

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

***Fahrenheit 9-11*, Need for Closure and the Priming of Affective Ambivalence: An Assessment of Intra-affective Structures by Party Identification**

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This study extends priming research in political communication by focusing on an alternative political information source (i.e., Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9-11), affect rather than cognitions, and the existence of intra-affective ambivalence. In addition, two moderator variables are analyzed: political party identification and need for closure. There is a statically significant three-way interaction between the viewing of F 9-11, political party identification, and need for closure relative to the dependent variable of affective ambivalence toward George W. Bush. High need for closure Republicans who viewed F 9-11 exhibited pronounced levels of Bush-affective ambivalence. In addition, high need for closure Independents who viewed F 9-11 exhibited far lower ambivalence toward Bush relative to their control group peers. The findings are discussed relative to the roles performed by emerging alternative political media and the expansion of the theory of priming within the context of political communication.

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The study of media priming influence within political communication has focused almost solely on the study of news (Price & Tewksbury, 1997; D. R. Roskos-Ewoldson, B. Roskos-Ewoldson, & Carpentier, 2002). Only recently have theoretical arguments been made and empirical evidence provided to allow for priming research within political communication to be extended into analyses of nontraditional political media content (e.g., entertainment media; Holbert et al., 2003). The present research further extends the study of priming within political communication by focusing on a nontraditional political information source from the 2004 American presidential election, Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9-11* (hereafter identified as *F 9-11*). This movie fared exceedingly well at the box office to become the highest grossing documentary film in American motion picture history (Waxman, 2004). The sheer level of audience exposure to this film during the 2004 election cycle warrants the study of its potential effects by political communication scholarship.

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Weaver, McCombs, and Shaw (2004) describe priming as a consequence of agenda setting (cf., Price & Tewksbury, 1995). Those issues that are made salient during the process of agenda setting, the media agenda influencing the audience agenda, are then used by citizens to evaluate a given political attitude object. Evaluation is a central concept for political communication priming research. However, an assumption has been made that citizens form simple bipolar (positive–negative) evaluations of political attitude objects as a result of their media consumption (e.g., Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Running counter to the assumption of relatively unidimensional evaluations is social psychological scholarship on the concept of ambivalence (e.g., Priester & Petty, 1996). Ambivalence focuses on the degree to which citizens retain heightened and conflicted intra-attitudinal evaluations of attitude objects (Thompson & Zanna, 1995). With good reason, the study of ambivalence has recently become a popular area of research within the field of political science (see Craig & Martinez, 2005). However, there has been little work completed on the role of media messages in creating ambivalence within a political setting. This study focuses on the ability of Moore's *F 9-11* to generate ambivalence toward the focus of the film's ire, President George W. Bush.

In addition to a focus on news influence and bipolar evaluations, priming research within political communication retains a proclivity for studying cognitions (Scheufele, 2000). The present priming study shifts its attention away from cognitions and toward emotions. Affect is a centerpiece of social scientific inquiry (Izard, 1977) and has become the focus of much research within the field of communication (e.g., Dillard & Wilson, 1993). Not only has a substantial body of evidence come to reveal that affective reactions often run counter to cognitive outcomes (e.g., Cacioppo, Gardner, & Bernston, 1997), but there has also been theoretical arguments put forward that speak to the "prepotence of affect" relative to cognitions (Lavine, Thomsen, Zanna, & Bordiga, 1998, p. 402; see Zaller, 1984). This study extends the study of priming in political communication by focusing on affect rather than cognition.

Our literature review describes extant political communication priming research and then argues for extending this theory within this particular mass communication subfield by highlighting the need to focus on alternative media sources, affect, and ambivalence. In addition, this study introduces two individual difference variables that have the potential to serve as moderators in the relationship between viewing Moore's *F 9-11* and the generation of Bush-affective ambivalence, political party identification, and need for closure. The introduction of these individual difference variables allows this study to better isolate the conditions under which specific media priming effects become evident (e.g., McLeod & Reeves, 1980). The Method section details the procedures for the experiment, the experimental design, measures employed for the study, the analytical techniques used to address this study's hypothesis and research question, and a statistical power analysis. The Results section details the relationships between the experimental stimulus conditions, political party identification, and need for closure in producing Bush-affective ambivalence. Finally, the

Discussion section details the conceptual and empirical extensions to political communication priming research made by this study.

Priming in political communication

Iyengar and Kinder's (1987) seminal work on political communication priming focuses on how public policy issues raised prominently in news media influence citizens' judgments toward political actors. A clear majority of news media-based political priming effects studied in extant research can be defined as short-term influences, but some research has uncovered effects that are long term (e.g., Krosnick, 1993). This area of political communication research has used a combination of content analysis, survey research, and experimentation to advance the cause of theory building (Simon & Iyengar, 1996), but it has been argued that the strongest work to date on political news media priming is grounded in experimentation (Willnat, 1997).

