groups. The terms “Liberal” and “Conservative” once had meanings that were not tainted with such stigmatized labels as “socialists” and “fascists.” Previous lofty thoughts of reason and logic have been replaced with straw-man arguments and zealous bigotry against out-group attitudes and behavior.

In addition to choosing how they will define themselves in terms of political standing, citizens must also decide which media sources to use in gathering information about the world around them, and this presents a dilemma: If all major cable media outlets are inherently slanted because of differing content and strategies of presentation,

then it is impossible for non-partisans to find a single outlet to follow. This is likely to alienate moderates from engagement in issues and rob society of a much needed voice of moderation and compromise.

But how does this process occur? In figure 1 below, I outline an overarching theory of what has occurred since 1996. This paper will discuss how the increased number of cable news stations influenced the demographics and viewership of ratings-based cable news media. This, paired with the social psychological heuristics of selection biases, gave way to a feedback loop of factors that ultimately resulted in active news media slanting on the part of the “Big 3” of cable news (Fox News Channel, MSNBC, and CNN). I will present a small pretest designed to validate the claim that there are varying levels of polarization between the channels, before moving on to a qualitative analysis of all 3 stations, which supports a typology of news media slanting tactics and persuasion strategies used by the stations being observed. This analysis of news media slanting, draws upon the concepts of polarization, groupthink symptomology and moral panic. Ultimately, with this understanding of what has occurred, I argue that there is a theoretical basis for explaining this polarization, and illustrate this by analyzing two social movements: the Tea Party, and Occupy Wall Street, as prime examples of extremist factioning of the otherwise mainstream Republican and Democratic Parties, respectively. For a visual aid of this process, refer to the theory map on the next page.

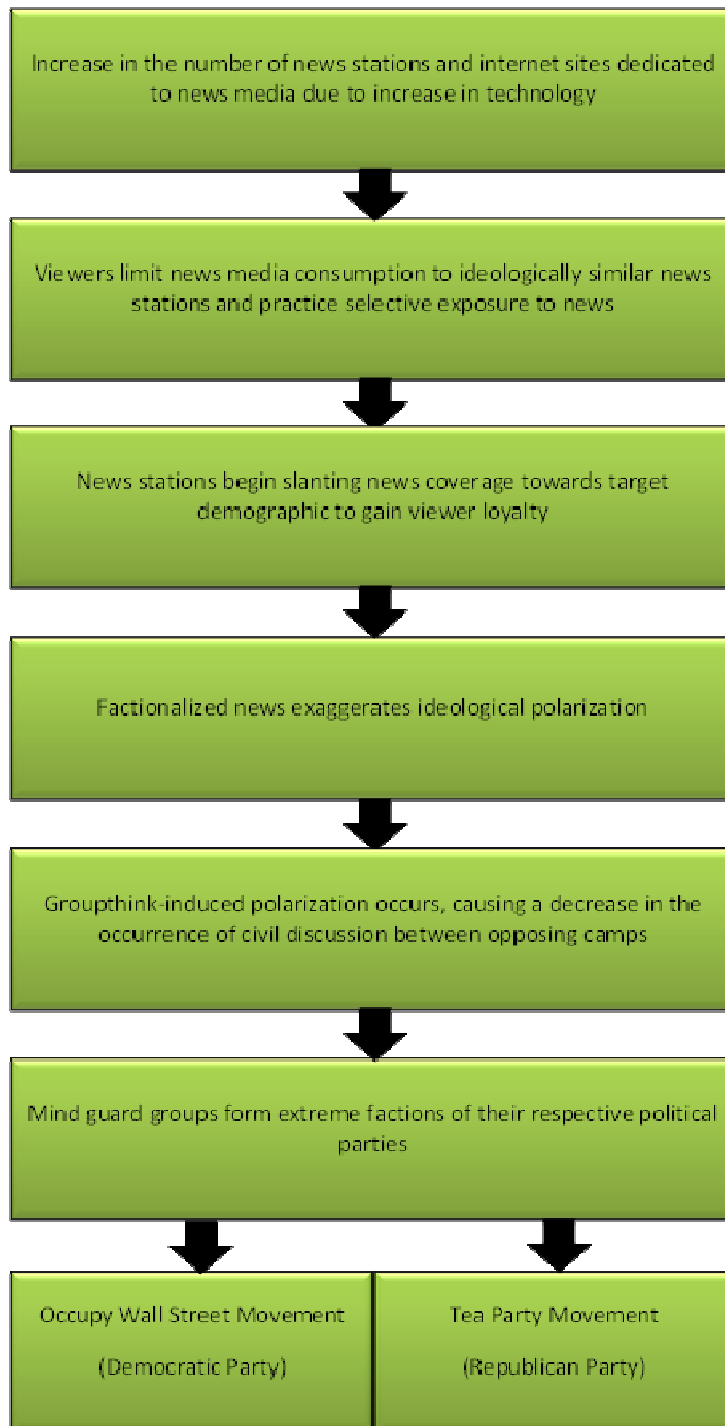


Figure 1-1 Theory Map

Having stated a very abridged version of my intentions, I now begin assessing this dilemma by focusing on all 3 major cable news channels in the hope of finding out if there are significant differences between them in terms of dedication to the facts and resistance to the ever increasing sensationalism of news broadcasting. I believe this is vital in order to (1) develop a better understanding of this change in the general political climate, (2) understand how such polarization occurs and (3) explore ways that this polarization reinforces incivility and decreases coherent and productive discussion. Specifically, I will document the narrative building processes and manner in which commentators' implicitly and explicitly slant the news stories they present. I will also outline how the vast expansion of the media gave rise to selective exposure, which in turn led to the various news stations shifting the way they presented the news by, for example, adding opinionated commentary and tailoring political representation for the demographic they hope to capture. Finally, I will discuss how this change has influenced the two primary political parties, thus furthering the shift of the media towards the two extremes¹.

¹ Many have argued that the Republican and Democratic parties are not really that different. However, politicians and their parties also exaggerate their differences in order to mobilize their constituencies. Thus, perhaps the media are just facilitating and participating in a preexisting process.

Chapter 2

The Rise of Factionalized News

In this chapter, I will argue that the tech boom gave rise to a multitude of new news media sources, including blogs, internet news, cable news, and social media. With the vast amount of choices now available to the general public, selective exposure narrowed each viewer's media choices to sources that were favorable to their own beliefs and ideologies. The news stations were also able to narrow their target demographics and begin to use slanting strategies to build a report with their intended audience. This process is pictured below in Figure 2.

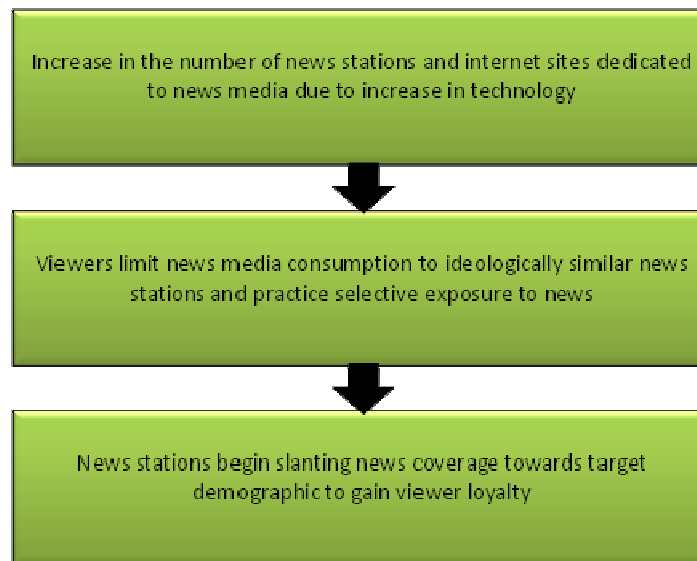


Figure 2 Formation of Factionalized News

The Tech Boom as a Facilitator

Xiaoxia Cao's article (2010) concerning Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* poses an interesting explanation for political polarization. With the drastic rise in the number of television channels having increased by 80% between 1995 and 2000, the available sources of news media were changed completely (Bednarski, 2001:18). This gave rise to

the big 3 of cable news we know today as FNC, MSNBC, and CNN. With this new sense of competition setting in, different news stations began to vie for viewership by tailoring the news to their desired demographic, at the expense of unbiased discussion of the topics at hand. The result was a sea of information that could be customized to each viewer's political beliefs and ways of thinking. The Fox News Network (FNC) cornered the market on Republicans; CNN had the largest subscriber rates overall until 2008, mostly because of the fact that it predated FNC or MSNBC, and also held the largest share of the market until a few years into the tech boom when FNC took the 1st place spot; MSNBC came into its own by edging CNN out of the label for "most liberal" station as CNN began to lose numbers, eventually leading to MSNBC taking the 2nd spot in primetime cable news about halfway through 2009 and leaving CNN, by default, as the moderate station (State of the Media, 2012).

One of the key attributes of these new stations is that they were cable news stations, meaning that they would succeed or fail based on the ad space and licensing fees they were able to sell. More significantly, however, they provided 24 hour news coverage. This is pertinent to the scope of my theory as I do not address network television in this paper, because, while evening news does have a much larger audience than that of cable news, it has been shrinking steadily since 1995 (State of the Media, 2006), and, more importantly, network news focuses less on political coverage and more on current events. Even in cases of political stories, network news has been shown to have less opinionated coverage and editorializes less frequently. In addition, network news does not usually produce a substantial amount of revenue for the network relative to the other shows in their broadcast lineup, whereas cable news stations are driven to produce profits almost entirely through licensing fees and advertisement revenues based on a 24 hour news format (State of the Media, 2012). Moreover, prior to and during the

rise of cable news channels, network news' presence was an institutionalized presence. Thus the effect of network news upon the current phenomena of partisan politics and demographic polarization can be discounted, for the most part, as a preexisting factor whose influence would have been limited. Any further mentions of "news media", therefore, will implicitly refer only to cable news stations, as network news is outside the scope of this study.

Selective Exposure

Hollander argues that news media are fragmenting and as a result our perceptions of partisanship are becoming more isolated than ever before, stating that "scholars have noted a trend... with people more likely to speak about public affairs with individuals much like themselves, thus reducing their opportunities to hear the kind of divergent viewpoints deemed integral to a healthy democracy." (Hollander 2008:23). With individuals selectively exposing themselves to news that confirmed their ideas and values, media outlets stopped getting complaints that their news coverage was unfair or biased. Those who disagreed with any channel's coverage simply changed the channel. This is not surprising inasmuch as humans are inclined to spend more time and effort searching for information that will validate the opinions and ideals we already believe to be true. The "validation" vs. "appraisal" motive (Sedikides 1993) tells us that not only do we seek to be found correct; we actively attempt to avoid information that might challenge our beliefs.

