



## Political Interviews: Examining Perceived Media Bias and Effects Across TV Entertainment Formats

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*See the companion work to this article*

*"Political Media as Discursive Modes: A Comparative Analysis of Interviews with Ron Paul  
from Meet the Press, Tonight, The Daily Show, and Hannity"  
by Geoffrey Baym in this Special Section*

Americans' confidence in news is at an all-time low, and many are turning to entertaining programming, such as cable-talk programs like *Hannity* or political-satire programs like *The Daily Show*. These programs regularly feature interviews with public officials, potential candidates, and celebrities. In this new hybrid news-entertainment environment, what are the effects on citizens' perceptions of media bias and its effects on themselves, as well as others? This study, combined with results from a qualitative analysis (Baym, this special section), demonstrates that different program brands have different effects on perceptions of bias and effects. Respondents were randomly assigned to view an interview with a potential 2012 presidential candidate, and results demonstrated significant differences among them in perceived bias toward the candidate. Perceptions of the candidate, the host, and the program's makers also differed significantly across the program conditions. Implications for media effects research are discussed.

In June, 2012, TV news reached an all-time low. Gallup found that Americans expressed the lowest confidence ever in television news in the 20 years since they began asking the question, with only 21% of respondents indicating that they had a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the forum. This new low did not detract from the years-long trend, but its low number sent shock waves through scholarly and media circles alike. What was also remarkable was that the drop could likely be credited more to liberal and independent viewers than conservative ones—those who have long suspected media of being biased to a liberal viewpoint (Morales, 2012).

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At a turning point in political media—where blogs, social networks, and other online sources often trump TV in the fight for citizens' attention—it is necessary to examine what, exactly, makes television news programming evoke such poor confidence. This project, along with its qualitative counterpart by Geoffrey Baym in this special section, examines one component of such programming: the political interview. Through an experimental design, citizens' perceptions of credibility, bias, and effects are examined after viewing an interview clip from different programs, but with the same guest and from the same time period of airing. Results demonstrate that simple exposure to a clip produced significant differences among viewers, even after controlling for demographic factors, including partisan identification.

### **Literature Review**

The nature of television programming in the current era is one of hybridity. Comedy programs take the appearance of news programs, and news programs are increasingly adopting techniques from comedy programs. Indeed, as a *New Yorker* profile of *NBC Nightly News* anchor Brian Williams proffered, "the anchor who can tell a joke—and take one—is the one who remains relevant" (Swansburg, 2011, para 1; see also Grant, 2011). The televised interview, in particular, is by nature a hybrid format, often mixing the formality of traditional journalism with the informality of a talk show (Baym, 2005; Ekström & Lundell, 2011; Hutchby, 2011). That these programs are also quite popular makes studying their effects worthwhile. Indeed, in the second quarter of 2011, viewership of Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* trumped other late-night programs in key demographics, with well over two million viewers per episode (Comedy Central, 2011). At the same time, news and opinion programs like *Hannity* on Fox can draw an average of 2.5 million viewers (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011). But the format and style—not to mention the content—of these shows and their interview segments can vary drastically from one episode to the next, depending on whether they are structured more traditionally or not.

### **Defining the Political Interview**

In theory, the televised journalistic interview—especially with a candidate for high office—represents that idealistic version of Habermas' public sphere. In this vision, the candidate is asked about his or her policy stances, and is then forced by the interviewer to defend those positions in the face of opposition. But in reality, these interviews take the form of rule-governed speech situations that rely on specified rituals (Baym, 2007). Deluca and Peebles (2002) argue that televised political discourse—as seen in political interviews—does not reflect rational debate, but rather, emphasizes image, emotion, and style. Baym (2007) suggests, however, that there is a space in between the ideal of the public sphere and the image-centered focus of the televised interview. His textual analyses of interviews on programs like *The Daily Show* (2007, 2009) reveal that these interviews reflect a traditional perspective on the journalistic interview combined with a more conversational, celebrity-type chat—a "hybrid mode of publicity and political discourse" (Baym, 2007, p. 94).

The traditional journalistic interview is often combative, relying on "gotcha" journalism, or an attempt to reveal insider information from public officials and political pundits (Jones, 2009). These

interviews (such as the ones seen on programs like *Hannity* or NBC's *Meet the Press*), Jones contends, are "centripetal," meaning that they present viewers "with a single conception of what 'makes sense' at any given moment" and are rooted in an "agreed-upon reality that other insiders are expected to accept" (ibid., p. 104).