There is much theoretical discussion centered on better explaining the "how" or "why" of political priming effects. Several cognitive-based "information-processing models" have been developed to try to flesh out processes of priming influence (Weaver et al., 2004, p. 264). For example, Higgins and King (1981) argue for priming within the context of a cognitive network model, with specific pieces of media content becoming more important when they are able to link up with pre-existing mental structures that are related to the focus of a media message. Wyer and Srull (1986) speak to the importance of recency, with the most recently acquired pieces of information becoming the most ripe for producing priming influences. More recently, Roskos-Ewoldson et al. (2002) argue for movement away from traditional connectionist-based models and toward a broader mental models framework. In short, varied theoretical discussions concerning processes of media priming influence are cognitive in nature, and, as a result, the outcome variables analyzed in this area of research are strongly cognitive (Scheufele, 2000).

Traditional priming research has focused on assessing judgments of political actors that fall along a single, bipolar (positive-negative) continuum (e.g., Iyengar, Kinder, Peters, & Krosnick, 1984). Some studies focus on multiple judgments of political actors (e.g., Krosnick & Kinder [1990] focus on overall performance, competence, and integrity). However, the multiple dependent measures are analyzed in relative isolation. Pan and Kosicki (1997) focus on how a variety of political assessments of George H. W. Bush (e.g., handling of the economy, foreign affairs, and the Gulf War) predict more general evaluations of this president across time. However, there is no direct assessment of whether there is intra-attitudinal conflict within citizens (e.g., an individual likes Bush's handling of the economy but detests the Gulf War). Traditional priming research on unidimensional outcomes of this kind represents important advancements for the literature. However, this area of research needs to entertain the possibility of multiple judgments of a political actor being both strong and in direct conflict with one another, creating ambivalence. The failure to

assess how multiple judgments of a political actor function relative to one another in the formation of a broader assessment of the political attitude object leaves open the potential for oversimplifying citizens' evaluations of political candidates and elected officials.

In short, the study of priming within political communication has focused on cognitive-based outcomes of news consumption. In addition, researchers using this theory continue to function under the assumption of media use producing bipolar judgments of political actors. This study seeks to extend political communication-based priming research by focusing on an alternative media source, affective assessments of a political actor, and the ability of a media message to generate intra-affective ambivalence.

Alternative political information sources and Moore's *F 9-11*

Holbert et al. (2003) argue that a singular focus on news content represents an artificial boundary-determining criterion for priming theory in political communication and reveal through their study of *The West Wing* that entertainment-based political media content can prime altered perceptions of real-world presidents (e.g., Bill Clinton, George W. Bush). It has been argued that the influence of alternative and entertainment-centered media in political elections is on the rise, and several lines of research have focused on varied political communication effects emanating from the consumption of non-news media content (Holbert, 2005).

It is important to continue to extend the study of political communication priming research into additional alternative information outlets in order to assess the generalizability of Holbert et al.'s (2003) basic argument that this theory should not be relegated to analyses of a single content type. In addition, the variety of information sources being made available to citizens during the course of an election is continuing to expand (e.g., *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, a seemingly endless number of political Web sites), and many of these sources cannot be easily placed into a simple entertainment–public affairs dichotomy (Mutz, 2001). One information source that made a name for itself during the 2004 presidential election is the controversial film *F 9-11* (Menard, 2004).

Michael Moore's *F 9-11* is a classic one-sided persuasive message that presents the Bush administration and its movement toward the creation of a war that sought the ouster of Saddam Hussein and the formation of a democratic state in the volatile Middle East. Moore opens the film with a fair bit of humor in framing the outcome of the 2000 presidential election and the major Republican players within the first Bush administration. The filmmaker then uses a dramatic portrayal of the 9-11 tragedies as a starting point from which to construct a complex degrees-of-separation argument concerning the Bush family, their incestuous ties to the Middle East, and the dubious nature by which America went to war with Iraq. The film then closes with focus being given to Lila Lipscomb, an early advocate of the war who eventually loses a son in the Iraqi conflict. The film sought to influence both people's minds and

hearts in shaping perceptions of George W. Bush as he sought reelection. This study focuses on the potential affective influences of this film on the electorate.

Affect

If priming focuses on “the effects of the content of the media on people’s later behaviors or judgments related to that content” (Roskos-Ewoldson et al., 2002, p. 97), then there is little reason to believe that the “effects” that can be studied relative to this theory need be only cognitive in nature. It is clear that a broad range of media content can also prime affective assessments of an attitude object (e.g., Nabi, 2002).

Lazarus (1991) argues that emotions are engaged by human beings to deal with specific person–environment relationships. Appraisal is a central concept for Lazarus (2001), a process by which “people are constantly evaluating relationships with the environment with respect to their implications for personal well-being” (p. 41). One element of the environment that humans are constantly affectively appraising is mass media content, and, more specifically, the attitude objects that are presented through various mediated communication experiences. As a result, communication scholarship has turned its attention to individual-level emotional reactions brought on by the consumption of media messages (e.g., Dillard, Plotnick, Godbold, Freimuth, & Edgar, 1996). Indeed, Dillard and Peck (2000) find that a variety of media messages have the potential to evoke multiple emotions within individuals.

