

A "Fair and Balanced" News Operation? Fox News' Content and Practices in Prime Time

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Abstract

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Fox News is the most watched cable news channel, drawing more viewers in prime time than all of the other cable news networks combined. While Fox News is a frequent subject of mass communication research, few of the studies examine the content of the network's programs. The literature is mainly concerned with Fox News' partisan and ideological disposition, and the explicit or imbedded assumption in most of the work is that Fox News is a journalistic news operation. Employing a series of qualitative textual analyses of the network's coverage of the debate over health care reform during two three-week periods of Fox News prime time programming--in 2009 and 2014--this work examines the content and practices of the network. Putting aside its bias, does Fox News' prime time programs adhere to the traditional values of objective journalism, or are they engaged in propaganda or persuasion? How do the individual styles of the hosts and entertainment-based practices help the prime time programs operate as they do? Are Fox News' practices in prime time unique to the network, or are they endemic to the 24-hour news process? And where does Fox News fit into the larger television news field? This work argues that Fox News does not follow the traditional values of objective journalism, instead operating more closely to propaganda, and that the differing styles of the hosts and the use of traditional tabloid press practices helped the network develop themes based on nonfactual assertions opposing health

care reform while maintaining the Fox News branding of being "fair and balanced." Further, Fox News' practices are unique to the network, allowing it to generate profits and influence national debates by identifying and serving a niche audience of conservatives distrustful of the network newscasts and CNN. These findings have implications for the scholarly study of Fox News, as well as on issues of transparency, the role of journalism in society and media trust.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Fox News Channel has been the most-watched cable news network for more than a decade, and while Fox News frequently appears in the mass communication literature, few works have studied the nature of the network's programming. Is Fox News, as it claims in its marketing content, a "fair and balanced" news operation? Aside from any ideological or partisan inclinations, does the network abide by the traditional values of journalism? Or does Fox News engage in propaganda, persuasion or some other traditional form of communication? How do the hosts operate, both individually and in relation to each other? How do the hosts, who have defined personas and styles, contribute to the network's programming? What specific practices does Fox News employ? Is the way Fox News operates typical of cable news networks, or is Fox News unique? Where does Fox News fit into the television news landscape? The literature is largely silent on these questions.

Fox News is an important object of study in journalism and communication research. The network is, by far, the most watched cable news channel, drawing more viewers than all of the other cable news networks combined (Wilstein, 2014). Given the financial success (Wemple, 2014) and influence (e.g. Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Clinton & Enamorado, 2014) of Fox News, an examination of what Fox News actually does on the air and how the network does it would contribute to the television news scholarship. This work seeks to address the questions listed above, arguing that Fox News, despite its self-representation, does not follow the traditional values of journalism in its prime time programming, instead operating closer to the elements of propaganda. Further, Fox news uses the varying styles of its anchors and entertainment-based tabloid

practices to enable the network to engage in propaganda-like programming while maintaining its branding as an unbiased news operation. Also, Fox News' practices do not simply reflect all cable news networks, but rather they reflect a unique approach to its specific goals. Finally, this work argues that Fox News finds both financial success and a position from which to influence the national discussion of policy by targeting and serving a niche of viewers who share the network's values and beliefs.

Fox News and the Atomization of the 20th Century Mass Media System

When Rupert Murdoch launched the Fox News Channel in 1996, television was in the middle of a titanic shift that was drawing viewers away from the broadcast networks (Baym, 2009). The introduction of cable channels that could target niche audiences and generate enough revenue through carriage fees and advertising to be profitable without targeting a mass audience had expanded the options for broadcasters. Instead of aiming to reach everyone as the networks did, for example, ESPN could target sports enthusiasts, Lifetime could program for women and BET could gear programming toward African Americans.

News was not immune to the atomization of the 20th century mass media system. From 1948 through 1980, Americans seeking national news on television had no options aside from the broadcast network newscasts, which generally ran at the same time and, as such, enjoyed strong ratings (Allen, 2001). In 1980, more than 50 million viewers watched the network newscasts (Guskin & Rosenstiel, 2012). In the 1960s, 70 percent of television sets in use were tuned to the evening newscasts on NBC or CBS (Allen, 2001). As more viewing options opened up with the introduction of cable television, including entertainment programming and a 24-hour cable news network, CNN, that launched in

1980, the viewership for the network newscasts declined steadily over the next 30 years, reaching a low of 21.6 million in 2010 (Guskin & Rosenstiel, 2012).

Fox News developed into one of the most successful cable networks by taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by the expanding cable television system. By targeting conservatives and others who had come to believe that the network newscasts held a liberal bias, the network offered something previously unavailable on American television: a 24-hour network that sought to provide news and opinion from a conservative point of view (Bennett, 2001; Hickey, 1998; Sherman, 2014). However, rather than brand itself as a conservative news operation, Fox News made the business decision to present itself as "fair and balanced" in an effort to attract viewers who no longer trusted the network newscasts and CNN (Bennett, 2001). The CEO of Fox News, Roger Ailes, had previously attempted a conservative-branded venture with radio host Rush Limbaugh, only to see it fail to find an audience large enough for it to survive (Jones, 2012). Fox News represented a less direct approach to conservative news.

By presenting itself as a balanced news operation while providing conservative content (Chalif, 2011) to a mainly conservative audience (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2011; Jamieson and Cappella, 2008; Coe, Tewksbury, Bond, Drogo, Porter, Yahn, & Zhang, 2008; Morris, 2005), Fox News quickly became one of the most successful cable television networks. In 2001, Fox News passed CNN as the top-rated cable news network in prime time (Holcomb, Mitchell & Rosenstiel, 2012), a position the network has held for fifty consecutive quarters thereafter (de Moraes, 2015a). While Fox News generates approximately a billion dollars each year in profit (Wemple, 2014), its influence goes beyond its ratings and revenue. For example, Jamieson and Cappella

(2008) argue that Fox News plays an influential role in politics, even acting as an organ of the Republican party, and other researchers have found the network to have an impact on voting (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007) and the positions of Republican members of Congress (Clinton & Enamorado, 2014). Major Republican figures regularly appear on the network, both as guests and as paid on-air personalities (Martin & Hagey, 2010).

Fox News and Academic Research

Not surprisingly given Fox News' success and influence, the network routinely appears in studies in the mass communication literature. Fox News is sometimes used in experimental designs as an example of conservative news (e.g. Iyengar & Hahn, 2008). Researchers have also examined the effects of Fox News on others, such as voters (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007), members of Congress (Clinton & Enamorado, 2014) and the credibility of candidates (Eargle, Esmail, & Sullivan, 2008). Several studies have looked into whether or not the network is biased (e.g. Groeling, 2008; Aday, 2010).

Virtually every study that includes Fox News makes two assumptions about the network. First, Fox News is always studied as a journalistic operation. Often, the assumption is stated, as studies refer to Fox News as a "news organization" (Harmon & Muenchen, 2009, p. 12), a "news outlet" (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005, p. 1191), a "national television news channel" (Clinton & Enamorado, 2014, p. 928), a "television news organization" (Eargle et al., 2008, p. 8) or something similar, often lumped into a category with MSNBC, CNN and/or network news operations, posing them as similar entities. Other times, Fox News' role as a journalistic operation is implied, as it is grouped with other news sources or treated that way by the researchers. There are precious few studies, however, that examine Fox News' content to determine whether or

not the network is, in fact, acting in a journalistic fashion. Two peer-reviewed papers have taken steps in this direction. Conway, Grabe, and Grievies (2007) examined the "Talking Points Memo" segment of Bill O'Reilly's Fox News program to analyze whether the host employed propaganda practices in his broadcasts. Peters (2010) also studied O'Reilly's show to determine whether he adhered to elements of objective journalism. The object of this work is to build on and extend the work of Conway et al. and Peters by more closely examining the Fox News prime time schedule to determine the network's practices.

Second, and somewhat incongruously, despite the assumption that Fox News is a news operation, much of the focus of the mass communication research relative to Fox News is built around the network's ideological and/or partisan bias. That is, the fact that Fox News presents conservative-leaning content to a mostly conservative audience seems to be the end of the inquiry into the network's content, forestalling asking further questions about Fox News' programming. For example, the network is held up as an example of conservative news (e.g. Stroud, 2010), examined to see if its conservative disposition leads to bias (e.g. Morris & Francia, 2010), or the effect of its conservative content is explored (e.g. DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007), but few studies have gone beyond the network's ideology. Just because a self-identified news operation is biased does not mean it cannot otherwise act consistently with the other values of objective journalism. As such, this work seeks to go beyond Fox News' partisan and ideological disposition to examine the nature of the network's content, especially in regard to journalism, propaganda and persuasion, as well as the entertainment-based practices of the tabloid press.

The Main Methodology of the Work

To answer the many questions about Fox News' content and practices raised above, most of the following chapters employ analyses of the same two periods of Fox News' programming. Given the absence of this kind of study in the literature, a qualitative analysis of the network's content is an effective way to ensure that a nuanced, detailed depiction of the network's practices can be produced. As such, the studies in the following chapters follow in the tradition of Siegfried Kracauer (1953), with an inductive, qualitative textual analysis allowing for a more deep, context-based examination of the content. More specifically, the examinations follow the lead of the qualitative portion of Papacharissi and Oliveira's (2008) work developing a set of categories on framing based on a predetermined set of attributes. This approach is well suited to the analyses here, which seek to determine different aspects of Fox News' content and practices based on how they conformed to different elements, such as objectivity, propaganda and tabloid practices.

Because it would be impractical to deeply examine all 24 hours of Fox News' daily programming with any level of depth, the prime time lineup was chosen as the subject of analysis. The three prime time programs have been, generally, among the highest-rated programs on the network, airing in the spotlight of prime time, so they are, presumably, most representative of the way the network wants to portray itself to the public. "The O'Reilly Factor," hosted by Bill O'Reilly, has consistently been the highest-rated program on Fox News, with Sean Hannity's "Hannity" and Greta Van Susteren's "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" following closely behind (Boedeker, 2009; Kissell, 2014). All three programs have aired in prime time continuously from their first

appearances on the network. Also, by choosing the prime time programs, the studies do not have to include Glenn Beck's evening program, which may not have been representative of Fox News' self-presentation. The network had ongoing problems with Beck (Stelter, 2009), eventually letting him leave the network in 2011 (Stelter, 2011). In the end, the large audience, consistency, longevity and high-profile nature of the three programs send a message that these shows represent the way Fox News wishes to be viewed by the public and thus position them as ideal objects of study.

In order to analyze the content and practices of the Fox News programs, it was useful to choose an issue that could serve as the basis of the examination, as it would allow for tracking how the programs handled the issue over time, as well as comparing how the different programs handled the same issue. The debate over health care reform after the election of Barack Obama in November 2008 provided a unique and particularly effective issue to track. The election shifted Fox News' position from supporting a Republican president, George W. Bush, for eight years (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008) to opposing the policies of a Democratic chief executive. Health care reform represented one of the first major policy initiatives of the new president, and it was a controversial one with a history of ideological battles (Starr, 2013). The network's handling of the health care debate in 2009 established a template from which the hosts would work in the ensuing years of the Obama administration.

The health care reform debate was unique in the sheer volume and longevity of its coverage. For weeks at a time, the issue was covered by all three Fox News prime time programs nearly each day they aired. Health care reform provides a rare opportunity to track the handling of one issue over multiple programs for multiple weeks on a day-by-

day basis. The pervasiveness of the discussion provides a better opportunity to see how the arguments opposing health care reform came together across the three programs in a seemingly coordinated fashion.

Similarly, the length and intensity of the debate gave the Fox News prime time programs the unique opportunity to, over time, embrace, ignore or reject the forceful, sometimes acrimonious and occasionally distorted arguments offered opposing health care reform. The clash over health care served as a stand-in for the historical conservative-liberal debate over the role of government (Phillips-Fein, 2009), and the rhetoric in the debate quickly included incendiary charges of socialism and racism (Knowles, Lowery & Schaumberg, 2010), as well as accusations that those proposing reform had nefarious intent. For example, on the August 17, 2009, episode of "Hannity," former presidential advisor Dick Morris said that health care reform "is a device to take medical care from the elderly and give it to largely immigrants." (All references to Fox News programming in this work come from transcripts obtained from LexisNexis.) This voluminous stream of content provides an ideal data set to examine when analyzing the content and practices of Fox News.

To provide a large enough sample of programming data, initially, a three-week period of programs was chosen. Specifically, the primary period of study was built around former Alaska governor and Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin's 2009 claim that proposed health care reform legislation contained a "death panel" that would decide which Americans would receive health care and which individuals would be denied care (Palin, 2009). The main period of study begins on Monday, August 3, 2009, providing a week of programming before Palin's claim to analyze the content and

practices of Fox News in the time leading up to the "death panel" post. The main period of study continues through Friday, August 21, 2009, providing two weeks of content after the claim had been made. The study is centered around Palin's death panel claim because it was a heavily covered, high-profile moment in the debate. For example, the day after Palin's Facebook post, the New York Times ran four news and opinion pieces in its print and online editions addressing Palin's statement (Dowd, 2009; Egan, 2009; Lorber, 2009; Seelye, 2009). The examination covered every weekday program, including those in which a guest host appeared instead of the regular anchor. Only content related to health care reform was examined.

One weakness of the chosen main period of study is that it is several years old, raising questions about the current validity of the findings. To address that concern, when appropriate, certain chapters also include an analysis of a second three-week period of Fox News prime time programming in 2014. The 2014 period of study is built around the April 1 announcement by the White House as to how many individuals purchased health insurance through the online exchange created by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the piece of legislation that emerged after the 2009 debate. Like the 2009 period, the 2014 examinations begin the first full week before the April 1 announcement, on Monday, March 24, and continue through to Friday, April 11. To maintain continuity, the 2014 analyses cover the same three programs -- "The O'Reilly Factor," "Hannity" and "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" -- even though "Hannity" and "On the Record" moved time slots within prime time in 2013. While the discussion of health care reform was not as pervasive on Fox News in March-April 2014 as it was in August 2009, the issue was nevertheless covered in a majority of the days for each of the three programs. The

specific methodology of the studies in the following chapters will be addressed in each of the chapters.

What Does Fox News Do and How Does It Do It?

Ultimately, through a close study of the prime time content of Fox News during two important periods in the debate over health care reform, as well as additional studies of MSNBC and the viewership of Fox News, this work provides a detailed analysis of the network's content and practices, filling a gap in the television news literature. Chapter 2 begins the task by examining the content of Fox News' prime time programs to determine whether, beyond a partisan disposition, the network adheres to the other objective journalistic values of fairness and balance and an allegiance to the facts, or if, instead, the prime time programs operated more closely to the traditional elements of propaganda or the rhetorical practice of persuasion. The chapter finds that, both in 2009 and 2014, the prime time programs advanced 12 seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform, all of which were based on misstatements or distortions of the underlying factual claims. The programs acted more closely to the elements of propaganda than those of journalism or persuasion.

Chapter 3 turns the attention to the hosts of the programs, finding that the disparate host styles allowed the prime time shows to advance the themes opposing health care reform while maintaining Fox News' branding as "fair and balanced." Moving from a news-based study to an entertainment-based one, Chapter 4 examines how the prime time programs' use of tabloid practices helped the network employ the propaganda-like themes identified in Chapter 2.

A question left unanswered in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 is whether the findings about Fox News are specific to the network or are part of the operations of any cable news operation facing the pressures of a 24-hour news cycle, especially if the channel has a partisan disposition. Chapter 5 seeks to answer that question by conducting an examination of MSNBC's prime time programs that parallels the study undertaken of Fox News in Chapter 2, finding that MSNBC did not advance seemingly coordinated themes supporting health care reform based on misstatements of fact, with one host engaged in fact-based argumentation reminiscent of persuasion, while the other exhibited an allegiance to the facts but not a consistent commitment to fairness and balance.

Fox News' place in the larger television news system is examined in Chapter 6, in which an ecological study of the network demonstrates how it is able to find financial success and a base from which it can influence the national discussion of issues by identifying and serving a niche of viewers by providing conservative-skewing content to a mainly conservative, older, male audience. Finally, Chapter 7 examines changes at Fox News after the 2012 election and argues that the decisions made by the network help validate the findings of the earlier chapters. Specifically, an examination of the Fox News host styles in 2014 in conjunction with a discussion of the loss of audience trust experienced by the network between 2010 and 2012 reveals how Fox News' moves after the 2012 election were not only intended to attract younger and female viewers, but also served to rebalance the host dynamics in a way that would allow the network to continue to support the conservative side of issues while maintaining its self-representation as an unbiased news operation. Chapter 8 summarizes the major findings of the work.

Too often, writers inside and outside of the academe view Fox News with little depth, reducing the network to solely its ideological disposition and treating it like a news operation, often as an opposite but equivalent version of MSNBC. What this work seeks to do, most of all, is to broaden and deepen the representation of Fox News in the literature and provide an in-depth examination of what content the network offers in prime time and how the network goes about presenting that content to its audience. It is hoped that future research on television news will not fall into simple assumptions about Fox News, but rather consider the network for what it is, at least in prime time: a self-described unbiased news operation that, despite its marketing protestations to the contrary, uses the indicia of a journalistic endeavor to make arguments for the conservative side of issues that are not always based in facts. Embracing a fuller, richer view of Fox News will only deepen the examination of the issues under study.

There may well be a real advantage to the role of the press in a democracy for news operations to have a point of view, advocating for causes it believes in and fighting against proposals it opposes (Bennett, 2001; Cunningham, 2003; Hallin, 1992). That point of view, though, requires a level of transparency, so that the public understands that such advocacy is taking place. Indeed, transparency of intent is one of the factors that distinguish rhetorical persuasion from propaganda. Hopefully, this work will help empower future researchers to examine Fox News and television news more generally in a way that does not obscure the intentions of the operations under study.

Chapter 2: Propaganda, Persuasion or Journalism? Fox News' Practices in Prime Time¹

Fox News Channel presents itself to the world as a television news operation. Beyond the name of the network, its slogans, like "We report, you decide" and "Fair and balanced," are meant to signal to viewers that the information presented on the network will be objective (Bennett, 2001).

Fox News Channel's longtime president, Roger Ailes, also presents the network as a primarily journalistic endeavor without an ideological bias. He has claimed Fox News "employs twenty-four liberals" and one conservative, with the rest of the hosts being "libertarians or populists or you can't really tell" (Boehlert, 2012).

The on-air hosts also often present themselves as journalists. For example, on the August 10, 2009, edition of "The O'Reilly Factor," O'Reilly said:

"The Factor" also gives voice to both sides, something you will never get on MSNBC News. So, fair-minded Americans know our reporting is honest, while much of the other TV news media is simply in the tank for the president. Now you'd think that liberal Americans would flock to hear their side propped up, but that's clearly not happening. For libs, conservatives and independents alike, there's really no choice. They have to watch us if they want to know what's going on. And they are in record numbers. "Talking Points" is not gloating, just reporting. But the massive viewership to Fox News is a watershed moment in media history. There is no question anymore that Fox News is now the most powerful voice in the news media, despite unrelenting attacks from almost all other press organizations.

Scholars have spent time examining whether or not Fox News is, in fact, unbiased (e.g. Groeling, 2008; Aday, 2010). However, the majority of scholarly work on Fox News has treated the network as a journalistic operation, whether the question involved bias (e.g. Groeling, 2008; Aday, 2010), impact on the political process (e.g. DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008) or using Fox News as part of the stimulus in an experiment (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).

¹ An edited version of this chapter was accepted for publication by *Electronic News* in April 2015.

Given that the literature also shows that Fox News provides conservative-focused information (Chalif, 2011; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008) to a mainly conservative audience (Coe, Tewksbury, Bond, Drogos, Porter, Yahn, & Zhang, 2008; Morris, 2005; Morris, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2014), it raises the question: Why is Fox News assumed to be a journalistic operation? A handful of scholars have taken on this very question.

Conway, Grabe and Grieve (2007) examined the most watched prime time program on Fox News, "The O'Reilly Factor," finding that the host engaged in propaganda, while Peters (2010) also looked at O'Reilly and found a mix of journalistic and non-journalistic approaches. But these studies are the rare exceptions that employ empirical methods to question whether or not Fox News is practicing journalism.

This chapter seeks to extend the work of Conway et al. and Peters by going beyond O'Reilly and asking similar questions about the rest of the Fox News prime time lineup, as well as expanding the range of possibilities in examining the approach of the programs. Are the prime time programs acting more consistently within the traditional tenets of journalism or propaganda? Certainly, even with an ideological and/or partisan predisposition, Fox News could nevertheless operate otherwise within the bounds of traditional journalism. Or is there another mode of communication, such as persuasion, that best describes the prime time content of Fox News?

Fox News Channel

Media mogul Rupert Murdoch launched the Fox News Channel on October 17, 1996 (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). The network added another piece to Fox's American television portfolio that already included an entertainment-based broadcast network and a

new series of sports rights acquisitions, including the National Football League (Hickey, 1998). By choosing a conservative approach to the new news network, Murdoch was able to cater to a niche audience of news viewers who believed the network news operations had a liberal bias (Bennett, 2001). Murdoch hired Republican strategist and media expert Roger Ailes, who had worked with Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, to run Fox News Channel (Hickey, 1998). Unlike CNN, Ailes filled Fox News' programming with opinion-based, personality-driven shows, leaving a relatively small window of straight news broadcasts (Hickey, 1998). Initially, Fox News Channel had a potential audience of only 17 million cable subscribers (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008).

Despite Fox News' conservative disposition, the network branded itself as objective, with its advertising taglines of "fair and balanced" and "We report, you decide." But the idea of fairness meant something different to Fox News. While the network included some putatively liberal and/or Democratic guests, the hosts did not give their positions equal time and respect (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008). Fox News' reference to "fair and balanced" didn't mean that the content was actually fair and balanced, but rather that by providing a conservative point of view, the network was balancing the mainstream media that it argued had a liberal bias (Iksander, 2005; Conway, Grabe, and Grievies, 2007; Bennett, 2001). Ailes argued Fox News didn't need to give liberals more voice on the network because the mainstream news media already did that. Fox News' contribution, rather, was to provide conservative views not covered by mainstream media outlets (Hickey, 1998).

Fox News' claims of fairness are, in the end, more about marketing than an accurate description of the network's news content (Bennett, 2001). Media critic Neil

Hickey (1998) argues that Murdoch knew that actively branding Fox News as conservative would present two problems: alienating viewers who were not conservative and potentially angering Fox affiliates who did not want to be associated with partisan content. But a news show claiming to be "fair and balanced" and to "report" while letting the audience "decide" would raise none of these concerns. In fact, Fox News also billed itself as "news you can trust" as an effort to draw viewers who had become less trusting of news content, regardless of ideology (Bennett, 2001).

As a result, Fox News is able to offer a conservative-slanted, largely opinion-based, self-described news operation, hiring primarily conservative-leaning producers and on-air personalities, while offering itself to the public as one of the only sources of balanced news content. The result, according to Hickey, is Fox News can act "unmistakably" as "a bully pulpit for conservative sentiment in America." (Hickey, 1998, p. 35). Or, as Bennett (2001) puts it, while there is nothing wrong with having a point of view in presenting the news, the problem is with the dishonest self-presentation in doing so: "Fox News Channel content is being represented as objective for purposes of creating a brand that attracts a right-of-center demographic audience who hear their own beliefs and values confirmed in the news and then decide that this must be objectivity" (p. 99).

Jamieson and Cappella (2008) note that even conservatives acknowledge that Fox News is not really "fair and balanced." They quote Robert L. Bartley, an emeritus editor of the Wall Street Journal, as admitting the "We report, you decide" slogan is a "pretense," but that Fox News is under no obligation to admit to its conservative position because the network news divisions do not admit to their liberal bias (p. 49).

While Hickey and, to a greater extent, Bennett are critical of the deception in Fox News' approach, Kathleen Jamieson and Joseph Cappella (2008) are less judgmental in their study of Fox News' influence, *Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment*. But they nonetheless situate Fox News in the heart of Republican politics.

Jamieson and Cappella, after performing a content analysis, argue that "Rush Limbaugh, Fox News, and the opinion pages of the Wall Street Journal constitute a conservative media establishment" that "have protected Reagan conservatism across a more than decade-long period and insulated their audiences from political persuasion from Democrats in the 'liberal media'" (p. ix). The authors argue Fox News and the others do so by creating "a self-protective enclave hospitable to conservative beliefs. This safe haven reinforces the views of these outlets' like-minded audience members, helps them maintain ideological coherence, protects them from counterpersuasion, reinforces conservative values and dispositions, holds Republican candidates and leaders accountable to conservative ideals, tightens their audience's ties to the Republican Party, and distances listeners, readers, and viewers from 'liberals', in general, and Democrats, in particular. It also enwraps them in a world in which facts supportive of Democratic claims are contested and those consistent with conservative ones championed" (p. x). Fox News "offer[s] opinion and evidence that make Democratic views seem alien and unpalatable" (p. xiii).

Jamieson and Cappella describe several functions Fox News' opinion hosts and guests play for the Republican Party and the conservative movement. By taking extreme positions, the network's hosts allow Republican positions to seem moderate in

comparison, effectively moving the center ground of issues to the right. Fox News' shows also protect Republican candidates and officeholders who have been accused of misconduct or bad judgment by attacking their accusers or offering allegedly comparable situations involving Democrats. In doing so, they invoke the alleged liberal bias of the mainstream media to deflect the charges and to shift the conversation. Conversely, Fox News shows present conservative positions and assumptions as the truth, leaving them unchallenged by the hosts or guests. Jamieson and Cappella also point to Fox News' role in uniting Republicans, avoiding highlighting differences between party loyalists by "focusing on enemies so threatening that the need to thwart them becomes a transcendent goal" (p. 56). And liberalism and a cultural liberal elite are often painted as the enemy, or at least a force supporting an enemy (such as terrorists).

To do its job, Jamieson and Cappella assert, Fox News joins with Limbaugh and the opinion pages of the Wall Street Journal to create an echo chamber, which they describe as "a bounded, enclosed media space that has the potential to both magnify the message delivered within it and insulate them from rebuttal" (p. 76). Inside and outside of Fox News, hosts and guests repeat and amplify each other's messages, so that listeners, viewers and readers hear only the conservative/Republican-approved position, backed with conservative/Republican-approved facts.

The network relies on "vivid, concrete, image-oriented language" which "tends to evoke emotional reaction," be retained longer, and can "short-circuit analytic assessment of the claims being offered " (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008, p. 180).

Fox News' role changes depending on who is in power, Jamieson and Cappella indicate. When a Republican holds the White House, the network serves as an outlet for

the president's talking points. But when Democrats are in power, Fox News (along with Limbaugh and the Wall Street Journal) seeks to infuse in its viewers a mistrust of government. Further, they argue, conservative media, including Fox News, "perform actual party functions," like helping vet candidates in GOP primaries for "their loyalty to Reagan conservatism" (p. 239).

It is important to note that Jamieson and Cappella do not address the veracity of the content on Fox News, nor do they challenge the notion that Fox News is a news outlet, but rather concentrate on the purported facts the network's hosts choose to highlight on their programs.

Fox News in the Literature

Fox News has been a frequent topic in the social scientific study of mass communication, with works ranging from looks at the network's influence in American politics (Clinton & Enamorado, 2014; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008) to studies seeking to determine if the network exhibits bias (e.g. Groeling, 2008; Aday, 2010) in its coverage. Fox News has also been used as stimulus in experimental research seeking to explain how individuals consume news (e.g. Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).

Much of the scholarly work on Fox News has focused in some way on the network's ideological disposition. For example, Iyengar and Hahn (2009) use Fox News as an example of a conservative news source in their experiment testing ideological selective exposure. Groeling (2008) is concerned with whether Fox News exhibited a partisan bias in reporting on presidential approval, and Morris and Francia (2010) ask similar questions about Fox News' coverage of the 2004 party conventions. In the same vein, Aday (2010) looked at whether Fox News' coverage of the war in Afghanistan was

biased in favor of President George W. Bush's position, and Aday, Livingston and Hebert (2005) made a similar inquiry regarding the war in Iraq, as do Harmon and Muenchen (2009). Groseclose and Milyo (2005) also examine Fox News in terms of media bias. Jamieson and Cappella (2008) place Fox News at the center of Republican party politics. DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007) examine whether the introduction of Fox News as a conservative news source had a measurable impact on voting, while Clinton and Enamorado (2014) seek to determine if the network affected the policy positions of elected representatives. Eargle, Esmail and Sullivan (2008) study how media, including Fox News, affect candidate credibility. In examining the demography of television news outlets, Morris (2005) is primarily concerned with the ideology of Fox News viewers.

An assumption -- sometimes stated, other times implied -- in all of these studies, though, is that Fox News is a journalistic operation. For example, Iyengar and Hahn (2009) offer their experimental subjects articles from Fox News, CNN and NPR, presenting them as journalistic equivalents. Groeling (2008) and Aday (2010) would only be concerned with bias in coverage if they were viewing Fox News as practicing journalism. Harmon and Muenchen (2009) specifically refer to Fox News along side CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC, CNBC and public broadcasting as "[n]ews organizations" (p. 12), while Groseclose and Milyo (2005) call Fox News, along with CBS, CNN and others, "news outlets" (p. 1191). Similarly, DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007) explicitly study Fox News as a conservative news source, as do Clinton and Enamorado (2014), who refer to Fox News as a "national television news channel" (p. 928). In Eargle, Esmail and Sullivan's (2008) study of the media's effect on candidate credibility, the authors test four "television news organizations": Fox News, CBS News, CNN and MSNBC (p. 8).

Outside of empirical research, however, it is not uncommon for writers -- both in the academy and popular press -- to examine Fox News as something other than a journalistic operation. For example, Jones (2012a) argues that Fox News is a form of entertainment television, and that judging the network by journalism standards would be as misguided as judging reality television programs by the standards of documentary film.

Two peer-reviewed empirical articles have, in fact, questioned whether Fox News is, in fact, practicing journalism. Conway, Grabe and Grieve (2007) examined the most watched prime time program on Fox News, "The O'Reilly Factor," finding that the host, Bill O'Reilly, heavily employed seven 1930s propaganda devices in his "Talking Points Memo" segment. Peters (2010) looked at two weeks of O'Reilly's programs and found that while O'Reilly adhered to some elements of objective journalism, he nonetheless practiced an emotion-based approach to his topics, "re-making" the news by "lower(ing) the threshold demanded under journalism's traditional rules of truth while simultaneously appealing to his dedicated audience as a 'superior' form of news" (p. 833).

Journalism and Objectivity

The disconnect between Fox News' claims of fairness and journalistic reporting and the actual content of its programming is worthy of examination. While the network has been found to exhibit an ideological and partisan predisposition, that finding need not be the end of the discussion. After all, a lack of bias is only one aspect of objective journalism, and objectivity itself has only been the defining feature of the American press since the 1930s (Schudson, 1978, 2001). There are even many scholars who argue the

press's role in providing information to sustain a democracy is not best served by journalism without a point of view (Bennett, 2001; Cunningham, 2003; Hallin, 1992).

So Fox News could be engaging in journalism-like functions even despite its ideological and partisan bias. In assessing whether Fox News' prime time programming engages in journalism, propaganda or something else, it is first necessary to define these terms based on the literature.

Objectivity is regularly recognized as a central indicator of journalism, at least in the United States. As Michael Schudson (2001) put it, "'Objectivity' is the chief occupational value of American journalism and the norm that historically and still today distinguishes U.S. journalism from the dominant model of continental European journalism" (p. 149).

Of course, this statement begs the question: What is objectivity? An examination of the work of some leading journalism scholars who have studied objectivity reveals that while writers have taken different approaches to the contours and desirability of the concept, there seems to be general agreement on its constituent parts. Three recurring themes happen to be the three items identified by Denis McQuail (1996) as the keys to objectivity:

- 1) Neutrality;
- 2) Balance and fairness; and
- 3) A quest for the truth and an allegiance to accuracy and the facts.

Neutrality

Neutrality addresses the starting point of journalism and requires that reporters come to a story with no predispositions or biases. A neutral reporter approaches an issue

with an open mind. Neutral journalists, as Michael Ryan (2001) asserts, "refuse to serve or to support any political, social, economic, or cultural interests, even those that appear to some observers as laudatory" (p. 4).

Balance and Fairness

Where neutrality looks at the starting point of a reporter, balance and fairness addresses the ending point, what is reported. In assessing objectivity, balance and fairness refer to the journalist's honest effort to give a fair airing to all of the legitimate arguments of a controversy. The issue could be of more personal, less societal interest (e.g. the competing versions of the story in a criminal case), but is most pronounced on political issues debated in the public sphere. Schudson (2001) argues: "Objective reporting takes pains to represent fairly each leading side in a political controversy" (p. 150).

But there also seems to be agreement that objectivity, despite requiring balance and fairness, is not passive, as it envisions an active reporter making decisions to get to the truth. Ryan (2001) cautions that objectivity "does not mean objective journalists cannot use analytical and interpretative skills in collecting and disseminating information," especially to "interpret and analyze information during information collection" (p. 4). And David T.Z. Mindich (1998) quotes then CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour as saying that objectivity is "giving all sides a fair hearing, but not treating all sides equally ... So 'objectivity' must go hand in hand with morality" (p. 4).

So balance and neutrality do not mean, simply by rote, giving both sides of an issue, but of using investigation and journalistic judgment to sort out the merits of the two sides of a controversy as fairly as possible. And, historically, this effort was made to

distinguish the journalist, with his/her motive of informing, from the propagandist, with his/her motive of convincing.

Neutrality and balance function independently. A neutral reporter (one with no allegiance to any political or ideological position) can still be unbalanced (e.g. giving only one side of a legitimate controversy), while a non-neutral journalist (one with an avowed ideology or political connection) can still operate in a fair and balanced way (e.g. accurately representing both sides of a legitimate controversy, even if he/she agrees with one of the sides).

Truth, Accuracy and the Facts

A journalist's commitment to truth, accuracy and the facts is regularly cited as central to the definition of objectivity. The same words and terms come up again and again, all echoing the spirit of Walter Lippmann's (1920) statement on objective journalism: "Not what somebody says, not what somebody wishes were true, but what is so, beyond all our opinion, constitutes the touchstone of our sanity" (p. 3).

A run through leading scholars' depiction of objectivity highlights the importance of truth, accuracy and the facts. Lance Bennett (2001) notes, "Journalists sometimes substitute terms such as *accuracy*, *fairness*, *balance*, or *truth* in place of *objectivity* to describe the prime goal that guides their reporting" (p. 183, emphasis in original). Barbie Zelizer (2004) argues, "Journalism prides itself on a respect for the facts, truth, and reality" (p. 100). David T.Z. Mindich (1998) points out that when the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics dropped the term "objectivity" in 1996, the new version replaced it with words like "truth," "accuracy" and "comprehensiveness" (p. 6). Michael Ryan (2001), in defending objectivity, describes objective journalism as "the

collection and dissemination of information that describes reality as accurately as possible" (p. 3). Kovach and Rosenstiel (1999) offer a to-the-point definition of objectivity: "[T]he classic function of journalism to sort out a true and reliable account of the day's events" (p. 5). Mark Deuze (2005), after comparing the ethics codes of the U.S. and countries in Europe and the Middle East, finds common ground in a "commitment to truth" (p. 449). Journalist Howard Fineman (2006), in defending blogs and some partisan media, argued: "Anyone can be a journalist if they have the dedication to get the facts, write the story and speak coherently" (p. 7).

Judith Lichtenburg (1996), in defending objectivity as a desired journalistic norm, defines the concept as "truth, fairness, balance, neutrality, [and] the absence of value judgments" (p. 225). She goes as far as to propose a continuum of objectivity, with three different kinds of facts: simple facts that are easy to lock down (e.g. who holds a certain office at a given time), issues that are based on fact but for which a cause is in dispute (e.g. how dinosaurs became extinct, since it is a fact they are no longer around, but the cause is debated), and questions that might not actually have a fact-based answer (she offers as an example the question of whether Clarence Thomas sexually harassed Anita Hill, since the outcome is dependant on the definition of sexual harassment used).

Lichtenburg's formulation was prescient, coming before a flood of opinion-based news arrived on cable television and the Internet.

Propaganda

Propaganda and news are highly intertwined subjects, not just because they both involve the transmission of information to an audience, but because of the role each has played as a foil to the other. For example, Schudson (2001) argues that, at least in part,

objectivity emerged as an effort by journalists "to disaffiliate from the public relations specialists and propagandists who were suddenly all around them" (p. 162).

If the journalism/propaganda distinction is at the heart of objectivity, it begs the question: What is propaganda?

Like with objectivity, while there are debates about the value of propaganda, the definitions all draw on similar concepts and elements. A look at some propaganda scholars reveals agreement that propaganda is a method by which the user elicits an intended action on the part of recipients through the manipulation of the recipient's individual and societal beliefs by using a combination of facts and lies, along with an attempt to shield the recipient from opposing facts and points of view. As Harold Lasswell (1934) asserted: "Propaganda in the broadest sense is the technique of influencing human action by the manipulation of representations" (p. 13).

Propaganda scholars Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell (2012) argue: "Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (p. 7). French philosopher Jacques Ellul (1965) offers a similar approach: "Propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization" (p. 31). To Ellul, modern propaganda is not about ideological doctrine but to "make the individual cling irrationally to a process of action" (p. 15).

An important part of Ellul's conception of propaganda is the role of the recipients. He argues that propaganda can only be successful when it taps into feelings that are not

only present in the individual, but which "express the fundamental currents of the society it seeks to influence," including the "collective sociological presumptions, spontaneous myths, and broad ideologies" (p. 21).

Ellul argues that propagandists use facts to draw in an audience, but then can employ falsehood in interpreting the facts and in presenting their intentions. The key, he says, is for the propagandist to cast his or her opinion as supporting some good (even if it is not actually the goal), all while accusing the opposition of the very thing the propagandist is trying to accomplish. As Ellul puts it: "Propaganda by its very nature is an enterprise for perverting the significance of events and of insinuating false intentions" (p. 29).

Lasswell makes a similar point about the recipients of propaganda: "Any particular group has vested values, ranging from claims upon property to claims for ceremonial difference; hopes of increasing its non-sharable assets; and universalized patterns of right and wrong, of propriety and impropriety (mores), which it tends to defend. The propagandist must redefine the significance of social objects in terms of these various constellations" (p. 18).

And Ellul notes that propaganda can be used for "agitation," meant to subvert (and then maintain power by subverting an enemy), and "integration," a 20th century development that "aims at stabilizing the social body, at unifying and reinforcing it" (p. 37).

Edward Bernays, an early pioneer in the field of public relations, unabashedly touted the benefits of propaganda, including in a national setting. Writing during World War II, Bernays (1942) argued that the goals of propaganda during wartime (what he

called "psychological warfare") should be: "(1) Heighten the morale-unity of your country. (2) Weaken the morale of your enemy. (3) Win over the morale of the neutrals" (Bernays, 1942, p. 237). So Bernays's approach to propaganda looks at all sides with a goal of both uniting and winning over those that may not (or do not) agree with you.

And some scholars equate propaganda with public relations, finding no inherent negative connotation to the term. Crofts (1989) said public relations is "simply propaganda in a dinner jacket" (p. 13).

Persuasion

It is not uncommon to see scholars use persuasion as a synonym for propaganda, or to employ the word persuasion to define what propagandists are doing (see, e.g., Sproule, 1997; Taylor, 1992). The British government in creating the Central Office of Information after World War II envisioned peace-time propaganda as less aggressive than persuasion, just a method for providing information to the public to achieve its goals for post-war reconstruction (Crofts, 1989). And the post-World War II rise of the social scientific study of persuasion grew out of the early 20th century investigations of propaganda (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2012).

But other writers, especially in the field of rhetoric (where persuasion and rhetoric are often used as interchangeable terms), actively sought to distinguish propaganda and persuasion, even defining propaganda in terms of how it differs from persuasion. For example, Donald Bryant (1953) called propaganda "rhetorical techniques gone wrong" (p. 415), and Randal Marlin (2003) distinguishes between "legitimate persuasion" and "ethically dubious propaganda" (p. 97).

Some scholars see propaganda as an abuse of ordinary persuasion, which is particularly worrisome in a modern age where persuasion is everywhere: "Every time we turn on the radio or television, every time we open a book, magazine, or newspaper, someone is trying to educate us, to convince us to buy a product, to persuade us to vote for a candidate or to subscribe to some version of what is right, true, or beautiful" (Pratkanis and Aronson, 2002, p. 3).

A study of the literature reveals some common themes on what factors distinguish propaganda from persuasion, namely the concepts of volition, transparency of intent, manipulation of the existing beliefs or prejudices of the group receiving the message, and the shielding of the listener from competing facts and points of view.

1. Volition

One difference between propaganda and persuasion is whether or not the change in opinion or conduct by the listener is voluntary. While propaganda often involves deception (and often with the propagandist seeming to be a persuader in the eyes of the target), persuasion, instead, is an effort to effect a mutually satisfying change, with both sides feeling like their needs were fulfilled. As Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) put it, the goal of a persuader is for the persuadee to consider the persuader's argument and think: "I never saw it that way before" (p. 32). Propagandists want their audience to think a change in opinion or decision to act is voluntary, even if it is the product of manipulation (Pratkanis and Aronson, 2002). Towards that end, Marlin (2003) describes propaganda as a "systematic, motivated attempt to influence the thinking and behavior of others through means that impede or circumvent a propagandee's ability to appreciate the nature of this influence" (p. 95).

2. Transparency of Intent

The transparency of the person engaging in the conduct is another difference between persuasion and propaganda. Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) make this point when they write: "People in the audience may think the propagandist has their interests at heart, but in fact, the propagandist's motives are selfish ones" (p. 13). However, since nobody "will put up with knowing that they are being manipulated and used to fulfill another's selfish needs, ... the propagandist cannot reveal the true intent of the message" (p. 39). In fact, to succeed, a propagandist has to appear credible to an audience, so if that credibility is not naturally apparent, it can be manufactured through the use of lies and distortions that mask the propagandist's true intentions (Pratkanis and Aronson, 2002).

As a result, Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) argue: "Identity concealment is often necessary for the propagandist to achieve desired objectives and goals" (p. 45). But it's not just concealment, in that the "the propagandist is very likely to appear as a persuader with a stated purpose that seems to satisfy mutual needs. In reality, however, the propagandist wants to promote his or her own interests or those of an organization--sometimes at the expense of recipients, sometimes not" (p. 45).

The intent of the propagandist--which will often be hidden--also involves a desire to gain or maintain power. While no power relationship is necessary when someone seeks to engage in persuasion, as Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) argue: "When the use of *propaganda* emphasizes purpose, the term is associated with control and is regarded as a deliberate attempt to alter or maintain a balance of power that is advantageous to the propagandist" (p. 3, emphasis in original).

3. Manipulation

A goal-based distinction between persuasion and propaganda lies in the response elicited through the purveyor's conduct. Persuasion involves the give-and-take of argument and discussion, with the effect (and goal) of the participants educating themselves in the process (Pratkanis and Aronson, 2002). While a persuader seeks to engage a person's logic and reason, "the propagandist exploits an audience's beliefs or values or group norms in such a way as to fan the fires of prejudice or self-interest" (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2001, p. 39). When employing propaganda, the sender of the message will tap into group beliefs or prejudices in order to position the message as consistent with those values. The propagandist, though, is interested in effectuating his/her goals, not necessarily furthering the values he/she is invoking (Luchins, 1978).

In appealing to the beliefs and prejudices of an audience, one of the most effective tools for eliciting a desired reaction is to arouse emotion in the listener (Marlin, 2003), including instilling fear. The fear approach works best when the level of fear is high, a specific and effective solution is offered to avoid the threat, and the recipient believes he/she is able to carry out that solution (Pratkanis and Aronson, 2002). Making a listener feel part of a group is also effective in helping to elicit a desired response, as is invoking a feeling of scarcity (Pratkanis and Aronson, 2002).

One way propagandists manipulate their audiences is through the use of terms that can assign intended meaning to an action or obscure or soften the underlying consequences. For example, during World War II, the Nazi Gestapo used the term "protective custody" to describe the arrest of individuals and "secure" for the confiscation of property (Pratkanis and Aronson, 2002).

4. Shielding Listeners from Opposing Facts

While a persuader engaged in an open argument seeks to counter the positions (and the facts they are based on) of his/her opponent, a propagandist seeks to block out opposing arguments to his/her audience. Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) argue, "Control of information flow takes the form of withholding information, releasing information at predetermined times, releasing information in juxtaposition with other information that may influence public perception, manufacturing information, communicating information to selective audiences, and distorting information" (pp. 45-46).

Research Questions

Conway et al. (2007) and Peters (2010) made important advancements in the literature when they set out to empirically test whether a Fox News prime time program engaged in propaganda rather than journalism. While their studies and analyses are quite effective in moving the focus on Fox News from journalism to propaganda, it would be useful to widen the lens of assessment to examine all of Fox News' prime time programs and look at Fox News' content to see if it conforms to the scholarly definitions of objectivity, propaganda and/or persuasion.

So with the definitions of these concepts in mind, this chapter asks:

RQ.1 Do Fox News' prime time programs demonstrate adherence to the traditional objective journalistic values of balance and fairness and an allegiance to accuracy and the facts, beyond the network's ideological predisposition?

RQ2. Do Fox News' prime time programs work more closely with the traditional elements of propaganda?

RQ3. Do Fox News' prime time programs seek to transparently use logic and argument to persuade the viewer without coercion?

Method

As discussed in Chapter 1, Fox News' breadth and depth of coverage of the debate over health care reform after the election of President Barack Obama provides a unique opportunity to track how the network's prime time programs covered one issue on a daily basis over an extended time period. As such, this chapter's analysis takes place during two time periods. First, three weeks in August of 2009 are examined, built around former Alaska governor and Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin's assertion that health care reform legislation contained a "death panel" that would ration care (Palin, 2009). The study begins a week before the death panel claim to capture the arguments being made on Fox News' prime time programs leading up to Palin's statement, and it continues for two weeks afterward to capture how the network's coverage developed after Palin's claim. Three more weeks, this time in 2014, are examined to see if the network's practices in covering the health care debate in prime time changed over time. These three weeks are built around the April 1 announcement by the Obama administration as to how many Americans had enrolled in health care coverage under the Affordable Care Act, as the participation level was viewed as a major test for the new health care program. As with the Palin statement, the examination begins a week before the April 1 announcement and continues for two weeks after.

As noted in Chapter 1, the study centers on Fox News' prime time programs, as they are the highest rated shows on the network and, appearing in these featured time slots, are most likely representative of the network's desired self-representation. In 2009, those three programs were "The O'Reilly Factor," "Hannity" and "On the Record with Greta Van Susteren." By 2014, Megyn Kelly's program had moved into the "Hannity"

time slot, with "Hannity" moving to 10 p.m. and "On the Record with Greta Van Susteren" airing at 7 p.m. However, to maintain the study's continuity, the 2014 study once again examines "The O'Reilly Factor," "Hannity" and "On the Record with Greta Van Susteren." In both time periods, the shows airing on weekdays during the time period were examined.

The specific method is guided by the qualitative portion of Papacharissi and Oliveira's (2008) study identifying frames, in which the authors built classifications on a predetermined set of attributes. Specifically, the present analysis consisted of reading the show transcripts and tracking the arguments of the hosts and guests on health care reform. Each time an argument was made on the issue, it was noted, along with the show, speaker and context. A second read through the transcripts grouped together the same or similar reoccurring arguments (across days and/or programs) as "themes." The instances in each theme were then examined to determine the veracity of the facts underlying the claims, using primary texts when possible (e.g. claims about what an individual said in a media statement or speech) and reliable news outlets and fact-checking organizations when necessary. Once the veracity of the underlying themes were assessed, each theme was again analyzed to determine to what extent the prime time programs' approach on the issues conformed most closely to the traditional values of journalism, propaganda and/or persuasion, as defined above, by analyzing how the arguments were made, whether they were based on truthful assertions, and whether they employed a balanced and fair approach to the issue, among other factors. By keeping the study grounded in objective questions (e.g. Does this statement state a position on health care reform? Is the underlying claim of the statement factual?), the resulting findings can as best as possible

avoid being tainted by the biases of the examiner, an issue facing news consumers (Coe, Tewksbury, Bond, Drogos, Porter, Yahn, & Zhang, 2008).

The 2009 Coverage of Health Care Reform

In August 2009, the Fox News prime time programs did not consistently work within the journalistic values of fairness and accuracy, instead engaging in a series of seemingly connected themes opposing health care reform. Coverage was almost entirely focused on the negative aspects of health care reform, and the 12 major arguments offered by the network in prime time opposing health care reform were based on assertions that were either inaccurate or distorted. The network's prime time programs, taken as a whole, produced content that was more consistent with the traditional definition of propaganda, seeking to tap into longstanding conservative values and fears to marshal support for opposing health care reform while screening out and discrediting facts and arguments supporting reform, as well as those making those arguments. The prime time programs did not act consistently within the traditional rhetorical concept of persuasion, as the intent seemed to be to manipulate like-minded audiences rather than to use fact-based arguments to persuade those supporting reform to see the issue another way. Further, Bill O'Reilly and Greta Van Susteren were not always transparent in their goals, often claiming to be presenting both sides while, in fact, participating in the anti-reform themes being offered by the prime time programs.

Before moving to the specific results, it should be noted that the prime time Fox News programs are not presented strictly as newscasts, but rather borrow from the traditions of newscasts (all three hosts sit at a desk and, at times, directly address the viewers), Sunday morning news analysis programs (like "Meet the Press," as the hosts

interview guests and preside over debates), and even television news commentaries (when the hosts offer their opinions). Due to the nature of these programs, the vast majority of the statements by the hosts and their guests highlighted below come in the course of discussions of issues between the hosts and guests, although occasionally the comments come when the host addresses the camera, often in the context of the introduction of a new segment. It should also be noted that the host controls the discussion of a program (Vraga, Edgerly, Bode, Carr, Bard, Johnson, Kim, & Shah, 2012). When a guest makes a statement and the host agrees or allows the statement to pass unchallenged, the host is essentially endorsing the message being sent to the audience. Also, during the periods of study, guests frequently appeared multiple times on multiple programs, leaving the host familiar with the guests. As such, the comments of the guests are essential elements of the programs, firmly within the control of the hosts.

12 Themes Opposing Health Care Reform

The study of the August 2009 period found that the prime time programs employed 12 themes to oppose health care reform -- across multiple shows -- that were based on either a misstatement, distortion or manipulation of facts: 1) the claim of the existence of a "death panel" in proposed health care reform legislation; 2) the distortion of statements by Democrats about health care reform protesters leading to a claim that the Democrats were attacking the protesters; 3) an inaccurate portrayal of a White House website post looking for false information on health care reform; 4) the mischaracterization of an op-ed piece by the CEO of Whole Foods and a subsequent boycott of the chain; 5) claims that health care reform would cover abortions and undocumented immigrants; 6) claims about the affect of proposed legislation on deficits

and taxes; 7) distortions of how health care reform would affect Medicare; 8) the president's purported refusal to work with Republicans; 9) the influence of the group ACORN; 10) the length and complexity of the legislation; 11) the use of reconciliation to bypass a filibuster; and 12) health care reform being a form of socialism.