At the other end of the spectrum are interviews on programs like *The Daily Show*, NPR's *Fresh Air with Terry Gross*, or *Charlie Rose* on PBS, which become more like a conversation than a traditional journalistic interview (Baym, 2007; Jones, 2009). Especially since *The Daily Show* redesigned its set in 2005, the interview segment has become a "serious hearing" of issues (Jones, 2009, p. 129). Jones refers to the discussions on these programs as "centrifugal" (ibid., p. 104). They don't follow the same rules of traditional pundit shows, primarily because they are structured to include citizens' voices, rather than solely political insiders'. In other words, the format gives both the guests and the audience a way to talk about politics in more common, everyday language. Perhaps because of this, *The Daily Show*, in particular, has become a desired outlet for candidates, pundits, and politicians to appear on (Baym, 2007).

While "format" can serve as a broad umbrella term describing all the structural and contextual features of a program, what makes these differences in format interesting is that each program has cultivated a defining brand in order to be more competitive in the marketplace (Kim, Baek, & Martin, 2010). In this sense, each program—and its inherent interviewer personality—is likely to produce unique responses among viewers, even if the person being interviewed is held constant. Indeed, audiences are quite good at identifying and understanding the underlying dimensions of a program's brand personality and traits (Chan-Olmstead & Cha, 2007), and perceptions of bias are often closely related to a program's reputation (Baum & Gussin, 2008). Moreover, viewers are able to draw a distinct line between traditional hard news and political comedy, in terms of both content and perceived effects (Becker, Xenos, & Waisanen, 2010). This suggests that brand personality can serve as a heuristic for viewers who are asked to evaluate bias and effects of certain programs. The present research proposes that, along with individual attributes (such as partisan identification and political interest), a program's brand personality should also play a role in perceived bias, third-person effects, and first-person effects.

### ***Effects of TV Format on Perceptions***

Vraga et al. (2012) and others argue that much of the research examining media effects on individual perceptions—like bias and third-person effects—have overly emphasized the personal characteristics that drive these perceptions. Yet as Bracken notes, above and beyond the content of programs, "relatively little is known about television *form* in forming perceptions" (2006, p. 723, emphasis added). Numerous studies have demonstrated that the size of the television screen, personality, or even the number of cuts can influence perceived credibility of political candidates (Bracken, 2006; Newhagen & Nass, 1989; Reeves & Nass, 1996).

Additionally, some scholars have argued that format and other structural features of television program can influence how immersed viewers become (i.e., presence), as well as perceptions of source credibility (Bracken, 2006; Gunther, 1992). Each of these studies suggests that the format and structure of programs, above and beyond content and character, can influence viewer perceptions. And there are

important implications for these perceptions; Newhagen and Nass concluded that, "differences in the nature of the media themselves, and how information from them is perceived, may lead to different information processing strategies" (1989, p. 284). Of course this conclusion is not new—Marshall McLuhan (1964) made the idea that "the medium is the message" a popular notion throughout the 1960s and 1970s. And rhetoricians, like Dan Hahn (2002), have long acknowledged the power of form. But with an increasingly diverse array of content, research shifted more toward the content of televised programming and how audiences responded to that, rather than to structural and contextual features of programs. Although this is an essential line of research, it has perhaps distracted us from the effects of structure, format, and nature of media and the programs therein, particularly when it comes to studying effects on perceptions.

More recent research has shown that televised programming has distinct contextual and situational factors that can produce effects beyond the content itself. Specifically, Vraga et al. (2012) examined the effects of a host's style in political television interviews, concluding that more combative styles have different effects than more entertaining ones. They argue that scholarship has continued to lag in examining the structural features of televised programs, lamenting that such studies are:

limited in that they focus only on individuals' preferences for such formats and selection biases in media choices. Given this, past research has failed to isolate the effects of media styles and therefore can only speculate about how different media formats affect the consequences of this consumption. (ibid., p. 7)

In their study, Vraga et al. (ibid.) controlled for the host style by producing original televised interviews with three distinct host styles: the correspondent (akin to *Face the Nation*), the combatant (like *Meet the Press*), and the comic (like *The Daily Show*). Results demonstrated that the correspondent-style host produced perceptions among respondents as being more informative and credible than the other styles, suggesting that perceptions can differ dramatically, even in a tightly controlled experiment where only host styles are manipulated. But what about viewing actual programs in a real-world environment? And since Vraga et al.'s study was conducted among college students, what differences might we find with adults? The present study builds on these limitations by examining the effects of actual televised content in a more ecologically valid environment.

