DISPOSITION THEORY AND PROTEST:

THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA FRAMES AND INDIVIDUAL DISPOSITION ON AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO PROTEST

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of news frames and individual disposition on audience response to protest. Specifically, the study sought to determine whether the social group depicted as the main actor in news coverage of protest would influence audience reactions to and support for organized protest. Informed by disposition theory and tested using an experimental design, the study found that certain audience characteristics can significantly predict attitudes toward protest based on the types of media content to which audiences are exposed, although the influence audience disposition toward the main actors within media frames of protest – the primary focus of this study – was less clear. Three characteristics consistently predicted participants' emotional and cognitive reactions to the stories about healthcare protest: their pre-existing attitudes toward the subject of the protest (affordable healthcare); their general political ideologies, and their pre-existing dispositions toward protesters in general. The results underscore the importance of an audience member's existing attitudes and dispositions in the interpretation of news content about protests.

DEDICATION

To my family, for your unwavering support, and to the revolutionaries who make research like this possible.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

a	Cronbach's index of internal consistency
F	Fisher's F ratio: A ration of two variances
M	Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements in the set
p	Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme as or more extreme than the observed value
t	Computed value of *t* test
<	Less than
=	Equal to

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social and political protests play a key role in the development, enactment, and evolution of democratic societies (Amenta, Caren, Chiarello & Su, 2010; Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Leighley, 1995). Demonstrations and protest resulting from active social movements are intended to popularize organizations and their ideas, garner resources and support, offer psychological rewards to their participants, and send a message to the government (Cottle, 2008; Jasper, 1997; Johnston & Klandermans, 1995). Scholarship across disciplines has seemed to agree that few of these goals can be realized without adequate and even favorable coverage by the mainstream media (Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong 2012; Gamson, 1995; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1992). As Stanford University professor Michael Novak (1969) put it: "The fate of all is bound up with the interpretation of events given by the mass media" (p. 681).

Prior to the election of Donald Trump to the United States presidency, political participation in Western democracies – and the United States in particular – had reached record lows. A 2009 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center measured eleven forms of political activity ranging from working with fellow citizens to solve local problems, to participating actively in organizations that try to influence public policy. Results indicated that only 4% of the U.S. population attended an organized protest the year prior, the lowest participation rate of any measure of civic engagement (Pew Research Center, 2009). Planned to coincide with Trump's inauguration, the 2017 Women's March on Washington was the single largest protest event in

United States history; it has served as a catalyst for civic engagement and sparked a new wave of protest activity in the United States and around the world (Chenoweth & Pressman, 2017). In response, a growing number of mainstream and alternative media outlets have reported on organized protests and their participants. Since 2017, social and political protests have been featured in magazines ranging from *Teen Vogue* (Mucha, 2018) to *National Geographic* (Gibbens, 2017), discussed by comedians like Jimmy Fallon and John Oliver on late night television shows, and reported by almost every "newspaper of record" in the United States and abroad.

Considerable attention has been given to the role of media in trivializing or legitimizing the goals, efforts, and outcomes of social and political dissenters (Gamson, 1995; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod, 2007; McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Shoemaker, 1984). Of particular interest are the frame and framing processes employed by the mainstream media and their likely – though still difficult to operationalize – effects on public opinion of protest (McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997; Noakes & Johnston, 2005). A longstanding and contentious debate exists between mass communication scholars, sociologists, and psychologist when it comes to defining media frames and their effects on individuals (Entman, 1993; Matthes, 2009; Reese, 2007; Snow et al., 1986; Vliegenthart, 2011). Despite a lack of consensus as to the definition, processes, and effects of media frames, scholars have tended to agree that the mass media distort the message of social movement organizations and their protests (Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong 2012; Gamson, 1995; McLeod & Hertog, 1992) and have often cited this as one of the main reasons social movement organizations fail to achieve their goals (Gitlin, 1980). This study seeks to disambiguate previous findings in this area by examining the effects of news frames and individual-level disposition toward social groups on support for organized protest. In departure

from previous studies that suggest social categorization theories as the most important predictor in these relationships, the present work suggests that disposition theory provides a more holistic explanation of the effects of news frames on individuals' attitudes toward protest.

Disposition theory has contended that affective responses to media content are contingent upon perceived similarities, which are both transient and dynamic, rather than readily identifiable social groups (Raney, 2006; Zillmann & Cantor, 1972). Although traditionally concerned with audience enjoyment of humor and mirth (Becker, 2014; Parrott, 2015; Zillmann & Cantor, 1976), disposition theory has also been used to explain audience responses to fright-inducing entertainment (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991; Oliver, 1993), action films (King, 2000), reality-based programming (Oliver, 1996), crime-based fiction (Raney & Bryant, 2002), news programming (Zillmann, Taylor & Lewis, 1998), sports spectatorship (Zillmann, Bryant & Sapolsky, 1989), and political talk shows (Weinmann et al., 2017). Despite this wide range of applications, Raney (2006) argued that the processes by which audience members form and maintain strong feelings toward media characters are quite similar regardless of media content. The present study examines the role of individual disposition toward social groups and audience response to news coverage of political protest. Such findings would not only have implications for journalists and media institutions, but also for social movement leaders and strategists.

Even with the recent surge in protest participation, no more than 15% of the United States public claims to have participated in an organized protest within the last year (Pew Research Center, 2017), yet opinions abound concerning Black Lives Matter (Pew Research Center, 2017) NFL players kneeling during the national anthem (CBS/YouGov Poll, 2017), protests in Standing Rock against the North Dakota Access Pipeline (Treuer, 2016), and other forms of organized political protest. In many of these cases, the opinions formed are not the result of

firsthand experience, but rather of fragmented, mediated communications and secondhand interpretations. As such, it is of critical importance that social movement organizations seeking to bring about lasting social change consider the role of the media in communicating their message and develop tactics accordingly.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of a healthy relationship between the mainstream media and social movement organizations is hinged on the view that the media both reflect and contribute to the creation of public discourse surrounding the issues for which protest participants are mobilized (Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong 2012; McCurdy, 2012). All social movements and protest imply that some group or groups have become dissatisfied with their environment and desire change (Griffin, 1952). Whether that change is social, economic, political, religious, intellectual, or otherwise, members of a social movement will make efforts to alter their environment, and often employ organized protest as one of their most recognizable tactics (Haiman, 1967). Scholars have contended that the mainstream media can present actors and issues in such a way that the public feels more or less inclined to listen to, understand, and perhaps even actively participate in causes for social change (Bodenhausen, Kang, & Peery, 2012; Raphael & Karpowitz, 2013; Scott & Smith, 1969). Given these findings, the way in which individual journalists and news organizations report on protest should be of particular concern to media institutions subscribing to the normative values of participatory and deliberative democracy (Stromback, 2005). Social movement organizations and protest groups should also take note of the role of the mainstream media in communicating their cause. As evidenced by Boyle and Armstrong's (2009) study on media coverage of abortion protests in four mainstream newspapers, protesters do have the power to influence media frames by making tactical adjustments to their approach. As such,

social movement organizations and protest groups should seek to understand the tendencies of the mass media and the role of audience member bias when planning their approaches to social change.

