Journal of Communication ISSN 0021-9916

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Expressive Responses to News Stories About Extremist Groups: A Framing Experiment

Michael P. Boyle[1], Mike Schmierbach[2], Cory L. Armstrong[3], Jaeho Cho[4], Michael McCluskey[5], Douglas M. McLeod[4] & Dhavan V. Shah[4]

1 Elliott School of Communication, Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0031
2 Department of Communication, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29401
3 College of Journalism and Communication, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611
4 School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706
5 Mass Communication and Journalism, Fresno State, Fresno, CA 93740-8029

With the tension between national security and civil liberties as a backdrop, this study examines responses to news coverage of activist groups. This 2 × 2 experiment presented participants with news stories about government efforts to restrict the civil liberties of an "extremist" individual or group (news frame) advocating for a cause supported or opposed by the respondent (cause predisposition). Willingness to take expressive action was greatest for individual-framed stories about a cause opposed by the respondent and for group-framed stories about a cause supported by the respondent. We contend that when reporters frame stories about extremist groups around individuals, fewer people will speak out in favor of causes they agree with and more will rally against causes they oppose.

doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00019.x

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the tension in the United States between concerns about protecting domestic security and respecting civil liberties has increased. In general, the pendulum has swung away from civil liberties toward the maintenance of law and order. For example, the implementation of the USA PATRIOT Act has given the government greater power to monitor groups considered potential threats, leading civil libertarians to claim that these powers can and have been inappropriately extended against innocent groups for political as well as security reasons. As these competing perspectives receive increased media attention, the debate is likely to influence public opinion and reactions to groups that challenge the status quo.

Given this charged political climate, it is important to understand how individuals respond to news coverage about dissenting groups. Within this paper, we extend contemporary research on opinion expression and news-framing effects to examine the impact of news stories about government surveillance of extremist groups. Our

Corresponding author: Michael P. Boyle; e-mail: Michael.boyle@wichita.edu.

analysis focuses on how these stories influence audience members' willingness to engage in expressive actions (such as speaking with friends, writing letters to newspaper editors, and attending public meetings) in response to an extremist group. We consider how these effects are contingent upon audience predispositions toward the group's cause and evaluations of the specific group featured in the story.

To investigate such effects, we used a 2 × 2 online experiment, in which participants read news stories featuring government efforts to restrict the civil liberties of an "extremist" individual or group (news frame) advocating a cause either supported or opposed by the respondent (cause predisposition). Further, we examine the interplay between the individual's predispositions toward the group's cause and postexperimental evaluations of the group itself. This research sheds light on how media coverage affects the willingness to take expressive action for *and* against groups and extends the literature on news framing.

Literature review

Expressive action

According to most theories of democracy, the free expression of opinions serves a vital function in maintaining an involved and active citizenry. In theory, the benefits of free expression include a populace that is better informed, makes thoughtful decisions, and pays closer attention to government actions. For representative democracies, open expression brings citizens closer to the decision-making process, keeps the government in check, and contributes to a "marketplace of ideas."

Noelle-Neumann (1993) identifies this conception of opinion expression as the "rational" function of public opinion. However, she argues that public opinion can also serve the function of "social control." For public opinion to represent the rational outcome of deliberative processes, individuals must contribute willingly and honestly to the process. Conversely, to the extent that public opinion functions as a form of social control, the opinions of those willing to share their views can drown out the voices of those who feel intimidated. In either case, expressive action is a key component of public opinion formation and a central reason why public opinion influences the political process. Moreover, discussion and opinion expression can be important precursors to other kinds of political action, such as voting and group membership (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Wyatt, Kim, & Katz, 2000).

Scholars have employed a variety of approaches to measuring opinion expression. Scheufele and Eveland (2001) argue that expression varies along several dimensions. For example, expression can be public or private—sharing views at a family dinner compared with speaking up at a city council meeting. In addition, opinion expression can take place in a more or less hostile setting—at a meeting of like-minded group members or to a crowd of opposite-minded protesters. Although scholars have used various approaches to conceptualize opinion expression, they share a basic understanding: Opinion expression involves disclosing internally held

attitudes to others. This implies that a necessary condition for being *willing* to express an opinion is having an issue-relevant attitude.

In addition, as Noelle-Neumann (1993) suggests, other factors can also influence whether people will share their opinion. These factors can include the strength of individual attitudes, interpersonal communication, and patterns of media use (Petric & Pinter, 2002; Scheufele, Shanahan, & Lee, 2001). Spiral of silence theory implies that perceptions of others' opinions also influence an individual's willingness to speak up as individuals who hold opinions that differ from those of the perceived majority may be less likely to express them (Noelle-Neumann; Scheufele & Moy, 2000).