Gamson et al attempt to flesh out some of the issues at hand when they state that even before the boom of the news industry after 1995, the media system did a poor job of explaining the "broader social forces that affect the conditions of their everyday lives." (1992:373) They then expands on the social construction of this process of searching for validation in spite of the facts or information, by suggesting that the images

and examples posited by popular propaganda figures often have more of an effect on the average viewer than the actual factual information does. That is, in part, due to the fact that the viewer is much more likely to remember what the anchor says about an issue than what the actual issue was about. Through statements that are taken out of context and the use of compelling rhetoric, the commentators charged with providing an accurate picture of reality can easily paint whatever picture their demographic desires.

But why don't those consuming news media simply think logically and realize they are being manipulated? The answer to this question is found in the social psychology of heuristics. For the most part, people operate by using sophisticated networks of beliefs and opinions called schemas (Bartlett 1961). These schemas are, in effect, networks of opinions, factoids, and attitudes that are processed much quicker than normal logical analysis. Also, because slanted images, factoids, and phrases are the first to be remembered, they provide the bases for the construction of an ill-informed or biased logic. Thus our impulsive response is likely to be one based on these same opinions, attitudes, and easily accessible factoids and anecdotes. The reason that we rely on schemas so prevalently is simply because higher level reasoning and logical thinking takes longer, and requires more attention and effort. This echoes the concept of the cognitive miser (Fiske & Taylor 1984). That is, since high level attention is more effortful, we often default to our schemas rather than logical processing, thus making most decisions much faster and more efficient. However, this shortcutting means that flaws in certain arguments will not be recognized. Inaccurate or slanted commentary is not properly evaluated and misrepresentations may be perceived to be just as valid as the empirical events they reference.

Furthermore, Arpan (2009) states that we give more credence to the images or exemplars than the matter being argued or presented. Thus, such "exemplars

consistently have been found to disproportionately influence perceptions of phenomena, even when accurate statistical information about the issue is provided in the same story.” (2009:250). In the news I selected for this study, examples of false information were readily available. For instance, Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona was allowed to present incorrect statistics during a speech to congress about the percentage of Planned Parenthood operations that included abortions, without any formal rebuke. The senator’s figure on this matter was off by over 87% (Peralta 2011). By the same notion, Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain blatantly speculated that, while he didn’t “have facts to back this up” the occupy wall street protests were a carefully orchestrated attempt to create anger at the Republican party and sympathy for President Obama in the upcoming election. Finally, even when the examples used are contextually relevant, they are usually atypical or uncommon occurrences, focusing on sensational motives for such rare or statistically deviant events. Moreover, exemplification, or the use of examples, was found to occupy 1/3 of the time devoted to the presentation of the typical news story; typically 3-4 examples would be used per story (Arpan 2009:250). Even though the specific examples used are typically extreme or statistically unlikely iterations of the phenomenon being described, the use of these examples are generally thought to maintain the viewer’s interest in the story, and according to Zillmann & Brosius, are used to support the commentator’s stance in 78% of cases, while being used as a counterpoint in only 10% (2000: 22). This comports with the theory that a disproportionate amount of attention is paid to the rhetoric presented by the show’s commentator rather than to the actual events of the news, which further undermines the power of information on and unbiased perception of the factual information.

Exceptions: Moderates vs. Independents

But what about those who do not identify with either side? How do they perceive news? How do moderates or independents balance the fact that there is so much partisanship in the mainstream media? First we must discuss how we define the terms moderate and independent. This study adheres to the approach that an independent is one who does not identify with either the Republican or Democratic Party. For this reason, their political attitudes must be accessed on an issue-by-issue basis. The term moderate, however, is more of a qualifier for other terms. One can be a moderate Democrat, a moderate Republican, or a moderate independent, because the term is being used in this study to be analogous to the term centrist. It denotes a tendency to reject any radical or divisive positions, instead tending toward an approach built on compromise and due consideration of both sides.

Most research shows that people usually think that the bias of the mainstream news media is in direct opposition to their political stance (Morris 2007:709). Thus, because centrists do not really have a polar opposite, according to Morris, they might not even fully recognize such biases. This means that they might be more susceptible to the customized messages they consume, as a result of a stronger mere exposure effect on moderates. For instance, if someone self-identified as a “conservative”, they would most likely be under the impression that the majority of media was biased towards the “liberal war on traditional values.” In the same way, a typical “liberal” would probably respond that the slant serves the “conservative strategy of maintaining the position of those in power.” The irony is that, based on Morris’s argument, moderates might actually perceive that the commentary is less slanted or biased than those on either side of the political debate (2007:709). This differs however, from independents, who may feel strongly about issues, and frequently have beliefs that are strongly at odds with one extreme or the

other. This is an important distinction to note, because while moderates might be less likely to perceive polarization, and thus be more susceptible to persuasion tactics, independents might strongly agree with conservatives on one topic and strongly agree with liberals on another. Thus, independents might be the most likely to seek news from a more diverse set of news channels.

News Slanting

So what effect is all of this uncivil political discourse having on the news media? According to Thorston, Vraga, and Ekdale (2010), it actually seems to make the things journalists are saying, no matter how inaccurate, more credible. They base their argument in social judgment theory, which according to Sherif et al. (1965) posits that we determine characteristics, such as the intelligence of a co-worker or the level of bias of an argument based on salient comparisons with our surroundings. If we believe the coworker being considered is more intelligent than all other coworkers we can easily think of, then we will conclude that the coworker is intelligent, even though they may or may not be as intelligent as the majority of other people we know. The same example can be applied to the amount of bias in an argument or the commentary paired with its commentary. This means that, unless the viewer is highly participatory or knowledgeable about the events being discussed, they will accept a given story as an “anchor” for judging their own reactions to the commentary expressed by comparing its rhetorical standing with the rhetorical standing of the anchor. If the anchor is not as polarized as the commentary of the story, the viewer will not be influenced to perceive the commentary as compelling or rational, since its rhetorical distance is relatively far from the anchor. However, if the commentator is highly opinionated in his discussion of a news story that is already rhetorically aligned with the viewer’s opinion, then the news story will seem implicitly more moderate and more readily acceptable. Therefore, if viewers hear a news

story with a partisan slant, and pairs it with commentary using an even more biased partisan slant, the original story seems more credible than if it had been paired with a moderate and reasonable analysis of the events. I suggest that news media use this method to intentionally hide spin in their story by juxtaposing it with rhetoric that makes it seem moderate in comparison to the commentary that follows.

Thus, when considering everything from the rise of 24-hour, ratings based news stations, to self-selection bias, and slanted news media reports, it's no wonder that our current news media is in such a factionalized state. When the news media are motivated by incentives other than providing an accurate account of the day's happenings, they will logically attempt to identify more closely with their target demographic in order to relieve their shareholder's pressure on them to turn a profit. And when that target demographic chooses to forsake other sources of news media because their chosen news source doesn't present them with potentially contrary appraisals of their incumbent beliefs, then they will most likely provide biased feedback to the news stations they watch, instead of holding them accountable for their editorialization and news slanting. Finally, when the news stations slant the news based on inaccurate or self-propagating feedback, they often carry on with their slanting strategies in order to maintain the positive feedback and viewer loyalty, insulating the viewer from opposing viewpoints and ideas. This generates a false sense of the social ills that threaten the audience's way of life, inaccurate perceptions of the viewer's political situation, and exaggerated perceptions of in group cohesion against perceived enemies of their chosen ideologies.

Chapter 3

Factionalized News and Ideological Polarization

Now that we have considered the foundations and root causes of our current news media fragmentation, it is important to understand what potential effects these changes can have upon those that consume news media. This chapter explores the results that widespread news media polarization can bring about. First, I will explain how fear of the opposition can lead to moral panic, a situation in which one group labels another group, behavior, or object as the root cause of certain social ills, and begin to take action against it. Next I will elucidate what psychological heuristics are at play when processing media bias, and how these neurological processes affect our attitudes and schemas concerning issues. Finally, I will describe the symptomology of groupthink, a phenomenon that can present itself when likeminded groups of individuals begin to isolate themselves from differing beliefs and ideologies, resulting in impaired judgment and internalized societal pressures to conform to the group. This is described in figure 3 below.

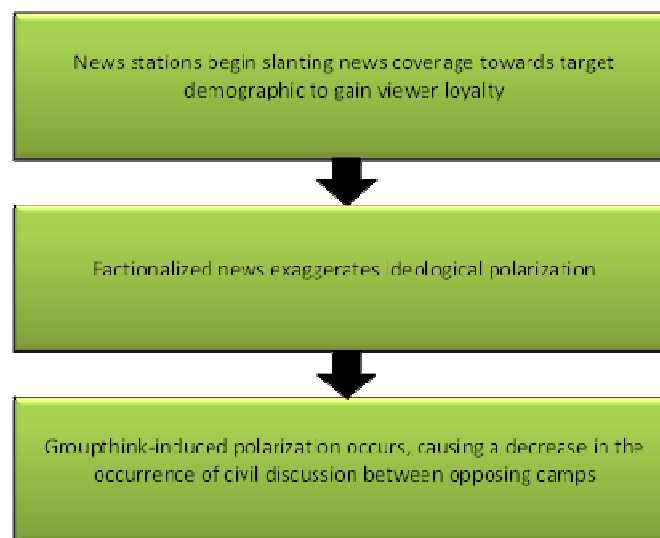


Figure 3 Formation of Polarized Public

Psychological Heuristics

This new form of media consumption strongly influences, both how and what we think about important issues. Forgetting, Morris, and Platt, argue that “television helps or hinders a mutual respect among opposing partisans” depending on what types and what amounts of news they watch (Forgetting, Morris, and Platt 2009:1). For instance, someone who only listens to conservative media will very likely begin to adopt these ideas and become more conservative in their principles and behaviors (Wanta, Craft and Geana, 2005). Furthermore, there is evidence that those who watch either “conservative” or “liberal” television media tend to supplement this selective exposure with even more radical or extreme internet information supporting whichever bias they happen to personally hold (Nie et al. 2010). George Lakoff explains this process from a neuroscience perspective. In *The Political Mind*, he touches on a point about the climate of the political debate being dominated by the conservatives. Lakoff points out that the enlightenment sedimented the idea that reason and objective truth will win out in the fight against kneejerk reactions and emotional responses. With this in mind, he argues that this notion is obsolete in the face of new cognitive information showing that 98% of the processes going through our mind are unconscious, preconscious, or subconscious (2008). The enlightenment assumption is that humans are reasonable and logical. However, as we discussed before, this is not always the case (Bartlett 1961; Lakoff 2008:7). People use schemas and subconscious shortcuts to guide their actions simply because thinking logically about the situation in its complexity is too demanding and time consuming a task. The flaw with the enlightenment argument seems to be that its assumptions are espoused to be universally true, when the fact of the matter is that people do not know what they think, are not logical, and cannot remove their emotions from the argument (Lakoff 2008:8).