Mainstream media and the status quo

Some theorists have proposed that the mainstream media reflect the interests of the existing power structure (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Paletz & Entman, 1981) and that media support for the status quo is embedded in the processes of news production, which often occur without the conscious awareness of the individuals who produce these messages (Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong 2012; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Shoemaker, 1984; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). A small sample of the theories, concepts, and ideas proposed to support these claims include: the protest paradigm (Chan & Lee, 1984; McLeod & Hertog, 1999), episodic vs. thematic framing (Iyengar, 1993), the politics of signification (Hall, 1985), selection bias (McCarthy, McPhail & Smith, 1996), description bias (Chan & Lee, 1984), the government's "de facto stranglehold" on news sources (Iyengar, 1993), and media adherence to public opinion (McLeod & Hertog, 1992). Despite the evidence shown to support these claims, issues of external validity have often been called into question (Matthes, 2009; Vliegenthart, 2011).

For example, the protest paradigm suggests that reporters tend to focus more on the protesters' appearance and actions rather than the issues they are raising, and that the overall tone of the articles covering protest is likely to be negative or critical, particularly when protests deviate greatly from the status quo (Boyle, et. al 2004; Chan & Lee, 1984; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Almost all mass communication research on social movements and protest has mentioned the paradigm's existence, many have applied it to their studies, and

most have addressed one or more of the elements characterized by it. However, how the protest paradigm has been empirically operationalized remains varied. Specifically, scholars do not seem to be in agreement on what measures should be used to determine media bias, as well as what constitutes such bias. In a general sense the protest paradigm refers to the trivialization, marginalization, and demonization of protesters (McLeod & Detenber, 1999). Yet without consistent, empirical, and widespread acceptance of the protest paradigm in mass communication research, the argument can be made that findings based on this concept are subjective and lack external validity. This is especially true if researchers approach the study of mass communication and social movements with the belief that media bias toward protest is inherent. To rectify this problem, social scientific scholars across disciplines should clearly and empirically define media frames before suggesting their effects.

Framing perspectives: Psychology, sociology, and mass communication

Psychologists have typically viewed framing as a change in judgement brought about "by alterations to the definition of judgment or choice problems" (Iyengar, 1993, p. 369). The psychological evidence for framing is principally derived from Tversky and Kahneman's (1981) study on the framing of decisions and psychology of choice. The study observed reversals of preference for choices regarding monetary outcomes and loss of human life based on manipulations to the description of a decision problem (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). The pair attributed these violations of consistency and coherence in choice making to the psychological principles governing the *perception* of decision problems and the evaluation of options (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Put differently, the study found that seemingly inconsequential changes in the words used to describe choice problems caused significant shifts in individuals' preference for the outcome. Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson (1997) expanded this perspective of framing to

include an effects component by examining the relationship between attitudes toward the poor and opinions on welfare. Their findings revealed that framing can affect the balance of considerations that individuals weigh when contemplating political issues even in the absence of crude propaganda ploys or ideological biases (Nelson et. al, 1997). Given this, the group concluded that "the mass media, and other institutions of mass political communication, can profoundly influence public opinion even without any overt attempt at persuasion or manipulation" (Nelson et. al, 1997, p. 236)

The sociological perspective on framing originates from Goffman's (1974) work on frame analysis and tends to view frames as schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" occurrences within their life space and the world at large. As such, sociologists view frames as a catalyst to render events and occurrences meaningful, to organize experiences, and to guide action (Benford & Snow, 2000). The sociological perspective of framing was perhaps most notably applied to the relationship between the mainstream media and social movements in Todd Gitlin's book *The Whole World is Watching* (1980). Gitlin defined media frames as largely "unspoken and unacknowledged processes" that serve to shape the worldview of journalists and—to an important degree—of the people who rely on their reports (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). Tuchman's (1978) research on the social construction of news examined media coverage of the U.S. Women's Movement and made similar claims, showing evidence that the demands of the news making industry made even "feminist journalists" (p. 144) complicit in producing narrow interpretations of the issues and actors involved in the Women's Movement. While these definitions do provide insight into newsroom sociology and framing processes, they fail to empirically define the resulting news frame. However, some sociologists have come remarkably close to agreement with mass media scholars on what

constitutes a frame (Snow et al., 2007), while others have argued that the field of mass communication completely misses the mark when analyzing and deriving conclusions from media frames (Benson, 2004). For example, Vliegenthart (2011) argued that media scholars overwhelmingly neglect the notion that more than one frame may exist in a given news article and, therefore, outlined four qualifications necessary for a communicating text or speech to be considered a frame. As such, he contended that:

> Frames are multiple and can be contradictory or oppositional in nature; that frames are part of a struggle for meaning between different actors with unequal material and symbolic resources; that news frames are the result of situated social and routinized processes in which the agency of the individual journalist is relative; and that frames used by audiences are the result of socially situated articulations between particular issues, individual and collective difference, experiential knowledge, popular wisdom, and media discourse (Vliegenthart, 2011, p. 105).

On the other hand, the definition of a frame assigned by Snow et al. (2007) is remarkably similar to the definition given by Entman (1993) in his groundbreaking work on media frames in the field of mass communication. Indeed, the sociologists applied Entman's definition of media frames to the case of the 2005 French riots that resulted from the death of three teenage boys fleeing from the police (Snow et al., 2007). In it the scholars argued that frames of protests are characterized in one of three ways: prognostic framing, diagnostic framing, and motivational framing. Each of these framing techniques align with Entman's definition of media frames as defining a problem (prognostic framing), offering a treatment recommendation (diagnostic framing), and making a moral judgement (motivational framing).

In the field of mass communication, a vast number of scholars look to Entman's (1993) definition of framing as the premier work in the field and as a catalyst for the multitude of scholarship on media frames that appeared in the wake of its publication (Matthes, 2009; Reese, 2007; Riffe, 2004). Entman defined framing as "the selection of some aspects of a perceived

reality made more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). Put differently, frames *define problems*, *diagnose causes*, *make moral judgements*, and *suggest treatment solutions*. However, Entman (1993) asserted that frames in themselves do not make any predictions nor do they guarantee influence in audience thinking. Instead, a frame can be viewed as the power of communicators or communicating texts to highlight some features of reality while omitting others (Entman, 1993; Matthes, 2009; McLeod, 2007; Noakes & Johnston, 2005). Over time, systematic use of similar frames may serve to create or reinforce existing schemata, or mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing of information (Entman, 1993; Graber, 1988; Rimé, Philippot & Cisamolo, 1990).

By analyzing the individual elements of a frame, as well as the frame as a whole, researchers can make inferences about the kind of media coverage given to particular events, individuals, and groups. The definition of a frame used in mass communication scholarship should provide clear, operational guidelines for how media frames have been determined. Matthes (2009) made this argument in his content analysis of media framing studies in the world's leading communication journals from 1990 to 2005. For a significant majority of the articles, he found that even in cases where precise operational steps were given (usually when a study cites Entman's definition of a frame) they were rarely explicitly followed. As such, Matthes suggested that such operational definitions need to be made transparent in frame analysis and that "single operational steps–that is, the translation of a definition to the exact operationalization–must be explicitly stated" (Matthes, 2009).

Social categorization and the ingroup projection model

An area of media processes and effects that has proven easier to operationalize and empirically define, is the individual-level response to media content based on one's own previously held beliefs, stereotypes, prejudices, and attitudes (Allport, 1954; Bissell & Parrott, 2013; Entman & Gross, 2008; Johnson et al., 2009; Parrott, 2015; Raney & Bryant, 2002). When generally accepted and widely practiced, these beliefs and attitudes can sometimes – though not always – stifle the progress and prosperity of entire social groups. The issues raised by the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, Women's Liberation Movement, and the LGBTQ movement in the mid-twentieth century helped to expose the detrimental effects of social categorization and discrimination on minority groups.