The implications of structural and contextual effects on audience perceptions are great; if perceived trust, credibility, and other perceptions are affected by a one-shot viewing of a program, long-term effects could influence other attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors. The present study will examine perceptions of media bias, as well as first- and third-person effects—which describe perceived effects on oneself and perceived effects on others, respectively.

Given that brand personalities are an essential component of political interview programs like *Meet the Press* or *Hannity*, as well as comedic ones like Jay Leno's *Tonight Show* or *The Daily Show*, format and structure can have potentially greater impact on perceptions than the content from program to program. Combined with a textual analysis of the programs' features (Baym, this special section), such an analysis demonstrates the effects of viewing a real interview clip, even if it is in the short-term. As Becker,

Xenos, and Waisanen (2010) concluded, in order to understand programs' effects on learning and behavior, we must first examine direct effects on audience perceptions.

### *Perceived Bias and Effects*

Scholars and pundits alike have lamented that American media and politics are in a "crisis of confidence" where citizens are opting out, journalists are succumbing to pressures, and politicians game the media. But if we know there is no clear, monolithic bias across media (as concluded in D'Alessio & Allen, 2000), it begs the question: What are the effects of different brands and program features on perceptions of bias? And how do these different brand personalities affect perceived effects on others? Because audience perceptions are such a central component to understanding media effects on other behaviors and attitudes, this study examines the effects of different televised interview formats on citizens. Specifically, I will examine format effects on perceived bias toward the interviewee, as well as perceived first- and third-person effects.

### *Perceived Bias*

Perceptions of bias can, of course, take many forms, since bias itself is multifaceted. Even the definition of bias can change depending on the context. In a meta-analysis, D'Alessio and Allen (ibid.) concluded that there was no across-the-board media bias across multiple studies, although there were trends in certain types of media that leaned either slightly conservative or slightly liberal (see D'Alessio & Allen [ibid.] for a complete review). What perhaps matters more than the existence of a broad media bias is how citizens *perceive* media bias, because these perceptions can often drive political behaviors (Hoffman & Glynn, 2008). For instance, it has been well-documented that journalists as a whole tend to be more liberal than the American public (e.g., see Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008). Citizens often use these facts to make judgments about media credibility.

Media bias is often defined as the opposite of objectivity, in that the content can be measured as being favorable toward some side of an issue (Lee, 2008). Yet it is ideological bias that we most commonly hear claimed among U.S. citizens. In early 2012, Pew reported that nearly 40% of Americans saw a great deal of political bias in the news, up from 25% in 1989 (Pew Research Center, 2012). In combination with the Gallup results reported earlier, this suggests that Americans don't think very positively about the news. The ongoing national conversation about bias has primed viewers to be on the lookout for cues, and it is predicted that different brands will influence perceptions of bias. As such, I predict that viewers of the four programs will differ significantly in their perceptions of the credibility, trust, and likeability of the program.

*H1: Viewers of The Daily Show, The Tonight Show, Meet the Press, and Hannity will significantly differ in their perceptions of the quality of the program, the interviewer, and the interviewee.*

Moreover, based on Vraga et al. (2012) and analyses by Jones (2009) and Baym (2007, 2009), I predict that perceived bias will also vary by exposure to these differently branded segments, such that:

*H2: There will be greater perceived bias toward the interviewee (former presidential candidate Ron Paul) in the hybrid (The Daily Show) and talk show (The Tonight Show) conditions than in the more aggressive styles of interviewing seen in Meet the Press and Hannity.*

#### *First- and Third-Person Effects*

When it comes to studying media effects on perceptions, one area of research has received the lion's share of attention. The third-person effect—the tendency for people to believe that media messages will have a stronger impact on others than on themselves (Davison, 1983)—has been well-documented in the nearly three decades of research on this phenomenon (Golan & Day, 2008). In addition to the perceptual component of the third-person effect, Davison (1983) also noted a behavioral component, where the perception can lead a person to take some action. The first-person effect (or reverse-third-person effect), on the other hand, refers to a situation where the effect of the media on oneself is estimated as being greater than on others, particularly when the content is perceived to be positive (Brosius & Huck, 2008; Golan & Day, 2008; Innes & Zeitz, 1988).