Lakoff introduces two terms to describe the typical reactions to any given issue. The first reaction is the reflexive response, in which the person responds to the stimulus through a series of schemas and impulsive, unconscious actions. The second is the reflective, response, which is the logical process of thinking the situation through and then deciding which course of action is the most beneficial to oneself (2008). The first reaction is the mode of action that I will be attempting to assess when analyzing the data I collect. These types of schema-based persuasion tactics will act as the stimulus to the overexposed media consumer, who will likely react to a situation without considering its complexity because they are processing information largely on the basis of unconscious schemas. This characterizes voters that utilize recycled sound bites from pundits in political discussions and vote according to their own heuristics. However, individual commentators may differ in the ways they discuss issues, and I may find that certain shows have a tendency to focus on either the reflexive or the reflective approach to explain their stance on the topic.

Finally, linguistic neural mapping, specifically fMRI studies, which measure the magnetic fields resulting from increased blood flow to certain areas of the brain when stimulated, can play an important role in the subconscious pairing and conditioning of a concept with a connotative meaning (Lakoff 2008: 94-101). For example, if someone speaks about a “free market”, they have already framed the idea by connecting “market” with the positivity- valued notions of freedom and independent choice. Since freedom is a valued and important asset to culture in the USA, one will impulsively think of the market as fair and good, instead of thinking about the economic manipulation and bullying that can often occur in an unregulated and unchecked market. This can be exploited by news media in order to frame their argument by pushing connotative meaning into the preexisting structure of terminology. In this way, we can see how our watching habits can

come to influence our actual perceptions, beliefs, and even actions, such as voting behavior.

Moral Panics

The effect of slanted and misleading media coverage is often the creation of a socially constructed fear of a group or behavior in the society which has been targeted as the root cause of certain social ills. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) refer to this as “moral panic.” Such panics can occur through any number of ways according to constructionist theories, meaning that explicit labeling of a group or behavior as a social problem is not necessary, as long as it is implicitly understood as such by those wanting to act against the behavior or group in question (151). Typically, these moral panics lead to certain members of the population championing the cause and becoming “moral entrepreneurs” (Becker 1973), people who act as the vocal moral “majority” on an issue, and lead what is referred to as a “moral crusade” against the perceived cause of the social problems (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994, 153-154). Once a moral crusade has begun, likeminded individuals band together and form a faction with its own agenda and motives. This organization can be the process through which major social change can occur. However, it can also be the vehicle of a perceived moral majority to persecute certain other groups, or to prevent change from occurring. Goode and Ben-Yehuda note that while moral panics have some fad-like characteristics; they differ from fads in the fact that no matter what the outcome of a moral panic, there is usually an institutionalized response that will remain after the panic has settled (149). This process follows logically from the notion that when the news incites citizens to action, they will respond in an organized way to the perceived social problem. Through the process of media influenced moral panic, (for better or worse) real social consequences will persist from the actions taken by the moral crusaders (Becker, 1973). Thus the creation of desirable consequences through moral

panic can be an effective tool in partisan politics, but just as easily become a method for likeminded individuals to band together and create a grassroots political faction at the fringe of an existing political party, in order to influence the political party's platform and force that party to court the new constituency's votes, such as what occurred during the Tea Party's rise to popularity.

Groupthink Symptomology

With all the outrage and moral panic being caused by our own heuristics leading us astray, it is easy to see how our objective and logical functioning can be impaired, leading to poorly thought-out belief systems and potentially impaired judgment. This type of impairment is indicative of a large scale version of a group dynamic process called groupthink. In groupthink, members of a group become so cohesive and unified in their beliefs, that they begin actively isolating themselves from any other ideas or arguments that might contest the attitudes their group holds, as well as persecuting members that voice opposing beliefs. (Janis, 1973)

The first symptom of groupthink is that of overconfidence. This usually involves the in-group out-group behavior that these factions display becoming so pronounced that they form a feedback loop of available information. An Example of this was the constant disregard that FNC gave to the polling that showed Romney losing all throughout the election coverage. By ignoring the polls instead of addressing the issues that Romney was weak on, they allowed themselves to be caught off guard when Romney, after being predictably behind Obama, ended up losing the election. Even more telling, was the fact that Romney had not even prepared a concession speech. This symptom seems to correspond with the media slanting tactic of negating of the opposing argument. By being so confident of their position, they neglect to pay any attention to a counter argument,

and by extension, leave room for an error in judgment by assuming that their initial impressions about an issue are correct.

The second type of groupthink symptom is that of close-mindedness. This type of groupthink is analogous to overgeneralization of the counter argument, because while it does realize that an opposing argument is being made, it fails to give due diligence in explaining that argument, thus leaving a large margin of error for misunderstandings concerning the argument being made against them. This is exemplified in the recent popularity of certain conservative bumper stickers that read: "I don't believe the liberal media." This wholesale discounting of any validity that the "liberal media" might submit is a symptom of groupthink because it places the conservative's beliefs beyond reproach, without proper consideration of the counterargument. When an argument being made is incorrectly understood or discounted unfairly, it will often be overlooked and favor will be given to the ideas that are already incumbent in the group's belief structure, following along with the aforementioned heuristic of validation. This is what is referred to as a group rationalization. Another method of close-mindedness stems from simply overgeneralizing the counterargument by stereotyping the opposing side. As stereotypes rarely have the complexities or exceptions of the actual demographics, much of an arguments accuracy and reliability is lost when using stereotypes to influence judgments.

The final type of symptom is that of the pressures toward uniformity concerning the members of the group. This symptom is most like vilification of the opposing side; however, in the concept of groupthink, the pressure to conform is being directed inward on the group, and not outward against the opposition. This pressure is typically enforced by extremely loyal members of the group referred to as "*mind guards*". These members have taken it upon themselves to champion the ideas of the group, believing them to be just and worthy of defending. They also have a tendency to be extreme in their beliefs

and critical of those that would argue against their cause or espouse ideological differences from within the same group. An example of this would be the staunchly conservative factions in the Republican primaries that pressured candidates to present themselves as being more conservative than their opponents, even when it might severely damage their chances of convincing more moderate and independent voters during the general election cycle. This type of in-group out-group behavior creates a false dichotomy, usually to the effect that if someone is critical of the in-group's beliefs, then they are automatically assumed to be for the out-group's beliefs, and considered an enemy, worthy of the in-group's vilification and disdain. (Janis, 1982)

Chapter 4

Empirical Analysis of News Slanting

Qualifying Polarization

It is important to point out that while I make assumptions about the polarization of citizen's attitudes and behaviors; I root those assumptions in an analysis of what is being presented to the public by television, radio, and political discussions. Fisher and Mattson's article, "Is America Fragmenting?" shows that while most everyday citizens are no more extreme than they were in 1970, the "political contestation around moral issues did escalate in the 1990s and [early] 2000s." (2009:438) They also suggest that political representatives were less likely to engage in bipartisan politics and have less moderate or cross-party ideals, as evidenced by their voting records. By studying news media commentary instead of the behavior of citizens or politicians, isolationism from the other perspectives is the type of polarization I have focused on in this part of study.

Quantitative Pretest

Data and Methodology

My purpose in the first part of the study is to identify whether or not there is a media source that less frequently than other networks uses inciting, divisive, or radicalizing language in their discussion of current events. My conceptual discussion has guided me to the notion that polarization in the news media is easily seen in the behavior displayed in prime time commentary of the news stories themselves, specifically the usage of divisive and polarizing language to denote factional and out-group bias. This pretest is represented as an elaboration of the process in Figure 2 from chapter II, and serves to validate the claim that there is, in fact, some level of news slanting and divisive language involved in news stations that are perceived to have a partisan bias.

I systematically observed and content analyzed the 3 news stations' prime time shows and observed the speech and behavior of those serving as commentators on the show. In this part of the study, I only focused on the hosts of the show because many times the guest is much more divisive than the rest of the show, and this can cause inconsistencies in the measurement of the phenomena I am trying to observe. Therefore, anything said by anyone other than the host commentator of the show was disregarded. For the sake of diversity, I chose Fox (a widely perceived conservative station), CNN (an assumedly middle of the road station), and MSNBC (a widely perceived liberal station) and compared these three channels in terms of frequencies of relevant phrases as a reasonable generalization of the differences between conservative, liberal and moderate television news representations.

I watched their prime time news shows to look for observable signs of sensationalist language. In order to provide consistency of the topics discussed, I recorded all 3 channels on the same timeslots of the same day, so as to reduce any difference in topical or temporal incongruity. I used primetime slots on a weekday to capture the typicality of the news that is being reported to the majority of Americans on a regular everyday basis. While the overall time observed in this pretest totals only 12 hours of footage, 4 hours from each channel, I believe that it is a reliable representation of the typical news cycle, because the times I recorded were specifically chosen during election coverage when there was little international or celebrity coverage. I am confident that while a more exhaustive analysis over multiple times would allow for more sophisticated statistical analysis, the footage observed is typical enough that it is sufficient to answer the limited scope of my hypotheses.

I measured the frequency that commentators used language that was polarizing or that presented mutually exclusive false dichotomies, such as "left" or "right", with no

discussion of a “middle ground”. I also counted direct responses to counter arguments that are overtly uncivil, because such responses demonstrate a feeling of antagonism and polarized opposition to the group that the target of the uncivil language represents. I recorded the phrase or word used along with a notation of the time in the recording that it was used. However, I ignored personal attacks based on character and only recorded those where the target of the uncivil language was attacked for his group’s stance, because this type of stratagem will be analyzed in part II of this study. The observed and cataloged terms and phrases are shown in the appendix. Although the terms identified are the result of my own subjective interpretation of their implicative meaning, I hope that bias has been limited by the use of a cold counting method of assessing their prevalence on the three channels.