In these 12 cases, the programs' hosts and their guests, across multiple shows, repeated these claims, and research found the underlying claims to be less than fully accurate. Also, in presenting these claims, the programs' hosts did not consistently present fair and balanced assessments of the issues under discussion. Instead, the hosts and guests often sought to incite their audiences to oppose health care reform by tapping into the values and fears of their conservative audience, using a combination of facts, misstatements and manipulations, all while shielding the audience from opposing facts and points of view and by discrediting opposing claims and the individuals making them.

An in-depth discussion of some of the more prominent themes will help illustrate how the prime time programs did not primarily engage in the journalistic practices of fairness and accuracy but instead acted more closely to the traditional elements of propaganda.

Death Panel and Rationing

On August 7, 2009, former Alaska Governor and Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin wrote on her Facebook page:

The America I know and love is not one in which my parents or my baby with Down Syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama's "death panel" so his bureaucrats can decide, based on a subjective judgment of their "level of productivity in society," whether they are worthy of health care. Such a system is downright evil (Palin, 2009).

Palin was not the first public figure to claim that health care reform legislation contained a "death panel" that would withhold care from certain Americans (e.g.

PolitFact, 2009a). Nevertheless, Palin's charge immediately became a topic of discussion. For example, the New York Times produced four pieces the next day on Palin's Facebook post: Two short news items in "The Caucus," one just reporting the claim (Lorber, 2009) and the other noting that PolitFact had found it to be untrue (Seelye, 2009), and two opinion pieces on the topic, one in which Maureen Dowd called Palin's statement "a demented, fact-free Facebook rant trashing the president's health care plan" (Dowd, 2009), and another in which Timothy Egan wrote: "This is pure fantasy, fact-free almost in its entirety" (Egan, 2009).

The Fox News prime time programs, however, did not mention the death panel claim until nearly a week later, on the August 13, 2009, episode of "Hannity." However, the concept of Americans -- mostly, older Americans -- being denied health care under proposed reform legislation was under discussion on the prime time programs in the week before Palin posted about a death panel on Facebook. In analyzing the Fox News prime time broadcasts, the hosts and guests' discussion of the death panel ran through three distinct periods. First, before Palin's claim, the programs devoted discussion to the argument that reform would deny health care to senior citizens. After Palin used the term "death panel" and the ensuing reaction to her claim, the prime time programs defended Palin. Finally, once it became clear to most people that the legislation did not include a death panel, the prime time programs translated the death panel claim into a rationing argument. This course of action did not demonstrate an allegiance to the facts, as the programs' charges about the death panel and rationing were quickly proven to be inaccurate. And the line of attack did not demonstrate fairness and balance, as the rationing and death panel claims were portrayed as fact, with little discussion of the

opposing position on health care reform. Further, the hosts and their guests took steps to discredit those supporting reform to move the focus away from Palin's death panel claim.

1. Period One: Before Palin's Death Panel Claim

Even in the week before Palin's Facebook post claiming the existence of a death panel, the Fox News prime time programs spent time arguing that reform legislation would deny health care to seniors. For example, on the August 3, 2009, edition of "Hannity," former presidential advisor Dick Morris said:

They can't say we want those people to die but that's what they mean. They are going to slice Medicare. My father is 99 years old. He spent a week in the hospital, has had two procedures for a bleeding ulcer. Survived. Visited him in five minutes ago. He's in great shape. He'd be dead today if Obama's plan passed because they would never approve that treatment for a 99-year-old, and I couldn't pay for it, I wouldn't be allowed to.

Morris posits that under health care reform, the government would not just refuse to pay for care of his 99-year-old father, but also that the legislation would prevent him from paying a doctor to treat his father. Since the health care reform bills called for the continuation of private insurance and no limitation on the ability of Americans to hire doctors as they chose, Morris's story is clearly not based in any realistic reading of the legislation. Rather, he was employing an extreme hypothetical, which serves not only to scare the audience, but by taking such a bizarre, outlier position, it makes mainstream Republican policy positions seem centrist by comparison, a strategy employed regularly at Fox to bolster Republican standing (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008).

At the end of the same interview, Morris said:

It's the senior citizens. And they're the ones that are going to suffer. Rationing isn't going to affect you. It isn't even going to affect me. It's going to kill our parents. Literally.

Sean Hannity responds: "Yes. Yes. Scary. Scary."

Neither Hannity nor Morris said the word "death panel," but Morris' argument about rationing is essentially the same as Palin's claim. Morris invokes the same false claim to appeal to the same fear of conservative viewers, that health care reform would lead to a rationing of care for seniors. Hannity, as the host, validates Morris' claims, agreeing with Morris's argument ("Yes. Yes. Scary. Scary."). Morris went on to make similar claims on August 6, 2009, on "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren," this time claiming that rationing would be necessary due to a lack of doctors.

Another example of pre-Palin rationing arguments came on August 7, 2009, when Laura Ingraham, guest hosting "The O'Reilly Factor," said in the show's introduction:

And what's driving this August activism is a lack of trust in what the Democrats are promising on health care. Voters hear, "Oh, don't worry, abortions aren't covered. Illegal aliens don't benefit. Care won't be rationed. Private insurance won't be killed off." Yet, informed Americans respond with, "We don't believe you."

Ingraham links rationing, which is at the heart of Palin's death panel claim, with other hot-button conservative worries about health care reform legislation (abortion, immigrants, preserving private health insurance) to disparage the facts offered by the mainstream media and provide, instead, a conservative version of the situation. Ingraham is employing this strategy to, consistent with the definition of propaganda, inoculate her audience against facts that oppose the conservative view of health care reform, since no matter how many times any reform proponent or journalist tries to show that none of these concerns are in the bill, it doesn't matter. She says they are there, establishing a new set of independent purported facts.

The Fox News prime time programs argued that reform legislation would lead to rationing of health care, even before the Palin death panel claim. In doing so, the hosts and their guests offered the same fear-based message that death panels were meant to

evoke: that the proposed health care reform bills would result in government officials denying life-saving care to senior citizens. In doing so, the hosts and their guests did not abide by the traditional journalism values of fairness and accuracy.

2. Period Two: Defending Palin

Once it became clear that proposed health care reform legislation did not contain a provision for a death panel, many conservatives acknowledged that Palin's statement was not correct. Republican Rep. Jack Kingston of Georgia admitted there was no death panel provision in the proposed legislation, calling Palin's formulation "a scare tactic" (Benen, 2009). Two days later, on NBC's "Meet the Press," conservative New York Times columnist David Brooks called the death panel claim "crazy" (Benen, 2009). On August 10, 2009, Palin commented on the reaction, posting on Facebook a call for civility in discourse so as not to move the focus from the substance of the health care debate (Weiners, 2009).

The three Fox News prime time programs all, in different ways, defended Palin. Bill O'Reilly, on his August 10, 2009, program made no comment on the death panel claim but tried to translate it before shifting to an attack on a Democrat, former Vermont governor Howard Dean, who criticized Palin. Initially, Sean Hannity took the same approach on "Hannity" when talking with conservative writer Ann Coulter, but even in translating, the two commentators essentially defended the substance of Palin's assertion:

HANNITY: Now, Ann, this has been the concern we have. Page 425 to 430 of the House bill they talk about taking seniors in a room and offering them end-of-life counseling.

COULTER: Yes. Right.

HANNITY: That doesn't sound very encouraging to me.

COULTER: Right. Which they keep lying about.

By the way, totally ironically, Zeke Emanuel is on my death list. Hold the applause. I'm going to be on the death panel. Then I'm in favor of it.

HANNITY: In other words, then you get to pick who dies?

COULTER: Right. I have a list. Should I start with the A's?

HANNITY: Read the headline tomorrow. It's going to be "Ann Coulter..."

COULTER: Of course it is true that they are going to have to encourage people with dementia to take the assisted suicide. As I said, you can't suddenly cover 47 million who aren't covered and cut costs and not be encouraging some people to take the end-of-life pill.

Hannity and Coulter use an extreme, unsupported attack (that people will need to "take the end-of-life pill"), and they seek to discredit a reform proponent and challenge his character (Ezekiel Emmanuel, a physician and brother of Rahm Emanuel, then the White House chief of staff). Earlier in the conversation, Hannity refers to the chief of staff as "Rahm 'Rahmbo Dead Fish' Emanuel." Attacking the Emanuels and discussing rationing diverted attention away from Palin's death panel claim, even as Hannity defended it ("Page 425 to 430 of the House bill").

When Hannity talks about the government "get[ting] to pick who dies," and Coulter asserts the government will urge people to take "the end of life pill," they are using fabricated "facts" offered as news that can tap into the fears of their conservative viewers, specifically that health care reform will lead to rationing and denial of care to seniors, to elicit a response, namely to oppose the health care reform legislation. In addition, by telling their audience that those proposing health care reform are bad people ("Zeke Emanuel is on my death list "), and by stating that the proponents are dishonest ("they keep lying"), Hannity and Coulter are engaged in the propaganda element of excluding opposing arguments, providing for their audience a way to screen off facts that contradict the conservative attacks on health care reform.

When the Senate Finance Committee removed the end-of-life-counseling provision that Palin had used to support her death panel claim (Parsons and Zajac, 2009),

the Fox News prime time programs offered this news as evidence to support Palin's original claim. On the August 13, 2009, "Hannity," Hannity explicitly supported Palin's death panel claim:

Well, let me -- one of the big questions has come up about death panels. And Governor Palin brought this up on her Facebook blog, and I agree with everything that she wrote in there because if you read the bill, and I finished reading every single solitary page of the House bill, I know it's going to change. But they talk about end-of-life counseling sessions. Now one of the chief advisers for the president is Rahm "Rahmbo Dead Fish" Emanuel's brother, Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel. Here's what he said. He said, "Services provided to individuals who are irreversibly prevented from being or becoming participating citizens," get this, "are not basic, should not be guaranteed, an obvious example of this is not guaranteeing health services to patients with dementia." Now that sounds to me like well, we're going to decide and ration that some people's lives aren't worth living.

Hannity is now standing by Palin's death panel claim ("I agree with everything that she wrote"). He links the bill to a statement by Ezekiel Emanuel, associating reform with rationing, while also ridiculing the chief of staff ("Rahm 'Rahmbo Dead Fish' Emanuel") and attacking the character of Emanuel's brother. In so doing, Hannity does not display balance or a commitment to accuracy.

By the next day, August 14, 2009, on "Hannity," Hannity had become even more resolute in his support of Palin, giving her credit for killing the offending provision of the Senate bill:

And now we have this week all this discussion -- discussion about the death panels. And now the Senate said they're going to remove the provision that they fought all week and telling the American people didn't exist in the bill. And we spotted it on page 425-430. So how do you remove something that you said earlier in the week didn't exist?

Hannity argues that Palin was correct, the provision for death panels existed, and as proof he offers the fact that the Senate Finance Committee removed the relevant language, which he took to be an admission of guilt. In doing so, Hannity reverses the

facts, since the committee decided to remove the provision because it was being used to back up false death panel claims. Even the ranking Republican on the committee, Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa, said the language in question was removed because it could be "misinterpreted or implemented incorrectly" (Parsons and Zajac, 2009). That is, the bill did not create death panels, but others could mistake the provisions for creating them.

Conservative commentator Tucker Carlson then took the issue one step further, arguing that even with the contested language removed from the bill, Palin's death panel would still come to be:

The truth is, you can remove this provision, you can add other provisions, providing that provisions like that will never take effect. But the truth, if you want to lower health-care costs, you're going to have to -- in a centralized way, if the federal government wants to lower health-care costs, they're going to inevitably look at the money spent in the final six months of life. That's the direction we're moving. You can pretend that's not true because you don't want to scare seniors, but it's happening.

As Hannity demonstrated earlier with Coulter, he and Carlson distort a news event (the purported removal of a provision because it contained death panels) in a way that will lead the conservative audience to fear the government deciding which senior citizens will get care and which will not. Carlson furthers the death panel fear appeal by telling viewers that even if the offending provision were removed, health care reform would still cause rationing of care for seniors. As importantly, Carlson moves to screen off the conservative audience from opposing facts, acknowledging the attacks of proponents on the death panel claim ("you don't want to scare seniors") but nonetheless claiming that the conservative charges are true ("it's happening"). These approaches are consistent with the traditional elements of propaganda.

Later in the August 14 edition of "Hannity," when talking with Republican campaign strategist Karl Rove, Hannity continues to defend Palin:

HANNITY: Well, let me give you a one example. We've spent a lot of time talking about what is now commonly known as the "death panels," in other words these end-of-life counselors, which when you read the House version of the bill would mandate that people -- when they're older in life, every five years this would be mandatory and maybe more often depending on their conditions. Now, the Senate -- we just confirmed that this -- they are dropping it from the bill.

ROVE: Right.

HANNITY: They had been denying that it existed all week and now they're saying that we're going to drop it.

ROVE: Right.

HANNITY: So -- is that a victory for the people showing up at town halls?

ROVE: Well sure and absolutely and remember -- I mean, you know and again. They try to first say, well, these are just nuts and try to say well, Sarah Palin she's not very smart and she's against this.

HANNITY: Put a victory in Sarah Palin's column.

ROVE: Exactly, exactly.

Now, Hannity has moved to handing Palin a "victory," while using the elimination of the provision from the Senate bill as proof that it contained a death panel provision all along. While the mainstream media (which Fox News taints by accusing those sources of hiding a liberal predisposition) was calling Palin's charge untrue, Hannity defended Palin's position, asserting the truthfulness of her claim in the face of contrary evidence, and creating, through his language, a new reality in which Palin's statement was, in fact, correct. Such an approach to the facts lacks an allegiance to balance and accuracy at the heart of the definition of objective journalism.

Hannity was not the only Fox News host or guest to rush to Palin's defense after the Senate Finance Committee removed the contested provision from the bill. On the August 14, 2009, "The O'Reilly Factor," Fox News contributor Tammy Bruce used the incident to extol Palin's power while ridiculing health care reform legislation: "Look, when Sarah Palin can do type, type, type, send, and get something removed from committee from the health care bill, which would be the death panels, when she becomes effectively the 101st senator, it indicates how weak what's going on is."

That same night, Laura Ingraham, guest-hosting for O'Reilly on his show, defended Palin:

In the "Personal Story" segment tonight, the power of Palin. When Sarah Palin went on her Facebook page last weekend, worrying that the Democrats' health reform plan would include death panels, she kicked up a storm that no one saw coming. And now key senators say they will exclude an end of life care provision from their legislation.

Ingraham defines Palin's post, without comment, as "worrying that the Democrats' health reform plan would include death panels." Ingraham doesn't challenge that assertion, but rather presents it as a viable possibility, even after all the evidence had emerged that the death panel didn't exist. Later in the segment, Amanda Carpenter, a writer for The Washington Times, credits Palin with forcing the Senate Finance Committee to remove the attacked provision from the bill, giving her credit for accomplishing what other Republicans could not.

Taken together, Ingraham, Bruce and Carpenter, just like Hannity and Carlson, are not prioritizing balanced or accurate coverage of health care reform. Instead, they are making an effort to defend Palin and her death panel assertion despite the available facts.

In the second period of Fox News' prime time coverage of Palin's death panel claim, the hosts and their guests defended Palin's charge as true. In so doing, they had to ignore objective facts about the proposed legislation, linking health care reform to issues that would arouse the anger of conservatives, all with the purpose of eliciting a response of taking action to oppose reform. As such, they are acting consistently with some of the traditional elements of propaganda, while not abiding by the journalistic values of balance or accuracy.

3. Period Three: Translating Death Panel into Rationing

A week after Palin's death panel statement, as fewer public figures defended the claim, the Fox News prime time programs adjusted, as the hosts and guests began translating Palin's assertion into a more general argument that health care reform would lead to rationing of care, even as Sean Hannity continued to defend Palin's assertion as factual. In doing so, the hosts and their guests moved the focus from the inaccuracy of the death panel claim to a fear-based appeal that health care reform would lead to a rationing of care, especially for senior citizens.

On the August 17, 2009, edition of "Hannity," Hannity stressed the correctness of Palin's death panel claim, while Dick Morris engaged in translation:

HANNITY: Let me ask this because the Dems dropped -- they're talking about dropping the public option. I agree with you that it's very deceptive, and we'll get into that in a minute. But, for example, ratting out their neighbors, the death panels they've gotten rid of. They've really pulled back -- go ahead.

MORRIS: Yes. But the death panels are not gotten rid of. There never was a panel that's going to say "die."

HANNITY: The provision -- page 425 of the House bill.

MORRIS: For counseling which isn't a bad idea. The point about these death panels is that if you restrict the amount -- the lifesaving surgeries and you tell someone no, you can't have that bypass surgery, but I'm going to die if I don't have it, well, here's the grief counselor. That will happen. And whether they fund the grief counselor or the end-of-life counselor or not, the rationing will take place when they tell you no, you can't have the surgery because we have to give it to a 40-year-old illegal immigrant instead.

Morris admits that there is no death panel in the bill ("There was never a panel that's going to say 'die'"), but he shifts the discussion into translation (rationing will lead to denied services for senior citizens: "here's the grief counselor"). And in doing so, he effectively screens off opposing facts, telling viewers "rationing will take place" and seniors will be denied care whether there are death panels or not. Morris goes straight for a hot button issue of his conservative viewers, tying health care reform to illegal immigration ("you can't have the surgery because we have to give it to a 40-year-old

illegal immigrant instead," and he later adds, "This program is a device to take medical care from the elderly and give it to largely immigrants"), using a false statement to disparage the bill and question the motives of the proponents of health care reform (that they are more interested in an "illegal immigrant" than an elderly American). And Hannity, the host, does not question or correct any of Morris's charges, failing to engage in the allegiance to balance or the facts that would be consistent with a journalistic approach. By translating Palin's death panel assertion from something discredited into a more defensible idea, Morris constructs a new reality of what Palin meant (one that is less obviously false), as well as new terms for the health care debate.

Later on the show, National Review columnist (and Rush Limbaugh substitute host) Mark Steyn engaged in translation, arguing that Palin was correct even if there was no actual death panel in the legislation:

You know, Sarah Palin got a lot of stick for this -- death panel. But that's absolutely what it means. The health authority in British Columbia has just announced that it's cutting back on senior services to eliminate its budget deficit, and it's going to cut elective surgeries by 15 percent. What that means is that you can elect to have the surgery, but the government won't elect to give it to you. ... That's what government health care, government bureaucrats inserting themselves between you and your doctor, that's where all this is.

Steyn translates the death panel assertion into one of rationing, and in so doing, he ties the reform legislation to three concepts that would activate the show's conservative viewers: denial of care for seniors, the charge that the American health care system would be like Canada's government-run one, and that the new health care system would mean government intervention in the private health decisions of patients. He also inoculates his audience from opposing arguments, telling them his interpretation of the

existence of a death panel is "absolutely what [the legislation] means." Steyn later reiterates his message:

The thing about a death panel isn't that it's a panel that actually says, "We're denying you this treatment," it's that the whole system is, in fact, a kind of death panel, because it has to make judgments about letting Mr. Smith live and Mr. Jones live. It's the nationalization of your body.

Again, he admits there is no actual death panel, but he translates the concept into rationing, all while stressing government intervention in private decisions (using the incendiary term "nationalization of your body," which would surely agitate viewers). Steyn constructs a new meaning for Palin's death panel assertion that was never offered by Palin herself, and in so doing is not displaying the journalistic characteristics of fairness or allegiance to the facts.

By the next day, even Hannity had to adjust his position. When a health care reform proponent on August 18, 2009, told Hannity, "We're in the land of fiction with health care, where there are death panels and euthanasia and abortion," Hannity initially responds with a defense of the existence of death panels, citing the provisions of the bill that he says call for the death panels. But then he pivots into translation in shifting the discussion to a conservative panelist, saying: "I'll throw this to you, it is very, very clear that end-of-life counseling. I don't want a bureaucrat that is designated to save money talking to an elderly person and offering them end-of-life advice. Do you?" So now even Hannity has to, in effect, acknowledge that there is no actual death panel, but instead translates end-of-life counseling into rationing, stirring the audience with descriptions of a "bureaucrat" trying to "save money" while "talking to an elderly person."

By August 19, 2009, Greta Van Susteren and Stephen Moore, an editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, were in full translation mode, acknowledging there were no actual death panels, but making it clear that the term stands in for rationing care:

VAN SUSTEREN: All right. Is there rationing?

MOORE: Well, look, the word "rationing" is not in that bill and it's not in this bill, and the Democrats will deny that there's rationing. But it's really interesting. If you look at a lot of the provisions of the bill -- for example, the really -- the thing that's so controversial right now is this idea of end-of-life counseling and so on...

VAN SUSTEREN: The thing that everyone keeps calling...

MOORE: The "death panel."

VAN SUSTEREN: That some people call "death panels"...

MOORE: Right.

VAN SUSTEREN: ... some say (INAUDIBLE) and that there is no "death panel" word...

MOORE: Right.

VAN SUSTEREN: ... in either bill.

MOORE: And there are -- these are not "death panels." Let's be very clear about this. But what it does is it basically -- if you want to cut costs in health care, as this bill attempts to do, the -- half of the costs of the health care system are people in their last six months of life. So it's hugely expensive, these treatments to elderly people. There is a belief -- and I believe it's true -- that if you're going to cut the costs, you're going to have to limit the options that seniors have for this end-of-life care.

Moore's summary of the issue stresses that there are no death panels, thus disassociating himself (as well as his publication, the program and the network) from Palin's now-discredited assertion. Van Susteren, as an individual, and the *Wall Street Journal*, as a publication, project themselves as serious journalistic players, less reckless with the facts than a commentator like Hannity. Moore talks about denying care to senior citizens, only now using the term "rationing" rather than "death panel." In doing so, he takes a fact (that end-of-life care expenses would have to be addressed if costs are to be contained in any health care plan) but distorts it (concluding that such expenses will be cut by denying care to seniors, something not contemplated in the proposed legislation). The result is that Moore is putting balance and accuracy behind an effort to distort the

facts in an effort to tap into the fears of his conservative audience (which tends to distrust government) to elicit a response of opposing health care reform. And in translating death panels into rationing (which, Moore says, would lead to denial of service), van Susteren and Moore act to screen their audience from facts opposing the conservative opposition to health care reform (in this case, that there were no death panels in the proposed legislation). Further, neither Moore nor van Susteren, both self-defined journalists, seeks to provide balance or fairness to the discussion. Instead, van Susteren not only fails to question Moore's leap but also actively assists him in the distortion.

The third period of how Fox News' hosts and guests handled Palin's death panel claim demonstrated clearly how the on-air personalities constructed key aspects of the health care debate. They took a concrete charge made by a prominent conservative figure and, after the claim had been widely discredited, attempted to salvage it by constructing a new meaning for the assertion, separate from what Palin actually said, all in an effort to support opposition to health care reform and to insulate viewers from facts that could be damaging to those oppositional arguments, especially surrounding the potential embarrassment of Palin's death panel claim being debunked. Now the idea of a death panel was no longer literal (although Palin had clearly meant it literally, something that Hannity insisted for a week was true), but was just a way to illustrate the conservative claim that health care reform would lead to rationing, especially for senior citizens. By constructing this new meaning for the term, the Fox News hosts and guests were engaging in practices closer to the traditional definition of propaganda -- using a mixture of facts and untruths (the existence of death panels) to draw on the values of their conservative viewers (opposition to government intervention in health care) to elicit a

desired action (active opposition to the proposed reform legislation), while screening off the audience from opposing facts -- than abiding by the traditional objective journalistic values of a commitment to balance and fairness and an allegiance to presenting accurate, factual information.

Democrats Are Attacking the Protesters

The Fox News prime time hosts and their guests mischaracterized the statements of several Democratic leaders, most prominently House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, to make an argument that the Democrats were attacking those who were protesting health care reform legislation. Often this theme manifested itself in the context of claims by health care reform supporters that the protests at congressional town hall meetings in the summer of 2009 were not "grass roots" expressions of anger by average citizens but were the product of "Astroturfing," that is generated and coordinated by corporate organizations like conservative group Americans for Prosperity; FreedomWorks, which was run by former Republican House majority leader Dick Armey; and Conservatives for Patient Rights, run by the former head of a chain of hospitals (Buchwalter and Gloudeman, 2009; Krugman, 2009; Herszenhorn & Stolberg, 2009).

To further the argument that the protests were the spontaneous reactions of ordinary Americans who were upset with health care reform, the prime time programs distorted and/or mischaracterized a number of statements by leading Democrats. For example, eleven times during the period of study the claim was made that a Democratic congressman said the protesters were like Timothy McVeigh, and a number of assertions were made that President Obama told the protesters to "shut up." But the bulk of the programs' attention was directed to two charges relating to House speaker Nancy Pelosi:

1) Pelosi called the protesters Nazis and/or swastika carriers; and 2) Pelosi and House majority leader Steny Hoyer called the protesters "un-American." The Fox News prime time hosts and their guests distorted and/or mischaracterized the original statements to discredit the charges that the town hall protests were Astroturfed and that the protesters were not behaving in a way that furthered the democratic process.

1. Nazis and Swastika Carriers

On August 5, 2009, during a brief interview with a reporter, Pelosi was asked if she thought the town hall attendees were offering "legitimate grassroots opposition," and she responded, "I think they are Astroturf. You be the judge ... carrying swastikas and symbols like that to a town meeting on health care" (FactCheck.org, 2009). Pelosi was referring to images of swastikas and other Nazi symbols on the signs and clothing of protesters.

The Fox News prime time programs turned Pelosi's words into the blanket statement that she had called all of the protesters Nazis and/or swastika carriers, a theme that was prominently and regularly featured for weeks. During the 13 days of weekday prime time programming from August 5 to the end of the period of study, the hosts and their guests made the charge that Pelosi had called the protesters Nazis and/or swastika carriers 42 times over the course of 17 different programs.

For example, Sean Hannity made reference to the claim that Pelosi had called the protesters Nazis and/or swastika carriers 11 times over a two-day period (August 10 to August 11), including statements like the protesters are "being attacked and called Nazis by people that are supposed to be public servants" and "we've had hard working Americans called Nazis" by Pelosi ("Hannity," August 11, 2009). Hannity's reporting of

Pelosi's remark did not reveal that she was asked a question about Astroturfing, photos did show some protesters employing Nazi symbols and Pelosi was not referring to all protesters, only those who did actually use the Nazi references.

For the 13 weekdays that followed Pelosi's original statement, on 12 of those days a prime time Fox News host or guest employed the exact same mischaracterization of the speaker's remark, and the claim appeared in nearly half of the prime time programs aired during the period. In addition to the lack of allegiance to accurately reporting on Pelosi's statement, this seemingly coordinated line of attack was used tap into the value system of the viewers, who already were predisposed to dislike the Democratic speaker of the house with a liberal reputation, serving to not only to rally opponents of health care reform, but also to insulate viewers from opposing evidence by demonizing a leading Democrat making the claim of Astroturfing.

While the combative Hannity was the most vocal in distorting Pelosi's statement on protesters and swastikas, the charges appeared on all of the prime time programs. Both Bill O'Reilly (e.g. "What Nancy Pelosi said: crazy, fanatical, swastika-wearing," "The O'Reilly Factor," August 5, 2009) and Greta Van Susteren (e.g. showing a clip of Rush Limbaugh saying, "Nancy Pelosi first calls you Nazis by saying that you're running around with swastika signs," "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren," August 10, 2009) also furthered the claim that Pelosi called the protesters Nazis and/or swastika carriers.

The approach of the Fox News prime time hosts and their guests to the issue of Pelosi's statement on protesters and swastikas lacked the two attributes of objectivity of fairness and an allegiance to accuracy. There was nothing fair about Pelosi's portrayal by

the on-air personalities. None of them acknowledged that there was photographic evidence of some protesters employing Nazi symbols on their signs (FactCheck.org, 2009). In the 42 references to Pelosi's statement on protesters carrying signs with swastikas, no host or guest acknowledged that Pelosi's remark was directed at those attendees who, in fact, did use Nazi symbols, not at all the protesters attending the meetings. Similarly, at no time did anyone portray Pelosi's charge in the context in which she was making it, namely to show that not all of the protesters were representatives of grassroots opponents of health care. The approach of the prime time hosts to covering this issue did not align with the objective tenets of balance or accuracy.

2. Nancy Pelosi Called the Protesters "Un-American"

The claim by Fox News' prime time hosts and their guests that Nancy Pelosi had called the protesters Nazis and/or swastika carriers stepped up in frequency once a second charge about Pelosi was adopted and pushed by the programs, that Pelosi had called the protesters "un-American." On August 10, 2009, responding to the town hall meetings, Pelosi and House majority leader Steny Hoyer wrote an op-ed piece in USA Today that contained the statement: "Drowning out opposing views is simply un-American" (Pelosi & Hoyer, 2009, p. 7A).

To put the quote in context, here are the paragraphs leading up to (and just after) the line in question:

However, it is now evident that an ugly campaign is underway not merely to misrepresent the health insurance reform legislation, but to disrupt public meetings and prevent members of Congress and constituents from conducting a civil dialogue. These tactics have included hanging in effigy one Democratic member of Congress in Maryland and protesters holding a sign displaying a tombstone with the name of another congressman in Texas, where protesters also shouted "Just say no!" drowning out those who wanted to hold a substantive discussion.

Let the facts be heard.

These disruptions are occurring because opponents are afraid not just of differing views -- but of the facts themselves. Drowning out opposing views is simply un-American. Drowning out the facts is how we failed at this task for decades.

Health care is complex. It touches every American life. It drives our economy. People must be allowed to learn the facts.

Taken as a whole, the op-ed recognizes the importance of Americans debating such an important issue ("We believe it is healthy for such a historic effort to be subject to so much scrutiny and debate."), but that to have such a debate, people have to refrain from perpetuating lies and allow both sides to have their say. Such an argument would not seem to be a controversial one, but the Fox News' prime time hosts and their guests turned the "un-American" language into a claim that Pelosi called all of the protesters "un-American," not the act of drowning out opposing views. By seemingly intentionally incorrectly reporting what she had said, turning an unobjectionable statement that all sides should be heard into a condemnation of the patriotism of the protesters, the programs did not display an allegiance to accuracy or balance, but rather were engaged in practices more consistent with propaganda, distorting the truth to tap into viewers' fears to inspire an action (maintaining the idea that the protests were a grass-roots activity) while discrediting opposing arguments of Astroturfing and the proponents making that argument.

On the day the op-ed ran, August 10, 2009, O'Reilly on his show steered clear of the article itself, but, in the context of a discussion on the role of AARP in health care reform, went out of his way to attack Pelosi:

I want to fix the healthcare system. And I believe it needs to be fixed. But you know, Nancy Pelosi writes a memo that they were going to partner up with AARP as part of a planned August recess PR blitz. I don't know if you want to be on the same side as

Nancy Pelosi and still say that you represent American seniors. She's a pretty extreme politician.

O'Reilly's approach to his show is to avoid association with the more outrageous elements of the right (as we saw, he never embraced the existence of a death panel as Hannity did). And here, he starts his point by trying to assert his reasonableness ("I want to fix the healthcare system. And I believe it needs to be fixed"). So he does not mischaracterize Pelosi's language in the op-ed into an attack on all of the protesters. But he still manages to take part in the attacks on Pelosi that would take place over the remainder of the night, engaging in ridicule and a challenge to Pelosi's character, along with making the idea of siding with the speaker irreconcilable with doing what is best for senior citizens, as well as referring to her as "a pretty extreme politician," thus outside of the American mainstream.

The attacks on Pelosi and the op-ed took off in the next hour on "Hannity." Hannity began his program with the introductory line: "Tonight, Nancy Pelosi calls town hall protesters un-American." From the very start, Hannity mischaracterized the op-ed piece, making it sound like Pelosi and Hoyer wrote that all of the protesters of health care reform were un-American, rather than just the action of "[d]rowning out opposing views."

Hannity describes the op-ed in his first segment, a discussion with former President George W. Bush's press secretary, Dana Perrino:

Now, believe it or not, that wasn't the most appalling response from the Democratic corner. Now House leaders Nancy Pelosi and Steny Hoyer, they tried to explain why you, the American people, are so angry, and they wrote in USA Today that, quote, "These disruptions are occurring because opponents are afraid not just of differing views, but of the facts themselves. Drowning out opposing views is simply," they say, "un-American." Now the White House later today tried to quickly distance themselves from these comments. But at this point while the Democrats have

compared those of us who oppose health care, they've compared us to Nazis, they've called us brown shirts, crazed mobsters that are manufactured by the RNC, and now they're accusing people of being un-American, all in an effort to shut down dissent.

Hannity has now provided a bit more context than in the opening teaser line about Pelosi calling protesters un-American, at least providing the line before. But Hannity portrays the line as something more sinister. First, he prefaced the quote with the warning that the response was "appalling" and disparaged what is to come with the dismissive modifier that the writers "tried" to explain American anger. Then, immediately after the quote, Hannity made two negative associations to the op-ed: First, that the White House distanced itself from it (that is, it's so extreme, the president cannot support it, and even that is a distorted statement, as it was based on a remark at a briefing from a White House spokesman that the protesting was not un-American). Second, Hannity associated the op-ed with the earlier comment from Pelosi on protesters carrying swastikas that Fox News distorted, as discussed above. The claim is made that Pelosi's goal is to "shut down dissent," even as the op-ed acknowledges the need for discussion of health care reform.

Hannity and Perrino continue to connect the "un-American" line to the other Fox News distortions of protester criticisms:

HANNITY: Nancy Pelosi, you know, saying it's un-American, and people bringing swastikas. The president telling people to shut up. We've had comparisons to Nazis, Tim McVeigh, political terrorism. These are congressmen and senators saying all of this. Why would they attack the American people and what do they think the outcome is going to be?

PERINO: I'm flabbergasted by it because I thought that, you know, like when you're in a hole, the rule is, like, stop digging?

HANNITY: Yes.

PERINO: But they've made a deeper hole today when they talked about these protests being un-American because the problem is they are provoking populist anger.

Hannity and Perrino now not only connect the "un-American" line to earlier distortions about Nazis and Timothy McVeigh employed by Fox News hosts and guests,

but they also connect the op-ed to the idea that the Democrats are "attack[ing] the American people." They have also now left the context behind, falsely claiming Pelosi characterized "these protests as being un-American."

Hannity continued on this theme throughout the show. He spoke with Fox News reporter Griff Jenkins, who was reporting from a town hall meeting, and Jenkins connected the outrage Hannity and Perrino expressed directly to the people:

People were absolutely upset about government intrusion. They were upset about the cost of this health-care legislation being proposed, and Sean, they were upset about the op-ed in USA Today by Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer. The scene inside, it was rumored to be controlled by the unions, to be heavily pro-Obama.

Jenkins also connected Pelosi and Hoyer to two entities that have negative connotations for conservatives: unions and the president, even as the op-ed had nothing to do with labor or the White House.

Later in the show, Hannity, during a panel discussion, returned once again to the op-ed piece:

This Nancy Pelosi using the swastika line. She called the people that are opposing Obamacare un-American, and then we also have Brian Baird, who used the Tim McVeigh comment that I referred to earlier.

Hannity again has removed the context, falsely reporting that Pelosi called the protesters un-American, translating the op-ed from the idea that drowning out opponents is un-American to the invented notion that "opposing Obamacare is un-American." And he is again connecting the "un-American" line with the distortions relating to Nazis and McVeigh.

Finally, on August 10, on "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren," Van Susteren began her show with a direct attack on the op-ed:

Tonight: "Un-American." Does that mean you? Now, that phrase has lit the country on fire and it's splashed across headlines from coast to coast. Are these people on your screen un-American for protesting the health care plan? House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and majority leader Steny Hoyer say yes. And guess what? Rush Limbaugh doesn't like it. You will hear with your own ears what Rush Limbaugh has to say about un-American comments.

In her tease, there is no context, just a blanket statement that Pelosi and Hoyer think it's un-American to protest health care reform. And Van Susteren employs Rush Limbaugh, a leading conservative figure, to validate her assertion.

Once Van Susteren reported on the story, she then moderated its presentation some: "The war over health care just got shoved up a bit notch or two. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer say in a new column that some of the protesters at recent town halls are un-American." She acknowledges that the op-ed only says "some of the protesters" are un-American (although she still characterizes the people as un-American, rather than the conduct Pelosi and Hoyer describe), but she still provides no context for the charge. But Van Susteren, who often lets her guests take the lead on more extreme arguments and inflammatory accusations, immediately pivots to a clip from Limbaugh's radio show earlier that day:

Nancy Pelosi, Steny Hoyer have an op-ed in USA Today in which they refer--the headline says it all--"Un-American attacks cannot derail health care debate." So those of you showing up at town hall meetings, Nancy Pelosi first calls you Nazis by saying that you're running around with swastika signs, and now she and Steny Hoyer in an op-ed that said you are un-American.

Limbaugh's attack lacks any context, explicitly mischaracterizing the op-ed as saying that the health care protesters are un-American. Van Susteren did not challenge Limbaugh's comments, instead moving to her guest, former Republican Senator Rick Santorum, who continued the mischaracterization of the op-ed:

VAN SUSTEREN: Un-American -- boy, I bet they wish they -- I bet they wish they could pull those words back.

SANTORUM: Yes, it's one thing - - as Rush referred to the swastika line, which was given in an offhand remark by the Speaker. That's one thing, and it's bad! It's horrible! But they wrote this down! This was vetted by everybody up and down the line! This is what they really think! This wasn't something that just sort of came off the cuff. They wrote an op-ed, and they called the American public showing up to these town meetings "un-American."

Santorum not only adds another voice to the false characterization of the op-ed as calling the protesters un-American, but he tries to broaden the meaning, arguing that it was supported by the Democratic party hierarchy ("vetted by everybody up and down the line"), thus connecting Pelosi and Hoyer's purported statement to all proponents of the health care reform legislation.

Later in the show, O'Reilly appears with Van Susteren to continue the attack on Pelosi:

Look, Nancy Pelosi is a right ideologue. That's who the woman is. She is a far left person who does not care about opposing points of view. All she wants to do is impose, and that's the word, her far left views, San Francisco values on the country. Obviously, millions of Americans don't want that, and they are going to object to it.

Again, O'Reilly doesn't directly address the invented Fox News translation of the op-ed piece, but he attacks Pelosi personally, linking her to ideas that would evoke negative emotions in Fox News' conservative audience ("ideologue," "far left person," "San Francisco values"). He also sets her as outside of mainstream American values, relegating her to a role as a fringe element.

Fox News' prime time programs on the day of Pelosi's op-ed article all attacked Pelosi personally and/or provided an inaccurate description of the article's content, portraying an assertion that a certain conduct (shouting down speakers) was un-American as a claim that all health care reform protesters were un-American. In doing so, the

programs were not acting within the objectivity elements of balance and accuracy. Instead, the seemingly coordinated strategy perpetuated the mischaracterization, apparently to foment the outrage of the viewers that two Democratic proponents of health care reform were attacking those who opposed the proposed legislation. In doing so, viewers would be insulated from the arguments Pelosi was making, instead only hearing about attacks that never actually took place. This conduct, which ran across all three Fox News prime time programs, more closely resembles the traditional elements of propaganda than the values of objective journalism.

For the remaining days of the period of study, the Fox News prime time programs no longer mentioned the USA Today op-ed piece. All that remained was the claim that Pelosi had called those protesting against health care reform un-American, often tying the charge in with the other Fox News misrepresentations of criticisms of individual protesters (e.g. comments on the protesters carrying signs with Nazi symbols).

Hannity introduced a health care protester the next day, on August 11, 2009, by saying, "Now we've had hard working Americans called Nazis and brown shirts and un-American by Nancy Pelosi." Later in the show, Hannity said, "It's Nancy Pelosi attacking the American people" and "Nancy Pelosi said they're un-American." The statements about Pelosi's op-ed piece now have been boiled down to the simple idea, created by the Fox News prime time hosts and their guests, that Pelosi had called all the protesters un-American. The USA Today article is no longer discussed.

This pattern continued across all three programs for the rest of the period of study, even filtering down to non-professional guests. For example, health care protester Dennis Feldt said on "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" on August 11, 2009, that Pelosi

"says that we're a bunch -- or, you know, we're a swastika crowd." Nearly a week later, protester Katy Abram said, "I've heard Nancy Pelosi saying about we're a mob and swastikas and all that stuff" ("Hannity," August 17). The statements from the citizens support Jamieson & Cappella's (2008) argument that conservatives rely on a right-wing news media "echo chamber." They are employing the same language they have heard, presumably on Fox News, to put forward the same inaccurate characterizations offered by the network. This speaks to the effect the Fox News programs are trying to elicit when they engage in propaganda-like conduct in presenting opposition to health care reform. Feldt and Abram have heard the Fox News version of the facts and are now repeating them back as the truth on Fox News. The network's approach, in these cases, has had the desired effect.

Conservative comedian Dennis Miller stated the Fox News translation of the op-ed as fact on the August 12, 2009, edition of "The O'Reilly Factor" ("Well, listen, from calling our CIA liars to calling the people un-American to inferring they're Nazis, Nancy Pelosi always seems to be able to put the ugliest possible face on something."), before engaging in an extended personal attack on Pelosi's character (one sample: "I think to be around Pelosi and not call her on what a vapid, insipid, empty-headed and nasty piece of work she is puts your own karma in compromise.").

In the following days, Dick Morris (on "The O'Reilly Factor" on August 12), Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly (on "The O'Reilly Factor" on August 13), Hannity (on "Hannity" on August 13, 14 and 18), Karl Rove (on "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" on August 13), conservative columnist Tony Blankley (on "Hannity" on August 14), Van Susteren (on "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" on August 17)

and O'Reilly (on "The O'Reilly Factor" on August 19) all state as fact some variation of the Fox News translation that Pelosi had called health care protesters Nazis and/or un-American.

The seemingly coordinated adoption of a false version of what Pelosi said in her op-ed article does not demonstrate a sense of balance and allegiance to accuracy on the part of the Fox News prime time hosts. No host or guest, especially beginning the day after the original op-ed was published, provided the context for Pelosi and Hoyer's use of the term "un-American," and every reference to the "un-American" comment after the first day portrayed it as an attack on all protesters, not the act of drowning out dissent. In perpetuating the mischaracterization of Pelosi's statement, the prime time programs insulated their audiences from the facts and arguments on health care reform and the conduct of the protesters in a way more consistent with the elements of propaganda.

The White House Wants You to Turn in Those Opposing Health Care Reform

In the same way that the Fox News prime time programs changed Pelosi's statement that "[d]rowning out opposing views is simply un-American" into a charge that the protesters of health care reform were un-American, the hosts and their guests took a White House Web posting looking to correct inaccurate information about reform and portrayed it as an attempt to identify people opposing reform.

The Web posting, titled "Facts Are Stubborn Things," identified its purpose as responding to "chain emails" and other sources making incorrect claims about health care reform (Phillips, 2009). A video on the page featured Linda Douglass, the communications director for the White House's Health Reform Office, explaining how health insurance reform legislation would not eliminate private coverage. The page also

included two videos of the president discussing what the legislation would and would not cover. The last substantive paragraph of the post read:

There is a lot of disinformation about health insurance reform out there, spanning from control of personal finances to end of life care. These rumors often travel just below the surface via chain emails or through casual conversation. Since we can't keep track of all of them here at the White House, we're asking for your help. If you get an email or see something on the web [sic] about health insurance reform that seems fishy, send it to flag@whitehouse.gov.

The Fox News prime time programs focused on the existence of the email address and the term "fishy" to turn the post into an effort by the Obama administration to seek out and silence legitimate criticism and opposition to health care reform by having Americans report their fellow citizens. The hosts and their guests turned the request for fishy information ("something") into a search for fishy people (those opposing reform). These claims aired on thirteen different segments across all three shows during the period of study, including on five of the six programs in the two days after the Web posting. The way the prime time programs handled the issue, misstating the text and intention of the post, did not conform to the journalistic values of an allegiance to accuracy and balance. Instead, by tapping into two core conservative fears of health care reform -- the elimination of private insurance and the overreach of governmental power -- the programs used the White House post to manipulate viewers into opposing health care reform while preventing viewers from being affected by the White House's efforts to correct misstatements, consistent with the definition of propaganda.

For example, Greta Van Susteren opened her August 5, 2009, show: "Tonight: 'Fishy'? Is there something 'fishy' about you? If so, the White House says we should report you to them immediately." She took the White House post's focus on the information ("If you get an *email* or see *something* on the web about health insurance

reform that seems fishy, send *it* to flag@whitehouse.gov," emphasis added) and turned it into an attempt to identify individuals ("Is there something 'fishy' about *you*? If so, the White House says we should report *you* to them immediately," emphasis added).

Sean Hannity engaged in the same mischaracterization of the post on August 5: "You get an email, you see something on the Web about health insurance that seems fishy, write to the White House. I mean it almost sounds like a secret police, you know, reporting-- citizens now report on each other, doesn't it?" In a different segment of the same show, Hannity makes the same point again: "Really? Do they want like -- I assume Hannity is probably right -- one of the top of the list. Hannity's a fishy character. Do you want -- do you want a neighbor telling on neighbor in all this?" Like Van Susteren, Hannity moves the focus from seeking incorrect information (what the post said) to asking Americans to "report on each other."

The next day, August 6, 2009, the prime time programs continued to misstate the use of "fishy," but did so in different ways. Van Susteren, in the opening segment of her show, said: "In a blog at White House.gov titled 'Facts are stubborn things,' the White House gives an email address where people can report to the White House 'fishy' speech - - that is, speech that questions the president's health care plan." Van Susteren incorrectly defines "fishy" as "speech that questions the president's health care plan," as the reference in the post is to the earlier "them," which refers back to "rumors" containing "disinformation." It is clear in the post that "fishy" refers to false information. There is nothing in the post to suggest the White House was equating "fishy" with "speech that questions" reform.

Hannity followed the same line that night, saying: "Now the White House is also helping to lead this charge and they have asked people to report what they call, quote, 'fishy behavior,' regarding the health care debate. Now that initiative caused one Republican senator to accuse the White House of developing an enemy's list." Like Van Susteren, Hannity mischaracterizes the post's use of "fishy," attributing it to behavior rather than information.

Bill O'Reilly was the only prime time host not to weigh in on the "fishy" language on August 5, but he did so on August 6, and while he expressed more skepticism than Van Susteren or Hannity, his handling of the issue still furthered the distortion of the Web post. O'Reilly introduced a segment: "[A] post on the White House website is asking for information about 'fishy' criticisms as we discussed of President Obama's health care initiative. Now, that has some people upset. Not me." While O'Reilly's initial description of the post is more accurate than those of Van Susteren and Hannity, O'Reilly nonetheless goes on to support the mischaracterization of the post in three ways. First, he calls attention to and legitimizes the criticism of the alleged misconduct of the White House, even if he disagrees with it ("that has some people upset"). Second, he gives a platform to guests who have an opportunity to further the mischaracterization. Third, after all the discussion on the show, he attacks the Web post on other grounds, ultimately reporting the same message to his viewers that Van Susteren and Hannity did.

After O'Reilly's statement that the Web post did not upset him, he interviewed conservative reporter Bernard Goldberg, who, while acknowledging the White House was not collecting names of opponents to health care reform, nevertheless attacked the hypocrisy of Democrats, arguing they would be upset if President George W. Bush had

done something of this nature. Defending under siege conservatives by turning the attack on Democrats who have (or, in this case, would) practice the same behavior is one of the common Fox News strategies identified by Jamieson and Cappella (2008).

Later in the program, O'Reilly's guest Judge Andrew Napolitano charged that the blog post looking for "disinformation" constituted illegal behavior reminiscent of the Nixon administration:

I was off the rails on this, Bill, because the purpose of the First Amendment, which protects free speech is to encourage open, wide, and robust debate. When Richard Nixon tried to suppress free speech during the Vietnam War era by sending military and civilian guards to take pictures of people at anti-war rallies, the Supreme Court told him he couldn't do it. And the Congress enacted a statute that specifically forbade the government from collecting information about people who speak against it and saving and storing that information. That's just what Barack Obama's doing.

Napolitano not only engaged in the information-to-individual distortion that Hannity and Van Susteren had employed, but he tied this nonexistent behavior to law breaking. While O'Reilly offered a tepid defense of the White House, replying, "I don't know if President Obama's doing that," it is far from unequivocal (he didn't say, "President Obama is not doing that"). And while O'Reilly continued pushing back on Napolitano's next series of claims (e.g. "Was it anybody or anything fishy?"), he eventually allows Napolitano's last point, as if it justifies his concerns, saying, "All right, so it's the perception." But once O'Reilly segued to an interview with Democratic former White House counsel Lanny Davis, he used the discussion to pivot into a criticism of the administration, portraying the White House post as something negative and, possibly, even an abuse of its position of power:

But you're putting a little bit of happy face on this, Davis. Now listen to me. The White House isn't like your website. I don't even have one, but I know if you do have one, it's dopey or the judge's website, okay? The White House website's not like that, or my website billoreilly.com. The White House website is the ultimate, the pinnacle

of power. There you have Linda Douglass, who we talked about with Bernie. And Linda Douglass is basically issuing, Lanny, a clarion call for information that goes against what the White House wants to do on health care, just because it's coming out of the White House elevates this thing right through the roof.

By the end of the discussion, O'Reilly unabashedly portrayed the post as if the White House had done something wrong, even if it was not collecting names:

I have to be honest here. I don't care what the White House says. I don't care what Linda Douglass says. If I want to criticize the White House health care plan, I'm going to criticize it. ... I agree with you that it sends the wrong message, but I don't think there's one person watching me tonight, not one who's not going to give their opinion on health care because of that dopey website.

So even as O'Reilly distances himself from the misstatement of the post (eschewing the distortion employed by Hannity and Van Susteren), he still portrayed the White House's message, which was simply that it wanted to be able to correct disinformation, into something nefarious (the website, he says, "sends the wrong message" and is "dopey"), and he furthers the distortion that the post sought to stop criticism rather than disinformation ("If I want to criticize the White House health care plan, I'm going to criticize it").

During the remainder of the period of study, O'Reilly became more overt in engaging in the mischaracterization of the White House Web post, for example on August 13 agreeing with Megyn Kelly when she said: "There's a real question about whether the White House taking - - asking people to snitch on their neighbors, essentially."