Cause predispositions

As indicated above, an individual's willingness to express an opinion is based in part on how strongly that opinion is held. Individuals are particularly likely to express opinions about issues that concern them and about activist groups that support or oppose their positions on these issues. Whether the expression defends or criticizes the group is based on the extent to which the group's cause is congruent with the individual's beliefs. In other words, the cause predisposition of an individual is likely to be an important determinant of whether praise or criticism of an activist group is expressed.[1]

Research from political science shows that an individual's intolerance of activist groups is largely a function of opposition to a group's cause. Intolerance is generally only expressed toward groups that represent political positions an individual dislikes or fears (Mueller, 1988; Sullivan & Marcus, 1988; Wilson, 1994). Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, and Wood (1995) argue that individuals would not act against a group unless they dislike the group's cause or mission. They argue that feelings of intolerance are closely tied to a sense of threat, with radical groups that strive for undesirable goals being much more likely to evoke that feeling. Intolerance, in turn, is a critical factor driving what they label as behavioral intentions, which include forms of expressive action. Research from sociology on social movements makes a similar point. Klandermans and Oegema (1987) argue that a necessary initial condition for taking expressive actions, such as attending a rally in support of a cause, is that a potential participant must be part of the rallying group's mobilization potential (i.e., the individual must share a common orientation toward the goals and issues advanced by the group). An individual who is not predisposed toward a group's cause is not part of that group's mobilization potential and will generally not speak out on that group's behalf.

Simply put, cause predispositions are important determinants of expressive actions, with individuals typically speaking on behalf of groups whose cause they share and against those whose cause they oppose. However, not everyone who is predisposed for or against a cause will speak up. Two factors that account for willingness to take expressive action are an individual's beliefs about the opinion climate, as suggested by spiral of silence research, and an individual's assessment of the group itself.

Framing

Media representations have the potential to shape both an individual's perception of the opinion climate and how an individual perceives a group. Marcus et al. (1995) describe several ways that contemporary information might shape subsequent judgments, including the presence of information that generates feelings of threat and that alters perceptions about the power of a group. However, in their studies, only the former is linked to tolerance judgments and neither influences behavioral intentions. Thus, scholars attempting to link media content with expressive action will have to stretch beyond threat-generating content to other media effect theories. One way in which media representations vary is through differences in how a story frames a group or issue. Framing involves several aspects of a story, including how it is structured, what information is included, and what tone is adopted (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Shah, Kwak, Schmierbach, & Zubric, 2003). In general, framing is defined in terms of the organizing principles used to construct press accounts. Research has shown that news frames may have an important effect on cognitions, evaluations, and attitudes about elements featured in the story (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Shah, Domke, & Wackman, 1996). For example, Iyengar (1991) assessed the effects of episodic and thematic frames. Episodic frames focus on isolated events, often told in terms of an exemplary individual, whereas thematic approaches consider events in a broader context, looking at how groups and social forces shape the world. Ultimately, whether stories were framed episodically or thematically influenced audience perceptions and attributions.

Framing effects have been demonstrated in the context of news stories about activist groups. McLeod and Detenber (1999) found that characteristics of news stories influenced perceptions of protesters, police, public opinion, and even judgments about the newsworthiness of the story. The conclusion of this study and others like it is that the nature of news coverage can influence the viability of a group seeking to change the status quo (see also McLeod & Hertog, 1999).

One potentially important framing technique that could influence judgments of a cause or movement is the presentation of news stories in terms of *groups* or *individuals* (Shah et al., 2003). Framing a story using an individual person as an "exemplar" to illustrate the issue being addressed in a news story is a common journalistic convention (Zillmann, 1999, 2002). Research on social cognition indicates that this convention may have important inferential consequences. For example, experimental findings indicate that subjects exposed to behaviors inconsistent with their own were more likely to attribute more extreme characteristics and motivations to individuals than groups (Susskind, Maurer, Thakkar, Hamilton, & Sherman, 1999). Keum et al. (2005) reported similar findings in that news stories about disliked groups framed in terms of individual members of that group resulted in lower levels of tolerance than when framed in terms of the group as a whole. Media coverage of extremist activists often focuses on individual members (Gitlin, 1980; D. M. McLeod, 1995; D. M. McLeod & Hertog, 1992). Gitlin's description of media presentations of individual student activists mirrors other work in this area,

suggesting that such presentations might actually make the group and its goals seem more extreme and potentially dangerous. Thus, for audience members already predisposed against a group's cause, a story framed around an individual could strengthen their resolve to take expressive action against the group.

Meanwhile, for those who support a group's cause, a story framed around a group may enhance the desirability of taking expressive action on the group's behalf. When presented as a group, the movement may seem more efficacious, more likely to succeed, and therefore more worthy of support. Work in sociology suggests that successful social movements must reach a critical mass of participants to attract more widespread participation by those not part of the group's "hardcore" activist base (Chwe, 1999; Macy, 1991). Thus, framing a news story about an activist group in collective terms might highlight the group's critical mass, leading potentially sympathetic audience members to deem the group worthy of consideration.

The extent to which audience members perceive the group to have critical mass may also influence perceptions of the future opinion climate toward the group. Movements presented in group terms may appear to have more members and provide more examples of individuals who hold a particular opinion. For those who agree with those views, this frame could reduce the fear of isolation associated with expressing those views and make respondents more likely to speak up. Perceptions of the opinion climate are known to affect the willingness to engage in expressive action (Noelle-Neumann, 1993).