After all the observations have been completed, I will total up and average the tallies of radicalizing statements per hour long show timeslot, in addition to running descriptive statistics. I will then run a one tailed ANOVA test to see if there is a statistically significant deviation in the means between each channel. Since CNN is thought to be a moderate news channel, I would expect that they will have statistically less occurrences of polarizing language, while the liberal and conservative news stations will have the similar amounts, assuming FOX is just as “conservative” as MSNBC is “liberal”. The rejection of the null hypothesis that all the means are equal will sufficiently support my theory, thusly answering my research question of whether or not there is a significant difference in the occurrence of divisive language use between media stations. If there is substantial evidence to reject the null hypothesis, I will run a least significant difference (LSD) post hoc test to determine which variations are significant between pairs of the three stations. Statistical significance between CNN and FOX will confirm my first working hypothesis. Statistical significance between CNN and MSNBC will confirm my

second working hypothesis. The absence of statistical significance between MSNBC and FOX will confirm my third and final working hypothesis.

Hypotheses

Sobieraj and Berry (2011) postulate that both the conservative and liberal media use the same styles of grandstanding and outrage tactics. However, in the first part of this study, I wish to test the hypothesis that conservative and liberal news agencies use the same amount of divisive language.

It is widely perceived that FOX news is conservative, and MSNBC is liberal. This leads to the question of where we place CNN on this continuum. Because it is widely thought among conservatives that CNN is liberal media and is widely thought among liberals that CNN is too conservative, CNN will be treated as a moderate news channel. Moreover, because CNN is defined as moderate, I hypothesize that they will have a lesser occurrence of polarizing language. The research hypothesis will be assessed indirectly by testing the contrasting null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean frequency of divisive language used by the three networks per hour long show.

$$H_0: \mu_{\text{CNN}} = \mu_{\text{FOX}} = \mu_{\text{MSNBC}}$$

If the data are conclusive enough to reject the null hypothesis, then I will attempt Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) post hoc testing, a test designed to determine significant differences between mean values in ANOVA tests, in order to further test three other working hypotheses:

The first hypothesis is that the variation of mean use of divisive language per hour long show between CNN and FOX is statistically significant. It will be formulated as:

$$H_1: \mu_{\text{CNN}} \neq \mu_{\text{FOX}}$$

The second hypothesis is that the variation of mean use of divisive language per hour long show between CNN and MSNBC is statistically significant. It will be formulated as:

$$H2: \mu_{CNN} \neq \mu_{MSNBC}$$

The third hypothesis is that the variation of mean use of divisive language per hour long show between FOX and MSNBC is not statistically significant. It will be formulated as:

$$H3: \mu_{FOX} = \mu_{MSNBC}$$

Analysis and Findings

After inputting the data into SPSS, Descriptive statistics are shown below:

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics											
	N	Range	Min	Max	Sum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	
	Stat	Stat	Stat	Stat	Stat	Stat	Std. Error	Stat	Stat	Stat	Std. Error
CNN	4	10.00	.00	10.00	22.0	5.50	2.21736	4.43471	19.667	-.482	1.014
FOX	4	37.00	5.00	42.00	88.0	22.00	7.62671	15.25341	232.667	.575	1.014
MSNBC	4	16.00	17.00	33.00	109.0	27.25	3.56780	7.13559	50.917	-1.530	1.014
Valid N (listwise)	4										

As the figures above show, the totals for all four timeslots are, for CNN: 22 uses of divisive language, for FOX: 88 uses of divisive language, and for MSNBC: 109 uses of divisive language. The means per show were, for CNN: 5.5 uses of divisive language per show, for FOX: 22 uses of divisive language per show, and for MSNBC: 27.25 uses of divisive language per show. Notable observations from these statistics are that FNC and MSNBC had widely different standard deviations, ranging a total of almost 8 points between them. This could denote that MSNBC, with a standard deviation of 7.1, are more

consistently divisive, whereas Fox News, with a standard deviation of 15.3, was more sporadic or varied in their usage of polarizing language between the shows being observed. CNN had the lowest standard deviation at 4.4, meaning that they were the most consistent in their usage of language used between shows, but this could be due to the fact that the observed content contained a 2 hour segment of one program, meaning that the same host and news team was reporting for a longer time than the other channels, resulting in less deviation in this figure because there was less variability in the actual number of shows being observed. The results of the ANOVA testing are shown below:

Table 2 ANOVA Testing Results

ANOVA

Frequency of divisive language use

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1030.500	2	515.250	5.097	.033
Within Groups	909.750	9	101.083		
Total	1940.250	11			

As the figures above show, the .033 significance value means that there is a significant difference of divisive language used between the three groups. We are able to reject the null hypothesis and continue on to the following three working hypotheses. The results of the LSD post hoc testing are shown below:

Table 3 LSD Post Hoc Testing Results

Multiple Comparisons

Frequency of divisive language use

LSD

(I) 1=CNN, 2=FOX, 3=MSNBC	(J) 1=CNN, 2=FOX, 3=MSNBC	Mean Difference (I- J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CNN	FOX	-16.5000*	7.10927	.045	-32.5823	-.4177
	MSNBC	-21.7500*	7.10927	.014	-37.8323	-5.6677
FOX	CNN	16.5000*	7.10927	.045	.4177	32.5823
	MSNBC	-5.25000	7.10927	.479	-21.3323	10.8323
MSNBC	CNN	21.7500*	7.10927	.014	5.6677	37.8323
	FOX	5.25000	7.10927	.479	-10.8323	21.3323

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As the figures above show, the significance value of .045 in the variance of means between CNN and FOX news is significant. Hypothesis 1 is confirmed. The significance value of .014 in the variance of means between CNN and MSNBC news is significant. Hypothesis 2 is confirmed. The significance value of .479 in the variance of means between MSNBC and FOX news is not significant. Hypothesis 3 is confirmed. The Null hypothesis was rejected and the research hypotheses were all confirmed.

Qualitative Analysis

Polarizing Tactics: Overview

Sobieraj and Berry (2011) argue that the purpose of sensationalist rhetoric is to elicit an emotional response of outrage from the viewer. Sobieraj and Berry also describe the tools the media use to fire the viewer up and enrage them with indignant feelings towards the whole governmental process. They categorize them primarily into “four types

of outrage—mockery, misrepresentative exaggeration, insulting language, and name calling” (2011: 29) with multiple other types occurring sparsely throughout. These four devices are used to trigger emotional responses from the viewer and reinforce heuristic attitudes towards the opposition. After looking through these approaches to outrage, one could see that all of Sobieraj and Berry’s techniques could be simplified to varying blends of argumentative techniques that revolve around the three types of news media slanting shown in Figure 3.

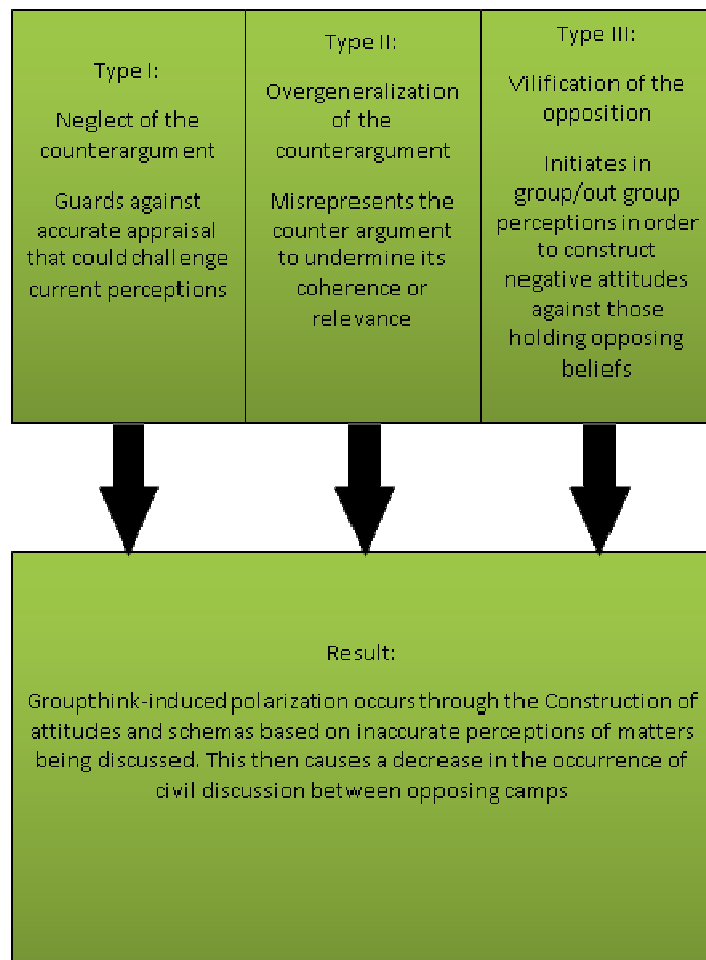


Figure 4 Polarizing Tactics

Mockery of an argument is a negation of the counter argument, because it makes fun of the opposing standpoint of being unworthy of serious consideration.