In the end, the Fox News prime time programs took a White House blog post that explicitly was seeking to effectuate what most people would agree is a positive value in a policy debate, ensuring that truthful information about the issue was available to citizens, and turned it into something else, an attempt to compile an enemies list of those who

opposed health care reform. And they did so in a pervasive way, discussing the issue on 14 different segments on 12 different programs, covering all three of the network's prime time offerings, in a less-than-two-week period. This seemingly coordinated mischaracterization of the Web post did not exhibit the objective journalism values of balance and accuracy. With the exception of O'Reilly's initial treatment of the White House Web post, the prime time programs presented the post only as an inappropriate and/or illegal attempt by the White House to ferret out and collect the names of those opposed to health care reform, rather than as an attempt to disseminate accurate information about the issue. This seemingly intentional mischaracterization, effectuated across all three prime time programs, was more consistent with the elements of propaganda. The hosts used a distortion of an actual event, converting the White House's call for examples of disinformation into a request for the identities of those opposing health care reform, not just to rally viewers against health care reform, but also to insulate the viewers from the attempt of the White House to correct misinformation.

Health Care Reform Legislation Covers "Illegal Immigrants" and Abortion

The Fox News prime time programs' misreporting of Nancy Pelosi's statements and the White House Web post on misinformation were examples of attempts to mischaracterize specific actions and tie them into the larger health care debate. The prime time shows also constructed a set of purported facts on the larger issues of whether health care reform legislation provided care for immigrants and abortions. Jamieson and Cappella (2008) identified the strategy employed by Fox News of activating its conservative viewers on an issue by associating it with other issues that would stir negative emotions in the viewers. This approach was evident in the attempts of the Fox

News prime time hosts and their guests to argue that health care reform would cover abortions and care for undocumented individuals (who they termed "illegal immigrants" or "illegal aliens"). In fact, the hosts and guests did not just say that these hot-button issues would be covered in the proposed legislation, but they portrayed the Democrats as actively wanting to include these elements in health care reform, as if they were key goals of the proposed legislation.

1. Covering Immigrants

All three Fox News prime time programs during the period of study featured charges that the proposed health care reform legislation would cover "illegal immigrants" or "illegal aliens." For example, Van Susteren devoted an entire segment to such a claim on August 19, 2009. But former presidential advisor Dick Morris was the most prominent proponent of the claim that health care reform would cover immigrants, and he appeared on all three Fox News prime time programs during the period of study. Morris argued not just that health care reform would cover undocumented individuals, but that doing so was the actual purpose of the proposed legislation and would lead to a denial of care to American citizens, mostly seniors.

On the August 3, 2009, edition of "Hannity," Morris said, "They're going to cover illegal immigrants." But by August 14, 2009, Morris, on "The O'Reilly Factor" (with Laura Ingraham guest-hosting), was more direct about the proposed health care reform legislation: "What it essentially is is a transfer of medical care from the elderly under Medicare to immigrants who are now un-covered."

Morris was even more specific in his August 17, 2009, appearance on "Hannity": "And whether they fund the grief counselor or the end-of-life counselor or not, the

rationing will take place when they tell [a senior citizen], 'No, you can't have the surgery because we have to give it to a 40-year-old illegal immigrant instead.'" Now he has personalized his claim, saying that a senior citizen will specifically be denied a medical procedure so that an undocumented immigrant can have that procedure instead. He is explicitly posing health care as an either/or proposition: treatment will be available to either senior citizens or immigrants, but not both.

Later, on his August 17 appearance with Hannity, Morris is even more direct: "This program is a device to take medical care from the elderly and give it to largely immigrants." Note that Morris is not just claiming that under the proposed health care reform legislation, tax dollars could be used to care for undocumented immigrants (which would have been inaccurate in itself). Rather, he is charging that the very purpose of reform legislation ("a device") is to not only care for immigrants, but to do so by taking care away from senior citizens.

In each of Morris's appearances during the period of study, the host either endorsed or did not challenge Morris's claims about health care and immigrants. And Morris's views were well known to the programs that booked him as a guest. As such, the prime time programs did not act consistent with the journalistic values of fairness or an allegiance to the facts. Obviously false statements about the intent and effect of the proposed health care legislation (e.g. "a device to take medical care from the elderly and give it to largely immigrants") went unchallenged. And the hosts made no effort to balance the charges with the simple fact that the proposed bills did not seek to cover undocumented immigrants, including the language that "individuals must be lawfully present in a state in the United States" to benefit from the law (Gorman, 2009).

Rather, the way the issue was handled was as a fear appeal consistent with the traditional elements of propaganda. The hosts and their guests used a false statement about a hot-button issue for their viewers -- immigration -- as a means to cast health care reform in a negative light. The systemic nature of how the issue was presented is evident in how Fox News' prime time programs handled a related issue during this time, that some of the uninsured claimed by Democrats were, in fact, illegal immigrants. Seven times during the period of study (with six of those instances in the last calendar week), the same claim was advanced on one of the prime time programs: That the figure of 47 million Americans without health insurance included between 6 million and 12 million illegal immigrants (depending on the speaker). Putting aside the inaccuracy of the figure on the upper end (PolitFact, 2009b, put the figure at 6 million), what is striking is the consistency of the argument over the course of seven different programs by five different speakers. In each case, the claim was made that the amount of uninsured Americans claimed by health care reform proponents was not compelling because, among other things, a large number of the uninsured were undocumented immigrants. This seemingly coordinated consistency of argument is more in keeping with the systematic behavior of propaganda than with the commitment to balance and accuracy that make up objective reporting.

2. Covering Abortion

Similar to the Fox News prime time approach to health care reform covering immigrants, the hosts and their guests regularly made a claim that the proposed legislation would cover abortions, even as neither the House nor Senate bills sought to do

so. In fact, the claim was made on 11 different occasions during the period of study, across all three prime time programs.

A regular theme of the hosts and their guests was that even though proponents of health care reform claimed abortion would not be covered by the proposed legislation, those claims could not be trusted. For example, Laura Ingraham, guest-hosting on "The O'Reilly Factor" on August 7, 2009, said, "Voters hear oh, don't worry, abortions aren't covered. ... Yet, informed Americans respond with, we don't believe you." Ingraham uses the word "informed" to negate claims by reform proponents that abortion would not be covered. Similarly, Hannity, on the August 5, 2009, edition of his show, after citing an Associated Press story that reported that the House version of the bill would not allow federal money to be used for abortions, followed up with, "But a spokesman for the National Right to Life, they're not buying that explanation. He said, quote, 'It is a sham. It's a bookkeeping scheme.'" Hannity invokes the National Right to Life, a trusted source for his conservative viewers, to insulate his audience from the specific fact reported by the AP that abortion would not be covered under the proposed legislation. Former U.S. senator Rick Santorum was even more explicit, arguing on the August 10, 2009, edition of "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren": "I heard the congressman before talk about, well, the -- you know, abortion's not in there, and all these things are not -- are lies -- well, he's just not telling the truth." Santorum directly accuses a congressman of lying in claiming abortion is not covered in the proposed legislation.

A similar line of attack adopted on Fox News' prime time programs argued that claims that abortion would not be in health care reform legislation could not be believed because Democrats would require coverage by virtue of being Democrats. Conservative

writer Ann Coulter made that point on the August 12, 2009, "Hannity": "[T]hey keep saying abortion is not in the bill; it is not in the bill. I will bet my entire profits ever that a Democrat Congress is not going to have a health-care bill that doesn't cover abortion. It's crazy." Her use of "it's crazy" hammers home the idea that it would not be possible for the Democrats seeking health care reform to not cover abortions. Santorum, on the August 19, 2009, "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren," made the same claim: "I'm telling you, if they put in this legislation that abortions were not covered under this, you'd lose enough Democrats in the House, you couldn't pass it." Santorum thus sets up a scenario under which there cannot be health care reform legislation that does not cover abortions, alerting the conservative audience that the two concepts are inseparably connected. The programs were not acting within the traditional values of journalism, as the statements on abortion lack balance or an allegiance to accuracy. None of the hosts (with the exception of Van Susteren on one occasion) made an effort, either on their own or in response to the claim of a guest, to challenge assertions that abortion was covered by the proposed legislation, nor did they provide the factual basis of what the legislation actually said. The underlying message of the hosts and guests on this topic was, essentially, that no matter what the other side says, no matter what facts they present, the legislation would cover abortion. The seemingly coordinated nature of the abortion claims had the effect of insulating viewers from the fact that both the House and Senate bills did not cover abortion, consistent with the traditional values of propaganda.

Other Themes Based on Misstatements of Underlying Facts

The Fox News prime time programs' handling of Palin's death panel claim; charges that Democrats had attacked anti-reform protesters by, among other things,

calling them Nazis and un-American; criticisms of a White House Web post looking for misinformation; and arguments that health care reform legislation would cover abortions and immigrants all followed a similar pattern: The hosts and their guests would take a factual event (e.g. a statement by Nancy Pelosi or a White House website post) and then inaccurately portray the event in a way that would give ammunition to conservative opposition to health care reform. Several other of the twelve themes identified in the 2009 programs followed the same pattern, mischaracterizing a fact and then using the mischaracterization to build an emotion-based argument opposing health care reform legislation. For example, unsupported charges were made that the liberal group ACORN had undue influence on health care reform. The effect of health care reform legislation on Medicare coverage was repeatedly misstated, as were the findings of independent bodies like the Congressional Budget Office on the proposed legislation's impact on taxes and deficits.

Similarly, the programs failed to provide journalistic context related to certain facts, so that the result was an unsupported attack on proposed health care reform legislation. For example, Van Susteren and Hannity repeatedly made reference to the length of the legislation, using the amount of provisions to inflame a conservative base wary of government. The size of the legislation gave rise to unsupported claims that members of Congress would not read the proposed law and/or would not know what provisions the law contained. Also, the programs attacked the potential use of the process known as reconciliation in the Senate to overcome a filibuster and allow legislation to pass with a simple majority. Reconciliation was presented as nefarious and an attack on democracy with no recognition of its historical use by both parties when controlling the

Senate. And the programs repeatedly featured arguments that the president had refused to work with Republicans, even as the Republicans engaged in a strategy of obstruction from the beginning of the Obama presidency (Draper, 2012). In these cases, the Fox News prime time programs did not display a commitment to balance, fairly portraying both sides of the issue, nor did they show a commitment to accuracy, relaying the facts as they were. Instead, the programs actively joined in the opposition to health care reform through practices that were more in line with propaganda, distorting facts to tap into core conservative values to elicit a reaction from viewers opposing health care reform while shielding the audience from countervailing facts and disparaging arguments in favor of reform and those making those arguments.

Defending an Op-Ed by the CEO of Whole Foods Market

The Fox News prime time programs did not just rely on misstatements of facts as outlined in the sections above to further themes opposing health care reform. Greta Van Susteren's handling of a Wall Street Journal op-ed piece written by the CEO of Whole Foods Market opposing the proposed health care reform legislation demonstrated a more subtle rejection of objective journalistic values.

On August 11, 2009, John Mackey, the CEO of Whole Foods Market, wrote an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal opposing the proposed health care reform legislation (Mackey, 2009). The article closely followed the Republican argument against health care reform, saying, "we clearly need health-care reform," but then defining reform as a combination of core conservative principles (decreased regulation, tax reform, tort reform, etc.). At the same time, Mackey painted health care reform as "a massive new health-care entitlement that will create hundreds of billions of dollars of new unfunded

deficits and move us much closer to a government takeover of our health-care system," a position that is contrary to the assertions of proponents of health care reform and consistent with the arguments made by Republicans in opposing reform. The piece begins with a quote from Margaret Thatcher disparaging socialism, setting the tone immediately that Mackey viewed the health care reform legislation as a form of socialism, a common attack on the Fox News prime time programs during the period of study.

Some Whole Foods customers who were angry about the CEO's position vented their frustrations on the company website and called for a boycott of Whole Foods stores and products (Etheridge, 2009). As one boycott website put it: "Whole Foods CEO, John Mackey, says healthcare is NOT a right and used his corporate bully pulpit to spread insurance industry lies. Join other shoppers who will not spend dollars supporting Mackey's right wing agenda" (Boycott Whole Foods, 2009).

On August 19, 2009, Greta Van Susteren's show opening included this programming tease:

Plus, a boycott. The CEO of a nationwide grocery store chain says he is for health care reform but dares to say that he's just not for the one President Obama wants. Yes, he disagrees with the president! So then what? Eighteen thousand people organize on Facebook, saying, Don't buy from this guy's stores. We have a report.

Van Susteren later opens the Whole Foods segment:

Well, wait until you hear this. It is on Facebook, 18,000 people on Facebook are calling for a boycott of the nationwide grocery store chain Whole Foods. It has to do with the debate over health care. Now, apparently, the CEO of Whole Foods, who says we do need health care reform, is not as liberal as some of his progressive clientele.

Van Susteren and her guest, Fox Business Channel anchor Brian Sullivan, then go on to portray Mackey as a charitable businessman (citing that he reduced his salary to one dollar per year and set up a charitable foundation) who offers eight practical ideas to

reform health care that just happen to be different than the president's proposal. And they go out of their way to portray him as not being conservative or Republican, with Sullivan calling him a libertarian and mocking those who would call him a "right-wing zealot."

Van Susteren describes Mackey as pragmatic, not political: "I do not know this guy, and I don't know if his ideas are good, but there is something to be admired about someone who sees a problem and says here are eight really good ideas, or he thinks they are really good ideas. He actually posts the good ideas." Her implication is that Mackey is outside of the partisan debate on the issue, even as Mackey's ideas parallel Republican talking points opposing health care reform. For example, tort reform was offered as a health care reform solution in ten separate segments across nine episodes, including all three of the Fox News prime time shows, during the period of study, including Hannity making that claim in five segments between August 17 and August 20. So Van Susteren mischaracterized Mackey's position, making it seem like it was nonpartisan.

Van Susteren and Sullivan portrayed the boycotters as completely unreasonable. Van Susteren says of Mackey's treatment: "And then for having to dare to differ with a particular segment, they come out and try to kill his business, a business that has employed lots of people, and, from what I can read, he seems like a pretty generous guy." They argue that the boycott won't hurt Mackey, but will hurt the 50,000 workers Whole Foods employs.

Van Susteren doesn't completely misstate the statements of Mackey and the protesters in the vein of Fox News claims on Palin's death panel, Nancy Pelosi's quotes, the White House Web post or the proposed legislation covering abortion and immigrants. Yet, Van Susteren's actions are not consistent with objective journalism. By portraying

Mackey as a charitable businessman and distancing his views from the Republican opposition to proposed health care legislation even as those views track the main talking points Republicans have offered on her show, she is demonstrating neither balance nor an allegiance to accuracy. Mackey did not support health care reform as that term was understood at the time, but rather Van Susteren was participating in the Republican attempt to co-opt the term by changing the meaning. The version of health care reform offered by Republicans (again, deregulation, tax reform and tort reform) preserves the main health care system but embraces traditional conservative policy initiatives that would not, in fact, address the issues of coverage, cost and service that drove the health care reform proposals in 2009. For example, studies have shown that tort reform would have no significant effect on medical costs (Baker, 2005), and deregulation would be insufficient to address cost and access issues (Nichols, Ginsburg, Berenson, Christianson & Hurley, 2004). That isn't to say that conservatives cannot or should not support these proposals, nor does it mean that those proposals necessarily could not be helpful from a policy perspective. But it would be mischaracterizing that set of positions to call it a form of "health care reform" as that term had been employed in the political and media arenas (as making changes to the system to cover the uninsured and lower costs) in 2009. Van Susteren, however, did not challenge Mackey in this regard, even as she featured on her program Republicans making the same claims. In so doing, she participated in the political gamesmanship of using the terminology but changing its meaning. Similarly, Van Susteren did not show balance or a commitment to accuracy in portraying the protesters, characterizing their opposition as being because Mackey disagreed with the

president rather than for the nature of his position itself (that he "used his corporate bully pulpit to spread insurance industry lies").

Van Susteren portrayed Mackey and the protesters -- Mackey being an independent thinker and the protesters blindly following the president -- in a way that would rouse anger and action on the part of her audience. The seeming strategy is also apparent in how Van Susteren continued to cover the boycott in the ensuing days. On the next day, August 20, 2009, Van Susteren devoted the opening segment of her show to the Whole Foods boycott, teasing the story in her opening:

And meanwhile, back here at home, a food fight. Disagreeing in this country has become a high-risk business. In fact, it can kill your business. The CEO of Whole Foods says he is for health care reform but comes out against the president's health plan. And now more than 20,000 people on Facebook are calling for a boycott of the Whole Foods grocery chain. But that has enraged some, and they are fighting back at the boycotters.

Van Susteren then had on two guests, one in favor of the boycott and one against it, and she continued hitting on the same themes: Stressing that Mackey is in favor of reform, portraying the boycotters as vilifying him for not agreeing with the proposed legislation, and extolling Mackey's charitable works, practical ideas and employment of tens of thousands of workers. Multiple times, Van Susteren responded to a criticism of Mackey with some variation on the statement, "Because he disagrees with you!"

On August 21, 2009 (the last day of the period of study), for the third consecutive day, Van Susteren devoted a segment to the Whole Foods story. In the show opening, she teased the segment: "Protesters take to the streets, and it's over health care. But this is no town hall, angry people calling for a boycott of Whole Foods because the company's CEO dared to disagree with our president." Again, she portrays the boycott as being about disagreement with the president, not the underlying issue. Later, during the

segment, joined by Stephen Moore of the Wall Street Journal, Van Susteren continued her attack on the boycotters and her defense of Mackey. She described the controversy by saying: "The protesters are furious at the CEO of the nationwide chain Whole Foods, John Mackey, who wrote an op-ed calling for health care reform, but opposing the president's plan." Again, Van Susteren portrayed Mackey as being in favor of health care reform, even as his plan tracked with the traditional conservative policy initiatives Republicans had offered on her show opposing proposed reform that would not be understood as health care reform by the terms of the time. Van Susteren and Moore then proceeded to discuss how the company is "liberal-friendly" while stressing that Mackey supports health care reform, he offered practical solutions based on his career in business (Moore calls him "a great American entrepreneur"), and he maintains a record as a good employer (and one who employs tens of thousands of workers).

For three consecutive days, Van Susteren dedicated a full segment of her program to the Whole Foods debate. Van Susteren's portrait of Mackey did not display a commitment to fairness and balance. Instead, she portrayed Mackey and the protesters in a way that would support Mackey's message while insulating the audience from the claims of health care reform proponents that Mackey was not acting independently. Her approach did not conform to traditional objective journalistic values.

More Themes Opposing Health Care Reform in 2014

While the 2009 data clearly reveals that the Fox News prime time programs did not conduct coverage of the debate over health care reform in a way that was consistent with the objective journalistic values of fairness and balance and an allegiance to accuracy and the facts, some questions remained open. Was the 2009 coverage indicative

of how the network covered the issue more recently? Was the coverage a product of the recent transition from a Republican president following policies the network supported to a Democratic president introducing legislation the network opposed? Or was the debate over health care reform so new and intense that the Fox News prime time programs behaved in a way that was not consistent with the way the network operated in prime time outside of the heat of the debate?

To address these questions, a parallel study was undertaken of three weeks of the same three Fox News prime time programs--hosted by O'Reilly, Hannity and Van Susteren--looking at coverage of health care reform nearly five years later, in the spring of 2014. The April 1, 2014 announcement of initial enrollment numbers under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) -- the piece of legislation under debate in 2009 -- gave rise to coverage of health care reform on Fox News' prime time programs and thus an opportunity to examine whether, at this point, the network was operating in line with the journalistic values of fairness and accuracy, the traditional elements of propaganda or the rhetorical tradition of persuasion. Clearly, the amount of coverage in 2014 did not reach the pervasive levels of 2009, as there were many days on which one or more of the programs did not discuss health care reform. However, the coverage was still heavy, with health care reform receiving at least some attention on nine of fifteen days on "The O'Reilly Factor," eleven of fifteen days on "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren," and nine of fifteen days on "Hannity," even as two major news stories covered multiple days of coverage during the period: the Russian invasion of Crimea and the disappearance of a Malaysian Airlines plane.

The examination of Fox News' prime time coverage of health care reform in March and April 2014 found that the network continued operate in the same manner it did in 2009. Again, the network adopted themes opposing the ACA that were not based on factual assertions, and the overall approach of the prime time programs was more in line with propaganda than with objectivity.

The coverage of the ACA across the three prime time programs was nearly uniformly negative, with little discussion of the positive aspects of the law. In twenty-one segments across all three programs during the period of study, a host or guest made a claim that the ACA exchanges were not functioning or that the entire system was not working. While there were, in fact, problems, the shows exaggerated the problems and ignored the positives, providing an unbalanced and distorted view of health care reform. Similarly, on fourteen different segments across all three programs, the hosts and their guests made unsubstantiated claims that the enrollment numbers produced by the White House were fabricated (or "cooked," as conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh said in a clip played by Van Susteren on her April 1 program). No subsequent investigation has validated these claims.

The 2014 data also did not exhibit an allegiance to accuracy. For example, the prime time hosts and their guests claimed repeatedly that the majority of those signing up for care under the ACA were already insured, older and/or not paying for coverage. These claims were made fifteen times during the period of study, occurring on all three programs. However, the claims were false (Greenberg, 2014, Kessler, 2014). Similarly, Hannity and Van Susteren and their guests made false claims thirteen times during the period of study on increases in health care premiums under the ACA (FactCheck.org,

2014; Greenberg, 2013). On eleven segments across all three shows, a host or guest made claims about patients losing doctors that were not accurate (Hiltzik, 2014). On eight occasions, across all three programs, charges were made about the ease with which an individual could avoid enrolling under the ACA, including becoming exempt from the law's personal mandate, which PolitiFact found to be "mostly false" (Sanders, 2014). Hannity also misstated figures on job losses at the Cleveland Clinic (Hansen, 2013).

Four Old Themes and Nine New Ones

The Fox News prime time programs continued to explicitly engage in three of the themes from 2009: the president's failure to work with Republicans, the length and complexity of the ACA and portraying health care reform as socialized medicine. In addition, in six segments across all three programs, the hosts continued to press the case of Republicans supporting "health care reform" in a way that was at the heart of the 2009 theme characterizing the boycott of Whole Foods after the company's CEO wrote an op-ed piece in the Wall Street Journal opposing the ACA.

The Fox News prime time programs also pursued in the 2014 period of study nine new themes based on misstatements and exaggerations that were not consistent with the traditional values of objectivity or persuasion: 1) misstating the impact of the ACA on patient relationships with doctors; 2) misstating the ease of getting an enrollment extension; 3) misstating that the people enrolling in health insurance plans in the exchanges were not paying, not young and/or were already insured; 4) exaggerating the delays and functionality of the online exchanges; 5) misstating the impact of health care reform on jobs; 6) misstating the increase of the cost of insurance in the exchanges; 7) misstating the number of remaining uninsured Americans and the goals for the first year;

8) unsupported claims about the amount and veracity of the data released by the White House on enrollments in the exchanges; and 9) exaggerations in the number of insurance policies canceled as a result of the implementation of the ACA.

Once again, accuracy and balance were not prioritized, while furthering arguments against health care reform were. Nearly all of the coverage of the April 1 deadline for enrollments under the ACA was negative. Before the deadline, the discussion was primarily about how the administration would not meet its stated goal for enrollments or how the administration might be dishonest about the data. After the deadline and the administration announcement that the enrollment goals had been easily met, the issue was downplayed and, when addressed, the coverage focused on attacks on whether the enrollment goal had actually been reached, why it did not matter or the ACA itself, before nearly disappearing from the show completely. For example, O'Reilly's programs prior to the April 1 ACA enrollment announcement featured the issue prominently in the lead or second segment, but once the goals had been met, on the April 1 show O'Reilly moved the issue to the third segment. And with the exception of reacting to two news events (a CBS reporter claiming the network killed her negative story on health care reform and the resignation of Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius), O'Reilly's program did not substantively cover the ACA for the remainder of the period of study. O'Reilly, through his coverage and emphasis, told his viewers how important the April 1 announcement was, only to argue after April 1 -- when the goals were met -- that it didn't matter, calling it "kind of bogus" on April 1. This kind of approach was evident on all three prime time programs (although the other two shows continued to cover the ACA more closely after April 1) and was more consistent with a

coordinated, deceptive approach to the issue that lied closer to propaganda than to the values of objective journalism. A more detailed look at some of the more prominent 2014 themes will help illustrate the network's approach.

Those Enrolling Under the ACA Are Not Young, Uninsured and/or Not Paying

The prime time Fox News programs in spring 2014 repeatedly raised a claim that while the enrollment numbers might (before April 1) or did (after April 1) meet the goals necessary to make the insurance exchange function, the figures were not accurate in that many of the enrollees were not young (young people were needed to offset the higher costs associated with the care of those who were older), were not uninsured and/or signed up but did not actually pay for coverage. This claim was made in fifteen different segments during the period of study, appearing multiple times on all three programs. In fact, these charges were speculative and turned out to be false (Bhardwaj, Coe, Cordina & Saha, 2014; Greenberg, 2014; Kessler, 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014; Voorhees, 2014). In this way, this 2014 theme resembled the 2009 themes of a death panel, Democrats attacking the protesters and the White House seeking to collect the names of those opposing health care reform in that they involved a false underlying purported fact meant to undermine the arguments of those in favor of health care reform.

For example, on the March 25, 2014, edition of "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren," the host made a charge that those enrolling in the exchanges were not young, uninsured and/or paying in two different segments. First, while interviewing Republican Senator John Thune, Van Susteren says of the ACA, "It's bad now for a lot of people. I think it will get worse, especially all those young people that aren't in there." Later,

during a panel discussion, after calling the administration's enrollment numbers "squishy," she incredulously asks one of her guests, "Do you think the administration really does know what percentage of enrollees, maybe not paid, but enrollees who have signed up in the demographic they want?"

The prime time programs' handling of claims about the nature of the ACA enrollees did not seek to provide balanced or accurate coverage of the April 1 announcement. Instead, the seemingly coordinated attacks across all three programs were intended to undermine the impact of the positive April 1 announcement based on false claims in a way that was more consistent with the elements of propaganda.

Rising Premiums

Similarly, on 13 occasions during the period of study, Hannity and Van Susteren's programs used nonfactual or exaggerated claims related to the cost of health insurance to discredit the ACA (Greenberg, 2013), either through positive statements that costs had gone up or negative statements about cost savings. The hosts and their guests offered numerous purported facts about costs that were not accurate. For example, Republican Senator Tom Coburn told Van Susteren on April 1, "The average new insurance policy, it's going to cost 40 percent more than it did last year"; John McCormack of the Weekly Standard told Van Susteren on April 1 that the ACA resulted in people "paying thousands of dollars more for health insurance"; Republican U.S. Senator Rand Paul told Hannity on March 26 that those signing up for insurance under the ACA are finding "it's costing me four times more than my old insurance used to cost"; and Hannity himself said on March 27 that insurance under the ACA "costs more" and on April 3 under the ACA

people are "paying more and rate shock is now impacting everybody." None of those statements were accurate.

In reporting on the cost of buying health insurance via the ACA, the Fox News prime time programs did not attempt to report the data in a fair or accurate way as would be expected of a journalist. Instead, the hosts and guests used purported facts about costs to discredit the legislation in a way more consistent with propaganda. And a similar approach was taken with regard to figures on exaggerating the number of policy cancellations due to the ACA (Kessler, 2014), lost jobs (Hansen, 2013), the ease of getting an extension, and exaggerating the number of Americans losing access to their preferred doctor.

The White House Was Dishonest With the Enrollment Figures

In 14 segments during the period of study, and across all three prime time programs, the hosts and their guests directly challenged the veracity of the ACA enrollment numbers announced April 1. However, there were no factual bases for these charges; they were speculative. And no subsequent investigations found any inaccuracy in the numbers. As such, unlike the 2009 themes involving death panels, Democratic attacks on protesters and the White House website, the programs did not just misstate a fact. Instead, the hosts and their guests invented a purported fact. In doing so, rather than respecting the journalistic values of balance or an allegiance to facts, the programs used baseless speculation to undermine and discredit facts and arguments that opposed the position of the shows.

The allusions to the dishonesty of the White House with the release of the data related to enrollment under the ACA started before April 1 and continued after, once the

numbers were announced. On March 31, 2014, all three programs warned their viewers that the enrollment figures to be announced the next day were not to be trusted. O'Reilly:

So, it doesn't matter how many people signed up for it. It doesn't matter how many people paid their premium or how many people who are 12 years old are getting insurance because it's all a ruse. And you know it's a ruse. The government doesn't want to tell the folks what's going on. They are hoping that we'll just give up. They are hoping we'll get so sick and tired of Obamacare and hearing about it we'll just give up.

Van Susteren engaged in a back-and-forth discussion with Republican U.S.

Senator John Barrasso on March 31, questioning both the administration's openness on the enrollment numbers and whether those who had enrolled were young, were uninsured and/or had paid, accusing the administration of withholding information:

When are we actually going to find out how many people -- as the administration says, we are going to tell you on this date, we are going to get this information from the insurance companies so we know how many people paid, how many young people paid, how many we have to subsidize or -- when do we get these numbers?

Hannity started his March 31 program with an intro that included the charge directed at the White House, "They've been dishonest from the get-go." He then goes on to expand on a list of purported lies from the president, eventually challenging the enrollment numbers themselves:

The year is 2014, and they still can't give us the number how many of all the people they claim signed up actually even paid for their health care. In other words, how many real people are there? Now, I've been contending from the beginning this is a Ponzi scheme and that they expect the young and the healthy to be paying premiums and be paying for the sick, the elderly and the uninsured.

All three hosts on the day before the April 1 release of the enrollment numbers had prepared their audiences for the positive news to come from the White House. Rather than engaging in a balanced analysis of the data or accurately portraying what the White House had and had not announced, the hosts all chose to make unsubstantiated charges

that the forthcoming numbers were false. In doing so, they sought to discredit the facts and arguments of those with an opposing view through the use of unfounded claims. This strategy was apparent on April 1, 2014, when Van Susteren introduced an interview with Republican Senator Tom Coburn by saying: "During today's speech, President Obama, taking a swipe at Republicans, saying many of the tall tales that have been told about this law have been debunked." Coburn then goes on to support the Fox News purported facts on increased costs, doctor choice, the length of the bill and the enrollees being uninsured that were, in fact, shown not to be true.

The Relationship Between Patients and Doctors

During eleven segments spread across all three programs (although predominately on "Hannity" and "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren"), the hosts and their guests made the claims that the ACA had led to vast amounts of patients losing their doctors and that there were not enough doctors to treat those newly insured under the legislation. Like with the theme of the White House being dishonest about the ACA enrollment figures, claims of lack of doctors were speculative, not based on any proffered data or studies. And claims of people losing their doctors were largely anecdotal, with the shows exaggerating the extent of the issue, much like the way the network exaggerated the amount of insurance plans that were canceled under the ACA (Kessler, 2014).

Ten of the eleven instances of this claim about doctors occurred on March 31, 2014, or later, once it was clear the ACA enrollment figures would be positive. For example, all three programs advanced the issue of doctor availability on April 1. On "Hannity," Republican Senator Marco Rubio said: "You can no longer see the doctor or go to the specialty cancer center you once went to." Republican Senator Tom Coburn on

"Van Susteren" warned that under the ACA, Americans would have "limited choice of who is going to be your caregiver." Both statements by the Republican senators went unchallenged by the hosts, and Coburn's earlier claim about his own choice of doctor was untrue (Hiltzik, 2014). O'Reilly himself was more direct on his show: "The anecdotal evidence is that the doctors are going to flee, all right, and that the medical services will then be provided by physicians' assistants and nurse practitioners, so that the whole medical industry we have in America is going decline pretty quickly and pretty drastically."

When faced with positive enrollment numbers by the April 1 deadline, the Fox News prime time programs raised baseless claims that Americans would no longer be able to see their doctors of choice, exaggerating and distorting an underlying fact to discredit the positive news regarding the ACA. Such an approach lacks the journalistic objective values of balance and allegiance to accuracy.

Propaganda, But Not Journalism or Persuasion

Conway et al. (2007) and Peters (2010) challenged the assumption in the literature that Fox News should automatically be judged as a journalistic operation. Conway et al. found that Bill O'Reilly's "Talking Points Memo" segment made use of 1930s-style propaganda; Peters argued that O'Reilly's program, while following some traditional tenets of objectivity, was largely an emotion-driven enterprise that allowed the audience to embrace a lower standard by which journalism should be judged. The current study expands the work of these two scholars, finding that in both 2009 and 2014, the Fox News prime time programs did not, as RQ1 asks, exhibit the objective journalistic values of fairness and accuracy, nor did they, as RQ3 asks, seek to transparently engage in

logical persuasion. Instead, as RQ2 asks, the hosts acted most consistently with the traditional values of propaganda.

Journalism

The prime time programs often did not abide by the traditional journalistic value of accuracy and an allegiance to the facts. The network's themes were based on premises that were not accurate. Pelosi didn't say that all protesters were Nazis (FactCheck.org, 2009), nor did she claim protesting health care reform was un-American, saying only that "[d]rowning out opposing views is simply un-American" (Pelosi & Hoyer, 2009, p. 7A). Van Susteren may have opened her August 5, 2009, show with: "Tonight: 'Fishy?' Is there something 'fishy' about you? If so, the White House says we should report you to them immediately," with Hannity and, indirectly, O'Reilly joining in, but the White House post in question didn't ask for people who were "fishy"; it sought to correct disinformation, asking people who "get an email or see something on the web [sic] about health insurance reform that seems fishy" to "send it" so factual information could be dispensed (Phillips, 2009). Of course, health care reform legislation contained no death panels, did not ration care, and had no provisions to keep 99-year-old fathers from receiving care, as former presidential adviser Dick Morris claimed ("Hannity," August 3), or to provide care to undocumented immigrants or women seeking abortions.

Similarly, despite claims to the contrary on Fox News' prime time programs in the spring of 2014, seven million existing health care insurance policies were not canceled by the ACA (Kessler, 2014; Greenberg, 2014), those who signed up for insurance via the ACA exchanges did not mostly already have health insurance (Greenberg, 2014), the ACA did not cause a rise in insurance premiums (Greenberg, 2013), the ACA did not

cause a loss of jobs at the Cleveland Clinic (Hansen, 2013), the Congressional Budget Office did not say the ACA would cause a \$2 trillion deficit (Jost, 2014), and becoming exempt from the ACA's individual mandate did require an explanation (Sanders, 2014).

Fox News' prime time programs also did not act consistently with the journalistic value of balance, in which issues are presented fairly. In 2009, efforts to provide health care coverage to the uninsured were generally portrayed as nefarious, with those opposing health care reform painted as patriots standing up for American values (and opposing socialism) who would be subject to retaliatory actions from the White House, while those in favor of reform were portrayed as calling protesters un-American Nazis and demonstrating against anyone who did not agree with the president. Health care reform was presented as, in the words of former presidential advisor Dick Morris, "a device to take medical care from the elderly and give it to largely immigrants" ("Hannity," August 17). Reform would, according to the prime time hosts and their guests, lead to the rationing of health care (if not an actual death panel), with Morris saying his father would "be dead today if Obama's plan passed because they would never approve that treatment for a 99-year-old, and I couldn't pay for it, I wouldn't be allowed to" ("Hannity," August 3).

The 2014 study confirms the findings of the 2009 data. Again, the Fox News prime time programs developed themes opposing health care reform based on misstatements of fact (repeating three of the themes from 2009), and again the coverage was unbalanced, with the focus solely on the negative aspects of the Affordable Care Act, ignoring any of its successes.

Propaganda and Persuasion

Fox News' prime time coverage, instead, worked more closely within the traditional elements of propaganda. By seemingly coordinating themes opposing health care reform based on nonfactual premises while insulating viewers from opposing facts and arguments, sometimes by disparaging and dismissing those supporting reform, the network tapped into the values of its audience, including the touchstone conservative concerns of socialism, the overreach of government (embodied in its most harrowing incarnation in a death panel) and the transfer of wealth from American seniors to undocumented immigrants, to make fear-based appeals more akin to the elements of propaganda than persuasion.

The lack of transparency of intent, especially apparent in Van Susteren's portrayal of the Whole Foods CEO's op-ed piece and O'Reilly's claim on his August 10, 2014, show that he "gives voice to both sides" and his "reporting is honest," further demonstrates that the network's prime time efforts were more in line with propaganda than persuasion.

The 2014 programs demonstrated the same approach. The prime time programs broadcasted inaccurate data on enrollment in the health care exchanges and the effects on prices, coverage and doctors that were at the heart of conservative concerns about health care reform. When it became apparent that the April 1 ACA enrollment data would be positive, the prime time programs engaged in a seemingly coordinated attack, challenging both the veracity of the White House's reporting and the effect of the legislation on patient choice of doctors. In both cases, the charges were speculative and not backed by data, but rather were seemingly attempts to discredit and counteract the positive news being released about the ACA without regard for fairness or accuracy.

Conclusion

As with all qualitative studies, the results of this examination cannot be generalized beyond the case at hand. The study speaks to how Fox News' prime time programs handled one issue in two periods five years apart. It does not tell us how the network operated in the context of less prominent, less incendiary issues, nor does it speak to the practices of the other news and opinion programs on the network. Future research would be needed to examine Fox News' method of operation on other issues and at other times in the network's schedule.

The question of whether the conduct of the Fox News prime time programs was standard for cable television news and not unique to the network will be addressed in a later chapter analyzing MSNBC's health care coverage. Similarly, the question of how the styles of the Fox News prime time hosts worked together to advance the network's policy goals will be treated in detail later.

Nevertheless, this chapter's findings do call into question the implicit assumption of much of the communications research focusing on Fox News that the network's prime time programming is or should be treated as a journalistic operation. The programs hosted by O'Reilly, Hannity and Van Susteren did not, in August 2009 and March-April 2014, operate consistently with the traditional elements of objectivity when covering the debate over health care reform, instead making use of tactics more closely associated with propaganda. As such, researchers would be better served by accounting for these findings when studying Fox News. Scholarship could benefit from an approach to the network that examines it not as a traditional news network but rather as an attempt to use the indicia of traditional television news to advance the conservative position on the

issues of the day. Further, if Fox News' approach is substantively different from a journalistic operation, researchers should exercise care in making comparisons to other television news providers, both on cable and the broadcast networks, on a like-to-like basis, especially when examining how individuals consume content.

Chapter 3: How Differing Host Styles Helped Fox News' Prime Time Programs Advance Themes Opposing Health Care Reform Legislation²

Chapter 2 focused on the content of the Fox News prime time programs as they covered health care reform for two three-week periods, first in August 2009 and then in March-April 2014. The study demonstrated that the programs did not abide by the traditional journalistic values of fairness and balance and an allegiance to accuracy and the facts, instead acting more in accordance with the traditional elements of propaganda, as they used a combination of facts and falsehoods to manipulate the audience into adopting the network's themes opposing health care reform, tapping into the core values of their conservative audience to do so, all while insulating their audience from opposing arguments and facts.

This chapter shifts the focus to the way in which the Fox News prime time programs functioned during the periods of study, focusing on the hosts of the programs. That question takes into account two contexts of the hosts' actions: they were broadcasting as part of the same nightly schedule as their colleagues, so how the hosts interacted would be part of the hosts' conduct. Also, the hosts all were operating on a network with a branded self-presentation as an unbiased news organization, so the conduct of the hosts would need to be understood in this context.

One of the main questions left unanswered by Chapter 2 is how three seemingly different hosts, employing three differing approaches, managed to come together to support the same themes opposing health care reform, all while functioning as part of the Fox News brand. To address this question, this chapter investigates the influence of

² This chapter is an extended version of an article to be published in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* in 2016.

hosting on the content of the prime time offerings of Fox News. Operating at the meso-level of analysis, where macro processes of organization and ideology meet the micro processes of individuals and content (Smelser, 1997), this analysis fills a gap in the larger Fox News literature by disaggregating host styles and closely examining their role in shaping the network's prime time programming through a qualitative textual analysis.

Fox News

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, by 2009, Fox News was an established, important player in the cable news field. Between two million and four million viewers tuned into Fox News during prime time (Boedeker, 2009), and the network played an important role in political discourse, especially for conservatives and Republicans (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). Fox News draws more viewers than all of its prime time competitors combined (Knox, 2014), employing a lineup of opinion programs hosted by personalities whose profiles have risen along with the growth of the network. Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity and Greta Van Susteren were the face of the network in prime time, and much of the research looking at Fox News examines what they do on their shows. But in doing so, the focus has been on the network, not the hosts. As Chris Peters (2010) asserts, despite Fox News' ratings dominance in cable news and the emergence of news opinion shows as the staple of prime time cable news, few peer-reviewed studies have examined these programs directly.

Fox News Research and the "Hierarchy of Influences"

The vast majority of academic research on Fox News has sought to draw conclusions about Fox News as an entity in contexts such as selective exposure (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009), media bias and voting (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007), audience

demographics (Morris, 2005), content bias (Groeling, 2008), content selection (Aday, 2010), objectivity (Aday, Livingston & Hebert, 2005), fairness (Hickey, 1998) and party influence (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). But in all of these cases, the authors seek to make statements about Fox News as a network, rather than looking closely at the individual programs they are analyzing or whose effects they are measuring. There have been some studies of individual Fox News hosts, like Conway, Grabe and Grieves's (2007) examination of Bill O'Reilly's "Talking Points Memo" segment. The authors found that O'Reilly employed propaganda techniques that were more severe and less nuanced than those used by Father Charles Coughlin in the 1930s. But even this study looked only at one element of one segment of one host's program.

These earlier studies have operated on the macro end of Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese's (1996) "hierarchy of influences," a theoretical framework through which one can examine how media messages are shaped, looking at the different actors and factors that can influence the final output. The model looks at media at different levels, from the micro to the macro, considering "individual, routines, organizational, extra-media, and ideological" factors, with "these forces operat[ing] simultaneously at different levels of strength in any shaping of media content" (Reese, 2001, pp. 178-179). The bulk of earlier Fox News research has concentrated on the organizational, extra-media and ideological aspects of the network -- on the macro end of the hierarchy of influences -- even while often operating at the show level. Similarly, much of the social science-based communications research on Fox News has focused on the content, reception and impact of the network's programming, rather than the performance of the

hosts themselves. This level of analysis has appeared in the less empirical entertainment literature (e.g. Jones, 2013), but such work is the exception, not the rule.

The Importance of Hosts in Television News Programs

The macro-focused studies of Fox News have left a gap in the literature as to how the performance of the network's on-air personalities play into the larger narratives addressed -- essentially, a meso-level analysis toward the micro end of the continuum in the hierarchy of influences (Smelser, 1997). And given the rising importance of the host in the modern news environment (Vraga, Edgerly, Bode, Carr, Bard, Johnson, Kim & Shah, 2012), which has been diluted by an explosion of programs and programming outlets, a meso-level analysis of Fox News' prime time programming adds an important facet to an understanding of the network, in line with Shoemaker and Reese's model. Cable television hosts have become among the most recognizable and, in some cases, admired broadcast news figures, on par with those at the traditional network news operations (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2010), and yet the literature is largely devoid of studies of the hosts (Peters, 2010).

Networks have increasingly relied on branding programming so it stands out from the field of competitors (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2001), and the branding approach often centers on the host or anchor of the program (Kim, Baek & Martin, 2010), as choosing the host is one of the areas in which news organizations and producers can try and control and shape the audience perception of the show (Newhagen & Nass, 1989). In addition, despite any lapses in traditional journalistic practice by television news anchors, they remain the face of journalism for many audiences (Meltzer, 2010). As a result, the host of a news program can be highly influential in how that show is perceived by the public,

including affecting the credibility of the network. As Tayo Oyedepi (2007) found a direct connection between the branding of a network and its credibility, the shows, branded via their hosts, have an important role to play in how credible the public finds the news operation. As such, understanding what the hosts are doing is an essential element of studying a network's practices and the perception of its programming.

The Fox News Brand

On the one hand, research has demonstrated that Fox News produces conservative-leaning content (See, e.g., Chalif, 2011; Conway et al, 2007; Iksander, 2005) for a mostly conservative audience (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Morris, 2005; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2011), occupying an important position in mainstream Republican politics (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008). The network's founder, Rupert Murdoch, has a track record as a producer of conservative-leaning news, and he hired long-time Republican political operative Roger Ailes to run Fox News upon its launch (Hickey, 1998; Sherman, 2014).

But at the same time, Fox News' branding is built not around its conservative disposition, but on its professed neutrality, with taglines of "fair and balanced" and "We report, you decide." Fox News uses a self-representation of being balanced and credible as a marketing tool to attract viewers who do not trust network television news (Bennett, 2001; Hickey, 1998; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). As Lance Bennett (2001) explains, the network saw the decreasing trust in television news and the growth of the idea that the network newscasts exhibited a liberal bias as a commercial opportunity. Fox News made the businesses decision to try and serve that audience by presenting itself as a news

source that could be trusted, while simultaneously offering a conservative take on the news to counter the networks and CNN.

If the scholars are correct and Fox News' actual messages do not match the claims of the network's self-marketing and branding, what role do the hosts play in this conflict? Chapter 2 revealed variation at the host level. While the host's styles were beyond the scope of that study, they are the focus of this one.

Fox News' Prime Time Hosts and Health Care Reform

As such, this chapter addresses how the Fox News prime time hosts, as the drivers of the network's brand, produce individual level variation within the unified messages of the network. Specifically, the chapter seeks to answer three main questions.

First, the hosts bring different backgrounds and personalities to their positions, and it would be useful to examine how those differences translate to the actual on-air content of the programs. So this chapter will address the question of what specific techniques, formulations and rhetorical devices each Fox News prime time host deploys to develop a self-specific brand on air.

Second, the different host styles exist despite the fact that Chapter 2 showed that the prime time programs advanced seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform legislation. That discrepancy raises this question: Within individual level variation, how does each of the individual hosts further Fox News' contribute to the network's themes identified in Chapter 2?

Finally, not only do the three hosts employ differing styles despite maintaining seemingly coordinated themes, but they also do so at a network that aggressively markets itself as an even-handed provider of information on key issues. As such, the chapter seeks

to address how these seemingly conflicting goals come together. Specifically, How do individual level and organizational strategies come together in furthering Fox News' "fair and balanced" branding?

Answering these three questions will provide a valuable meso-level analysis of how Fox News operates when addressing an important national issue in prime time, as well as identifying some potential ways the network's approach can affect perceptions of news and journalism.

Method

This chapter's study follows the same template as the one conducted in Chapter 2. That chapter analyzed six weeks of Fox News prime time programming and found that the hosts and their guests pursued seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform in a way that hewed closer to the elements of propaganda than the traditional objective journalistic values of balance and accuracy. The study in this chapter replicates the earlier examination of the 2009 period of study, again following Papacharissi and Oliveira's (2008) study identifying frames, only this time, instead of looking at the substance of the arguments made by the hosts and their guests (i.e. the claims), the focus is how the hosts approached the themes identified in the first study. Specifically, in this study transcripts were analyzed with instances of the programs discussing one of the themes noted, and then the approach of the host noted and examined (e.g. Did the host directly further the claim? Did the host further the underlying basis of the claim? Did the host embrace, ignore and/or reject the theme?).

Once again, the period covers the weekday prime time programs of Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity and Greta Van Susteren, beginning the week before Sarah Palin's Facebook

post claiming proposed health care reform legislation contained a "death panel" (Palin, 2009), and continuing for two weeks after, running from Monday, August 3, 2009, through Friday, August 21, 2009.

Since the 2009 health care reform debate provided one of the first opportunities for Fox News to address a major initiative from a new Democratic president after eight years of generally supporting the policies of a Republican president, and because the issue was so pervasive during the period, covered on nearly every program on every day of the study period, the 2009 programs are especially instructive in analyzing how the hosts' styles affected the network's ability to advance themes opposing health care reform legislation. As such, the analysis centers on the 2009 period. The 2014 period did not feature as pervasive examination of health care reform, as it was not unusual for a program to go several days without discussing the issue. As such, the 2009 period is better suited to an examination of how the hosts handled a single issue on a daily basis over an extended period of time. The 2014 period will, however, be discussed in Chapter 7 when the changes at Fox News after the 2012 election are analyzed.

A host-by-host analysis allows for a deep and nuanced examination of the rhetorical devices used by the on-air personalities to support the network's themes opposing health care reform. A discussion of the larger issues that bridge the individual programs follows, addressing how the on-air personalities can vary while still reinforcing the Fox News brand.

Bill O'Reilly: Protecting the People from the Powerful

In the August 2009 programs under study, O'Reilly often presented himself as a voice of truth and protector of average citizens from the abuses of those in power. He

claimed a lack of affiliation with any party or ideology. His self-presentation often contrasted his role as a speaker of truth (he employs the term "no spin zone" to describe his approach) against the rest of the mainstream media, which he viewed as liberal (or, in the case of the United Kingdom, socialist). For example, on August 12, 2009, O'Reilly, in the context of a statement from AARP that it had not taken a position on proposed health care reform legislation, said: "There's no question that CNN and MSNBC generally support President Obama, especially in the health care arena." Soon after, he added:

Now if you watch "The Factor," you know, I've been fair to the president. But there comes a time when the benefit of the doubt shifts. Misstating the AARP position, using a young girl as a setup, attacking a news organization that actually covers the news honestly doesn't speak well, Mr. President.

O'Reilly is referring to Fox News when he said "a news organization that actually covers the news honestly." These statements are exemplary of how O'Reilly handled the health care reform debate in August 2009. He claims that the other cable news networks are biased, but Fox News is not, as it "covers the news honestly." He also establishes his neutrality, beginning his monologue with the qualification that he's "been fair to the president." But all of that qualification and the claims of balance and accuracy do not stop him from contributing to a network argument against health care reform, this time distortions of what happened between the president and AARP.

O'Reilly tended to sidestep the most inflammatory conservative charges opposing health care reform. And he often made his claims in definitive and sometimes bombastic and self-aggrandizing assertions, presented in a way that set himself above and beyond anyone who would disagree with him.

Ratings as Validation

O'Reilly used the relative ratings success of his program as validation of his self-professed role as an impartial conveyor of information. For example, on the August 10, 2009, edition of his show, he said:

"The Factor" also gives voice to both sides, something you will never get on MSNBC News. So, fair-minded Americans know our reporting is honest, while much of the other TV news media is simply in the tank for the president. Now you'd think that liberal Americans would flock to hear their side propped up, but that's clearly not happening. For libs, conservatives and independents alike, there's really no choice. They have to watch us if they want to know what's going on. And they are in record numbers. "Talking Points" is not gloating, just reporting. But the massive viewership to Fox News is a watershed moment in media history. There is no question anymore that Fox News is now the most powerful voice in the news media, despite unrelenting attacks from almost all other press organizations.

O'Reilly says viewers "have to watch [him] if they want to know what's going on," setting himself up as the go-to source of news. Here, the claims are meant as evidence to back up his claim that he "gives voice to both sides," unlike other media outlets that are "in the tank for the president." And while he calls Fox News "the most powerful voice in the news media," he argues that the network is not just for Republicans, because "libs, conservatives and independents alike" watch his show to get the real news. O'Reilly's touts his ratings -- he says he "is not gloating, just reporting" -- to establish his show and his network as the only balanced source of news.