However, the functions of social categorization are not inherently negative, but in fact fundamental to human cognition and how we organize and structure our knowledge of the world (Lee, Jussim, & McCauley, 1995; Bodenhausen, Kang, & Peery, 2012). Given this, a major problem arises when individuals have limited direct exposure to members of a particular social group and therefore must form beliefs about the group based on the mediated communications of others. As such, communications are subject to both cognitive and institutionalized systematic distortions (Allport & Postman, 1947; Bodenhausen, Kang, & Peery, 2012). Systematic cognitive distortions can be an issue when strong *a priori* expectations about a social group lead to biased perceptions of newly encountered group members (Bodenhausen, Kang, & Peery, 2012; Cameron & Trope, 2004). As Bodenhausen et al. (2012) put it, "the implicit operation of stereotypic expectancies can transform non-stereotypic information into stereotype-congruent representations, creating an illusory sense that one's prior beliefs have been confirmed" (p. 320). Therefore, the specific condition of the intergroup contact – in this case, the mediated communication of protest – is crucial to understanding the relationship between mass media and

public opinion of protest (Allport, 1954; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2008). Empirically defining the communication processes and conditions in which protest becomes tolerable to, or even supported by, mainstream publics could help journalists and media institutions develop an approach to protest reporting that would speed the resolution of intergroup conflict and diminish political partisanship. Additionally, social movement organizations with understanding of these processes may be able to implement tactics that better position their message to be received and considered by those whose attitudes and actions they seek to change.

Because most social movements and protest challenge the status quo, they are often predisposed to negative reactions from ingroups who feel their identity is being threatened (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Tajfel and Turner (1986) argued this occurs because ingroups have a strong desire to give positive value to their own social identity by favorably differentiating themselves from outgroups. As such, social categorization – seeing oneself as a member of an ingroup and others as an outgroup – is likely to bring about negative stereotypes and group representations that favor the ingroup over the outgroup (Fiske, 1998; Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2008). Social psychologists have posited that any form of group membership, even one based on the most trivial of shared characteristics, activate both positive feelings for the ingroup, and negative evaluations of the out-group (Billig and Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel et al. 1971). Because individuals typically categorize themselves into multiple groups, researchers have suggested that a hierarchy of group affiliations provides the most meaningful cues for social attitudes, and that the more salient the affiliation the more biased the individual's beliefs about ingroup and outgroup members (Iyengar et. al, 2012; Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2008). As such, it is

reasonable to conclude that group membership alone does not dictate how individuals respond to media stimuli, but rather the salience of a particular group membership at any given time.

Taking this into account, Wenzel, Mummendey, and Waldzus (2008) offered a theoretical analysis of social categorization resulting in the ingroup projection model. Its basic argument was that positive intergroup relations are possible when individuals evaluate ingroup and outgroup attributes from a higher-order social category that includes both groups. For example, since the Pew Research Center began surveying U.S. public opinion in 1977, no less than 88% of those surveyed have agreed they are "very patriotic." As such, protest reporting that depicts demonstrators as patriotic (i.e. carrying an American flag, or a military veteran in uniform) may be more likely to garner support from the mainstream public because of its appeal to a widely held and highly valued social grouping. According to Wenzel et al. (2008, p. 334-335), "individuals who may have been regarded as outgroup members before will be met with greater cooperation, empathy, or liking, once they are recategorized as members of a social category that includes ingroup and outgroup." The ingroup projection model supports the arguments made by Zillmann and Cantor (1972), Raney (2003), Iyengar et al. (2012), Parrott (2015) and Weinmann et al. (2017), that it is not necessarily one's belonging to, but one's disposition toward groups that shapes their perceptions of interactions.

Disposition theory

Disposition theory suggests that individuals form affiliations that are both transient and dynamic with certain media characters, including those depicted in news stories (Zillmann, Taylor & Lewis, 1998), on an affective continuum that extends from extremely positive to extremely negative (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976). Put simply, the theory posits that audiences enjoy cheering for the success of media characters they like and rooting for the failure of those

they do not. These alliances have most often been conceptualized as emotional reactions to media content and therefore are typically described as *affective dispositions* (Raney, 2003). While it is understood that social categorization plays a role in the formation of these affective dispositions, especially when observing characters and content with which one has very little first-hand experience, disposition theory contends that *perceived similarities* between individuals and media characters serve as a more powerful determinate of audience responses to media content than readily identifiable group memberships. As Zillmann and Cantor (1976) put it, "we have dismissed the dichotomization of affiliation, groups, or classes, and instead employed a conceptual continuum of affective disposition" (p. 100). They do not suggest that social identity theories and models based on affiliations or reference groups are inaccurate, but rather that they are special cases of the more general disposition theory (Ferguson & Ford, 2008). Where disposition theory deviates from other theories of social categorization is in its emphasis on the concepts of *affiliation*, *empathy*, and *moral judgement* in predicting audience response to media content.

Concepts of disposition theory: Affiliation, empathy, and moral judgment

Scholars of disposition theory have devoted significantly less discussion to the factors that lead to disposition formation than they have to the effects of such formations on audience response to media content. However, in their original work on disposition theory, Zillmann and Cantor (1976) did suggest that the formation of affective dispositions and the responses they predict are usually more contingent on emotional state than personality traits. As such, they discussed three concepts—*affiliation*, *empathy*, and *moral judgment*—that lead to the formation of affective dispositions and can thereby predict how audience members will respond to the plights of media characters and content. The first two factors, affiliation and empathy, are

emotion-based, require little cognitive effort, and are likely to dominate audience responses to media content. However, in line with other theories of morality, like moral foundations (e.g. Graham et al., 2011; Tamborini, 2011), disposition theory suggests that individuals will be more motivated to cognitively process media scenarios and the characters involved when the content does not square with previously held notions or beliefs. That is, audience members will not base their judgments of media content and characters solely on emotional reactions, but will employ the more cognitive process of moral judgment to determine their feelings and attitudes. The following sections are intended to provide an overview and definition of each of the three elements contributing to the formation of individuals' affective dispositions.

Affiliation

In one of the foundational studies of disposition theory and mass communication, Zillmann and Cantor (1976) suggested that affiliations, defined as those objects and actors toward which a subject adopts the same attitude as he/she does toward himself/herself, help to explain individuals' affective dispositions toward media characters. The pair contended that these affiliations may be acquired, created, or imposed (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976). Acquired affiliations refer to those that are created by people (e.g. beloved friends, places, and works of art), and created affiliations refer to those things that have been constructed by the subject (e.g. children, art productions, and academic theories) (Wolff, 1934; Zillmann & Cantor, 1976). Imposed affiliations are those to which destiny has affiliated the subject and include things like race/ethnicity, sex, and parents (Wolff, 1934; Zillmann & Cantor, 1976). A subtype of this last form of affiliation may include all objects to which the subject is conscious of resembling, or "affiliations by similarity" (Wolf, 1934, p. 344). These groups are not mutually exclusive, as a single object may belong to more than one. It has been noted, however, that the most important

affiliations are those which are acquired and maintained as the result of intense positive sentiment, including political, religious, and patriotic affiliations (Wolff, 1934).

In his foundational work on the subject, Wolff (1934) suggested that affiliated objects are all the things that an individual can call his or her own—from physical and intellectual power, to reputation, friends and family, property ownership, and clothing—all of these things can illicit the same emotional responses from individuals. Because of this, we may consider an individuals' acquired social, cultural, and political affiliations as more accurate predictors of their responses to media content than those affiliations imposed on him or her by race/ethnicity, sex, birth, or socioeconomic status. Regardless of which type of affiliation an audience member may share with a media character, individual responses to media content and characters based on affiliation are almost always the product of emotional reaction and rarely of cognitive deliberation.