Hypotheses

In this study, we presented respondents with news stories that focused on the efforts of the government, specifically the Federal Bureau Investigation (FBI), to monitor the activities of an "extremist" activist group. Participants identified their cause predispositions prior to exposure to the stimulus news story by indicating their most liked and least liked groups from a list of six different mainstream special-interest organizations. The news story presented to participants featured a fictional extremist group that shared the issue with either the participant's most or least liked group. In addition, participants read stories that were framed as being either about a group or about an individual representative of the group. In general, we expect that those reading about a disliked group (one that advocates for a cause the respondent opposes) would express opinions against the group, whereas those reading about a liked group (one that advocates for a cause the respondent supports) would tend to take expressive action on behalf of the group. This design draws on the work of Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982), in which individuals were assigned to read about a group selected on the basis of their attitudes toward a set of groups—primarily groups the individual disliked.

However, unlike those studies, which focused on questions of tolerance, this study includes the possibility of reading about liked groups to widen the range of possible motivations to take expressive action. It is important to note that, although

the intent of the experimental manipulation is to maximize feelings of affinity or aversion to a cause, predispositions toward the cause may not always translate to feelings toward the group, that is, some individuals may not especially dislike their "least liked" group, whereas others may not especially like their "most liked" group.

For those in the least liked group condition, framing the story around an individual should make respondents more willing to take expressive action. Conversely, in the most liked condition, respondents should prove more willing to take action when the story is framed around a group. This expectation derives from two lines of reasoning—the influence of frames on judgments about the group or individuals involved and the effect of perceptions of the general public opinion climate.

Regarding judgments, Susskind et al. (1999) observe that impressions about an individual tend to be more extreme than those about groups when the individual or group behaves in an unexpected way. This observation may be explained by Hamilton and Sherman's (1996) principle of entitativity, which suggests that judgments about individuals are more extreme than judgments about groups as people see groups as having a moderating effect on individual extremism. In the least liked condition, individual framing would amplify a preexisting dislike of the cause, prompting stronger oppositional expression. In the most liked condition, reading about individuals might suppress support because of a perception that the activist is too extreme. Past research indicates that that this principle applies to social tolerance in that the greater perceived threat of individuals leads people to be less tolerant of disliked individuals compared to disliked groups (Keum et al., 2005). If this is the case, respondents may be more inclined to express opposition. At the same time, those in the most liked group condition should be more willing to speak out when reading a story framed about a group. They should see the persecuted group as being larger, more viable in terms of critical mass, and ultimately more worthy of support. As such, respondents may be more willing to take expressive action on behalf of the group.

Frames could also affect judgments about the opinion climate. The group frame may suggest that the activist organization is more powerful, more likely to succeed, and more socially accepted. Those who support the cause the group represents should perceive less risk of social isolation and be more willing to take expressive action on behalf of the group. By contrast, when the story is framed around an individual, participants may see the cause as less viable and less socially supported, encouraging expressive action by those opposed to the group's cause. In essence, it may seem less risky to speak against an isolated individual, whereas speaking against a large group may have negative repercussions. Based on these arguments, we advance the following hypotheses:

H1a: When individuals oppose the cause advocated by activists, those who encounter an individual story frame will be more expressive than those who encounter a group story frame.

H1b: When individuals support the cause advocated by activists, those who encounter a group story frame will be more expressive than those who encounter an individual story frame.

It is important to note that just because a person supports a cause advocated by an activist group, it does not mean that the person will support the group in question. For instance, an individual who supports the pro-life cause may have a negative reaction to an activist who bombs an abortion clinic. Group evaluation is a complex judgment, not based solely on cause predisposition but on a variety of other factors including perceptions of the extremity and tactics of the group, as well as more general tolerance toward activist groups. Perceptions of public support for the group may also provide cues that shape group evaluation (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). In addition, people may be intolerant toward a group whose cause they are predisposed to support because they have an adverse attitudinal or emotional response to a group (Chong, 1993; Kuklinski, Riggle, Ottati, Schwarz, & Wyer, 1991). Support for a group based on predisposition toward its cause may be muted if the group is considered to be a danger to the community, or if the group's image tarnishes the cause (Marcus et al., 1995; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). Thus, group-specific evaluations, in addition to cause predisposition, may influence willingness to take expressive action.

Therefore, although we expect a correlation between cause predisposition and positive or negative evaluations of the group, it is likely that some participants felt unfavorable toward extremists whose cause they supported, whereas other participants felt favorable toward extremists whose cause they opposed. Evaluations of the group may moderate the direct effect of cause predispositions on expressive action. In particular, we expect that unfavorable attitudes toward a group should amplify the effects of a predisposition to oppose the cause, leading to an increased willingness to speak out against the group. In contrast, favorable attitudes toward a group should increase the impact of a predisposition to support the cause, leading to increased willingness to speak out in favor of the group. Accordingly, we test the following hypotheses:

H2a: When individuals oppose the cause advocated by activists, their group evaluation will be negatively related to willingness to take expressive action.

H2b: When individuals support the cause advocated by activists, their group evaluation will be positively related to willingness to take expressive action.

Methods

Design

This study employs a 2 × 2 experiment embedded within a Web-based survey. Respondents for the survey were drawn from two U.S. populations. The first was a group of students enrolled in courses at a large Midwestern university who were offered extra credit for participating in this research experience. The second group was recruited from residents of Madison, Wisconsin, using a variation of random-digit dialing. Students in an upper division research methods course contacted a probability sample of selected households and spoke to a randomly selected adult

within each contacted household. Potential participants were told about the study and offered a chance to win one of five $50 cash prizes in exchange for participation. Approximately 37.2% of the eligible contacted participants provided an e-mail address to students. Although final participation rates were quite low, the results provided here should be viewed in terms of experimental findings that show strong internal validity, rather than as an externally valid assessment of the feelings of the Madison community.