What is interesting about these phenomena is that there are several important moderators. For instance, the social-distance corollary suggests that the further away from the respondent a target group is (geographically, ideologically, etc.), the greater the perceived effect. Even demographics like age and education can play a role in the third-person effect (Tiedge, Silverblat, Havice, & Rosenfeld, 1991).

Most research examining this effect looks at socially undesirable content like pornography or violence (e.g., Gunther, 1995; Lo & Wei, 2002; Rojas, Shah, & Faber, 1996). Yet when it comes to socially desirable content like public service announcements, viewers often report a first-person effect—that they are, in fact, more influenced than others (e.g., Duck, Terry, & Hogg, 1995). Although this first-person effect is not as frequently studied as its third-person counterpart, it makes sense to analyze it in the context of news or political media. Indeed, several studies have concluded that, when it comes to political content—even if it is negative attack advertising—individuals perceive greater effects on themselves than others (e.g., Cohen & Davis, 1991). This research suggests that programming like a political interview with a potential presidential candidate could increase perceptions of first-person effect (or reverse third-person effect). However, research on first-person effects has yielded mixed evidence, particularly when it comes to socially desirable content (Golan & Day, 2008).

Yet, as evidenced by the many uses of the term “content” in this line of research, it is evident that much of the research on these effects has ignored format. As such, I propose two research questions:

*RQ1: Will third-person effects differ among viewers of the four program brands (Meet the Press, Hannity, The Daily Show and The Tonight Show)?*

*RQ2: Will first-person effects differ among viewers of the four program brands (Meet the Press, Hannity, The Daily Show and The Tonight Show)?*

## Methods

### *Sample and Procedure*

The present study utilized an online survey with five conditions among an adult sample recruited from the state of Delaware. Respondents had previously agreed to serve on this panel, and of the approximately 800 who were recruited, 198 respondents completed the survey.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of using this sample, rather than a student sample, was that these adults had already expressed some interest in politics and that it was likely they would view political programming. This provides a more realistic sample than, say, a group of college students who may not ordinarily view such programming. Moreover, because respondents viewed the clips online, this reflects the current political consumption atmosphere, where many Americans are getting information on computers, phones, and mobile devices (Cillizza, 2012).

Of the respondents, 55% were male, and 46% identified as Democrats, while 33% identified as Republicans and 21% as Independents. The average age was 61.7 years old ( $SD = 11.43$ ). The majority of respondents were educated, with 72% reporting having had graduated college, had some graduate school, or graduate degrees, and 96.4% reported being white. To further demonstrate that this sample was more interested in politics than the average group of people, respondents were also highly interested and attentive to the 2012 campaign; on a 1 to 5 scale, attention was  $M = 4.08$  ( $SD = .93$ ), and interest was  $M = 4.33$  ( $SD = .75$ ).

Conditions were selected to correspond with Baym's (see this special section) textual analysis of political interviews. Because these were actual clips from televised shows, we chose to control for the guest, so as to examine how the same candidate would appear in different formats. The clips were also selected because of their close proximity in time aired. The clips included approximately 3- to 4-minute segments of interviews with Ron Paul on *The Daily Show* (September 26, 2011;  $n = 39$ ), *Meet the Press* (October 23, 2011;  $n = 34$ ), *Hannity* (October 24, 2011;  $n = 30$ ), and *The Tonight Show* (December 17, 2011;  $n = 54$ ). A fifth control condition featured a clip of an interview with a chef about Chinese cooking ( $n = 41$ ).<sup>2</sup> Each respondent viewed only one randomly selected clip. The four experimental conditions represent the gamut of political interviews, from the traditional journalistic interview (*Meet the Press*) to the more combative style of *Hannity*, the hybrid format of *The Daily Show*, and the celebrity talk-show style of *The Tonight Show*.

The survey was open to participants May 11, 2012–May 21, 2012. Interestingly, during this time period, Ron Paul made the announcement that he would cease campaigning in new states for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination (Good & Volak, 2012). This was an unforeseeable occurrence, but because the majority of respondents (67%) had taken the survey by the time of this announcement and

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked whether they had been able to view the clip in its entirety, and those who responded "no" were removed from this final sample.

<sup>2</sup> Examinations of demographics and attitudes were not significantly different between the control and the experimental conditions, so the control condition was not used in further analyses reported here.

the questions asked only about the interviews and not the support of Paul, I am confident the news didn't directly affect the results.