Empathy

Empathy is identified as the chief mechanism guiding emotional responses to media content (Raney, 2006). Disposition theory posits that individuals' enjoyment of media content is high when media characters who are liked experience positive outcomes and those who are disliked experience negative outcomes. The strength and valence of this response, however, is governed by empathetic reactions to the group (Zillmann, 1991). In evoking these empathetic reactions, Raney (2006) contended that individuals first identify the roles and activities of an agent and then (1) react with empathy toward agents whose roles and activities they associate with positive experiences, (2) react with counterempathy toward characters whose roles and activities they associate with negative experiences, or (3) both. These empathetic reactions lead individuals to align with those who are more experientially close to them, while counterempathic reactions lead individuals to align against those who are more experientially different (Raney,

2006). When examining audience responses to news stories of protest, it seems that positive empathetic reactions may be particularly elusive given that so few have first-hand experience with organized protest. Again, it is important to note that, similar to affiliation, empathy is an emotional reaction to media content and is not guided by rational thought and reasoned judgment, but rather, as Tamborini (2011) suggests, is "better characterized as an automatic 'gut' reaction, where immediate emotional response occurs without careful consideration" (p. 39).

Moral judgment

Disposition theory also posits that in order for individuals to cheer for the success of a given actor, they must first judge the character as morally acceptable. That is, "people's emotional side-taking with characters…must square with their notions of right and wrong" (Raney, 2011, p. 18). These moral judgments are particularly important in viewing media content because individuals come to like characters whose actions are judged as appropriate and morally correct while disliking characters whose actions are judged as inappropriate and morally incorrect (Raney, 2004). As such, scholars are able to predict whether audience members will root for the success or failure of a given media character based on the moral judgments rendered.

On one hand, individuals' social nature requires that the selection of favored and unfavored characters not be capricious, but rather that our feelings and attitudes toward media characters be morally justified (Raney, 2003; Zillmann & Cantor, 1976). On the other hand, individuals with no affiliations and/or no feelings of empathy toward a media actor may not be cognitively motivated to make reasoned moral judgments about the actor and their plights. Instead, they will defer to the emotional processes of affiliation and empathy to inform their moral evaluations of the media character and scenario. Given this, it is clear that disposition-based theories of media have tended to align most closely with the social intuitionist perspectives

of morality (Haidt, 2001; Tamborini, 2011; Zillmann, 2000;) and have suggested a more rationalist perspective (Kohlberg, 1981) only when motivated by a particular moral dilemma. In media content, such a dilemma may arise when it is hard to tell whether a media character shares an affiliation and/or when liked media characters deviate from adherence to highly salient moral expectations. As Tamborini (2011) put it: "the need for careful moral deliberation results from…the extent to which a story provides salient exemplars that are difficult to categorize" (p. 41). That is, media content with actors that are easily categorized by affiliation or experiential similarities and differences should require little or no cognitive effort from audience members when rendering moral judgments. Conversely, when audience members observe media actors with whom they share perceived similarities participating in deviant activity, they will be more likely to consider such media content from a place of reasoned moral judgment and less likely to rely solely on emotional reactions when forming their opinions.

Although the processes of reasoned moral judgment are thought to occur somewhat infrequently in social interactions and exposure to media content (Tamborini, 2011), when they do occur, role taking is considered their common cause (Selman, 1971; Tamborini, 2011). That is, the ability to understand the reciprocal nature of interpersonal relationships and to take the perspective of other people is one of the most common factors in eliciting cognitive moral judgments rather than emotional reactions from individuals. This may be a particularly important concept for social movement organizations to consider because, unlike the emotional reactions of empathy and affiliation, cognitive moral judgments are not directly related to self, but rather are "linked to the interests and welfare of society as a whole, or at least of persons other than the judge or agent" (Haidt, 2003, p. 853).

Judgments based solely on emotional reactions may be particularly harmful to social movement organizations and protest groups with whom audience members hold no affiliations and have no experiential similarities (e.g. do not belong to any of the same social groups and do not, themselves, participate in organized protest). It also may help to explain why, despite the fact that 91% of Americans believe that the right to nonviolent protest is an essential component of democracy and 92% believe that the rights of people with unpopular views should be protected, only 18% of Americans strongly support the Black Lives Matter movement and only 25% somewhat support it (Pew Research, 2017; Pew Research, 2016; Lartey, 2016). Perhaps more interesting is how support for the movement breaks down among social groups. About the same percentage of Black Americans (82%) and Democrats (80%) support Black Lives Matter, while White Americans (52%) and Republicans (20%) are much less likely to support the movement. Similar trends are visible in American public opinion of the NFL anthem protests, which have been heavily supported by Democrats (72%) and Black Americans (61%), and overwhelmingly rejected by White Americans (34%) and Republicans (11%) (CBS/YouGov Poll, 2017). Conversely, Republicans (38%), compared to Democrats (88%) and Black Americans (84%), were slow to blame White supremacists for inciting protest violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, that killed one counter protester and injured 19 more (Heim, 2017), and the majority (69%) approved of Donald Trump's response to the White supremacist rally blaming "both sides" for the deadly violence (Shear & Haberman, 2017; Quinnapec University Poll). Interestingly, Democrats (88%) were more likely to blame White supremacists for the violence than Black Americans (84%), and young people (77%), Hispanics (71%), and White college-educated women (66%) were others likely to condemn the violence of the White supremacists. While some may suggest that these variances are the result of a rational assessment

of the issue being protested and reasoned moral judgments concerning group tactics, I propose that it is considerably more likely that support for organized protest is based on individual-level attitudes and emotional responses to the *people* represented in news coverage of protest. In line with this reasoning, I advance the following hypotheses:

H1. Individuals' dispositions toward the social group whose members are defined as the main actor in news frames of protest will significantly predict their emotional reactions to news coverage of protest, such that the more positive the disposition, the more positive the emotional reaction.

H2. Individuals' dispositions toward the social group whose members are defined as the main actor in news frames of protest will significantly predict their moral judgments of the main actors, such that the more positive the disposition, the more positive the moral judgment.

H3. Individuals' dispositions toward the social group whose members are defined as the main actor in news frames of protest will significantly predict their attitudes toward protest in general, such that the more positive the disposition, the more positive the attitude.

H4. Individuals' dispositions toward the social group whose members are defined as the main actor in news frames of protest will significantly predict their support for the protest, such that the more positive the disposition, the more likely their support.

Given that the nature of protest is to change the publics' attitudes not with violence or coercion but through force of appeal (Haiman, 1967), it is of critical importance that social movement organizations seeking to influence the opinions and actions of those outside their own social group employ tactics that encourage cognitive moral judgments rather than emotional

reactions from audience members. As such, if these hypotheses are supported, organizers should seek to diversify group membership and leaders who appear in public forums, and recruit members from social groups that they are most trying to influence, and especially from groups toward which potential converts feel particularly warm.

3. METHODOLOGY

To examine its hypotheses, this study employed an experimental design conducted at the University of Alabama. Participants were recruited through a participant pool in the College of Communication & Information Sciences, and they received course credit for participating in the study. Participants were primarily between ages 18 and 21 (n=150, 93%). Participants were mostly female (n=108, 67%) and they were primarily White (n=136, 85%), followed by Black or African American (n=14, 9%), Hispanic or Latino(a) (n=7, 4%), Asian/Pacific Islander (n=2, 1%), or Other (n=2, 1%). Ten participants served in the U.S. military (6%). In terms of political ideology, participants leaned conservative with 74 participants (45%) describing themselves as strongly or somewhat conservative, and 54 participants (34%) describing themselves as strongly or somewhat liberal. Participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions, with 54 in the control group, 52 in a group that read an article featuring Black protesters, and 55 in a group that read an article featuring military veteran protesters. Please see below for additional information related to the treatment conditions.