Misrepresentative exaggeration is used as an overgeneralization of the counter argument, because while it attempts to present the opposing standpoint, it does so in a convoluted way so as to highlight its weakness and undermine its logic. This divisive outrage rarely occurs in the same argument as a logical rebuttal to an counter argument, and many times the only defense offered by the other side of the argument is by a straw man, in order to showcase the absurdity of the counterpoint without a true representation of that counterpoint being addressed. Insulting language, name calling, and mockery of a person fit into the technique I called vilification of the opposing side, because it focuses on an ad hominem argument directed at the personal beliefs, social characteristics, and individual traits of the messenger rather than the argument being made. I will now address each type and provide examples from each subtype from both MSNBC and FNC to demonstrate their usage in both a liberal and conservative setting:

Polarizing Tactics: Neglect of the Counterargument

Connotation:

The first persuasive tactic used by news media in the slanting of political discussion is the negation of the counterargument, otherwise hereto referred as negation. This tactic was a very common occurrence in my observation, and was primarily used to construct narratives that were favorable to the commentator's view. Many times the anchor or panel host would preface the story or discussion with a negation tactic that included an ideological narrative in order to prime the audience to react to certain terms with a favorable connotation while setting the counterargument up for failure by using words with overtly negative connotations to describe the opposing viewpoints, such as "not cooperating", "filibustering", or painting the adversarial party as a literal antagonist to

the narrative's protagonist. This way, when the defense was presented by the opposing side, they would be forced to directly respond by using those same negatively connoted terms, thereby admitting that they did in fact "not cooperate" or "filibustered", or else object to the terms themselves and be seen as being elusive

In a segment of MSNBC's Politics Nation, Al Sharpton displayed this tactic when his monologue included charged phrases such as "The GOP has always protected the rich, but recently it's begun attacking the poor, too." This statement brings with it the connotation that the GOP is a party of rich people with power that abuse the poor and underprivileged, drawing upon the compassion of the reader and planting resentment against the opposition. He frames this statement between pairing the idea of Obama's jobs plan with benefiting and helping the working class. He then reinforces his negation by bringing in Melissa Harris-Perry and asking her the rhetorical question, "...am I going crazy, here? Are we actually talking about the minimum wage being lowered by a presidential candidate?" This question implicitly pairs the idea of lowering the minimum wage with insanity and reckless disregard for those that work for a wage. Later on in the discussion, he uses the phrase, "This assault they did immediately on the unions..." in a negative tone that imparts a hegemonic connotation of the GOP then changes his language while maintaining the same theme of physical combat with, "...those that are on the front line fighting for the working class are the ones that have had the real fight, here." to valorize the Democratic party and those that support the jobs plan. This language sets that there is a "...real battle between..." the Democratic Party as the defenders of the working class that have "...had a war, in [his] opinion, had a war declared upon them by those [Republicans] that want to protect those at the very top of the income gap in this country." He then finishes his segment by stating "And that [supporting the working class is] the only way that we are going to be able to lift this country and have Americans live

the American dream..." solidifying the notion that there is absolutely no viable counterargument to be made against supporting the Democratic favored jobs plan.

To demonstrate this from the other side of the political spectrum, The Hannity Show on FNC presents another connotative use of negation by framing Romney's loss through an ideological shift in the general public. Hannity begins by describing that "America in some ways is changing, and it's changing in this way: It's that... It's the allure of free. It's the allure of 'Oh, no pressure!' It's the allure of government taking care of you." By taking this rhetorical line, he is posturing that anyone that voted for or supported a democratic candidate is a figurative antagonist because they are implicitly lazy and not willing to work for their own benefit. He then begins a dialogue with Ann Coulter in which they frame the connotative undertones that immigrant and other demographic shifts provided an unfair advantage to Obama by pairing the image of immigrants with living off the government. Hannity then proceeds to paint Obama's campaign staff as bad guys by speculating that if he were one of them, he would be embarrassed by their actions and behavior during the election. He uses language like "they knew no boundaries when it came to lying, and demonizing, slandering, smearing, besmirching, attacking a nice guy" referring to Romney as the unfortunate protagonist. All of this language is indicative of behavior that is almost universally connoted with negative feelings and looked down upon, such as when he states, "You killed somebody!" when referring to a hypothetical boundary that the campaign would have to cross to finally be rebuked by the liberal media. He then juxtaposes the actions of the Democratic Party's campaign strategies with Romney's "classy campaign" to reinforce the injustice and outrage that the viewer should feel at the Obama's reelection. He then returns to his initial point that those that voted for Obama were likened to irresponsible children for favoring a parent that gave them free candy as opposed to the accountable parent that tells the child to study and

work hard to better themselves, all the while not mentioning any counterpoint or opposing motive for why anyone would ever vote for Obama over Romney.

Burden of Proof:

Another prevalent way to display negation was in placing the burden of proof on the counterargument. By providing no counterargument for the story at all, news media can insinuate to the viewer that those holding another belief were unable to defend their viewpoint and therefore forfeited the argument to the orator's side. This was very common in typical anchor-based stories in which the host presented talking points or monologued over taped footage, but much less common in situations of interviews or panel segments. This is obviously because when the counterargument is allowed to have a dialogue and address the accusations or arguments of the interviewer or panel member, they were allowed to make their case for a moment. Many times, the host will make use of constructing a narrative in which the reporter went above and beyond the call of their journalistic duty to hear the other side of the story, but were thwarted by the fact that the opposing side of the narrative was "unable to be reached for comment", "did not return the reporter's calls", or else purposefully stated that they would not comment on the issue.

One example of this tactic is the June 1st, 2012 Talking Points segment in which FNC's Bill O'Reilly outlines a narrative that addresses the economy. He states that May showed the first month in the last 11 that the unemployment had risen, and that 69,000 jobs were added to the economy. In spite of this evidence that would easily be used to refute his argument, he states that this is "dismal" and that the Obama administration is unable to defend their decisions. He then moves to explain why he believes that the economy is so bad. He states that economic fear and geopolitical instability are the reason that the economy is growing so slowly, yet provides no evidence for these claims,

placing the burden of proof instead on the Obama administration to justify their subsidies of companies like Solyndra. When he states that Obama believes that his stimulus “strategy will pay off soon...” O’Reilly negates this statement with the claim that they have no data to act as evidence of the administration’s success, in spite of the gradually decreasing unemployment rate and a steady addition of jobs. By focusing his argument on fear and uncertainty, he shifts the viewer’s attention away from information that could act against his argument toward a rhetorical argument that makes the claim that the recovery isn’t happening fast enough, and frames the argument in such a way that not even evidence to the contrary is sufficient enough to satisfy the burden of proof placed upon the administration.

Another example of this type of negation is MSNBC’s Chris Matthews’s “Let Me Finish” segment on June 18th, 2012. He begins by insinuating that Romney doesn’t really care about the issues and really only wants the title of president. Something that he provides no evidence for, leaving the burden of proof on the Romney campaign. He then continues to rail against him by stating that Romney doesn’t answer any question that he hasn’t been prepared for, again providing no evidence for this claim. He builds a narrative that Romney has pandered to his constituent factions of the Republican party and adopted his platform based on what will provide him the most votes. By leaving these claims unjustified, he allows the viewer to assume that these statements are true, and the burden of proof is left on the Romney campaign, who’s voice is entirely absent due to the nature of Chris Matthews’ monologue.

Crosstalk:

Cross talk is another effective usage of negation that was used specifically in dialogue situations. Crosstalk refers to multiple people talking at once so that the viewer is unable to hear the counterargument as they present a rebuttal. This was almost

exclusively used by the host or more prominent panel member to bully the interviewee or panel member representing the political minority in the group, into cutting their statements short with extemporaneous objections to (usually) semantic incongruities. As most panel shows only staff one member of the opposing channel's party affiliation, the counterargument starts off being outnumbered and facilitates validation of the station's target demographic rather than accurate appraisal due to coherent discussion. This is usually accomplished by the side with the superior numbers using crosstalk to obfuscate the counterargument's representatives' attempt at explaining themselves properly in order to address the initial argument.

On July 11, 2011, MSNBC's Chris Matthews interviewed the Republican representative Joe Walsh from Illinois on the house bill concerning discretionary funding and plans for the governmental budget. During the interview, which took about 11 minutes, Matthews interrupted or spoke over Rep. Joe Walsh a total of 35 times. This cross talk was usually used after Matthews had asked a question and Rep. Joe Walsh was in the middle of his answer. By obfuscating the points that the congressman was trying to make, he controlled the dialogue to suppress the counter arguments being made, thus negating its effective delivery into the discussion.

On July 15, 2011, FNC's panel show "The Five", which consists of four panelists that identify as conservative and only one panelist, Bob Beckel, who is identified as a liberal discussed affirmative action, social justice, and homosexuality as well as other topics that were taught or included in some public school system's curriculum. During the almost seven minute segment, Bob Beckel was interrupted or spoken over a total of 11 times. He spoke for just over two minutes of the segment's seven minute duration. Through the ratio of conservative to liberal panelists, the counter argument was

effectively suppressed, and allowed for crosstalk to hinder the message that Bob Beckel was attempting to deliver.

Mockery:

As discussed before, mockery takes up a very large part of the negation tactics popularity, and while it can be argued that it is a form of overgeneralization of the counterargument, I observed they only refer to the counterargument as a place holder against the “rational and reasonable” argument they claim to be making. Instead of misrepresentation, the counterargument is instead mocked outright, as absurd, without making an attempt to understand its merit. For this reason, I categorized it under negation, but admit that some of these tactics are used in conjunction with each other, meaning that there are overlaps and complex cases in which one incidence could easily fit into multiple categories. I define mockery as any rhetoric that purposefully ignores the opposing argument by painting it as being an irrational or foolish choice, making the omitted argument, which the orator actually supports, the only real choice left to the audience. Mockery creates a false choice to the audience by degrading one choice into an absurdity rather than defending or supporting the argument the speaker agrees with. This is used both in monologue and dialogue, and is often used in panel discussions to great “punch line” effect. The aspect of humor also provides an extra aspect of persistence in the audience’s mind, because mockery is easily recalled and used in political discussions with others outside of television.

FNC’s “The Five” discussed the Democratic national convention in September of 2012, during which Greg Gutfeld used mockery to discredit 3 prominent celebrities that spoke in support of the Obama campaign. His first line in the opening monologue is outright mockery, as he begins by stating that “liberal celebrities are chuckle buckets.”, then continues to mock Eva Longoria as a “not so desperate housewife” that “makes

millions mouthing other people's words" making it "easy for her to give away other people's money." He then refers to her as a "fake" and says that she is nothing but a "cool kid sacrificing the uncool, because they didn't get rich playing make believe." Kerry Washington is mocked next. Greg jokes that she must be in character as an activist for women in third world countries, before asking the rhetorical question, "Where do these people live?! What America do they inhabit?!" He then infers that people from Hollywood are "coked up", before starting to mock Scarlet Johansson by stating, "Wow. Some friend you are! You're worth millions! Why don't you help them instead of asking me?" He continues to joke that Hollywood shouldn't be able to reproduce before asking Scarlet Johansson out to a date, adding sarcastically that he would pay, because he "knows how helpless women can be." After finishing this monologue, he returns to mock Kerry Washington further by mentioning that "she created so many straw men, there, it was a fire hazard." All of this mockery was used to undermine the message that these figures were presenting and negate the validity of the counter argument by distracting the audience from the issue at hand, painting those that made the argument as absurd and not worthy of serious consideration.