All recruited participants were contacted by e-mail and given the Web address of the online survey. Nonstudent participants who provided an invalid e-mail were contacted again by telephone, and every effort was made to obtain a legitimate e-mail address to use for recruitment. Individuals who failed to respond to our initial e-mail contact received an e-mail reminder. To receive extra credit or be included in the prize drawing, participants were required to provide their e-mail at the start of the survey. About 65% of recruited students completed the online experiment, for an n of 413. Demographic characteristics of the student sample include age (M = 20.1, SD = 2.6), total years of education (M = 13.8, roughly equivalent to 2 years of college; SD = 2.9), total income of all members of household including parents (Mdn = $70,000–$90,000), and gender (female = 72.7%). In addition, 51% of nonstudent respondents who provided e-mail addresses participated in the experiment, for an n of 237. Demographic characteristics of the adult sample include age (M = 40.3, SD = 13.2), total years of education (M = 16.6, roughly equivalent to a 4-year college degree; SD = 3.9), total income of all members of household (Mdn = $50,000–$70,000), and gender (female = 52%). The combined N for students and community members was 650. Potential differences between the adult and the student samples were addressed in two ways: using sample type as a covariate and running analyses after splitting the samples. First, using sample type (student vs. adult) as a covariate does not alter the pattern of results presented subsequently in this study. Second, running analyses for student and adult samples separately revealed minimal differences, although results were slightly stronger for the adult sample. Further, checks of demographic characteristics by experimental conditions reveal no significant differences suggesting successful randomization. As such, the combined sample is used in all subsequent analysis.

In addition to a standard battery of pre- and posttest questions, the respondents read and responded to an experimentally manipulated fictional news story about potential civil liberties restrictions and safety concerns following September 11. Participants were first presented with a preliminary story, formatted to be consistent with the presentation of the rest of the online study but including a slightly larger "headline" and broken into short paragraphs in a fashion consistent with the news story. This story introduced either an individual or a group targeted by the FBI for monitoring because of an unspecified possible threat. After reading this article, which was only a few paragraphs long, respondents had four choices, presented as links at the bottom of the page. They could continue with the survey, or they could read more information in one of three categories: "tracking and monitoring,"

"search and seizure," or "restrictions on speech and assembly." By clicking the link, participants were taken to a short block of additional text relevant to the chosen section, describing further FBI efforts related to the target individual or group. As with the main story, each additional block of text ended with a set of links, allowing participants to read more about the same topic, switch to one of the other two topics, or move forward with the survey. Each topic had a total of three additional blocks of text, which were always presented in the same order. Therefore, individuals who read all additional text would consume nine additional pages of material in addition to the main story.

Embedded within these stories were two manipulations that are the focus of this study.[2] The first concerned whether the individual/group targeted by the government represented a perspective that the respondent supported or opposed. This was determined by previously stated preferences to a list of established special-interest groups. Early in the experiment, respondents were presented with six established special-interest groups and were asked toward which group they felt the most negative. A second question asked respondents toward which group they felt the most positive. The answers to these questions were used to generate the affiliation of the individual or group featured in the news story, with respondents randomly assigned to read about an extremist group that advocated a cause they supported or opposed. This was done to minimize the influence of existing knowledge about real groups and to help mask this manipulation. For example, if respondents listed the National Rifle Association as their most liked group and were assigned to the most liked condition, they would read a story that discussed the "Arm America Front."

The second experimental factor dealt with how the story was framed. In the group condition, respondents read a story in which the selected group, as a whole, was the subject of FBI scrutiny. The group was discussed as a unit, and any quotes came from an anonymous spokesperson for the group. Where possible, the story made reference to "groups" rather than "individuals." In the individual condition, participants read about a particular member of the selected group, Greg Anderson. Anderson was quoted and the story made frequent reference to individuals rather than groups. Given the fact that participants could read anywhere from zero to nine additional pages beyond the main page of the story, we tested whether there were any significant differences in the number of pages read across the experimental groups. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed no significant differences between experimental groups in amount of additional information read ($F = .002$, $df = 1, 621$, *ns*).

Independent variable

To construct a group evaluation variable, we asked participants to evaluate the fictional group described in the story (e.g., Arm America Front) using a series of six semantic differential items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$, $M = 21.08$, $SD = 6.72$). Measured on a 7-point scale, the six group evaluation items were honest/dishonest, wise/foolish, good/evil, fair/biased, beneficial/detrimental, and harmless/dangerous. Although

those in the most liked group condition generally evaluated the stimulus group more positively than those in the least liked group condition, there was considerable range in evaluations of the group. Apart from statistical differences between cause predispositions and group evaluations, there are also practical reasons for considering this difference. For example, consider the diversity of approaches to defending the environment. A substantial portion of Americans believe in some form of environmental protection. Yet, many moderates lament the actions of more radical groups such as Greenpeace and Earth First, complaining that their approach hurts the movement as a whole. At the same time, proponents of these organizations complain that mainstream groups such as the Sierra Club and the World Wildlife Federation, by working with corporations, create the false impression that market-based solutions are adequate to save the planet. Forced to identify with a single cause, all these individuals might pick the environment or a representative group. Yet, given the chance to evaluate a specific group, they would show a vast range of attitudes, depending on the tactics and philosophy of the specific organization.

