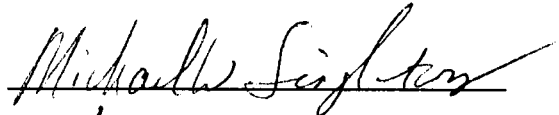


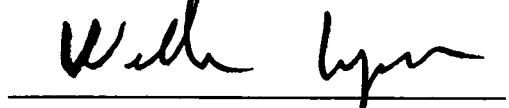
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Mark A. Paxton titled "The Third-Person Effect and Attitudes Toward Freedom of Expression." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communications.


Dorothy Bowles, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

THE THIRD-PERSON EFFECT
AND ATTITUDES TOWARD FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Mark A. Paxton
December 1995

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the third-person effect and its relationship to support for freedom of expression. Previous research has found substantial support for the existence of the third-person effect, a theoretical approach in which people tend to believe that they are largely immune to media messages but that other people are much more susceptible; that is, media messages don't affect "me" or "you," but they affect "everyone else." A number of researchers have speculated that this third-person effect could explain censorship; people believe others are adversely affected by media messages, so they want to restrict expression to protect them from these messages, even though they do not believe they have been affected by the same messages themselves. This study examined whether this speculation was supported empirically.

This study was based on a random-sample mail survey of the general population. Results were obtained from 275 people, for a 40 percent response rate. Those results produced scales based on scores to a battery of questions about perceived media effects on self and on others, plus a battery of freedom of expression questions and measurements of news media consumption.

More than nine of ten respondents (93.1 percent) reported that they would be less affected than others by a variety of media messages, thereby exhibiting the third-person effect. Correlation matrices showed that the stronger that discrepancy between media effects on self and on others, the

stronger the belief in restrictions on expression. The support for restrictions on expression was stronger the more people believed others were affected by media messages, and the less people thought themselves affected by the same messages. There was no support for research hypotheses that news media use patterns were related to either the third-person effect or to support for expressive rights.

These findings suggest that support for restrictions on expression are related to perceptions by the public that, even though they are largely immune to many media messages, other people are not immune and should be protected for their own good.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and of the press, but as anyone with even passing knowledge of the law recognizes, those guarantees are far from absolute. The U.S. Supreme Court, for instance, has ruled that entire categories of expression -- obscenity, libel, "fighting words" -- are subject to less protection than other types of expression.¹ The broadcast media are regulated by the Federal Communications Commission, which imposes its own rules on political speech, children's programming, and indecency.

Indeed, it can be argued that the United States has a rich tradition of limiting free expression. Former National Endowment for the Arts Chairman John Frohmayer wrote that: "Ironically, in spite of the First Amendment, America has a robust history of repression, intolerance and censorship."² Thomas Bowlder published an expurgated "family" edition of Shakespeare's works in 1818.³ Anthony Comstock championed laws banning "obscene" material from the mails in 1873.⁴ The Espionage Act of 1917 essentially made

¹ For example, see *Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire*, 315 U.S. 568 (1942), *Roth v. United States*, 354 U.S. 476 (1957).

² John Frohmayer, Out of Tune: Listening to the First Amendment (Nashville, TN: The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, 1994) 35.

³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴ *Ibid.*

it a crime to oppose U.S. involvement in World War I.⁵ Parents in Kanawha County, West Virginia, shut down the county school system in 1974 with picketing, roadblocks and even schoolhouse bombings to protest textbook selection for primary and secondary schools.⁶ More recently, opponents of pornography, arguing that sexually explicit material is such a significant threat to the health and welfare of women that it does not deserve constitutional protection, have attempted to enforce their views through legislation making it a crime to distribute books, magazines or movies depicting the explicit subordination of women.⁷ The U.S. Senate, pushed by Sen. John Exon of Nebraska, voted in mid-1995 to enact far-reaching content restrictions on computer networks and the Internet in part because of fears that pornographic images could be seen by minors, who -- the thinking was -- would be traumatized by such exposure.⁸

The Supreme Court, meanwhile, has approved limits on expression in a variety of cases, often with the expressed intent to protect others from presumed harmful effects.

In *Paris Adult Theatre I v. Slaton*, the Court decided that a state legislature could legally limit distribution of obscene material to consenting

⁵ Schenck v. United States, 249 U.S. 47 (1919).

⁶ Kanawha County, West Virginia: A Textbook Study in Cultural Conflict (Washington: National Education Association, 1975).

⁷ Nat Hentoff, Free Speech for Me -- But Not for Thee (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) 341-342.

⁸ Philip Elmer-Dewitt, "On a Screen Near You: Cyberporn," Time 146 (July 3, 1995):38-45.

adults in an effort to protect members of society: "Although there is no conclusive proof of a connection between antisocial behavior and obscene material, the legislature of Georgia could quite reasonably determine that such a connection does or might exist."⁹ "Indecent" but not "obscene" broadcasting content can be regulated because of the presumed effect it might have on children who might come in contact with it, the Court ruled in *FCC v. Pacifica Foundation*.¹⁰ In *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, a high school principal's censorship of a student newspaper was ruled to be justified, in part, to ensure that immature students who might read the publication would not be harmed.¹¹

It can be argued that the judicial system in these cases was merely reflecting the views of the public. Academic researchers and professional pollsters have examined public support for freedom of expression for half a century, finding that Americans cherish the First Amendment far more in the abstract than in the specific. When asked in general to judge the importance to society of freedom of speech and of the press, they respond overwhelmingly that freedom of expression is an essential part of this country's heritage. But when asked whether specific forms of expression should be protected, they are much more likely to respond negatively. Wyatt, based on national surveys covering two consecutive years, found that people

⁹ 413 U.S. 49 (1973).

¹⁰ 438 U.S. 726 (1978).

¹¹ 484 U.S. 260 (1988).

express greater support for personal rights than for media rights.¹² The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, in a 1990 survey, found that 87.3 percent of the public ranked as "very important" the right to speak their minds and express opinions without fear of arrest or interference, while just 58.6 percent rated as "very important" the press's ability to publish whatever information it uncovered; more than half favored government regulation of media content involving sex or violence.¹³

Sociologist W. Phillips Davison, in a 1983 journal article, postulated a fascinating hypothesis called the third-person effect that could help to explain why some people seek to limit or censor the information made available to others.¹⁴ It could explain why some people want to censor pornography, hate speech, television programming, movies or politically sensitive media messages. But in the dozen years since Davison's seminal Public Opinion Quarterly article, few researchers have attempted to test Davison's link between the third-person effect and censorship, and the few who have tested the link have done so only tangentially.

¹² Robert O. Wyatt, Free Expression and the American Public: A Survey Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the First Amendment (Murfreesboro, TN: American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1991), 36.

¹³ Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, Public Attitudes Toward Censorship and Free Expression, unpublished paper, Charlottesville, Va., 1990.

¹⁴ W. Phillips Davison, "The Third-Person Effect in Communication," Public Opinion Quarterly 47 (1983): 1-15.

Several other researchers have measured public support for freedom of expression, generally focusing on support or non-support for individual rights or for media rights. None has attempted to link that support or non-support to the theoretical framework offered by the third-person effect.

This study presents an attempt to determine whether the third-person effect is correlated with a lack of support for freedom of expression, and, if so, to what extent. Such a correlation between the third-person effect and support for censorship would have implications for the policy-making process in areas such as Congressional attempts to regulate violence on television, or on prosecutorial attempts to limit distribution of sexually explicit material. If attempts to limit expression are based on the perceived enormous societal effects of the media, and if such effects are in fact an artifact of the third-person effect, then the very framework for restrictions of speech and of the press may be based on an erroneous assumption of massive media effects.

This study begins by examining the previous studies into the third-person effect, followed by an examination of the research into free-expression issues. Then, this study examines the few third-person research articles that have addressed the phenomenon's role in calls for censorship.

In an attempt to determine whether the third-person effect is positively correlated with support for restricting free expression, the bulk of this study is based on a random-sample mail survey measuring perceptions of media effects and attitudes about free expression issues.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Third-Person Effect

Davison's third-person effect hypothesis consists of two main concepts. First, people tend to overestimate the effect that persuasive communication has on others. Second, any effect that the communication achieves may be attributable not to the individual, but to the belief by that individual that the communication is having an effect on others.

Davison summarized his hypothesis this way:

In its broadest formulation, this hypothesis predicts that people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes and behaviors of others. More specifically, individuals who are members of an audience that is exposed to persuasive communication (whether or not this communication is intended to be persuasive) will expect the communication to have a greater impact on others than on themselves. And whether or not these individuals are among the *ostensible* audience for the message, the impact that they expect this communication to have on others may lead them to take some action. Any effect that the communication achieves may thus be due not to the reaction of the ostensible audience but rather to the behavior of those who anticipate, or think they perceive, some reaction on the part of others.¹⁵

In an oft-quoted line from his study, Davison summarized the first part of his hypothesis by stating, "In the view of those trying to evaluate the effects of communication, its greatest impact will be not on 'me' or 'you,' but

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

on 'them' -- the third persons."¹⁶ The second half of his hypothesis -- that the belief in communication's effect on others will lead to behavioral changes -- has not been as widely cited or studied.

Davison traced his interest in, and formulation of, the third-person effect to two incidents. In the first, a unit of black soldiers stationed at Iwo Jima during World War II was targeted by Japanese propaganda leaflets urging the soldiers to give up or desert so they wouldn't have to risk their lives for "the white man's war." The next day, despite no evidence the soldiers paid any attention to the propaganda, the unit's white officers withdrew the unit from the field. In the second incident, West German editorialists were asked what effect their editorials would have on an upcoming election. The editorial writers said their opinions would have little effect on people like themselves but would have great effect on the masses.¹⁷

The third-person effect has provided a robust arena for research since Davison's initial article. Most of the published or presented work stemming from that research can be separated into two distinct approaches. Some researchers have examined the third-person effect through survey research, attempting to study attitudes and perceptions on existing issues; others have used an experimental approach to determine how people will respond to hypothetical communication. The only published exception has been an attempt to link the third-person effect to events in American journalism history such as the Sedition Act of 1798 and the Yellow Press role

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1-2.

in causing the Spanish-American War.¹⁸ Whatever the approach, though, virtually all researchers have found at least some evidence for the existence of a third-person effect.

The first published study to explore Davison's hypothesis was "Public Opinion About Public Opinion" by Carroll J. Glynn and Ronald E. Ostman, based on a survey of 285 people.¹⁹ Ironically, it also is the only published exploration of the hypothesis that did not find evidence of the third-person effect. Significantly, though, Glynn and Ostman did not examine the effect that communication had on the respondents. Instead, they looked at the perceived influence of public opinion on the respondents. In effect, although they claimed to have found no evidence of a third-person effect, they were studying something else entirely -- how the respondents perceived they were influenced by others, not how they were influenced by communication. This is more of a test of the Spiral of Silence theory²⁰ than of the third-person effect.

Other survey research has found evidence of a third-person effect. Lasorsa in 1989 found 31 percent of his respondents expected others to be influenced substantially more than themselves after watching the network television miniseries "Amerika," which depicted the United States under

¹⁸ James L. Baughman, "The World is Ruled by Those Who Holler the Loudest: The Third-Person Effect in American Journalism History," Journalism History 16 (1989): 12-19.

¹⁹ Carroll J. Glynn and Ronald E. Ostman, "Public Opinion About Public Opinion," Journalism Quarterly 65 (1988): 299-306.

²⁰ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion," Journal of Communication 24 (1974): 43-51.

Soviet control.²¹ Lasorsa found that those who perceived themselves to be politically astute were more likely to overestimate media effects on others.

Mutz in 1989 found a third-person effect among her sample of Stanford University students, staff and faculty on the issue of the university's financial interests in South Africa.²² She found fully half of her respondents exhibiting a third-person effect, operationalized in her study as perception that media reports about divestment at Stanford would affect others more than those surveyed themselves. She, too, found that perceived knowledge fueled the third-person effect; faculty and staff, who presumably knew more about the issue (or at least perceived that they did) than did the students, exhibited the strongest third-person effect. She also found that the more important the issue was to the respondent, the greater the magnitude of the third-person effect.

Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice and Rosenfeld's 1991 article, "Discrepancy Between Perceived First-Person and Perceived Third-Person Mass Media Effects," provided an important methodological advance in third-person effect research.²³ Their study, which found a third-person effect among a whopping 88 percent of the respondents, altered the order of the questions,

²¹ Dominic Lasorsa, "Real and Perceived Effects of 'Amerika,'" Journalism Quarterly 66 (1989): 373-378.

²² Diana C. Mutz, "The Influence of Perceptions of Media Influence: Third Person Effects and the Public Expression of Opinion," International Journal of Public Opinion Research 1 (1989): 3-23.

²³ James T. Tiedge, Arthur Silverblatt, Michael J. Havice and Richard Rosenfeld, "Discrepancy Between Perceived First-Person and Third-Person Mass Media Effects," Journalism Quarterly 68 (1991): 141-154.

asking some respondents first to estimate the effect of media messages on others, then asking them to estimate the effect on themselves. Previous studies had asked respondents to estimate the effect of communication on themselves, then asked them to estimate its effect on others. To eliminate any question of whether the order of those questions could lead to an overestimation of the effect on others, Tiedge *et al.* varied the order of the questions. They found that the magnitude of the third-person effect was not affected by the order of questioning. Their study also found evidence that education level is positively correlated to the third-person effect; the more educated a respondent was, the more likely he or she was to perceive communication effects on others exceeding the effects on self.

Gunther examined the third-person effect as a reason some people want to restrict access to pornography.²⁴ Gunther found 61 percent of his respondents perceiving that others were more affected by pornography than they were themselves. Gunther also randomly varied the order of questions, asking half his sample the effect of pornography on others first, and asking the other half the effect of pornography on themselves first. He also found no question-order effect, with no significant differences in results between the two groups.

Perloff, Neuendorf, Giles, Chang and Jeffres, like Lasorsa in his 1989 study, examined the third-person effect in relation to the "Amerika"

²⁴ Albert C. Gunther, "Overrating the X-Rating: The Third-Person Perception and Support for Censorship of Pornography." Journal of Communication 45 (1995): 28-38.

miniseries.²⁵ Their 1992 study focused on three samples -- the general population, "peace activists," and ethnic minorities. They found that a significant portion of all three groups perceived that others would be affected more by watching the miniseries than they would be themselves.

Innes and Zeitz found support for the third-person effect on three sample messages -- the effect of media coverage of a current political campaign, the effect of violence depicted on television, and the effects of an anti-drunken driving campaign. The most significant third-person effect came when respondents were asked about violence on television.²⁶ It should be noted, however, that this study suffered a serious design flaw; interviewers selected respondents for the "random" sample from shoppers at shopping centers. Because the sample frame was improper and the respondents were not truly chosen at random, the results are not generalizable.

Another study, based on a survey of Hong Kong residents, found limited evidence of the third-person effect, with 33 percent of the sample reporting greater media effects on others than on themselves. The effect was greatest among the highly educated, while the magnitude of the effect did

²⁵ Richard M. Perloff, Kimberly Neuendorf, Dennis Giles, Tsan-Kuo Chang and Leo W. Jeffres, "Perceptions of 'Amerika,'" Mass Comm Review 19 (1992): 42-48.

²⁶ J. M. Innes and H. Zeitz, "The Public's View of the Mass Media: A Test of the 'Third Person' Effect," European Journal of Social Psychology 18 (1988): 457-463.

not significantly increase with issue salience -- the importance of the issue to the respondent.²⁷

Lometti and other researchers from the University of South Carolina also found evidence of a third-person effect in a national telephone survey.²⁸ Their results will be examined in detail later in this paper.

Rucinski and Salmon, based on a telephone survey of a Wisconsin county, reported a significant difference between perceived effect on self and perceived effect on others on a variety of political messages, including news reports about elections, political advertisements, and pre-election polls.²⁹

Atwood conducted a longitudinal survey to determine whether the third-person effect occurred among residents who heard through media reports a self-proclaimed "expert's" prediction of the likelihood of a major earthquake along the New Madrid fault. Atwood found that about half of his sample reported in November 1990 that they thought others were affected by

²⁷ Lars Willnat, "Testing the Interaction of the Third-Person Effect and Spiral of Silence in a Political Pressure Cooker: The Case of Hong Kong," Paper presented to Mass Communication and Society Division at Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual meeting in Atlanta, August 1994.

²⁸ Guy Lometti, Linda L. Ashby and Wendy Welch, "The Nature of the Public's Objections to Television Programs: An Examination of Third-Person Effects," Paper presented to Communication Theory and Methodology Division at Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual meeting in Atlanta, August 1994.

²⁹ Dianne Rucinski and Charles T. Salmon, "The 'Other' as the Vulnerable Voter: A Study of the Third-Person Effect in the 1988 U.S. Presidential Campaign," International Journal of Public Opinion Research 2 (1990): 345-368.

the news reports more than they were themselves. By February, two months after the predicted earthquake failed to occur, the percentage reporting a third-person effect dropped to about 36 percent. Atwood reported those who perceived some element of "expertise," by saying they did not believe earthquakes could be predicted accurately, were more likely to report that others were more affected by the news media.³⁰

Experimental research also has found support for the third-person effect.

Cohen, Mutz, *et al.*, used an experimental research design in an attempt to link the third-person effect to the amount of damage awards in libel lawsuits.³¹ Their research, in which subjects at Stanford University were exposed to defamatory or non-defamatory articles about a public figure, presented important empirical findings on the extent and dynamic of the third-person effect. Where Mutz examined the role issue importance played in the third-person effect, Cohen, Mutz *et al.* found that the more the source of the communication is perceived as negatively biased, the greater the discrepancy between perceived first-person and third-person effects. They also found that the greater the "social distance" between the first-persons and the third-persons, the greater the effect; students thought other Stanford students would be less affected by the defamatory communication than would be other Californians, and that other Californians would be less

³⁰ L. Erwin Atwood, "Illusions of Media Power: The Third-Person Effect," Journalism Quarterly 71 (1994): 269-281.

³¹ Jeremy Cohen, Diana Mutz, Vincent Price and Albert Gunther, "Perceived Impact of Defamation," Public Opinion Quarterly 52 (1988): 161-173.

affected than the public at large. It should be noted, though, that this relationship was not strictly linear; the degree to which the students' perceived effect on themselves differed from their perceived effect on other students did not equal the differential between perceived effect on other students and perceived effect on other Californians, or between other Californians and people in general.

In another experiment involving defamatory articles, Gunther found that people generally accurately perceive the effect communication has on themselves but overestimate the effect it has on others.³² Importantly, Gunther reported finding no evidence of the second half of Davison's third-person effect -- there was no finding that people who misperceive the effect of communication on others would be likely to change their behavior because of that misperception.

Perloff used an experimental design to gauge the third-person effect of network TV newscasts involving the 1982 war in Lebanon.³³ This study demonstrated that individuals will overestimate both the direction of media effect and the magnitude of media effects on others when the individuals (the first-persons) are highly involved in the issue that is the subject of the communication.

Cohen and Davis also reported some evidence that individuals exposed to political advertising will expect advertising to have a greater effect on

³² Albert C. Gunther, "What We Think Others Think," Communications Research 18 (1991): 355-372.

³³ Richard M. Perloff, "Ego-Involvement and the Third Person Effect of Televised News Coverage," Communications Research 16 (1989): 236-262.

others than on themselves.³⁴ Significantly, though, they found that when supporters of a candidate were exposed to a negative advertisement about their candidate, they expected others to be influenced, but not themselves. Conversely, when the ad attacked the opposing candidate, the subjects reported a "reverse third-person effect" -- they reported that they would be affected, but others would not be.

In a similar study, Gunther and Thorson studied the effects of emotional and neutral advertisements on their subjects.³⁵ The researchers reported that when individuals consider it to be socially acceptable to be influenced by an advertisement, they report that they will be more affected than others; when it is considered socially unacceptable to be influenced, they report that others are more yielding to the message.

Gunther and Mundy also reported that people will overestimate the effect negative communication has on others, while estimating greater effect on themselves when the message is perceived as neutral or beneficial.³⁶

One of the problems with the third-person effect hypothesis is that it is isolated from other theoretical approaches involving public opinion. Perloff

³⁴ Jeremy Cohen and Robert G. Davis, "Third-Person Effects and the Differential Impact in Negative Political Advertising," Journalism Quarterly 68(1991):680-688.

³⁵ Albert C. Gunther and Esther Thorson, "Perceived Persuasive Effects of Product Commercials and Public Service Announcements," Communication Research 19(1992): 574-596.

³⁶ Albert C. Gunther and Paul Mundy, "Biased Optimism and the Third-Person Effect," Journalism Quarterly 70(1993): 58-67.

wrote that the hypothesis appears "*in media res*" -- in the middle of things.³⁷

Several researchers have attempted to fit the third-person effect into social-psychological theoretical approaches. These few attempts, though, have failed to establish a firm tie to these approaches or to other communication theories.

For instance, both the third-person effect and the Spiral of Silence³⁸ theoretical approach focus on perceptions of others. The Spiral of Silence hypothesis proposes that people use the mass media, in part, to gauge public opinion, compare that opinion with their own and then take actions based on the perceived difference.³⁹ But while the Spiral of Silence is predicated on how individuals perceive public opinion, the third-person effect focuses on how individuals perceive others have been affected by communication. The third-person effect (i.e., the belief that media messages have swayed the opinions of others) may lead to a perception of public opinion. Mutz suggested that a perception that others are affected by mass communication could alter perceptions of the distribution of public opinion, leading to a Spiral of Silence effect.⁴⁰ But there has been little published research tying these two approaches together in that way.

³⁷ Richard M. Perloff, "Third-Person Effect Research 1983-1992: A Review and Synthesis," International Journal of Public Opinion Research 5 (1993): 179.

³⁸ Neumann.

³⁹ Gunther and Thorson, 575.

⁴⁰ Mutz, 20.

Similarly, both the third-person effect and pluralistic ignorance also focus on perceptions of others, but again in significantly different fashions. Pluralistic ignorance is based on the misperception of individuals who either overestimate or underestimate the proportion of others in the population who think, feel or act as they themselves do.⁴¹ This illusion of what others feel enters into and distorts their own opinions.⁴² The difference is the key concept -- perception of how others think, feel or act vs. perception of how others are affected by media messages.

A third approach that has been tied to the third-person effect, the "looking glass perception," theorizes that people perceive that others think the same as they do themselves; in the absence of strong counter-forces, people believe that others hold the same opinions as they do themselves.⁴³ This approach, while also focusing on the perception of others, would appear to be inherently in opposition to the third-person effect hypothesis, which states that people believe others are *unlike* themselves in key ways. Perloff, in his critique of ten years of third-person effects research, wrote that establishing such a link between the hypothesis and another public opinion

⁴¹ Hubert J. O'Gorman and Stephen L. Garry, "Pluralistic Ignorance -- A Replication and Extension," Public Opinion Quarterly 40 (1976): 450.

⁴² Daniel Katz and Floyd Henry Allport, Students' Attitudes: A Report of the Syracuse University Reaction Study (Syracuse, NY: The Craftsman Press, 1931) 152.

⁴³ James M. Fields and Howard Schuman, "Public Beliefs About the Beliefs of the Public," Public Opinion Quarterly 40 (1976): 445.

approach might help explain how the misperception of effects on others could lead to behavioral change.⁴⁴

Perloff suggests that the underlying cause of the third-person effect is that people have acquired a "media effects schema" in which they hold a number of beliefs about the media, including the beliefs that the media exert strong effects and that the audience of media messages is gullible and susceptible to persuasion.⁴⁵ In this formulation, an individual is exposed to a persuasive media message; because the individual believes that such media content will exert a strong effect, and because the individual does not experience that strong effect, then the individual perceives that others *must* be affected. Media effects schema would explain why people misperceive the effect communication has on others, but it does little to explain the second half of the third-person effect -- the behavior change.