The study of affect has been applied in a political communication context and relative to the functioning of basic democratic processes (e.g., Hsu & Price, 1993; Nadeau, Niemi, & Amato, 1995). Marcus and MacKuen (2001) have completed the most extensive work on affect relative to political communication. These authors argue that “emotion is a catalyst for political learning” and that “emotionality aids, rather than disrupts, political reasoning and enhances, rather than diminishes, the quality of democratic life” (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993, p. 672). In particular, Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000) discuss the concept of affective intelligence in describing how citizens manage their emotional reactions to the political symbols (i.e., environmental stimuli) they encounter daily, especially during campaign season. Overall, Marcus et al. (2000) find strong empirical support for their conclusion that “affective intelligence shapes political judgment in presidential elections” (p. 128).

The ultimate goal for each citizen in a presidential election is to make a choice for which candidate should lead the country for the next four years, and political communication shines its empirical lens on the multifaceted roles played by a variety of interpersonal communication and mass communication processes that can influence political judgments of this kind (Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1985). Lazarus (1991) lists a series of goal-congruent (positive) and goal-incongruent (negative) emotions in outlining his theoretical approach to the study of affect, and these goal-oriented affective states have been the focus of extant persuasion-based communication research (e.g., Mitchell, Brown, Morris-Villagran, & Villigran, 2001). Given that (a) the study of affect is grounded in individuals’ goal-directed activities and

(b) discrete, goal-oriented emotions have been shown to play important roles in various processes of persuasion, there is strong conceptual and empirical support for applying the study of goal-(in)congruent emotions to persuasion-based communicative acts that occur during the course of a political campaign. In addition, it is important to stress the essential nature of studying both positive and negative emotions in a single study given that valence is a “defining feature of affect” (Dillard & Wilson, 1993, p. 638).

This study will focus on two goal-oriented discrete emotions that are opposite in valence: joy and anger. Joy occurs when “we think we are making reasonable progress toward the realization of our goals” (Lazarus, 1991, p. 267), whereas anger is “one of the most powerful emotions” that is engaged when it appears that a goal is not going to be achieved (p. 217). Coming into contact with *F 9-11*’s portrayal of George W. Bush at the height of an election campaign should create an interesting set of relationships between the joy and the anger citizens’ feel toward this sitting president as the political process moves forward toward Election Day.

Ambivalence

It is important to differentiate the concept of ambivalence from two like-minded constructs, uncertainty and indifference (Martinez, Craig, & Kane, 2005). Ambivalence is reflective of an individual retaining strong but conflicting intra-attitudinal perceptions toward a given attitude object (Kaplan, 1972). In short, ambivalence “allows for the possibility that a given attitude may simultaneously invoke strong positive and negative evaluations” (Lavine et al., 1998, p. 401). Uncertainty resides in individuals who do not retain enough information toward a given attitude objects to allow for an impression to be rendered. Indifference exists within individuals who retain enough information about a given attitude object but fail to generate an evaluation of the attitude object that is either positive or negative in valence.

There is a long history of psychologists analyzing separate positive and negative attributes that play distinct roles in various processes of attitude formation (Edwards, 1946; Green & Goldfried, 1965). Out of these early research efforts have come more formal lines of research on intra-attitudinal structures in general and ambivalence in particular (e.g., Cacioppo et al., 1997; Thompson & Zanna, 1995; Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995). Social psychological research of this kind has focused largely on cognitive aspects in intra-attitudinal structures (see Priester & Petty [1996] for summary) but has also spread to analyses of potential ambivalence between cognitive and affective components of specific attitude formations (e.g., Lavine et al., 1998). This study will focus on intra-affective ambivalence, the notion that people may retain strong but competing emotional states relative to a political attitude object like George W. Bush. Given that extant research has revealed affective assessments to play an important role in evaluations of political actors (e.g., Abelson, Kinder, Peters, & Fiske, 1982), it is important to begin to assess the consistency of

intra-affective structures within citizens relative to their opinions of political candidates and elected officials.

Support for this claim can be found in the field of political science and its growing interest in the concept of ambivalence. Ambivalence has been studied relative to attitudes toward public institutions (e.g., McGraw & Bartels, 2005), the concept of patriotism (e.g., Citrin & Luks, 2005), and opinions on governmental spending (e.g., Jacoby, 2005). More specific to this study, prior research has directly connected the concept of ambivalence to the study of public opinion concerning elected officials (e.g., Lavine et al., 1998). There is every reason to believe that individuals' overall evaluations of a politician retain some level of intra-attitudinal conflict. For example, many argue that a majority of American citizens remained in a constant state of intra-attitudinal conflict during the second term of the Clinton presidency, with many people supporting this particular president's policy positions but finding his personal defects hard to defend (Wayne, 1999).