To avoid issues of internal validity, participants were told they were participating in two separate studies. Upon beginning the first study, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions designed to measure their political attitudes, beliefs, and activities (Appendix A). In the second part of the first study, participants were asked to complete a survey intended to measure their dispositions toward a variety of social groups, including protesters, Black people,

and military veterans (Appendix B). This concluded study one. In study two, participants were told they were being assigned a random news blurb about any number of current events. In actuality, all participants were assigned one of three short news blurbs about a healthcare protest (Appendix C). Two of the news blurbs were manipulated to frame members of a different social group (African Americans, military veterans) as the main actor of the protest. The third stimulus functioned as a control and did not identify any members of a social group in the news blurb. After reading the news blurb about the healthcare protest, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions intended to measure their emotional response to the media content, as well as their moral judgments of the main actors, their attitudes toward organized protest in general, and their desire to see the protest described in the news blurb fail or succeed (Appendix D). Finally, participants were asked to answer demographic questions before concluding the survey (Appendix E).

Moderating variable: Disposition

Employing the "Social Groups Survey" developed for use in Moral Foundations Theory by social psychologists, participants were asked to rate their feelings toward a variety of social groups. Social groups participants' encountered ranged from "elderly people" to "priests" to "vegetarians" and "homosexuals" (Appendix B). However, this study was interested in only three of these responses: individuals' feelings toward military veterans, individuals' feelings toward Black people, and individuals' feelings toward protesters. The feelings of "warmth" or "coldness" participants assigned to these groups served to define their affective dispositions, a moderating variable in this study. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate how warm they felt toward Black people (M=80.52, SD=20.84), military veterans (M=__, SD=__), and

protesters (*M*=55.91, *SD*=25.31) on a feeling thermometer ranging from 1 ("extremely cold") to 100 ("extremely warm").

Independent variables: News frames of protest, attitudes toward healthcare, political leaning

Drawing from the mass communication definition of framing developed by Entman (1993), news frames were defined as "the selection of some aspects of a perceived reality made more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment solution for the item described" (p. 50). Rather than operationalizing a frame in its entirety, Matthes and Kohring (2008) suggested splitting up the frame into its individual elements before assessing the analytical variables of which it is comprised. In this study, the present study looks only at the *problem definition* given by news media to determine the effects of media frames on individuals' emotional responses, as well as their existing attitudes toward political protest. According to Entman, the *problem definition* of a frame should determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits. These cost and benefits are usually measured in terms of common cultural values. When operationalizing this frame element, Matthes and Kohring (2008) coded for the *central issue under investigation* and the *most important actor,* as these two variables mark the content of the debate—that is, they define the central problem of a news story.

To determine the effects of media frames on audience responses to protest, the present study manipulated only the *most important actor* identified in the news frame and left the central issue under investigation (healthcare protest) the same across all stimuli. It manipulated this variable by changing the social group represented by the most important actor through visual representation (a photo) and source citation (the name/title of protester). In stimulus A, the main

actor defined in the news frame was United States military veterans, a social group that a majority of Americans (78%) believe contribute "a lot" to society's well-being and the number one ranked occupational group esteemed by the American public (Pew Research Center, 2013). In stimulus B, the main actor was Black Americans, whose protests and social movement organizations have proven to be particularly socially and politically divisive in the past (Pew Research Center, 2016). In stimulus C (the control), the main actor was not identified in a photo and was given a generic name/title (Appendix C).

To control for the central issue under investigation, in this case healthcare, participants were asked to indicate how important they felt certain issues were to democratic societies. Specifically, they were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed (1) or disagreed (7) with the statement "Generally speaking, I think people in democratic societies should have the right to access affordable healthcare" (M=5.98, SD=1.21).

Finally, to understand the influence of participants' political leanings on response to news coverage of protest, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they identified as liberal or conservative. Participants' were asked to select from one of six choices ranging from strongly liberal (1) to strongly conservative (6) (M=3.23, SD=1.20)

Dependent variables: Emotional reaction, moral judgment, and attitudes toward protest

Upon entering the experiment, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions regarding their social and political attitudes, as well as their existing attitudes toward organized protest and their own political participation (Appendix A). After exposure to the stimulus, these measures were reassessed to determine the effects of news frames on audience response to protest (Appendix D).

To measure the audiences' emotional reactions to news coverage of protest, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they did (7) or did not (1) experience a range of emotions while reading the news blurb. Participants' aggregate positive emotional response was calculated and used to test H1. Participants were asked to indicate how the articles made them feel in terms of happiness and pride on a 1 to 7 scale, with 7 indicating "to a great extent." The scale was reliable (α =.79; *M*=6.60, *SD*=3.91).

Moral judgments of the main actors in an organized protest were measured by asking participants to indicate the degree to which they believed the conduct of the protesters was morally acceptable. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed (7) or disagreed (1) with the statement "In general, I feel positive about people who participate in protests like this one" (*M*=4.82, *SD*=1.49). Participants' moral judgments were used to test H2.

General attitudes toward protest were measured using a two-item scale. Attitudes were measured by asking participants to indicate the degree to which they felt that "people should have the right to participate in organized protest" and to what degree they felt that "protests are an important part of democratic societies. Responses were measured on a 1 to 7 scale, with 7 indicating "to a great extent." The scale was reliable (α =.79; *M*=6.60, *SD*=3.91) and used to test H3.

Finally, participants were asked to indicate how hopeful they were that the protest depicted in the news story is successful. Responses were measured on a 1 to 7 scale, with 7 indicating "to a great extent" (*M*=5.14, *SD*=1.58). Results were used to test H4.

4. RESULTS

To examine the hypotheses of this study, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to determine the contribution of participants' existing dispositions toward social groups on the outcomes. Two analyses were conducted per hypothesis: one for news stories and dispositions related to Black people protesting and one for news stories and dispositions related to military veterans protesting.

In the first analysis for H1, five factors were entered as independent variables for the first block of the model: participants' existing dispositions toward Black people; participants' existing dispositions toward protesters in general; participants' attitudes toward healthcare, the topic being protested; participants' political leaning; and the degree to which participants' reported being politically engaged. The first block of the model included the treatment condition (exposure to a news article featuring Black protesters as the main actor) dummy coded so that participants who were exposed to the article were represented by 1 and the control and military veteran protester conditions were represented by 0. In the second step of the model, an interaction term was entered for the treatment condition X participant's existing dispositions toward Black protesters or military veteran protesters. The dependent variable was the degree to which participants experienced positive emotions after reading the news blurb. The five factors entered into Step 1 predicted 36% of the variance in positive emotion, $F(6, 135)=3.32$, $p<.05$.

However, none of the variables proved significant and there was no significant interaction. Therefore, H1 was not supported for the Black protester treatment condition.

The analysis was repeated for veterans with the same dependent variable and predictor variables, except participants' existing dispositions toward Black people was replaced with participants' existing dispositions toward military veterans, and the dummy coded variable for the Black protester condition was replaced with the dummy coded variable for the military veteran protester condition. The five independent variables in Step 1 explained 41% of the variance, $F(6, 136) = 4.5$, $p<.001$. Participants' existing attitudes toward military veterans predicted greater positive emotion, beta=.19, $t(136) = 2.21$, $p<.05$. The more participants supported individuals' right to affordable healthcare, the more they experienced positive emotions upon reading about the protest, beta=.18, $t(136) = 2.13$, $p<.05$. Again, no significant interaction occurred. Therefore, H1 was not supported for the military veteran protester treatment condition.