Gunther, in his experiment involving defamatory articles, theorized that attribution theory might explain the cause of the third-person effect, particularly in light of repeated findings that the effect is strongest when the individuals studied are highly involved in the issue being communicated.⁴⁶ Simply put, attribution theory states that people distinguish between dispositional causes (internal to the individual) and situational causes (external to the individual). People separate their judgments about themselves and others on this basis. People assume their own actions are a

⁴⁴ Perloff, "Third-Person Effect Research 1983-1992," 179.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 177.

⁴⁶ Gunther, "What We Think Others Think," 356-357.

response to circumstances and situations, while they attribute the actions of others to personal dispositions. (A classic example: My homework is late because I had a flat tire on the way to school; my classmate's homework is late because he's lazy). Gunther hypothesized that in the context of the third-person effect, people tend to see others as less responsive to the situation (i.e., the persuasive content of the communication). As Gunther put it:

When judging message impact on others, observers will underestimate the effect of situational (external factors) and attribute relatively more opinion change to others; but in judging themselves, observers will estimate modest, if any, opinion change, attributing it to their greater awareness of, and discounting of, situational factors like persuasive intent.⁴⁷

Again, as with media effects schema, attribution theory would explain the misperception of communication effects. But it does little to advance our understanding of the link between that misperception and the ensuing change in behavior.

One of the psychological hypotheses that has emerged from research on pluralistic ignorance is the notion of "disowning projection," which suggests that people indirectly project their own socially unacceptable attitudes onto others. In the third-person context, individuals exposed to persuasive communication would be influenced by this communication but would believe that it is bad to be influenced; because of that, the individuals would "project" that undesirable influence, saying that others would be affected more than they would be themselves. Gunther argued that his data did not support the notion that disowning projection is behind the third-person effect because individuals accurately estimated how much their

⁴⁷Ibid., 357-358.

opinions were influenced by the communication while overestimating the effect on others.⁴⁸ If the disowning projection were the proximate cause of the effect, the individuals would have both underestimated the effect on self and overestimated the effect on others.

The "impersonal impact" hypothesis proposes that people form beliefs about media impact on both a personal and a societal level.⁴⁹ They believe, for instance, that bad things happen to other people, but not to themselves.⁵⁰ There are some situations in which it is a negative to be affected by media messages; because of this "differential impact," they believe these messages will not affect themselves (the individual level) but will affect others (the societal level).

"Ego enhancement" presents another fruitful area for examining the causal mechanism behind the third-person effect. In this theoretical approach, people are motivated to reinforce their self-esteem by seeing themselves as smarter or "better" than their peers. When faced with a media message that is perceived to be negative (i.e., it would be bad to be influenced by it), people will either see themselves as smarter and less susceptible to the message than others, or as less susceptible to negative outcomes and better off than others.⁵¹ Conversely, if the message is perceived as positive (i.e., it

⁴⁸ Ibid., 368.

⁴⁹ Tom R. Tyler and Fay Lomax Cook, "The Mass Media and Judgments of Risk: Distinguishing Impact on Personal and Societal Level Judgments," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 47 (1984): 693.

⁵⁰ Glynn and Ostman, 300.

⁵¹ Gunther and Mundy, 60.

would be socially acceptable to be influenced by it), then the individual would perceive himself or herself affected while others are not. In this regard, ego enhancement would account both for the third-person effect when the message is perceived as negative and the reported "reverse" third-person effect, when people reported they were *more* influenced by positive messages than others. Gunther and Mundy reported support for this approach, stating that subjects in their study of negative and positive advertising messages "attribute particularly savvy responses to themselves" while others are perceived as less discriminating: "These data suggest that people do attribute greater influence of media to others, but only when it is likely to bolster their own sense of competence and self-worth to do so."⁵² Despite this finding, though, ego enhancement still does not explain any behavioral change because of the perceptions of media influence.

Despite the difficulty in reaching a consensus on the underlying causal mechanism, the empirical research into the third-person effect has established important limits on the effect. To summarize:

--The third-person effect is not universal among all people. Researchers who found evidence of the phenomenon (all but Glynn and Ostman) reported that anywhere from 31 percent to 88 percent of the people studied reported a greater media effect on others than on themselves. In a review of third-person effect research, Lasorsa wrote that the general implication is that about half of the population typically exhibits a third-

⁵² Ibid., 67.

person effect by perceiving greater media effects on others than on themselves.⁵³

--The amount of misperception of media effects on others is in part a function of social distance. In short, the more unlike me the others are, the more I believe they are pliable in the face of persuasive communication.

--If the source is perceived to be negative, individuals are more likely to perceive a greater effect on others. As Cohen *et al.* stated their findings involving defamatory communication, "The more the source ... is perceived as negatively biased, the greater the discrepancy between perceived media influence on self and on others."⁵⁴

--If the message is perceived to be negative, then the individual is more likely to perceive influence on others. If it is perceived that the message is neutral or positive, then a "reverse" third-person effect is more likely -- the individual is apt to perceive greater influence on self than on others.

--The better educated are more likely to perceive that others are affected more by persuasive communication, although this finding is somewhat tentative.⁵⁵ There also is some evidence that age is positively correlated to a perception that others are affected more than self.⁵⁶

⁵³ Dominic L. Lasorsa, "Policymakers and the Third-Person Effect," in J. David Kenamer, ed., Public Opinion, the Press and Public Policy (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992) 169.

⁵⁴ Cohen, Mutz, Price and Gunther, 172.

⁵⁵ Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice and Rosenfeld, 150.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

--If the issue being communicated is of great importance to the individual, then the individual will expect others to be affected more. Several researchers have speculated that if the individual is highly involved in the issue, then the individual will perceive himself or herself to be an "expert" on that issue and immune to communication that can sway others. As Mutz explained it in her study of Stanford students:

People perceiving themselves as generally more knowledgeable than others may reason: I understand the issues and am not likely to be influenced much by things I learn from the media. But other people may not know as much as I do; they may believe whatever they read in the newspapers or see on television.⁵⁷

In sum, then, it appears that twelve years of empirical evidence supports the existence of a third-person effect under certain conditions. Rather than Davison's broad, almost universally applicable statement, then, it might be more accurate to restate the third-person effect this way: Some individuals, under some conditions, will perceive that mass communication, whether intended to be persuasive or not, will influence others more than themselves; in fact, they will tend to underestimate the amount it influences themselves and overestimate the amount it influences others, with the magnitude of that misperception dependent on variables such as the source of the message, the nature of the issue being communicated, and the social distance between individuals and the "others" who are being affected. The more unlike "me" the "others" are, the more "I" will expect them to be negatively influenced. Because of these misperceptions, these individuals

⁵⁷ Mutz, 12.

may tend to change their behavior because they believe the communication has influenced or will influence other people.

Freedom of Expression Research

Social science research into expressive rights has been conducted over the past 50 years, creating a rich environment for studying attitudes toward free speech and freedom of the press. Wyatt cited an American Institute of Public Opinion survey in 1936 as one of the first such studies, while other surveys were conducted by organizations such as Fortune magazine and Gallup.⁵⁸ Generally, these surveys found a dichotomy -- respondents reported overwhelmingly that they believed in the principles of free speech and freedom of the press, but they were much less likely to support specific expressive acts such as allowing "radicals" to hold meetings, permitting the press to attack the president, or sanctioning the printing of a nude painting.⁵⁹

Modern social science research into freedom of expression is generally dated from Stouffer's survey on attitudes toward communists' civil liberties.⁶⁰ Based on individual interviews with 6,000 men and women across the country, Stouffer's book represented a landmark study into attitudes

⁵⁸ Wyatt.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Samuel A. Stouffer, Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1955).

toward the civil liberties of extremists. Stouffer reported that 31 percent of his sample did not think a socialist should be allowed to speak publicly to favor public ownership of all railroads and big industries,⁶¹ 60 percent did not believe an atheist should be allowed to speak against churches and religion publicly,⁶² 51 percent believed admitted communists should be jailed,⁶³ and 89 percent said college teachers should be fired if they are found to be communists.⁶⁴

Surveys into free expression continued through the ensuing decades, but some researchers began to take a closer look at one particular aspect of freedom of expression -- freedom of the press. Using Stouffer's 1955 work as a jumping off place, Wilson in 1970 conducted face-to-face interviews with 2,468 adults in a national survey to gauge support for freedom of the press.⁶⁵ He found that 32 percent of the respondents did not believe newspapers should be allowed to criticize the police, 53 percent did not believe people should be allowed to publish books attacking our system of government, and 62 percent did not believe people should be allowed to make speeches attacking God.⁶⁶ Wilson converted his results into a freedom of speech and

⁶¹ Ibid., 29.

⁶² Ibid., 33.

⁶³ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁵ W. Cody Wilson, "Belief in Freedom of Speech and Press," Journal of Social Forces 31 (1975): 69-76.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 71.

press scale, with 38 percent at the lowest level with no support, 24 percent with minimal support, 17 percent with moderate support and 21 percent with high support.⁶⁷

At about the same time as Wilson's study, Nunn was examining support for civil liberties among college students, finding about a third of his student sample highly libertarian and about 20 percent slightly libertarian.⁶⁸

Immerwahr and Doble, based on a nationwide telephone survey, found the public generally tolerant, believing that people with diverse viewpoints deserve to be heard.⁶⁹ Still, they found a "hard-core" of about 15 percent to 30 percent nonsupportive of free expression rights.⁷⁰

Page and Shapiro reported that a compilation of General Social Survey questions about civil liberties from 1972 to 1990 suggested that support for expressive rights increased steadily during the period,⁷¹ although Andsager suggested that trends in survey research about free expression are difficult to measure because many studies used questions based on salient issues of the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁸ Clyde Z. Nunn, "Support of Civil Liberties Among College Students," Social Problems 20 (1973): 300-318.

⁶⁹ John Immerwahr and John Doble, "Public Attitudes Toward Freedom of the Press," Public Opinion Quarterly 46 (1982): 177-194.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 181.

⁷¹ Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992) 85-90.

time, such as communism in the 1950s.⁷² Another confounding factor is the vast variation in questionnaire format; some studies were based on as few as three questions designed to measure support for expressive rights, while others have been based on scales constructed from a battery of as many as 58 questions.⁷³

An example of the latter is Wyatt's study of personal and media rights.⁷⁴ Based on comprehensive national surveys covering two years, Wyatt's study found people expressing greater support for personal rights than for media rights, with as many as 55 percent saying broadcasters should not be allowed to disclose the projected winners of elections while voting is still occurring.⁷⁵ Respondents were asked to answer 24 questions ranking support for free speech rights and 34 questions gauging support for media rights.

Despite differences in research design, questionnaire construction and reported results, several demographic variables have been highly correlated with tolerant attitudes toward civil liberties, including education,

⁷² Julie Andsager, Examining The Relationship Between Media and Personal Expressive Rights: The Effect of Need for Cognition, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Tennessee-Knoxville, 1993, 8.

⁷³ Andsager, 10.