#### *Measures*

*Independent variables.* In the analyses that follow, several independent variables were tested. Perceptions of the interviewer, interviewee, and maker(s) of the video (with the prompt, "for example, the producers and editors") were each measured on a seven-point semantic-differential scale with the following nine traits: Fair/Not Fair; Likable/Not Likeable; Trustworthy/Untrustworthy; Reliable/Unreliable; Honest/Dishonest; Credible/Not Credible; Qualified/Unqualified; Informed/Uninformed; and Reasonable/Unreasonable (with the positive trait of each pair rated higher on the scale). The nine traits were reliable for each target, and were thus combined into scales. Perceptions of the interviewer (Cronbach's alpha = .97) averaged 4.97 on the seven-point scale (SD = 1.54), while the scale measuring perceptions of Ron Paul was reliable at M = 5.0 (Cronbach's alpha = .95, SD = 1.49). Finally, perceptions of the maker(s) of the video (Cronbach's alpha = .98) had the lowest average of 3.39 (SD = 1.52).<sup>3</sup>

Respondents' general media trust was measured at the beginning of the survey. Three questions asked respondents to measure, on a five-point scale, their level of agreement with these statements: "In general, the news media provide accurate information," "In general, the news media provide trustworthy information," and "In general, the news media deal fairly with all sides." The three items scaled reliably (Cronbach's alpha = .91) and were averaged to create a measure of media trust, with higher scores indicating greater trust (M = 2.80, SD = .98).

In each model, education, political interest, political attention, gender, party ID (with Democrat as the reference group) and age were included as controls. ANOVA revealed that none of these variables, including media trust, differed significantly across the randomly assigned conditions.

*Dependent variables.* Perceived bias was measured as a combination of two questions that asked viewers their perception of favorability toward Ron Paul. The first question asked, "Evaluating the video clip as a whole, what would you estimate was the percentage of favorable references to Ron Paul?" (M = 58.62, SD = 26.92). The second asked, on a ten-point scale, "Do you think the makers of this video have more favorable personal opinions toward Ron Paul, or do you think they are more unfavorable?" Responses were converted to a 100-point scale (M = 55.50, SD = 24.21); since the measures were correlated at  $r = .65$ , they were combined to create an index of perceived favorability toward Ron Paul (M = 57.06, SD = 23.20).

Third-person effect was measured with a scale of three items that asked, "Sometimes people talk about what influences our picture of politics. Now that you've watched the video clip, click and drag the slider to indicate how important an effect you think this information has on . . ." 1) your family's or friends attitudes toward Ron Paul; 2) Delawareans' attitudes toward Ron Paul; and 3) Americans' attitudes toward

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<sup>3</sup> Subjects in the control condition were not asked about perceptions of Ron Paul, so their responses are excluded from this measure. All means and standard deviations therefore represent the four experimental conditions.

Ron Paul. Although the three items measure three levels of social distance (see Gibbon & Durkin, 1995), they were highly correlated (Cronbach's alpha = .84), so we combined them into one item representing third-person effect ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 2.04$ ).

First-person effect (or reverse third-person effect) was measured using a single item with the same phrasing as above, but ending with "your own attitudes toward Ron Paul" ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 2.90$ ).

### Results

Three OLS regression models were run with 3 blocks of variables—demographics, trust and perceptions, and conditions. The condition variable was broken up into the four experimental conditions as dummy variables in order to compare effects across conditions. *The Daily Show* was left out as the reference category, since both Jones (2008) and Baym (2008) see this program as a hybrid of other types of content, whereas the other programs adhere to more or less standard formats. A preliminary examination of multicollinearity statistics (tolerance and VIF) revealed that the scale measuring perceptions of the interviewer was highly multicollinear with the other program perceptions. It was thus excluded from the regression models utilized in H1, RQ1, and RQ2, leaving perceptions of the maker and perceptions of Ron Paul as independent variables in that category.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that perceptions (the combined measure representing Fair, Likable, Trustworthy, Reliable, Honest, Credible, Qualified, Informed, and Reasonable) of the makers of the video, the interviewer, and the interviewee would differ as a function of program format. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of condition on perceptions of the maker, perceptions of the interviewer, and perceptions of Ron Paul (see Table 1). Post-hoc comparisons (Tukey's HSD) revealed that viewers of the *Hannity* clip perceived the makers significantly more positively than viewers of *The Daily Show* saw its makers. Interestingly, the opposite effect appeared when the question was about the interviewer; viewers of *Hannity* perceived Sean Hannity significantly more negatively than viewers saw the hosts of the three other programs. Finally, regarding perceptions of Ron Paul, the only significant differences were in comparison to *The Daily Show*. Ron Paul was perceived significantly more positively by viewers of *The Daily Show* than viewers of any of the other shows. Hypothesis 1 is supported, in that audiences had different impressions of the program and its components depending on the clip they saw.