In the analysis of H2, the same independent variables related to the Black protesters story were entered into the first and second steps of the regression. Moral judgement served as the dependent variable. The first model predicted 58% of the variance in moral judgment, $F(6, 136) = 11.49$, $p<.001$. Participants' existing attitudes toward healthcare predicted more positive moral judgments of the Black protesters, beta=.22, $t(136) = 2.89$, $p<.01$. The warmer participants felt toward protesters in general, the more likely they were to have positive moral judgments of Black protesters, beta=.24, $t(136) = 2.69$, $p<.01$. Finally, the more conservative participants reported being, the less positive their moral judgments of the Black protesters, beta= -.29, $t(136) = -3.63$, $p<.001$. However, the interaction was not significant and, therefore, H2 was not supported for the Black protesters condition.

The analysis was repeated for military veteran protesters with the same dependent variable and predictor variables. Similar to the Black protesters model, the first model for the military veterans protesters predicted 57% of the variance in moral judgment, $F(6, 137) = 11.16$, $p<.001$. Again, participants' existing attitudes toward healthcare predicted more positive moral judgements of military veteran protesters, beta=.22, $t(137) = 2.79$, $p<.01$, and the warmer participants felt toward protesters in general, the more likely they were to make positive moral judgments of military veteran protesters, beta=.24, $t(137) = 2.78$, $p<.01$. Finally, the more conservative participants reported being, the less positive their moral judgment of the military veteran protesters, beta= -.29, $t(137) = -3.51$, $p<.001$. When the interaction term was added, the second model explained 60% of the variance in moral judgments, $F(7,136) = 11.09$, $p<.001$. An additional 3% of variance was explained, R square change = .04, F change (1, 135) = 7.48, $p<.01$. For the military veteran protester condition, H2 was supported.

In the analysis of H3, the same five predictor variables and the dummy coded treatment condition for Black protesters were again entered into the first step of the model as predictors. The interaction term of existing dispositions and treatment condition were entered into the second step, with attitudes toward protest in general entered as the dependent variable. The first model predicted 52% of the variance in attitudes toward protest $F(6, 136) = 8.37$, $p<.001$. Participants' political leaning negatively predicted support for protest such that the more conservative participants reported being, the less likely they were to agree that people should have the right to participate in organized protest beta= -.18, $t(136) = -2.18$, $p<.05$. The warmer participants felt toward protesters in general, the more likely they were to agree that people should have the right to participate in protest beta= .34, $t(136) = 3.67$, $p<.001$. When the interaction term was added, the model explained 54% of the variance in general attitudes toward

protest, $F(7, 135) = 8.03$, $p<.001$. An additional 3% of variance was explained, R squared change = .02, F change (1, 135) = 4.62, $p<.05$. Participants' attitudes toward protestors in general remained a significant predictor, beta= .35, $t(136) = 3.80$, $p<.001$. The interaction between the treatment condition and participants' attitudes toward protest in general was also significant beta= .71, $t(136) = 2.15$, $p<.05$. Therefore, H3 was supported for the Black protester condition.

The analysis was repeated for military veterans. The first model predicted 49% of the variance in support for protest in general $F(6,137) = 7.33$, $p<.001$). The warmer participants reported feeling toward protesters in general the more likely they were to agree that people should have the right to participate in protest beta= .38, $t(137) = 4.17$, $p<.001$. However, the interaction between the treatment condition and participants' attitudes toward protest in general was not significant. Therefore, H3 was not supported for the military veteran protester condition.

Finally, for an analysis of H4, the same five predictor and the dummy coded treatment condition for Black protesters were again entered into the first step of the model as predictors. The interaction term of existing dispositions and treatment condition were entered into the second step, with support for the protest described in the article entered as the dependent variable. The first model predicted 70% of the variance in support for the protest in the news article $F(6, 136) = 21.7$, $p<.001$. Participants existing attitudes toward healthcare positively predicted support for the protest described in the news article beta= .38, $t(136) = 5.57$, $p<.001$, and the warmer participants felt toward protesters in general the more likely they were to support the protest beta= .23, $t(136) = 2.98$, $p<.01$. Finally, participants political leaning negatively predicted support for protest, such that the more conservative the participants reported being the less likely they were to support the protest beta= -.30, $t(136) = -4.34$, $p<.001$. However, the interaction between the treatment condition and participants' support for the protest described in

the news article was not significant. Therefore, H4 was not supported for the Black protester condition.

The analysis was repeated for military veteran protesters with the same dependent variable and predictor variables, except participants' existing dispositions toward Black people were substituted for participants' existing dispositions toward military veterans, and the dummy coded variable for the Black protester condition was substituted for the dummy coded variable for the military veteran protester condition. Similar to the Black protester model, the first model for the military veteran protest predicted 70% of the variance in support for the protest in the news article $F(6, 137) = 21.7$, $p<.001$. Again, participants' existing attitudes toward healthcare positively predicted support for the protest described in the news article beta= .37, $t(137) = 5.52$, $p<.001$, and the warmer participants felt toward protesters in general the more likely they were to support the protest beta= -.32, $t(137) = -4.35$, $p<.001$. Finally, participants political leaning negatively predicted support for protest, such that the more conservative the participants the less likely they were to support the protest (beta= -.32, $p<.001$). When the interaction term was added, the model explained 71% of the variance in support for the protest, $F(7, 136) = 19.56$, $p<.001$. An additional 1% of variance was explained, R square change = .02, F change (1, 136) = 4.01, $p<.05$. Participants' existing attitudes concerning health care positively predicted support for the protest, beta= .36, $t(137) = 5.33$, $p<.001$. In addition, political leaning negatively predicted support, beta= -.32, $t(137) = -4.48$, $p<.001$. Finally, participants' attitudes toward protestors in general positively predicted support, beta= .22, $t(137) = 3.03$, $p<.01$. Unlike the condition for Black protesters, the interaction between the treatment condition and support for the protest described in the article was significant beta= .69, $t(136) = 2.00$, $p<.05$. Therefore, H4 was supported for the military veteran protester condition.

5. **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether individuals' existing dispositions toward social groups could serve to predict audience support for protest based solely on the characteristics of media content to which they were exposed. Specifically, the study examined whether – all else being constant – altering the social group depicted as the main actor in news coverage of protest would influence audience reactions to and support for organized protest. Informed by disposition theory and tested using an experimental design, the study found that certain audience characteristics can significantly predict attitudes toward protest based on the types of media content to which they are exposed.

Three characteristics consistently predicted participants' emotional and cognitive reactions to the stories about healthcare protest: their pre-existing attitudes toward the subject of the protest (affordable healthcare); their general political ideologies, and their pre-existing dispositions toward protesters in general. The results underscore the importance of an audience member's existing dispositions in the interpretation of news content about protests. Based on the results, we might expect political conservatives to be less welcoming of political protest, even when the protests involve members of a well-regarded social group such as military veterans. This could be a sign of the times, given most news stories concerning protest in 2017-2018 involve gatherings in opposition to a Republican president's stances, statements, and behavior, and against policies such as increased gun control. The fact that participants' attitudes toward

protesters predicted their post-test attitudes lends support for this notion. Finally, we might also expect people to be more willing to endorse protests that address issues they consider important. Political advocates would do well to take these factors into account when organizing protests or when anticipating public acceptance of positions being espoused during protests.