MSNBC's Rachel Maddow presents an example of mockery when she "curates" Herman Cain's "performance art project." She begins by making the point that Herman Cain is not a serious competitor for the Republican candidacy because of his choice in source material in his speeches. She first begins with his closing argument in the Iowa Republican primary debate, when he quotes the Pokemon movie, then moves on to mock him for using the same tax plan that Sim City 4 first introduced in their urban planning computer game. After these points, she argues that Herman Cain is a performance artist based on a reference that Mr. Cain used in a speech. The phrase "brother from another mother" found its origin as a joke in the third movie of the Rush Hour trilogy and was

used to demonstrate Herman Cain's close relationship with the Koch brothers. She then finishes with a close reference to The Simpsons movie when Herman Cain states that "We need a leader, not a reader." This phrase is very similar to the movie quote spoken by an action hero president character, with traits not unlike Arnold Schwarzenegger, when he is presented with five plans of action to resolve a crisis and blindly picks number three, for seemingly arbitrary reasons without reading the choices. When this character is questioned why he won't even read them to make the best decision he responds, "I was elected to lead, not to read." Rachel Maddow then ties this mocking narrative together by stating that she believes that Herman Cain is not an actual candidate, but rather a performance artist making a joke of the entire democratic process. By making this narrative, she portrays a message that this candidate should not be taken seriously and his arguments should be discounted and negated because of the comedic and playful nature of the source material rather than the actual message being made by Mr. Cain.

Polarizing Tactics: Overgeneralizing of the Counterargument

The next slanting tactic I observed was overgeneralizing of the counterargument. This type of tactic was widely used, and speakers had various ways of employing its goals. Overgeneralization occurred when the opposing side was discussed, and was done in a way that created an imperfect or overly simplistic version of that view that provided much more support and complexity to the argument that the speaker supported than it did to the argument that the speaker opposed. These types of news slanting tactics required a deeper understanding of the argument at hand, because unlike negation, they did provide an explanation for the other side of the story, but did not always flesh it out as well or else purposefully distorted the events of the matter to paint the side their demographic agrees with. Because this tactic is much more complex and required some prior understanding of the facts to even recognize when it was being used,

specific subcategories of overgeneralization are very difficult to formulate. This is compounded by the fact that overgeneralization is a much more subtle type of persuasion than is negation, and usually draws from multiple different approaches to persuasion and obfuscation. Thus it is difficult to identify isolated cases of overgeneralization.

Speculation:

One example of overgeneralization that was clear enough to represent a subcategory is that of insinuation. Certain elements of the story might be left out and yet claims are still made about the nature of the situation through implication, such as when reporters talk of a group of moderate Muslims using their right to free speech in a critique of their government, and through insinuation imply that they somehow have ties to Muslim extremists. In this example, while the tie is not explicitly made, the commentator implies that it is not unlikely that a connection could be made, thus painting the group of moderate Muslims in a very poor light. As stated before, Mr. Cain's insinuation that Obama was behind the occupy wall street protests in order to produce anger against wealthy Americans was true in the fact that the OWS movement was led by Democratic supporters and that these supporters were angry with the ability that wealthy Americans could unfairly impact the democratic process through lobbyists and special interest groups, but purely speculative that Obama was related in any way to the movement or its leadership.

An example of this type of insinuation is when MSNBC's Lawrence O'Donnell spoke in August on his show "The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell". He begins his monologue about Romney's lack of tax disclosures by stating his mistrust of the candidate's integrity, stating that "He is not honest... He lies about himself. He lies about what he has said. He lies about positions he has taken and then contradicted. He lies about his opponents. He has lied relentlessly about the president. He has lied about what

the president has said. And so he has left America with absolutely no reason to think that lying about his money, and lying about his taxes, and even lying to the Internal Revenue Service about his money is somehow beneath Mitt Romney.” He then shows a very short clip in which Ann Romney says only, “We pay our taxes.” before the clip ends. Lawrence then insinuates further misdeed by using this clip as evidence of such misdeed by stating, “Notice, and this is very important, notice that she said, ‘We pay our taxes.’ She did not say, ‘We pay our income taxes. Our federal income taxes.’ He then speculates that this word was purposefully omitted so that they would technically not be lying if they were not to pay their income tax, so long as they had paid other taxes. He furthers this insinuation by stating that, “What we don’t know, is whether Mr. and Mrs. Romney pay any income taxes at all.” He then uses speculation from Democratic Senator Harry Reid, to infer that Romney hasn’t paid federal income taxes in 10 years. He then makes the claim that,

“Mitt Romney, like his wife, is very careful to never, ever, ever, use the phrase ‘income tax’ when he talks about them paying taxes. The Romney’s are so careful not to use the phrase ‘income taxes’, so lawyerly coached on that, that they have now entered a zone of reasonable suspicion that their accounting shenanigans have really left them paying nothing in federal income taxes, nothing in the tax returns that Mrs. Romney just angrily promised to continue to hide.”

He then plays a clip in which Ann Romney states that in addition to paying their taxes they donate 10% of their income to charity. To which Lawrence replies,

“I’m sorry, but I don’t believe you, Mrs. Romney. I don’t believe you give 10% of your income to charity. What income? Your gross income? Your net income as defined by you, or Mitt, or your adjusted gross income? I don’t believe you give 10% of your income to charity and the only way you can prove you give 10% of your income to charity is by releasing your tax returns. I know that the Mormon Church expects you to give 10% of your income, but I have no reason to believe that you do. And how embarrassing would it be for you and Mitt to release tax returns that revealed that you did not consistently keep your promise to the Mormon Church of donating 10% of your income. Is that one of the pieces of

ammunition that you're so afraid we will get if you release your secret tax returns? ...Ammunition. Ann Romney is saying right there that she knows there are things in the Romney's tax returns that are ammunition against them. There are things in their tax returns that are bad, that are politically disastrous, that America will not accept as reasonable. She calls it ammunition. Ammunition is what comes out of a smoking gun. And the Romney's have decided that that smoking gun is so dangerous to them that they would rather go through another 83 days of questions about hiding their tax returns. They would rather do that than reveal their tax returns. Because of that smoking gun. They have clearly made that calculation. Releasing the tax returns would be more damaging to them than hiding the tax returns. And hiding the tax returns has been very, very damaging, and will continue to be very damaging to them. But the Romney's are absolutely resolved about this... It continues to be perfectly reasonable and becomes increasingly reasonable to now suspect that the Romney tax returns contain the political disaster, the political ammunition of a tax felony in them."

He then goes on to insinuate that Romney is a tax felon on the basis that Romney has a Swiss bank account and speculates that there was so much tax evasion by people with swiss bank accounts that the government set up an amnesty program for "people like Romney". These types of unsubstantiated insinuations and hearsay allow the commentator to make up limitless types of claims against the opposition, all the while discrediting the counterargument of its intended message.

During the election coverage FNC's O'Reilly made an example of this tactic by stating that the presidential race was so close because America was changing and was no longer a "traditional America". He then continues to make the claim that 50% of the American public whose motivation was simply to get free governmental aid. He then further insinuates that the Democratic voters are driven by this motivation and states that Obama knew that voters just wanted "free stuff" and purposefully ran on a platform of government handouts. While the actual argument of the campaign was that low income families couldn't provide for themselves even when fully employed, these types of overgeneralizations take the part of the argument that is factual, the notion that governmental aid is rendered, and then distorted the motivations behind the argument to

portray the oppositional argument as greed and sloth. O'Reilly then insinuates that the "white establishment is now the minority." before restating a partial truth that there is a sentiment that some low income families think the system unfairly hinders their upward mobility, before obfuscating the argument with the overgeneralization that they feel entitled to aid, instead of any number of other issues.

Factual Manipulation:

Factual, statistical, and methodological manipulation is a another very large portion of this category, as numbers can be misconstrued into presenting half-truths and inaccurate information. While these figures or information may have a valid statistical basis within their original context, they can be misappropriated into representing something which it cannot accurately describe. In some situations, it can simply be misinformation, such as in the case with John Kyl and the incorrect statistic concerning funding of abortions in Planned Parenthood. However, in others, the number could be correct and yet the interpretation of the statistic could be purposefully misleading. This was especially relevant in shows that polled their viewership or web visitors and reported those numbers as evidence of the opinions of the population of the aggregate nation. These poll topics ranged and varied in topic, but many times were based on loaded questions concerning support or opposition of a politician's stance on an issue. Not surprisingly, the slant of the station would dictate the response that they received and the target demographic would be shown to be the majority. Many times the commentator would reference these polls to enforce the notion that the "majority of Americans" were in opposition or support of an issue, depending on which served the purpose of the argument at the time.

One example of this type of manipulation is provided by FNC's "The Five" when they talked about climate change in April 2012. They began by presenting a clip from

ABC news that stated March had over 200 more tornadoes than they typically have, yet when they open the topic up for discussion, instead of using factual figures and scientific data, they claim that the media don't know what they are talking about, citing an unspecified source that 42% of the Americans believe that reports of global warming are exaggerate. Not only does this still mean that the majority disagrees, but the perceptions of the public are not generally accepted as valid scientific basis for predicting future climate events. Bob Beckel presents the counter argument by stating that there is scientific evidence of climate change, and that 10 of the last 11 years have been the hottest on record, then Greg Gutfeld overgeneralizes the facts of the matter further when he states that regardless of whether or not there is global warming, Al Gore and by extension the Democrats have poisoned the well of dialogue by using fear and panic in their arguments, rendering the discussion with liberals impossible. Shortly after, Andrea Tantaros gives some notice to the validity of the counterargument by admitting that according to think tanks of varying political opinion, that the majority of Americans believe that climate change does exist, but then cites a poll that shows that the number of Americans that believe it is a serious problem has gone down, in spite of the fact that the majority still believe global warming is an issue. At this point Greg Gutfeld uses a hypothetical to manipulate the events of the topic by saying that even if the climate is changing by a couple of degrees in Celsius, that scientists measure in degrees Kelvin, making it seem like degrees Celsius are smaller in scale than degrees Kelvin, when in fact the scale of the two are the same, simply shifted by 272.15 degrees to account for more convenient measurement of extreme temperatures. He follows this statement by claiming that humans flourish during higher temperatures, and cold spells kill humans, even though there is ample evidence that heat waves kill many people every year as well.