Given the volume of empirical studies finding Fox News to be conservative both in content (Chalif, 2011; Jamieson and Cappella, 2008) and audience (Coe, Tewksbury, Bond, Drogos, Porter, Yahn, & Zhang, 2008; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Morris, 2005; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2011), it seems quite clear that O'Reilly's argument is more strategic than sincere, meant to give weight to his critiques (or those of his guests) of proposed health care reform legislation.

Translating Hot-Button Issues

O'Reilly often avoided the most controversial elements of the conservative opposition to health care reform while furthering those arguments in a more indirect, broadly acceptable manner. For example, unlike Hannity, O'Reilly did not say that Sarah Palin's claim that proposed health care reform legislation contained a death panel that would decide who would receive care was true. In this way, he avoided being associated with a controversial and false assertion by an opponent of health care reform. But rather than just say the claim wasn't true, O'Reilly found a way to further the Fox News theme underlying Palin's claim without endorsing the false death panel itself. In referencing Palin's Facebook post, he immediately translates it to something less incendiary: "Now, Mrs. Palin referring to fears that health care will be rationed and the elderly and acutely ill will go to the back of the line." So immediately O'Reilly has moved the focus away from the false claim -- the death panel -- to a broader concept -- rationing -- that is being advanced on all three prime time programs.

Next, O'Reilly moves the focus even further from Palin, moving to attack one of the prominent Democrats who challenged Palin. After showing a clip of Democratic former Vermont Governor Howard Dean criticizing Palin, O'Reilly said, "Now, as far as we can tell, Sarah Palin never mentioned euthanasia. Dean made it up to demean Palin. Dean does that all the time. And it's wrong." The focus has now been moved from Palin's lie to an attack on Dean. A viewer who tuned into O'Reilly that night wondering if there was a death panel in proposed health care reform legislation was not told by O'Reilly that one existed. However, the viewer would walk away from the discussion still afraid of rationing and angry at a purported unfair attack on Palin by a liberal political figure. In not joining in on Palin's claim, O'Reilly adhered to his self-presentation as a nonpartisan

reporter of facts. But at the same time, by translating Palin's controversial assertion into something more palatable and raising the possibility of a single-payer system, he nevertheless furthered the conservative message that health care reform would lead to rationing, just without the partisan "death panel" claim attached to it.

The same pattern emerged in O'Reilly's handling of a USA Today op-ed piece written by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer. While the other two prime time Fox News hosts took part in misstating what Pelosi and Hoyer wrote, O'Reilly did not. Instead, on August 10, 2009, when the other two prime time hosts promoted the misstatement, O'Reilly attacked Pelosi in the context of a discussion about the role of AARP in health care reform, calling her "a pretty extreme politician" who does not represent "American seniors," without ever referencing the op-ed piece.

O'Reilly also supported the Pelosi theme by couching the attack in a larger question of broadcast news bias by a powerful corporation that he says is using its power against what he portrays as regular citizens. O'Reilly opened his August 13, 2009, program with: "As President Obama's poll numbers continue to fall, NBC News goes on the offensive to help the president. We'll present the evidence." Here, he doesn't claim to be attacking the president. Instead, he cites poll numbers before setting Fox News up as the fact-based ("We'll present the evidence"), balanced purveyor of news when compared to NBC, which he says is "on the offensive to help the president." Then, O'Reilly said:

Now, there's something very disturbing about a major corporation, GE, allowing its news division to brand regular Americans, racist, fascist, stupid because they oppose a public policy. In fact, I've never seen this before in my 35 years of journalism. I mean, think about it, folks are using their constitutional rights to protest the health care policy they believe will harm them and the country. A powerful corporation, GE, which just received more than a billion dollars in low cost government loans, that's taxpayer money, demonizes the very people that provided them the cash. Is that unbelievable?

Rather than directly engage in the theme that Pelosi had called protesters un-American or Nazis, O'Reilly comes at the issue in another way. He sets himself up as a balanced reporter (noting his "35 years of journalism"), and he makes references to attacks on the protesters ("racist, fascist, stupid because they oppose a public policy") but does not connect those claims to the specific charges. Rather, he poses the entire question as average Americans (he said "folks," a term of address that O'Reilly used often during the period of study) being taken advantage of by a major corporation (NBC and its parent company, General Electric). O'Reilly is able to further the Fox News theme while maintaining his self-presentation as a balanced, fact-based reporter.

O'Reilly took a similar approach to the Fox News mischaracterization of a White House website post looking to correct untruthful claims about health care reform. The page asked for reports of "fishy information," which the other Fox News prime time hosts reported as a search for fishy people, turning the post into an effort by the administration to identify and possibly punish opponents of health care reform. O'Reilly did not join in this interpretation of the site, saying on August 6, 2009, a day after his colleagues had engaged in the mischaracterization: "[A] post on the White House website is asking for information about 'fishy' criticisms as we discussed of President Obama's health care initiative. Now, that has some people upset. Not me."

Nevertheless, O'Reilly furthered the network theme by supporting the underlying concerns of the Fox News claim, even as he dismissed the claim itself. For example, O'Reilly joins conservative pundit Bernard Goldberg in an attack on the hypocrisy of Democrats related to the website. O'Reilly does not support the false claim, but he manages to turn the issue against Democrats in another manner. Later, O'Reilly criticizes

the administration, portraying the White House post as something negative and, possibly, even an abuse of power. Before long, even without directly embracing the false statement endorsed by Van Susteren and Hannity, O'Reilly portrays the post as looking to quell criticism rather than to dispense truthful information, which was the heart of the issue underpinning the mischaracterization made by the other Fox News prime time hosts, saying he "doesn't care what the White House says" and that he will "criticize the White House health care plan" no matter what the administration puts on its "dopey website." In this case, O'Reilly has followed his recurring pattern: He sets himself up as balanced by stating that he is not being drawn into a misstatement-based claim, but by the end of the segment, he has furthered the underlying issue of the theme while maintaining his self-presentation as balanced.

O'Reilly as Protector of the Common Man

Despite O'Reilly's self-presentation as an honest broker imparting unbiased information to his bipartisan audience, he nevertheless regularly engaged in caustic attacks on those with whom he disagreed. But the method by which he was able to act in such an aggressive manner and still claim to be nonpartisan was to characterize his attacks as not based on ideology or party, but as against those who are extreme and out of the mainstream. In so doing, he portrayed himself as looking out for average Americans who were, he says, being challenged by someone in power not acting in Americans' best interests.

In addition to his attacks on Pelosi (e.g. on Van Susteren's show on August 10, 2009, he called Pelosi "a right ideologue" and "a far left person" who wants to "impose ... San Francisco values on the country"), O'Reilly went after Howard Dean on more than

one occasion, for example calling him and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman "poster boys" for socialism on August 17, 2009. He also called self-described socialist democrat Senator Bernie Sanders a "pinhead" on August 17. By painting Pelosi, Dean, Krugman and Sanders as outside of the American mainstream, he can cast his aggressive attacks on these liberal figures as protecting his viewers from extremists trying to undermine American values.

Similarly, he often couched his policy criticisms in the same way, positioning them as a defense of citizens against a government run amok. For example, on his August 4, 2009, program, he criticized health care reform legislation as being out of the mainstream: "Once again, Americans are saying no to a socialistic program that puts more power in the hands of the government." Here, O'Reilly is protecting "Americans" from the government's "socialistic program." In this way, he can claim that he is not being partisan or unbalanced, but rather he is on the side of nearly everyone -- "Americans" -- against something that is often viewed as un-American -- socialism.

O'Reilly often defended that attacks on proponents of health care reform by portraying them as being so liberal they were out of the mainstream, in such a way that he wasn't criticizing mainstream Democrats, just outliers. For example, on August 19, 2009, O'Reilly said:

I submit that every time a Barney Frank, a Barbara Boxer, a Nancy Pelosi or any of these far left bomb throwers get out there and start to tell people that they are idiots, okay, as Mr. Frank obviously did, that hurts Obama because by sticking up for Obamacare, these people associate themselves with the president. So the president is now being demonized by his own crew.

Pelosi was the House speaker and Frank was in the House leadership, but O'Reilly characterizes them as "far left bomb throwers" who are oppressing "people" (in this case,

he means the health care protesters). By essentially defending the president, he maintains his self-presentation as being balanced. But by characterizing the Democrats as extremists, he can position the attack as protecting Americans from powerful government actors who are out of the mainstream.

In the end, O'Reilly was able to further most of the Fox News prime time themes opposing health care reform during the 2009 period of study all while maintaining a self-presentation as a fair journalist who provides facts about both sides of the issues. As a result, he did not explicitly join in on some of the more controversial claims made during the period of study (e.g. death panel, the attacks on Pelosi, the White House Web posting). Nevertheless, he furthered the themes by translating them into something more palatable, shifting the focus to something more favorable to opponents of health care reform, attacking the individuals or institutions involved from a different angle and portraying the issue as powerful interests abusing average Americans.

Sean Hannity: Unabashed Conservative

Where O'Reilly went to great lengths to present himself as not beholden to any ideology or party, Sean Hannity held no such pretenses, openly taking conservative positions. Hannity regularly engaged in an aggressive defense of conservatives and conservatism, while at the same time attacking liberals and liberalism.

Accuracy Is Secondary to Defending the Conservative Position

During the period of study, on several occasions accuracy was a casualty of Hannity's defense of the conservative position on health care reform. For example, Hannity claimed three times on his August 19, 2009, show that Democratic Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus said Social Security could be "insolvent in

two years." But Baucus made no such statement. In fact, it was Republican congressman Spencer Bachus who weighed in on the solvency of Social Security, and soon after making the statement, Bachus recanted it (Media Matters for America, 2009). Despite the fact that multiple media outlets reported Hannity's error, he nevertheless repeated the Baucus Social Security claim the next day. Hannity's continued pursuit of the argument in the face of the facts was consistent with his approach during the period of study. He tended to hold to arguments even after some of his colleagues and guests had moved on.

In one high-profile example, Hannity was the only one of the three prime time hosts to insist that Palin's death panel claim was literally true, maintaining the assertion long after nearly all of the hosts and guests of the prime time programs had acknowledged a death panel did not exist and instead translated the issue into one of rationing. Just as Hannity said on his August 12, 2009, program that "page 425 to 430 of the House bill" called for end-of-life counseling that amounted to the government "get[ting] to pick who dies," he continued on his August 17 program to cite "page 425," even after Dick Morris, who had engaged in aggressive scare tactics on the issue of rationing, admitted, "There never was a panel that's going to say 'die.'"

Similarly, accuracy took a back seat to advocacy when Hannity addressed remarks made by Nancy Pelosi about individuals protesting health care reform legislation. When Pelosi noted that some of the protesters used Nazi emblems on their signs and clothing, Hannity reported repeatedly that she had called the protesters, as a group, Nazis and swastika carriers. In fact, over two days, August 10, 2009, and August 11, 2009, Hannity inaccurately made the claim eleven times. Hannity prioritized defending against charges that the protests were corporate-driven over accurately

portraying what Pelosi had said. Hannity also put the argument before the facts in reporting on Pelosi's USA Today op-ed calling the shouting down of dissent "un-American," repeatedly reporting instead that Pelosi had called the protesters themselves un-American for not supporting health care reform.

Hannity followed the same practice in reporting on a White House Web posting looking for "fishy information." To rallying his conservative viewers against proposed health care reform legislation, Hannity repeatedly inaccurately claimed the White House had posted looking for "fishy" people. That is, he took a White House plea for examples of misinformation that could be corrected and turned it into a quest by the administration to collect the names of people opposing health care reform so that they could be punished, even saying: "I mean it almost sounds like a secret police, you know, reporting -- citizens now report on each other, doesn't it?" Accuracy was secondary to strategy in this case.

Leading the Fox News Position

Of the three prime time hosts, Hannity was the most consistent in openly espousing the network's themes opposing health care reform. Of the three prime time hosts, Hannity was the most likely to explicitly call the president, his policies and/or health care reform legislation "socialism" or "socialistic." Where, in 2009, O'Reilly would sometimes invoke the term (e.g. on August 4, "Once again, Americans are saying no to a socialistic program that puts more power in the hands of the government"), he was more likely to associate such claims with individuals he identified as being "far left" or leadingly ask more aggressive guests (like Glenn Beck) if socialism was present. Van Susteren, too, let her guests lead the way on claims of socialism. But Hannity

unabashedly called the president, his policies and health care reform legislation socialism. For example, on his August 5, 2009, program, referring to the president, Hannity said: "A socialist leader. Take over health care, take -- promise day care, buy everybody a car." On August 17, 2009, he was even more explicit:

There's no hyperbole here. This is socialism. The government is taking over our banks. The government is attempting to take over health care.

Hannity more than any other prime time host aggressively and explicitly supported the theme that health care reform was a form of socialism.

Again, Hannity was the only prime time host to defend Palin's death panel claim. O'Reilly and Van Susteren translated Palin's assertion into the idea of health care rationing, and neither asserted that a death panel existed. But Hannity supported the claim, taking two separate but complementary approaches: First, he defended Palin's Facebook post (e.g. "I agree with everything that she wrote," on August 13, 2009). Second, he claimed to have read the bill and found the death panel provisions on specific pages (e.g. "We spotted it on page 425 to 430," on August 14, 2009). For Hannity, the fact that the Senate Finance Committee had removed the provision that was being cited for the existence of a death panel was proof positive that the death panel existed, even as the section was deleted to prevent misinterpretations like Hannity's from occurring (Parsons & Zajac, 2009).

Once the idea of a death panel was widely discredited, the other Fox News prime time hosts and guests moved to a strategy of translation, reconceptualizing Palin's claim into a rationing argument, and leaving behind the fictional death panel. But Hannity's commitment to the existence of a death panel hardly wavered. Again, even as Morris

admitted there was no death panel on August 17, 2009, Hannity disagreed with him, claiming it was on "page 425 of the House bill."

Hannity was equally openly supportive of other themes employed by the Fox News prime time programs. As discussed above, Hannity turned a statement by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that some protesters were seen "carrying swastikas" at events, for which there is photographic evidence (FactCheck.org, 2009), into a charge that Pelosi said all the protesters were Nazis and/or swastika carriers. In the thirteen days between the statement and the end of the period of study, the prime time hosts and their guests leveled that charge forty-two times, taking place on seventeen different programs and covering twelve of the thirteen days. Again, in one two-day period alone, beginning on August 10, 2009, Hannity's program referenced Pelosi calling the protesters Nazis and/or swastika carriers eleven times.

Similarly, Hannity was the first prime time host to mischaracterize Pelosi's USA Today op-ed piece, leading off his show on August 10, 2009, with the introductory line: "Tonight, Nancy Pelosi calls town hall protesters 'un-American.'" What Pelosi and Hoyer actually wrote was: "Drowning out opposing views is simply un-American" (Pelosi & Hoyer, 2009). Where O'Reilly had sidestepped the mischaracterization of Pelosi's words as calling all health care reform protesters un-American, rather than the act of "[d]rowning out opposing views," Hannity openly employed it three separate times over the course of his August 10, 2009 program. And he went on to state as fact some variation of the claim that Pelosi had called all health care protesters un-American on four more shows during the remainder of the period of study.

Whether it was mischaracterizing a White House webpage, turning a claim for information into a request for Americans to turn in their neighbors as health care reform opponents, calling health care reform legislation socialism, or claiming the legislation would cover abortion and undocumented immigrants, Hannity stated the theme and kept to it, even if the other prime time hosts abandoned it or danced around it in the first place.

Greta Van Susteren: Reasonable Reporter

Unlike O'Reilly and Hannity, Greta Van Susteren came to Fox News from a mainstream news outlet, CNN, where she was a legal analyst and host. As such, Van Susteren often portrayed herself as a reporter, and one who, like O'Reilly, was not beholden to Republicans. But Van Susteren also engaged in partisanship, including frequently approvingly hosting partisan figures like Dick Morris, Karl Rove and Rick Santorum, and furthered the Fox News themes opposing health care reform even while sidestepping some of the more controversial claims.

Start With the Facts

In keeping with her self-presentation as a reasonable reporter, Van Susteren often steered clear of embracing widely discredited claims like Palin's death panel assertion, often using factual information as a jumping off point to create or participate in a Fox News theme. One example was her coverage of efforts to boycott the grocery chain Whole Foods after John Mackey, the company's chief executive officer, wrote an op-ed piece in the Wall Street Journal opposing the proposed health care reform legislation. Mackey's article was consistent with the statements on health care reform of many of the Republicans who appeared on Fox News during August 2009. For example, Mackey proposed tort reform as a health care reform solution, a proposal made by conservatives

in ten separate segments across nine prime time programs on Fox News during the period of study.

In covering Mackey's op-ed piece and the ensuing boycotts, Van Susteren did not falsely identify the contents of the article as Hannity had in other cases. Instead, she framed the debate in a way that furthered the Fox News themes opposing health care reform. Van Susteren portrayed Mackey's suggestions not as similar to those of other Republican guests during the period of study, but as the unique, practical suggestions of a nonpolitical businessman with a record of charitable works. As such, she said on August 19, 2009:

I do not know this guy, and I don't know if his ideas are good, but there is something to be admired about someone who sees a problem and says here are eight really good ideas, or he thinks they are really good ideas. He actually posts the good ideas.

Van Susteren's implication is that Mackey is outside of the partisan debate on the issue, even as his "ideas" closely paralleled the statements of her Republican guests opposing health care reform.

Van Susteren similarly portrays the boycotters in a way that fits the network's themes opposing health care reform. According to the website of one of the groups that called for a boycott of Whole Foods, the reason for the anger at Mackey lied in the charge that his op-ed contained misinformation, mainly in regard to characterizing the proposed legislation as a government takeover of health care, as well as his use of his "bully pulpit" to spread the inaccurate claims of health care reform protesters (Boycott Whole Foods, 2009). In effect, the boycotters were angry because of how closely Mackey's article tracked with many of the Fox News prime time themes opposing health care reform. But Van Susteren did not portray the boycott in this manner, instead characterizing the anger

at Mackey being based in the fact that he disagreed with the president. That is, according to Van Susteren, both Mackey and the boycotters wanted health care reform, but Mackey just had a different plan than the one they supported. But the boycott was about the fact that Mackey did not, in reality, support health care reform as that term was used in the summer of 2009, and that by writing the op-ed article, Mackey was co-opting the term to kill reform.

By mischaracterizing the cause of the boycotters and portraying their cause as a petty disagreement, Van Susteren helped further the Fox News prime time themes about health care reform. By painting Mackey as a nonpartisan health care reform advocate and the boycotters as petty ideologues, Van Susteren was able to shift the debate on Mackey's op-ed piece without associating it with the Republican position. And in so doing, she was able to further the Fox News prime time narrative on health care reform without having to embrace the seamier mischaracterizations and distortions engaged in by other hosts and guests, thus maintaining her self-presentation as a nonpartisan reporter.

But Not Always

At the same time, Van Susteren sometimes -- often in her opening show teases -- raised a more blatantly nonfactual claim, even as she didn't explicitly embrace it. For example, when the Fox News prime time hosts and their guests were mischaracterizing Nancy Pelosi's USA Today op-ed piece, Van Susteren used the theme to tease the content of her program. She began her August 10, 2009 show:

Tonight: "Un-American." Does that mean you? Now, that phrase has lit the country on fire and it's splashed across headlines from coast to coast. Are these people on your screen un-American for protesting the health care plan? House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and majority leader Steny Hoyer say yes.

Van Susteren endorses the Fox News prime time misstatement of the USA Today op-ed article in a way that O'Reilly did not (but Hannity did).

The same scenario played out with the Fox News theme distorting a White House webpage looking for "fishy" information. Van Susteren opened her August 5, 2009, program with this tease: "Tonight: 'Fishy'? Is there something 'fishy' about you? If so, the White House says we should report you to them immediately." Here, she is furthering the theme, turning a post looking for false information about health care reform into a search for people opposing reform.

Let Others Make the Attacks

One of the ways Van Susteren was able to embrace the Fox News prime time themes without taking Hannity's direct approach to distorting a story was by allowing her guests to do the work in this regard. In these cases, she would either remain silent or raise the issue, while her guest, who in these cases adopted a Hannity-like direct approach to furthering a theme, made the more aggressive charges.

For example, former presidential advisor Dick Morris, like Hannity, openly embraced some of the Fox News themes based on mischaracterizations and engaged in incendiary rhetoric (e.g. saying his 99-year-old father would "be dead today if Obama's plan passed," "Hannity," August 3, 2009). And while he may have moderated his language somewhat when appearing with Van Susteren, he nevertheless said on her August 6, 2009, program: "And then on top of that, they're expanding coverage by fifty million people with no extra doctors. That means rationing, and that obviously means the elderly are not going to get the medical care they need." In this way, Van Susteren is able to participate in the Fox News prime time theme of rationing resulting from health care

reform, but she does not have to step out of her self-presented role of honest reporter to do so. Instead, she gives a platform to Morris to make the rationing claim.

Similarly, in subsequent programs, Van Susteren allowed conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh (August 10, 2009, via video clip), Republican former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum (August 10, 2009) and Republican strategist Karl Rove (August 13, 2009) to make unchallenged statements furthering the mischaracterization of Pelosi's statements on health care reform. In these cases, Van Susteren does not directly join in on the nonfactual themes. Instead, she lets her guests make the most controversial claims without correction.

Van Susteren portrayed herself as a reporter in her prime time programs. Nevertheless, by often avoiding direct support of the more controversial claims opposing health care reform but supporting the underlying issue (e.g. rationing rather than a death panel), often by giving a supportive platform to guests with a track record of explicitly supporting the Fox News themes opposing health care reform legislation, she was able to help further the themes without disrupting her self-presentation as a reporter.

Host Styles Come Together to Support Fox News Themes

The analysis of the August 2009 Fox News transcripts provides an individual-based, meso-level examination of how, despite maintaining a unified message, the styles and approaches of the Fox News prime time hosts were not uniform, with each taking a different route toward furthering the network's arguments. The first research question asked how the specific techniques, formulations and rhetorical devices of the hosts differed, and the second research question focused on how those practices helped further Fox News' brand, and the answers to these questions are quite clear from the 2009 data.

O'Reilly held himself out as a nonpartisan, independent reporter of truth, giving both sides a fair airing, with an overriding objective of protecting the people from the abuses of those in power. By stressing the relatively high ratings of Fox News and avoiding especially controversial strategies that had been discredited as untruthful elsewhere, and by couching his attacks on liberals as non-ideological efforts to prevent out-of-the-mainstream power figures from acting against the will of the people, O'Reilly was able to support the Fox News prime time themes opposing health care reform while maintaining a self-presentation of neutrality and accuracy. Van Susteren took a similar tact, but instead of portraying herself as an opponent of those in power, she adopted the posture of a traditional reporter, relying on fact-based distortions and letting her guests make the less palatable charges (while occasionally joining in on allegations O'Reilly avoided) to further the networks' themes opposing health care reform. And Hannity took a more direct approach, aggressively supporting Republicans and conservatives and attacking Democrats and liberals, endorsing the more spurious claims long after they were proven incorrect, and putting advocacy above accurate reporting, to further the network's themes opposing reform.

The individual analyses of the hosts are an effective way to examine how each of them operated and how they furthered the Fox News themes on health care reform. But answering the third research question -- how the differing host styles come together to further the Fox News brand -- requires analyzing how the individual host styles interact. A meso-level analysis allows us to examine the actual on-air effect of the host style interactions, regardless of motive, especially in light of the already rich body of macro-level studies of Fox News.

We know from the literature that Fox News brands itself as "fair and balanced" and depends on being able to make the claim that, unlike the network newscasts, it provides factual content representing both sides of issues (Bennett, 2001; Hickey, 1998; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). In fact, Fox News Chief Executive Officer Roger Ailes has argued that the network "employs twenty-four liberals," while Hannity is the only conservative at Fox News, with the rest of the hosts being "libertarians or populists or you can't really tell" (Boehlert, 2012). O'Reilly has made similar claims on the air, including that Fox News is the only network that "gives voice to both sides" ("The O'Reilly Factor," August 10, 2009) and that he is "not in the business of promoting any political party" ("The O'Reilly Factor," August 27, 2012).

Given how Fox News holds itself out to the public, it would controvert the network's branding to choose strident, direct conservatives like Hannity to host all of its prime time programs. Instead, by choosing on-air personalities who boast of their neutrality and/or have a history of working in a more journalistic manner, the network can support its branding claims of fairness. In fact, Ailes had experienced the branding problem of trying to launch an overtly conservative provider of content when, prior to starting Fox News, he joined with Rush Limbaugh to launch such a venture, and it failed to find a sufficient audience (Jones, 2012).

So the fact that each of the prime time hosts would take different routes to get to the common themes advanced by the network makes sense when Fox News' self-presentation is considered. By having O'Reilly boast of his independence or Van Susteren embrace the reporter's role, the marketing presentation of the network is protected. In this way, the varied styles of the prime time hosts are essential to the network's credibility

with audiences, as the branding of fairness and balance would be a major influence on credibility (Oyedeji, 2007). In this manner, the network can continue to play its role as an advocate for Reagan conservatism (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008), all while maintaining its branding as fair and balanced. All cable networks face the pressures of balancing content and branding, and while this study is focused on Fox News, it should be noted that a later chapter features a follow-up examination of MSNBC, which revealed that the prime time hosts on the liberal-leaning network in the same August 2009 period did not exhibit the same level of coordination of themes and approaches as found on Fox News.

It is important to note that this study looks at one specific issue -- health care reform -- that was especially heavily discussed and fought over, especially in 2009, so future research will have to determine if these same host style processes are apparent with regard to other topics, as well, especially those that are less incendiary and prominent in cable news coverage. Additionally, the study only examines the prime time lineup at Fox News. The influence of the hosts of the daytime programs on Fox News would need to be studied to see if the findings here carried over to the non-prime time shows.

Conclusion: Public Trust in News

There is nothing inherently wrong with news offered with a point of view, as some scholars have even argued that objectivity neither fosters the best reporting (Bennett, 2001; Cunningham, 2003; Hallin, 1992) nor helps fuel democratic practice (Nerone, 2013; Zelizer, 2013). But the practices of the Fox News prime time hosts -- as well as the network, itself -- may be problematic when viewed through a lens of journalistic ethics. If Fox News presents itself as an objective journalistic operation, in part by offering hosts with different styles, but, in practice, it does not follow the norms

of objective journalism, then the network is just using the indicia of a news network as a façade to mask its efforts to present a unified message on the issues. At a time when public trust in news is low (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a), given the importance of journalism in providing the necessary information for a democracy to function (Starr, 2009), this kind of deception can be problematic in further degrading citizens' trust in news.

Walter Lippmann (1925/1995), writing close to a century ago during another time of low trust in journalism, argued that one of the roles journalism could still play in society, even if newspapers were not sufficient to create an informed public capable of sustaining a democracy, was to expose partisans in a debate. The differing self-presentations of the Fox News prime time hosts make that task more difficult. When O'Reilly portrays himself as nonpartisan, or when Hannity sits on a set that looks like those employed at traditional objective news and analysis programs, or when Van Susteren presents herself as a mainstream broadcast journalist, all while strategically advancing seemingly coordinated conservative talking points opposing health care reform that are not based on factual premises, they are hiding their partisanship behind indicia of journalism. And in doing so, the public has greater trouble identifying the partisans, further eroding trust in journalism.

Chapter 4: Us Against Them: How Fox News Used Entertainment and Tabloid Practices in Its Prime Time Coverage of the Health Care Debate in 2009 and 2014

Chapter 2 questioned the assumption in the mass communication empirical literature that Fox News was a journalistic operation. The study demonstrated that Fox News' prime time programs were not guided by the traditional journalistic values of balance and accuracy, instead working more closely to the elements of propaganda while advancing themes opposing health care reform legislation. Chapter 3 examined one way in which the network was able to take a propaganda-like approach to covering health care reform, finding that the different styles of the prime time hosts came together to help further the themes opposing health care reform while maintaining Fox News' self-presentation as offering content that was "fair and balanced."

This chapter continues the examination of the strategies used by the Fox News prime time programs by asking if journalism is even the correct standard by which to judge Fox News' programming. This chapter argues that the Fox News prime time programs employed elements of entertainment programming -- namely, tabloid news techniques -- in covering health care reform in August 2009 and March-April 2014, and that these practices not only helped the network further its themes opposing health care reform, but also that they did so in a way that helped further the propaganda-like approach to covering the issue demonstrated in Chapter 2. A study of Fox News through a lens other than journalism is especially deserving of attention given Chapter 2's finding that Fox News is not, in fact, adhering to the principles of objectivity in prime time.

As Chapter 2 noted, when the empirical mass communication literature has considered Fox News, it has done so only in the context of journalism. But some

entertainment and popular culture scholars have focused on journalism in the context of tabloid news techniques derived from entertainment. For example, Jeffrey Jones (2012a) argues that cable news should not be judged by journalism standards at all. He says cable news networks are not news organizations that have been dumbed down, but rather that they are simply not news operations. He claims: "Cable news networks are now in the business of transforming the raw material of public life into entertainment performances" (Jones, 2012a, p. 148). Jones argues that while cable news networks, by self-identifying as news operations, in effect beg to be judged as journalistic enterprises, to do so would be a mistake.

Reality television isn't assessed by the norms of the documentary tradition, nor are television adaptations of Jane Austin novels examined by the standards of literary criticism. Yet cable news continues to be seen as journalism. (Jones, 2012a, p. 147)

Studying Fox News as entertainment-influenced tabloid news provides further insight into how the network's prime time programming furthered arguments opposing health care reform legislation. In discussing the seemingly coordinated themes employed by the programs, we saw how the hosts and their guests tapped into the values of the viewers to elicit a response, often based on generating fear (fear of government intrusion into health care, fear of choice of doctor being taken away, etc.). Taking elements from entertainment and tabloid news are useful tools in building a community, and in activating that community through the manipulation of emotions. As such, the focus of this chapter is to apply an empirical examination to claims made in the entertainment literature about cable news generally and Fox News in specific, using the same two three-week periods as in earlier chapters to examine the network's handling of health care reform.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, there is a fairly robust literature empirically examining Fox News in the context of journalism and democracy (e.g. Morris, 2005; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). Most of these studies come at the problem primarily looking at Fox News in terms of its ideological slant and its status as a self-identified news organization. Less attention has been spent on empirical studies looking at how Fox News presents its programming. While the journalistic and ideological examinations of Fox News are important and revealing, these studies often do not consider that the network -- and cable news generally -- can also be viewed as a form of entertainment programming. The channels employ entertainment-type devices (narrative storytelling, flashy graphics, etc.) as they vie in the marketplace for viewers (in both number and type) that can allow their corporate parents to sell advertising on the shows and generate profits (Thussu, 2007; Cushion, 2010a). These two functions -- entertainment and ideology -- are not necessarily separate and/or independent. As we saw in Chapter 3, the styles of the Fox News prime time hosts combined to allow the network to further its arguments opposing health care reform while maintaining its marketing claims of being fair and balanced.

As such, our understanding of Fox News as a self-identified journalistic operation would be furthered by an examination of whether the network uses entertainment and tabloid devices in its prime time programs.

Entertainment in News

Before the rise of cable television and the Internet, television news was dominated by the monopoly of the three network newscasts, all of which took an objective, civic-minded approach to presenting the news (Baym, 2009). The rise of cable news and then

the Internet expanded the possibilities of news, with outlets free to provide less objective, more opinionated sources of information (Prior, 2007). And the rise of cable television introduced added entertainment elements to broadcast news, both on cable and the broadcast networks, and both within programs self-identifying as news and by expanding the palate of programs that could engage in news-like practices, including comedy (Jones, 2005).

Jones (2005) argues that three 1990s shows that combined comedy and politics -- Bill Maher's "Politically Incorrect," Jon Stewart's "The Daily Show" and Dennis Miller's "Dennis Miller Live" -- changed the idea of televised political discourse, which had previously resided only on the networks. Jones says the three programs "challenged normative assumptions about who gets to speak about politics on television, what issues will be covered and in what manner," as well as "challeng(ing) the boundaries between 'serious' and 'entertaining' programming erected in the network era" (Jones, 2005, p. x).

At a more basic level, Jones's argument challenges the traditional institution of objective, journalistic television news programs. He writes of "the mistaken idea that television's primary role in politics is to educate voters," instead viewing television as engaged in "the circulation of conversations -- its role as a political and cultural forum where ideas, issues, events, people, values, and beliefs are entertained in a myriad of ways" (p. 195).

Entertainment has always been a part of journalism (what Thussu, 2007, calls "tickling the public," p. 15), and while the dominant journalism discourse concentrates on hard news, that's a small percentage of what is produced. In fact, Lieset Van Zoonen (2005) argues that politics cannot be completely divorced from entertainment, as the

language used in politics and the staging of politics is drawn from the entertainment world. She even finds parallels between fan communities and political constituencies. Robin Andersen (1992), who examined Oliver North's Iran-Contra congressional testimony, found television news complicit in the government's attempt to use entertainment-based visuals and ideas (e.g. from war movies and the film "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington") to engage in propaganda.

In this way, Fox News' programming cannot be separated from entertainment. When News Corporation divided into two entities, Fox News went with the entertainment division (Jones, 2012a). As Peter Dahlgren (1992) noted, "the experience of TV news ... cannot be totally isolated from the experience of television generally" (p. 11). That is, Fox News is delivered through the same mechanism (a television set, laptop computer, tablet, smart phone, etc.) that people use to receive entertainment programming, and it is not easy to separate the news from the flow of images and sounds coming at the viewer, especially as news competes with other programming for viewers.

A recent example of the conflating of news and entertainment came in the 2015 suspension and demotion of NBC News anchor Brian Williams. Williams, who regularly appeared on entertainment programs like "The Tonight Show" and "The Late Show With David Letterman," was suspended after telling stories on "Letterman" and on his newscast about his participation in an attack on American helicopters in Iraq that later were revealed to be inaccurate. Williams played the dual role of journalist (when anchoring his newscast) and entertainer (e.g. when "slow-jamming" the news with Jimmy Fallon), blurring the lines to the point that he was unable to maintain the line between his two roles.

Fox News has been on the forefront of incorporating entertainment elements into its programming. The network was an early adopter of the news ticker on the bottom of the screen after the 9/11 attacks (Poniewozik, 2010), reducing news stories to a handful of words. It eschewed conventional newscasts in prime time, instead opting for opinion-based programs that featured lively hosts passionately (often loudly) making their points (Hickey, 1998; Sherman, 2014). Engaging the audience was a priority from the beginning. This approach is not surprising, given that Roger Ailes, Fox News' original and current leader, before launching Fox News, had tried overtly conservative programming (including a venture with Rush Limbaugh) but failed to find an audience (Jones, 2012). So when Fox News began in 1996, Ailes took a different approach, incorporating entertainment elements into the programming. And Fox News employs the personalities of its prime time hosts to disseminate its message on issues while maintaining the network's branding of providing a fair and balanced approach, as we saw in Chapter 3.

The emergence of 24-hour cable news networks, whose ratings and attention soar when live, breaking events take place, has also fueled the influence of entertainment on news. Stephen Cushion (2010) argues, in the context of a study of Sky News and BBC News, that with the development of 24-hour news channels has come a change in approach, from reporting factual information that has already occurred to providing a medium through which live events are brought to the public. Facts are de-emphasized in favor of interpretation and explanation. In this environment, the argument goes, cable news programs are more geared toward providing this kind of narrative-driven, entertainment-influenced service to its viewers, rather than simply reporting the news.

After all, the network has 24 hours to fill, but there is rarely 24 hours worth of news to report. Similarly, the need for speed in reporting in a 24-hour news cycle has prioritized getting a report on the air over accuracy and ethics (Juntunen, 2010).

Some have argued that by using entertainment, an organization that purports to be a news operation can help build a community of its viewers to better distribute the network's message (Hartley, 1996; Peters, 2011; Jones, 2012a). Van Zoonen's (2005) work comparing fan clubs and political constituencies helps explain how Fox News is able to keep its conservative viewers engaged and mobilized. She notes that "the emotional constitution of electorates ... involves the development and maintenance of affective bonds between voters, candidates, and parties" (p. 66).

Jeffrey Jones (2013) argues that Fox News uses the feel-good language of television morning news shows like "Today" on its "Fox & Friends" morning program to build a community of conservatives around the triumphs and fears the group shares. He says "Fox & Friends" "is designed to thrust the viewer into the world of common-sense groupthink, complete with all the rumours, smears, innuendo, fear-mongering, thinly veiled ad hominem attacks, and lack of rational discourse they can muster," and that "the function of the program is to begin the broadcast day with cavalier discussions of political matters -- to trot out all manner of conspiracy theories, catchphrases, and buzz words that can prime the audience, both cognitively and semiotically, for similar narratives derived from contemporary right-wing conservative ideology which they will encounter throughout Fox's schedule" (Jones, 2013, p. 187).

Tabloid News

Tabloid news is often thought of as the intersection of entertainment and news, as tabloid news providers seek to make their stories more entertaining to readers. Many scholars have argued that the tabloid press simplifies complicated matters for consumers. For example, Colin Sparks (1992), in comparing coverage of a Manchester prison riot in the tabloid press (*The Sun*) and "quality" press (*The Times*, both owned by Rupert Murdoch), concludes: "The essential difference between the popular coverage of an event and the quality coverage of the same event is that the popular press offers an immediate explanatory framework in terms of individual and personal causes and responses" (p. 40). Similarly, Jostein Gripsrud (1992), looking at the Norwegian tabloid papers, points to the tabloid use of melodrama as a way of making stories seem relevant to the audience: "Melodrama continues to present its audiences with a 'sense-making system', a system which insists that politics or history are only interesting in so far as they affect our everyday life and its conditions, our feelings -- fears, anxieties, pleasures" (p. 88).

Daya Kishan Thussu (2007) argues that not only do news producers use entertainment to attract viewers, but that the commercialism of news has made it essential for news producers to incorporate entertainment into their presentations. Thussu doesn't view tabloid news as a dumbed-down version of journalism, but instead sees it as "a powerful discourse of diversion" that plays a role in "taking the attention away from, and displacing from the airwaves, ... grim realities of neo-liberal imperialism" like the Iraq war, among other things (p. 9).

Glynn (2000) argues that tabloid news provides a platform to "voices frequently excluded from 'serious' news and often centers on those that are typically marginalized in mainstream media discourse" (p. 7) He points to the "sensational" and "melodramatic"

nature of tabloids (p. 7), claiming that there is a contradiction between the increased participation offered by the shows and the reliance on perpetuating fear in the audience (citing as an example the fear of nonwhite people engendered by "America's Most Wanted").

Entertainment and Tabloid Practices

By choosing to air opinion programs rather than newscasts in prime time, Fox News has seemingly embraced Jones' (2005) view of news as "the circulation of conversations," as well as Cushion's (2010) observation that the news networks do not report on stories as much as discuss and explain them. As such, it opens the question as to whether the entertainment and tabloid practices theorized by the critical scholars are, in fact, present in Fox News' prime time programs. Specifically, in presenting and advocating for the network's position on health care reform, it would be instructive to examine if the hosts and their guests:

- 1) used comedy to broaden the sources from which political arguments could be drawn (Jones, 2005);
- 2) drew language from the entertainment field to discuss politics (Andersen, 1992; Van Zoonen, 2005);
- 3) de-emphasized facts and emphasized the explanation of events (Cushion, 2010);
- 4) simplified complicated matters into simple binary options and provided explanatory frameworks for contested issues (Sparks, 1992);
- 5) employed melodrama (Gripsrud, 1992) and stoked fear in the audience (Glynn, 2000) to further the network's goals opposing health care reform legislation; and/or

6) used tabloid tactics to divert attention from facts that were inconsistent with the network's opposition to health care reform (Thussu, 2007).

Method

To examine whether the Fox News prime time programs employed the practices of entertainment and tabloid news discussed in the critical literature, the same six weeks of coverage of health care reform will serve the basis of the study. Again, all weekday programs of "The O'Reilly Factor," "Hannity" and "On the Record with Greta Van Susteren" from August 3, 2009, through August 21, 2009, and Monday, March 24, 2014, through to Friday, April 11, 2014, were examined. The study in this chapter follows that of Chapter 2, employing a qualitative textual analysis of the transcripts. In this case, instances were identified when a host or guest furthered one of the network themes of the period of study. Then, the statements were examined to see if they employed the entertainment and tabloid practices identified above. Finally, reversing the focus, a more holistic examination was performed, seeking to assess for each entertainment and tabloid practice whether the approach of the programs, as a whole and in concert with each other, employed that practice.

Using Comedy and Language From Entertainment

As discussed in Chapter 3, each of the hosts brought a historically established and branded style to the conduct of their programs. Bill O'Reilly held himself out as a protector of the average person against institutions of power who "gives voice to both sides" ("The O'Reilly Factor," August 10, 2009). Greta Van Susteren, a former legal reporter at CNN, presented herself as an objective reporter. Sean Hannity played the role

of the conservative firebrand, unbound by claims of lack of bias like his fellow prime time hosts.

Given these online personas, it is not surprising that O'Reilly and Van Susteren did not often regularly explicitly employ humor or entertainment language, which would have challenged the appearance of being serious participants in the debate on health care reform. Similarly, Hannity, who while less reportorial than his prime time colleagues nevertheless wanted his audience to know of the serious danger of health care reform, also generally approached the issues in a more serious manner. However, at times, both O'Reilly and Hannity used humor in their broadcasts, but it was not in the way Jones (2005) described. Rather than using humor as an alternative vehicle to discuss political issues and expand the range of people who could comment on these issues, the hosts employed humor as a weapon, using insults and mocking to disparage those who supported health care reform.

O'Reilly did often use colloquial language as part of his public presentation as the defender of individual Americans, allowing him to connect with his viewers. For example, in discussing a White House web posting looking for "fishy" inaccurate information on health care reform that the other two prime time programs turned into a request to have Americans report individuals opposing health care reform, O'Reilly said, "I don't think there's one person watching me tonight -- not one -- who's not going to give their opinion on health care because of that dopey website." O'Reilly is able to further the Fox News theme opposing health care reform, but he does so in a way ("dopey") that is less formal and humorous. The colloquial, humorous language allows him to better play his self-presented role as a defender of average Americans. The term "dopey" also

disparages a source that could challenge the Fox News flow of information (or misinformation) on health care reform legislation.

However, given O'Reilly's more serious self-presentation, when discussing the issues, while he certainly employed bluster and volume, he did not often use humor as Jones (2005) discussed. It is especially instructive that even when conservative comedian Dennis Miller appeared on "The O'Reilly Factor," it seemed as if he had to adjust his approach to the tenor of the show rather than bringing a comedic tone to the issue of health care reform. Miller discussed health care reform on "The O'Reilly Factor" twice during the 2009 period of study, on August 12 and August 19 (his August 5 appearance focused on North Korea and Bill Clinton). Miller, as a comedian, did attempt to be humorous, but the humor was not used as a way to discuss policy (as Jones, 2005, described when discussing Miller's program before he became an outspoken conservative). Instead, humor was employed to disparage supporters of health care reform. For example, Miller said on the August 12 "O'Reilly Factor":

But the weird thing is, Barack's starting to remind me of Johnny Friendly a little, you know? They have these town halls. You can hear all the SEIU guys outside, tapping the baseball bats, like they're in the church basement with Karl Malden.

Here, Miller uses humor to discredit the president, referring to him by his first name, and he disparages union members by likening them to thugs in the classic film "On the Waterfront." The humor is not used as an alternative method to address an issue, as Jones (2005) laid out. Rather, humor is used as a tool to sharpen an attack on a supporter of health care reform.

When Miller actually weighed in on health care-related issues, though, his statements did not differ much from those of the politicians and pundits who appeared on

the network during the period of study. For example, on the August 12 "O'Reilly Factor," in discussing how the press had treated President Barack Obama regarding the health care reform debate, Miller said:

I'm convinced that at this point, Barack Obama could get in a flight suit and land on a carrier deck in a jet and stand in front of a "Mission Accomplished" sign and nobody in the press would call him about it. So is he accomplished, or does he just have a free pass? Looks like he has a free pass, to me.

There is a hint of humor here in offering the imagery of former President George W. Bush's often criticized appearance in the early days of the Iraq war to disparage Obama. But the statement doesn't really rise to the level of an attempt at comedy. Rather, it is the kind of comparative statement seen in other instances during the period of study, like conservative reporter Bernard Goldberg's criticism of the White House Web post looking for health care misinformation on O'Reilly's August 6 program, when he argued that Democrats would be irate if President Bush had engaged in similar conduct.

Similarly, in furthering the Fox News theme incorrectly reporting on House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's quotes on the individuals protesting health care reform, Miller's comments on August 12 were just like the ones of the other prime time guests during the period of study: "Well, listen, from calling our CIA liars to calling the people un-American to inferring they're Nazis, Nancy Pelosi always seems to be able to put the ugliest possible face on something." Again, there is no comedy here. Miller's statement is a straightforward attack on Pelosi that was similar in form and substance to those made by hosts and guests throughout the 2009 period of study.

Hannity's style was more conducive to the use of humor, but, again, humor was often employed to disparage supporters of health care reform, much like Miller did on "The O'Reilly Factor." The August 10, 2009, exchange between Hannity and

conservative pundit Ann Coulter, discussing Sarah Palin's death panel claim, offers a particularly vivid example:

COULTER: Right. Which they keep lying about. By the way, totally ironically, Zeke Emanuel is on my death list. Hold the applause. I'm going to be on the death panel. Then I'm in favor of it.
 HANNITY: In other words, then you get to pick who dies?
 COULTER: Right. I have a list. Should I start with the A's?
 HANNITY: Read the headline tomorrow. It's going to be "Ann Coulter..."

Coulter jokes about being on the death panel and killing the brother of the White House chief of staff, a doctor and supporter of health care reform. In doing so, like Miller, she uses humor to disparage a political opponent and further the network's theme on Palin's death panel claim.

Humor also allows Hannity to play the role of a fiery defender of the conservative position, helping him connect with his viewers. For example, in challenging the White House Web post looking for disinformation, Hannity said on his August 5, 2009 show: "Really? Do they want like -- I assume Hannity is probably right -- one of the top of the list. Hannity's a fishy character. Do you want -- do you want a neighbor telling on neighbor in all this?" Hannity uses colloquial language and humor ("I assume Hannity is ... one of the top of the list") to further his argument opposing health care reform.

While humor was something present in the prime time programs discussing health care reform, it was not used in the way contemplated by Jones (2005). Fox News' self-presentation as a serious, journalistic operation, even in its prime time opinion programs, meant that humor was not consistent with its branding, at least when it came to directly discussing health care reform. The hosts strove to be taken seriously, and humor, in the way it was employed in the 1990s by Bill Maher, John Stewart and (a very different) Dennis Miller, is a means to undermine rather than establish serious claims of journalism.

As such, Jones' conception of humor as an alternative way to discuss issues was not really in evidence on the Fox News prime time programs during the periods of study. Instead, the hosts and guests used humor as a way to disparage proponents of health care reform legislation.

The 2014 Coverage

The 2014 data was largely devoid of humor and entertainment language, as the coverage of health care reform was less pervasive than it was in 2009, and the focus had shifted from whether the ACA should be enacted to how it was performing. The guests who spoke about the ACA were limited to journalists and pundits (nearly all conservative) and Republican politicians. O'Reilly discussed the ACA with only a handful of people outside of the Fox News family, including one politician (Republican Rep. Paul Ryan), conservative writers Charles Krauthammer (twice) and Bernard Goldberg, and James Carville, a former adviser to President Bill Clinton. Van Susteren was more active in bringing in voices from outside of Fox News, including fifteen different writers/pundits, nearly all conservative, and seven politicians, all Republicans, but no comics. As in 2009, the discussion of the ACA on "The O'Reilly Factor" and "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" was of a serious tone in 2014, with both hosts and their guests providing near universally negative accounts of the law and the April 1 reporting deadline. Hannity, similarly, matched his 2009 approach to the ACA in 2014, openly attacking the legislation and treating the April 1 deadline and the law itself as a serious threat to Americans, leaving little room for humor. His guest list, like Van Susteren's, was a mix of politicians (five, all Republicans) and writers/pundits (eight, all conservative), along with a steady stream of Fox News and Fox Business personalities.

One exception in the 2014 data was the network's approach to a March 29 "Saturday Night Live" sketch that poked fun at President Obama's efforts to encourage young people to sign up for health insurance and the problems with the federal exchange website. On his March 31 program, Hannity used the "Saturday Night Live" clip as evidence of the failures of the ACA. The sketch fits in with Jones' (2005) argument on using humor to expand the voices that can comment on political issues, but Hannity's use of the clip was not comedic. With the knowledge that the April 1 reporting on enrollment was likely to be positive, Hannity used the sketch, from a program with a history of satirizing Republicans, to disparage the ACA before the positive news was released.

The 2014 data confirms the 2009 findings that humor and entertainment were not primary tools for the Fox News prime time programs in opposing health care reform legislation. When humor was deployed, it was often in the service of disparaging those who disagreed with the Fox News position.

Explanation Over Facts

While humor and entertainment were not key practices adopted by the Fox News prime time programs in advancing themes opposing health care reform, the use of tabloid techniques was prominent during the periods of study and provided a method by which the hosts and guests could act in a way consistent with the traditional elements of propaganda. One of those practices, favoring explanatory frameworks over providing facts to viewers, goes to the heart of the journalism-propaganda distinction discussed in Chapter 2. During the periods of study, the prime time programs were not primarily concerned with objectively reporting facts to their audiences. Instead, the shows provided

an explanatory framework for viewers by advancing themes opposing health care reform legislation.

Stephen Cushion's (2010) findings that 24-hour cable news channels prioritize explanation over providing facts was based on an examination of two British news channels, Sky News and BBC News. Despite the self-presentations of O'Reilly and Van Susteren as even-handed reporters, the prime time schedule on Fox News is, nonetheless, made up of opinion-based programs. As such, it is not surprising that Cushion's conclusions were even more apparent on Fox News.

During both the 2009 and 2014 periods of study, the prime time programs were clearly directed toward crafting a conservative explanation of health care reform legislation, not accurately reporting on its contents. This approach is clear in the seemingly coordinated themes that appeared during each period.