⁷⁴ Wyatt.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 13.

age and religion.⁷⁶ Support for expressive rights is higher among the better educated, the younger and less religious.⁷⁷

In general, though, Americans support freedom of speech and freedom of the press as abstract principles. But when it comes to specific instances, they become more likely to endorse censorship if the communication runs counter to their personal beliefs.⁷⁸ As Wyatt reported, "Only under rare circumstances -- disagreeing with the president, journalistic criticism of politicians, distributing books after objections to their content -- do a majority of Americans ever endorse absolutely" the free speech and free press protections of the Constitution.⁷⁹

The Third-Person Effect and Freedom of Expression

Davison speculated that censorship might provide the most interesting area for research into the third-person effect, hypothesizing that the phenomenon might explain why some people want to prevent others from seeing or reading certain material. To illustrate his point, he wrote of members of the former Maryland State Board of Censors (which existed from 1916 to 1981) who spent years watching movies they deemed unfit for others

⁷⁶ Karen von Elten and Tony Rimmer, "Television and Newspaper Reliance and Tolerance for Civil Liberties," Mass Comm Review 19 (1992): 27-35.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁸ Wyatt, 35.

⁷⁹ Wyatt, 32.

to see, but which apparently did not affect the morals of board members themselves. Apprehension and fear over the effect of "heretical" or dissident communication on others "probably has accounted for a grisly percentage of the world's suffering and horror," Davison wrote. Yet, he added, "Insofar as faith and morals are concerned, at least, it is difficult to find a censor who will admit to having been adversely affected by the information whose dissemination is to be prohibited."⁸⁰

Rucinski and Salmon wrote that the third-person effect's link to censorship might be the most important aspect of Davison's model because of its societal implications.⁸¹ Gunther wrote that a third-person effect link to support for restrictions on pornography has "interesting implications for public policy."⁸²

Despite the case Davison and others have made for using the third-person effect to explain censorship, though, few researchers have looked in to the connection between freedom of expression and the third-person effect.

Gunther, in his survey on attitudes toward pornography, attempted to ascertain whether the perception that others were more affected by exposure to sexually explicit material could be linked to support for pornography restrictions (the behavioral part of Davison's hypothesis). Among those who reported a greater effect on others than on themselves, a

⁸⁰ Davison, 14.

⁸¹ Rucinski and Salmon, 346.

⁸² Gunther, "Overrating the X-Rating: The Third-Person Perception and Support for Censorship of Pornography," 37.

statistically significant portion also supported restrictions on the availability of pornography. Gunther reported that in a multiple regression analysis, the degree of perception of affect on others more than self was the single greatest predictor of whether the respondents would favor restrictions on pornography.⁸³

The Lometti *et al.* study discussed briefly earlier was an attempt to link the third-person effect to support for restrictions on violent, sexually explicit or otherwise socially unacceptable television content.⁸⁴ Rather than use aggregate opinions about the effect of television programming on the respondents themselves and the perceived effect on others, Lometti *et al.* asked respondents in their national telephone interview whether they had watched, discussed or read about any of 48 specific programs. Those who had were asked if anything they saw or heard was personally unacceptable; those who answered affirmatively were then asked to name specific things they objected to. The objections were then coded. Responses were marked as examples of the third-person effect if respondents cited one of several reasons involving media effects on others, such as "the program makes other people think inappropriate behavior is acceptable" or "people will imitate unacceptable behavior." Methodologically, the Lometti *et al.* study measures, then, not whether people exhibit a third-person effect, but the number of times some people cite third-person effects. For instance, one person who

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Lometti, Asbhy and Welch.

objected to ten programs was given the same weight in the study as were ten people objecting to one program each.

The television study reported that among those who objected to at least one program, 53 percent did not believe the program should be allowed on television. But the study made no attempt to correlate that figure with the instances of the third-person effect. Therefore, for the above stated research design flaws, the study sheds no light whatsoever on whether individuals who exhibit a third-person effect would be more likely to support restrictions on television programming content.

Rojas, Shah and Faber found support for the link between the third-person effect and support for censorship in their non-probability sample of 133 students, who were selected for the study because of their membership in certain classes or extra-curricular groups.⁸⁵

Rucinski and Salmon, meanwhile, found only partial support for their hypothesis that the greater the third-person effect, the greater the desire for an independent monitoring commission to oversee campaign-related media content.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Hernando Rojas, Dharvan V. Shah and Ronald J. Faber, "For the Good of Others: Censorship and the Third-Person Effect," Paper presented to Communication Theory and Methodology Division at Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual meeting in Washington, D.C., August 1995.

⁸⁶ Rucinski and Salmon, 360.

Research Hypotheses

This study was designed to measure whether there is, as Davison and others have speculated, a link between the third-person effect and support for censorship.

The third-person effect can be articulated as the difference between the degree to which an individual perceives he or she is affected by a media message and the degree to which that individual perceives that others are affected by the same message. If the individual believes that others are affected more, the amount of that difference between perceived first-person effect and perceived third-person effect can be categorized as the degree to which the individual exhibits the third-person effect.⁸⁷

The first research hypothesis is that a majority of individuals will exhibit a third-person effect. The second is that individuals who exhibit the third-person effect will be more likely to support restrictions on personal and media expression, while individuals who do not exhibit the third-person effect -- whose perceived first-person effect is equal to or more than their perceived effect on others -- will either be positively correlated with support for freedom of expression, or will have no significant correlation.

Specifically, the first two research hypotheses are:

H1: Most individuals will exhibit a third-person effect.

H2: The degree to which individuals exhibit the third-person effect will correlate with support for restrictions on freedom of expression, as measured by a series of questions ascertaining support for speech and media rights.

⁸⁷ Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice and Rosenfeld, 143.

Previous research has found a positive correlation between heavy newspaper use and the third-person effect. If, as theorized, the third-person effect is strongest among those who consider themselves to be "experts" on the topic of the media message and therefore "immune" to its effect, it is logical to believe that individuals who are relatively heavy media users will consider themselves to be "experts" in a wider range of subject areas, while those who are light media users and less informed would be less likely to consider themselves to be experts. In a study of this question, television attention to public affairs programming was found to be unrelated to the third-person effect, while newspaper attention to public affairs programming was positively correlated.⁸⁸ That study, however, focused solely on use of public affairs news content, and not on general use of and attention to news content in general. This leads to the third research hypothesis:

H3: News media use will be positively correlated with the third-person effect.

A fourth hypothesis, then, combines the results of the three previous hypotheses. If media use and attention are positively correlated with the third-person effect, and if the third-person effect is positively correlated with support for restrictions on expression, the fourth hypothesis is:

H4: Heavy news media users will be more likely to support restricting expression than will those who pay little attention to the news.

⁸⁸ Rucinski and Salmon, 363-365.

Summary

To summarize, this research was designed to determine whether previous speculation is correct in assuming that the third-person effect is a possible explanation of why some people want to restrict the expression of others. Previous research has found ample support for the existence of the third-person effect phenomenon. Previous research also has measured attitudes about a variety of free speech and free press issues. This study combined these two concepts; by linking perceptions about media effects with attitudes toward freedom of expression, this study was an attempt to confirm that the third-person effect could explain why some people want to restrict certain forms of expression. By restricting that expression, these people perceive that they are protecting "others" from harm by media messages to which they themselves are largely immune. This study also examined the question of whether the third-person effect and attitudes toward freedom of expression are correlated with media use patterns.

This study attempted to correlate the third-person effect with support, or lack of support, for freedom of expression, a relationship hinted at in a number of studies over the past dozen years but not systematically studied. The third-person effect appears to offer a possible answer to the question of why some people want to restrict the expression of others. This study promises to expand our understanding of both the third-person effect and attitudes toward freedom of expression.

Chapter III

DESIGN AND METHOD

Survey Design

This research consisted of a mail survey of randomly selected Knox County, Tennessee, residents measuring their news media use and their attitudes toward media effects and freedom of expression issues. Knox County, with a population of about 335,000, has both an urban area (Knoxville) and rural areas. It is the home of a major state-funded research university and a major governmental agency, the Tennessee Valley Authority.

The survey instrument construction and distribution plan were guided by the Total Design Method (TDM) described at length by Dillman.⁸⁹ TDM is based on social exchange theory, which posits that the actions of individuals are motivated by the cost of that action and the perceived benefit; an action that is seen as having a high cost (i.e., "it will take a lot of time to complete this task") will be undertaken only if the perceived benefit (i.e., "my completion of this task will help society") outweighs the cost.⁹⁰

In the area of surveys, Dillman contends that a respondent will choose to participate only if the "benefit" of completing the questionnaire

⁸⁹ Don A. Dillman, Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 12.

outweighs the "cost." A respondent who perceives that he or she, or society in general, will benefit from participating is more likely to complete and return a mail survey. The benefit does not have to be financial or even direct; a cover letter explaining that the respondent is part of a carefully selected sample and that the response is needed if the study is to be successful is one way of providing an explicit "benefit."⁹¹

Dillman sets forth a complete guide to conducting TDM mail surveys, from instrument design to follow-up mailings. Dillman reported that nearly 50 mail surveys that adhered to the TDM, including questionnaire and cover letter design and follow-up mailings, achieved an average response rate of 74 percent, with some studies of specific interest groups (such as home economics teachers) achieving response rates of up to 87 percent. On the other hand, Alreck and Settle stated that mail surveys with response rates in excess of 30 percent are rare, with rates of 5 percent to 10 percent not uncommon.⁹² Wimmer and Dominick wrote that the typical mail survey will have a response rate of 20 percent to 30 percent.⁹³

This study consisted of surveys mailed to 800 households selected at random. The respondents were selected from the Cross Directory of Greater Knoxville, 1994 edition. This directory lists all residences in Knox County alphabetically by street address, as well as listing all residences numerically

⁹¹ Ibid., 13.

⁹² Pamela L. Alreck and Robert B. Settle, The Survey Research Handbook (Homewood, Ill.: Richard Irwin Inc., 1985), 45.

⁹³ Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick, Mass Media Research: An Introduction (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1991) 123.

by phone numbers. Knox County addresses are included on approximately 400 pages, including the listings for the suburbs. A random numbers table was used to determine the sampling interval, with the *kth* address on each page of the Knox County listings selected for this study.⁹⁴ If an address for a business was selected using this method, the closest residence was substituted, alternating between the closest after the business address and the closest before the business address. To ensure adequate participation by both sexes, households receiving the mailing were asked that questionnaire be completed by the adult in the household who had the most recent birthday.

Respondents were asked to complete an eight-page questionnaire. Each questionnaire asked respondents to gauge their support for a number of freedom of speech issues and freedom of the press issues as a way to determine their overall support for freedom of expression. They also were asked estimate the effect of nine media messages each on themselves and on other people in general. The questionnaires also asked the respondents to estimate their news media consumption during the previous seven days.

Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter on University of Tennessee School of Journalism letterhead written using the TDM method, plus a postage-paid return envelope obtained from the College of Communications. Each return envelope contained a number so the respondent could be removed from the mailing list once the survey was returned.

⁹⁴ Earl Babbie, Survey Research Methods, Second Ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1990), 84.

The questionnaires were mailed May 15, 1995. On May 23, each respondent was mailed a postcard reminder of the importance of completing and returning the questionnaire. On June 13, approximately one month after the initial mailing, respondents who had not yet returned their completed questionnaires were sent a third mailing containing a new cover letter, another copy of the questionnaire, and another postage-paid return envelope. Because of financial constraints, Dillman's suggested final wave involving certified mail to non-respondents was rejected as too costly.

The population selection, questionnaire, cover letter and follow-up mailings were all designed to comply with Human Subjects Review policies, and the entire project was approved in advance by the University of Tennessee Office of Research Administration.

Because some of the 800 respondents selected from the Cross Directory had moved and either left no forwarding address or their forwarding order had expired, and because a few of those selected died after the directory was published, the U.S. Postal Service was unable to deliver 113 of the questionnaires. By the end of the third mailing wave, 275 completed, usable surveys were returned. Dillman⁹⁵ and Babbie⁹⁶ recommend computing the response rate for mail surveys by dividing the number of completed questionnaires by the number delivered by the Post Office. Using this method, this survey had a response rate of 40 percent. Dillman notes that computation of the response rate using this method tends to underestimate

⁹⁵ Dillman, 50.