In December of 2011, MSNBC's Al Sharpton demonstrated this type of overgeneralization in an interview with Florida state Rep. Dennis Baxley about voter laws. Al Sharpton begins the interview by asking Rep. Baxley if there has been widespread voter fraud, and Dennis Baxley answers that the laws are a preemptive measure to fraud so they can increase the credibility of the results. At this point Reverend Sharpton points out that there have only been 31 cases of voter fraud in the past 3 years, failing to mention that those years did not include a presidential election. He then accuses Florida Republicans of changing the voting laws to restrict young and minority voters, even though technically, the law would not target them directly, and would only possibly suppress these demographics as a side effect. The representative then assures Al Sharpton that not only is the motivation to reassure voters and corrects the reverend about his claim that they will cut voting hours by saying that the bill will not cut a single hour of voting. Al Sharpton then contradicts himself and manipulates the information when he states that there was no voter fraud, even though he himself stated that there were 31 cases in the past 3 years. Representative Baxley reassures him that the purpose of the bill was to avoid fraud before it happened. A claim that Al Sharpton ignores by asking, "If it wasn't broke, then why are you fixing it, other than [that] this is some political game?" He follows up this accusation by stating that the lack of action after the hanging chad incident in the Bush/Gore election was a justifiable reason to not try to prevent voter fraud in the future. In fact, Baxley then informs Reverend Sharpton that he is incorrect again, and that Florida did make voting reform after the hanging chad incident. Finally, Baxley provides a claim of his own that Mickey Mouse had voted in last year's election, meaning that there is in fact some level of fraud, yet Sharpton overgeneralizes this claim and states that if his opponent has to resort to claiming that Mickey Mouse voted that their point is somehow absurd and unjustifiable.

Polarizing Tactics: Vilification of the Opposition

While the first two tactics were of a persuasive variety, the third tactic was used to enforce homogeneity and solidarity of beliefs and values among the target demographic; this tactic, which relied on derision and insult of the opposition, was an admittedly rare yet effective method of persuasion because of the emotional charge of the language used. I refer to this tactic as vilification of the opposing side, and it is based on the use of a wide variety of straw man and ad hominem arguments rather than directly addressing the issue itself. These types of arguments are usually unsubstantiated attacks against the character of the typical opponent of an issue, and are polarizing because they create in-group/ out-group thinking. Moreover it is one of the most damaging tactics because it directly discourages rational intelligent discussion. Vilification positions those of the opposing side as an antagonistic enemy, thus building a narrative of good vs. evil. When either party of an argument is cast as evil, it forces the audience to either identify with the protagonist and reject the antagonist, or deny the protagonist's argumentative validity altogether. This is an ultimatum that often is the catalyst for the creation of false dichotomies and is the behavioral manifestation of polarization. Two of the most prominent, although not necessarily frequent users of this tactic were Bill O'Reilly and Al Sharpton. O'Reilly has a regular segment of his show on FNC which is titled "Pinheads or Patriots", in which he presents a situation and then makes an argument for whether the target of the narrative is either a "pinhead" or a "patriot". Al Sharpton on the other hand, makes frequent usage of heavily charged political language in his discussion of the opposing side, often resorting, like many other hosts on FNC and MSNBC, to presenting false dichotomies and attacking the opposing argument with value based judgment in attempting to build narratives of good vs. evil. The end result of vilification is usually the same: produce conflict rather than compromise, and outrage rather than discussion.

One example of vilification was from Ed Shultz from MSNBC's "The Ed Shultz Show" when he was talking about the Affordable Care Act website, and said that if you were a "Glen Beck disciple" that the website would be different, adding on "/dumbass" to the original url. Another example of vilification came from FNC's Neil Cavuto during a monologue concerning the media's treatment of Mitt Romney in which he derides the media for not being "decent" enough to show the republican candidate the respect Neil believed he deserved. Finishing with the statement "Mitt is too decent to call them all disingenuous, pretentious, obnoxious, phony asses. Fortunately, I am not."

Chapter 5

Explaining Social Movements

When applying the theoretical model developed here to our current political situation, we can easily see that there can be large, lasting ramifications to the fragmentation that occurs when two major political parties can subsist in contention with each other, while not involving themselves in any sort of meaningful ideological exchange. When powerful subgroups become locked into groupthink, the normative structures and guiding ideologies of the larger group can shift. When two opposing parties come under the influence of groupthink concurrently, then the shifts can be dramatic and markedly polarizing. Using the same concepts of social referencing as before, our heuristic reasoning can guide us to perceive a given ideology as moderate when we use an extreme version of an opposing ideology as a point of reference. When this occurs, staunchly committed members of a group can begin to mind guard themselves from opposing viewpoints while enforcing conformity within their own group.

This can potentially lead to extremist factions of likeminded individuals forming a microcosm of super conformity. This process could explain why extremist factions of each party could manifest and gain traction within the disillusioned general populace of their otherwise moderate members. This is especially relevant when one considers that news media use these aforementioned polarizing strategies to refute opposing ideas, instead of engaging in a reasoned dialogue through which a mutual understanding can be discovered. When these two groups are so divided that they no longer fully understand the ideology of those they oppose, they begin to, in effect, fulfill the fallacy of the straw man argument. The partisan media and polarized political factions create an argument they believe the opposing polarized political faction would assert, then attack it into absurdity to reinforce the perceived infallibility of their own cause. As this cycle of

inaccurate and one sided debate continues, the constituency becomes more solidified and unified against the opposing argument, because they perceive their argument to be fully superior to what they think the opposing argument is. This is illustrated in Figure 5 below.

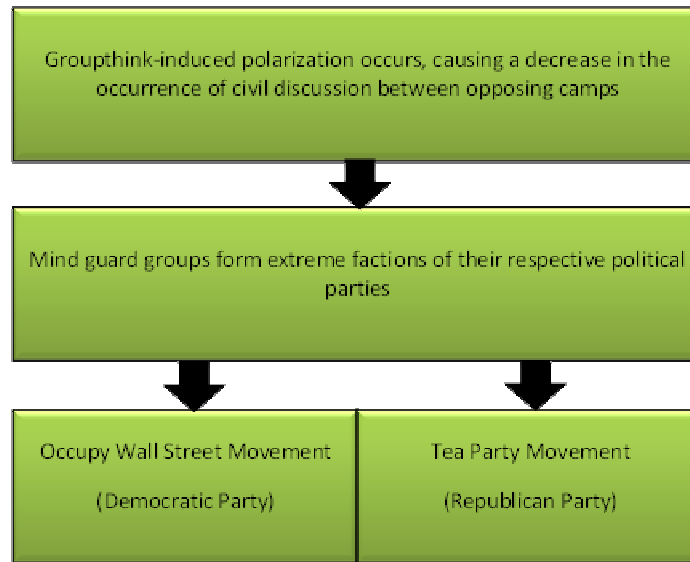


Figure 5 Formation of Political Movements

I submit that the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street Movement were both, in their formation, grass root populist groups that became coopted by these groupthink symptoms and developed into polarized factions of the Republican and Democratic parties respectively. As these groups garnered more attention in the public, usually by way of the polarizing cable news media, they gathered more support and became viable political movements that commanded accommodation by the larger platforms of the two major parties who feared losing favor among extremist constituencies. Moderate movements, on the other hand, have not seemed to produce the same effect, potentially because a compromising faction would not gain the support of the media's attention due to their lack of a clear target demographic. Also, moderate movements might be less

susceptible to the groupthink symptomology because, by nature, they lack the kind of extremism that produces the high cohesion and that characterizes groupthink.

Perhaps what is most peculiar about the kind of polarization discussed here is that previously it was thought to be a good thing. Rae's article (2007) presents an interesting view of the process, stating that in 1950 the APSA (American Political Science Association) reported that polarization kept the responsible party in check, and improved political discussion by adding a viable counterpoint. This is called democratic equilibrium (Held, 2006: 159), and is encapsulated in a political theory known as Pluralism, which is quite apt when referring to the impact of privately owned media companies that wield such influence upon the political landscape. When working as intended, the pluralist system works to provide a necessary balance by utilizing loose connections of widely varied points of view to form coalitions based around common goals on specific issues. This system of pluralist democracy, in which interest groups are courted by candidates that champion their cause, is called polyarchy. In a polyarchy, these coalitions are not very cohesive, because of the heterogeneous nature of complex societies, and are formed on an issue by issue basis (Dahl, 1989). This can be likened to the caucus or special interest system in voting constituencies, because, while they may have vastly different political allegiances, they can all agree upon the interests that benefit the caucus as a whole. For example, a teachers union may draw support and members from both political parties, each of which have many varying beliefs on a number of issues, but they come together on the issue of education to act in the best interests of the teachers.

These coalitions exercise what is referred to as potential power. Potential power is a sort of influence that is not derived from the causal act of effecting legislation, manipulation, or enforcement of the political reality, which, in contrast, is called actual power (Wrong, 1968). Some examples of potential power would be organized voting

blocs, political contributions, sponsorships, political endorsements, political action committees, financial backing, social capital, or, especially relevant to this study, ownership of major news media organizations that can disseminate editorialized information and propaganda under the guise of factual objective news shows. This plays into the concept of pluralism because while there are only two major political parties, there are potentially limitless numbers of special interest groups, caucuses, unions, and lobbies all exercising their potential power upon the representatives of the electorate. Theoretically, this would produce a marketplace of ideas and a wealth of discussion because each interest group would be able to exercise their potential power upon the dialogue through freedom of speech, and out of the confluence of ideas would arise a democratic compromise that based itself in the good faith actions of each party to promote mutual understanding of the situation.

However, pluralism was critiqued because this supposed marketplace of ideas is not always on equal footing. Elitist pluralism is a sub theory of pluralism that entails the imbalance of potential power that can arise. If certain groups amass more potential power, they can theoretically gain a disproportionate share in the marketplace of ideas, and push agendas further than would normally be possible and even censor other ideas from receiving proper exposure (Schattschneider, 1960). This would explain how news media companies that have close ties to the companies or interest groups that they partner with could be motivated to alter the content of their programming to serve the best interests of the partnership by pushing agendas favorable to partnered groups while suppressing the ideas of competing agendas. From this point, it is easy to see how compromise based democratic pluralism could be derailed from polyarchy to corporatism, a similar system, but with the main difference being that bands of coalitions become increasingly cohesive and homogeneous, often becoming more important to the identity

of the individual members than many of the other interest groups that they may be a part of. These more cohesive groups begin to supersede the other identities that the members maintain, and form the basis for greater avenues to utilize this more homogeneous voting bloc to push uniform agendas more efficiently. This seems to be what has happened in the formation of the Occupy Wall Street and Tea Party movements, whereas previously the platform of the Republican and Democratic parties were more varied and dispersed throughout the different interest groups with only a few major ideological tenants drawing the party together. After the formation of these two opposing factions (Tea party and OWS), the rhetoric seems to have gotten much more uniform and homogeneous, most likely a result of in-group pressures to conform to movement standards and isolation from competing ideas, which was facilitated by the restricted and biased editorialization that cable news media propagated throughout the years following the tech boom. Thus the pluralist argument also failed to account for the over polarization of groups, which led to an almost isolationist perspective within each.