For analyses, scores on these items were divided into three distinct groups based on whether the respondent's score was neutral, negative, or positive toward the group.[3] The initial measures were scored on a 7-point scale, with one indicating the most negative evaluation of the group and seven the most positive evaluation. As scores between three and four are essentially the midpoints, any respondent who scored between 19 and 24 was recoded as neutral ($n = 266$, 42.8%). Respondents who scored below 19 were recoded as negative ($n = 199$, 32.0%). Finally, any respondent who scored higher than 24 was recoded as positive ($n = 156$, 25.1%). Although the most liked/least liked manipulation and evaluations of the group featured in the stimulus story were clearly related, they are distinct concepts. Of the respondents in the least liked condition, 51.5% evaluated the group negatively, 37.4% neutrally, and 11.1% positively. Of the respondents in the most liked condition, 12.9% evaluated the group negatively, 47.9% neutrally, and 39.2% positively.

Dependent variable

The criterion variable used for this study was willingness to take expressive action. Specifically, respondents were asked to indicate how likely they would be to engage in various behaviors if the group portrayed in the stimulus materials attempted to establish a local chapter. This measure was composed of six items, each measured on a 7-point scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$, $M = 24.64$, $SD = 12.01$). These items included talking to friends and family, expressing their views to other people, sending a letter to an editor, contacting public officials, attending a public meeting, and attending a rally.

Results

Hypotheses were tested using an ANOVA model that included the main effects and the two hypothesized interactions. Hypotheses 1a and 1b predicted that for

individuals in the least liked condition, expressive action would be higher under the individual frame, whereas for those in the most liked condition, it would be higher under the group frame. These hypotheses were supported (see Table 1). The interaction between frame condition and cause predisposition was significant ($F = 3.94$, $p < .05$). Expressive action was higher for those in the least liked group condition when they received the individual frame manipulation than when they received the group frame manipulation. For the most liked group condition, expressive action was higher for the group frame condition than for the individual frame condition.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b predicted an interaction between cause predisposition and evaluation of the stimulus group on expressive action. These hypotheses were supported (see Table 1). Although ANOVA revealed no main effects for cause predisposition (i.e., the most liked vs. least liked manipulation) or group evaluations, there was a significant interaction between them as predicted ($F = 6.34$, $p < .01$). Expressive action was higher in the least liked group condition when individuals evaluated the group negatively. In the most liked condition, expressive action was higher when individuals gave the group a positive evaluation.

Figure 1 shows the overall pattern of the relationships between cause predisposition, group evaluation, and framing on expressive action. Both significant interactions are reflected. First, the interaction between group evaluation and cause predisposition is illustrated by the crossing sets of parallel lines. Expressive action drops sharply as evaluations become more positive in the least liked condition. By contrast, the lines slope upward showing an increase in expressive action as evaluations become more positive for those in the most liked condition. Second, the interaction between individual–group frame and cause predisposition is illustrated by the relative positions of the group and individual lines. For respondents in the least liked condition, expressive action is consistently higher for those receiving the individual frame. For those in the most liked condition, the reverse was true. Those individuals in the group frame condition were consistently more likely to show a willingness to take expressive action. Additional analyses found no significant three-way interactions between the variables—the conditional effects of frames were

Table 1 Analysis of Variance Testing Effects of Cause Predisposition Manipulations Interacting With Frame Manipulation and Group Evaluations on Willingness to Engage in Expressive Action

Variance Source	*df*	*Ms*	*F*	*p*
Cause predisposition	1	218.08	1.58	.209
Evaluations	2	214.68	1.55	.212
Frame manipulation	1	11.58	.08	.772
Predisposition × Evaluation	2	875.32	6.34	.002*
Predisposition × Frame	1	544.24	3.94	.048**
Within-cell errors	604	138.08		

* $p < .01$.
** $p < .05$.

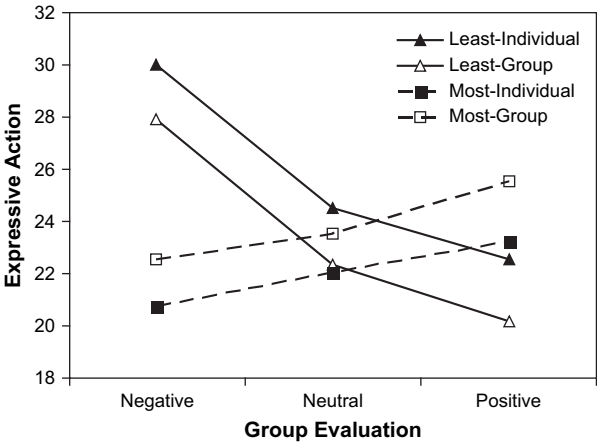

Figure 1 Estimated means for willingness to engage in expressive action from analysis of variance testing effects of frame and cause predisposition manipulations on participation across levels of group evaluations.

not influenced by differences in evaluations, and the conditional effects of evaluations did not vary by frame condition.