⁹⁶ Babbie, 182-183.

response rate for mail surveys; in telephone and face-to-face interviews, refusal is not considered such until a contact is made, while in mail surveys the opposite is assumed -- a nonresponse is considered a refusal unless proved otherwise.⁹⁷

A relatively low response rate for a mail survey is not ideal, but it also is not unheard of. Dillman noted that mail surveys of the general population generally have lower response rates than do surveys of homogenous groups, such as members of a religious affiliation or of an academic specialty.⁹⁸ Several published studies with response rates lower than or similar to the rate in this study have been reported, each measuring a homogeneous group that should provide a higher response rate than a survey of the general population. Chew used a two-wave mailing (initial survey and a postcard follow-up) in his study of the information needs of audiences toward a low versus a high relevance issue, reporting a response rate in his general population sample of 25.8 percent (254 usable questionnaires).⁹⁹ Auman's study of newspaper design desks was based on a mail survey of newspaper managing editors with a response rate of 31.4 percent (109 usable questionnaires, supplemented by in-depth interviews with about a dozen respondents).¹⁰⁰ Fryman and Harp's study of broadcasting faculty was based

⁹⁷ Dillman, 50.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁹ Fiona Chew, "The Relationship of Information Needs to Issue Relevance and Media Use," Journalism Quarterly 71 (1994): 679.

¹⁰⁰ Ann Auman, "Design Desks: Why Are More and More Newspapers Adopting Them," Newspaper Research Journal 15 (1994): 129-130.

on a series of three mail surveys; the first has a response rate of 22 percent (64 usable questionnaires), the second had a response rate of 36 percent (105 usable questionnaires), and the third (using a much smaller sample) had a response rate of 80 percent (77 usable questionnaires).¹⁰¹ Dickson's survey of public high school student newspaper editors, using a two-wave mailing of original survey and a follow-up mailing three weeks later, had a response rate of 41 percent (426 usable questionnaires).¹⁰² Basow and Byrne's study of former journalism internship holders was based on a mail survey with a response rate of 36 percent (291 usable questionnaires).¹⁰³

Indeed, Dillman in his 1991 examination of research into the construction and implementation of mail surveys noted that a low response rate does not always result in nonresponse error (a discrepancy between the frequency of a population characteristic and the results of the survey that occurs because some of those in the sample did not respond).¹⁰⁴ A determination of whether those who did not respond to this survey differ in their attitudes and perceptions from those who did would be impossible without conducting an additional survey of those nonrespondents. However, one method of determining whether the response to this survey

¹⁰¹ John E. Fryman and Dennis A. Harp, "The Future of Video Curricula Beyond Traditional Broadcasting," Journalism Educator 49 (1994): 7.

¹⁰² Thomas V. Dickson, "Self-Censorship and Freedom of the Public High School Press," Journalism Educator 49 (1994): 58.

¹⁰³ Robert R. Basow and Mark V. Byrne, "Internship Expectations and Learning Goals," Journalism Educator 47 (1993): 49.

¹⁰⁴ Don A. Dillman, "The Design and Administration of Mail Surveys," Annual Review of Sociology 17 (1991): 229.

approximates the general population is to compare the demographic data with the results with U.S. Census data.

The survey sampled more men (56.7 percent) than women (42.2 percent), while results from the 1990 U.S. Census shows Knox County's gender distribution was 48 percent male and 52 percent female.

The racial distribution among respondents was closer to the Census figures. Whites (92.4 percent) outnumbered African-Americans (5.5 percent) among questionnaire respondents, while the Census distribution for Knox County was 89.9 percent white and 8.7 percent African-American.

Younger Knox County residents (teens and 20s) were underrepresented among questionnaire respondents, but otherwise the age distribution for the survey respondents was similar to the Census figures (Table 1). Such undersampling of young adults in a mail survey conducted in a university town should not be surprising; students are particularly transient, and many may have left town after the end of the Spring semester and before the survey was mailed.

Table 1. Age Distribution for Survey Responses and U.S. Census.

<u>Age group</u>	<u>Survey percent</u>	<u>Census percent</u>
Teens	0.4	4.8
20s	7.6	22.2
30s	19.3	21.8
40s	25.8	17.0
50s	11.6	11.9
60s	16.0	11.2
70s and above	18.5	11.0

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire in this study was designed to measure four things, in addition to basic demographic data.

Respondents were asked a battery of 12 questions measuring their support for expressive rights under a variety of circumstances. Six questions asked respondents to mark on a 5-point Likert-type scale their belief that "a person should be protected by law" when engaging in speech-related activities (Figure 1). Six additional questions asked respondents to measure their belief that "the news media (such as newspapers, radio, television and magazines) (should) be protected by law" when they engage in various activities (Figure 2). Responses ranged from 1 (should be protected all of the time) to 5 (should not be protected at all).

Respondents also were asked to gauge the effect of a variety of media messages on themselves and on others. The question order was altered on the second set of questions, concerning media effects on others, to reduce question-order bias (Figures 3 and 4). Responses ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

Respondents were also asked to report their personal consumption of news media reports during the past seven days and to estimate the attention they paid to news content (Figure 5). The questions asking for media consumption included of an eight-point response, from 0 (no days) to 7 (seven days). The questions about attention paid to news content had a six-point response, ranging from 1 (a lot) to 6 (none). When the data were

Should a person be protected by law when ...

Criticizing the president or other high government officials?

Advocating satanism or other religious cults in public?

Burning the flag to protest actions of the government?

Using words or phrases that would offend people from a different racial or ethnic group?

Taking God's name in vain or saying other sacrilegious things?

Buying magazines, books or videotapes that feature sexually explicit material?

Figure 1. Support for Free Speech Questions.

Should the news media (such as newspapers, radio, television and magazines) be protected by law when they ...

Advertise products that are legal but harmful to the public, such as tobacco products?

Criticize U.S. government leaders?

Criticize the military during a war or other international conflict?

Project the winners of an election while people are still voting?

Distribute material of a sexual nature, such as X-rated pictures or movies, to consenting adults?

Keep their sources confidential if a court demands to know the identity of that source?

Figure 2. Support for News Media Rights Questions.

My opinion of a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if I read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report criticizing the official's performance.

My opinion of a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if I read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report concerning allegations of misbehavior in the official's private life.

My opinion of a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if I read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report alleging criminal activity by the official.

Watching a television program that depicts physical violence tends to make me more violent in my personal life.

Watching a motion picture that depicts physical violence tends to make me more violent in my personal life.

Seeing a film or reading a magazine with sexually explicit content would affect my moral values concerning sex.

Seeing a film or reading a magazine with sexually explicit content would have a negative impact on my attitudes about members of the opposite sex.

TV commercials and other advertisements for particular products often persuade me to purchase those products when I shop.

When I'm deciding which candidates to support during elections, negative campaign ads often persuade me to change my mind.

Figure 3. Media Effects on Self Questions.

Watching a television program that depicts physical violence tends to make other people in general more violent in their personal lives.

When other people are deciding which candidates to support during elections, negative campaign ads often persuade them to change their minds.

The opinions of other people in general toward a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if they read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report concerning allegations of misbehavior in the official's private life.

The opinions of other people in general toward a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if they read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report alleging criminal activity by the official.

Watching a motion picture that depicts physical violence tends to make other people in general more violent in their personal lives.

The opinions of other people in general toward a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if they read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report criticizing the official's performance.

Seeing a film or reading a magazine with sexually explicit content would affect the moral values of other people in general concerning sex.

Seeing a film or reading a magazine with sexually explicit content would have a negative impact on the attitudes of other people in general about members of the opposite sex.

TV commercials and other advertisements for particular products often persuade other people to purchase those products when they shop.

Figure 4. Media Effects on Others Questions.

In the past seven days, on how many days did you read a newspaper?

Generally, how much attention do you pay to news stories, rather than features like Dear Abby, the comics, or advertisements, when you read the newspaper?

In the past seven days, on how many days did you watch a local television newscast (such as at noon, 6 p.m. or 11 p.m.)?

In the past seven days, on how many days did you watch a national television newscast (such as the 6:30 p.m. network news or a CNN newscast)?

Generally, how much attention do you pay to the news when you watch a newscast on TV?

In the past seven days, on how many days did you watch a TV news magazine show such as 60 Minutes, Dateline NBC or Primetime Live?

In the past seven days, on how many days did you listen to a talk show on radio in which listeners are urged to call in and express their views?

Figure 5. News Media Consumption Questions.

analyzed, the attention to news questions were recoded to correspond with the other questions.

Scale Construction

Results from the freedom of expression questions were used to create a freedom of expression scale. Results from the media use questions were used to create a media use scale. Scales also were developed using the questions on media effect on self and media effect on others.

The media effect questions had a five-point Likert-type response option, ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 signifying "strongly agree" and 5 signifying "strongly disagree." Respondents whose "effect on self" scale results were higher than their "effect on others" scale were found to exhibit a third-person effect. If the results of the two scales were equal, or if the "effect on others" scale was higher than the "effect on self" scale, the respondents was not be found to exhibit a third-person effect.

The freedom of expression questions also employed a five-point answer system. These questions were adapted from Wyatt's survey work on freedom of expression.¹⁰⁵ Although Wyatt used a three-point scale for his freedom of expression questions (types of expression should be protected "all of the time," "some of the time" or "not at all"), this study used a five-point scale to provide greater variation in results for statistical purposes.

¹⁰⁵ Wyatt, 91-97.

The media use questions asked respondents how often in the past seven days they had read a newspaper, watched a local television newscast, watched a national television newscast, watched a television "news magazine" show, or listened to a radio talk show, and how much attention they paid to the news content in the newspaper and on the television newscasts. The construction of these questions permitted the breakdown of the responses according to medium for further analysis. The use of "in the past week" as the reference period in the media use questions is based in part on research by Price recommending the specific time period rather than the more vague "in a typical week" when asking about media use.¹⁰⁶ Other researchers have found support for focusing on attention to, rather than use of, media as a measurement of media use.¹⁰⁷

The survey results, then, provided four scales for analysis: a media effects on self scale, a media effects on others scale, a freedom of expression support scale, and a media use scale. Two of the scales -- media effects on self and media effects on others -- were used to create a fifth scale, a third-person effect measurement based on the difference between the media effect on self scale and the media effect on others scale. For example, a respondent whose combined score on the media effects on self battery of questions was 39 and

¹⁰⁶ Vincent Price, "The Impact of Varying Reference Periods in Survey Questions About Media Use," Journalism Quarterly 70 (1993): 615-627.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen H. Chafee and Joan Schleuder, "Measurement and Effects of Attention to Media News," Human Communication Research 13 (1986): 76-107. Vincent Price and John Zaller, "Who Gets the News: Alternative Measures of News Reception and Their Implications for Research," Public Opinion Quarterly 57 (1993): 135-164.

whose combined score on the media effects on others battery of questions was 23 would have a score on the new third-person scale of +16.

The two media effects scales were compared to determine how many of the respondents perceived media effects on others to be greater than media effects on themselves. Those respondents were found to exhibit the third-person effect.

A pretest of the survey form was conducted using a non-probability sample of 95 undergraduate students enrolled in an introduction to mass communication class in 1994. The survey form used in the pretest, however, differed in several significant aspects from the survey form used in this study. For example, the students were asked to rate their support of freedom of expression issues and to estimate their own media use using three-point response categories; it was determined that using larger response categories would provide better data for analysis. In addition, several of the media effects, freedom of expression and news media use questions were modified or dropped based on the pretest results.

Chapter IV

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Results of Questionnaire

The questionnaire in this study provided a rich array of data for analysis. In addition to the demographic material mentioned earlier, results were provided for a battery of 12 questions concerning freedom of expression, seven questions regarding news media consumption, and nine questions each on perceived media effects on the respondents and on other people.