Presently, interest groups and political parties are less inclined to compromise and more likely to employ hyperbole in their critiques. That is, Instead of providing productive counterpoints to each other, political opponents often bypass critiques of ideas and instead vilify anyone who does not share their ideas. We have turned “conservative” and “liberal” into dirty words uttered in resentment instead of using them as an accurate point of reference to our own perspective. In early 2012, even when we were weeks away from our nation defaulting on our loans and financial responsibilities, the two parties that dominate government were stubbornly refusing to work out an agreement. This was the very thinking behind the doubt expressed by Standard & Poor’s (2011) change in the outlook of our sovereign finances from “stable” to “negative”. In Fact, the doubt that the two parties could compromise on any sort of action was cited as the reason for mistrust

of the economic system in the first place. Obviously if our political structure is in such bad shape that we can no longer find a way to compromise our way out of a coming fiscal crisis, the scale perhaps unseen in our history, then political polarization and factioning has indeed become a serious social problem.

Chapter 6

Closing Remarks

Overview of Findings and Discussion of Limitations

Judging by the results, all three working hypothesis were confirmed, along with the rejection of the null hypothesis. This leads me to believe that MSNBC and FNC use roughly the same amount of polarizing language, while CNN uses significantly less. However, as with many studies done in such a short span of time, this pretest would benefit from an expansion of time and resources in observation, especially since in the interest of brevity and convenience; the data were based on only 12 hours of observation during the same day. Other limitations of this pretest include the absence of a mechanism for assessing sarcasm and a better method for coding non-terminological styles of divisive communication. In summary, while there is still bias in every station involved in the study, my pretest has concluded that a more qualitative approach would most likely be more apt in fully grasping the subtle differences or similarities that news media use in their narrative building.

As for the qualitative portion, I believe the typology constructed is an accurate representation of typical news slanting strategies, and covers the subtypes used. Limitations include the need for a better method for coding multiple types and subtypes simultaneously and verification by multiple researchers concurrently coding and comparing coding results. The study would also benefit from a more sophisticated coding mechanic for sarcasm and tone to elucidate the mockery subtype, potentially splitting the category into negation by mockery, overgeneralization by mockery, and possibly even vilification by mockery. Finally, more information could be gathered concerning the demographics of each station by analyzing the advertisements in order to solidify a better understanding of the differences in the each station's target audience, as the motivation

to sell ads is a driving force of the slanting process to achieve viewer loyalty, and such analysis could illuminate and reinforce the political leanings of partisan news media.

Where We Are

As stated before, we find ourselves wrapping up one election cycle, while starting the next. The charged atmosphere of American politics has become so polarized that days after the 2012 election was over, the news media had begun asking questions about the 2016 election prospects of Hillary Clinton. Rather than waiting to see what the economic or geopolitical landscapes would be after Obama's presidency enacted potentially lasting changes to the nation, our media were already trying to inflame the audience with partisan politics to capitalize on the ratings hype. It appears that the news media industry has changed from a medium for information and healthy discussion of opposing ideologies into a vehicle of propaganda in order to sell ads. Through the advent of cable news, a large portion of our information has become privatized and vulnerable to the overly subjective narratives of companies using the premise of identification with their audience to sell their product. Instead of news conglomerates using ad space as a profit center in order to fund investigative journalism that will seek objective truths and promote fact-based dialogue, they seem to be selling their voice to the highest bidder, with no regard for the actual substance of the matters at hand, other than to keep fueling the outrage of the audience in order to maintain their viewership. Through the self-continuing loop of selective exposure and non-representative feedback they have lost touch with the moderate public, and ignore any mention of political compromise. This, in turn, leaves the moderate viewer with a distinct lack of exposure to the rhetoric of compromise and what steps could be taken in an issue that would result in a mutual benefit for all involved. As this becomes more and more normal, the moderate viewer is left to pick and choose between two extremes, as an independent might.

How We Got Here

By addressing the ways that partisan media slants the news towards their target demographic, we can more clearly see the ways in which the political landscape itself shifts and fragments, leaving less and less room for coherent dialogue and meaningful compromise. The tech boom of the 1990's gave way to a wealth of methods and mediums in which to express information and opinions, and when FNC and MSNBC joined the cable news landscape, the result was a fight for viewership. Regardless of the motives of the business themselves, a cycle started that began a chain reaction. The news was slanted to identify with a certain demographic, which then provided positive feedback to the news station, urging them to continue their tactics in order to gain viewer loyalty. This repeated itself and eventually the demographics became insulated from alternative views because they self-selected their information only from sources that validated their preexisting ideas. This fed the behavioral inclinations resulting from a heuristically-rooted disregard of information contrary to their worldviews. This was reflected in the rhetoric of the news media, which fostered a disregard and resulting ignorance of the other side's argument. Arguments that were presented were editorialized and taken out of context, representing an overgeneralization tactic. Finally, when the stations had gained enough loyalty with their demographic to openly identify themselves as either the center for conservative news, as the FNC does, or as the channel for progressive news, as MSNBC's tagline "Lean Forward" connotes, they were able to use framing narratives, divisive language, improper exemplification, and other rhetorical strategies to even greater effect. This led to the construction of archetypes not only of what a good conservative or liberal believed, but also a profile of what the opposition looked like, spoke like, and behaved like, leading to an implicit vilification of the opposition. The result was such in-group/ out-group polarization that morality became overtly political, with the

assistance of more outspoken personalities from each station like the Rev. Al Sharpton or Glen Beck. This drove the two constituencies of each political party even further from each other and began to provide social pressure upon those caught in the middle to pick a side. From there, the staunch loyalists of each party formed factions of super cohesive like-minded individuals that became the radical conservatives and liberals that began the Tea Party Movement and the Wall Street Movement respectively.

Some might argue that the Wall Street Movement is not a political “faction” in the sense that their political candidates have not identified themselves as “OWS candidates” in the same manner that the Tea Party has. However, I would respond that the movement has nonetheless made profound enough influences on the rhetoric and attitudes of many Democratic candidates for it to be an affiliate of the Democratic party. One should need to look no further than the term “99%” to justify this statement, especially when it is used on a regular basis by a number of prominent Democrats, some of whom have publicly endorsed the movement. These two radical groups became so cohesive and loyal to their beliefs that groupthink symptomology appeared and drove those factions to the political extremes of each party, leaving the moderates of each party with a sense of disillusionment with party politics, and alienated from the political system at large.

Where We Go From Here

Moderates however, are not the only ones that have become frustrated with our current political reality. As the more extreme factions gain traction and exacerbate the congressional gridlock, we have seen record lows in congressional approval ratings, reaching as low as 5% (GfK Public Affairs & Corporate Communications), and have also witnessed a congress that has passed the least number of laws in its history (Ornstein et al., 2013). With this fragmentation eroding our hopes of possible compromise and

progress, it can be very difficult to see an upside and maintain faith for our society's future. However, perhaps we are on the precipice of a great awakening. On October 30, 2010, there was a rally on the national mall which garnered about 215,000 people. The rally, organized by the two prominent political satirists, Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, was a rally to restore Sanity, and served to provide a, albeit comical, platform for moderatism and political tolerance. Their message sought to promote civil dialogue and to parody the extreme tones that the news media has used to draw the nation apart. Perhaps if we can restore rationality to our current political landscape, then we can tackle the current economic and social problems that face us instead of focusing our efforts to block the opposing party's agenda. In order to do that, we need to better understand how the mass media affects us, and how our perceptions can shift through rhetorical manipulation.

By deepening our understanding of this process of polarization, we can better inform ourselves and those around us, in the hopes that we, as voting members of our society, can identify polarizing and non-productive arguments, then make strides to stimulate more open-minded coherent dialogue from all sides of the argument, so that the virtue of the best idea may be revealed through a mutual understanding of the situation. If we, as consumers of news media, can differentiate between information and editorialization, then perhaps it is possible to voice our opinions to the news media itself and attempt to limit the amount of polarizing rhetoric we are exposed to. We must strive to reject the false dichotomies that cable news media presents us with and break the cycle of feedback and viewer selectivity. We must hold our journalism to a higher level than opinions and logical fallacies. We must realize that we are all Americans, and our system of government is built through compromise, not domination. We must remember that those that disagree with us are not antagonists, but simply hold differing

perspectives, schemas, and attitudes than we do. Free speech entitles all involved to voicing their opinions, and until these opinions are fully understood, one cannot assume to know what the opposition means more fully than those making the argument themselves do.

Appendix A

List of Divisive or Inciting Language Defined as “Polarizing” Used in Quantitative Pretest

1. Liberal
2. Conservative
3. Socialist
4. Fascist
5. Communist
6. Nazi
7. Pinhead
8. Right (or any variation)
9. Left (or any variation)
10. Birther (or any variation)
11. Progressives
12. Radical
13. Monsters
14. Extremists
15. Rich (or wealthy)
16. Poor (or peasants)
17. Uncle Toms
18. Bunk
19. Gibberish
20. Dopey
21. Corrupt
22. Demonize
23. Heartless
24. Cheapskate
25. Hippie

26. Beaten up
27. Smeared
28. Slandered
29. Besmirched
30. Racist
31. Bigot
32. Homophobe
33. Cowardly
34. Weak
35. Nutty
36. Dumb
37. Religious zealot
38. Incoherent
39. Ignorance
40. Stupid
41. Bellicose
42. Aggressive
43. Fake
44. Quack
45. Fringe
46. Ridiculous
47. Idiotic
48. Freak show
49. Thieves
50. Special interest lobbyists

51. Bureaucrats

52. Garbage

53. Bull

54. Red

55. Blue

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