The 2009 Themes

In 2009, the prime time programs made no effort to accurately report on whether or not proposed legislation contained a death panel to decide if Americans would be entitled to receive health care, as Sarah Palin claimed. An information-driven approach to this issue would have led to an examination of the proposed bills and a conclusion that such a death panel did not exist. Instead, Hannity repeatedly claimed that the death panel existed, citing the purported page numbers of the bill that created the death panel (e.g. "we spotted it on page 425-430," "Hannity," August 14, 2009) and reporting that the removal of a section of the bill by a Senate committee was proof that the death panel existed ("Put a victory in Sarah Palin's column," "Hannity," August 14, 2009). Van Susteren and O'Reilly never claimed that the death panel existed, but they, instead, along

with their guests, engaged in translation, turning Palin's claim that an actual death panel existed into a claim that health care reform legislation would lead to the rationing of care. All three Fox News prime time programs prioritized an explanatory framework for Palin's death panel claim over reporting what the proposed bill actually covered.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the prime time programs also prioritized explanation over factual reporting when discussing claims by Democrats that the protests at congressional town hall meetings in the summer of 2009 were supported and promoted by corporate entities rather than being purely grassroots expressions of protest. All three prime time programs regularly claimed House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called the protesters un-American and Nazis, which was not accurate. Instead, she said that drowning out the voices of opponents was un-American and that some protesters employed Nazi symbols on their signs and clothing. Rather than accurately reporting these events, the prime time programs constructed an explanatory framework that the Democrats were attacking the protesters, and then misreported facts about the Democrats' (especially Pelosi's) statements to provide purported evidence of their explanation. The process was in line with Cushion's (2010) findings.

Similarly, the coverage of a White House Web post looking to correct "fishy" information was used by the Fox News prime time programs to construct an explanation, that the White House was trying to identify and punish those opposing health care reform legislation, including asking Americans to turn in their neighbors. The programs did not report what the post actually said, turning the call for fishy information into an attempt to find fishy people.

Rather than just changing the underlying facts, the network's prime time coverage of whether or not proposed health care reform legislation covered abortions and undocumented immigrants simply rejected the facts, providing a competing explanatory framework for Fox News viewers. Whether it was former presidential advisor Dick Morris saying, "They're going to cover illegal immigrants" ("Hannity," August 3, 2009), or guest host Laura Ingraham responding to the fact that the legislation did not cover abortions with, "We don't believe you" ("The O'Reilly Factor," August 7, 2009), the network's goal was not to provide information on what the proposed legislation did or did not contain. Rather, the prime time programs sought to explain the issue to its viewers, contending that a Democratic-sponsored bill would have to cover undocumented immigrants and abortions, as these aims would not just be desirable to Democrats but would be the very purpose of the legislation in the first place. For example, Morris called proposed health reform legislation "a device to take medical care from the elderly and give it to largely immigrants" ("Hannity," August 17, 2009), and former Senator Rick Santorum said that if the bill did not cover abortions, Democratic representatives would not vote for it ("On the Record With Greta Van Susteren," August 19, 2009). The Fox News prime time programs were, as Cushion (2010) argued, prioritizing explanation over reporting facts.

Cushion's (2010) findings are equally applicable to the other 2009 themes. Van Susteren did not simply report on the Wall Street Journal op-ed article by the CEO of Whole Foods opposing health care reform and the ensuing boycott of the chain, instead constructing a story for her viewers: The CEO was a philanthropic, nonpartisan successful businessman who was offering "eight good ideas," and the protesters were

upset because the CEO "disagrees with the president" ("On the Record With Greta Van Susteren," August 19, 2009). The hosts and their guests misstated and mischaracterized Congressional Budget Office findings to construct a story that the proposed legislation would balloon taxes and the deficit, as well as incorrectly reporting the law's effect on Medicare to create an interpretation that would mean a massive loss of care for American senior citizens. The prime time programs created a scenario in which President Obama refused to work with Republicans on health care reform, even as the Republicans were engaging in near unprecedented levels of obstruction (Draper, 2012). Similarly, the programs portrayed the use of the process of reconciliation in the Senate to avoid a filibuster as an unprecedented, possibly illegal tactic by Democrats despite a history of both parties using reconciliation when in the majority. The prime time shows used claims of socialism and the influence of the liberal group ACORN to provide an explanatory framework of a left-wing administration run amok to scare viewers, as well as portraying the proposed legislation as so long and complex, lawmakers had not even read the whole thing. In all of these cases, the priority was not the reporting of information. Instead, as Cushion (2010) found with the British television news providers, the Fox News prime time programs were claiming to explain what the facts -- real and invented -- meant for their viewers, and these explanations were in the service of themes opposing health care reform legislation.

The 2014 Themes

The Fox News prime time programs' use of explanatory frameworks continued in 2014. In 2009, the themes centered on opposing proposed health care reform legislation, while in 2014, that legislation had become a reality in the form of the Affordable Care

Act (ACA). The 2014 study was built around the April 1 announcement of how many Americans had enrolled in health care coverage via the exchanges created by the ACA. If the enrollment goals set by the administration were not met, there would be negative consequences for the functionality of the exchanges. Conversely, meeting the enrollment goals would mean that at least in this regard the system was functioning as intended, and millions of uninsured individuals would now be covered.

The prime time coverage on Fox News in March-April 2014 was not focused on providing information regarding the April 1 deadline. Rather, the twelve themes all constructed frameworks to explain away the April 1 results. For example, O'Reilly featured the upcoming April 1 deadline prominently on his program in two segments on March 31, but when the positive results were announced on April 1, he downplayed the announcement, not addressing it until the third segment of the program and calling the results "kind of bogus." In O'Reilly's explanation, the enrollment figures released by the Obama administration not only could not be trusted, they did not really matter, "because the law hinges on two things, cost and whether it disrupts the medical industry, and those things will not be completely defined for a few more months." O'Reilly's approach to the deadline was not to report the results, but to use unsupported claims to construct an explanation as to why the positive enrollment numbers were not, in fact, positive.

Cushion's (2010) finding of explanation over reporting facts was present in the 12 themes the prime time programs employed in 2014 to disparage the ACA. Rather than providing a balanced reporting of the facts, the prime time programs made false, exaggerated and/or unfounded claims on the law's effects on patient-doctor relationships, the ease of getting an extension under the law, the functionality of the system, purported

job losses, health care premium costs, the remaining number of uninsured Americans, the cancellations of existing policies, and whether enrollees were young enough, paying and previously uninsured. Similarly, all three prime time programs made unfounded claims as to the veracity of the enrollment figures provided by the White House. The themes were in service to building a consistent narrative on the prime time programs that the ACA was socialized medicine and had been a complete failure, failing to cover enough Americans while negatively affecting the cost and quality of health care. This explanatory system was the focus of the programs, not reporting the facts related to the ACA and the April 1 reporting deadline.

Creating Simple Binaries

One way tabloid news outlets can provide explanatory frameworks for their audiences is by taking complicated sets of facts and reducing them to more simplistic binary, good-bad positions, often setting up direct cause-effect relationships (Sparks, 1992). This tactic was not only present on the prime time Fox News programs during the 2009 and 2014 periods of studies, but it also lied at the heart of many of the themes opposing health care reform the network furthered during those periods.

Contemplating changes to the American health care system entailed complicated and interlocking data and policy related to cost, access, service and other questions, along with the economic and fiscal impacts on the country. These questions also had to be addressed within the context of potential health care systems, with an array of options ranging from a completely private health care system with no government involvement to a government-run, single-payer system with no private players (Reid, 2010). Of course, the proposed changes in 2009 after the election of Barack Obama were set against a long

history of debate on the health care issue that were closely tied to ideological divisions that go back decades (Starr, 2013).

When Colin Sparks (1992) compared the coverage of a Manchester, England, prison riot in two Rupert Murdoch-owned newspapers, *The Times* and *The Sun*, Sparks found that the difference between the tabloid *Sun* and "quality" *Times* was the simplification of the issues involved. The 2009 and 2014 coverage of health care reform by the Fox News prime time programs more closely followed *The Sun* than *The Times*. This use of binaries to reduce complicated health care-related issues to simple this-that and good-bad formulations was at the heart of the themes the programs used to oppose health care reform during both periods of study.

The 2009 Coverage

The majority of the twelve themes the Fox News prime time programs advanced in August 2009 opposing health care reform legislation involved taking complex, nuanced issues and reducing them to binary either-or propositions, while inaccurately portraying the side of the binary favorable to health care reform.

Health Care Reform as Socialism

Nowhere was this practice more prevalent and consistent with Sparks' (1992) findings than with the Fox News programs' use of the charged terms "socialism" and "socialistic." The proposed health care legislation in 2009 did not call for a single-payer system in which the government would provide the only mechanism through which Americans accessed health care, such as the regimes found in Canada and many countries in Europe. Rather, the proposed legislation followed in Massachusetts' footsteps, seeking to provide health care through an insurance mandate and subsidy schema, under which

citizens were directed to private insurers who competed in a marketplace, with the federal government subsidizing the fees for individuals whose incomes were not sufficient to allow them to pay (Munro, 2013). As the legislation was being debated in August 2009, many Democrats were advocating for the inclusion of a "public option," or a government-run health insurance system to run parallel to and in competition with private insurers, but the public option did not receive enough support to be included in the final bill that was passed through Congress and signed by the president (Stolberg, 2009).

Thus the proposed health care reform legislation sat somewhere on the continuum between full government-sponsored single-payer health care and a free market system in which the government played no role in providing health care to its citizens. However, the Fox News prime time programs in August 2009 did not portray proposed health care reform legislation in this context. Rather, the programs reduced the debate over health care to the simple binary of socialized medicine (sometimes using the terms "government takeover" and "government run") or a private system, which is how the shows characterized health care at that time, even with the heavy government involvement of Medicare and Medicaid. Calling health care reform a form of socialism would be an effective way to rally Fox News' conservative viewers to oppose reform legislation, as conservatives would view socialism as a wholly negative descriptor.

During the 2009 period of study, the prime time hosts and their guests, including individuals in video clips played on the shows, made reference to health care reform, the president, Democrats or the current government as being "socialism" or "socialistic" on 25 separate occasions. Three other times, a host introduced a guest by including the title of the guest's book that included in the title the word "socialism" in the

context of the government. The 25 claims of socialism were made on all three prime time programs and covered all but three days of the period of study. That is, on a daily basis, viewers of Fox News in prime time were repeatedly presented with statements that portrayed the policies of the president, including health care reform legislation, as being "socialism" or "socialistic." In doing so, the programs had reduced the complex and nuanced range of health care options to a simple choice dichotomy of reform representing socialism and the status quo as capitalism.

Lauran Ingraham, guest-hosting for Bill O'Reilly on August 14, explicitly turned health care reform into a socialism-capitalism binary in a way that would especially connect with her conservative audience. She first played a video clip of President Ronald Reagan saying:

One of the traditional methods of imposing statism or socialism on a people has been by way of medicine. It is very easy to disguise a medical program as a humanitarian project. Most people are a little reluctant to oppose anything that suggests medical care for people who possibly can't afford it.

By invoking one of the most revered figures in conservative circles, she established the credibility of the idea that a socialistic medical system is not just a problem on its own, but that it is actually the first step toward "imposing statism or socialism on a people." She then connected Reagan's statement to the current health care reform debate:

I have to believe that Ronald Reagan is smiling down on these town hall forums where law abiding and hard-working Americans are standing up for freedom. Independents, moderates, and now even Democrats who are senior citizens are saying no to a government-managed healthcare system. Their worries are real. And while violence is never justified, the passion certainly is. Until people see real practical signs that President Obama is taking their concerns seriously, these protests are going to continue, regardless of how well-produced the president's own town hall events are. Simply put, the country is nowhere near as left wing as President Obama obviously is. And he never had a mandate for this type of radical change.

All nuance is gone. The entire health care debate has been reduced to a simple either-or question. Ingraham refers to a "government-managed healthcare system," connecting to Reagan's warnings of socialism, setting the socialism of the "left wing" president against the opposition from "law abiding and hard-working Americans."

Sean Hannity repeatedly referred to the president, his administration and health care reform as being socialistic, making six such claims during the August 2009 period of study, as well as featuring other such claims by guests or in video clips. For example, he called Obama "a socialist leader" on August 5, and on August 20 he said Obama and the Democrats were "so committed to this holy grail of socialistic medicine and redistribution of wealth, [they] will do anything to pass it." Hannity is even more explicit on August 17:

There's no hyperbole here. This is socialism. The government is taking over our banks. The government is attempting to take over health care.

Hannity reduced the nuance and complexity of health care reform to a simple binary proposition: health care reform is socialism, while the system in place at the time was not.

Hannity, as discussed in Chapter 3, was more overt in his advocacy of conservatism and thus more expected to call health care reform socialism. Nevertheless, O'Reilly, who, as discussed in Chapter 3, holds himself out as a nonpartisan, balanced defender of the common man, also aggressively furthered the socialism theme during the period of study. In the most overt example of creating a socialism-capitalism dichotomy around health care reform (and the president as a leader) Fox News host Glenn Beck and O'Reilly had the following exchange on "The O'Reilly Factor" on August 4:

O'REILLY: You think [President Obama] has a hidden socialistic agenda?

BECK: Oh, no. It's not hidden anymore.

O'REILLY: So you think he's a hard-core socialist?

BECK: I think when you look at who he's put in as his czars, communists, actual communists, people who say, "I want sterilants in the drinking water." People who say that we should be able to kill a child up until 2 because they don't -- they haven't been socialized yet, just like Peter Singer.

O'REILLY: That's the Princeton guy. Right?

BECK: Yes, Peter Singer. When you have these people who are -- they are not in the mainstream by any stretch of the imagination. They are on the lunatic fringe. And they're putting them -- he's putting them in these czar roles.

Beck, with no challenge from O'Reilly, goes beyond just calling the president a socialist, accusing Obama of appointing communists to key positions in the administration (O'Reilly later pushes back that the czars have power, but he never disagrees with the assertion that they are communists). Statements like these further the Fox News binary presentation of health care reform, portraying reform as equivalent to socialism.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Beck may not best represent Fox News' desired self-presentation, as he clashed with the network (Stelter, 2009), eventually leading to his dismissal (Stelter, 2011). Nevertheless, O'Reilly chose to feature him on his program, and even unencumbered by Beck's more extreme views, O'Reilly nonetheless concluded his August 4 "Talking Points Memo" segment:

Most Americans want strict government oversight on health care and the insurance industry, but they don't want the Feds calling their medical shots. Once again, Americans are saying no to a socialistic program that puts more power in the hands of the government. Most folks, including me, do not want that. If President Obama does not wise up to that reality, his administration will be badly damaged.

Even as O'Reilly initially recognized some nuance, acknowledging that "most Americans want strict government oversight," he nevertheless characterizes proposed

health care reform as "socialistic," thus rejecting the proposed health care reform legislation as falling on the socialism side of the dichotomy.

O'Reilly also called socialism "alive and well, among the far left" when characterizing the mainstream Democratic position that health care was not a run-of-the-mill commodity (August 20), as well as calling economist Paul Krugman and Democratic former Vermont Governor Howard Dean socialists (August 17) in the context of the health care reform debate. O'Reilly's thoughts on socialism were made explicit on August 17 when he called self-described democratic socialist Senator Bernie Sanders a "pinhead." O'Reilly also provided a platform on his program for three others to refer to health care reform and/or the president as being socialistic. O'Reilly's viewers received a steady diet of descriptions of health care reform and its proponents that made clear that there were only two sides of the issue: those who supported socialistic health care reform, and those who opposed the socialistic efforts.

Greta Van Susteren, like O'Reilly, holds herself a reporter who is above partisan cheerleading, but, as was demonstrated in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, she nevertheless managed to further the Fox News themes opposing health care reform, often by allowing her guests to further the themes unchallenged. The same pattern held true in August 2009 regarding claims that the president and health care reform were socialistic. Van Susteren, unlike O'Reilly and Hannity, never made direct claims of socialism, but she did feature such claims on her program. For example, she did not challenge Fox News reporter Griff Jenkins when he approvingly reported on a protester at a town hall meeting complaining that health care reform meant the country was "going down the road to socialism" (August 11).

Medicare Cuts in the Proposed Legislation

The Fox News prime time programs similarly reduced the discussion of Medicare to an oversimplified binary. Proposed health care reform legislation called for changes to the handling of certain kinds of coverage, as well as ways of reducing costs. Rather than treating the system as a whole, the prime time programs zeroed in on the amount of money that would be cut from Medicare without discussing how that reduction would actually affect care for senior citizens. While the law's intention was to cover everyone, including senior citizens, the programs set up a binary relationship between the proposed legislation and Medicare, repeatedly claiming that the Medicare cuts would mean rationing of care to senior citizens. That portrayal of the Medicare cuts appeared 21 times across all three prime time programs during the period of study.

For example, Republican pollster Frank Luntz said on the August 4 "Hannity": "Sean, do you realize that they are going to divert funding that was intended for Medicare to help pay for this healthcare takeover?" Luntz does not offer the cuts in the context of the larger legislation. Rather, it's now a direct choice: Medicare cuts mean reduced care for senior citizens. Former Senator Rick Santorum was even more direct on the August 5 "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren": "I mean, seniors realize that the Democrat bill calls for half a trillion dollars in Medicare cuts. Now, ordinary people realize that what you're talking about here is taking away choices from them about health care."

Other Themes as Binaries

Other August 2009 themes were also, at heart, reductions of complicated issues to simple yes-or-no binaries. As discussed in Chapter 2, the proposed legislation contained a provision for end-of-life counseling that Sarah Palin turned into a "death panel" that

would decide who would receive care. During the 2009 period of study, Hannity reported Palin's death panel as fact, reducing the complex question of how to control medical costs for older people to a simple binary: health care reform legislation advocates wanted to kill older people, while those who opposed reform wanted senior citizens to live. Former presidential advisor Dick Morris made the binary formulation even more explicit when he said on "Hannity" on August 17 that proposed health care reform legislation was "a device to take medical care from the elderly and give it to largely immigrants." O'Reilly and Van Susteren did not defend the existence of a death panel, but they also furthered the Fox News theme by translating Palin's charge into an argument about the rationing of care. In this way, the two programs also reduced proposed health care reform legislation to two choices: reform leading to people denied care, while the status quo allowed for care.

The prime time programs also regularly referenced the length and complexity of the proposed health care reform legislation. Despite the enormity of the undertaking, the hosts and their guests repeatedly used the size of the bill to argue that it meant that it was problematic and that members of Congress had not read it. The binary was set up: A long, complex bill is suspect and being rammed through without being read, allowing the proponents to sneak in nefarious provisions, while a shorter, simpler bill would allow members of Congress to read the bill and see the negative aspects the proponents were trying to hide.

Like the length of the legislation, the prime time programs also reduced the nuance and complexity of the debate to the simple binary that the president and his party were not working with the Republicans on the bill. Listening to the Fox News hosts and

their guests, it would seem as though both the Republicans and Democrats wanted to reform the health care system, but the Democrats in Congress were, instead, moving forward without taking into account the input of the Republicans in Congress. This simple binary -- the Republicans wanted to collaborate but the Democrats did not -- did not just ignore Republican obstructionism (Draper, 2012), but it misstated and oversimplified the health care reform debate taking place in August 2009. In this vein, the programs also portrayed the use of the procedural action of reconciliation in the Senate as a possibly illegal, ahistorical, out-of-the-mainstream practice, when, in fact, both parties had used the device to overcome a filibuster when the parties controlled the Senate.

Many of the 2009 Fox News prime time themes opposing health care reform were, at heart, reductions of complex, nuanced issues to simplified binary framings that helped the programs rally their conservative viewers to oppose health care reform legislation. In doing so, the shows employed this kind of tabloid practice identified by Cushion (1992).

The 2014 Coverage

As noted above, the 2014 themes were more centered on inaccurate information about the ACA -- the effect on doctors, jobs, cancellations and costs; the age, payment status and insurance status of enrollees; how to get an extension; and the veracity of the president's administration in providing enrollment data on April 1 -- than addressing more policy-based aspects of the law that would be susceptible to oversimplification, as we saw with the 2009 themes. Nevertheless, some of the 2014 themes did tackle issues that could be reduced to simple binaries, and when the prime time programs addressed

these issues, much like in 2009, the themes reduced the complex, nuanced issue to a simplistic binary formulation.

The ACA Is Not Working

The most prominent 2014 theme in which the Fox News prime time programs simplified a complicated issue to better further the theme opposing health care reform legislation involved the success of the ACA itself. The law created a complicated, intricate program. Thomas B. Edsall, a critic of the ACA, noted in the New York Times that the online insurance exchange "requires coordination of over 288 policy options (an average of eight insurers are competing for business in 36 states), each with three or more levels of coverage, while simultaneously calculating beneficiary income, tax credit eligibility, subsidy levels, deductibles, not to mention protecting applicant privacy, insuring web security and managing a host of other data points" (Edsall, 2013).

As the April 1 ACA enrollment announcement approached, the program had already experienced both failures and successes. When the ACA's health insurance exchanges began operating in 2013, both the federal (Pear, LaFraniere, & Austen, 2013) and state (Goodnough & Abelson, 2013) websites designed to house the exchanges experienced technical problems, leading to much criticism (Edsall, 2013). But while the federal portal and some state exchanges continued to experience problems, the system functionality improved over time and ultimately met its primary goals related to coverage, participation and cost (Rattner, 2015; Sanger-Katz, 2014).

However, that complicated, nuanced picture of the ACA and its performance was not the way the law was portrayed by the prime time programs in March-April 2014. The hosts and their guests portrayed the ACA in more simplistic terms, reducing the

assessment of the law to a simple yes-no binary of its success. The hosts and their guests furthered the claim that the ACA was not working, with no attempt to include context or the law's successes, even after the positive April 1 enrollment announcement. The blanket claim that the ACA was a failure was made twenty one times during the March-April 2014 period of study, appearing on all three programs examined.

For example, on the March 25, 2014, "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren," Republican Senator John Thune said, unchallenged by the host: "I think the American people have picked up on this, which is why they are having trouble getting people to sign up -- is it just isn't working. It doesn't add up." Thune inaccurately claims Americans were not signing up for healthcare via the new law, as a week later the enrollment goals were exceeded. And he uses this claim as evidence that the ACA "just isn't working." After the April 1 announcement that the program had exceeded its enrollment milestone, on her April 1 program, Van Susteren had as guests Hannity, four conservative journalists and Republican Senator Tom Coburn, and they all effectively engaged in a three-segment-long attack on the ACA. The themes brought out included inaccurate information on the effect of the law on doctors and costs; the ease of getting an extension; whether the enrollees were young enough, uninsured and/or had paid; and whether the ACA was a government takeover of health care, as well as repeatedly making baseless challenges to the veracity of the White House's enrollment numbers. The message was clear: the ACA wasn't working, despite the positive report. Coburn essentially summed up the attack when, employing one of the themes based on an inaccurate claim, he said: "The president 28 times has done fixes to [the ACA] because the law was so lousy."

On March 26, before the April 1 enrollment deadline, Hannity said on his program: "The Obama administration has made another embarrassing delay to the cornerstone of its domestic policy agenda, also known as the train wreck that is Obamacare." Like Thune, he begins with a misstatement of fact, as there was not a delay but an accommodation to those who started to enroll but had a technical difficulty, to then make a categorical statement about the failure of the law ("the train wreck that is Obamacare"). Hannity also calls the ACA an "epic failure" on his March 26 show. He reduced the complicated legislation and its successes and failures to a simple pass-fail binary. Even after the positive news of the April 1 announcement, Hannity did not change his analysis or terminology. On his April 3 program, in previewing an upcoming appearance by Republican Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, Hannity said Jindal "has his own alternative to Obamacare and that train wreck." Later in the show, he talks about the president not "shying away from this train wreck." Despite the two-day-old news of a success for the ACA, to Hannity, the law is still to be judged by a good-bad binary formulation.

Similarly, before the April 1 announcement, on March 27, O'Reilly on his program called what he termed 38 "delays" of the ACA "a farce," before responding to Democratic strategist James Carville's claim that the ACA is "starting to move in the right direction" by saying, "they had three years to get it at least under control and they couldn't." While Carville acknowledges the problems with the implementation of the ACA and also points to its successes, O'Reilly rejects the nuanced interpretation, reducing the analysis of the law to a simple working-not working binary. Despite the Obama administration announcing positive enrollment data on April 1, O'Reilly

continued to view the issue in black and white, reducing the analysis of the ACA to two different binaries. First, in line with his March 27 handling of the law, he included in his April 1 program introduction: "Also tonight, Krauthammer on whether Obamacare can make a comeback." Even with the positive results, the ACA still needs a "comeback," in O'Reilly's formulation of the issue. In addition, O'Reilly tried to explain away the positive news, first by belittling the importance of the data by calling the enrollment numbers "bogus" and a "ruse," but then by shifting to the capitalism-socialism binary discussed earlier: "[The ACA is] just basically a stop on the way station to full government control of the medical industry."

On all three prime time programs during the 2014 period of study, the Fox News analysis of the ACA reduced the complicated issue of how the law was performing to a simplistic yes-no question, ignoring any successes of the law.

Government Takeover of Health Care

The prime time programs continued to refer to the ACA as a government takeover of health care during March-April 2014, making the claim ten times during the period of study. Like in 2009, the complicated issue of health care reform was reduced to a simple socialism-capitalism binary. One change from 2009 was that the hosts and their guests did not continue to specifically employ the term "socialistic" with the same frequency. The term only appeared twice during the 2014 period of study. But the message was the same, that the ACA represented a government takeover of health care.

For example, on the March 31 "O'Reilly Factor," the day before the White House was set to announce the enrollment numbers of the ACA, O'Reilly disparaged any

potential good news by making it clear that the ACA was a government takeover of health care:

So, it doesn't matter how many people signed up for it. It doesn't matter how many people paid their premium or how many people who are 12 years old are getting insurance because it's all a ruse. And you know it's a ruse. The government doesn't want to tell the folks what's going on. They are hoping that we'll just give up. They are hoping we'll get so sick and tired of Obamacare and hearing about it we'll just give up. And then the Democrats can control the health industry which is what the bottom line is from Washington. This is just an intermediate step for full government seizure of the medical industry. And they are never going to give you the truth. They are never going to give you stats. They're never give you anything because that's where we are right now. They are hoping Hillary gets elected and Hillary takes it the next step up. We'll call the shots on the health care industry. We'll decide what you get and what you don't get. What doctor you can see. We will do what Britain does. And then but there will be other thing for the rich people they can buy their health insurance just like they do in Great Britain. All right but that's what they want, Bernie, the whole thing is a ruse.

O'Reilly takes the entire complexity of the ACA and completely dismisses it, including the enrollment numbers, instead reducing the issue to a simple binary: government takeover or not. O'Reilly says whatever purported facts are offered, and whatever reports are made, the intention is to use the ACA to transition into a Great Britain-style of health care, which is socialized medicine. And when the positive enrollment numbers were announced by the White House on April 1, O'Reilly was ready on that night's program: "So, I said last night, the whole thing is a ruse. I think they don't really care how many people signed up, they being the Obama administration. It's just basically a stop on the way station to full government control of the medical industry."

"Hannity" featured six claims of government takeover of health care during the period of study. For example, Hannity refers to "Obamacare" as "socialized medicine" on his March 25 program. The next day he says people like the proponents of the ACA "have been pushing for nationalized health care of some kind" for the "last 70 years."

Republican Senator John Thune says unchallenged on "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" of the ACA: "There was just a much better way to do it than having the government take over one-sixth of the economy."

On all three programs, as occurred in 2009, the hosts and their guests reduced the ACA to the simple binary of socialism or capitalism.

The Misstated Facts as Binaries

Even the 2014 themes based on misstated facts did, to an extent, rely on simplifying more complicated issues. The question of doctor availability under the ACA was reduced to the simple idea that Americans couldn't see their physician of choice under the new law. Similarly, the complicated question of costs, which not only encompasses costs to consumers and the overall cost of health care, but also has to distinguish between rate of growth and cost increases, was reduced to the simple charge that costs have gone up under the ACA. Data on the number of cancellations was not only misstated, but, again, the issue was simplified, as none of the hosts or guests discussed the outcome for those individuals whose policies were cancelled (that is, were they covered by substantially similar policies at a substantially similar cost). The reasons for any extensions granted by the administration to ACA deadlines were not provided any context, but simply presented as part of the simple equation that extensions meant the law wasn't working. The complexity of the law was reduced to the simple proposition that, because it was long, it was not thoughtfully considered (or even read) by those who read it and was not working.

In the end, the 2014 period of study, like the 2009 programs, demonstrates how the Fox News prime time programs often reduced complicated issues to simple binary

propositions in the service of advancing the network's themes opposing health care reform legislation.

Fear and Melodrama

Jostein Gripsrud (1992) and Kevin Glynn (2000) identify fear and melodrama as practices that allow tabloid news provider to help the audience feel as though it can better relate to the subject of the story. Interestingly, Glynn looks at tabloids in terms of providing a voice to those who "are typically marginalized in mainstream media discourse" (p. 7). Clearly, since the Fox News audience is dominated by older, white males (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b), it may seem at first look as if the network is not serving a marginalized audience. But Fox News began with just such a mission, to provide a news source for conservatives who felt as though the network newscasts and CNN operated with a liberal bias (Bennett, 2001; Hickey, 1998; Sherman, 2014). In that sense, Fox News targeted an audience that felt marginalized and left without a voice in national news. As such, tabloid practices, following Glynn's claims, would fit the Fox News approach.

Further, as the Fox News prime time programs offered seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform in 2009 and 2014, the network was more than just providing information, but instead was trying to provoke action from its viewers, namely opposing reform legislation. Entertainment and tabloid practices can help build a community around an identity or issue (Peters, 2011; Van Zoonen, 2005). Fear and melodrama are two practices that would be powerful in that regard, rallying a community around a perceived threat. By portraying events as having outsized consequences -- in

effect, by employing melodrama -- Fox News was able to use fear-based appeals to help further the network's themes opposing health care reform legislation.

An examination of the health care coverage of the Fox New prime time programs in 2009 and 2014 found that fear and melodrama were both in evidence in the network's themes opposing health care reform legislation. In fact, many of the themes were directly intended to induce fear in the Fox News audience.

The 2009 Coverage

Of the twelve 2009 themes opposing health care reform, ten of them were essentially fear-based. In these cases, the prime time programs presented a purported news event or policy to their viewers as a warning, stoking fear that they faced some kind of negative consequence as a result of the event or policy. The network tapped into the traditional concerns of its conservative audience to further the fear-based themes.

Death Panels and Rationing

No issue demonstrated the network's use of fear like the embrace of Sarah Palin's melodramatic claim of death panels and related claims of rationing under health care reform legislation. Hannity was the one host who repeatedly insisted the death panel was real, warning his viewers, "Now that sounds to me like well, we're going to decide and ration that some people's lives aren't worth living" ("Hannity," August 13, 2009). Hannity explicitly warns his viewers, more than 40 percent of whom were over 65 (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b), that if the proposed health care reform legislation became law, many of them would lose care and possibly even their lives. This kind of over-the-top, fear-based appeal would be effective in rallying the viewers to action.

Even before Palin's death panel claim, Hannity took a fear-based approach to rationing claims. When former presidential advisor Dick Morris, who spoke often on Fox News about rationing, told Hannity, "Rationing isn't going to affect you. It isn't even going to affect me. It's going to kill our parents. Literally," Hannity responded, "Yes. Yes. Scary. Scary" ("Hannity," August 3, 2009). Again, Morris uses a melodramatic, exaggerated claim to tell his viewers that they are going to die if health care reform legislation is enacted, and Hannity leaves no doubt that they should be scared ("scary"). Even by August 17, when nearly everyone on Fox News' prime time programs except Hannity had admitted there was no death panel in the proposed legislation, Morris told an approving Hannity, "The rationing will take place when they tell you, no, you can't have the surgery because we have to give it to a 40-year-old illegal immigrant instead." Now the audience is told not only that under the proposed legislation they won't receive care, but those resources instead will be allocated to a non-citizen. Morris taps into conservative fears not only of the government controlling health care, but also of benefits accruing to an "illegal immigrant," who will receive health care before "you," presumably Hannity's conservative, older, white viewers (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b).

Even though O'Reilly and Van Susteren did not openly embrace the existence of death panels in the way that Hannity did, the hosts did make or participate in fear-based arguments centered on the idea of rationing. For example, three days after Palin's death panel post, on his August 10 show, O'Reilly, after bringing up the Canadian system of health care, said, "[Y]ou couldn't -- wouldn't -- have any choice if the government takes over the system. And there just simply is not enough medical personnel to handle the

elderly." O'Reilly taps into the conservative concern of the government controlling health care and limiting choice. He rallies his viewers by making them afraid of losing access to doctors.

Van Susteren on several occasions let her guests make fear-based statements on rationing without challenge. Before the Palin post, on August 6, Morris told Van Susteren, "[T]hey're expanding coverage by 50 million people with no extra doctors. That means rationing, and that obviously means the elderly are not going to get the medical care they need." Morris seeks to scare his older viewers with a warning that the proposed law would lead to a lack of care.

And later, after the death panel claim had been made and largely discredited, Van Susteren helped Wall Street Journal editor Stephen Moore translate the claim into one of rationing on August 19, when he said, "[I]f you want to cut costs in health care, as this bill attempts to do, the -- half of the costs of the health care system are people in their last six months of life. ... There is a belief -- and I believe it's true -- that if you're going to cut the costs, you're going to have to limit the options that seniors have for this end-of-life care." Again, Moore is making a fear-based appeal to senior citizens that the proposed law will mean care will be withheld from them.

The ACA and Medicare

The Fox News prime time programs followed a similar fear-based approach with the theme on the proposed legislation's impact on Medicare. For example, when Morris appeared on "Hannity" on August 3, he melodramatically said of the proposed health care reform legislation: "This is the end of Medicare as we know it." In the same way that Morris told older viewers that the law would mean reduced or no care for them, he is now

stoking fear by saying that passage of the legislation would effectively end their Medicare coverage. Three days later, on "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren," Morris continued to use fear of a loss of Medicare to rally older viewers against the health care law. He said: "Somebody is trying to take away [seniors'] health care. This program of the administration's is the repeal of Medicare." Morris explicitly is trying to scare older viewers by telling them the proposed law repeals Medicare, the program on which many of them rely for health care. Oliver North continued this fear-based appeal on August 7 on "Hannity," claiming: "We are going to be without Medicare. We're going to be without any kind of medical insurance because this guy is going to take it away from us." North is even more direct than Morris: He says that the president is going to take away Medicare and "any kind of medical insurance" from older viewers if the law passes.

Similarly, former Senator Rick Santorum, a Republican, told Greta Van Susteren on her August 5 program: "Seniors realize that the Democrat bill calls for half a trillion dollars in Medicare cuts. Now, ordinary people realize that what you're talking about here is taking away choices from them about health care." Santorum, like Morris, is trying to scare older viewers by claiming that the proposed law would cut their Medicare, leading to reduced choice and care.

While the fear-based Medicare theme was more prominently supported by Hannity and Van Susteren, O'Reilly also made the claim on his August 19 program when Morris appeared as a guest. After Morris described the proposed reform legislation as "a massive transfer of \$200 billion from old people to young people, primarily at least half immigrants," O'Reilly responded: "Okay. Now, there is also a Medicare component to

this because the Obama administration has to cut back Medicare payments in order to do this big federal government transition." O'Reilly introduces the Medicare theme after Morris raises the rationing theme, seeking to fan the fear felt by senior citizens that he references in the beginning of this line of questioning with Morris ("What is the one thing that the elderly fear about the Obama care plan?"). O'Reilly raises Medicare cuts -- along side a government takeover of health care -- to scare his conservative, older viewers.

Other Fear-Based Themes

Eight of the other ten 2009 Fox News prime time themes opposing health care reform legislation were fear-based, similar to the network's handling of claims relating to rationing and Medicare cuts. Distorting Democratic politicians' statements about some of the protesters preyed on conservative viewers' fears of having their opposition to health care reform be demonized by Democrats in power. For example, Hannity said on his August 11, 2009, program the protesters were "being attacked and called Nazis by people that are supposed to be public servants," and Van Susteren opened her August 10 show by challenging her viewers: "'Un-American.' Does that mean you? ... House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and majority leader Steny Hoyer say yes."

The portrayal of the White House Web post looking for incorrect information about health care reform as an attempt to induce Americans to turn in their neighbors for opposing reform stoked fears of a government out of control. For example, on August 5, Hannity said: "You get an email, you see something on the Web about health insurance that seems fishy, write to the White House. I mean it almost sounds like a secret police, you know, reporting -- citizens now report on each other, doesn't it?" Similarly, the network's statements about the use of reconciliation to pass reform legislation in the

Senate tapped into the same anti-government anxieties. Misstatements about whether proposed reform legislation covered abortion and immigrants drove anxiety about two signature conservative issues, as did the statements on taxes and deficits. Claims of the involvement of ACORN raised the specter of an organization conservatives blamed for many liberal-associated ills. By claiming health care reform was socialized medicine, the prime time hosts and their guests invoked a word guaranteed to cause anxiety in conservatives. And frequent references to the length and complexity of the legislation, including charges that lawmakers were voting on the law without reading it, tapped into conservative fears of a liberal government run amok.

Even beyond the themes, the hosts used tactics meant to stoke fear. Both Hannity and Van Susteren made use of provocative, anxiety inducing teases at the beginning of their shows, much like those used by local television news stations to keep people viewing (Allen, 2001). For example, Van Susteren used a personal ("you"), fear-based tease related to the White House misinformation Web post on August 5: "Tonight: 'Fishy'? Is there something 'fishy' about you? If so, the White House says we should report you to them immediately." She took a Web post looking for "fishy" information and turned it into a search for "fishy" people, notably her viewers, clearly to cause fear. Hannity used a similar tactic on August 10, 2009, while misstating an op-ed piece written by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi: "Tonight, Nancy Pelosi calls town hall protesters un-American." With his opening words, Hannity is warning his conservative viewers that a Democratic leader has tried to silence opposition to health care reform by challenging the patriotism of the protesters.

Fear was at the center of most of the 2009 themes, as the prime time programs sought to scare viewers into believing that the proposed health care reform law would not only result in loss of care and fiscal ruin, but would also do violence to a number of core conservative principles.

The 2014 Coverage

Like in August 2009, fear-based appeals were present in the Fox News prime time coverage of health care reform in March-April 2014. In addition to continuing the fear-based theme that the ACA represented a socialistic government takeover of health care, all nine of the new themes during the period were fear-based. The nine themes constituted different aspects of one larger fear-based appeal: that the ACA wasn't working and was wreaking havoc on the health care system for the viewers. The health care-related segments during the March-April 2014 period were meant to jar viewers into being afraid of what has become of health care in the United States after the ACA so that the viewers would take action, notably voting in the 2014 midterm elections later that year.

For example, the prime time hosts and their guests used incorrect and distorted data to scare their conservative viewers about the performance of the new health care law, misstating the effect of the Affordable Care Act on jobs, insurance costs, the number of policies canceled by the ACA, the number of Americans still uncovered by health insurance, and the number of people enrolling in the online exchanges who were not paying, not young and/or were already insured. All of these data misstatements were designed to induce fear in viewers as to the damaging effects of the ACA. Oversimplifying and exaggerating the functionality issues of the federal health care

enrollment website also stoked fear about the law. Similarly, the prime time programs misstated the effect of the ACA on patient-doctor relationships and the method by which Americans could receive a waiver from enrolling in a health plan by the deadline.

While all of these misstatements would stoke fear about the ACA, one 2014 theme actively argued that viewers should be fearful of the government itself. As discussed above, the prime time programs repeatedly and explicitly accused the administration of withholding information and producing false data related to the April 1 reporting of enrollments under the ACA exchanges. Fourteen times during the period of study, including on all three programs on March 31 and on two of the three shows on April 1, the hosts and their guests warned their viewers that even if the White House reported positive enrollment figures, the information was not to be trusted.

The March 31 programs provide a clear example of how the prime time hosts and their guests used scare tactics in advancing the theme that the White House's enrollment numbers were not to be trusted. On March 31, O'Reilly said on his show: "And you know it's a ruse. The government doesn't want to tell the folks what's going on. They are hoping that we'll just give up. They are hoping we'll get so sick and tired of Obamacare and hearing about it we'll just give up." This fear-based appeal to his audience warns that the government was hiding the true damage caused by the ACA.

Similarly, on March 31, Van Susteren spent the first segment of her program approvingly featuring guests and showing video clips of speakers who challenged the veracity of the White House numbers. Republican Senator John Barrasso said in a video, "I think they are cooking the books on this." Also in a clip, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, when asked if "the White House is fixing the books," replied, "Totally, they

are." During an interview, Barrasso repeatedly challenged the reporting data, not just the number but also how many paid, were young and/or were uninsured. Van Susteren reported on a tweet by Nancy Pelosi on how many people had signed up for health care through the ACA exchanges and asked her panel of three conservative commentators: "But should Leader Pelosi have double-checked those numbers before tweeting them out? Is that 9.5 million a correct number?" All three commentators challenged the truth of the figures, covering the number of enrollees as well as whether they were young and/or uninsured.

Hannity on his March 31 program continued the attack on the veracity of the White House's enrollment data, like Van Susteren dedicating the first segment to the topic. The show introduction included Hannity saying of the White House: "They've been dishonest from the get-go. Karl Rove thinks it will come back to haunt them in 2014." Hannity not only tells his viewers to ignore any positive enrollment numbers the president reports the next day, but he then links this claim to the action his viewers can take: voting for Republicans in the 2014 midterm elections. Hannity backs up his claim that the White House is providing incorrect data on enrollments by using false or distorted figures on the ACA's policy cancellations, cost and functionality (including calling the ACA a "Ponzi scheme") to show a purported pattern of false data from the administration.

Shielding Opposing Views

Much like the fear-based themes of the prime time programs, the vast majority of the Fox News arguments opposing health care reform included an effort to prevent

viewers from hearing opposing facts and arguments, or discredited those making those arguments.

In 2009, for example, the network tried to insulate its viewers from the fact that some protesters did, in fact, display Nazi symbols at protest rallies and shout down protesters at town hall meetings (FactCheck.org, 2009) by misstating the claims of the Democrats bringing up these issues. By turning the White House Web posting looking for false information on proposed health care reform legislation into an effort to find and punish opponents of reform, the prime time programs were able to change the discussion from the numerous misstatements made by health care reform opponents to the idea that the government was out to get dissenters. False assertions about whether the proposed legislation would include a death panel, cover abortion and immigrants, raise taxes and increase deficits, and decrease Medicare coverage for seniors insulated the audience from the actual terms of the reform proposals. Similarly, by invoking socialism, viewers were not provided with the full terms of the law, including the ways in which it bolstered private insurance companies and differed from the socialized medicine systems in Canada and the United Kingdom. The claims of the president ignoring Republicans and the length of the proposed legislation allowed the network to keep its viewers from seeing or considering how Republicans were handling the health care reform debate.

The same pattern emerged in 2014. The misinformation on doctor-patient relations, the ease of getting extensions to enroll under the ACA, the number of people enrolling in the exchanges (and whether they were young, paying and/or uninsured), the functionality of the federal online exchange, the impact of the ACA on jobs and the cost of insurance, the number of policy cancellations and the number of remaining uninsured

all served to insulate the viewer from hearing any positive aspects of the ACA. And by directly claiming the information produced by the administration related to the number of enrollments was incomplete and/or false, the prime time programs were able to dismiss the positive enrollment numbers that its viewers may have heard about elsewhere.

An incident from the 2009 period serves as an example of how the Fox News hosts discredited opposing facts during both periods. While filling in for O'Reilly on the August 7 "O'Reilly Factor," Laura Ingraham addressed claims that opponents of reform were making up claims about the proposed legislation not by citing the relevant portions of the bill, but by saying the absence was not dispositive:

Voters hear, "Oh, don't worry, abortions aren't covered. Illegal aliens don't benefit. Care won't be rationed. Private insurance won't be killed off." Yet, informed Americans respond with, "We don't believe you."

What Ingraham is saying to her viewers is that even if the evidence shows that a reform opponent's claim is wrong, it doesn't matter, because proponents of reform will do these things anyway. In doing so, she is acting to discredit any argument made by those on the other side of the issue from the viewers, regardless of the facts.

Over the two periods, nearly all of the Fox News prime time themes opposing health care were intended to shield viewers from opposing facts and arguments or to discredit the arguments and those making them.

Tabloid Practices and Propaganda

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Fox News prime time programs, in covering health care reform in August 2009 and March-April 2014, did not consistently adhere the traditional objective journalistic values of fairness and balance and an allegiance to accuracy and the facts. Instead, the hosts and their guest engaged in practices more

consistent with the traditional elements of propaganda, largely via coordinated themes opposing health care reform legislation. At their essence, the practices of the hosts and their guests were intended to rally their conservative viewers to oppose health care reform legislation by presenting a combination of facts and falsehoods that would tap into the core values of the viewers and use them to manipulate the viewers into seeing the issue of health care reform in the way the network thought would be most effective to spur action.

This chapter demonstrates that the prime time programs not only used the tabloid practices discussed above, but that these practices were integral to many of the themes offered by the network to oppose health care reform legislation. As such, examining these tabloid practices helps to explain some of the mechanisms by which the Fox News prime time hosts and their guests were able to further the propaganda-like themes in both periods of study.

Stoking Fear in Viewers

Fear is a classic propaganda technique, as it is effective in demonizing the opposition and motivating the like-minded to action (Conway et al., 2007). So it is easy to see how in seeking to tap into the values of conservative viewers, the Fox News prime time hosts and guests would find it valuable to portray health care reform issues in a way that would make their viewers afraid. Conservatives are wary of big government, so the network portrayed health care reform as a socialistic government takeover of the industry (and, as Laura Ingraham reminded viewers by invoking conservative icon Ronald Reagan, health care reform might just be the first step toward further imposition of socialism in the country). Further, the network presented health care reform as

government infringing on the private relationship between patients and doctors, even going so far as deciding who would and would not receive care at all. In the argument of the prime time programs, the government was so intrusive that it was collecting the names of opponents of reform so revenge could be sought. And the government's ineptitude was stressed, especially in March-April 2014, as the hosts and guests repeatedly argued that the government was incapable of running the exchanges and related elements of the ACA, and that the figures on enrollment produced by the administration could not be trusted. The Fox News prime time message was loud and clear: be afraid of health care reform legislation, because all of your nightmares about big government will come true.

Similarly, conservatives are concerned with taxes, spending and government waste, and the themes employed by the prime time programs used fear-based appeals in this regard. The prime time programs repeatedly told their viewers that the ACA would be lead to increased taxes, increased spending and increased deficits. By linking health care reform to these pocketbook issues, and using misinformation in doing so, the programs were able to create a cloud of fear around health care reform legislation.

Additionally, by linking people and concepts that conservatives oppose to health care reform, the prime time programs could further attach fear to the proposed legislation. As such, the hosts and guests linked health care reform to immigrants and abortions, as well as to ACORN, a liberal organization that was a frequent target of conservatives, even as ACORN had nothing to do with health care reform. The shows also attacked reform proponents like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, using false information to disparage her and other unpopular figures. By doing so, the prime time programs sent the fear-

based messages that if these unpopular individuals and groups want legislation that will help these other practices that conservatives oppose, viewers need to fear passage of that law.

Finally, the prime time programs made fear-based appeals based on the knowledge that their viewers were older (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b), not just conservative. As such, the hosts and their guests claimed that the proposed health care reform legislation would destroy Medicare and, ultimately, leave senior citizens without any care at all. The message to seniors was clear: Fear this proposed reform, since it could actually kill you (as Dick Morris said on the August, 3, 2009, "Hannity," rationing due to health care reform legislation was "going to kill our parents. Literally.").

The tabloid practice of fear did not just independently spur action in Fox News' prime time viewers, but the fear allowed the hosts and guests to tap into the viewers' core belief system, the first step in taking a propaganda-like approach to advancing themes opposing health care reform legislation.

Creating Victims and Villains

In Conway et al.'s (2007) study of O'Reilly's "Talking Points Memo" segment, the authors examined the propaganda technique of "separating sides into good and evil, or scapegoat and messiah" (p. 201). This practice was also central to many of the themes advanced by the Fox News prime time programs in both periods of study. Health care reform was framed in several ways that fit this simple formulation: Proponents wanted socialism, where those who opposed the proposed legislation wanted capitalism. Protesters were "hard-working Americans" and grass-roots patriots, while proponents

wanted to stop dissent (like the White House website) and demonize protesters (like the false charges leveled at Nancy Pelosi). Opponents of reform were charitable businessman like the CEO of Whole Foods and sober politicians and analysts who claimed to want to fix the health care system but in a more responsible way, while proponents wanted to install socialized medicine that would ration care, cover abortions and give care to "illegal immigrants" at the expense of senior citizens. Opponents of reform were protecting your right to see the doctor you wanted (or receive any care at all), while proponents were looking to institute a system in which you can't choose your doctor and care will be rationed. The themes were geared toward creating victims and villains, and the proponents of health care reform were always the villains.

Institute for Propaganda Analysis's Seven Techniques

Conway et al. (2007) also point to the Institute for Propaganda's seven propaganda techniques, including "name calling" and "plain folks" associations (p. 199), and these were evident in the Fox News prime time themes. For example, O'Reilly (e.g. Bernie Sanders is a "pinhead" and the White House website post is "dopey") and Hannity (e.g. "Rahm 'Rahmbo Dead Fish' Emanuel") made frequent use of name calling to disparage proponents of health care reform and distance their arguments from the viewers. Similarly, all three hosts portrayed opponents of health care reform as plain folks, defending the grass-roots nature of the protests. Hannity and Ingraham both used the phrase "hard-working Americans," and Hannity presented protesters as guests on his program as heroes. O'Reilly positioned himself as the protector of average Americans who were being persecuted by Washington power elites.

The tabloid practices used by the Fox News prime time programs were not employed in a vacuum. The practices also operated as elements of the propaganda-like themes opposing health care reform during the periods of study.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 made the case that Fox News does not engage in journalistic practices in prime time. This chapter questions whether Fox News should even be judged by journalistic standards in the first place. This chapter provides a blueprint of how the Fox News prime time programs employed an array of traditional tabloid news techniques to their coverage of the health care reform debate in August 2009 and March-April 2014. These techniques helped the networks further the seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform legislation. Importantly, the tabloid practices often mirrored and supported the propaganda-like practices used by the network.

This chapter's findings are limited to how the network handled one unusually pervasive and polarizing issue during six weeks of programming spread over two periods. The study cannot tell us if Fox News handles different issues in prime time in a similar manner. In that same vein, the results of this study are limited to the prime time programs. Additional research would be needed to see if the daytime newscasts on Fox News engage in the same kind of tabloid practices.

Another aspect not considered in this chapter that is worthy of future research is an examination of the Fox News visuals in prime time. While some of the entertainment elements posited by the entertainment scholars were not found in this study, an examination of the pictures Fox News produces could yield more information on the network's use of entertainment practices in its prime time programs.

This chapter, along with Chapter 2, poses some important questions for scholars to consider when they study Fox News or use Fox News as a reference point in their studies. It would be a mistake to assume that the network, at least in prime time, practices journalism. Beyond this consideration, this chapter calls into question the underlying assumption that Fox News should even be studied as journalistic operation, despite its self-representation. Chapter 2 showed that the prime time programs' handling of the health care reform debate hewed close to the traditional elements of propaganda. This chapter demonstrates one mechanism through which the Fox News prime time programs were able to advance themes opposing health care reform, and these practices came not from the world of objective journalism, but from the tradition of entertainment-driven tabloid news. Examining Fox News' prime time programs as journalism, or comparing the network to news organizations that make more of an effort to follow the traditional values of objective journalism, would be a mistake.