On the freedom of expression battery, questions concerning the rights of citizens and media to criticize government leaders got the most widespread support, while a question about the rights of individuals to burn the U.S. flag received the least support. More than half of the survey participants (55.3 percent) supported absolute protection for individuals who criticize government leaders, and nearly as many (47.6 percent) supported absolute protection when the media criticize government leaders. Conversely, more than half of the participants (55.3 percent) said individuals who burn the U.S. flag should have no protection by law (Table 2). Despite abundant findings by previous researchers that individuals tend to value individual

Table 2. Results of Freedom of Expression Questions.

Individuals should have the right to ...

	Frequency	Percent
Criticize president		
Protected all of the time	152	55.3
Protected most of the time	57	20.7
Protected some of the time	37	13.5
Protected very little	10	3.6
Not protected at all	19	6.9
Advocate satanism		
Protected all of the time	76	27.6
Protected most of the time	34	12.4
Protected some of the time	30	10.9
Protected very little	35	12.7
Not protected at all	100	36.4
Burn U.S. flag		
Protected all of the time	68	24.7
Protected most of the time	18	6.5
Protected some of the time	11	4.0
Protected very little	26	9.5
Not protected at all	152	55.3
Use hate speech		
Protected all of the time	77	28.0
Protected most of the time	41	14.9
Protected some of the time	50	18.2
Protected very little	40	14.5
Not protected at all	67	24.4

Table 2 (continued).

Individuals should have the right to ...

	Frequency	Percent
Say sacrilegious things		
Protected all of the time	86	31.3
Protected most of the time	29	10.5
Protected some of the time	33	12.0
Protected very little	31	11.3
Not protected at all	96	34.9

Buy sexually explicit material

Protected all of the time	81	29.5
Protected most of the time	43	15.6
Protected some of the time	37	13.5
Protected very little	35	12.7
Not protected at all	79	28.7

Mass media should have the right to ...

Advertise tobacco

Protected all of the time	99	36.0
Protected most of the time	47	17.1
Protected some of the time	49	17.8
Protected very little	22	8.0
Not protected at all	58	21.1

Criticize government leaders

Protected all of the time	131	47.6
Protected most of the time	64	23.3
Protected some of the time	46	16.7
Protected very little	7	2.5
Not protected at all	27	9.8

Table 2 (continued).

Mass media should have the right to ...

	Frequency	Percent
Criticize military during war		
Protected all of the time	80	29.1
Protected most of the time	61	22.2
Protected some of the time	61	22.2
Protected very little	26	9.5
Not protected at all	47	17.1
Project election winners		
Protected all of the time	71	25.8
Protected most of the time	29	10.5
Protected some of the time	34	12.4
Protected very little	23	8.4
Not protected at all	118	42.9
Distribute sexually explicit material		
Protected all of the time	89	32.4
Protected most of the time	39	14.2
Protected some of the time	27	9.8
Protected very little	29	10.5
Not protected at all	91	33.1
Keep sources secret		
Protected all of the time	96	34.9
Protected most of the time	63	22.9
Protected some of the time	39	14.2
Protected very little	24	8.7
Not protected at all	53	19.3

expressive rights more than media rights,¹⁰⁸ there was no clear difference in these results between support for individual and media expressive rights. Indeed, nearly parallel questions asking whether individuals should have the right to buy sexually explicit material and whether the media should have the right to distribute sexually explicit material had almost the same amount of support; 58.6 percent of the respondents said individuals should be protected at least part of the time when buying sexually explicit material, while 56.4 percent said the media should be protected when distributing the same material.

On the news media use questions, more than half of those participating in the study (50.9 percent) reported reading a newspaper each of the previous seven days, while nearly half (48 percent) reporting watching a local television newscast each day. In what might be considered to be a contradiction, 5.5 percent of the sample reported reading no newspapers in the past seven days, but when asked how much attention they paid to the news content of the newspaper (as opposed to features such as the comics or Dear Abby), just 1.8 percent reported that they don't read the newspaper. This discrepancy might be explained if some of those who reported not reading a newspaper in the past seven days normally do so, and therefore do pay some attention to news content (Table 3).

¹⁰⁸ Wyatt, 36.

Table 3. Results of News Media Use Questions.

	Frequency	Percent
Days read newspaper		
None	15	5.5
One	23	8.4
Two	12	4.4
Three	27	9.8
Four	21	7.6
Five	18	6.5
Six	19	6.9
Seven	140	50.9
Attention paid to newspaper news		
A lot	126	45.8
Quite a bit	87	31.6
Some	49	17.8
Very little	7	2.5
None	1	0.4
Don't read paper	5	1.8
Days watched local TV news		
None	18	6.6
One	8	2.9
Two	17	6.2
Three	15	5.5
Four	21	7.7
Five	35	12.8
Six	28	10.2
Seven	132	48.2
Days watched national TV news		
None	22	8.0
One	14	5.1
Two	19	6.9
Three	26	9.5
Four	31	11.3
Five	43	15.6
Six	24	8.7
Seven	96	34.9

Table 3 (continued).

	Frequency	Percent
Attention paid to TV news		
A lot	110	40.0
Quite a bit	106	38.5
Some	43	15.6
Very little	12	4.4
None	1	0.4
Don't watch TV news	3	1.1
Days watched TV news magazine shows		
None	69	25.1
One	52	18.9
Two	49	17.8
Three	55	20.0
Four	21	7.6
Five	17	6.2
Six	2	0.7
Seven	10	3.6
Days listened to talk radio		
None	156	56.7
One	29	10.5
Two	20	7.3
Three	21	7.6
Four	15	5.5
Five	21	7.6
Six	5	1.8
Seven	8	2.9

When asked to assess how they would be affected by a variety of media messages, participants in this study clearly thought they would be more affected by news of a political nature and by product advertising. At the same time, they perceived they would not be affected by violence depicted on television or in the movies or by material of a sexual nature. For instance, more than two-thirds of those surveyed (69.1 percent) agreed somewhat or agreed strongly with the comment, "My opinion of a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if I read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report alleging criminal activity by the official."

Meanwhile, a nearly equal number of survey respondents (67.6 percent) strongly disagreed that "Watching a television program that depicts physical violence tends to make me more violent in my personal life." In many ways, these results confirm findings by other researchers that the third-person effect is more pronounced when the media message is perceived to be negative (Table 4).¹⁰⁹ If it is perceived to be good to be influenced by a message (such as a public service announcement about the importance of wearing seat belts), people report they are influenced by the message more than others. If it is bad to be influenced by the message, then

¹⁰⁹ Gunther and Thorson, 592. Also Esther Thorson and James Coyle, "The Third-Person Effect in Three Genres of Commercials: Product and Greening Ads, And Public Service Announcements," The Proceedings of the 1994 Conference of The American Academy of Advertising (Atlanta: American Academy of Advertising, 1994) 103-112.

Table 4. Results of Media Effects on Self Questions.

	Frequency	Percent
Official performance		
Strongly agree	9	3.3
Somewhat agree	72	26.2
Neither agree nor disagree	103	37.5
Somewhat disagree	45	16.4
Strongly disagree	46	16.7
Official misbehavior		
Strongly agree	26	9.5
Somewhat agree	109	39.6
Neither agree nor disagree	64	23.3
Somewhat disagree	39	14.2
Strongly disagree	37	13.5
Crime by official		
Strongly agree	67	24.4
Somewhat agree	123	44.7
Neither agree nor disagree	43	15.6
Somewhat disagree	27	9.8
Strongly disagree	15	5.5
Watching violent TV		
Strongly agree	8	2.9
Somewhat agree	12	4.4
Neither agree nor disagree	50	18.2
Somewhat disagree	27	9.8
Strongly disagree	178	64.7
Watching violent movie		
Strongly agree	7	2.5
Somewhat agree	13	4.7
Neither agree nor disagree	47	17.1
Somewhat disagree	22	8.0
Strongly disagree	186	67.6

Table 4 (continued).

	Frequency	Percent
Moral values		
Strongly agree	13	4.7
Somewhat agree	21	7.6
Neither agree nor disagree	50	18.2
Somewhat disagree	23	8.4
Strongly disagree	168	61.1
Attitudes about opposite sex		
Strongly agree	10	3.6
Somewhat agree	22	8.0
Neither agree nor disagree	49	17.8
Somewhat disagree	35	12.7
Strongly disagree	159	57.8
Purchases due to ads		
Strongly agree	16	5.8
Somewhat agree	100	36.4
Neither agree nor disagree	60	21.8
Somewhat disagree	42	15.3
Strongly disagree	57	20.7
Negative political ads		
Strongly agree	11	4.0
Somewhat agree	48	17.5
Neither agree nor disagree	61	22.2
Somewhat disagree	51	18.5
Strongly disagree	104	37.8

people tend to say they are less affected by the message than are others. The results of this study show that when the media message involves depictions of violence or sex, individuals perceive they are not affected by the media message; on the other hand, when the message involves political matter, these same individuals perceive they are more strongly affected.

When the question turned to effects of these same media messages on others, the strongest effects were seen on the issues involving politics, while there was less effect seen concerning violent or sexual TV or movies. Two-thirds of the survey participants (67.6 percent) somewhat or strongly agreed that others would have their opinions of public officials lowered if they heard or read media messages. At the same time, about half (48.7 percent) strongly or somewhat agreed that violent television program makes other people more violent (Table 5). When compared with the results from the media effects on self questions, it is apparent that for many media messages, such as violent TV programming or television or movie sexual material, people tend to think they are significantly immune to those messages, while they perceive that others are much more susceptible.

Table 5. Results of Media Effects on Others Questions.

	Frequency	Percent
Official performance		
Strongly agree	16	5.8
Somewhat agree	134	48.7
Neither agree nor disagree	90	32.7
Somewhat disagree	27	9.8
Strongly disagree	8	2.9
Official misbehavior		
Strongly agree	32	11.6
Somewhat agree	154	56.0
Neither agree nor disagree	74	26.9
Somewhat disagree	9	3.3
Strongly disagree	6	2.2
Crime by official		
Strongly agree	59	21.5
Somewhat agree	158	57.5
Neither agree nor disagree	51	18.5
Somewhat disagree	4	1.5
Strongly disagree	3	1.1
Watching violent TV		
Strongly agree	30	10.9
Somewhat agree	104	37.8
Neither agree nor disagree	67	24.4
Somewhat disagree	44	16.0
Strongly disagree	30	10.9
Watching violent movie		
Strongly agree	32	11.6
Somewhat agree	97	35.3
Neither agree nor disagree	82	29.8
Somewhat disagree	36	13.1
Strongly disagree	28	10.2

Table 5 (continued).

	Frequency	Percent
Moral values		
Strongly agree	33	12.0
Somewhat agree	76	27.6
Neither agree nor disagree	99	36.0
Somewhat disagree	50	18.2
Strongly disagree	17	6.2
Attitudes about opposite sex		
Strongly agree	22	8.0
Somewhat agree	66	24.0
Neither agree nor disagree	114	41.5
Somewhat disagree	47	17.1
Strongly disagree	26	9.5
Purchases due to ads		
Strongly agree	58	21.1
Somewhat agree	146	53.1
Neither agree nor disagree	57	20.7
Somewhat disagree	9	3.3
Strongly disagree	5	1.8
Negative political ads		
Strongly agree	25	9.1
Somewhat agree	130	47.3
Neither agree nor disagree	83	30.2
Somewhat disagree	25	9.1
Strongly disagree	12	4.4

Scale Results

Before the research hypotheses can be addressed, the reliability of the four measurement scales must be determined. One method of determining the internal validity of scales is with Chronbach's alpha, a statistical test based on correlation of items making up the scale. If items within the scale are measuring the same entity, they will covary.¹¹⁰ The amount of alpha indicates the percentage of variance within the scale items that is systematic, or attributable to the variable being measured. An alpha of .80, for instance, means that 80 percent of the variance in the scale is reliable variance.¹¹¹

The minimum acceptable alpha level for social science scales is subject to debate; some statistics scholars argue that .50 or .60 will suffice for early stages of research, while others suggest a standard of .70.¹¹² Further, some statisticians have contended that lower minimum alpha levels will suffice for the early stages of research and in determining differences between groups, while higher minimums are required when scores are used for making important decisions about individuals (such as their selection or placement in social programs).¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Marija J. Norusis, SPSS/PC+ Statistics 4.0 (Chicago: SPSS Inc, 1990) B-190.