The basic argument being put forward in this work is that one potential outcome of political media priming is intra-attitudinal ambivalence. The issues raised by media regarding politicians and elected officials may create strong but conflicted intra-attitudinal structures. This study focuses on the ability of Moore's *F 9-11* to generate (or reduce) viewers' intra-affective ambivalence toward Bush. With this stated, it is important to step beyond a simple assessment of a single stimulus-response relationship and approach this question from the standpoint of a conditional effects framework (e.g., McLeod & Reeves, 1980). In particular, will increased or decreased ambivalence be found in different types of viewers? Will the generation of intra-affective ambivalence be evident in only certain types of viewers? Both of these questions speak to the possibility of moderator variables in the *F 9-11*-affective ambivalence relationship (e.g., Baron & Kenny, 1986). This study focuses on two potential moderators: political party identification and need for closure.

Political party identification

Many political scientists approach the study of elections from a lens established by one of the earliest and now classic works from the Michigan School, *The American Voter* (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). Campbell et al. (1960) concluded "we are convinced that the relationships in our data reflect primarily the role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes toward political objects" (p. 120). The Michigan School is grounded in a psychological approach to voting.¹ As Chaffee and Hochheimer (1985) have pointed out, the Campbell et al. conceptualization of party identification stems directly from Freud's concept of "identification" and the psychoanalyst's understanding of this concept as a deep, long-term, affective connection between an individual and his/her ideal.

If political party identification represents a deep emotional connection to an ideal, then those individuals who are *not* linked to a given party (i.e., Independents) are less likely to retain consistent intra-affective structures concerning George W. Bush

(i.e., the anointed ideal of the Republican party). Simply stated, Independents do not retain the same emotional anchor that can be found in either partisan group. Republicans are more likely to retain relatively coherent intra-affective structures for Bush when compared to Independents, with relatively strong-positive and weak-negative emotional ties to this political attitude object. The same is true of Democrats relative to Independents, with Democrats holding relatively strong-negative and weak-positive affective associations with this president. In short, Independents are more likely to retain inherently higher levels of affective ambivalence toward Bush than either Democrats or Republicans.

When Independents come into contact with a strong one-sided anti-Bush message like *F 9-11*, their lack of an emotional anchor will lead them to begin to mirror the affective elements of the persuasive message. Thus, the lengthy and detailed persuasive arguments put forward by Moore will be taken in by Independents, with the outcome being a reduction in Bush-affective ambivalence. In short, the relationship between negative and positive affective reactions to Bush should become more consistent for Independents as a result of this mediated communication experience. Similarly, Bush-affective ambivalence should also be reduced in Democrats as a result of viewing the film. However, Democrats should already start with relatively low levels of ambivalence, so there is less room to work with for Democrats to become even less ambivalent toward Bush. Nevertheless, there should still be a reduction in affective ambivalence in this group as a result of viewing *F 9-11*. Conversely, the counterattitudinal anti-Bush message of *F 9-11* will have the greatest likelihood of generating increased levels of affective ambivalence among Republican viewers. For example, Republicans may still retain their strong-positive affective associations with Bush after viewing the film, but now their negative feelings toward the president have risen as a result of consuming Moore's work. This would lead to an increase in ambivalence. This scenario does not produce pure ambivalence, but a stronger and more heated level of intra-affective conflict should be detectable among Republicans who viewed the film. As a result of these arguments, the following hypothesis is offered:

- H1: Political party identification serves as a moderator in the relationship between viewing *F 9-11* and affective ambivalence toward George W. Bush, with Republicans viewing the film retaining higher levels of ambivalence than their control group peers, and Democrats and Independents viewing the film retaining lower levels of ambivalence than their control group peers.

Need for closure

The study of party differences in affective reactions to *F 9-11* may only tell part of the story of how this film primes different members of a media audience in unique ways. Affective connections (or the lack thereof) toward a politician as embodied within political party identification will compete with individual differences in how

willing various citizens are to engage a persuasive message. Kruglanski (2004) argues that individuals are intrinsically motivated to come to closure (or not come to closure) in their evaluations of a given attitude object, and his concept of the need for cognitive closure has been shown to be influential in determining the overall effectiveness of persuasive messages (Kruglanski, Webster, & Klem, 1993). Although past research has shown that those who are more politically conservative also tend to retain higher levels of need for closure (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), there is variance in this individual difference variable across all party identification groups.

The relationships between viewing *F 9-11*, political party identification, and Bush-affective ambivalence become more complex with the introduction of need for closure. Several plausible scenarios arise with this additional individual difference variable. One change in influence may be found with Republicans who vary in high versus low need for closure. If it is hypothesized that Republicans are more likely to increase in Bush-affective ambivalence as a result of viewing *F 9-11*, might this effect be more pronounced for those members of the Grand Old Party (GOP, another name for the U.S. Republican Party) who retain relatively low levels of need for closure (i.e., are more willing to live with some state of ambivalence)? Another difference may be found with Independents, with high need for closure Independents being more likely to take the general message offered by Moore and rush to a consistent intra-affective assessment of the president. High need for closure Independents are motivated more by the need to come to a consistent evaluation of Bush than the evaluation being inherently positive or negative. Therefore, Moore may give this particular group the ammunition it needs to reduce its intra-affective ambivalence. Finally, Democrats who are high in need for closure may retain especially low levels of intra-affective ambivalence toward George W. Bush compared to their low need for closure peers, so the anti-Bush film may do little for the former group in terms of further reducing affective ambivalence. However, the film may serve to significantly reduce affective ambivalence in the low need for closure Democrats. In short, need for closure may serve as a contributory condition when comparing high and low need for closure Democrats. Overall, need for closure has the ability to alter the nature of *F 9-11* influence on Bush-affective ambivalence across all three political party identification groups. As a result, the following research question is offered:

RQ1: Does need for cognitive closure serve as a moderator in the relationships between viewing *F 9-11*, political party identification, and affective ambivalence toward George W. Bush?

Method

Subject pool

Participants ($N = 402$) were recruited from several introductory undergraduate communication courses offered at two major research institutions, the University of Oklahoma ($N = 135$) and the University of Delaware ($N = 267$). The first

university is located in the Southwestern portion of the United States and a decidedly “red” or Republican-leaning state. The second university is located in the Middle Atlantic portion of the United States and what is defined as a “blue” or Democratic-leaning state. The subject pool is slightly more female (62.7%) than male. All subjects were of legal voting age ($M = 19.5$ years). The participants are decidedly moderate in terms of their political ideology. Political ideology was operationalized as a two-item additive index consisting of responses on 7-point scales, ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative, regarding respondents’ personal stances on economic and social issues, respectively ($r = .68$, $p < .001$; $M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.17$).

Procedures

Participants received extra credit in various classes for participating in the study. The same procedures were followed at both universities. In Phase 1 of the study, subjects completed an initial questionnaire that asked for demographic information, political allegiances, political knowledge, need for closure, situational involvement in the presidential campaign, perceptions of Bush’s policy stances and personality traits, as well as basic patterns of public affairs media use. The first phase of the study was completed during the last week of September 2004.

Subjects were then asked to appear on the evenings of either October 10th or October 11th, 2004 to take part in Phase 2 of the study. Once attending the second session on either night, subjects were randomly assigned to one of two rooms at the respective institutions. One room provided the stimulus condition where subjects viewed a full-length, large-screen presentation of Michael Moore’s *F 9-11*. Once the viewing of the film was complete, subjects filled out a second questionnaire asking for an appraisal of their discrete emotional reactions to George W. Bush. Subjects were also asked to respond to a series of questions concerning Bush that were identical to items found in the Phase 1 questionnaire. Finally, subjects were also asked to provide their previous experiences with *F 9-11*. The control condition subjects did not view the film and immediately completed the exact same Phase 2 questionnaire as the stimulus group.

Experimental design

The study uses a 2 (view *F 9-11*, did not view *F 9-11*) \times 3 (party identification: Democrat, Republican, and Independent) \times 2 (need for closure: high, low) between-subjects design. These independent variables were studied in coordination with a single covariate, previous exposure to *F 9-11*. The dependent measure for the study is affective ambivalence toward George W. Bush.

Measures

Bush-affective ambivalence

There is much debate surrounding the proper measurement of ambivalence toward an attitude object (Holbrook & Krosnick, 2005; Martinez et al., 2005). Priester and

Petty (1996) identify eight unique operationalizations of real intrapsychic conflict in the existing social psychology literature.² The measure of ambivalence employed in this study stems from the work of Thompson et al. (1995) and is defined by Priester and Petty as the similarity-intensity model of ambivalence. Thompson et al. stress that there are two necessary conditions for the generation of higher levels of ambivalence. The first criterion is increased similarity between positive and negative reactions to the attitude object. The second criterion is the combined intensity of the positive and negative reactions to the attitude object, with greater intensity pointing toward greater ambivalence.

The ambivalence measure used in this study takes into account both of the Thompson et al. (1995) criteria. Each subject was asked in Phase 2 of the experiment to assess his/her emotional reactions to George W. Bush. Once again, the two goal-oriented discrete emotions focused on in this study are anger (negative) and joy (positive). The name "George W. Bush" appeared in very large font at the top of a page, and participants were asked to rank their distinct emotional reactions to this political attitude object on 7-point scales, ranging from 1 (*do not experience the emotion at all*) to 7 (*experience the emotion a great deal*). The Bush-Anger measure was first added to the Bush-Joy response, and this sum was then divided by two. This portion of the measure reflects the intensity criterion. The second portion of the measure consists of the absolute value of the Bush-Anger item minus the Bush-Joy item. This portion of the measure reflects the similarity of the respective positive-negative affective reactions. The latter value was then subtracted from the former value to form a single Bush-affective ambivalence measure.

The final ambivalence measure ranges from +7 (*total ambivalence*) to -2 (*total lack of ambivalence*). For an example of the former, a participant who responds with 7s for both Bush-Anger and Bush-Joy would retain a score of +7 (i.e., $[(7 + 7)/2] - [7 - 7] = 7 - 0 = 7$). For an example of the latter, a participant who responds with a 7 for Bush-Anger and a 1 for Bush-Joy would retain a score of -2 (i.e., $[(7 + 1)/2] - [7 - 1] = 4 - 6 = -2$). The following are the first two moments for the Bush-affective ambivalence measure: $M = .01$, $SD = 1.96$.