While these factors are certainly relevant and important, the primary focus of the current research concerned participants' disposition toward the actors within media frames of protest. In this case, disposition was represented by one's pre-existing attitudes toward military veterans and African Americans. The results were less clear, though they did provide evidence that people's attitudes toward social groups portrayed in news stories about protest sometimes inform subsequent interpretations of the protest and protest in general.

H1 suggested that the more positive participants' dispositions toward the social group represented in the news blurb (Black people as protesters or military veterans as protesters), the more positive participants' emotional reactions would be after exposure to the stimulus. This hypothesis was not supported for either treatment condition in relation to positive emotions. It could be that participants' dispositions toward protestors and their political ideologies simply drowned out the contribution of their attitudes toward African Americans and military veterans, which would not be surprising given the current divisive political climate in the United States. While the present study measured both positive and negative emotions, the quantitative data did not provide much insight into what was driving participants' emotional responses. Without understanding the context of participants' emotional reactions (e.g. were they angry that the issue necessitated a protest to begin with, or were they angry that an issue they deemed unimportant was being protested) it is difficult to predict which emotional reactions should lead to greater support for the protest. Future research in this area should include a written component relating

to emotional reactions and measure all emotions individually rather than employing the use of a scale. Further, specific attention should be given to the role of sadness/empathy in predicting moral judgments of protesters, as this is defined as the chief mechanism guiding emotional responses to media content (Raney, 2006).

H2 suggested that the more positive participants' dispositions toward the social group represented in the news blurb, the more positive their moral judgments of the protesters would be (e.g. "In general, I feel positive about the people participating in this protest"). This hypothesis was partially supported. A significant interaction between treatment condition and moral judgment was recorded for military veteran protesters (beta=.003, $p<.01$), but not for Black protesters. A likely possibility for this is that military veterans are one of the most highly regarded social groups in the United States regardless of political affiliation, gender, race/ethnicity, and other typically distinguishing social factors (Pew Research Center, 2013). Secondly, because the strength of empathetic reactions toward military veteran protesters was greater than the strength of empathetic reactions toward Black, disposition theory correctly predicted that participants would be more likely to hold positive moral judgments of the protesters in the military veteran condition (e.g. the media characters for which greater empathetic reactions were recorded). Future research should explicitly examine the relationship between the emotional reaction and moral judgment concepts of disposition theory.

H3 suggested that the more positive participants' dispositions toward the social group represented in the news blurb, the more likely they would be to suggest that individuals should have the right to participate in organized protest. The interaction was significant for the Black protester treatment condition but not for the military veteran protester condition. Therefore, the hypothesis was partially supported. Because participants' political leaning was a significant

predictor of the dependent variable for the Black protester model (beta= -.32, $p<.05$) but not the military veteran protester model, it is possible that the skewed nature of participants' political leaning in the sample used to test the hypothesis contributed to this discrepancy. That is, 74 participants (45%) of the sample reported conservative political leanings, which negatively predicted support for protest, where only 54 participants (34%) described themselves as liberal. As disposition theory suggests, media actors that are easily categorized by affiliations, including political affiliations, are less likely to illicit reasoned moral judgments than those actors which are more difficult to categorize. As demonstrated in H2, participants who were exposed to the military veteran protester condition were more likely to make positive moral judgements of the actors in the news blurb than those participants who were exposed to the Black protester condition. It may be possible, then, that conservative leaning participants' (45%) who were exposed to the Black protester condition were responding based on emotional reaction rather than reasoned moral judgment, while those who were exposed to the military veteran protester condition were more likely to engage in careful deliberation thereby nullifying the influence of political leaning on attitudes toward protest (Tamborini, 2011).

H4 suggested that the more positive participants' dispositions toward the social group represented in the news blurb, the more likely they would be to hope for the success of the protest. Both models predicted 70% of the variance in support for protest among participants, but only the military veteran protester condition resulted in a significant interaction between exposure to the stimulus and support for the protest (beta=.04, $p<.05$). For both the Black protester and military veteran protester models, participants existing dispositions toward protesters, political leaning, and attitudes about individual's right to access affordable healthcare were significant predictors of support for the protest. Again, as demonstrated in H2, participants

who were exposed to the military veteran protester condition were more likely to make positive moral judgements of the actors in the news blurb than those participants who were exposed to the Black protester condition. Taken together, these results support the contention of disposition theory that in order for individuals to cheer for the success of a given actor, they must first judge the character as morally acceptable (Raney, 2011). Because the participants in this sample were more likely to make positive moral judgments of the military veteran protesters (e.g. "like" the media character in the news blurb), the findings that resulted from H4 fully support the application of disposition theory to media content relating to organized protest.

Limitations

One major limitation to this study was its reliance on a feeling thermometer (e.g. how warm/cold participants reported feeling toward a given social group) to determine individuals' dispositions toward social groups. Such measures can be easily influenced by participants' proclivity to respond in socially desirable ways. To limit these influences, future research on disposition theory should consider measuring the three concepts that comprise an individuals' disposition (affiliation, empathy, moral judgement) separately and then combining the responses using a scale. Further, this would also allow researchers to examine the ways in which the concepts of disposition theory interact with each other (e.g. how empathy might predict moral judgment; how moral judgment might predict support for protest).

Another major limitation to the study was the sample from which the data was collected. Because disposition theory suggests that affiliations play a role in predicting audience attitudes toward media content, it is important to use data gathered from a less homogenous sample. That is, participants' age, gender, race/ethnicity, political affiliations, and geographic location should

be more varied than what a sample from a student participant pool at a southeastern university tends to provide.

As noted in the analysis of H1, future research seeking to determine the effects of protest-related media content on audiences' emotional reactions should be sure to account for the context of the emotional reaction. This may be achieved by employing a qualitative component to the experiment or asking respondents to explain their reactions in writing and coding for certain key words. Additionally, all emotional reactions should be measured individually rather than employing the use of positive/negative scale. This would allow researchers to observe certain nuances in participants' emotional responses and to better understand the role of sadness/empathy in predicting support for protest.

Conclusion

Despite these limitation, the findings that resulted from this study may have useful implications for future researchers as well as for political activists and organizers. Results indicated that conservative audiences are more likely to support a given protest when media coverage featured military veterans as the main actor. As such, social change organizations should pay careful attention to the dispositions of the groups they are seeking to influence and recruit members to participate in organized protest toward which their intended audiences feel particularly warm. These findings also suggest that disposition theory may be used to predict the effects of media content on audience attitudes toward protest in certain situations.

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APPENDIX

A

For the following questions, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree somewhat; 3 = disagree slightly; 4 = neutral, 5 = agree slightly; 6 = agree somewhat; 7 = agree strongly

Generally speaking, I think people living in democratic societies should have the right to:

- Own a gun
- Use a gun in self defense
- Access abortion services
- Affordable healthcare
- Express themselves freely and openly
- Participate in organized protest
- Access a quality, public education
- Affordable tuition at colleges and universities
- Fair compensation for a day's work
- Earn a living wage
- Choose their own religion

For the following questions, answer "yes" or "no"

In the past year, I have:

- Signed a petition
- Contacted a national, state, or local government official about an issue
- Worked with a fellow citizen to solve a problem in the community
- Attended a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs
- Given money to a political candidate or party or any other political organization or cause
- Been an active member of a group that tries to influence public policy or government
- Attended a political rally or speech
- Sent a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine
- Please mark no so we can ensure you're paying attention
- Worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate
- Made a speech about a community or local issue
- Attended an organized protest

B

The following questionnaire gauges your feelings about various groups of people, using what researchers call a "feeling thermometer." If you have positive, favorable, or "warm" feelings about that group, you should click on one of the options on the red bars. If you have negative, unfavorable, or "cold" feelings about that group, you should select one of the options on the blue bars. Go with your gut feelings on these questions. If you have no feelings either way, then click on the option in the middle of the scale. This portion of the survey is timed and we ask that you respond as quickly as possible.