Chapter 5: Is It Fox News or All Cable News? MSNBC's 2009 Prime Time Coverage of Health Care Reform

The chapters so far have built a picture of Fox News in prime time, demonstrating that the network developed propaganda-like themes opposing health care reform, with the differing host styles and use of tabloid news practices allowing the programs to support the themes while maintaining the network's branding of "fair and balanced." A question left open by these chapters is whether the practices identified in those studies were a product of practices unique to Fox News, or whether they were, instead, a product of the grinding 24-hour news cycle of cable news in general. This chapter seeks to answer that question by examining the prime time coverage of health care reform by another cable news network, MSNBC.

MSNBC in the Literature

In the popular press, MSNBC is often identified by its ideological bias, as it is positioned as a liberal counterpart to Fox News. This point of view is on display when former CNN anchor Bobbie Battista said the networks go "to the extreme left and right" (Arango, 2009, p. C1). The liberal disposition of MSNBC, along with its equivalency to Fox News, is often assumed without any supporting evidence (see, e.g., Stelter, 2009a; Kurtz, 2009).

While Fox News is a frequent subject of academic inquiry, MSNBC's news operation has gone largely unexamined by media scholars. A handful of studies have examined narrow sections of the network's coverage, usually in comparison to or combination with other networks. Feldman, Maibach, Roser-Renouf and Leiserowitz (2012) compared the coverage of global warming by Fox News, MSNBC and CNN. In

another study, news items on the websites of MSNBC, Fox News, CNN, and CBS News were examined to see how the articles portrayed the age, religion, race and gender of eight 2008 presidential candidates, but there was little analysis of the different coverage by each network, including any ideological differences (Eargle, Esmail & Sullivan, 2008). Another study looked at whether MSNBC, CNN and Fox News were biased in projecting state winners in presidential elections (Uscinski, 2007). In this case, the author called his sources "the three major cable news networks" (p. 51) but did not label the partisan or ideological leanings of the networks, although they are implied. Similarly, in a study of gender bias in the coverage of then Senator Hillary Clinton in the 2008 presidential primary races, Uscinski and Goren (2011) examined transcripts from the broadcast network newscasts as well as "the three major cable news networks, CNN, Fox News Network, and MSNBC" (p. 888). Again, the political leanings of the cable networks are not stated, and the authors lump the cable data together, choosing not to make network-based comparisons. Boone and MacDonald (2009) interviewed producers at MSNBC to research questions of ethics, decision-making and gender at a cable news network, but MSNBC was the sole focus only because Fox News and CNN both declined to participate, and the study did not look into issues of content or ideology at MSNBC.

MSNBC also occasionally appears as a subject of survey data or as a stimulus in experiments, explicitly or ostensibly standing for a liberal news source, often set opposed to Fox News (e.g. Arceneaux, Johnson & Murphy, 2012). The assumption in these cases is that the two networks are equivalent in their operation, with the sole important difference being their ideological disposition. Sometimes MSNBC is grouped with CNN as liberal-leaning news sources -- explicitly or implied -- in analysis of survey data

related to media usage on, for example, topics such as bias (Morris, 2007) or the hostile media effect (Stroud, 2008).

So while MSNBC pops up in studies from time to time, the literature lacks a direct empirical study of the network's news practices. Also, the majority of the studies involving MSNBC either state or imply that the network is a liberal counterpart to Fox News, but no study compares the two operations' larger practices beyond a handful of issue-based studies. This chapter seeks to fill this void in the literature. Nearly all the empirical studies of Fox News assume the network to be a journalistic operation, but Chapter 2's examination showed that the network did not generally adhere to the journalistic objective values of balance and an allegiance to accuracy. Instead, the Fox News prime time programs and their guests often engaged in conduct more in line with the traditional elements of propaganda, especially relying on false premises and insulating its viewers from opposing arguments and facts. This chapter will ask the same questions regarding MSNBC.

Beyond Left and Right: Fox News and MSNBC

There has been substantial research on selective exposure that has found that, when given a choice, people will often choose media sources that tend to reinforce their existing beliefs (e.g. Sears & Freedman, 1967; Knobloch-Westerwick, Sharma, Hansen, & Alter, 2005; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Garrett, 2009; Valentino, Banks, Hutchings, & Davis, 2009), including choosing sources based on perceived ideology (e.g. Coe, Tewksbury, Bond, Drogos, Porter, Yahn, & Zhang, 2008; Stroud, 2008; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). As noted above, the idea of partisan media, with Fox News representing the conservative position and MSNBC often standing for the liberal side, is a base

assumption in many studies (e.g. Morris, 2005). And in reading these studies, one comes away with the idea that Fox News and MSNBC are just two sides of the same coin. That is, they are addressed as news agencies that differ only in their partisan and/or ideological orientation.

While MSNBC's ratings do not approach those of Fox News, with Fox News capturing fully two-thirds of the cable television audience in prime time in August 2009 (Kondolojy, 2012), the network carries importance in the literature as the representative example of a liberal television news network (e.g. Morris, 2005; Feldman, Maibach, Roser-Renouf & Leiserowitz, 2012). When these studies compare Fox News and MSNBC, are they comparing like organizations? While the literature is filled with analyses of Fox News, both assuming its partisan bias and examining some kind of ensuing effect (e.g. DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Iyengar and Hahn, 2009) and/or studying whether there is a bias in the network's coverage (e.g. Aday, 2010; Aday, Livingston & Hebert, 2005; Groeling, 2008), there is little scholarly work examining MSNBC's content.

One difference between Fox News and MSNBC lies in their self-presentations. Fox News portrays itself as "fair and balanced," promising, "We report, you decide." The network does not hold itself out as a conservative or Republican organization, but rather as a news operation. MSNBC does not make the same kind of explicit claims of unbiased content. During the period of study, MSNBC's advertising tagline was "the place for politics." In 2010, the network unveiled a new marketing pitch, "lean forward," which subtly acknowledged MSNBC's liberal disposition, contrasting the network's progressive,

self-described forward-looking hosts against the Fox News programs, which, the tagline implies, looked backward (Stelter, 2010).

Journalism, Propaganda and Persuasion

Chapter 2 identified three main values consistently identified in the literature as the bedrock of objective journalism: 1) Lack of bias; 2) fairness and balance; and 3) an allegiance to accuracy and facts (McQuail, 1996; Mindich, 1998; Ryan, 2001; Schudson, 2001). Just like with Fox News, it is useful to look beyond a lack of bias to see if the network, in this case MSNBC, nevertheless abides by the values of fairness and accuracy.

Chapter 2 then identified the traditional elements of propaganda from the literature, including the use of a combination of facts, distortions and untruths to manipulate an audience into adopting a position or taking action, while tapping into the core values of the group to elicit an emotional response and taking action to discredit or isolate contrary facts and arguments, often by attacking the source of the opposing information (Bennett & O'Rourke, 2006; Bryant, 1953; Ellul, 1965; Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012; Lasswell, 1934).

Finally, Chapter 2 distinguished between propaganda and persuasion, noting that persuasion requires the subject to voluntarily come to a conclusion without coercion. Persuasion differs from propaganda in four main ways. First, a persuader's intention is for the listener to make a judgment based on the listener's volition, not coercion (Marlin, 2003; Pratkanis & Aronson, 2002). Second, a persuader is transparent in his or her agenda in engaging in speech (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012; Pratkanis & Aronson, 2002). Third, a persuader does not seek to manipulate the listener (Luchins, 1978). Instead, the intention is for the listener to say, "I never saw it that way before" (Jowett & O'Donnell,

2012, p. 32). Finally, a persuader does not try to shield a listener from opposing facts and arguments, instead providing facts and arguments to counter those from the other side (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012).

With these definitions in mind, this chapter asks substantially the same research questions about MSNBC that were asked about Fox News in Chapter 2. Specifically:

RQ.1 Do MSNBC's prime time programs demonstrate adherence to the traditional objective journalistic values of balance and fairness and an allegiance to accuracy and the facts, beyond the network's ideological predisposition?

RQ2. Do MSNBC's prime time programs work more closely with the traditional elements of propaganda?

RQ3. Do MSNBC's prime time programs seek to transparently use logic and argument to persuade the viewer without coercion?

Method

The intent of this chapter is to replicate Chapter 2's analysis of Fox News, this time examining MSNBC. As such, the same methodology is used, following Papacharissi and Oliveira's (2008) development of frames. The 2009 period of study, covering a week before Sarah Palin's claim that health care reform legislation contained a "death panel" (Palin, 2009) and two weeks after her charge, is the same, from Monday August 3, 2009, through Friday, August 21, 2009, covering the weekday, prime time programs: Keith Olbermann's "Countdown" at 8 p.m. and "The Rachel Maddow Show" at 9 p.m. (the network reran Olbermann's show at 10 p.m.). Each program drew about 1 million viewers at the time, making the shows the most-watched hours on the channel (MSNBC, 2009).

Like Chapter 2's study of Fox News, this chapter entailed a qualitative textual analysis of the transcripts -- again, obtained from LexisNexis -- of MSNBC's prime time

programming, noting instances when arguments opposing health care reform were repeated across shows or across different episodes of the same programs. The themes were then checked for the accuracy of the factual assertions, going back to the primary sources when possible and using fact-checking websites and national mainstream publications when necessary. Finally, the themes were re-examined to analyze how the hosts and guests furthered the themes on the programs.

In Chapter 2, the 2014 study followed the same three Fox News programs examined in 2009, even though two of the shows changed air times in the interim. Replicating the 2014 Fox News study for MSNBC was problematic, as Olbermann left MSNBC in January 2011. MSNBC's 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. lineup in 2014 contained only one program that also aired in that time block in 2009, "The Rachel Maddow Show." Substituting programs would have introduced a new dynamic that would have rendered comparisons between the two eras imprecise. As importantly, it is impossible to identify cross-program themes with only one show. Also, a LexisNexis search revealed that the term "Obamacare" (including the alternate spelling "Obama care") appeared on "Maddow" on only six of the fifteen days of the 2014 period of study. While the discussion of health care reform was robust enough to appear on every day of the 2009 period of study on both Fox News and MSNBC, during the 2014 period of study, the issue was more heavily covered on Fox News than on MSNBC in prime time, further complicating an attempt to study the 2014 period on MSNBC. As such, this chapter's analysis of MSNBC is limited to the 2009 period. Since the 2014 Fox News data was mainly used to confirm the findings regarding the 2009 period of study, MSNBC's 2009 findings will nevertheless provide a meaningful comparison to the Fox News 2009

analysis, allowing for a comparison of how the two networks handled health care reform during the same three-week period.

Themes

The study in Chapter 2 found that Fox News' prime time programs employed 12 seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform in 2009, and that these themes were primarily based on premises that were nonfactual or mischaracterized. The prime time hosts did not generally adhere to the traditional objective journalism values of fairness and balance and an allegiance to accuracy and the facts, even beyond the network's ideological predisposition. Instead, the programs operated more closely to the traditional elements of propaganda, employing themes based on false premises and shielding the audience from opposing facts, while discrediting the proponents of health care reform.

The examination of the same three weeks of prime time programming on MSNBC revealed a different approach to the coverage of the health care reform issue. While it was clear, like with Fox News, that MSNBC had an ideological predisposition -- supporting health care reform -- there appeared to be less coordination between the programs. The themes that emerged were larger and more conceptual (e.g. an argument that the protests at congressional town hall events were largely driven and funded by large corporate lobbying organizations rather than products of grassroots activism), but there was less repetition in the way these arguments were made.

As news analysis programs, the MSNBC shows, like those on Fox News, were largely dependent on the news of the day to generate the topics covered in the programs. So in that sense, both MSNBC prime time shows (like their Fox News counterparts)

covered similar news issues (e.g. health care reform, the "cash for clunkers program"), and, regularly, similar news events (e.g. congressional town hall meetings). Where MSNBC differed from Fox News in prime time related to *how* those similar issues were covered (e.g. the two hosts' different arguments relating to the inclusion of a public option in health care reform legislation).

In the Fox News study, all three of the prime time programs regularly employed similar themes, language, and approaches -- often involving the same mischaracterization or misstatement of an underlying fact -- to further a larger theme opposing health care reform. For example, all three programs invoked the same misstatement of a quote by then House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, an op-ed piece written by Pelosi, and a post on the White House website related to health care reform misinformation, all to serve larger arguments opposing health care reform. On MSNBC, this kind of coordination was not in evidence. Differing language and approaches were generally employed to address the same arguments, and the arguments were generally factually accurate. For example, on August 21, 2009, both Olbermann and Maddow focused their programs on health care reform, and both were clearly interested in supporting reform and rebutting the claims of those opposing reform. In that sense, there was thematic agreement across the programs. But the specific focuses of the two hosts had little in common. Maddow's program was largely about the politics of the health care fight, covering a statement from the president's press secretary, highlighting a statement by Republican Senator John Kyl that no Republican would vote for health care reform, and commenting on a television appearance by death panel proponent Betsy McCaughey. Alternatively, on his August 21 program, Olbermann examined the possibility of the final reform bill including a public

option, reporting what prominent Democratic members of Congress had said on the topic and highlighting poll numbers on the issue.

So, unlike Chapter 2's Fox News study, this chapter's examination found no seemingly coordinated recurring themes supporting health care reform based on misstatements of fact. This provides evidence that, in response to RQ2a, the MSNBC hosts were not working within the traditional values of propaganda. An examination of the transcripts supports that result, while also revealing that the two MSNBC hosts had a similar approach on one of the objective journalistic values, an allegiance to the facts, but quite different efforts with regard to balance and fairness, as RQ1 asks. And, in response to RQ2b, only one of the hosts engaged in practices reminiscent of persuasion.

Allegiance to Accuracy and the Facts

Chapter 2 revealed that Fox News' prime time programs, especially "Hannity," often put strategic goals ahead of demonstrating an allegiance to accuracy. In one notable example, Hannity repeatedly attributed a quote by Republican Representative Spencer Bacchus to Democratic Senator Max Baucus, even after his incorrect statement had been highlighted elsewhere, seemingly because the quote, if it had come from Baucus, would have been helpful to his argument about the cost of health care reform. The examination of MSNBC showed that both hosts, though in very different ways, prominently made an effort on the air to be accurate with their content, in contrast to Hannity's approach to the facts.

Maddow's Corrections

One prominent example of Maddow's attempt to demonstrate allegiance to accuracy was her on-air corrections during the period of study. Correcting past mistakes

is a hallmark of objective journalism, a way for journalists to demonstrate an allegiance to accuracy. Newspapers have traditionally provided sections in which they correct mistakes from earlier editions (Shepard, 1998), and this practice even continued as print news sources moved online (Arant & Anderson, 2001). Television news, including local newscasts, has also demonstrated a commitment to running corrections (Cremedias, 1992). Maddow worked in this tradition, airing four corrections during the three weeks under study.

On August 6, 2009, while discussing institutions supporting the protesters at congressional town hall meetings, Maddow said:

Last night, I reported on the sophisticated, well-funded corporate efforts to make it seem as though the opposition to health reform in this country is actually a spontaneous grassroots movement instead of a -- instead of a sophisticated, well-funded corporate effort. And in that reporting, I said that two groups, Patients United Now and Patients First, were both busing people around the country to demonstrate against health care reform. I apologize for being wrong when I said that. It's actually just Patients First that is bussing people around.

Maddow's correction, appearing prominently at the beginning of a segment, did not serve any purpose in advancing her argument supporting health care reform, as it did not help support her claim that the protests were corporate-supported. Instead, it appears that the correction was an end in itself, to ensure that the program's reporting was accurate, in line with the objective journalistic value of an allegiance to the facts. In doing so, Maddow was also following the objectivity value of balance, as she provided a fair accounting of the role of Patients United Now.

Maddow again issued a correction on August 12, 2009, acknowledging that two of the graphics accompanying her discussion of a North Carolina poll on whether the president was born in Hawaii were incorrect. Like with her August 6 correction, Maddow

did not gain any rhetorical advantage by admitting her error (although, she admitted: "I'm almost happy we screwed it up just so I could have the chance to say it all over again"). If anything, it damaged her credibility regarding the data she was using to support her argument, as she admits she "screwed up." If Maddow were engaged in propaganda, it would be to her advantage to let the mistaken graphics go unmentioned. And yet, she still saw fit to correct the data. The correction's only seeming purpose was to ensure accuracy.

Maddow is more explicit in embracing the value of an allegiance to the facts on her August 14, 2009, correction, when she said she was "happy" to grant a request by the public relations firm Shirley & Banister to correct a misstatement from the day before as to the dates Shirley & Banister represented a conservative organization. But Maddow fights back against what she says is the company's attempt to silence her reporting on the organizations behind health care reform protests, and she argues that the underlying point she had made the day before remained true. In making this defense of her approach, she concluded with a statement that goes to the heart of Maddow's approach respecting the objective value of accuracy:

We deal with the facts here. We correct the record when we need to. But I will not -- and we will not -- be intimidated out of covering the news.

Maddow is essentially saying that she operates as an investigative journalist, and in doing so, she has a duty to "cover the news" and will "not be intimidated," but in doing so, she is going to follow the journalistic value of accuracy, as she and her colleagues on her show "deal with the facts" and "correct the record when we need to."

Finally, on August 17, 2009, Maddow acknowledged that on the previous night's program, she said the member of Congress who condemned violence and other misconduct by protesters was a Democrat when, in fact, the congresswoman was a

Republican. The situation mirrored Hannity's claim that Democrat Max Baucus rather than Republican Spencer Bacchus had made an alarming statement about the imminent insolvency of social security. But unlike Hannity, who continued with the misstatement the next day, Maddow corrected her error before repeating it. Hannity chose advancing his argument over accurately reporting the facts. Maddow, conversely, chose to ensure the accuracy of her program, even as it hurt her argument about the conduct of protesters opposing health care reform. Maddow's willingness to correct her earlier errors four times during the period of study was consistent with the objective journalistic value of accuracy.

Olbermann's Use of Facts

Olbermann operated closer to Hannity in his disposition, in that he was often aggressive and abrasive, not afraid to use bluster to make ideological arguments on health care issues and disparage others who did not share his position. But despite Olbermann's caustic approach, he did, actually, show an allegiance to accuracy and the facts, even as he used them more to batter opponents of health care reform than to engage in persuasion or reporting.

One example of Olbermann's fact-based approach to attacks came in his August 3, 2009, "Special Comment" on health care reform, in which he listed the amounts of money certain senators and members of Congress who opposed health care reform had received in political donations from the health care industry, doing so in his aggressive, attacking style. For example, he says about one member of Congress:

How about Congresswoman Ginny Brown-Waite? Good evening, ma'am. You are the Florida representative who claimed on the floor that Democrats had "released a health care bill which essentially said to America's seniors: 'drop dead.'" Now, those are strong, terrorizing words. That's exactly what your insurance and

medical overlords wanted to hear. But are you truly worth every dollar of the 369,255 of them you have received over the years from the health sector?

There is nothing unbiased or balanced about Olbermann's attack. It is partisan and aggressive. But in making his attack, he linked his charge -- that members of Congress were serving the health care industry in return for campaign donations -- to a fact -- the amount of money the person received in contributions and what she said on the floor of the House. The list of campaign contributions is the basis of the argument. Olbermann even begins the list by citing the source of the numbers, giving the viewer the opportunity to check his data.

In fact, one of the roles Olbermann often played on his program was that of a checker of facts. He spent many of his "Special Comment" and "Worst Persons" segments claiming to correct misstatements, usually by conservative politicians and media. For example, on the first "Countdown" after Sarah Palin's "death panel" claim, on August 10, 2009, Olbermann attempted to debunk her assertion:

The euthanasia scare comes from something as benign as a proposal to let you put in for insurance if you have to consult a doctor about what to do if you or a loved one are fatally ill. If you are where I was last March, when I sat down with the doctors to talk about my mother: fatally ill, not awake, not aware. The health care reform will now pay you back for the doctor's fee for that conversation. And it will pay, whether you decide to let your loved one go, or you insist to the doctor that they keep that dear one alive at all costs, to treat them for months or years or decades more. And this part of this bill actually was originally co-sponsored by a Republican congressman. And from that caring bipartisan starting point, through her own paranoia or for her own political gain, Sarah Palin has invented the boogeyman of "death panels."

Again, Olbermann is partisan and caustic. He accuses Palin of "paranoia," seeking "political gain" and "invent[ing] the boogeyman of 'death panels.'" But in doing so, unlike the Fox News attacks on Nancy Pelosi, Olbermann stays close to the facts, reporting the

actual meaning of the provision at issue in proposed health care reform legislation to demonstrate that Palin's claim is false.

Similarly, Olbermann used his August 20, 2009, "Worst Persons" segment to fact-check a claim by a Republican congressman opposing health care reform:

But our winner tonight, Congressman Roy Blount of Missouri. The minority whip has told this one to the editorial boards of newspapers in Springfield, Missouri, and St. Louis. "I'm 59," he says. "In either Canada or Great Britain, if I broke my hip, I couldn't get it replaced." Two-thirds of the hip replacements done by the National Health Service in Great Britain last year were done on people 65 or older; 63 percent of those done in the Canadian system were done on people 65 or older; 1,200 of them in Canada were done on people older than 85.

Again, Olbermann is partisan and caustic. He has named Blount the "winner" of the "Worst Persons" segment. But in making his attack on Blount, Olbermann is fact-checking Blount's claim, citing data on hip replacements in Great Britain and Canada to show that Blount's data was false. Olbermann may not be balanced, but he does abide by the journalistic value of an allegiance to the facts.

With regard to the second half of RQ1, whether the MSNBC prime time hosts adhered to the traditional objective journalistic value of an allegiance to accuracy and the facts, the 2009 data supports a conclusion that both hosts, in fact, generally did demonstrate this value during the period of study.

Balance and Fairness

The other half of RQ1 asks if Olbermann and Maddow demonstrated balance and fairness, and here the examination of the 2009 data revealed that the two hosts showed different approaches in their shows. Maddow did generally adhere to the journalistic value of fairness, often working more in the model of a reporter, investigating the origins and background of people, groups and issues related to health care reform. Olbermann,

on the other hand, was less interested in fairness. Instead, his show often focused on using facts to discredit opponents of health care reform and their arguments.

Maddow as Investigative Reporter

Over the course of the period of study, Maddow often used a traditional investigative reporting approach, looking at the facts that lied under arguments related to health care reform. One example of her approach, which contrasts with the way the Fox News hosts handled the same issue, examined whether protests against health care reform were spontaneous results of angry citizens (i.e. "grassroots"), as many conservatives claimed, or the product of corporate lobbying groups (i.e. "Astroturfed"), as many liberals argued. As noted in Chapter 2, the Fox News prime time hosts misstated several statements by Democratic figures, including two statements by Nancy Pelosi, to discredit claims of Astroturfing. Maddow's approach was different, as she tried to make the case for Astroturfing through fact-based research.

For example, on August 10, 2009, Maddow showed a clip of a video advertisement opposing health care reform that focused on, she says, scaring senior citizens. She then engaged in a 690-word examination of the commercial, saying, in part:

As you may have seen at the end of that ad there, the organization that's behind this ad is called the 60 Plus Association. What's the 60 Plus Association? I am so glad you asked. As we've done with some of the other groups pushing this kind of misinformation about health care reform, we decided to find out exactly who they are. 60 Plus is a registered non-profit organization. They're based in Alexandria, Virginia. On their website, they describe themselves as a, quote, "non-partisan seniors advocacy group." Non-partisan.

A look at the group's leadership seems to suggest at least a slightly partisan tilt. The president of 60 Plus is a gentleman named Jim Martin. You may remember him from some of his previous and recent advocacy work, such as the Public Service Research Council, otherwise known as Americans Against Union Control of Government. He was also involved with the National Conservative Political Action Committee. Hmm, non-partisan. Alongside Mr. Martin is the group's honorary chairman, Roger Zion,

who the website itself promotes as, quote, "one of Washington's leading spokesman for the conservative cause." Indeed, Roger Zion is a former Republican congressman from Indiana who authored a new book called "The Republican Challenge."

That's who's running this non-partisan group that's currently running ads scaring old people about President Obama's health care reform plans. And who has a record of funding this organization 60 Plus? Well, when 60 Plus started lobbying against prescription drug reform at the state level a few years ago, AARP actually looked into who was behind them. And they found that, quote, "virtually all of their largest contributions in recent years have come from the same source: the nation's pharmaceutical industry."

Maddow is not unbiased in her examination of the 60 Plus commercial. She clearly has a position, accusing 60 Plus of "currently running ads scaring old people about President Obama's health care reform plans." But in making her argument, Maddow goes on a point-by-point, fact-based investigation of the advertisement's background. She identifies the group that produced the spot, who its leaders were, and what sources funded the organization. She is working in the tradition of an investigative reporter, despite her bias. Her argument is fact-based and builds a case based on the publicly available resumes of the people and groups involved. Again, Maddow is not unbiased. She has a position, and she uses sarcasm to defend it. And it is likely that the people behind 60 Plus would have preferred Maddow had not aired the connections to the organization. But it would be hard to argue her approach to the group's claim that it is nonpartisan was unfair.

Similarly, on August 19, 2009, Maddow dedicated a segment to uncovering the corporations supporting a self-professed grassroots organization on oil and energy. She engaged in a similar process with UnitedforHealthReform.com as the one she employed in examining 60 Plus:

Now, the "United" in UnitedforHealthReform.com refers to United Health Group, the second largest health insurer in the country. United Health Group is most

famous in the current health care debate for its connection to the Lewin Group. The Lewin Group is part of one of United Health Group's wholly owned subsidiaries. And the Lewin Group is the group that's producing these studies that are so frequently cited by Republican members of Congress about how risky health care reform would be.

Maddow then showed a series of video clips featuring Republicans citing the Lewin Group as a source for information opposing health care reform before continuing:

The Lewin Group providing the anti-health reform talking points for Republicans and the dramatic numbers about all the bad things that will happen if we reform health care, that happen to be off what the nonpartisan sources say by a factor of 10 -- that group is actually United Health, the insurance company. But again, United Health on the surface maintains that it is supportive of health care reform.

Like she did with 60 Plus, Maddow examined who was behind a piece of messaging opposing health care reform. Here, she connects the dots between the health care company and the research group making claims opposing health care reform. Maddow backs up her finding with a series of video clips showing Republicans citing statistics from the research group. Making these connections, with the intention of unpeeling the layers behind the website, is another example of how Maddow uses investigative reporting to back up her arguments. She is not unbiased, but she nevertheless provides information for her viewers, in the tradition of journalism, avoiding unsupported attacks in the process.

Olbermann Uses Facts as a Battering Ram

Even as Olbermann adheres to the objective journalistic value of accuracy, he did not always work within the value of balance and fairness. Where Maddow employed investigative reporting practices to dig for facts associated with a person, group or claim, Olbermann often used his facts to batter opponents of health care reform. He may have

worked with facts, but he was not looking to fairly provide a balanced look at both sides of an issue. Instead, he used the facts to attack.

For example, On August 18, 2009, Olbermann employed poll numbers to attack Fox News' coverage of the health care issue:

For those who have feared that Republican lies on this occasion have been working, fresh evidence tonight of just how well the lies are resonating among some -- especially those who get their news from Fox. Looking at two of the most prevalent lies, a majority of those surveyed, overall 54 percent in the new NBC News poll out tonight -- I misstated it earlier, it's not the Wall Street Journal, just NBC -- they believe that the health care legislation being debated would lead to a complete government takeover of health care. Among Fox viewers, the number jumps to 79 percent, versus just 41 percent of those who watch MSNBC and CNN.

The fabricated "death panels" got the least amount of traction -- again, depending on what you watch -- less than half overall; 45 percent believing the "pull the plug on grandma" monstrosity. Yet three out of every four Fox viewers believe this. Seventy-five percent, hook, line and sinker, versus 30 percent of those who are not lied to on MSNBC and CNN.

Here, Olbermann makes no effort to provide a fair and balanced investigation into the coverage of health care reform. Instead, he is using a set of verifiable facts (poll numbers) to attack Fox News. His use of "Republican lies" does not demonstrate the fairness Maddow used when looking at 60 Plus and UnitedforHealthReform.com. While Olbermann works consistently with the objective journalistic value of accuracy -- even correcting an earlier misstatement about the source of the poll -- he does not demonstrate the value of fairness and balance. There is far less nuance to his reporting than was visible in Maddow's examination of the groups opposing health care reform. He is not seeking to convince his viewers of the merits of an aspect of health care reform. Rather, he is focused on discrediting those who oppose health care reform and their arguments.

Olbermann's handling of a response to a claim by some that the White House website was looking for citizens to report individuals who opposed health care reform --

the website actually looked for instances of "fishy information" it could correct (Phillips, 2009) -- provides an example of how his approach differed from Maddow's when it came to balance and fairness. While Maddow examined which people and organizations were behind groups like 60 Plus and UnitedforHealthReform.com, Olbermann attempted to debunk such a claim on August 20, 2009, with a combination of facts and attacks:

Senator John Cornyn of Texas, still pumping the paranoia that the White House offered to correct any spurious emails about health care reform was a, quote, "fishy" way to collect email addresses of its opponents. The same collection of addresses, by the way, is done at the website of Senator John Cornyn of Texas. You want to write a letter of complaint to the senator, you oppose him, you're his enemy? You have to leave your email address and you're real-life address too, street address and everything, where you live. One thing left out of this equation, people, some of them people who work for insurance companies, are sending out these mass spam emails and urging recipients to send them on to everybody they know. You got your wish. Shut up.

Where Maddow researched the facts underlying a claim to reveal the source of that claim in an investigative journalistic matter, Olbermann used his facts to batter an opponent of reform. He did not to address the issue itself but instead caught the person making an argument opposing health care reform in a hypocritical moment, coming up with the information that Cornyn's website engaged in the same conduct he charged the White House site with taking part in. But rather than just presenting the case like Maddow did, Olbermann added attacks ("Shut up") and broader charges (the insurance companies are behind some of the emails) that go beyond what a journalist would consider fair and balanced. Olbermann, instead, is focused on the attack to discredit the messenger, not the message itself.

In the end, with regard to RQ1, an analysis of three weeks of prime time MSNBC programming revealed that while both Maddow and Olbermann worked within the objective journalism value of accuracy and an allegiance to the facts, Maddow also

generally adhered to the value of balance and fairness while Olbermann was less likely to do so.

Propaganda, Persuasion or Something Else?

RQ2a and RQ2b sought to determine if Olbermann and Maddow were working within the traditional elements of propaganda and persuasion, respectively. Since both hosts exhibited an allegiance to the facts and accuracy, and since neither was deceptive in his or her motives or methods, as they both openly supported health care reform, neither Olbermann nor Maddow worked in a way that was consistent with propaganda. But what about persuasion?

Maddow and Persuasion

As noted earlier, persuasion differs from propaganda in the volition of the listener, the transparency of the intent of the speaker, the absence of manipulation of the listener by the speaker, and the speaker not seeking to shield the listener from opposing facts and arguments. By this definition, Maddow often engaged in persuasion through the use of the journalistic values associated with investigative reporting. While she was not unbiased on the health care issue, she was transparent in her position supporting reform. She used facts and argument, as opposed to manipulation, to convince her viewers of the merits of her position, as demonstrated earlier with her investigation of 60 Plus and UnitedforHealthReform.com. Also, Maddow often engaged opposing arguments, rather than trying to shield them from the viewer.

The examples of Maddow's investigative reporting-like examinations listed above demonstrate how she often engaged in persuasion on her show. Another example came on August 21, 2009, when Maddow talked about how it appeared a public option would

not be a part of health care reform legislation. Responding to a quote of "that's democracy" from the president's deputy press secretary as to why the public option appeared to be off the table, Maddow said:

Wait. "That's democracy?" The president says he wants public option. Three committees in the House have already voted in favor of a public option. The one committee in the Senate that's already voted has voted for a public option. The top Democrat on health care in the Senate, conservadem Max Baucus, put in writing at the start of the health care fight that he was for the public option. A new poll just out showed 77 percent of Americans support a public option. And, by the way, Democrats have 60 seats in the United States Senate. But the public option is not even up for discussion in the Senate anymore. It's not even on the table.

Maddow sought to persuade her viewers (and give her viewers the tools to persuade others) as to why the public option should be included in the final health care reform legislation. She is transparent, clearly supporting the public option. Specifically, she addressed the argument that the public option was dropped as part of the democratic process, and she listed evidence to the contrary. Maddow is saying to her viewers, in effect, that the Senate's failure to even consider the public option made no sense based on her argument, and that the viewers should adopt her position because of the evidence she just produced. She favored a public option being included in the final bill, and she was open that she was building an argument to defend why, politically, it should be under discussion. Maddow's approach to the audience was to seek a voluntary change of opinion, Jowett and O'Donnell's (2012) "I never saw it that way before" (p. 32).

Similarly, on August 4, 2009, Maddow engaged in persuasion-like conduct to argue that the protests at congressional town hall meetings were Astroturfed, not grassroots uprising by individual citizens:

In terms of the origins of these protests, a big portion of the media continues, I think, to miss the obvious. D.C. lobbying groups with ties to the health care industry have not only been organizing these events, these made-for-YouTube

ambushes, they also have been taking credit for them. Meet Conservatives for Patients' Rights. It's a Washington, D.C.-based lobbying organization that's run by a former hospital executive named Rick Scott. Rick Scott was actually forced out of the health care company amid a fraud investigation that ultimately resulted in the company paying a \$1.7 billion fine. Well, now, Rick Scott's Conservatives for Patients' Rights is emailing out town hall alert flyers and emailing out spreadsheets about where town hall meetings are so that they can be targeted by activists on the right. Here's their website today, for example, prominently featuring a long list of congressional town hall meetings. This is a health care industry-linked lobbying group organizing uprisings at town hall events. And if you check out other groups linked to Washington, D.C. lobbying firms, like FreedomWorks, for example, can you find your instructions about how best to shout down and intimidate any possibility of civil discourse at these events. So that corporate lobbying groups are doing their part -- they're turning out the mobs, telling them where to go and giving them their scripts.

Maddow was transparent in her position: She believed that the protests were Astroturfed ("made-for-YouTube ambushes"). But she sought to persuade viewers by laying out her argument, citing the organizations and individuals involved to make her point. By stating facts and building an argument, she was not trying to coerce viewers, but rather she attempted to allow them to come to their own conclusions based on her evidence.

It should be noted that like the Fox News hosts, Maddow's audience is overwhelmingly like-minded to her position. Her viewers identify as overwhelmingly Democrat (74 percent) and liberal (57 percent) or moderate (31 percent) (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). As such, it is more likely that Maddow was not trying to persuade her viewers directly, but rather was providing arguments for her viewers to use when they discussed health care reform with others. Either way, though, by embracing the journalistic values of accuracy and balance in the service of openly laying out arguments in favor of positions in a way meant to allow listeners to change

their views of their own volition, Maddow's approach on air was reminiscent of the rhetorical tradition of persuasion.

Olbermann and Persuasion

At times, Olbermann, like Maddow, engaged in argumentation that was consistent with persuasion. For example, on August 18, 2009, Olbermann tried to construct a persuasive argument in favor of the public option (one that was different from Maddow's three days later):

"When a bully asks for your lunch money," advises the letter writer, "you may have no choice but to fork it over. But cutting a deal with the bully is a different story, particularly if the deal means helping him steal other's money as the price of protecting your own." Those words are from none other than House Minority Leader John Boehner. He, of course, is casting President Obama as the bully and couples making more than \$350,000 a year as those having their lunch money stolen. But in our fifth story on the "Countdown": Yes, there goes *pate de foie gras* for lunch. But Congressman Boehner's accidental brilliance -- indeed brilliance -- is unintentionally counseling his perceived bully on the utility of negotiating health care reform with the Republicans. Boehner's succinct advice: appeasement rarely works in conflict resolution. Not that the president has stopped negotiating with the enemy, even if the enemy is now admitting on a daily basis that it is negotiating in bad faith. The Senate Republican whip, Jon Kyl of Arizona, today is telling reporters he will not be whipping up any GOP votes. Quote: "There is no way that Republicans are going to support a trillion-dollar-plus bill." Senator Kyl adding that at whatever cost figure, almost all Republicans are likely to oppose health care reform no matter how bipartisan the final bill might be.

Meanwhile, 60 House progressives -- three more than last time -- today warning the administration -- again -- in a letter, that they will kill any health care bill that does not include the public option. Quoting from the letter, "To take the public option off the table would be a grave error; passage in the House of Representatives depends upon the inclusion of it."

Olbermann was trying to persuade his audience that the public option should be included in health care legislation. His frame was that rather than try and work with Republicans, who Olbermann said had no interest in compromising, the Democrats should operate on their own. To back up his claim, he assembled pieces of evidence:

Boehner and Kyl each said they would not cooperate with Democrats, and the progressives in the House would not vote for a bill that did not contain the public option. So, Olbermann argued, the president should take Boehner's advice and not try and appease Republicans. Olbermann asked his viewers to make a conscious decision to support the inclusion of the public option, which he openly supported.

But on other occasions, Olbermann's actions often were not consistent with journalism, propaganda or persuasion. Instead, as outlined above, Olbermann used facts as a battering ram to attack opponents of health care reform. When doing so, Olbermann was not seeking to make an argument that would voluntarily result in a listener coming to the conclusion, "I never saw it that way before" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012, p.32). Instead, Olbermann was seeking to discredit opponents of health care reform, first and foremost, while secondarily arming those in favor of health care reform with facts to be used in a persuasive argument, as well as injecting emotion into the debate to stir up support for his position. In this way, Olbermann was operating with some values from each of the traditions: He had an allegiance to facts and accuracy, like a journalist; he offered emotional appeals, like a propagandist; and he engaged with the opposing facts and arguments, like a persuader. But Olbermann, on the whole, did not really work consistently with the values of any of the three traditions, as asked by RQ2a and RQ2b.

For example, on the August 11, 2009, "Countdown," Olbermann sought to press the claim that racism was a theme in the protests of proposed health care reform legislation. He did not seek to lay out a substantive argument on health care reform, but rather, in effect, he tried to discredit the opponents of reform. His appeal was fact-based,

but at the same time, it was more an attack on an opponent that differed from Maddow's investigative unraveling of the source of anti-reform advertisements:

To this point, no one congratulates themselves on powers of perception when the sinking feeling that there is racism at some of these health care town halls proves true, when the suspicion is born out by an obvious display of hatred, about to suggest this was a case of that, an effigy or a sign of a racial slur. But in our fourth story on the "Countdown": It may not be the only motive, it may not be the predominant one, but it does exist, it can't be ignored. And it is an undercurrent that connects the irrational birthers to the equally irrational deathers, a crowd that believes there is an Obama death panel. Congressman David Scott, Democrat of Georgia, victim of it -- at a recent town hall meeting, he dared to accuse disruptive participants who tried to hijack that gathering. Scott's district office in Smyrna, Georgia, has now been vandalized. A four-foot swastika painted on the office sign overnight. That, and what Michigan Congressman John Dingell has encountered at town halls, has reminded Dingell of something from a very long time ago.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

REP. JOHN DINGELL (D), MICHIGAN: Well, the last time I had to confront something like this is when I voted for the civil rights bill and my opponent voted against it. At that time, we had a lot of Ku Klux Klan folks and white supremacists and folks in white sheets and other things running around causing trouble.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

OLBERMANN: But there's nothing more illustrative than an account sent to *The Atlantic* magazine from someone who had planned to be attending the town hall meeting of Democratic Congresswoman Kathy Castor, Betty Reed in Tampa. "I was to attend the health care summit. I never made it into the building. I never experienced in my life, really experienced outright racism in a public place. Signs of Obama hung in effigy, racial slurs on signs, people chanting negative words, too many to list, and outright screaming at Obama supporters. The hatred was in their eyes and they actually scared me for a moment. At first, I was shocked and then a little scared. Then I got outright mad in the span of one minute. I actually left."

Olbermann's appeal is emotional. By running Dingell's clip, he connects the protesters with the Klu Klux Klan, which certainly would appeal to the emotions of his viewers, and is an especially aggressive tactic. He refers to "irrational birthers" and "equally irrational deathers" to belittle opponents of health care reform. But despite the aggressive tactics, there is nothing false or distorted about Olbermann's evidence. He points to actual incidents (a swastika on a sign, a woman leaving a town hall after seeing violent imagery) to support his claim, without extending the evidence in the way the Fox

News hosts did with the attacks on Pelosi and other proponents of health care reform (Olbermann doesn't say all protesters are racist, just that some racist behavior is present). But there does not seem to be, at heart, a desire for a viewer to say, "I never saw it that way before." Rather, the use of facts is focused on discrediting opponents of health care reform.

Similarly, in his "Special Comment" commentaries, Olbermann engaged in rhetoric that was aggressive and direct, mixing sarcastic humor and caustic attacks to make his point. For example, in his "Special Comment" on the August 3, 2009, "Countdown," which focused on the influence of campaign donations by the health care industry, Olbermann begins by describing the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire:

In March of 1911, after a wave of minor factory fires in New York City, the City's Fire Commissioner issued emergency rules about fire prevention, protection, escape, sprinklers. The City's Manufacturers Association, in turn, called an emergency meeting to attack the Fire Commissioner and his "interference with commerce." The new rules were delayed. Just days later, a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory. The door to the fire escape had been bolted shut to keep the employees from leaving prematurely. One hundred and fifty of those employees died, many by jumping from the seventh floor windows to avoid the flames. Firefighters setting up their ladders literally had to dodge the falling, often burning, bodies of women. This was the spirit of the American corporation then. It is the spirit of the American corporation now. It is what the corporation will do when it is left alone for a week.

Olbermann begins with an attack on corporate influence ("It is what the corporation will do when it is left alone"), associating it with a well-known tragedy. In making the connection between the Triangle Shirtwaist fire and the health care industry's opposition to reform legislation, Olbermann is seeking to discredit an opponent of health care reform. As when he goes on to list members of Congress and the amount they received in donations from the health care industry, he is not really focused on changing minds. Rather, he is using facts to discredit those arguing against health care reform, in

this case by exposing their motives. Again, Olbermann shows an allegiance to facts, but he does not employ those facts in a way that comports with the definition of persuasion.

Fox News or Cable Television?

While Chapter 2 found that the Fox News prime time programs did not consistently adhere to the journalistic values of balance and accuracy in covering health care reform, it was noted that the results left open the question of whether the network's practices were unique to Fox News or were, alternatively, reflective of how 24-hour cable television news operates generally. This chapter's study goes some way toward answering this question, finding that the MSNBC prime time programs operated in a different manner from their Fox News counterparts -- and even from each other. MSNBC's prime time programs did not develop themes based on untruthful premises, and the two programs' varying approaches to the issues covered on the network lacked the seeming coordination found on Fox News.

Further, while the Fox News prime time programs did not generally follow the objectivity value of an allegiance to accuracy, facts lied at the center of the approaches of both MSNBC prime time programs -- albeit in different ways. Maddow used facts as part of an investigative reporter-like process to persuade viewers to support various issues related to health care reform. While Maddow clearly came to the issues with a bias, her disposition was overt.

Olbermann, on the other hand, made use of facts, but he often did not do so in the service of inducing a voluntary change of heart in viewers. Instead, Olbermann used facts to discredit opponents of health care reform and their arguments. Where Maddow employed facts to uncover the truth behind arguments opposing health care reform,

Olbermann, often acting in a fact-checking capacity, tended to turn his attention to politicians and Fox News, as he focused on attacks that showed when claims opposing health care reform were false, or when statements made by opponents of reform were false, contradictory or hypocritical. Olbermann often lacked the more balanced approach found on Maddow's program, so like the Fox News prime time programs, he did not always adhere to this journalistic value.

These findings demonstrate two important points about MSNBC's prime time programming. First, the network's MSNBC's two prime time programs in 2009 differed from each other in their approaches at a level that made the coordination seemingly evident at Fox News less likely at MSNBC. While the two programs sometimes commented on the same news events, they often approached the news in different ways. Where, for example, all three Fox News programs furthered the exact same interpretation of Nancy Pelosi's op-ed article or a White House Web post, these kinds of common themes and buzzwords were not generally present at MSNBC. It would be a mistake to discuss MSNBC's prime time lineup collectively when studying what the network does in prime time.

Second, the practices of MSNBC's prime time programs differ substantially from their Fox News counterparts. Both Fox News and MSNBC offer partisan programs in prime time that do not abide by the journalistic value of lacking bias. In this way, it is accurate to think of Fox News as generally supporting conservative positions on issues in prime time, while the corresponding programs on MSNBC tended to defend liberal positions. But beyond ideology, the two networks acted quite differently in prime time while covering health care during the 2009 period of study. Taken together, the studies in

Chapter 2 and this chapter demonstrate that the prime time programs on the two networks engaged in different processes with different relationships to journalistic values. Fox News may call itself an objective news operation, but, at least in prime time, the programs did not follow journalistic values, instead engaging in propaganda-like practices. And despite the fact that MSNBC made no such claims of objectivity, its prime time programs followed the journalistic value of accuracy. Neither MSNBC program engaged in propaganda, with one geared toward persuasion, while the other often used facts to batter opponents. To examine Fox News and MSNBC in prime time as equivalent operations that only differ by ideology would be a mistake in light of these two studies. Future researchers, especially those who use survey data or experimental designs, would be advised to take note of these differences when crafting their studies.

Like the previous chapters, there are limitations to these findings. The results are limited to MSNBC's prime time programs, as well as how they handled one especially contentious issue. Future research will need to determine if the MSNBC programs outside of prime time operate with different values, and if the prime time shows acted differently when covering other issues. Also, since MSNBC's prime time lineup lacked the continuity found at Fox News, the same kind of 2009 to 2014 comparison made for Fox News cannot be made for MSNBC.

What Is News?

Using objectivity as a stand-in for the idea of journalism, this work has sought to define, in a sense, what Fox News actually does in prime time. Chapter 2 tried to determine if the prime time programs were examples of journalism, propaganda, persuasion or something else, finding that propaganda was the closest match. This

chapter dispels the notion that Fox News acted like all cable news operations in prime time, as the two prime time MSNBC programs in 2009 operated differently from their counterparts at Fox News, with "Maddow" and "Countdown" generally showing an allegiance to facts while avoiding propaganda-like practices. At this level, the studies provide fairly straightforward answers to the posed questions: Fox News does not adhere to journalistic values in prime time, while MSNBC does, at times. Adding to these findings, we also learned that Fox News' differing host styles and use of tabloid news practices help the network engage in propaganda-like programming while maintaining a branding of fairness and balance.

Given that, as discussed in Chapter 2, the overwhelming majority of empirical mass communication studies of Fox News treat the network like a news operation, and given, as noted in this chapter, that when MSNBC is used by researchers, it is often posed as a liberal counterpart to Fox News, these chapters contain important findings that offer guidance to future research in the field. But if we look beyond the research questions, these chapters, taken together, raise an even more complicated question: What is news in the current media environment? That is, while it is important, in light of the literature on Fox News and MSNBC, to find out if, in fact, these networks are engaging in journalism, in a 21st century media landscape reeling from the atomization of the 20th century mass media system, the findings in these chapters can challenge us to think of news in a new way. Fox News and MSNBC are not engaging in traditional objective journalism, but a more important finding might be that they are engaged in all these new programming genres that may not have strictly been on the menu of news options only two decades earlier, but with elements evident on the programs that go back a century. In that sense, it

may be useful to move the focus of research away from comparing cable news to traditional journalism and, instead, examining these new forms.

As Peters (2010) argued, even though opinion programs dominate prime time programming on cable television, the literature lacked empirical examinations of this type of programming. The preceding chapters have showed us that, during prime time on cable news, one can find propaganda-like programs posing as news programs, with the host claiming to be a populist journalist but acting, as one study found, like Father Coughlin on 1930s radio (Conway et al., 2007); a broadcast news anchor; or a conservative advocate. At the same time, on another network, we saw a program engaged in investigative journalism-like persuasion (with echoes of Edward R. Murrow's approach to issues like McCarthyism on "See It Now"), and another one that combined fact-checking (like can be found on numerous websites) with advocacy in the form of attacks on opponents and their arguments.

The original larger question of this chapter is whether MSNBC was like Fox News. Combining this chapter's results with those in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, what we've found is that in a fractured 21st century news environment, the networks not only differ from each other in prime time, but the programs on those networks, to different degrees, differ not only from each other, but from the traditional presentations of journalism developed in the 20th century.

Trust in News

Chapter 3 argued that Fox News, by dressing in the indicia of a news network -- self-identification, marketing taglines touting objective journalism, traditional news production techniques, etc. -- but by using the journalistic setup as a means to dispense

propaganda, ran the risk of contributing to the decrease in public trust of news (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a).

According to this chapter's analysis of MSNBC's prime time programming, the same risk to trust in news by the MSNBC programs may not be quite as strong, but some risks remain. Beyond her ideological predisposition, Maddow generally adhered to the journalistic values of fairness and balance and an allegiance to accuracy and the truth, working in the tradition of investigative reporting in seeking to understand the facts that underlie key issues in the health care debate. She used those journalistic values as a way of engaging in persuasion-like argument. Unlike with the Fox News hosts, there is no gulf between Maddow's self-presentation and her actual on-air activity. She was open about her intentions and positions. No issues of deception would seem to be in play.

The question, then, is if the conduct of the "The Rachel Maddow Show" could have a negative effect on trust in news based on her bias. Some scholars have argued that a neutral approach to news may not be the best way to provide information on important issues that helps citizens operate in a republican democracy (Bennett, 2001; Cunningham, 2003; Hallin, 1992). But given the wide partisan differences in credibility ratings (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a), news trust may not be restored by self-described news operations, regardless of how they conduct themselves on the air, if they come with an ideological or partisan predisposition. In fact, a recent Pew study showed that Fox News and MSNBC enjoyed almost identical percentages of respondents who trusted their content: 49 percent for Fox, 50 percent for MSNBC, but those figures were lower than the broadcast networks, who seek to employ a more traditionally

objective, bias-free approach to their newscasts (Baym, 2009; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a).

So the effect of Rachel Maddow's show on public trust in news may be tied to whether credibility is more dictated by transparency and journalistic values or neutrality. And if that is the case, then the same question lingers over "Countdown" (although it is no longer on the air). Olbermann was not fair and balanced, but he did have an allegiance to accuracy and was transparent in his presentation. Then again, he did wrap himself in the indicia of news, for example borrowing Edward R. Murrow's signature sign-off, "Good night and good luck," even while working outside of two of the three traditional objective journalism values. While less cut and dried than the Fox News prime time programs, the MSNBC shows raise some of the same issues of media trust. What separates the MSNBC programs, though, is their transparency. There is no separation from their self-presentation and their approach to covering the issues. Whether that is enough to make a difference regarding media trust is a question worth pursuing in future research.