F 9-11 stimulus

Subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental stimulus (i.e., view *F 9-11*; $N = 232$) or the control condition (i.e., no stimulus provided; $N = 170$).

Political party identification

All subjects were placed into one of four categories (Democrat, Republican, Independent, and third party) based on responses to a series of political party identification items (Dennis, 1988). There is a relatively equal breakdown of Democrats ($N = 115$), Republicans ($N = 124$), and Independents ($N = 153$). Ten subjects identified themselves as members of a third party. These subjects were dropped from the analyses.

Need for cognitive closure

Webster and Kruglanski's (1994) 42-item need for cognitive closure scale has proven itself to be valid and reliable in extant research and produces a strong reliability for this study ($\alpha = .86$). Seven-point scales (1–7) were associated with each of the 42 items, and 16 of the 42 items were reverse coded so that all responses reflect high need for closure responses being ranked high. Two groups (high, low) were formed from a mean split of the additive index ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .58$).

Previous exposure to F 9-11

Prior exposure to F 9-11 was measured with a single 7-point item, ranging from 0 (*have not seen the film*) to 6 (*seen the film six or more times*). A vast majority of subjects indicated that they had not seen the film prior to taking part in the experiment (70.4%), and another decent percentage of participants stated that they had seen the film just once (23.4%). Only 4.1% of the subjects stated that they had seen the film more than once prior to the experiment ($M = .41$, $SD = .79$).

Analyses

A single analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was run to address this study's hypothesis and research question. The three independent variables reflect the experimental design: experimental stimulus, political party identification, and need for closure. The single dependent variable is Bush-affective ambivalence, and the single covariate is previous exposure to F 9-11.

Assessment of statistical power

A statistical power analysis was performed for this study using the software package, GPower (Faul & Erdfelder, 1992). In accordance with Cohen (1977, see chap. 8), GPower uses the effect size of f when assessing power in an ANCOVA. This statistic is "the standard deviation of the standardized means" (Cohen, 1977, p. 275). The alpha level for this analysis was preestablished at .05, and the sample size for the study is 402. GPower, also in accordance with Cohen, suggests the following f values for small, moderate, and large effects, respectively: .10, .25, and .40. These f values translate to the following η^2 values, the most commonly reported effect size statistic in the communication sciences: .01, .06, and .14, respectively (see Cohen, 1977, p. 283, table 8.2.2). The number of groups in the study is reflective of the $2 \times 3 \times 2$ design, with the addition of a single covariate. Thus, there are 13 groups. Two sets of power analyses were run for the set of three effect sizes. The first set reflects tests with a single degree of freedom (df) in the numerator, and the second set concerns tests with 2 df in the numerator. These two test types reflect all the tests run within this study's single ANCOVA. The following results were obtained for the 1 df numerator power analysis: $f = .10$, power = .516; $f = .25$, power = in excess of .99; $f = .40$, power = in excess of .99. The following results were obtained for the 2 df numerator power analysis: $f = .10$, power = .414; $f = .25$, power = in excess of .99; $f = .40$, power = in excess of .99. Overall, the study retains weak statistical power for

detecting small effects when judged against the desired power level of .80. However, the study retains more than adequate statistical power to detect moderate to large effect sizes.

Results

Political party identification is the only independent variable to produce a statistically significant main effect, $F(2, 359) = 8.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Independents retain higher levels of affective ambivalence ($M = .49$) than either Democrats ($M = -.53$) or Republicans ($M = -.06$). Neither the experimental stimulus, $F(1, 359) = 1.50$, $p > .20$, $\eta^2 = .00$, nor need for closure, $F(1, 359) = 0.57$, $p > .45$, $\eta^2 = .00$, produced a statistically significant main effect. However, it is important to judge these non-significant results in light of this study's low statistical power to detect small effects.

The only statistically significant two-way interaction is the hypothesized relationship between experimental stimulus and the moderator variable, political party identification, $F(2, 359) = 3.59$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$. An assessment of mean differences within the two-way interaction reveals that the only increase in Bush-affective ambivalence from control to the stimulus conditions can be found when comparing the Republican control ($M = -.27$) and stimulus ($M = .15$) groups. Democrats who viewed *F 9-11* retained lower levels of affective ambivalence in Bush ($M = -.69$) relative to their control group peers ($M = -.37$), and the same is true for the Independent stimulus ($M = .07$) versus control ($M = .91$) groups. This finding confirms H1. In short, the Republicans were the only party identification group who increased in Bush-affective ambivalence as a result of viewing Moore's *F 9-11*. The Democrats and Independents reduced their affective ambivalence toward the president as a result of viewing the film.