¹¹¹ Elazar J. Pedhazur and Llorca Pedhazur Schmeklin, Measurement, Design and Analysis: An Integrated Approach (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991) 97.

¹¹² Ibid., 109.

¹¹³ Ibid.

The 12 freedom of expression questions, measuring support for freedom of speech and freedom of the press, were combined, with a Chronbach's alpha of .90 (Table 6). A correlation matrix showed that results from each of the 12 questions was correlated with the others at $p < .001$ (Table 7).

The news media consumption scale had an alpha of .66 (Table 8). Interestingly, the two newspaper-oriented questions correlated at .33 ($p < .001$), while the television-oriented questions correlated even more strongly; the talk radio question enjoyed a significant correlation only with the question measuring to what extent respondents watched TV news magazine shows ($p < .01$) (Table 9).

The heart of the study consisted of the scales measuring perceived media effects on self and on other people in general.¹¹⁴ Each was assessed with a battery of nine questions. The scale on media effect on self had an alpha of .75 (Tables 10 and 11), and effect on others in general had an alpha of .84 (Tables 12 and 13).

In summary, the four scales (freedom of expression, media use, media effects on self and media effects on others) had acceptably high interior correlation according to their Chronbach's alpha.

Another, more powerful, statistical technique for measuring the association among items in a scale, however, is factor analysis. In particular, factor analysis is useful in identifying interrelated variables that are

¹¹⁴ A third media effects scale in the pretest, estimating effects on other students, provided a test of the social-distance aspect of the third-person effect, but that portion of the data provided little statistical help and was dropped from the final version.

Table 6. Reliability Analysis for Freedom of Expression Questions.

	Scale Mean If Deleted	Item Total Correlation	Alpha If Item Deleted
Criticize president	31.90	.58	.8928
Advocate satanism	30.58	.75	.8829
Burn U.S. flag	30.12	.65	.8888
Hate speech	30.84	.67	.8876
Say sacrilegious things	30.68	.74	.8836
Buy sexually explicit material	30.80	.68	.8869
Advertise harmful products	31.15	.49	.8965
Criticize government	31.72	.65	.8894
Criticize military during war	31.13	.61	.8907
Project election winners	30.44	.41	.9014
Distribute sexual material	30.78	.68	.8870
Keep sources secret	31.21	.46	.8992

Coefficient alpha = .8989

Table 7. Correlation Matrix for Freedom of Expression Questions.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Criticize president	1.00											
2. Advocate satanism	.50	1.00										
3. Burn U.S. flag	.35	.57	1.00									
4. Hate speech	.45	.60	.50	1.00								
5. Be sacrilegious	.45	.72	.58	.68	1.00							
6. Buy sexually material	.33	.64	.48	.47	.60	1.00						
7. Advertise products	.31	.42	.30	.37	.42	.42	1.00					
8. Criticize government	.72	.50	.38	.48	.48	.39	.38	1.00				
9. Criticize military	.49	.45	.49	.46	.47	.38	.28	.63	1.00			
10. Project winners	.21	.29	.45	.31	.27	.29	.31	.24	.30	1.00		
11. Distribute sex material	.36	.59	.43	.46	.58	.75	.37	.47	.40	.25	1.00	
12. Keep sources secret	.32	.30	.33	.26	.26	.32	.24	.42	.38	.28	.43	1.00

All correlations significant at $p < .001$

Table 8. Reliability Analysis for News Media Use Questions.

	Scale Mean If Deleted	Item Total Correlation	Alpha If Item Deleted
Read newspapers	21.61	.32	.6434
Attention to news in paper	22.53	.40	.6300
Watched local TV	21.43	.48	.5809
Watched national TV	22.01	.60	.5338
Attention to news on TV	22.58	.47	.6226
Watched TV news magazines	24.63	.41	.6081
Listen to talk radio	25.28	.08	.7060

Coefficient alpha = .6583

Table 9. Correlation Matrix for News Media Use Questions

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Read newspaper	1.00						
2. Attention to news in paper	.33 ^a	1.00					
3. Watched local TV news	.23 ^a	.15 ^b	1.00				
4. Watched national TV news	.36 ^a	.30 ^a	.57 ^a	1.00			
5. Attention to TV news	.10	.49 ^a	.45 ^a	.40 ^a	1.00		
6. Watched TV news magazines	.10	.19 ^a	.39 ^a	.36 ^a	.32 ^a	1.00	
7. Listened to talk radio	.07	.09	-.05	.06	.03	.15 ^b	1.00

^a $p < .001$

^b $p < .01$

Table 10. Reliability Analysis for Media Effects on Self Questions.

	Scale Mean If Deleted	Item Total Correlation	Alpha If Item Deleted
Official performance	28.71	.41	.7259
Official misbehavior	29.10	.39	.7299
Crime by official	29.66	.23	.7545
Watching violent TV	27.64	.52	.7106
Watching violent movie	22.76	.48	.6217
Moral values	27.60	.55	.7060
Attitudes about opposite sex	27.80	.49	.7132
Purchases due to ads	28.84	.22	.7597
Negative political ads	28.24	.43	.7240

Coefficient alpha = .7484

Table 11. Correlation Matrix for Media Effects on Self Questions.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Official performance	1.00								
2. Official misconduct	.58 ^a	1.00							
3. Crime by official	.45 ^a	.59 ^a	1.00						
4. Watching violent TV	.04	.05	-.06	1.00					
5. Watching violent movie	.05	.07	-.02	.90 ^a	1.00				
6. Moral values	.13 ^c	.14 ^c	.03	.64 ^a	.66 ^a	1.00			
7. Attitudes about opposite sex	.10	.07	-.02	.52 ^a	.54 ^a	.63 ^a	1.00		
8. Purchases due to ads	.19 ^a	.10	.04	.09	.10	.13 ^c	.15 ^b	1.00	
9. Negative campaign ads	.35 ^a	.28 ^a	.10	.22 ^a	.22 ^a	.29 ^a	.28 ^a	.25 ^a	1.00

a $p < .001$

b $p < .01$

c $p < .05$

Table 12. Reliability Analysis for Media Effects on Others Questions.

	Scale Mean If Deleted	Item Total Correlation	Alpha If Item Deleted
Official performance	20.23	.58	.8151
Official misbehavior	20.50	.46	.8265
Crime by official	20.75	.38	.8332
Watching violent TV	20.00	.61	.8107
Watching violent movie	20.04	.65	.8044
Moral values	20.00	.60	.8107
Attitudes about opposite sex	19.82	.57	.8150
Purchases due to ads	20.67	.45	.8269
Negative political ads	20.26	.55	.8174

Coefficient alpha = .8352

Table 13. Correlation Matrix for Media Effects on Others Questions.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Official performance	1.00								
2. Official misconduct	.43a	1.00							
3. Crime by official	.39a	.59a	1.00						
4. Watching violent TV	.34a	.14c	.14c	1.00					
5. Watching violent movie	.39a	.21a	.21a	.79a	1.00				
6. Moral values	.32a	.18b	.10	.50a	.51a	1.00			
7. Attitudes about opposite sex	.30a	.20a	.09	.48a	.45a	.79a	1.00		
8. Purchases due to ads	.42a	.40a	.34a	.23a	.26a	.28a	.25a	1.00	
9. Negative campaign ads	.50a	.48a	.37a	.35a	.38a	.29a	.26a	.35a	1.00

a $p < .001$

b $p < .01$

c $p < .05$

designed to measure a complex construct such as love, creativity or support for freedom of expression.¹¹⁵

The variables in this study were examined through factor analysis, using the principal components method with a varimax rotation, which is the most common method of factor analysis and the method that maximizes the variance in the loadings.¹¹⁶ The minimum loading for forming the factors was .50.

The freedom of expression questions produced two factors with Eigenvalues of at least 1.0, accounting for 58 percent of the total variance. One factor, which included questions about sexually explicit material, sacrilege, hate speech, flag burning and advertising tobacco, clearly measured attitudes about expression on issues with a moral aspect. The other factor, which included questions about criticism of various government officials and agencies as well as the protection of sources in the face of a judicial order, clearly measured attitudes about expression on issues involving the government. One variable, asking whether the media should be protected when projecting election results before the polls close, did not load adequately on either factor (Table 14). For purposes of this study, the first factor will be called "moral expression" and the second "political expression."

Using the same method, the media use variables split into three factors, as expected: use of newspapers, television and radio. These factors

¹¹⁵ Norusis, B-125.

¹¹⁶ Robert M. Thorndike, Correlational Procedures for Research (New York: Gardner Press Inc., 1978), 301.

Table 14. Factor Loadings on Freedom of Expression Questions.

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Criticizing government	.22705	.86163
Project election winners	.45505	.18679
Burn U.S. flag	.65735	.31220
Say sacrilegious things	.78557	.30550
Hate speech	.65009	.37973
Criticize president	.27364	.86163
Criticize military during war	.32033	.72675
Advocate satanism	.76844	.34334
Buy sexually explicit material	.83107	.14415
Keep sources secret	.25004	.54644
Advertise harmful products	.56043	.20207
Distribute sexual material	.73849	.26840

Factors account for 58.0 percent of total variance.

accounted for 68 percent of the total variance (Table 15). Based on these factors, the media use questions were broken down into three variables -- newspaper use, TV use, and radio use.

To summarize, the questionnaire results provided a number of variables to be used in testing the research hypotheses. In a broad sense, the freedom of expression variable is the result of the battery of 12 questions about personal and media rights. In a narrower sense, the freedom of expression measurement can be broken down into two distinct variables. One measures attitudes about expressive rights on matters with a moral aspect, while the other measures attitudes about expression concerning political matters.

Likewise, the media use variable is the result of seven questions measuring newspaper, television and talk radio use and attention. Using factor analysis, the media use question can be broken down into separate measurements for newspaper use, television news use, and talk radio use.

Finally, the battery of 18 questions about perceived media effects produced two scales. One measured perceived media effects in self, while the other measured perceived effects on others. The final variable, the third-person effect, is the result of subtracting each respondent's "other effects" score from that same respondent's "self effects" score.

Table 15. Factor Loadings on News Media Use Questions.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Read paper	.06774	.82387	-.03125
Attention to newspaper news	-.24975	-.74019	-.14527
Watch local TV news	.82413	.09846	-.19182
Watch national TV news	.69931	.37162	-.02940
Attention to TV news	-.67045	-.29312	-.02940
Watch TV news magazines	.72658	-.08780	.34112
Listen to talk radio	-.00987	.08757	.94519

Factors account for 68.0 percent of total variance.

Test of the Hypotheses

The first hypothesis was that a majority of respondents would exhibit a third-person effect. Each question concerning perceived media effects had a possible score ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Each respondent's score on the media effects on self scale and on the media effects on others scale could range from 9 to 45. Therefore, if a respondent's score on the media effects on self scale was higher than that respondent's score on the media effects on others scale, that individual was determined to exhibit a third-person effect; that is, those individuals perceived that they were less effected by media messages than were other people.