Chapter 6: Atomization, Fragmentation and Niches: The Place of Fox News in the Current Television News Ecology

The chapters thus far have helped identify Fox News' practices in its prime time programs. Chapter 2 demonstrated that rather than follow the journalistic values of balance and accuracy, the network's prime time programs presented propaganda-like programming in furthering seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform. Chapters 3 and 4 helped show how the network was able to support opposition to health care reform in prime time while maintaining its branding of being "fair and balanced," through the complementary differences in the prime time hosts' styles and the use of traditional tabloid practices. An analysis of MSNBC's prime time programs in Chapter 5 helped make the case that Fox News' practices were unique to Fox News and not just a product of the demands faced by all self-described 24-hour cable news operations.

The previous chapters focused on the content and presentation of the Fox News prime time programs, both individually and collectively. This chapter opens the lens wider and seeks to determine where Fox News, as a network, fits into the bigger picture of television news in the early 21st century. Such an analysis sheds light on how Fox News' strategies helped the network become and remain financially successful while at the same time using that success as a platform for influencing the debate surrounding issues. A media ecology approach is taken to examine Fox News' place in the television news landscape.

From Mass Media to a Fractured Media Landscape

Fox News' existence was made possible by a series of significant changes that started to take place in the United States in the 1970s. For nearly three decades in the

second half of the 20th century, network television news was, along with newspapers, the most popular and trusted form of news for Americans (Baughman, 2007; Baym, 2009). In the 1960s, 30 percent of all U.S. homes and 70 percent of television sets in use watched the NBC or CBS evening newscasts (Allen, 2001). But since the 1970s, television news ratings have been in decline, with the weekly average viewers for the three network newscasts falling from 50.1 million in 1980 to 22.5 million in 2011 (Guskin & Rosenstiel, 2012), with recent modest growth pushing viewership up to 23.7 million in 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Of course, up to 1980, Americans wishing to obtain same-day news had few options aside from the network newscasts. Local television news had largely shifted away from national stories by the late 1970s (Allen, 2001), newspapers operated a day behind, and news magazines, as weeklies, concentrated more on news analysis than breaking news stories. Aside from radio, the television newscasts were the only game in town.

The first significant challenge to the dominance of the broadcast network news divisions came with the development of cable television, which expanded the number of options available to viewers. The introduction of CNN in 1980 offered 24-hour news patterned after the network newscasts (Friedland, 1992). CNN and its spinoffs (such as CNN Headline News, which is now known as HLN) were responsible for siphoning off some viewers from the network newscasts (Baldwin, Barrett & Bates, 1992). As cable television continued to expand and increase audience penetration, the door opened for alternative approaches to news that differed from the broadcast newscasts, especially in terms of ideology (Baym, 2009). Fox News Channel was one of the first to take this approach, beginning in 1996. MSNBC launched the same year, only the new network

was more technologically than ideologically driven, as MSNBC represented a coming together of old media (television, NBC) and new (Internet, Microsoft), without a clear programming goal beyond providing space for NBC News on-air personalities (Garber, 2012). The popularization of news on the Internet, beginning in the late 1990s, gave Americans a powerful alternative to watching news on television. It was in this context that Fox News became an important player in American political news.

But to explain the decline of network news viewership simply in terms of the arrival of cable and the Internet is to oversimplify what happened during this time period. The shifting of viewers away from the network newscasts and the rise of Fox News were part of a larger set of developments in U.S. society, namely sociological and technological developments that not only worked against the network newscasts, but also provided Fox News with an opportunity to identify and sustain a workable business model.

Ecosystems

Scholars have used the concept of environments and ecologies to examine communications and media, both literally and as a metaphor (Scolari, 2012). Owing to the works of a succession of scholars, including McLuhan and Postman (Scolari, 2012; Strate, 2004), this approach "looks at the interactions between media, as if they were species of an ecosystem" (Scolari, 2012, p. 210). Working from the basic framework of evolution, the ecological view rests on the idea of species battling for resources in their environment, with those best able to adapt surviving, based on their ability to select and retain promising variations in the ecosystem (Monge & Contractor, 2003; Dimmick, 2003). When applying this idea to news organizations, the resources are often viewed as

the consumers of news, specifically their time, attention and money. For example, an ecological examination of a city's news environment, like the one Friedland (2013) did when looking at the interaction of media sources in Seattle, would look at the sources of news (e.g. newspapers, blogs, radio, television, etc.), as well as the resources available to those sources in the city (audience size, advertisers, etc.).

Niches

The space in which a species competes for survival and "thrives" is known as a niche (Popielarz & Neal, 2007, p. 68). So long as the carrying capacity -- the ability of the niche to provide the resources necessary to sustain the populations in the niche -- is not exceeded, the niche can continue on. But new species entering the niche can affect the ability of the incumbent species to continue to prosper, depending on their ability to compete for resources (Popielarz & Neal, 2007). McPherson (2004) combined the idea of niches with Blau's "multidimensional spatial conception of social structure" (Popielarz & Neal, 2007, p. 68) to create the idea of "Blau space," which "organizes our conception of social networks at the global level, rather than at the individual level," so it "combines the simple image of global level processes of social networks with an evolutionary model of the growth, decline and change in social entities" (p. 264). The key to McPherson's approach is the principle of homophily, as he argues that "people who have similar backgrounds will be more likely to communicate," and thus will be "more likely to have common experiences, common friends, and common relationships to other social entities" (p. 270).

In terms of media, a niche is the space in which a network can find an audience, as media "niche environments are closely related to markets" (Lowrey, 2012, p. 221). If a

broadcaster can secure enough viewers to justify advertising and carrying fees necessary to sustain the costs of broadcasting, the network can operate in that niche. Niches can be general, which in media would mean seeking a mass audience, or specialist, looking only for a discrete portion of the general audience (Dimmick & Rothenbuhler, 1984).

Niche theory is useful in examining how the introduction of a new media outlet affects those organizations already in existence (Dimmick, Kline & Stafford, 2000). The new media competes with the existing entities for consumer time and resources. In the event that the new media targets audience members (resources, in niche terms) that are being served by the existing outlets, they will compete for those consumers. If the new entrant can successfully lure audience from one or more incumbents, the result will be replacement or displacement -- the new outlet takes over some or all of the roles played by the incumbent (Dimmick et al., 2000). As such, older media companies will either have to adapt, adjust to a smaller audience or cease to exist.

The Launch of Fox News

Fox News was just such a new entrant when it launched in 1996. At that time, the television news ecology was populated by the three network newscasts who, despite decreasing ratings, still garnered much of the television news audience, approximately 35 million viewers (Guskin & Rosenstiel, 2012), and CNN and its spinoffs, like HLN, were the only major cable news options.

The networks and CNN produced newscasts that were intended to be objective and neutral, even if by 1996 they had moved towards infotainment and away from the high modern ideals of civic news and a separation between entertainment and informing (Baym, 2009), and as such were intended for a general audience. That was not the case

with Fox News. Rupert Murdoch, in launching the network, sought to provide a news outlet for conservatives and others who believed that the networks and CNN held a liberal bias (Hickey, 1998; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). In this way, Fox News was seeking to enter a delineated space of a specific type of viewer, some of whom watched the competition, but others who may have opted out of television news altogether. In this manner, Fox News immediately sought to operate in a specialist niche, offering news with a conservative slant to a distinct audience of conservative and media-cynical viewers (Bennett, 2001). As such, Fox News' audience is substantially smaller than the viewership enjoyed by each of the network newscasts (Wilstein, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2015), but in meeting the needs of its discrete audience, it is able to prosper, both in terms of profits (Wemple, 2014) and in influencing the political discourse (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008).

Understanding how Fox News fits into the television news ecology -- and understanding what the ecology looked like at the time of the network's launch -- is instructive in demonstrating why and how Fox News was able to become a profitable and influential operation while attracting a relatively small, niche audience, and how the network was thus able to use that success as a base to influence conservative discourse on issues. This kind of information is especially important, given how the general niche filled by the network newscasts for decades atomized at the end of the 20th century, leaving nothing but specialty niches in its wake. As practitioners and scholars seek solutions to fill the gap in civic news left by the decline of daily newspapers and the reduced audience and quality of the network newscasts, understanding the new television news ecology of the early 21st century would be a necessary starting point.

Research Questions

The news environment underwent tremendous changes between 1980 and 2014. New players -- like Fox News -- entered the television news ecology, and established entities were forced to adapt to new conditions. It is Fox News' position in the current news ecology, as well as the current position of the network newscasts, that is the subject of this chapter. Specifically, this chapter asks:

RQ1: What was the pattern of the television news ecology before the arrival of cable?

RQ2: What is the current pattern of the television news ecology?

RQ3: Where does Fox News fit into the current television news ecology? Specifically, what niche does it occupy?

RQ4: How has the rise of Fox shifted the niche filled by the network newscasts?

Method

To establish a map of the television news ecology, the study will use audience members -- their number and characteristics -- as the resources available to the news outlets. The most recent comprehensive examination of news audience demography and psychography comes from the Pew Research Center in a 2012 study. For audience size, Nielsen's ratings for the year 2014 and other relevant years are used, which are accessible via multiple media reports. Patterns are then extrapolated from the data, in line with the media ecology literature. Specifically, the resulting map looks at how the audiences for the television news operations differ in size and type.

To understand the changes to the media ecology from the mid-20th century to the early 21st century, it is first necessary to examine the three factors that made the

emergence of niche news operations like Fox News possible: 1) sociological changes, 2) technological changes, and 3) the changing economic structure of television that resulted.

Sociological Changes

Decline of Traditional Institutions

The years of decline in network newscast ratings, as well as the appearance and development of Fox News, coincides with a period in which U.S. society experienced a decline in traditional community and political engagement, marked by decreased participation in community organizations, from formal ones like church groups, labor unions, fraternal organizations and parent-teacher organizations, to informal associations like neighborhood dinner parties and bowling leagues (Putnam, 2000). Putnam argues that one cause for this decline was the commodification of entertainment in post-industrial America, since as radio and television moved entertainment into the home, people were able to keep to themselves rather than engaging with their communities (Putnam, 2000, pp. 216-246).

In the ensuing years, many scholars challenged Putnam's arguments (Stolle & Hooghe, 2005), with some challenging Putnam's claim of erosion of social capital on its face (Stolle, 2001), others accepting his evidence but dismissing its significance for democracy (Uslaner, 2000-2001), and still others arguing that new forms of social interaction have replaced the organizations in decline cited by Putnam (Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Whether Putnam is correct or not about declining social capital, there is more agreement on the fact that the social infrastructure of the 1950s to the 1970s documented by Putnam did begin to come apart thereafter. The new social interactions and means of association changed how people gathered and

related. And all this took place at the same time network television news viewing declined.

Self-Sorting

Released from the bonds of community, and empowered by the increased economic and infrastructural ability to move and relocate, Americans began a process of self-sorting, as people increasingly moved into more homogeneous communities of people like themselves, seeking “like-minded churches, like-minded neighborhoods, and like-minded sources of news and entertainment” (Bishop, 2009, p. 29). With voters self-sorting themselves into ever more polarized congressional districts (or, as Bishop calls them, “landslide counties,”), politicians were forced to play to these partisan communities, fueling polarization in Washington (Bishop, 2009, p. 47). Some political scientists have argued that polarization is a product of elites and that individuals have not, in fact, sorted themselves politically (Fiorina, Abrams & Pope, 2005). But others have come down on Bishop's side, arguing that sorting exists, it is a major cause of polarization, and that a “substantial portion” of the electorate is engaged and polarized (Abramowitz, 2006, p. 72).

Homophily

Bishop does not use the term, but the concept of homophily lies at the heart of his research. Homophily begins with the idea that people choose to be with “others who are similar” (Monge and Contractor, 2003, p. 223), so that “contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people” (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001, p. 416). Homophily can be based on inherited characteristics like race, gender, age, and religion, as well as on characteristics that can be acquired like education, occupation,

social class, behavior, and beliefs. Bishop is more interested in self-sorting based on the acquired characteristics, but inherited qualities "strongly structure" how individuals relate to others (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 429). The inherited and acquired characteristics can be mutually reinforcing. For example, in the United States, while education is acquired, an individual is more likely to benefit from an education if he/she comes from a higher socioeconomic upbringing. Similarly, in the U.S., whites are more likely to benefit from a higher socioeconomic background than African Americans.

Homophily explains not only why individuals would self-sort themselves into like-minded communities, as Bishop argues, but also how and why news outlets, including Fox News, have relationships with other news organizations and other institutions, as well as with like-minded viewers. For example, Jamieson and Cappella (2008) argue that Fox News works in concert with radio host Rush Limbaugh and the editorial page editors of the Wall Street Journal to frame stories in a way that protects Reagan conservatism and the Republican party. And Fox News is a frequent landing spot for conservative politicians, with Republican office-holders like Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum and Mike Huckabee all having been employed by the network while out of office (Martin & Hagey, 2010).

There are two types of homophily discussed in the sociological tradition, dating back to Lazarsfeld and Merton: "status homophily, in which similarity is based on informal, formal, or ascribed status, and value homophily, which is based on values, attitudes, and beliefs" (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 419). In this chapter, value homophily, concentrating on economic, social and cultural inclinations, is more relevant than demographic indicators like race, gender and age, as this concept provides the

background of the self-sorting in the United States identified by Bishop. But, again, there is interaction between the two kinds of characterizations. For example, there is a correlation between age and race on one hand and Fox News viewership and Tea Party membership on the other (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). This self-sorting lies at the heart of the development of new, niche-based forms of media, after the atomization of the 20th century mass-media system.

Television programmers found that they could generate profit by feeding content to discrete, like-minded groups, in a way that wasn't possible when the three networks controlled the airwaves (Carter, 2013). In the pre-cable era, the three networks had a virtual triopoly on the television viewing audience. As such, they drew audiences far larger than ABC, CBS and NBC do today in a media ecology flooded with hundreds of cable and satellite options as well as the Internet (Wilstein, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2015). The resulting business model required programmers to provide programming that could reach the largest possible audience to sustain advertising rates based on large viewership. With the arrival of cable television and the hundreds of new options, a new financial model emerged. With lower costs and audience expectations, it was possible to turn a profit by identifying a small, specific audience that would be attracted to a kind of programming and who would be attractive to specific advertisers, and then catering a network to that group. This development allowed programmers to concentrate on small but dedicated groups of potential viewers. And the emergence of the Web expanded the niche options even further. Bishop argues that these new niche media offerings are providing the like-minded content for the self-sorted groups. This is the basis of Jamieson

and Cappella's (2008) identification of "echo chambers," in which like-minded opinions circulate among like-minded people without confrontation from opposing views.

Technological Changes

The processes described by Putnam and Bishop, and explained by homophily, created a sociological opening for partisan news operations like Fox News. But without the technological changes of the period, it would have been much harder to reach these new, self-sorted audiences. From the introduction of network television newscasts in the late 1940s through to the launch of CNN in 1980, the networks had no competitors for national television news. But as cable television expanded the number of stations available to viewers, the networks lost their monopoly on television news consumers. CNN stretched the networks temporally, as it offered around-the-clock newscasts, retraining viewers to let go of the idea that television news was something they could get once a day, in the evening, when the networks offered their newscasts. After years of waiting to see what Chet Huntley and David Brinkley or Walter Cronkite had to say about the day's events, viewers no longer had to wait. They could turn to CNN and find out what was going on at that moment. CNN was soon followed by CNN Headline News (now HLN), which offered quick bites on the big stories of the day (Friedland, 1992). The growth curve for cable took some time to truly impact the television ecology. In 1982, two years after CNN launched, only 34 percent of the 27.9 million U.S. television households subscribed to cable television (Pace, 1982). By 2011, 90.4 percent of television households subscribed to cable or satellite services (Nielsen, 2012). So it took some time for the majority of viewers to actually have the opportunity to take advantage of the expanded menu of offerings.

The next challenge to the network newscasts came with the arrival of Fox News in 1996. While the network's initial potential audience was only 17 million cable subscribers (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008), Fox News quickly gained traction, challenging and passing CNN in the ratings by 2001 (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). Where CNN presented network-style news throughout the day, Fox News competed with the networks and CNN by offering an alternative, news and opinion from a conservative perspective. MSNBC, which also launched in 1996, initially aired "a mix of interview, magazine, and news programs" featuring mostly NBC news personalities (Lesly & Rebello, 1996), but by 2003 had turned to politics. Building on the success of "Countdown with Keith Olbermann," which began on March 31, 2003, the network developed a prime time schedule of news and opinion from a liberal point of view.

Connecting Niche Audiences and Programming

The development of cable television, with its expanded menu of programming options, opened the door for alternative news approaches, like the one adopted by Fox News, at the very time Americans were self-sorting into niche communities. The combination of the sociological and technological developments (both of which were necessary) roiled the news ecology, allowing entities like Fox News to find a niche in which it could prosper.

Consumers could now, if they so chose, limit what they read and watched to only topics and points of view they wanted to see, screening out any unwanted or undesirable content (Sunstein, 2007). Empirical studies have showed that viewers selectively expose themselves, choosing media that matches their ideological, political or issue viewpoint.

Iyengar and Hahn (2009) found that when given the option between reading content from Fox News, CNN or NPR, conservatives and Republicans generally chose Fox News, while liberals and Democrats opted for CNN or NPR. Stroud (2008) concluded that not only do partisans choose cable television newscasts that match their political predispositions, the same pattern was present across all media types tested (including newspapers, radio and the Internet). And in a follow-up study, Stroud (2010) found that selective exposure was positively related to polarization.

As a result, programmers, who no longer had to exclusively develop content aimed at mass audiences (like the network newscasts), could target the increasingly self-sorted American communities to provide audiences for narrowly focused cable channels. With lower costs and access to two streams of revenue (rights fees and advertising), these niche cable channels could attract smaller audiences but still be profitable. And in doing so, they provided specific groups with the content they sought.

It was this process of social and technological changes that allowed the 20th century mass media ecosystem to fracture into the highly niched media ecosystem we see today. This targeting of specific audiences manifested itself in the vast array of entertainment- and sports-focused programming that quickly filled newly created cable television channels, and it shaped the development of cable news, at least after CNN launched in 1980 with a strategy to extend the network-style national newscast to 24-hour coverage (Allen, 2001). The result is that of the five highest rated cable news networks in 2014, three -- Fox News, MSNBC, and CNBC -- target specific, narrow audiences (Flint, 2015; Wilstein, 2014; Flood, 2014). The top two in ratings in prime time, Fox News Channel and MSNBC, provide programs with opinion and a partisan disposition

(conservative for Fox News, liberal for MSNBC), while CNBC targets viewers interested in financial news.

Fox News' Audience and Influence

Of the four most viewed cable news channels (CNBC airs alternative programming in prime time), Fox News is by far the highest rated, making up more than half of the average prime time audience for cable news viewers (Flint, 2015; Wilstein, 2014; Flood, 2014). But it is important to note that Fox News, despite its success in the cable arena, still draws far smaller audiences for its programs than the networks do for their evening newscasts. In fact, the top-rated Fox News program, "The O'Reilly Factor," drew 2,667,000 viewers on average in 2014 (Kissell, 2014), less than half the average audience for the lowest rated network newscast during that same year, "The CBS Evening News," which attracted 6,084,000 people on average (Pew Research Center, 2015). Nevertheless, even with a regularly large audience, Fox News has been extremely profitable (Wemple, 2014). By combining large enough ratings for advertisers looking for Fox News' homogenous viewers and large carrying fees reflecting Fox News' role in the national political discussion for conservatives, the network has found ample resources to sustain itself in a niche of the television news ecosystem (Carter, 2013).

However, Fox News' influence goes beyond its ratings. The channel plays a key role in the dissemination of political information to conservatives, so much so that Jamieson and Cappella (2008) argue that Fox News -- in concert with Rush Limbaugh and the editorial page of the Wall Street Journal -- operates as an organ of the Republican Party, performing party functions. Fox News is also influential with voters. A Pew study found that Fox News was the number one source of information for voters during the

2012 presidential campaign, cited by 34 percent of respondents, compared with 29 percent for CNN, 13 percent for MSNBC, 12 percent for ABC, 10 percent for NBC and 9 percent for CBS (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). While not a majority, Fox News was an important source of electoral information for a large group of voters, and its following is larger than those of the three broadcast networks combined.

Nevertheless, Fox News is not a mass-audience network. Its prime time ratings, averaging 1,748,000 viewers (Wilstein, 2014), demonstrate that the channel serves a targeted niche of conservative viewers (see, e.g., Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2011; Jamieson and Cappella, 2008; Coe, Tewksbury, Bond, Drogos, Porter, Yahn, & Zhang, 2008; Morris, 2005) with content that is from a conservative point of view (Chalif, 2011).

Fox News' approach is not surprising, given the network was started in 1996 by conservative media entrepreneur Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch was motivated, at least in part, by ideology, as many conservatives argued that the network news operations operated with a liberal bias (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008; Hickey, 1998). Murdoch's desire to provide a conservative version of the news manifested itself in the choice of Roger Ailes, a longtime Republican operative who had advised Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, to lead the channel (Hickey, 1998).

Fox News' branding suggested more than ideology was at work. Having failed with overtly conservative programming before (Jones, 2012), Ailes had to present Fox News as something else, adopting as tag lines "fair and balanced" and "we report, you decide," as well as "news you can trust," seeking to attract those who did not trust the networks to tell them the truth (Bennett, 2001). So for Fox News, "fair and balanced"

didn't mean that the content was actually fair and balanced, but rather that by providing a conservative point of view, the channel was balancing the mainstream media that it (and its audiences) viewed as having a liberal bias (Iksander, 2005; Conway, Grabe, and Grievess, 2007; Bennett, 2001). By positioning Fox News in this way, Murdoch was identifying an unserved audience and providing it with the content it sought.

The Television News Ecology - Before CNN

The first research question asked what the television news ecology looked like before the introduction of cable television, most notably CNN and its option of 24-hour news. One way to approach the television news ecology is to see it as embedded in a larger news ecology, encompassing all the different sources individuals access for news. Such an approach would have television news taking its place alongside newspapers, magazines, and radio, as well as other less widely circulated sources. In this wider news ecology, the different media were not necessarily in direct competition, as studies of television news usage have found that those most likely to watch television news were also likely to read the newspaper (Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak, 2005; Epstein, 1973). And the network newscasts often followed the lead of major newspapers like the New York Times in determining what stories to cover (Golan, 2006).

That news ecology was substantially less crowded between the 1950s and 1970s than it is today. During those three decades, local newspapers thrived, both in quality of content and circulation (McChesney & Nichols, 2010). And network television news, which began in the shadow of radio news and had to fight for its legitimacy, quickly took off, soon passing newspapers as Americans' most trusted source for news (Baughman, 2007). Television news in this period, at least in the stated intent of the men who ran the

news divisions, was to operate objective, traditional news operations that were separate from the entertainment and business objectives of the rest of the networks (Baym, 2009). Local television news had started to gain in ratings by the late 1960s, as many stations, at the urging of research-backed consultants, shifted away from the network-style, single-anchor newscast to a more team-oriented, friendlier approach that stressed local news of interest to "upper-lower-class" and "lower-middle-class" Americans, rather than the upper-middle-class and upper-class viewers targeted by the content of the network newscasts (Allen, 2001).

So in the 1950s through 1970s, the news ecology was largely made up of the network newscasts, local newscasts and radio providing of-the-minute news, supplemented by daily newspapers operating a day behind and more analytical news publications (like *Time* and *Newsweek*) retrospectively looking at the previous week. The television news ecology was limited to the network and local newscasts, which, by virtue of operating on the same stations, were not really in competition with each other. That is, on a given channel, the local news could only come before and/or after the network newscasts. But viewership was largely interdependent, as the ratings for the national network newscasts in a given market usually correlated heavily with the ratings for the local newscasts in that market (Allen, 2001).

With so little competition, both on and off television, the network news divisions operated in a large, general niche, seeking to attract mass audiences for their newscasts. (See Figure 1.) While the content of the newscasts generally hewed to important national issues that were of interest to the upper-middle class, the audiences of national newscasts in the 1950s through 1970s drew from across the socio-economic range (Allen, 2001).

Simply put, there was not just one or two groups of Americans who watched -- and were targeted by -- the national newscasts during this period. Instead, the networks successfully sought all viewers for its newscasts, so much so that they were able to attract about a third of the country and more than two-thirds of television viewers (Allen, 2001) during their time periods -- 15 minutes until 1963 for CBS and NBC, a half hour thereafter; ABC made the jump to 30 minutes in 1967 (Baughman, 2007).

Between the 1950s and 1970s, the network news operations filled a large, general niche in the television news ecosystem, which took up a large part of the American population with television sets in their homes. With little competition, the niche offered more than ample resources to sustain the networks, which was reflected in large audiences and massive profits for the newscasts (Socolow, 2010; Epstein, 1973). And television news also played a prominent role in the larger news ecology, also filling a large, general niche, with only newspapers playing nearly as large a role. The audiences for television news and newspapers were similar, although the general education level of viewers tended to be lower than the average level for readers of the daily papers (Epstein, 1973).

The Television News Ecology - Today

The second research question asked what the television news ecology looks like today in the post-cable, post-Internet era. Both the news and television news ecologies are far more crowded today than they were in 1979. If the network newscasts enjoyed a general niche in the old television news ecosystem, that general niche has fragmented into a series of specialist niches. With all of the available media and television news options, it would be virtually impossible for any news operation in the current television

news ecology to target a general niche. Some of these specialty niches overlap, and they come in varying sizes (as we saw with the big spread of viewership between Fox News and some of its competitors). And it may be possible for some combination of these specialty niches to approximate the space formerly filled by the newscasts in the older general niche. The homophily-backed self-sorting tracked by Bishop, combined with the explosion in media options -- first with the arrival of cable, and taking off with the popularization of the Internet -- has atomized the 20th century mass media system and set the stage for more niche-based outlets. With multiple cable news channels, most of which operate on a 24-hour basis, the television news ecology now has many players seeking viewers. (See Figure 2.) A nearly endless sea of news websites, blogs, and other sources of news content, including via social media, has left the news ecology far more fragmented and densely populated than the far simpler pre-CNN period.

Fox News' Niche in the Television News Ecosystem

The third research question asked what niche Fox News occupies in the current television news ecosystem. As explained above, by appealing to a conservative audience with a pitch of providing news that, unlike mainstream media news outlets, comes free from a liberal bias, Fox News fills one of the new niches in the television news ecosystem. The network, despite its marketing campaign and even the protestations of its anchors,³ provides news to a specific, discrete group of viewers. Again, the highest-rated prime time Fox News program, "The O'Reilly Factor," draws less than half the audience of the lowest-rated network newscast, "The CBS Evening News" (Kissell, 2014; Pew

³ For example, Bill O'Reilly, on the August 10, 2009 installment of his program *The O'Reilly Factor*, made the claim: "'The Factor' also gives voice to both sides ... [s]o fair-minded Americans know our reporting is honest, while much of the other TV news media is simply in the tank for the president. ... For libs, conservatives and independents alike, there's really no choice." Transcript obtained via LexisNexis.

Research Center, 2015). The audiences for Fox News' prime time programs average 1,748,000 (Wilstein, 2014), which is far below the level of audience sought by the networks.

While the demands of drawing an audience for a nightly news and opinion program are different than those for a weekly entertainment show, a comparison of the ratings can be useful to understanding the different financial needs of a specialty niche like Fox News when compared to the more generalized niche of the networks. For the 2014-2015 season, "The O'Reilly Factor" and its 2,667,000 average viewers would have placed 153rd (out of 188) in the ranking of most-watched network television programs of the season, behind every program on ABC and CBS and all but two offerings on NBC (de Moraes, 2015). In fact, the top 109 network programs of 2014-2015 drew more than five million viewers, and Fox News' average viewership of 1,748,000 would have placed 173rd of 188 programs, only coming out ahead of two Fox (the broadcast entertainment network, not Fox News) shows and the entire CW lineup (de Moraes, 2015). A better comparison, in terms of audience size, for Fox News lies in the ratings of the niche entertainment cable television networks. Fox News was the seventh most-watched cable network in 2014, falling just below the History Channel and just in front of Fox owned-entertainment channel FX (Kissell, 2015). In the way that ESPN (first place, with 2.28 million viewers) caters to the niche of sports fans and Disney (fourth place, with 1.94 million viewers) targets the niche of children, Fox News has built a niche directing its attention to conservatives. Like its cable network counterparts, Fox News has been able to turn impressive profits -- approximately a billion dollars each year -- by producing content for a small but committed niche audience (Wemple, 2014).

Fox News viewers do not just tend to be conservative. The network's audience also skews older, with 53 percent of its viewers age 50 or older (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). In fact, fully 42 percent of the audience for "Hannity" and 40 percent of those watching "The O'Reilly Factor" are 65 years old or older. The Fox News viewers tend to be among the least educated news consumers, with only 24 percent having graduated from college (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). Of the 24 categories of news consumption looked at by Pew, all but talk radio listeners had higher educational attainment than Fox News viewers. Fox News viewers also finished 23rd out of the 24 sources in income, with 33 percent making less than \$30,000 per year and 64 percent earning less than \$75,000 per year (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). The findings on income are not surprising given the age demographic, as, presumably, many of the viewers are retired. Fox News' viewers are among the least informed news consumers, with only 16 percent able to answer four current events questions correctly, and only 45 percent able to get three of the four right, ranking Fox News viewers 19th out of Pew's 24 categories (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b).

The Fox News audience is ideological, with 60 percent of viewers identifying as conservatives, 23 percent as independent, and only 10 percent as liberal (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). The ideological bent is even more pronounced in prime time, as 78 percent of "Hannity" viewers and 69 percent of the audience of "The O'Reilly Factor" identify themselves as conservative. And Fox News' viewership has become more partisan over time, as only 14 percent of Republicans said they watched Fox News regularly in 1998, but by 2009 that number had risen to 36 percent (Pew

Research Center for the People & the Press, 2009). In fact, in 2009, 63 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents said they got most of their news from Fox News (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2009).

So rather than serve a varied, general audience, Fox News not only survives but also prospers in a narrow niche of the news ecology, as the largest specialized niche in the specialist news category. The network has succeeded by providing opinion and news to conservatives, especially those who are older, less educated and less informed, making the lowest incomes (although they may be retired with accumulated wealth). This empirical description of the audience matches what scholars have found in examining Fox News, including Jamieson and Cappella's (2008) assertion that the network is a vital part of a right-wing "echo chamber." In this "bounded, enclosed media space," the on-air personalities can "both magnify the message delivered within it and insulate them[selves] from rebuttal" (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008, p. 76). The idea is that the hosts and guests repeat and amplify each other's messages, so that viewers hear only the conservative-approved position, backed with conservative-approved facts. The result is what media critic Neil Hickey (1998) calls "a bully pulpit for conservative sentiment in America." (p. 35), and what Lance Bennett (2001) describes as a network "creating a brand that attracts a right-of-center demographic audience who hear their own beliefs and values confirmed in the news and then decide that this must be objectivity" (p. 99).

Fox News faces little competition in its corner of the television news ecology. While the network has synergistic relationships with other conservative media outlets, such as Rush Limbaugh's nationally syndicated radio program (in the periods studied in the earlier chapters of this work, the Fox News prime time hosts regularly featured

Limbaugh in video clips commenting on the major issues of the day) and the Wall Street Journal (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008), there are no other significant conservative television news channels in the niche. In fact, by marketing itself as the response to what the network claims are liberal broadcast news outlets (the networks and CNN), Fox News is able to establish itself as a vital news source for the viewers in its niche. Its position also insulates the network from attacks about its content, as the charges of those on MSNBC, CNN or the networks, or those writing for the New York Times or other national publications, can be dismissed as partisan claims of the liberal media, thus insulating the Fox News audience from these challenges to the network's presentation of purported facts. This strategy is made possible by the homogeneity of the Fox News audience, as the network can successfully identify a cache of conservatives and independents who are distrustful of a mainstream media they see as liberal and unreliable and provide them with the conservative arguments on issues the viewers want.

Fox News identified a target audience -- older conservatives who would be sympathetic to a conservative view of the news -- and then crafted programming to meet the needs of that audience. In doing so, the network crafted a niche space in the television news ecology in which it could be not just profitable but also influential, playing an important role in Republican politics and serving as a primary source of news for many Americans (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012c).

Fox News' Niche and Its Themes Opposing Health Care Reform

Looking at Fox News' place in the news ecosystem helps further an understanding of the findings in the previous chapters. When the prime time programs developed

themes opposing health care reform, the network was not just furthering an ideological argument, but it was also developing content to feed its niche. Stories of death panels, rationing and the undermining of Medicare would be of significant interest to Fox News' audience of older Americans. Keeping its viewers engaged allows the network to remain profitable with a relatively small, niche audience. Similarly, the strategies employed by the network discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 make more sense when Fox News' position in the television news ecology is considered. The explanatory and fear-based strategies of tabloid news would be effective in engaging the network's niche audience, as would creating a blend of voices so that the viewer can experience Jamieson and Cappella's (2008) echo chamber while still maintaining the illusion that by watching Fox News, the viewer is being informed. In the end, the network is able to serve its niche audience to maintain the flow of committed viewers that, while small, is nevertheless large enough to be highly profitable and allow the network to find a sustaining niche in the television news ecology.

Fox's Influence on the Broadcast Network News Place in the Ecosystem

The fourth research question asked about Fox News and the network news outlets' place in the television news ecosystem. So much of Fox News' branding, which is, not coincidentally, its niche profile, sets the network apart from the broadcast network newscasts. Fox News' niche in the television news ecology is fed by viewers who find the broadcast networks to be offering a liberal account of news events. These viewers do not trust the broadcast network newscasts, and Fox News serves them by providing them with the content they want to see. As such, to understand Fox News' place in the

television news ecology, it is necessary to examine the more generalized niche occupied by the broadcast network news divisions.

The Broadcast Network Audience Changes and Declines

The position of the network news operations in the television news ecology has radically changed from the pre-CNN years. Where the networks stood virtually alone in the ecology from the 1950s through the 1970s, they now face competition from cable television and the Internet. And while the network newscasts still draw far more viewers than their cable competitors -- the 2014 viewer averages were 8,895,000 for NBC, 8 million for ABC and 6,084,000 for CBS (Pew Research Center, 2015) -- the total audience for the network newscasts has plummeted from 50.1 million in 1980 to 23.7 million in 2001 (Guskin and Rosenstiel, 2012). The networks no longer dominated the television news audience, like when they drew 70 percent of the sets in use or 30 percent of the country to their newscasts (Allen, 2001).

As such, the size of the networks' niche in the television news ecosystem has shrunk, no longer roughly equal in size to the entire system in which it sat. (See Figures 1 and 2.) While most of the cable news channels occupy specialty niches (such as Fox News and conservatives, MSNBC and liberals, etc.), CNN and to a lesser extent HLN battle the networks in the general audience television news niche (at least during the hours the networks present news shows). The network news operations arguably still fill a general niche, in that, unlike Fox News, they do not have an ideological or other set of narrow, specific parameters for content meant to meet the demand of a specific, discrete audience. At the same time, the audience for the network newscasts has narrowed to the point that there are groups, like older Americans, for whom some news is targeted by the

networks (Harper, 2005), as news outlets will produce news on a subject if there is an audience for it (Hamilton, 2004). So if the network news operations still occupy a general niche, it is much smaller than the one they inhabited 35 years ago.

The audience for network newscasts are older, with only 9 percent of viewers between the ages of 18 and 29, 25 percent of those watching 65 and older, and 59 percent being 50 or older (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). Of the 24 news sources Pew examined, only MSNBC's "Hardball" and "Hannity" on Fox News drew older viewers. As such, while still in some ways a general niche, the networks are moving closer to serving a discrete audience, in this case older Americans, although it is unlikely the network news divisions aspire to become servants to that niche audience.

While the viewers of the network newscasts are just below the middle of the pack for income, with 27 percent earning \$75,000 per year or more and 56 percent making \$30,000 per year or more, the network newscast audience has higher income figures than those of MSNBC, CNN, local television news, morning television news, and Fox News (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). The network newscast audience is also better educated than that of CNN, local television news, morning television news, MSNBC and Fox News, with 31 percent having graduated from college (compared with the average of 29 percent for the entire sample).

Despite claims by conservatives that network news exhibits a liberal bias, the audience for the network newscasts is a bit more conservative than the average for the sources Pew studied, with 38 percent identifying as conservative, compared to 35 percent of the sample (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). That said, while the percentage of Democrats watching the network newscasts has remained fairly steady

between 1998 and 2008 (fluctuating between 37 percent and 41 percent), Republican viewership fell during that period from 41 percent to 25 percent (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2009).

The network newscasts can no longer claim to be a primary source for citizens in making voting decisions. While 45 percent of respondents in 2000 said they regularly learned about candidates from the network newscast, only 26 percent made that claim in 2012 (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012).

So while the network newscasts may, in a sense, still consider themselves as inhabiting a generalist niche in the television news ecosystem, the space is a lot less general than it was in the 1950s through 1970s. The current audience for the network newscasts is older, somewhat more educated and somewhat more affluent than the viewers of other television news sources, and far less likely to be Republican. This finding comports with the idea that traditional network news was aimed at an upper-middle class, educated audience (Allen, 2001). Forced to compete for resources/viewers in a way that was not necessary in the pre-CNN era, the networks have responded by, at least to some degree, tailoring their content to meet the needs of their audiences (e.g. an increase in health stories, Harper, 2005). In this way, the network news niche has evolved into a specialized niche, as the general niche it occupied atomized with the introduction of cable television and the Internet.

This placement of the network newscasts, along with the findings related to Fox News' niche, helps explain the studies in the earlier chapters. The exodus of Republicans from the network newscasts makes sense in light of the approach taken by Fox News' prime time programs in covering the health care reform debate. By advancing themes

opposing health care reform, Fox News sought to cater to its niche audience of conservatives. In doing so, the network has, at least in part, eaten into the audience for the network newscasts. By employing hosts who differ from the objective approach taken by the network newscasts, even as two of the three hosts portray themselves as unbiased, as well as by employing tabloid tactics meant to entertain and distract viewers from the more serious network newscasts, Fox News can directly and successfully compete with the broadcast networks for conservative viewers.

The Content of the Broadcast Network Newscasts Change

Not surprisingly, the changes in the audience and audience share of the network newscasts since the 1970s has had a direct effect on the content of the reports. Specifically, the technological changes -- more networks vying for audience in the marketplace -- led to programming changes, as the broadcast news networks, which formerly had no competition, suddenly had to compete for viewers. Before the introduction of cable television, at the time the networks opted to show newscasts (and they generally aired at the same time), the audience, effectively, could only choose between watching news and watching nothing at all. With this power, the networks had the ability to determine the nature of its news programming, including prioritizing civic responsibility over entertainment (Baym, 2009). As such, the period of the 1950s to 1970s was marked by what CBS president Frank Stanton called "an 'impenetrable wall' between 'the newsroom and the boardroom'" (Baym, 2009, p. 11), and an approach CBS News head Richard Salant described as drawing "the sharpest possible line" between television news, "which is dealing with fact," and the "entertainment side of the business," which was concerned with drama (Baym, 2009, p. 27). The networks could

give people what they thought they ought to hear on the news, rather than pander to what people wanted to see in newscasts.

That all changed when cable television emerged and offered the audience more options, both in news and entertainment. As a result, the networks changed their approach to news to what CNN president Jonathan Klein called "emotionally gripping, character-driven narratives" (Steinberg, 2005). Entertainment and news were no longer walled off from each other, as focus shifted, at least in part, from Washington-centered news to more audience-friendly topics like health and celebrity news (Allen, 2001; Baym, 2009).

This change in approach to news is reflected in the findings of the earlier chapters of this work. The blurring the lines of news and entertainment paved the way for Fox News to employ entertainment-based tabloid practices to further its themes opposing health care reform -- which not only fulfilled an ideological imperative, but also helped the network cater to its targeted niche in the television news ecosystem. Similarly, the influence of entertainment opened the door for Fox News' opinion-based programs hosted by large, established personalities who were more likely to entertain viewers than the broadcast network anchors, again helping the network serve its niche. The blurred lines between the newsroom and the boardroom was essential to even conceive a news network with an ideological agenda, as well as one targeting audience members of a specific ideology with content that fails to meet the broadcast networks' standard of objectivity. The substantive changes to the network newscasts after the introduction of cable television paved the way for the practices engaged by the prime time programs on Fox News documented in the previous chapters.

The Overall News Ecosystem

It is also important to note that not only is the television news ecosystem more competitive for viewers, but the changes to the larger news ecosystem may, in fact, be an even larger challenge to the networks, as Americans, especially in younger cohorts, turn away from television news. The total viewership for the network newscasts dropped from 50.1 million in 1980 to 23.7 million in 2014 (Guskin and Rosenstiel, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2015), but cable news programs don't account for the loss of more than 26 million viewers, as the nightly audience for cable news programs only totals to just over 3 million (Flood, 2014; Wilstein, 2014). Many audience members have not replaced network broadcast news viewing, opting out of television news completely, especially in younger cohorts, and online news consumption, especially via social media, has quickly emerged as a leading source of news, again, especially for younger Americans (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012).

While television is still the source most used by Americans to get news, the number of people saying they obtained some news from television the day before has dropped from over 70 percent in the mid-1990s to only 55 percent in 2012 (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). And while 60 percent of respondents said they regularly watched network news in 1992, by 2012 that number had dropped to 27 percent (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b).

Television's biggest challenger, once newspapers, is now the Internet, as online/mobile news is claimed as a source by 39 percent of respondents in 2012, up from 24 percent in 2004 (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). But when you look at usage by age, it is clear that it is older Americans who rely on television for news. Television was a source of news the day before for 73 percent of those 65 or over

and 65 percent of those 50 and over, but only 29 percent for the 18 to 24 age group, 41 percent for those 25 to 29 and 47 percent for those 30 to 39 (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). Conversely, 41 percent of those 18 to 24 reported getting news from online sources, as did 45 percent of the 25 to 29 age group and 47 percent of those 30 to 39, which was the same percentage for television news use in that age group (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b).

More troubling for the future of television news is how few of the members of the younger cohorts rely solely on television to get their news. While 60 percent of those 65 and over exclusively use traditional platforms (television, newspapers, etc.) for news in 2012, only 11 percent of those 18 to 24 do so, which represents a steep drop from 2010, when 21 percent of that age group responded that they relied on traditional platforms for news (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b).

What the Pew data helps us see is the declining space taken up by the network news niche in the news ecosystem. With the entry of an array of online sources, including the sharing of news over social networks, a vast number of new players have entered the space, while the amount of resources to sustain the players (consumers of news) has not increased at nearly the same rate. In fact, a strong argument can be made that the audience for news, in general, is declining, as every age group, including the younger cohorts of 18 to 29 and 30 to 39, is spending less time with news in 2012 than they did in 1994, with an overall drop from 74 minutes to 67 minutes a day (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b).

Network news, once the dominant force in both the television news and news ecosystems, is now closer to a specialty niche, taking a generalist approach to the news,

but serving an increasingly older (and disappearing) audience. Meanwhile, new entrants into the television news ecosystem, usually focusing on specific audiences, as well as the vast array of online options, have eroded away the viewers of the network newscasts.

Fox News Uses Its Niche To Influence Issues

Fox News identified a group of viewers who could sustain the network in a niche in the ecosystem. By providing content built to gain the loyalty of a group of people who were either disillusioned with the broadcast networks or did not watch national television news at all, Fox News found an audience that would financially sustain the network, through advertising and carriage fees (Carter, 2013). These individuals -- mostly white, mostly older, and mostly conservative -- were not being served by any entities in the ecosystem until Fox News provided the content they were seeking. This ecological analysis of how Fox News launched to fill a specialty niche in the television news ecosystem and provided programming to keep its niche viewers engaged helps to explain the findings of the previous chapters. Through an ecological lens, the advancement of themes opposing health care reform on the Fox News prime time programs makes sense beyond any ideological objectives, as the network was providing the content for the conservative echo chamber Jamieson and Cappella (2008) described. Since these viewers' aversion to the broadcast network newscasts was based on a claim they held a liberal predisposition, Fox News' efforts to present itself as fair and balanced, as seen in the use of varying host styles in prime time, acts as a further tool to attract and retain the niche audience on which the network can survive. In this same way, the prime time programs' use of entertainment-based tabloid practices serve both of these objectives: the audience is engaged and activated, protecting its niche in the ecosystem.

From an ecological point of view, Fox News may have opposed health care reform, but, at heart, what the network was doing in prime time was creating and maintaining a niche, at least in part at the expense of the broadcast networks. In doing so, Fox News was quickly able to earn up to a billion dollars in profit each year, even while only drawing less than two million viewers each night, far less than the broadcast networks.

Ultimately, though, the story of Fox News' identifying and occupying its niche in the television news ecosystem is more than just a story of a division of a multinational corporation finding a way to earn more money. Sure, the television news ecosystem looks like a place where corporations who successfully identified and occupied an unserved niche were able to prosper. CNBC catered to those interested in financial news, HLN took aim at viewers interested in a simpler, lighter take on the news, and CNN sought to provide more traditional, objective news, establishing itself as the go-to place to turn for breaking news stories, all attracting an audience with identifiable demographics and psychographics to support the niche. MSNBC, eventually, with the success of Keith Olbermann's program, sought to serve liberals looking for news from the progressive point of view, moving within the ecosystem to find the resources necessary to survive. But as MSNBC has consistently failed to draw the size of audiences reached by Fox News, it is telling that in 2015, NBC appears to have decided that the liberal niche is not large enough to support MSNBC and is changing the approach of the network from liberal content to an extension of NBC News with a hard news, objective approach (Concha, 2015). In doing so, MSNBC is targeting yet another space in the ecosystem that, the network hopes, offers resources that will allow it to survive.

What makes the ecological position of Fox News unique is that it combines not just the financial aspects of occupying a niche in the television news ecosystem, but also a platform for an ideological agenda. HLN, CNBC and CNN seem to cover their beats primarily as a way of finding a niche audience that can provide a profit for the networks. MSNBC did not begin as a liberal network, and the network's abandonment of its liberal approach in 2015 seems to confirm that ideology was solely a way to find an audience that could sustain the network in the television news ecosystem. But Fox News clearly is interested in more than making money. The network's role in Republican politics is well documented (e.g. Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Sherman, 2014), and its influence may even extend to how members of Congress vote (Clinton & Enamorado, 2014). By 2012, no other television news source was relied on more than Fox News by Americans making election-related decisions, with the network serving more voters than the three broadcast news divisions combined (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012c).

As discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, Fox News' claim of practicing fair and balanced journalism may not be accurate, but the network uses the self-branding as a way of building and sustaining its audience. While serving this audience provides Fox News with the resources to sustain in a niche and generate profits, it also gives the network a platform from which it can affect the national political conversation. Fox News not only has major Republican political figures on its shows as guests, but it has hired national candidates like Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum and Mike Huckabee to be analysts (Martin & Hagey, 2010). Through its secure position in the television news ecosystem, it can provide leadership on issues from opposing health care to defending

Donald Trump's controversial comments while campaigning for president in 2015 (Sherman, 2015).

As such, Fox News' content is directed at two sets of audiences: On the one hand, it needs its core viewers -- mainly white, older and conservative -- to remain in business. At the same time, though, Fox News is directed at conservatives at large, including elites, in a way that seeks to influence the direction of discussion. When the prime time programs developed themes opposing health care reform, they were providing content its niche audience craved. But the network was also providing all conservatives with a way to talk about the health care issue. It was not just the hosts who furthered the themes. The guests, too, were using the same language and logic, and eventually, average viewers were, too.

A telling example of this kind of circulation of terminology and ideas was evident when the Fox News prime time programs in 2009 embraced the theme that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was attacking protesters of health care reform. The theme was not only articulated in a seemingly coordinated way by the prime time programs' hosts, as elite guests also used the same terminology and approach. For example, former press secretary for President George W. Bush Dana Perrino said on the August 10, 2009, "Hannity": "But at this point while the Democrats have compared those of us who oppose health care, they've compared us to Nazis, they've called us brown shirts, crazed mobsters that are manufactured by the RNC, and now they're accusing people of being un-American, all in an effort to shut down dissent." Perrino uses the same terminology ("they've compared us to Nazis") as the hosts, and positions the statements in the same way. Similarly, on the August 10, 2009, "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren,"

Republican former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum said, "They wrote an op-ed, and they called the American public showing up to these town meetings 'un-American.'" Like Perrino, Santorum uses the same approach and language as the hosts furthering the theme opposing health care reform.

But it was not just elites using the same language and approaches as the Fox News prime time hosts. The themes were absorbed by the viewers, too. Health care protester Dennis Feldt said on the August 11, 2009, "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" that Pelosi "says that we're a bunch -- or, you know, we're a swastika crowd." On the August 17, 2009, "Hannity," protester Katy Abram said, "I've heard Nancy Pelosi saying about we're a mob and swastikas and all that stuff." It seems that Jamieson and Cappella's echo chamber is present with regard to this Fox News theme opposing health care reform. The Fox News version of what Nancy Pelosi said was not only evident in the words of the hosts. Republican elites and like-minded individuals, presumably Fox News viewers, had adopted the Fox News language and story, as well.

The Fox News theme that Nancy Pelosi had called protesters Nazis and un-American demonstrates how the network did not solely adopt themes to provide content its niche audience would embrace, but also how Fox News used its secure place in the television news ecosystem as base from which it could seek to influence elites and individuals as to what the language and approach surrounding issues should be.

Conclusion

Scholars researching television news for most of the 20th century had to primarily concern themselves with network and local news. Those looking at the network newscasts were studying a mass medium, as the newscasts sought the largest possible

national audiences to make their business models work. In ecological terms, the network newscasts operated in a general niche, drawing from a large portion of the population. But with the atomization of the mass media system at the end of the 20th century, after the introduction of cable television and the Internet, the basis for most of that 20th century research has changed. The network newscasts no longer can, in the crowded television news ecology, seek the same kind of mass audiences their predecessors were able to attract for more than three decades of the 20th century. As the work describing the television news ecosystem has shown, the network newscasts are just another specialty niche (albeit a large one), looking for its discrete space in the ecosystem while surrendering viewers to new, even more specialized niche outlets (being displaced, in ecological terminology). Those seeking lighter fare have HLN, while those looking for financial news can go to CNBC. Liberals have had MSNBC for a like-minded slant on the news, and conservatives can watch Fox News.