However, the hypothesized two-way interaction is trumped by the finding of a statistically significant three-way interaction between the experimental stimulus, political party identification, and need for closure, $F(2, 359) = 5.59$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .03$. A plotting of means reveals two transverse interactions (Republicans and Independents), while the two Democrat groups retain relatively modest shifts downward from control to stimulus for the dependent variable of Bush-affective ambivalence (see Figure 1).

A rank ordering of the six control groups (*Party ID* \times *Need for Closure*) according to Bush-affective ambivalence provides the first insight from the three-way interaction. The highest levels of Bush-affective ambivalence among the control groups can be found with the Independents (high need for closure, $M = 1.14$, and low need for closure, $M = .68$). The two moderate control groups in terms of ambivalence are the low need for closure partisans, Republicans ($M = .37$) and Democrats ($M = -.15$). The control groups that retain the lowest levels of affective ambivalence toward Bush are the high need for closure partisans, Democrats ($M = -.58$) and Republicans ($M = -.91$). The finding of the high need for closure partisans retaining the lowest levels of ambivalence speaks to well-defined intra-affective

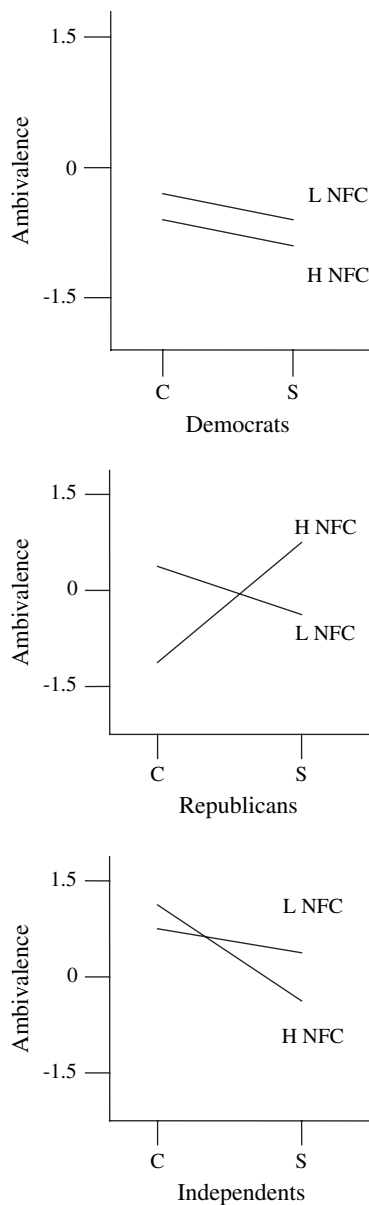


Figure 1 Three-Way Bush-Affective Ambivalence Interaction: *Experimental Stimulus* \times *Party Identification* \times *Need for Closure*.

structures within these groups, while the weakest intra-affective structures can be found in the two Independent control groups. In short, increased partisanship is strongly associated with well-defined intra-affective order outside the introduction of *F 9-11* as a political information stimulus.

A different story emerges when rank ordering the six *F 9-11* stimulus groups. Most importantly, high need for closure Republicans retain the highest level of affective ambivalence among the stimulus groups, $M = .65$. This is a dramatic shift from this group's control group peer that rated lowest in ambivalence among the six control groups ($M = -.91$). In short, there is a dramatic upsurge in Bush-affective ambivalence in high need for closure Republicans who viewed the film.

It is important to note that high need for closure Republicans are the least likely participants to be motivated to view *F 9-11* outside the confines of this experiment.³ Kruglanski (2004) stresses the importance of identifying information-seeking goals in ascribing roles to be performed by the individual difference variable of need for closure. Republicans who truly desire closure are not going to seek out information that they know runs directly counter to their unquestioned belief that Bush is the best candidate in the 2004 general presidential election. However, when this group is forced to consume *F 9-11* for the purposes of this experiment, extreme affective ambivalence is the outcome.

This result parallels some of the early inoculation findings by McGuire (1964) on resistance to unwanted persuasion. McGuire found that the attitudes most susceptible to unwanted influence are those which have never been previously questioned (Pfau, 1997). A parallel may be found with the study of intra-affective ambivalence toward an attitude object and need for closure. High need for closure Republicans generally retain fairly consistent intra-affective structures toward Bush, as is evidenced by the control group mean, but this intra-affective consistency is severely reduced as a result of viewing Moore's *F 9-11*. The high need for closure Republicans are those who are least likely to question their affective appraisals of Bush, but this fact also lends to their intra-affective structures remaining relatively open to potential unwanted influence.

The high need for closure Republicans stand out relative to their low need for closure peers in that the low need for closure Republicans who viewed the film retain a lower level of affective ambivalence ($M = -.35$) relative to their control group peers. In short, it is only the high need for closure Republicans who increase in ambivalence as a result of watching *F 9-11*. This is an important caveat to the hypothesized party ID by stimulus two-way interaction finding outlined previously.