**Table 1. Group Differences with Post-Hoc Tests in Perceptions of Maker(s), Interviewer, and Interviewee.**

Variable	F-value	Comparison Groups	Mean Difference (s.e.)	Confidence Interval
Perceptions of the maker(s) of the video	3.00*	<i>Hannity – TDS</i>	0.99 (0.37)*	(0.03, 1.95)
		<i>Hannity – Meet the Press</i>	0.71 (0.39)	(-0.30, 1.17)
		<i>Hannity – Tonight Show</i>	0.28 (0.35)	(-0.62, 1.18)
		<i>TDS – Meet the Press</i>	-0.28 (0.36)	(-1.20, 0.66)
Perceptions of the interviewer	5.70**	<i>Hannity – TDS</i>	-0.14 (0.38)*	(-2.41, -0.44)
		<i>Hannity – Meet the Press</i>	-0.14 (0.30)*	(-2.43, -0.36)
		<i>Hannity – Tonight Show</i>	-0.94 (0.36)	(-1.87, -0.01)
		<i>TDS – Meet the Press</i>	0.99 (0.34)*	(-0.95, 1.0)
Perceptions of the interviewee (Ron Paul)	5.93**	<i>Hannity – TDS</i>	-1.4 (0.34)**	(-2.27, -0.48)
		<i>Hannity – Meet the Press</i>	-0.38 (0.36)	(-1.32, 0.56)
		<i>Hannity – Tonight Show</i>	-0.52 (0.32)	(-1.36, 0.32)
		<i>TDS – Meet the Press</i>	0.99 (0.34)*	(0.11, 1.87)

Notes: \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

In predicting perceived bias—measured as perceived favorability of the program toward Ron Paul—condition was a significant predictor, even in the face of controls. The model itself was significant ( $F = 6.20, p < .001$ ), and it accounted for 32.4% of the overall variance in perceived bias. The experimental condition was the only variable to have a significant effect in the final model. Specifically, viewers of *Meet the Press* perceived less bias toward Paul than *The Daily Show* viewers ( $b = -22.52, s.e. = 4.84, p < .001$ ). Conversely, viewers of *The Tonight Show* perceived more bias toward Paul than *The Daily Show* viewers ( $b = 17.08, s.e. = 4.09, p < .001$ ). In other words, viewers of *The Daily Show* saw more positive or favorable bias toward Ron Paul than viewers of *Meet the Press*, while viewers of *The Tonight Show* saw more positive bias toward Paul than those of *The Daily Show*. This makes sense in light of the nature of these programs, which range from more celebrity-chat to hybrid, to traditional news interview. Hypothesis 2 is supported. Results can be found in the first column of results in Table 2.

**Table 2. OLS Regression Results Predicting Perceived Bias, Third-Person, and First-Person Effects.**

Predictors	Perceived Favorable Bias toward Ron Paul		Perceived Third-Person Effects		Perceived First-Person Effects	
	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
(Constant)	39.31	17.0	3.26	1.75	1.35	2.46
Education	0.81	1.23	0.06	0.13	-0.01	0.18
Political attention	3.21	2.42	-0.51*	0.25	-0.60	0.35
Political interest	-0.96	2.97	0.27	0.31	0.11	0.43
Gender (male)	3.00	3.37	0.05	0.35	-0.34	0.49
Independent	-5.26	4.40	-0.88	0.45	-0.48	0.64
Republican	-1.89	4.18	-0.51	0.43	0.69	0.61
Age	-0.16	0.15	-0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02
Perceptions of maker(s) of video	-1.00	1.21	0.14	0.13	-0.05	0.18
Perceptions of Ron Paul	1.40	1.22	0.35**	0.13	0.68***	0.18
Media trust	3.72	1.92	-0.22	0.20	0.04	0.28
<i>Hannity</i>	3.92	5.11	-0.37	0.53	0.58	0.74
<i>Meet the Press</i>	-22.52***	4.84	0.95	0.50	1.91**	0.70
<i>The Tonight Show</i>	17.08***	4.09	0.19	0.42	0.67	0.59
<i>F</i>	6.20***		1.93*		2.41**	
Adjusted <i>R</i> -square	0.32***		0.08		0.12	

Notes: \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ . Coefficients are unstandardized. Comparison group for Independent and Republican is Democrat. Comparison group for each condition is *The Daily Show*. Significant values for adjusted *R*-square indicate *F*-change from previous model, excluding conditions.