In this way, using an ecological approach to television news helps us explain the rise and success of Fox News. To some extent, the network found a place in the television news ecosystem by seeking to capture an audience (resources) that were not being served by the, at-the-time, general niche of the network newscasts. In this way, Fox News entered the general niche of the networks and offered a small group of viewers something they lacked, thus providing Fox News with the resources to survive in this specialty niche. While the network certainly attracted some viewers who had abandoned the broadcast networks, given some of the similar demographics of Fox News viewers and the network newscasts, namely in regard to age and race, as well as the collapsing ratings for network news, it seems that displacement was also present in the ecosystem, as Fox

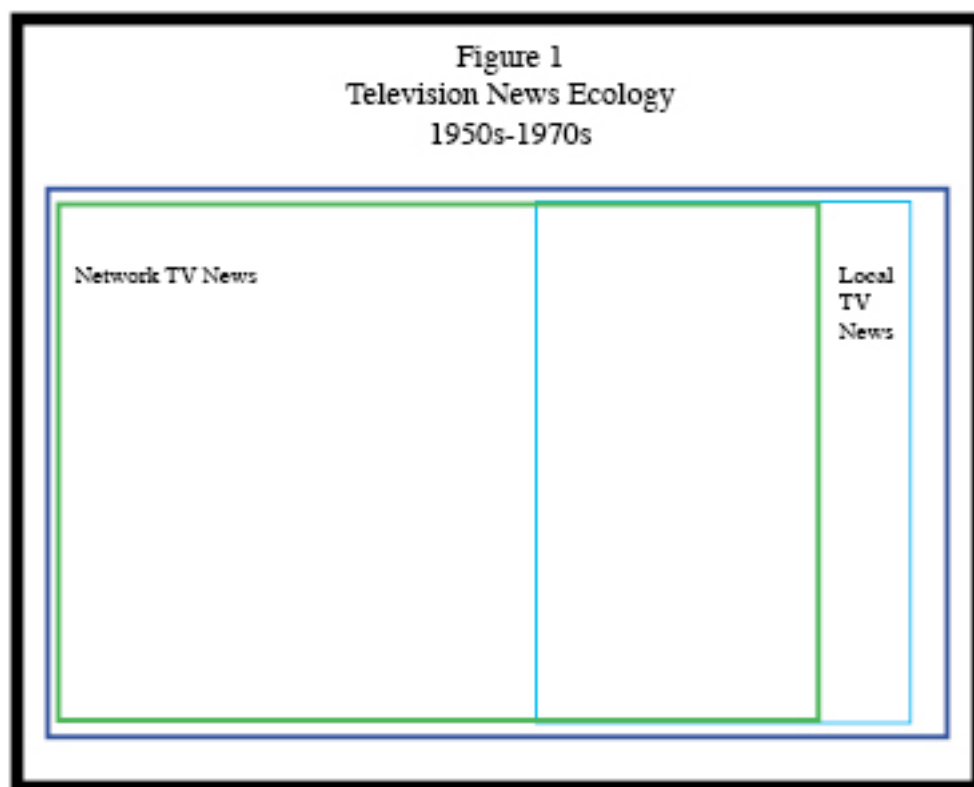
News took over some viewers from the networks who were happy to find an alternative source closer to their ideological dispositions. Understanding Fox News' development in ecological terms also helps us see that whatever the network's footprint is in the nation's political conversation, it is still a specialized niche, serving a small, discrete, specialized audience.

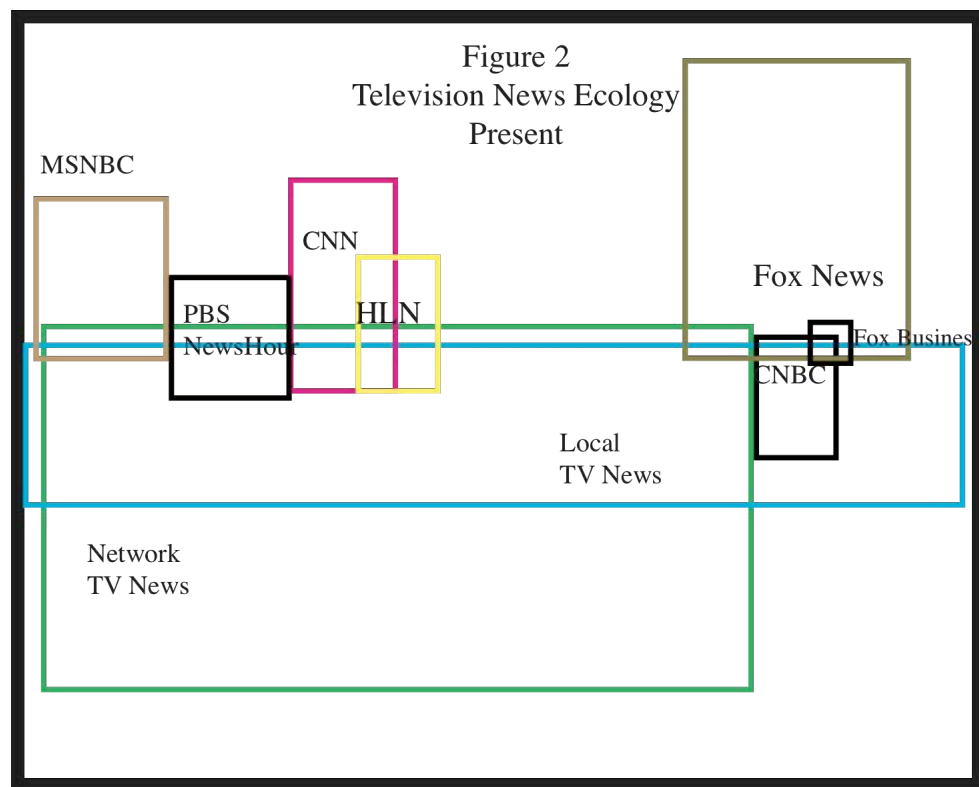
However, the ecological approach to studying television news also demonstrates how Fox News can use its success in identifying and serving a niche audience to extend its influence beyond its limited viewership. By securing the attention and loyalty of an active group of conservatives, the network can then use that space to provide terminology and arguments it would like to see become the conservative response to important issues. As a result, when the network adopts a theme, the language doesn't just come from the hosts. Over time, the Republican and conservative elites who appear on the programs also use the same language and make the same arguments, and those words and claims eventually find their way to the individuals who watch the network.

The repositioning of network news and the success of Fox News in filling a niche are key and demonstrative examples of how the television news ecosystem changed between the 1970s and today, moving from a space dominated by the three networks to a crowded, more specialty-based environment where the players seek to find differentiated spaces in which they can serve a discrete audience. Researchers and practitioners would be well served by understanding the changes as changes in the television news ecology.

Figures

(Figures group the channels by their niches, and as such the bounded areas represent their niche resources, which in media correlates with the market/audience for each channel. Note that the sizes of the niches are not to any precise scale, but are meant to generally represent the relative size of the niches. Overlaps are based on inferences from the Pew data and literature, where available.)





Chapter 7: Fox News in Prime Time After the 2012 Election

Between the 2009 and 2014 periods of study, a significant change took place in the prime time lineup of Fox News. Megyn Kelly, who had anchored afternoon and morning programs for the network, was given her own prime time program in 2013, "The Kelly Files," airing at 9 p.m. weekdays after "The O'Reilly Factor" (Foxnews.com, 2015). Fox News moved the former occupant of the 9 p.m. slot, "Hannity," to 10 p.m., which bumped "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" from 10 p.m. to 7 p.m. The media coverage of the move centered on Kelly's age and gender, arguing that Fox News was seeking to lure more younger and female viewers, as the network's audience had become heavily skewed toward older males (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b; Wemple, 2013a). While this conclusion may well be true, it likely overlooks a larger, macro goal of the network in moving around its successful prime time lineup.

This chapter argues that the changes instituted in Fox News after the 2012 election were not just an effort to attract younger and more female viewers (in line with the search for a niche with the resources to support a network discussed in Chapter 6), but also acted to recalibrate the balance in the network's prime time programs so that it could continue to advocate for conservative positions while maintaining its branding as being a "fair and balanced" news operation. The moves made by Fox News after the election serve to validate the findings of the previous chapters, showing how the network not only aims to effectuate ideological goals but also maintains its self-representation as an unbiased provider of news. First, an account of the key events is provided to lay out the argument as to Kelly's impact on Fox News' prime time schedule. Then, an analysis of the Fox News prime time host styles in the 2014 period of study is employed to

empirically examine how the hosts' presentations changed -- if at all -- between the 2009 and 2014 periods of study, with the 2012 election and the 2013 addition of Kelly to the network's prime time lineup occurring in between the two periods.

Fox News and the 2012 Presidential Election

On election night 2012, November 6, Megyn Kelly, the host of the 1 p.m. daily program on Fox News who had been tapped to co-anchor the network's election coverage, announced that Fox News, like most of the other news networks, had determined that President Barack Obama would win Ohio and thus the 2012 presidential election. Karl Rove, a former advisor to President George W. Bush and a major fundraiser for Republicans in the 2012 election cycle, who was serving as a Fox News analyst that night, agreed with officials in Republican nominee Mitt Romney's campaign who thought the call of Ohio was premature. As Rove made the argument that with a quarter of the vote in Ohio still uncounted, it was too soon to say who would win the state, Kelly interrupted him to explain that the network's experts had done the projections based on the locations of the uncounted votes. Rove allowed the experts were "smart guys," but continued to argue that calling the race was premature. Kelly, again interrupting and sounding a bit exasperated, scolded Rove, "But you know how the science works. They know the counties, they know the expected outcomes" (Berg & Teitelbaum, 2012; Weinger, 2012). The discussion ended with Kelly -- at the direction of Fox News CEO Roger Ailes (Sherman, 2012) -- walking on-air from the anchor set to the room containing the network's projection team and interviewing the experts as to why they were comfortable saying that Obama would, in fact, win in Ohio.

The Kelly-Rove exchange is telling, as it represents changes that would take place at Fox News after the 2012 election, both in content and form. Rove and fellow partisan firebrand Dick Morris, both of whom had made predictions that Romney would win the 2012 election, were largely taken off the air in the beginning of 2013, with Fox News' head of programming reportedly saying, "the election's over" (Sherman, 2012). And Kelly, both younger and perceived as being less of an ideologue than the other Fox News prime time hosts, was moved into a prime time slot in September 2013 (Wemple, 2013a).

What drove Fox News, by far the most successful of all the cable news networks, with the largest audience (Pew Research Journalism Project, 2014a), revenue (Pew Research Journalism Project, 2014b) and profits (Pew Research Journalism Project, 2014) of any cable news channel, to make these major changes to its prime time schedule? This chapter argues that two factors were at play: First, a desire to attract a younger audience to prime time. Second, a need to reconfigure the balance of host styles as audiences became more aware of the network's approach after nearly a decade of offering a prime time schedule of O'Reilly, Hannity and then Van Susteren.

The Run-up to the Election

After Obama's election in 2008, Fox News pivoted from supporting a Republican president's policies (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008) to rallying against those of a Democratic president, as Chapter 2 demonstrated with the network's opposition to health care reform. Fox News also promoted alleged Obama administration scandals like those involving the attack on the American diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya (Maloy, 2014), and the Internal Revenue Service (Boehlert, 2013). In both cases, Republican-led House committees found no wrongdoing on the part of the president (Schmidt, 2014;

Rein & Eilperin, 2014). Nevertheless, the prime time programs continued to discuss these issues as if they were important revelations about the administration.

With the arrival of 2012, like with most news outlets, Fox News turned its attention to the upcoming presidential election. The network's high-profile analysts Rove (Mali, 2012) and Morris ("The O'Reilly Factor," October 31, 2012) predicted a decisive Romney victory, despite the projections of less partisan pollsters and analysts -- such as Nate Silver, Intrade, the Washington Post, and a host of political scientists -- who foresaw a fairly easy re-election for the president (Plumer, 2012).

Changes After the Election

Fox News made a number of high-profile changes in the months after the 2012 election. Most prominently, Kelly was given her own prime time program in Hannity's high-profile 9 p.m. slot. At the time of the change, "Hannity" was the second-highest-rated program on Fox News, trailing only "The O'Reilly Factor" (Fox News Channel, 2012). "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren," the network's fourth-highest-rated program, in turn was moved to the periphery of prime time at 7 p.m. Moving Kelly to prime time was not an exercise in replacing a low-rated show with an on-the-rise star at the network. Rather, to add Kelly, Fox News, a network that, at the time, had gone nearly fifty consecutive quarters as the top-rated cable news network in prime time (de Moraes, 2015a), disrupted three of the four time slots between 7 p.m. and 11 p.m., with only "The O'Reilly Factor" remaining in its position.

Immediately after the 2012 election, Fox News moved to distance itself from some of its most high-profile conservative and Republican expert analysts, with Fox News CEO Roger Ailes reportedly telling the network's executives that he wanted "faces

associated with the election off the air" (Sherman, 2012). As a result, for a time after the election, both Karl Rove, who was especially under the microscope after challenging the network's Ohio projection, and Dick Morris were not booked as guests on Fox News prime time programs. Former vice presidential candidate and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin also left her role as an analyst at Fox News shortly after the election (Sherman, 2013).

By the time 2013 came to a close, Fox News had undergone major changes, especially with the addition of Kelly to the prime time lineup. And these changes came about despite the network continuing to amass large audiences and profits in prime time.

Fox News' Credibility After 2012

After the 2012 election, Romney's failure to win despite the predictions of the network's on-air analysts put Fox News in an uncomfortable position, given its branding of being "fair and balanced." With most organizations reading the polls as pointing toward an Obama win, the Romney predictions of Rove, Morris and others on Fox News' prime time programs resulted in the network appearing not only out of touch, but, more dangerously given Fox News' self-representation, as an outfit blindly loyal to Republicans. Ailes told the Fox News election team at 5 p.m. on election night, "if things don't go your way tonight, don't go out there looking like someone ran over your dog" (Sherman, 2012). Yet, when Fox called Ohio, and thus the election, for Obama, Rove's refusal to accept the result was the story of the network's coverage. The gap between the reality of the 2012 election and the picture painted by Fox News' prime time programs, both leading up to election night and culminating in Rove's election night dispute of the

Ohio projections, was hard to explain for a network that bases its marketing on claims of fairness.

Rove's election night reaction to the Ohio projection was not the beginning of Fox News' perception problems, but instead a high-profile manifestation of a trend away from trust in Fox News' self-professed neutrality. By 2012, more people did not believe what Fox News aired than took the content as truthful (Pew Research Center, 2012). In fact, of the thirteen news sources examined by Pew, Fox News was tied with USA Today as the least trusted source, one of only three sources with negative trust numbers, 49 percent believing and 51 percent not believing (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a). The drop in credibility was likely especially troubling to Fox News given how quickly the network's perception in this area had declined. In 2002, 67 percent of Pew respondents found Fox News to offer believable content (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a).

The perception problem, though, was largely outside of Fox News' niche audience, as 67 percent of Republicans still found the network believable in 2012, compared to only 37 percent of Democrats and 43 percent of independents. In fact, Fox News was the only one of Pew's thirteen news sources that was trusted more by Republicans than Democrats. The changes in believability numbers by party further bolsters the case that the drop in the network's credibility was driven by Democrats, not Republicans. Between 2002 and 2012, some Republicans had lost faith in Fox News, as the network's believability numbers with GOP respondents fell from 76 percent to 67 percent. But during that time, Fox News largely lost the faith of Democrats, who went from 67 percent believing the network's content in 2002 to only 37 percent doing so in

2012. Fox News was able to keep most of its core audience convinced it was providing accurate information, but by 2012, its claims of fairness and balance were no longer resonating with Democrats and independents. And this was problematic, given Fox News' repeated claims that the network provided accurate information, covering all sides of issues under discussion.

The data seems to point to the run-up to the 2012 election as a key time when trust in Fox News dropped. The network's trust numbers declined slowly and steadily between 2002 and 2012, going from 67 percent in 2002 to 62 percent in 2004 to 58 percent in 2006 to 59 percent in 2008 to 56 percent in 2010 before dropping seven full points to 49 percent in 2012 (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a). CNN and MSNBC's credibility ratings followed similar patterns during the same time period, so it seems that the audience lost trust in all cable news outlets -- local television news' numbers remained mostly constant -- not just in Fox News (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a). Even if Fox News' decline in trust was part of a larger perception that cable news could not be trusted, nevertheless most viewers were no longer accepting Fox News' long-time marketing claim of fairness and balance.

As discussed in Chapter 6, Fox News established itself as a profitable and influential self-described news network by identifying and serving a niche audience of conservative and mainstream media-skeptical viewers who either did not like the broadcast news networks or had given up on television news completely, and providing them with conservative-supporting content while claiming to be an unbiased source of information. Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated how the choice to present stylistically varying hosts and using entertainment-based tabloid news practices helped Fox News

serve its conservative viewers while maintaining a self-representation as a fair and balanced source of news that airs both sides of important issues. With Fox News' declining credibility, somewhat with Republicans but more visibly with Democrats and independents, the entire structure on which the network operated was eroding, even if only slightly. As will be discussed further below, the changes in Fox News after 2012, while ostensibly about the age and gender of viewers, can be seen, in a more macro sense, as directed toward rebuilding the network's claims of fairness and balance on which its business model is based.

Fox News' Audience Gets Older and More Male

That is not to say that the increasing narrowness of the Fox News audience wasn't also in evidence. As discussed in Chapter 6, Fox News' prime time viewership was older and more male than nearly any other news source. Of the twenty-four news sources examined by Pew in a 2012 study, "Hannity" had the oldest audience, with 42 percent of viewers 65 years old or older and 66 percent of the audience 50 or over. "The O'Reilly Factor" was the fifth oldest show, with 40 percent 65 or older and 64 percent 50 or more (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b). For the entire Pew sample, only 17 percent were in the 65-plus group and 43 percent were 50 or older. ("On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" was not one of the programs studied by Pew.) Similarly, Fox News' prime time viewers were overwhelmingly male. "Hannity" tied for the fifth most male program in Pew's study, with only 43 percent of viewers being female. "The O'Reilly Factor" tied for seventh, attracting women for only 44 percent of its audience. The Pew sample actually skewed female, with 51 percent of respondents being women (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012b).

By 2013, after the 2012 election coverage, despite Fox News' dominance of cable television ratings, there were troubling signs for the network based on the demographics of its viewers. The ratings for Fox News' prime time programs declined 34 percent among 25-to-54-year-olds from 2012 to 2013, and while the decreased viewership in a nonelection year was a factor, the network's ratings in that key demographic had substantially declined over the previous five years, from 557,000 to 379,000 (Wemple, 2013; Carter, 2013). By the second quarter of 2013, Fox News' ratings in the 25-to-54 demographic fell to its lowest levels since 2001, with CNN coming close to Fox News in that age group, and the median viewing age for the network climbing to over 65 (Carter, 2013).

The 2013, post-election ratings decreases felt by all of the cable networks were felt across the Fox News prime time lineup. "The O'Reilly Factor" was down 26 percent in the 25-to-54 demographic and even with all viewers, "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" had 13 percent fewer viewers than the show attracted the previous year and 35 percent fewer viewers between 25 and 54, and "Hannity" was off 5 percent in total viewers and 28 percent in the key demographic (Know, 2013). Fox News might have drawn the seventh-most viewers of all cable channels in 2014, but the network was not even in the top 20 cable networks in viewers in the 18-to-49 age group favored by advertisers (Kissell, 2015).

While Fox News was the unquestionable ratings leader among cable networks in 2013, boasting of 45 consecutive quarters of drawing the largest cable news audience (Know, 2013), the network saw troubling signs with the demographic makeup and trends with its audience. In this way, as discussed in Chapter 6, Fox News had to ensure that the

space it occupied in the television news ecosystem had sufficient resources -- the number and type of viewers -- to prosper. Towards that end, it makes sense that the network would, despite its first place position, seek to attract younger viewers that are more attractive to advertisers. So giving Kelly her own prime time program and moving around three-fourths of the 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. schedule made sense along these lines. Kelly had the tenth most watched program on the network, even though it aired in the afternoon, and, at 42, she was younger than the 51-year-old Hannity, whose 9 p.m. slot she took over (Wemple, 2013). Fox News' decision to move Kelly into prime time had the desired effect. By November 2014, her new program, "The Kelly Files," was second in ratings only to "The O'Reilly Factor" on Fox News and first in the 25-to-54 demographic, leading the network to a 12 percent increase in 25-to-54-year-old viewers from the previous year (Shaw, 2014).

Beyond Demographics: Protecting the Fox News Brand

As discussed above, between 2002 and 2012, audiences lost trust in Fox News, with the biggest drop coming from 2010 to 2012 (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a). Again, it is clear that the loss of viewer confidence was part of a larger trend of Americans losing faith in cable television news (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a), but regardless of the reason, the public perception of Fox News was, for the first time, in danger of upending the branding of fairness and balance the network took great pains to perpetuate, as evidenced by Chapter 3's examination of the varying host styles employed by Fox News in prime time. The network marketed itself to media skeptics as "fair and balanced" and with the promise that "we report, you decide," but those claims start to lose power when more than half of the audience,

including about a third of Republicans, don't believe Fox News' information can be trusted (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a). Fox News was able to hold on to its core audience, but as those audience members aged and were not replaced by younger viewers (Carter, 2013), the network's business model, which, as was discussed in Chapter 6, not only provided for profits but also a base from which Fox News could influence the national conversation on important issues, was in danger of becoming less stable.

And, again, the Fox News coverage of the 2012 election further challenged the public perception of the network's trustworthiness. The predictions of a Romney victory that never came, especially as the prognostications differed from the predictions of an overwhelming number of polling entities that Obama would win (Plumer, 2012), portrayed Fox News as cheerleading for the Republican candidate rather than providing accurate information. In this light, it is not surprising Ailes wanted to distance the network from the 2012 election after it was over (Sherman, 2012).

Fox News' perception problem is exemplified by Rove's refusal to accept the election results on election night, making it difficult for Fox News to maintain its claims of providing a fair discussion of important issues. Post-election reporting of the network's election night coverage gravitated to Rove's behavior, portraying him and the network in a negative light. For example, the Washington Post wrote that Fox News "was the place to go if you wanted to watch political contributor Karl Rove try to hijack a network and get it to un-declare Ohio for Obama" (de Moraes, 2012). The Los Angeles Times described Rove's behavior as a "meltdown" and said he "staged a civil war on the air" (Blake, 2012). In an article titled "Karl Rove rejects reality," CNN's then media critic,

Howard Kurtz, said Rove refused to "accept reality," calling his behavior an act of "partisan warfare" (Kurtz, 2012). Kurtz raised the issue that Rove's dual role as a Fox News analyst and head of political action committees supporting Republican candidates constituted an important problem, as it "blur[red] the line between journalism and politics." Jeremy Peters went even further in the New York Times, describing "an extraordinary on-air confrontation between Mr. Rove, a Fox commentator, and the network's team of voting analysts" before asking, "What role was Karl Rove playing when he heatedly contradicted Fox News?" (Peters, 2012). Peters, like Kurtz, criticized Rove's dual, blurred role on Fox News.

The prevailing sense that Rove's election night behavior was partisan and placed Fox News in the role of a participant on the Republican side of the election rather than as an unbiased news organization covering the vote had to trouble the top executives at Fox News. This kind of conflation between Fox News and the Republican Party may not be new (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008), but the public perception of such an alliance challenged the network's self-presentation as a fair, balanced provider of news. The perception of the network by the public had, for many Americans, caught up with the reality of Fox News' practices.

By the end of 2012, for the first time in the network's 16-year, successful run, Fox News faced a perception by a majority of Americans that it was not providing trustworthy, unbiased information. This position posed a significant problem for Fox News, as the network's branding and its strategy for identifying and retaining a niche audience depended on a self-presentation of being a fair provider of information. As such, the changes that came in late 2012 and into 2013 must be viewed in this light. Even

as Fox News was drawing the largest cable news audience and producing healthy profits, its future depended on adjusting its presentation to realigning perceptions with the network's branding. In fact, Ailes began easing the network's opinion shows from supporting the Tea Party toward more mainstream Republican ideals as early as 2011, what he called a "course correction," as Fox News, among other things, let Glenn Beck leave, who Ailes called "a bit of a branding issue for us" (Kurtz, 2011).

Why Would Fox News Make Changes While Maintaining Its Dominant Ratings?

Chapter 3 demonstrated how the varying host styles of the Fox News prime time programs allowed the network to advance seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform legislation while maintaining the Fox News marketing claims of fairness and balance. Specifically, in the 2009 period of study, while Sean Hannity was allowed to openly take conservative positions, he was balanced by Bill O'Reilly, who claimed to give voice to all sides and avoided explicitly embracing the network's more controversial claims, and Greta Van Susteren, who portrayed herself as a reporter and often left it to her guests to make the attacks. But, as discussed above, audience perceptions of Fox News changed between 2009 and 2014. Americans, including many Republicans, no longer trusted the content coming from the network. The loss of credibility meant, among other things, that the balance of prime time hosts at the network was no longer allowing for a perception that Fox News was producing something other than content meant to support the conservative view on issues. When Ailes claimed in 2012 that the network had only one conservative, Hannity, and the rest were "twenty-four liberals" and "libertarians or populists or you can't really tell" (Boehlert, 2012), the audience, including many Republicans, no longer believed him.

In this light, the elevation of Kelly to the prime time lineup in 2013 can be seen as an attempt to rebalance the host styles to recreate a formula by which the network's claims of fairness and balance could be perceived as more credible. If O'Reilly and Van Susteren were no longer enough to act as a counterweight to Hannity, Kelly could be viewed as the right anchor to play that role. Her role as the voice of reason on election night in 2012, telling Rove, "But you know how the science works" (Berg & Teitelbaum, 2012), was a symbolic representation of Fox News' marching orders for 2013 that "the election's over" (Sherman, 2012). Kelly's reputation as reasonable endured even with her history of supporting the Fox News position on issues (Wemple, 2013), so much so that the network continued to put her in high-profile positions, including moderating the first Republican 2016 presidential debate in August 2015. In addition to Kelly's election night taming of Rove, she also received media coverage for occasionally taking on major Republican and conservative figures, including challenging Dick Cheney on Iraq (Breitman, 2014) and Donald Trump on his remarks about women (Martin & Haberman, 2015). Kelly's debate performance is especially instructive, as the coverage of the event often centered on positive evaluations of the Fox News moderators, led by Kelly, with headlines like the Guardian's, saying, "Forget Donald Trump -- Megyn Kelly won the Republican debate" (Smith, 2015).

Kelly's elevation to prime time seemingly had the effect Fox News intended with the move. On the surface, she helped boost ratings, with "The Kelly File" by 2014 rising to the second-highest-rated program on Fox News and the most watched in the key demographic of 25-to-54-year-olds (Shaw, 2014). But, as importantly, Kelly also provided Fox News with a face of reasonableness, fairness and balance in prime time just

when trust in the network's content had fallen to its lowest levels, including among Republicans (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a). The balance of 2009 between the public perceptions of O'Reilly, Van Susteren and Hannity had been upended by 2013. Kelly helped recalibrate and restore the balance, with her program now acting as the counterweight to more overtly conservative programming on Fox News' prime time schedule, preserving the ability for the network to claim fairness and balance in its programming.

O'Reilly, Hannity and Van Susteren on Health Care in 2014

As noted in Chapter 3, the August 2009 period of study was well suited to a comprehensive examination of the styles of the Fox News prime time hosts, as health care reform was a pervasively discussed topic, appearing on nearly every program on every day of the period. While the issue was heavily covered in March and April of 2014 due to the White House's April 1, 2014, announcement of how many individuals enrolled in health care plans under the Affordable Care Act exchange, health care reform would go undiscussed for days at a time on the three prime time programs under study. While the 2014 period was not well suited to the kind of comprehensive analysis performed in Chapter 3, a study of the period is a useful way to empirically examine how the styles of O'Reilly, Hannity and Van Susteren developed between 2009 and 2014. Did the hosts conduct themselves and their shows in the same way? Or was there a change? Such an examination would allow us to see the dynamics discussed above with regard to Kelly's introduction to the prime time lineup. As such, a qualitative textual analysis of the 2014 period -- using the same three programs, "The O'Reilly Factor," "Hannity," and "On the Record With Greta Van Susteren" -- was conducted using the same method described in

Chapter 3, of the same 2014 period examined in Chapters 2 and 4: Monday, March 24, 2014, through to Friday, April 11, 2014, built around the April 1 White House announcement on ACA enrollment. The 2014 data supports the changing dynamics on Fox News' prime time lineup, demonstrating that O'Reilly and Van Susteren, in subtle ways, became more overt in advancing seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform legislation, thus leaving an opening for a recalibration of the network's prime time host balance.

Chapter 3 had found that, to maintain the network's branding as "fair and balanced," only one of the three prime time hosts -- Hannity -- held himself out as a conservative and regularly explicitly espoused the network's themes opposing health care reform. The other two hosts self-presented as unbiased, with Van Susteren relying on her history as a reporter and O'Reilly vocally positioning himself as a defender of the common man from government overreach, beholden to no party. This host dynamic allowed the network to, at the same time, maintain a claim of balance while also developing and furthering seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform legislation.

By 2014, the host balance had changed in a small but noticeable way. With Kelly joining the prime time lineup in 2013, she acted as a counterbalance to Hannity's open conservatism, giving O'Reilly and Van Susteren room to subtly move in the direction of more aggressively advocating certain Fox News themes.

Easy to Get an Extension Theme

One 2014 theme in which O'Reilly and Van Susteren acted more overtly in furthering a Fox News argument opposing health care reform legislation than they had in

2009 was the mischaracterization of how easy it was to get an extension to enroll in health care by the April 1, 2014, deadline. Van Susteren furthered the theme in four segments during the period of study, and O'Reilly's show featured the claim in three segments, while the argument was made only once on "Hannity." For example, Van Susteren was aggressive in the lead up to the April 1 enrollment reporting date in advancing this theme. As in 2009, she allowed guests to make openly inaccurate statements, like when Republican Senator John Thune said on March 25: "And you can kind of get an extension for any kind of hardship. And you can kind of define what a hardship is. So, it's -- it's very loosely constructed." But Van Susteren was a bit more overt in furthering the theme than she had been in 2009, asking this question that spurred Thune's response:

This delay, as I understand it, and correct me if I am wrong, is that there is a two-week extension beyond March 31st in which you can elect to have a delay, right? I mean, it's not -- two weeks is not the new deadline. It's not April 14th. April 14th is the deadline for you to figure out you need an extension.

The extension was only allowed for people who had logged into the system before April 1 but were unable to complete purchasing insurance due to technical problems with the system (Goldstein, 2014). So, unlike in 2009, when Van Susteren was mostly passive in the process of her guests advancing the network's themes opposing health care reform, in 2014 Van Susteren made a statement that mischaracterized the nature of the extension, setting up Thune to make the claim that was factually inaccurate.

Similarly, O'Reilly was more aggressive in furthering the enrollment theme in 2014 than he had been in advancing the network's themes in 2009. For example, on March 31, the day before the enrollment deadline, O'Reilly's introduction to the first segment of his program included this statement:

Tonight is the deadline to sign up for Obamacare but it's really not. There is no deadline -- the rollout of the affordable healthcare law is complete chaos. So sign up when you want, just tell the IRS you had trouble with the website, everybody does. That's all you've got to do.

There is no translation as O'Reilly had done with death panels, and no back-door attacks like O'Reilly had engaged in on Nancy Pelosi. Here, O'Reilly is explicitly furthering the network's theme on the extension deadline in a way he did not in 2009.

The White House's Enrollment Numbers Cannot Be Trusted

Both O'Reilly and Van Susteren were direct and aggressive in March-April 2014 in furthering the theme that the enrollment figures released by the White House could not be trusted. O'Reilly only addressed the theme on two programs, but when he did, he dropped any pretense of balance in making the unsubstantiated claims questioning the veracity of the enrollment data. On March 31, the day before the enrollment numbers were to be reported, O'Reilly said:

The government doesn't want to tell the folks what's going on. They are hoping that we'll just give up. They are hoping we'll get so sick and tired of Obamacare and hearing about it, we'll just give up.

There is no translation or circumvention here. O'Reilly explicitly tells his audience the administration "doesn't want to tell folks what's going on."

Van Susteren was also direct in furthering the theme that the White House's enrollment data could not be trusted, featuring the claim in eight different segments during the period of study (compared to two on O'Reilly's program and four on "Hannity"). On March 28, Van Susteren began a segment of her program with the following tease: "Straight ahead, does the Obama administration know more than it is telling us about who has signed up for and paid for Obamacare? House Republicans say yes, and they have the evidence." As discussed in Chapter 3, Van Susteren often used

teases to preview the network's 2009 prime time themes opposing health care reform. But this 2014 tease differs in two ways. First, the tease is now not just a question, but ends with an affirmative statement supporting the claim, in this case that House Republicans "have the evidence" to prove the administration had been dishonest. Second, in 2009, Van Susteren would back down from the absolute statement of her teases after the segment began, returning to her self-presentation as an unbiased reporter once she began to discuss the issue with her guests. But as the handling of the March 28 tease shows, that pattern did not always repeat in 2014. After teasing that that the House Republicans "have the evidence" of White House misconduct, Van Susteren continues to openly support the theme in the introduction to the segment:

This week, the White House touting that six million Americans have signed up for Obamacare. No mention though of how many actually paid for Obamacare. But is there more to the story? Something the Obama administration is not telling us? House Republicans say there is evidence suggesting the administration also knows who has paid his first premiums despite telling Congress otherwise.

Van Susteren participating directly in a theme that was based on a claim that had been shown to be untrue (Greenberg, 2014) represents a change in her approach between 2009 and 2014.

The day the positive enrollment figures were announced, April 1, Van Susteren started a show segment with the question, "Is it the real deal or fuzzy math?", before showing video clips of four different conservatives questioning the data and the ACA itself. Van Susteren then did not just let her guest, conservative reporter Elise Viebeck, advance the theme that the administration's data could not be trusted, but instead she engaged in the attack, such as saying:

You see, we don't know -- and that's true, we don't know. Does the president know? Does Secretary Sebelius know the answers? Are they just not telling us? Could they

tell us a good ballpark figure? If they can say that about 7.1 million have signed up, can they tell us any of these other answers?

Again, by acting in concert with her guest and using the supporting clips in the tease, her hosting style had subtly shifted from 2009 to 2014, as Van Susteren became active in advancing the 2014 theme in a way she did not in 2009.

Enrollees Were Not Young, Not Paying and/or Not Uninsured

Much like the claim that the president could not be trusted on the enrollment data, the Fox News hosts and their guests questioned whether those who were enrolling in the health care exchange created by the ACA were young, actually paying for insurance after signing up and/or uninsured when they enrolled. These claims were factually incorrect (Bhardwaj, Coe, Cordina & Saha, 2014; Greenberg, 2014; Kessler, 2014; U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services, 2014; Voorhees, 2014), yet Van Susteren pressed this claim in eight different segments, and O'Reilly featured the theme in three segments, compared to four segments for the more openly aggressive Hannity. For example, on March 28, days before the White House's enrollment announcement, Van Susteren teased her first segment on the ACA by saying: "Straight ahead, does the Obama administration know more than it is telling us about who has signed up for and paid for Obamacare?" From the beginning, she raised the question as to whether people were paying for health insurance through the exchange. When she began the first segment, she was again skeptical, saying that while the administration had released positive preliminary numbers, "No mention though of how many actually paid for Obamacare." Again, Van Susteren directly furthered the theme, not relying on her guests to make the direct attacks as she did in 2009. This practice continued as she brought on Republican Congressman Kevin Brady and, later, Karl Rove to make the same charges.

Once the enrollment figures were announced on April 1, Van Susteren played a series of video clips of Republicans challenging the veracity of the data before saying:

Well, 7.1 million, that's a good gross number, it depends on what it really [is] made up of. What don't we know about that 7.1? That's very important.

Later, as noted above, Van Susteren challenged whether the enrollees paid for the insurance rather than just signing up:

Does the president know? Does Secretary Sebelius know the answers? Are they just not telling us? Could they tell us a good ballpark figure? If they can say that about 7.1 million have signed up, can they tell us any of these other answers?

Again, Van Susteren openly challenges whether the enrollees paid or were uninsured. A series of conservative guests followed, all of whom challenged whether the enrollees were paid, young and/or uninsured. Hannity was the last guest to appear with Van Susteren, and he called the ACA a "Ponzi scheme" and questioned whether young people were enrolling. By making the claims herself and teaming with Hannity to further the theme, Van Susteren employed a more overt style in supporting a Fox News theme opposing health care reform legislation than was apparent in the 2009 period of study.

O'Reilly forcefully and explicitly challenged the veracity of the enrollment numbers, both on March 31 before they were announced and on April 1 after the figures were released, calling the process a "ruse" designed to push the country to a single-payer system. As part of his monologues on those two days, he also explicitly raised some of the questions related to whether the enrollees had paid, were young and were uninsured. On March 31, after conservative reporter Bernard Goldberg questioned these aspects of the exchange enrollees, O'Reilly, as part of a speech attacking the administration, said:

It doesn't matter how many people paid their premium or how many people who are 12 years old are getting insurance, because it's all a ruse. And you know it's a ruse. The government doesn't want to tell the folks what's going on.

The next day, on April 1, O'Reilly continued in the same vein, claiming that the ACA is intended to push the country into a single-payer system. During his monologue he said: "They don't want to give you stats. They don't care who pays. They don't care about any of that."

O'Reilly directly embraced several 2014 themes, including the veracity of the enrollment data, who bought insurance in the federal exchange and that the ACA was the first step toward full socialized medicine, in a way that he did not in 2009 with death panels, the White House Web post looking for "fishy" information, and the purported statements about protesters by Nancy Pelosi.

2014 and the Recalibration of the Prime Time Host Styles

In 2014, the hosts played similar roles as they did in 2009, but O'Reilly and Van Susteren acted more directly in furthering certain themes opposing the ACA. These changes would not have been possible without another host playing the role of a counterpart to Hannity, and Kelly filled that position when she joined Fox News' prime time lineup in 2013, as she carried with her a reputation for being more even-handed than some of her Fox News colleagues. In this way, the 2014 interplay between the hosts works to the same effect as how the hosts acted in 2009. In both cases, the balance exists between the openly conservative Hannity and the other hosts with more balanced self-representations. However, as the public's perception of Fox News changed over time, with the public becoming more skeptical of the network, O'Reilly and Hannity (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a), Fox News had to recalibrate the host balance. Now Kelly provided the balance for Hannity, freeing Van Susteren and O'Reilly to, at times, take a more direct route toward supporting the Fox News themes, especially

as O'Reilly's claims of providing unbiased content became less convincing to a majority of viewers. Van Susteren and O'Reilly could continue to claim to be unbiased, and certainly some viewers, especially among Republicans, most likely accepted this representation. But for those who no longer trusted Van Susteren and O'Reilly, Kelly now could be the show on which the network could place its claims of fairness and balance.

Conclusion

When examining the nature of Fox News' prime time programming in Chapter 2, the findings from an examination of three weeks of 2009 shows was largely supported by a second study of three weeks of programs in 2014. But while Fox News may not have changed too much in that five-year period, the network's audience and the American public's perception of Fox News did undergo changes during that time. Fewer Americans believed Fox News' content by 2014, and while some Republicans lost faith in the network, Democrats and independents especially no longer thought Fox News' branding of being fair and balanced was, in fact, true. And between 2009 and 2013, Fox News' prime time audience got older and more male, with the network's ratings in the key 25-54 demographic shrinking in prime time. The network may have still garnered the biggest audience by far, but the nature of the viewers threatened the network's future viability in its niche. As importantly, the changing perceptions of Fox News threatened its branding representations of fairness and balance.

Because of these developments, Fox News' response to its election night coverage, including its elevation of Megyn Kelly to prime time in 2013, provides a real-life demonstration of some of the network's strategies discussed in Chapter 3. Once the 2009 host balance between the openly conservative Hannity, the self-described unbiased

protector of the common man O'Reilly, and the reporter Van Susteren was undermined by the audience's changing perception of Fox News, the promotion of Kelly, who held a reputation as a reasonable reporter, can be seen as more than just an effort to attract younger viewers. Kelly actually allowed the network to recalibrate the balance in prime time, with Kelly now acting as the counterweight to Hannity's openly conservative approach, as O'Reilly and Van Susteren no longer retained the trust in the audience to play that role for all of the network's viewers. Kelly, who had acted as the voice of reason when Karl Rove refused to accept the Ohio projection on election night in 2012, was by 2013 better able to make a claim of balance and fairness like the one O'Reilly had made in 2009.

It should be noted that Fox News' handling of Donald Trump's attack on Kelly after the Republican presidential debate in August 2015 demonstrates how the network might struggle maintaining the host balance in 2015 and beyond as it did in 2009. After Kelly's tough questioning of Trump at the debate, Trump attacked Kelly over the next two days, insulting her by saying, "you could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever" (Peters & Victor, 2015). Trump reportedly told Hannity he was "never doing Fox again" (Sherman, 2015a). When faced with emails and other correspondence from Fox News viewers that supported Trump and criticized Kelly, Ailes chose to support Trump, giving him a platform on the network ("Fox and Friends" and "Hannity") to defend himself and softening the network's defense of Kelly (Sherman, 2015a).

The audience reaction to Kelly's questioning of Trump complicates Kelly's role as the "fair and balanced" counterweight to Hannity. On the one hand, Kelly, like O'Reilly

and Van Susteren in 2009, supports the Fox News marketing self-presentation. Toward that end, she said on her first program after the Trump attack on her: "I certainly will not apologize for doing good journalism, so I'll continue doing my job without fear or favor" (Peters & Victor, 2015). That kind of statement that positions her as an accurate, fair and balanced journalist fulfilled her role in the host balance in prime time on Fox News. However, ultimately, the core Fox News viewers -- not the general American audience that had lost trust in Fox News -- was not interested in "good journalism" or a journalist doing her job "without fear or favor." Fox News viewers, apparently, were more interested in Trump's conservative positions on immigration and other issues discussed at the debate and did not have a problem with Trump's attacks on Kelly. When Ailes had to take a side, he followed his audience, supporting Trump over Kelly (Sherman, 2015a). In this case, Fox News was unable to both support the conservative position on events and maintain a self-representation of fairness and balance. Future research will have to determine whether the Fox News practices and strategies discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 can successfully continue in light of the network's need to maintain its niche by serving its core audience while also branding itself as an unbiased source of information, despite the loss of trust the network has experienced in the last few years. Nevertheless, the changes at Fox News after the 2012 election, including the subtle shift in the host styles exhibited by O'Reilly and Van Susteren, demonstrate how the network has successfully been able to balance these dual goals, allowing Fox News to earn substantial profits while securing a place from which it can play a role in dictating and supporting the conservative position on important issues.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The atomization of the 20th century mass media system has led to drastic changes in the content and audience of television news. The emergence of first cable television and then the Internet has opened up new avenues for the distribution of news, and, as a result, scholars have followed these new paths, grappling with questions related to the new developments that challenged the established pathways of news from the second half of the 20th century. The academic task has been daunting, as the new types of information sources have sometimes challenged the very premises on which areas of communication research are based. For example, studies of the hostile media effect assumed that news was objective and unbiased (Vallone, Ross, and Lepper, 1985), but the theory had to be updated to account for partisan news (Coe, Tewksbury, Bond, Drogos, Porter, Yahn, & Zhang, 2008).

The emergence of Fox News as a profitable and influential source of information for conservatives is one of those avenues opened up by the social and technological changes of the late 20th century. Scholars certainly took note of Fox News' quick rise to the top of the cable television pecking order. Some studies used Fox News as an example of a conservative news source, juxtaposing it against other journalistic outlets like CNN and NPR (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Other examinations asked whether Fox News was biased, again assuming the network to be a news outlet like CNN and the broadcast networks (e.g. Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Harmon & Muenchen, 2009). Much scholarly effort has also gone into looking at the effect of Fox News in various areas, again assuming the network to be a journalistic news operation (e.g. Clinton & Enamorado, 2014; Eargle, Esmail & Sullivan, 2008).

The content and practices of Fox News, however, have largely escaped scholarly scrutiny. Aside from two examinations of "The O'Reilly Factor" (Conway, Grabe & Grieve, 2007; Peters, 2010), peer-reviewed examinations of what Fox News puts on the air have not been in evidence. Further, the works that did address Fox News have routinely assumed, explicitly or impliedly, the network to be a journalistic news operation, either a conservative counterpart to MSNBC or one of a number of television news outlets like CNN and the broadcast networks.

The Main Findings of This Study

The previous chapters have attempted to fill this gap in the literature and provide a clearer picture of the nature of Fox News' content and practices in prime time. The analyses therein have adduced several key findings. First, despite the assumption in the literature that Fox News is a news outlet, the network did not adhere to the traditional values of objectivity in its prime time programs when covering health care reform in 2009 and 2014. Instead, the three programs advanced twelve seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform legislation -- in both 2009 and 2014 -- that were based on underlying assertions that were false or distorted. By tapping into the value system of the viewers and seeking to shield the audience from opposing arguments (or to discredit these arguments and the people advancing them), the prime time programs worked more closely to the elements of propaganda.

In addition, one way in which Fox News was able to engage in propaganda-like programming while maintaining a self-presentation as a news operation was by making use of practices from tabloid news. By prioritizing explaining what events mean over the presentation of facts, simplifying complicated issues into basic binary propositions,

employing melodrama and stoking fear in the audience, and diverting attention away from opposing arguments, Fox News was able to further propaganda-like themes opposing health care reform legislation within the confines of self-described news programs.

Also, by choosing hosts with varying host styles to participate in the advancement of the themes opposing health care reform, Fox News was able to support the conservative position on health care reform while maintaining its branding as a "fair and balanced" news operation that "reports" and lets the viewer "decide." In this way, the overt support of themes opposing health care reform legislation by Sean Hannity would be balanced by the more subtle support of Bill O'Reilly, who portrayed himself as a protector of the average citizen without an allegiance to a party, and Greta Van Susteren, who projected a persona as an established reporter in line with her biography of having served in that role at CNN before joining Fox News.

Further, Fox News' practices were not simply the result of a partisan operation being forced to contend with the programming realities of a 24-hour news cycle. During the same 2009 period that the Fox News prime time programs were advancing twelve seemingly coordinated themes opposing health care reform legislation, the two prime time hosts at MSNBC were supporting health care reform but doing so in a different manner. There were no seemingly coordinated themes based on nonfactual premises on MSNBC. Instead, one of the hosts, Rachel Maddow, showed an allegiance to accuracy, especially through the use of on-air corrections. She approached her reporting in a way reminiscent of the rhetorical practice of persuasion, seeking to transparently use facts and arguments to persuade the listener to voluntarily change positions. The other prime time

host, Keith Olbermann, was less fair and balanced, but he did show a commitment to facts and accuracy. However, Olbermann used the facts mainly as a battering ram to argue against and discredit arguments opposing health care reform, as well as the individuals making those claims. As such, the practices at Fox News and MSNBC during the same period covering the same issue were quite different.

The changes at Fox News instituted after the 2012 election illustrated many of the findings outlined above. By 2012, Fox News -- as had all cable news outlets -- experienced a steep drop in the number of viewers who trusted the network's content. Most Democrats and independents, and even some Republicans, no longer believed the Fox News marketing claims of fairness and balance. In effect, the gap between what Fox News claimed to be and what it did on the air had become visible to many more Americans than ever before. With this development as the background, Fox News' promotion of Megyn Kelly to a prime time slot despite the network's ratings success made sense even beyond an effort to attract younger and female viewers. The promotion of Kelly, who enjoyed a reputation for reasonableness (to go with her history of expressing conservative views), can be seen as an effort by Fox News to attempt to recapture the public's acceptance of its self-presentation as a fair journalistic operation, especially after Kelly's high-profile role as the voice of reason when Karl Rove refused to accept the network's projection on election night 2012 that Barack Obama would win Ohio. Kelly could provide a counterbalance to Hannity, as the public started to question O'Reilly's claims of being fair and balanced. However, the Fox News audience's support of Donald Trump over Kelly after the two clashed at a 2015 debate for Republican

presidential candidates illustrates the difficulty Fox News will have going forward in maintaining its journalistic self-representation in light of the demands of its audience.

Finally, the findings of the previous chapters, when paired with audience data, allows for an ecological study of Fox News' place in the television news system, demonstrating how the network has been able to not only prosper but maintain a platform from which it can influence the discussion of issues by identifying and serving a niche audience of conservatives and skeptics of the broadcast news networks and CNN.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

While qualitative textual analyses provide opportunities for deep, context-based examinations of a text, it should also be recognized that such analyses also carry the limitation that the findings cannot be generalized beyond the situations under study. As such, the analyses in this work provide insight into how Fox News' prime time programs covered one high-profile issue during two three-week periods. As such, the studies cannot tell us how Fox News conducts itself outside of prime time, especially during the day when its offerings skew more to news than opinion (even if the audience is far smaller for these broadcasts), nor do they address how the prime time programs cover issues other than health care reform. The studies here offer valuable insight as to how Fox News operates in prime time, but further research would be needed to determine if these findings are applicable to other facets of the network.

Even with the studies' limitations, the work can still help scholars take more nuanced and specific approaches when studying Fox News. It is hoped that the findings here will challenge some of the untested assumptions about Fox News that have been imbedded in the literature. Above all, those writing about Fox News, especially in

academic research, would be well served to avoid automatically treating the network, at least in prime time, as a news outlet. Experimental researchers using Fox News as an example of a conservative news source to study audience behavior on issues need to be mindful of how Fox News differs from other self-described television news outlets, as well as audience perceptions of Fox News as opposed to those of other outlets. Further, it would be useful to go beyond Fox News' partisan and/or ideological predisposition when studying the network, taking into account the actual practices at play. Fox News in prime time is not a mirror image of MSNBC, but rather Fox News is a unique entity, using the indicia of a news operation to define and support the conservative position on issues without actually adhering to the journalistic objective values of accuracy and fairness.

Media Trust and the Role of Journalism in Democracy

As discussed in Chapter 3, while it might be beneficial for news to be provided by partisans with a point of view on an issue, such efforts, to serve the best interests of democracy, need to be transparent so that the public understands the motives of those making the claims. From Tocqueville to Lippmann to Habermas, transparency of intent has been an essential element of information necessary to allow a democracy to function. As such, this work should not be viewed as an attack on or condemnation of partisan news. If there are cautionary findings in the previous chapters, they go to this issue of transparency. The challenge to democracy is not that an information-providing organization has become financially successful and influential by advocating for one side, but rather that the organization has done so while claiming to be an unbiased news outlet. Between 2006 and 2012, Americans lost trust in the content of cable news (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012a). It seems likely that the strategy of the largest

cable news network to project itself as an unbiased news operation while providing partisan content sometimes removed from the facts has contributed to this lost of trust.

From the founding of the country, journalism was intended to play the role of the "fourth estate," watching over the government and reporting on corruption and other misconduct (Starr, 2009). And the press is also supposed to play a key role in providing information for citizens to use in voting. Journalism is presently facing the challenge of a collapsing business model that has affected the press's ability to perform its traditional watchdog and informing functions. A loss of trust only further hobbles the ability of journalism to play its traditional roles in American democracy. The link between Fox News' use of journalism as a façade from which to provide partisan arguments that sometimes lack veracity and a loss of trust is an important area of study, given the challenges journalism faces now.

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