Discussion

For hardcore members of an activist group, expression may be an ongoing part of their lives; however, for most citizens, such as the typical participant in this study, expression is influenced by a combination of dispositional and situational factors. When exposed to a news story about an activist group, audience members considering whether to express themselves are likely to rely on assessments about the congruity between the cause of the group and their own personal predispositions.

In this study, respondents who displayed willingness to engage in expressive action could be motivated to take action in support of, or in opposition to, the group in question. Although we did not specifically measure the nature of this expression, existing literature supports the assumption that cause predisposition is closely linked to the direction of expression. Simply put, if an individual supports a group's cause, resulting expression would likely support the group and vice versa if the individual is opposed to the group's cause.

This distinction is important for interpreting the results of this study. Both group evaluations and news story frames interacted with cause predispositions to affect the willingness to take expressive action, that is, the influence of both factors was conditional depending on predisposition toward the cause of the group featured in the story. These findings support our hypotheses that the willingness to take expressive action is influenced by preexisting orientations toward a group's cause as they interact with group evaluations and news frames.

Specifically, individuals reading about a cause they supported were more willing to take expressive action when they read about the group rather than an individual. However, respondents reading about a cause they opposed were more willing to take expressive action when assigned to the individual framing condition. Likewise, as group evaluations become more congruent with predispositions, the willingness to take expressive action rises. This further supports our interpretation that predispositions largely determine the direction of the expression. Seen this way, expression in support of a group increases with more positive feelings toward a group, whereas expression against a group increases with more negative feelings toward that group. The overall pattern of results suggests an underlying nonlinearity (see Figure 1). The most dramatically high levels are at the extremes. As such, it is likely that reasonably strong emotions are needed to activate expression. This is particularly the case for oppositional expression, which is highest among those with strongly negative evaluations. However, the implications are similar for supportive expression when cause predisposition and group evaluation are both positive. When predispositions and evaluations are not congruent, expression is lower. This suggests that merely supporting or opposing a cause is not sufficient to provoke expression; strong feelings toward the group are required. The effects of individual and group frames amplify or abbreviate these effects, depending on whether respondents encounter a cause they support or oppose.

Notably, additional analyses (not reported) found no significant relationship between news frames and group evaluations and no signs that evaluations mediate or moderate frame effects. This finding suggests that the influence of the frames is not primarily due to shifts in feelings toward the group—in particular, it implies that a sense of threat does not explain the influence of media coverage on willingness to take action. This finding emphasizes the distinction between this work and studies of tolerance, in which perceptions of threat were critical in explaining feelings of tolerance and in which such effects did not translate clearly into changes in potential behavior (Marcus et al., 1995). A perceived threat to the social order no doubt remains an important factor in explaining feelings of intolerance and reduced support for civil liberties—a finding confirmed in the context of September 11 by Davis and Silver (2004)—but it does not explain the framing effects found in our study.

So, what might account for framing effects? The most common model assumes that frames somehow influence the accessibility, applicability, or other qualities of mental constructs (Price & Tewksbury, 1996). Individual frames might make certain negative qualities more accessible, more applicable in judgment, or more important. A story framed around an individual activist might render concepts such as extremism more important to cognitive judgments. For example, the individual frame might activate extremist exemplars such as Ted Kaczynski, Timothy McVeigh, or Eric Rudolph to the point where they affect subsequent responses. This accessibility argument is consistent with the perspective of Nelson and colleagues (Nelson, Clawson, et al., 1997; Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997), who find that framing shifts the importance individuals assign to specific aspects of an issue. This notion, that

framing affects the relevance or accessibility of extremists, is reflected in the entitativity principle (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). This argument maintains that the group frame mutes the influence of extremism judgments by invoking the inference that group affiliations temper the extremism of individual activists. This would account for why participants in the least liked condition were more willing to express themselves when exposed to the individual frame, whereas those in the most liked condition were more willing to speak out when exposed to the group frame.

Another consideration is that respondents who encountered extremist activists advocating a cause they supported were likely to have been somewhat conflicted. Although inclined to support the group's cause, they may have been concerned about what attracted the attention of the FBI. These conflicted feelings may interact with the story frame. Because many of the real-world referents for domestic terrorism are associated with individuals rather than groups, suspicions may be greater in the condition that featured an extremist individual, leading to a reduced willingness to speak out in support. Conversely, the group condition may have triggered the activation of positive mental constructs about movement solidarity, or it could have generated concern that the civil liberties of a larger number of people were being infringed. In essence, the group story frame may lead to greater concern about civil liberties and more sympathy for the group under FBI scrutiny.

Story frames can also trigger responses that focus less on the impact of the group on society and are tied more to the impact on the individual respondent. In the least liked condition, negative evaluations may invoke concerns about personal safety. A respondent's willingness to take expressive action may be somewhat muted in the group condition, which may induce more fear about retaliation by anonymous group members than would the individual condition. When it comes to speaking out on behalf of groups, respondents may be more focused on fear of isolation rather than fear of retaliation, as suggested by research on the spiral of silence. Willingness to take expressive action could be influenced by perceptions of the opinion climate. The group frame may generate greater feelings of social support and thereby enhance willingness to speak out. Moreover, as Macy (1991) argues, a "critical mass" of participants is necessary to generate sufficient momentum for a social movement to succeed. Thus, individuals who support a group's cause may draw inspiration from collective framing and be more willing to speak up.