To answer RQ1, which sought to examine how third-person effects might vary as a result of program format, I ran a hierarchical OLS regression predicting the combined perceived effects on family, friends, Delawareans, and Americans. Results indicate that the model did not account for much variance in perceived third-person effects, with just 8% of variance accounted for, although the final model was significant ( $F = 1.93, p < .05$ ). The third and final block revealed that condition did not play a role in influencing third-person effect. The only significant contributors in this model were the perceived credibility of Ron Paul ( $b = 0.35, s.e. = 0.13$ ), and political attention, such that increased political attention predicted a decrease in third-person effects ( $b = -0.51, s.e. = 0.25$ ; see the second column of results in Table 2).

Finally, RQ2 asked whether first-person effects (or reverse third-person effects) would be affected by the format differences across the experimental conditions. The overall model was significant ( $F = 2.41, p < .01$ ), and adjusted *R*-square was .12. As in the response to H1, the *Meet the Press* condition

again differed significantly from viewers of *The Daily Show*, such that *MTP* viewers were more likely to see an effect on themselves than *TDS* viewers ( $b = 1.91$ ,  $s.e. = 0.70$ ). In the language of format described earlier, this suggests that the "combatant" format of *Meet the Press* (Vraga et al., 2012) increases perceived first-person effects when compared to the hybrid comedy format of *The Daily Show*. Results are shown in the last column of Table 2.

### Discussion

As Vraga et al. concluded, the shift in political programs' format from "dispassionate to more humorous and hostile styles" (ibid., p. 15) plays an important role in how Americans view media and its credibility. The results of this study, which sought to examine differential effects of program type on perceptions of bias and effects among politically attentive adults, support that assertion. Results show that there is clearly something about these programs that generates different perceptions of both bias and effects. Indeed, what is perhaps most remarkable about each model is the fact that many standard demographic and political variables do not contribute to these perceptions. This suggests that the media format, as well as its content and characters, can have a direct effect on perceptions of bias and effects.

Overall, results provide little evidence of third-person effects, perhaps because of the sophisticated nature of the sample—politically attentive adults. Yet these respondents are also the ones who would be more likely to watch such programming. The results demonstrate that, when presented with arguably socially desirable content (like a political interview), respondents did not perceive third-person effects differently based on the program they viewed. This is interesting, given that viewers of each program had significantly different perceptions of the quality and nature of the makers, hosts, and Ron Paul, as seen in the test of H1. These findings also support those of Vraga et al. (2012), although those researchers examined credibility, and this study included that and other features, such as likeability and qualifications.

In testing H2, that perceived bias would differ based on program brand, we not only saw significant differences among conditions controlling for standard demographics and political variables, but we also saw nearly 33% of the variance in the final model explained by the variables included, with condition accounting for over 4% of that variance. The results are somewhat expected, given the literature outlined earlier. The combative style of *Meet the Press* resulted in viewers of that clip perceiving less favorable bias toward Paul than those of *The Daily Show*. Indeed, in Baym's accompanying analysis to this piece, he labels this interview as "interrogation," suggesting that it epitomizes the "accountability interview." In other words, the nature of the format, structure, and questioning employed led viewers of the *MTP* clip to see less favorable bias than viewers of *TDS*.

Also not surprisingly, Baym labels the *TDS* interview a "conversation," where Ron Paul uses humor and the host engages in an active question-and-answer structure. In short, Jon Stewart is "nicer" to Ron Paul than David Gregory. Finally, viewers of the *Tonight Show* clip saw more positive bias toward Paul than viewers of *TDS*. This "celebration" of an interview (see Baym, this issue) had a completely open platform, and Leno agreed with the vast majority of Paul's claims.