How do you feel about…

Elderly people?
Illegal immigrants?
People on welfare?
American Expatriates (Americans who emigrate to become citizens of other countries)?
Nurses?
People who spank their children?
Fans of your favorite team?
Feminists?
Hispanics?
Government officials?
Highly spiritual people?
Military veterans?
Homosexuals?
Hunters?
Atheists?
Political liberals?
Sports referees?
Muslims?
People who have casual sexual relations?
Black people?
Pacifists?
Scientists?
Europeans?
Anarchists?
Protesters?
White people?
Priests?
Vegetarians?
Socialists?
Professional boxers?
People who cheat on their taxes?
Poor people?
Rich people?
Teachers?

C

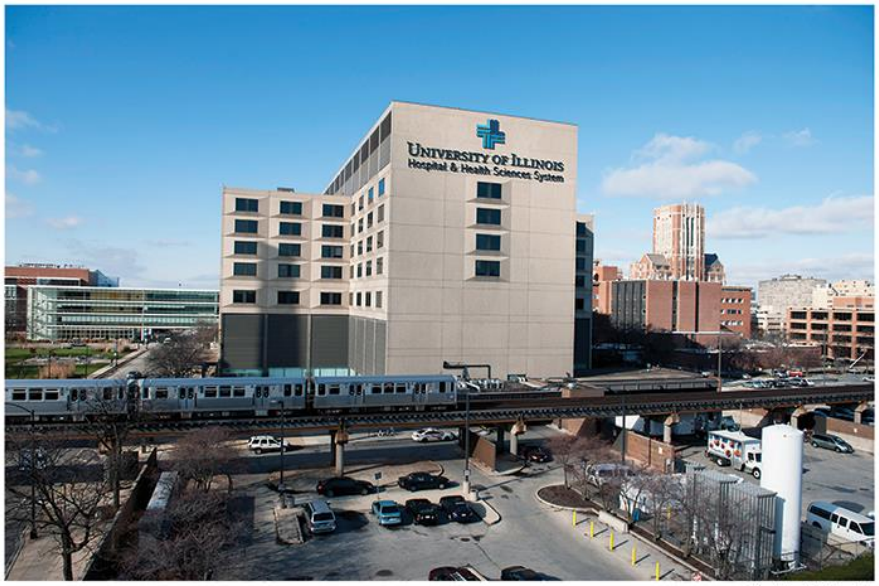

Photo by Eric Schnider

Thousands protest during 'March for Health', demand equitable, affordable healthcare

CHICAGO – Thousands of people gathered in downtown Chicago to demand affordable healthcare for all and to protest perceived failings of the U.S. healthcare system.

"We want a healthcare system that will provide all Americans with quality, affordable healthcare," said Taylor Campbell, a demonstrator at the march. "It's time for the people to decide for themselves what the United States healthcare system should look like, and it's time to stand up and demand healthcare for those who have been marginalized."

Control

Photo by Eric Schnider

Veterans protest during 'March for Health', demand equitable, affordable healthcare

CHICAGO – Thousands of U.S. military veterans gathered in downtown Chicago to demand affordable healthcare for all and to protest perceived failings of the U.S. healthcare system.

"We want a healthcare system that will provide all Americans with quality, affordable healthcare," said Lt. Gary Knolls, a U.S. military veteran. "It's time for the people to decide for themselves what the United States healthcare system should look like, and it's time to stand up and demand healthcare for those who have been marginalized."

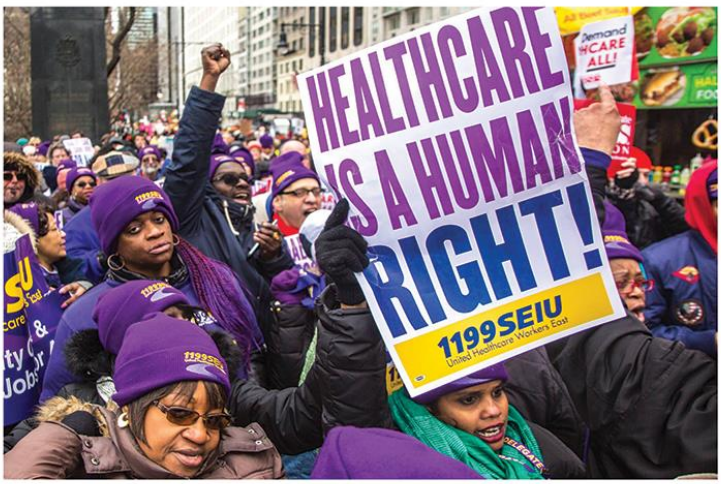

Photo by Eric Schnider

Activists protest during 'March for Health', demand equitable, affordable healthcare

CHICAGO – Thousands of activists from the Black community gathered in downtown Chicago to demand affordable healthcare for all and to protest perceived failings of the U.S. healthcare system.

"We want a healthcare system that will provide all Americans with quality, affordable healthcare," said LaVonne Williams, a local activist. "It's time for the people to decide for themselves what the United States healthcare system should look like, and it's time to stand up and demand healthcare for those who have been marginalized."

D

Please indicate the degree to which you experienced or did not experience the following emotions while reading this news article: (1 = not at all, 7 = strongly)

When I read this article, I felt _____.

Anger
Disgust
Happiness
Sadness
Pride
Fear

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale: 1 = disagree strongly; 2 = disagree somewhat; 3 = disagree slightly; 4 = neutral, 5 = agree slightly; 6 = agree somewhat; 7 = agree strongly

Affordable healthcare is a serious issue facing the United States public.
People who participate in protest usually do more harm than good.
In general, I feel positive about people who participate in protests like this one.
Organized protests are an important part of democracy.
There are better ways to express political opinions than participating in protest.
People should have the right to participate in protest.
I hope this protest is successful.

E

What is your political affiliation?
(democrat, republican, independent, other)

For which political party did you vote in the last election?
(democrat, republican, independent, did not vote)

How would you describe yourself politically?
(1 = strongly liberal, 2 = somewhat liberal, 3 = moderate. 4 = somewhat conservative, 5 = strongly conservative)

F

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NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE:	March 06, 2018	
TO:	Steele, Hailey, Department of Journalism	
	Armstrong, Cory, Journalism and Creative Media, Parrott, Michael, Journalism	
FROM:	Graham, Jeanelle, MPH,Research Compliance Specialist, NM Expedited	
PROTOCOL TITLE:	Studies of Social and Political Attitudes	
FUNDING SOURCE:	NONE	
PROTOCOL NUMBER:	18-02-1006	
APPROVAL PERIOD:	Approval Date: March 06, 2018	Expiration Date: March 05, 2019

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled: Studies of Social and Political Attitudes. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol. This protocol must be reviewed for renewal on a yearly basis for as long as the research remains active. Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.

If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the PI's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.

This approval is issued under University of Alabama's Federal Wide Assurance 00000647 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under Committee's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please direct any questions about the IRB's actions on this project to:

Graham, Jeanelle

Graham, Jeanelle

Approval Period:	March 06, 2018 through March 05, 2019
Review Type:	FULLBOARD
IRB Number:	03