Future research may be necessary to further specify the relative influence of factors that account for the framing effects identified in this research. Regardless of the underlying psychological mechanism, the results of this study demonstrate the importance of considering frames in conjunction with other elements of the story or with readers' attitudes. To that end, this piece fits into a growing line of work that argues for considering frames not as absolute influences on judgment but rather as conditional factors (Shah et al., 2003). Certain frames can interact with other frames and cues; this study shows they also interact with cause predispositions. Understanding and accounting for these conditional relationships is important in advancing framing research.

These findings also have important implications for media coverage of social movement groups, providing further evidence that the way media represent social movements matters. As Gitlin (1980) and others have argued, certain frames may act to marginalize groups or individuals by turning public favor, and ultimately expressive and participatory action, against that group or individual. Our findings support these assumptions as news coverage focusing on individuals promotes opposition while stifling support.

Limitations and future directions

This paper begins to reveal the factors that contribute to willingness to engage in expressive action in response to civil liberties restrictions on extremist groups, including the important and conditional role that media frames can play in influencing expression. However, future research should address some of the weaknesses in this study to further explore these relationships.

As the interactions with cause predispositions suggest, expression on behalf of, or in opposition to, a group is likely to be explained by different factors. Future research should distinguish between these types of expression. Moreover, scholars could even consider whether those supporting a group are doing so because they favor the group's cause, hope the group achieves its specific goals, or simply want to support the group's civil liberties.

It is also important to recognize that framing effects may be short lived. Though the results of this study show that variations in media texts create shifts in willingness to express an opinion, one must question whether these effects would be sustained for any length of time. Although expression is an important antecedent to political participation and action, it is uncertain whether the effects we observed will ultimately produce political action. Future studies may help clarify the persistence of such effects, as well as the extent to which they translate into actual behaviors, both expressive and participatory.

A related issue concerns the processes underlying the framing effects found in this study. A number of psychological factors could account for these effects. Additional research that considers some of the interceding cognitive effects, including *how* individuals process the manipulations, differences in construct activation, and the nature of social attributions, would help determine what factors are at work. Similarly, scholars should consider whether the framing effects here reflect responses to the perceived opinion climate, testing fear of isolation and retribution and perceptions about the group's prospects for success. In addition, scholars should look at whether these framing effects hold across other groups and issue contexts, as well as considering whether other differences in media texts affect the willingness to engage in expressive action.

Nonetheless, the importance of such future research is clear in part because of the intriguing findings from this study. Public responses to extremist political groups and to governmental efforts to monitor those groups will likely shape how Congress modifies the PATRIOT Act and other future legislation. These data suggest that such

reactions hinge upon the evaluations of such groups—evaluations that are rooted in highly charged, somewhat emotional assessments. In addition, media content can play an important role in shaping reactions. If reporters focus on individuals in a more episodic fashion, these data imply that responses will be more negative; fewer people will speak out in favor of groups they agree with and more will rally against groups they oppose. Overall, although questions about public opinion and tolerance regarding targeted groups are important, the willingness to take expressive action may prove the most critical issue in this charged political climate. Citizens firing off angry letters, casting ballots, and marching through the streets as protesters are difficult to ignore. This study helps us understand the antecedents of such actions during an era when politicians are making choices that could dramatically reshape the political and social landscape in America.

Notes

1 The phrase "cause predisposition" here refers to a particular type of belief that helps shape judgments. In their research on tolerance, Marcus et al. (1995) identified two such predetermining factors: predispositions and standing decisions. In the scheme used by Marcus et al., our notion of cause predispositions would perhaps be closer to a standing decision, an example of which is prior judgments about controversial groups. However, those standing decisions require past evaluations of real groups, whereas in this study, we assess attitudes about fictional groups that are probably driven in large part by ideology, a factor that more closely matches the idea of predispositions in the Marcus et al. work.

2 A third experimental factor concerned the ideological cue attached to a fictional think tank, the Liberty Institute. Throughout the story, the institute was used to provide a counter to FBI claims, discussing the merits of civil liberties protections and the need for government restraint. As a cue to participants, the institute was described at multiple points in the story as either "liberal" or "conservative." This wording shift was the only change for the ideological opposition cue. This cue was not related to the hypotheses tested in this paper and was not included in the analysis.

3 This division is important for two main reasons. First, it allows us to use evaluations as a factor in ANOVA. We split group evaluations in three groups (positive, neutral, and negative) rather than using the original variable as a covariate because analysis of covariance requires that covariates have a linear relationship with the dependent variable. As indicated in Figure 1, the relationship between evaluations and expressive action is conditional on predispositions and therefore not consistently linear. Second, there is also a theoretical basis for this distinction in that there is something qualitatively different between those who evaluate the group positively, neutrally, or negatively. Having a largely favorable or unfavorable impression of a group is fundamentally different from proclaiming one's neutrality, which is partly an indication of weak feelings toward the group.