The remaining four stimulus groups all retain lower levels of Bush-affective ambivalence when compared to their control group peers (high need for closure Democrats, $M = -.82$; low need for closure Democrats, $M = -.56$; low need for closure Independents, $M = .25$; high need for closure Independents, $M = -.11$). However, the largest control-stimulus differential among these four groups can be found with the high need for closure Independents. This group does not hold a deep emotional connection to a political party but retains a strong desire to come to some decision, any decision, about where it stands relative to the incumbent. This combination of individual differences creates a classic example of what Kruglanski (2004) identifies as a high need for nonspecific closure group. High need for closure

Independents just want to come to some closure about Bush, no matter whether it is generally positive or negative. As a result, this group takes in the persuasive message offered by Moore and quickly comes to a more consistent intra-affective structure toward Bush. This group goes from retaining the highest level of affective ambivalence among the six control groups to a substantially lower level of affective ambivalence in the stimulus condition.

The other three groups, low and high need for closure Democrats and low need for closure Independents, all show modest reductions in affective ambivalence when comparing the stimulus to control conditions. However, the low need for closure Independents in the stimulus condition still retain a modestly larger rating of ambivalence relative to either of the Democrat groups. In fact, the two Democrat groups retain the lowest levels of affective ambivalence toward Bush when comparing the six stimulus groups. In short, Democrats walk away from viewing *F 9-11* with the most consistent intra-affective structures toward Bush.

Discussion

This study extends the theory of priming in political communication in three important ways. First, a non-news political information media source is the focus of this research effort. Second, attention is paid to affective assessments rather than cognitive outcomes. Third, there is movement away from the assumption of simple bipolar (positive–negative) evaluations of political attitude objects. In particular, this study focuses on the concept of ambivalence and intra-affective conflict. In addition, this study approaches its assessment of the influence of *F 9-11* on the production (or reduction) of affective ambivalence in George W. Bush from a conditional media effects framework. More specifically, two moderator variables, political party identification and need for cognitive closure, play integral roles in determining the strength and direction of *F 9-11*–affective influence across various subpopulations.

It is clear that the most interesting finding from this study is the high level of Bush-affective ambivalence among high need for closure Republicans who viewed Moore's film. It is argued post hoc that some of McGuire's (1964) early inoculation findings concerning unwanted influence may provide some insights into why this effect is produced. Republicans retain a deep positive affective connection to the GOP and the candidates who represent the grand old party. In particular, high need for closure Republicans believe that there is merit in coming to clear resolutions in their assessments of attitude objects. It may be that this combination of individual differences singles out those individuals who never previously questioned their relatively consistent intra-affective associations with Bush. As a result, Moore's extensive anti-Bush appeal could prey upon these defenseless intra-attitudinal structures.

The study of ambivalence (cognitive, affective, or cognitive–affective) is important in the context of political communication because this concept has been linked

to some of the core outcome variables found in extant priming research. Several research efforts have focused on how intra-attitudinal ambivalence is related to more general assessments of political candidates (e.g., McGraw, Hasecke, & Conger, 2003; Meffert, Guge, & Lodge, 2000). Ambivalence has also been analyzed relative to the destabilization of public opinion across time (e.g., Craig, Martinez, & Kane, 2005). This study provides an important first step in the process of looking at political media priming outcomes from the standpoint of ambivalence. However, additional work is needed to ensure that the study of various types of intra-attitudinal conflict brings greater sophistication to this area of study rather than needless complexity (Boster, 2002).

The most glaring weakness of this study is the focus on a single (and relatively unique) political media message. In short, the generalizability of these findings is an issue. Just as it has been argued that traditional political priming research needs to focus on more than news, the study of the media priming of ambivalence needs to extend to analyses of other types of political information sources (e.g., traditional news, talk radio, debates, political advertising, political Web sites). Only with focus being given to a broad media spectrum will there come a more complete understanding of media and the production of (in)consistent intra-attitudinal structures.

It is our hope that this study will initiate a movement toward more sophisticated outcomes of political media priming within a conditional media effects framework. In particular, there needs to be work completed on identifying additional moderator variables that can serve to improve the predictive value of our theoretical claims. It is also important for research to better understand the roles various types of ambivalence may play as mediators between political media message consumption and the outcome variables of greatest interest to the discipline. This type of approach will ensure an adherence to the basic Orientation-Stimulus Orientation-Response model of media influence that defines the empirical study of political communication (McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002).

Notes

- 1 Gelman and King (1993) provide a detailed summary of the Michigan School and its peers, the Columbia and Rochester Schools.
- 2 Holbrook and Krosnick (2005) distinguish between perceived and real intrapsychic conflict measures. The former measures ask respondents to provide a personal sense of how "conflicted" or "ambivalent" they feel toward a given attitude object, while the latter measures generally ask respondents to respond to a series of inquiries that tap separately the positive and negative associations with a given attitude object. A single measure of ambivalence is then created from the separate positive and negative responses.
- 3 The high need for closure Republicans retains the lowest mean for the previous exposure to *F 9-11* covariate among the six party ID by need for closure groups formed for this experiment ($M = .22$).

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