Yet there are no significant differences between *Hannity* and *TDS* in terms of perceived bias. At first blush, this seems surprising, given the combative nature of *Hannity* and this interview in particular, and that such styles can significantly lower perceptions of media credibility (Vraga et al., 2012). Yet, in his analysis, Baym argues that this interview is more about Sean Hannity than Ron Paul, such that the host confronts Paul about questioning Hannity's brand itself. This provides some explanation for why there is no difference in perceived bias among *Hannity* viewers; the brand is being questioned, and viewers are presented with Hannity's widely varying agreement and disagreement with his guest. In other words, the brand is literally in question, making it unclear to viewers if there is bias or not.

These findings would lack clarity were it not for the accompanying textual analyses that shed light on the format and personality brands embedded within the segments. What the test of H2 tells us, then, is that simple structural features—like the visual dividing line between Gregory and Paul—can provide cues to viewers about the bias inherent within the program. Moreover, the fact that other demographics and variables did not succeed in eliminating effects of condition suggests that there are, indeed, direct effects of programs on perceptions (see Becker, Xenos, & Waisanen, 2010).

The models for first- and third-person effects do not account for as much variance as the one for perceived bias, but they do reveal some interesting differences across both perceived effects. In both models, perceptions of Ron Paul were a significant predictor, such that, in both cases, more positive perceptions of Paul led to increased perceptions of effects on both self and others. This suggests a projection effect of sorts, where if "I" like Ron Paul, then both I and others will be more affected by the content. This variable, however, was not a significant predictor in the perceived bias model. So bias, it appears, does not necessarily utilize viewers' evaluations of the interviewee, whereas first- and third-person effects, to some extent, rely on individuals' perceptions. These results add yet another wrinkle in the research on perceptual effects, because perceived likeability, reasonableness, etc., impact one's perceived effects on self and others, but not perceived bias within the program itself. This lends support to the argument that brand personality is very visible to viewers, such that they are likely to take into account the reach, audience, and standards of each program when evaluating bias. Yet, when evaluating effects, they seem more likely to take their own attitudes into account.

What these results amount to is an argument for going back to examining structure and format of programming in addition to the specific content therein. Although the shift away from structure, medium, and format—and from scholars like McLuhan—is valuable, we shouldn't lose sight of the importance of format. Indeed, in a parallel line of research, scholars are finding that viewers are keen to identify various components of a program's brand and use that information to assess bias (Baum & Gussin, 2008; Chan-Olmstead & Cha, 2007). The present study calls for an integration of analysis of both content and structural features in examining media effects on perceived bias and perceived effects.

There are, of course, limitations to this study that should not go unnoted. First and foremost, the sample was relatively small and included politically attentive and interested citizens in a small region of the United States. Part of the reason for the small sample was an issue of panel attrition, as this study was the last of several requested among panelists. However, it does provide some preliminary evidence

for the effect of brand personality on adult viewers, and it also lends credibility to Vraga et al.'s (2012) and Becker, Xenos, and Waisanen's (2010) findings among college students in a controlled environment.

Another limitation of this study is the one-shot design; viewers only watched a brief three- to four-minute segment, which makes it difficult to address long-term effects. Moreover, I did not measure respondents' preexisting attitudes about the various hosts and programs, nor about the guest, Ron Paul. An alternative explanation for these findings is that viewers' attitudes trumped program features. Future research should include such measures. There is also the fact that Ron Paul was not a frontrunner in the race for the Republican nomination, nor was he a typical candidate. And the study did not include measures other than political attention and interest to get at how often viewers attended to these specific programs.

But perhaps most important, the study did not control for content. While the experiment effectively controlled for interviewee, there were variations in content, as well as format. Moreover, it is possible that Ron Paul's own performance varied from interview to interview for reasons unrelated to the format of the program. Yet this is a trade-off, given that exposure to actual interviews provides a more ecologically valid experiment. However, future research should control for both content and format when examining the effects of these types of interviews on perceptions of bias.

With these limitations in mind, the study reveals that program characteristics can have important effects on perceptions of bias, as well as perceived effects on oneself and others. The study also demonstrates the value of "breaking boundaries" between disciplinary and methodological camps. Examining media effects requires a broader understanding of what is going on in the media environment, something that is too often forgotten in simple one-shot effects studies. Textual analysis can assist media-effects scholars in making meaning of the results they get. Conversely, critical scholars can benefit from studies that utilize strict experimental and statistical control. The results reported here should be evaluated in concert with Baym's (this special section) findings to draw a more complete picture of the role the political interview plays in the current political landscape. Incorporating multiple perspectives will no doubt elucidate the vast amount of quantitative (e.g., Baumgartner, Morris, & Walth, 2012; Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009) research studying the effects of political humor.

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