References

Cappella, J. N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *Spiral of cynicism: The press and the public good*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Chong, D. (1993). How people think, reason and feel about rights and liberties. *American Journal of Political Science*, **37**, 867–899.

Chwe, M. S. Y. (1999). Structure and strategy in collective action. *American Journal of Sociology*, **105**, 128–156.

Davis, D. W., & Silver, B. D. (2004). Civil liberties vs. security: Public opinion in the context of the terrorist attacks on America. *American Journal of Political Science*, **48**, 28–46.

Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, **95**, 1–37.

Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Hamilton, D. L., & Sherman, S. J. (1996). Perceiving persons and groups. *Psychological Review*, **103**, 336–355.

Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Keum, H., Hillback, E. D., Rojas, H., Gilde Zuniga, H., Shah, D.V., & McLeod, D. M. (2006). Personifying the radical: How news framing polarizes security concerns and tolerance judgments. *Human Communication Research*, **32**, 1–25.

Klandermans, B., & Oegema, D. (1987). Potential networks, motivations, and barriers: Steps towards participation in social movements. *American Sociology Review*, **52**, 519–531.

Kuklinski, J. H., Riggle, E., Ottati, V., Schwarz, N., & Wyer, R. S. (1991). The cognitive and affective bases of political tolerance judgments. *American Journal of Political Science*, **35**, 1–27.

Macy, M. W. (1991). Chains of cooperation: Threshold effects in collective action. *American Sociological Review*, **56**, 730–747.

Marcus, G. E., Sullivan, J. L., Theiss-Morse, E., & Wood, S. L. (1995). *With malice toward some: How people make civil liberties judgments*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

McLeod, D. M. (1995). Communicating deviance: The effects of television news coverage of social protest. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, **39**, 4–19.

McLeod, D. M., & Detenber, B. H. (1999). Framing effects of television news coverage of social protest. *Journal of Communication*, **49**, 3–23.

McLeod, D. M., & Hertog, J. K. (1992). The manufacture of public opinion by reporters: Informal cues for public perceptions of protest groups. *Discourse and Society*, **3**, 259–275.

McLeod, D. M., & Hertog, J. K. (1999). Social control and the mass media's role in the regulation of protest groups: The communicative acts perspective. In D. Demers & K. Viswanath (Eds.), *Mass media, social control and social change*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.

McLeod, J. M., Scheufele, D. A., & Moy, P. (1999). Community, communication, and participation: The role of mass media and interpersonal discussion in local political participation in a public forum. *Political Communication*, **16**, 315–336.

Mueller, J. (1988). Trends in political tolerance. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, **52**, 1–25.

Nelson, T. E., Clawson, R. A., & Oxley, Z. M. (1997). Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance. *American Political Science Review*, **91**, 567–583.

Nelson, T. E., Oxley, Z. M., & Clawson, R. A. (1997). Toward a psychology of framing effects. *Political Behavior*, **19**, 221–246.

Noelle-Neumann, E. (1993). *The spiral of silence. Public opinion—Our social skin*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. M. (1993). Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political Communication*, **10**, 55–75.

Petric, G., & Pinter, A. (2002). From social perception to public expression of opinion: A structural equation modeling approach to the spiral of silence. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, **14**, 37–53.

Price, V., & Tewksbury, D. (1996). News values and public opinion: A theoretical account of media priming and framing. In G. Barnett & F. Boster (Eds.), *Progress in communication sciences*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Scheufele, D. A., & Eveland, W. P. (2001). Perceptions of "public opinion" and "public" opinion expression. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, **13**, 25–44.

Scheufele, D. A., & Moy, P. (2000). Twenty-five years of the spiral of silence: A conceptual review and empirical outlook. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, **12**, 3–28.

Scheufele, D. A., Shanahan, J., & Lee, E. (2001). Real talk: Manipulating the dependent variable in spiral of silence research. *Communication Research*, **28**, 304–324.

Shah, D. V., Domke, D., & Wackman, D. B. (1996). "To thine own self be true": Values, framing and voter decision-making strategies. *Communication Research*, **23**, 509–560.

Shah, D. V., Kwak, N., Schmierbach, M., & Zubric, J. (2003). The interplay of news frames on cognitive complexity. *Human Communication Research*, **30**, 102–120.

Sullivan, J. L., & Marcus, G. E. (1988). A note on "Trends in political tolerance." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, **52**, 26–32.

Sullivan, J. L., Piereson, J., & Marcus, G. E. (1982). *Political tolerance and American democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Susskind, J., Maurer, K., Thakkar, V., Hamilton, D. L., & Sherman, J. W. (1999). Perceiving individuals and groups: Expectancies, dispositional inferences and causal attributions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **76**, 181–191.

Wilson, T. C. (1994). Trends in tolerance toward rightist and leftist groups, 1976–1988: Effects of attitude change and cohort succession. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, **58**, 539–556.

Wyatt, R. O., Kim, J., & Katz, E. (2000). How feeling free to talk affects ordinary political conversation, purposeful argumentation, and civic participation. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, **77**, 99–114.

Zillmann, D. (1999). Exemplification theory: Judging the whole by some of its parts. *Media Psychology*, **1**, 69–94.

Zillmann, D. (2002). Exemplification theory of media influence. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (2nd ed., pp. 19–41). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.