An overwhelming majority of respondents -- 93.1 percent -- had media effects on self scores higher than their media effects on others scores and therefore exhibited a third-person effect. The remaining 6.9 percent of respondents had equal scores on the two scales or had lower media effects on self scores than media effects on others scores, indicating they believed they themselves to be either as affected or more affected by the media messages than others in general. These results are in line with Lasorsa's report that research has found the third-person effect in a portion of the population ranging from 31 percent to 90 percent.¹¹⁷

Further analysis revealed that respondents who exhibited a third-person effect reported higher media effects on self scores than their scores

¹¹⁷ Lasorsa, "Policymakers and the Third-Person Effect," 168-169.

for media effects on others for each of the series of questions, while respondents who did not exhibit a third-person effect did not have significantly higher scores on the battery of questions with one exception. For those exhibiting a third-person effect, paired t-tests comparing each respondent's score on each question about media effects on self and on others resulted in t-values of at least 3.88 (Table 16). Respondents who did not exhibit a third-person effect did not have significantly different scores on a paired t-test with the exception of the question about the effect of reading or hearing news reports about misbehavior by a government official ($t=2.54$), and in that case they believed that they themselves would be more affected by the news reports than would others (Table 17).

More respondents reported they would be less affected by media messages than would other people faced with the same messages. Hypothesis 1, that a majority of respondents would exhibit a third-person effect, was supported.

Analysis of the freedom of expression questions is required for the second hypothesis, that the degree to which respondents exhibit a third-person effect will correlate with their lack of support for freedom of expression issues.

First, each respondent's third-person score was correlated with that respondent's score on the 12-item freedom of expression scale, resulting in a correlation of .12 ($p < .05$), meaning the more a person exhibited a third-

Table 16. Paired T-Tests on Media Effects Questions for Respondents Exhibiting Third-Person Effect.

	Mean self score	Mean other score	T-value
Official performance	3.17	2.48	9.58
Official misbehavior	2.85	2.23	8.34
Crime by official	2.28	2.00	3.88
Watching violent TV	4.35	2.73	21.13
Watching violent movie	4.41	2.70	23.62
Moral values	4.21	2.74	19.84
Attitudes about opposite sex	4.16	2.90	16.59
Purchases due to ads	3.08	2.06	13.95
Negative political ads	3.69	2.43	14.50

All t-values significant at $p < .001$

N=256

Table 17. Paired T-Tests on Media Effects Questions for Respondents Not Exhibiting Third-Person Effect.

	Mean self score	Mean other score	T-value
Official performance	3.05	3.47	1.80
Official misbehavior	2.36	2.89	2.54 ^a
Crime by official	2.15	2.47	1.55
Watching violent TV	3.47	3.36	0.57
Watching violent movie	3.26	3.36	0.62
Moral values	3.15	3.42	1.84
Attitudes about opposite sex	3.63	3.73	0.57
Purchases due to ads	3.15	2.84	2.05
Negative political ads	3.63	3.68	0.27

^a $p < .05$

N=19

person effect, the more likely that person was to support restrictions on expression. In addition, the more each respondent believed others would be strongly affected by the media messages in the media effects scale, the more likely that respondent was to support restrictions on expression (correlation $-.36, p < .001$). In addition, the less respondents believed they themselves would be affected by the media messages, the more likely they were to support freedom of expression ($-.22, p < .001$) (Table 18).

When the freedom of expression scale was split through factor analysis into the moral expression and political express variables, the relationship between the third-person score and support for expressive rights becomes somewhat less clear. The score on the moral expression questions correlated with the third-person score weakly at $.15 (p < .05)$. As with the full battery of freedom of expression questions, the stronger that respondents believed others would be affected by the media messages, the more likely they were to support restriction of the moral expression issues such as sacrilege, flag burning and pornography ($-.37, p < .001$). Likewise, the more strongly that respondents believed they themselves would not be affected by the media messages, the more likely they would be to support expressive rights on the moral expression issues ($-.20, p < .001$).

However, there was no statistically significant correlation between the third-person effect scores and the respondents' support for restricting the political expression issues such as criticizing government leaders ($.09$).

Table 18. Correlation Matrix for Third-Person and Freedom of Expression Scales.

	1	2	3	4
1. Third person	1.00			
2. Effects on others	-.44 ^a	1.00		
3. Effects on self	.52 ^a	.52 ^a	1.00	
4. Freedom of expression	.12 ^b	-.36 ^a	-.22 ^a	1.00

^a $p < .001$

^b $p < .01$

Still, the stronger that respondents believed others would be affected by the media messages, the more likely they were to support restriction of the political expression issues ($-.27, p < .001$). Likewise, the more strongly respondents believed they themselves would not be affected by the media messages, the more likely they were to support restricting expressive rights on the political expression issues ($-.17, p < .01$) (Table 19).

These results support the proposition that people want to restrict certain forms of expression, ostensibly because they believe others will be affected by that expression. At the same time, people tend to believe they are somewhat immune to those same messages. The more someone believes that others will be affected by media messages, the more willing that person will be to support restrictions on expression. That scenario appears to be strongest when the expression involves expression on matters rich with moral implications, such as advocating satanism, buying or distributing sexually explicit material, or advertising harmful products. This inclination appears to be less apparent when the expression involves political issues, such as criticism of the president or criticizing the military during a war or other conflict.

Previous studies have found statistically significant correlations between both age and education and support for freedom of expression¹¹⁸ and the third-person effect.¹¹⁹ More specifically, previous studies have found that the more education a person has, the more likely that person is to

¹¹⁸ Andsager, 16-18

¹¹⁹ Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice and Rosenfeld, 153.

Table 19. Correlation Matrix for Third-Person, Moral Expression and Political Expression Scales.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Third person	1.00				
2. Effects on others	-.44 ^a	1.00			
3. Effects on self	.52 ^a	.52 ^a	1.00		
4. Moral expression	.15 ^c	-.37 ^a	-.20 ^a	1.00	
5. Political expression	.09	-.27 ^a	-.17 ^b	.64 ^a	1.00

a $p < .001$

b $p < .01$

c $p < .05$

support expressive rights, while the older a person is, the less likely that person is to support those rights.¹²⁰ Education and age also were found in one study to be positively correlated with the third-person effect.¹²¹

The results of this study also found a relationship between support for freedom of expression and both education and age. The older a survey respondent was, the less likely that person was to support expression as measured by the overall freedom of expression scale (.21, $p < .001$) as well as the moral expression scale (.18, $p < .01$) and political expression scale (.22, $p < .001$). At the same time, the more education a respondent had, the more likely that person was to have a score on the freedom of expression scale indicating support for expressive rights (-.25, $p < .001$), as well as the moral expression scale (-.27, $p < .001$) and the political expression scale (-.20, $p < .001$). There was no statistically significant relationship, however, between any of the third-person measures and either age or education.

To ensure that the relationship between the third-person effect and support for restricting freedom of expression was not an artifact of the above-mentioned correlation involving age and education, the data in this study were analyzed using a partial correlation, holding constant for age and education. There was no change in the findings; the overall freedom of expression scale and the moral and political expression scales are positively correlated with the third-person effect and with perceived effects on self and on others (Table 20).

¹²⁰ Andsager, 16-18.

¹²¹ Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice and Rosenfeld, 153.

Table 20. Correlation Matrix for Third-Person and Expression Scales, Holding Constant for Age and Education

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Third person	1.00					
2. Effects on others	-.44 ^a	1.00				
3. Effects on self	.52 ^a	.52 ^a	1.00			
4. Freedom of expression	.12 ^b	-.40 ^a	-.26 ^a	1.00		
5. Moral expression	.15 ^b	-.41 ^a	-.24 ^a	.95 ^a	1.00	
6. Political expression	.08	-.29 ^a	-.19 ^a	.64 ^a	.62 ^a	1.00

^a $p < .001$

^b $p < .05$

To summarize, the data in this study support hypothesis 2, that the degree to which individuals exhibit the third-person effect will correlate with support for restrictions on freedom of expression.

The third hypothesis in this study is that news media use will be positively correlated with the third-person effect, under the theory that one of the driving forces behind the third-person effect is that people who consider themselves to be "experts" on an issue will believe they are immune to media messages on that topic but that others are not.

As stated previously, research has found a positive correlation between heavy newspaper use and the third-person effect. In one study attention to public affairs programming on television was found to be unrelated to the third-person effect, while attention to public affairs programming in the newspaper was positively correlated.¹²² If, as theorized, the third-person effect is strongest among those who consider themselves to be "experts" on the topic of the media message and therefore "immune" to its effect, individuals who are relatively heavy media users should consider themselves to be "experts" in a wider range of subject areas, while those who are light media users and less informed should be less likely to consider themselves to be experts.

The data in this study, however, do not support this hypothesis. Using the combined measurements of news media consumption as a media use index, a correlation matrix shows that media use is not significantly

¹²² Rucinski and Salmon, 363-365.

correlated with the degree of third-person effect, with the extent to which respondents believe others would be affected by the media messages, or with the extent to which respondents believe they themselves would be affected by the media messages. Using the breakdown by medium derived through factor analysis, there was no significant correlation for newspaper use or television use with the third-person variable, the media effects on others variable, or the media effects on self variable. Only the measurement of how often respondents listened to talk radio had a statistically significant correlation. The correlation matrix shows that the number of times respondents listened to talk radio was negatively correlated with the extent of the person's third-person effect ($-.17, p < .01$). That indicates that the more a respondent listened to talk radio, the less that person exhibited a third-person effect (Table 21). There was no evidence that news media use had any relationship to the third-person effect.

The fourth hypothesis was that heavy news media users will be more likely to support restricting expression than will those who pay little attention to the news. This hypothesis rested on the third hypothesis, which was that heavy news media use would be positively correlated with the third-person effect. Because the third hypothesis was not supported, it should be no surprise that the fourth hypothesis also was not supported.

There was no statistically significant correlation between the broad-based freedom of expression scale and the news media use scale, the newspaper use variable, the television use variable, or the talk radio variable. Likewise, there was no statistically significant correlation between either the moral expression or political expression variables produced

Table 21. Correlation Matrix for Third-Person Effect and Media Use Questions.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Media use	1.00						
2. Newspaper use	.66 ^a	1.00					
3. TV use	.88 ^a	.35 ^a	1.00				
4. Talk radio	.34 ^a	.09	.05	1.00			
5. Third-person effect	-.01	.02	.02	-.17 ^b	1.00		
6. Effect on others	.01	-.01	.00	.05	-.44 ^a	1.00	
7. Effect on self	.05	.02	.02	-.11	.52 ^a	.52 ^a	1.00

^a $p < .001$

^b $p < .01$

through factor analysis and any of the news media variables (Table 22). There was no evidence linking support or lack of support for freedom of expression to media use patterns.

In summary, the data provide support for the first two hypotheses. First, there is ample evidence that a majority of the population exhibit a third-person effect; they believe that media messages affect other people to a greater extent than those same media messages affect themselves. Second, there is substantial evidence that the extent to which people exhibit a third-person effect correlates with a lack of support for expressive rights. In addition, the more people think others are susceptible to media messages, the more likely those people are to support restrictions on expression.

However, the data do not support the final two hypotheses. There is no evidence that the third-person effect is related to the amount of news media use. There also is no evidence that support for restrictions on freedom of expression (or, conversely, support for expressive rights) is tied to news media use.

Comments by Survey Respondents

Each questionnaire contained space on the back page with an invitation for survey participants to express in their own words any thoughts they had. A number of participants took advantage of that opportunity. Several used the space to offer thanks for being asked to

Table 22. Correlation Matrix for Freedom of Expression and Media Use Questions.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Media use	1.00						
2. Newspaper use	.66 ^a	1.00					
3. TV use	.88 ^a	.35 ^a	1.00				
4. Talk radio	.34 ^a	.09	.05	1.00			
5. Freedom of expression	.06	.01	.10	-.05	1.00		
6. Moral expression	.03	-.02	.08	-.07	.95 ^a	1.00	
7. Political expression	.08	.06	.08	-.02	.81 ^a	.64 ^a	1.00

^ap<.001

participate in the survey, and several others used the space to offer a critique of the survey instrument.

Many, however, used the space to write comments on freedom of expression issues and/or media messages. Several wrote comments that appeared to support the finding by previous researchers about "social distance" -- that is, the more unlike the "others" are from an individual, the more the individual will think the others are affected by media messages.¹²³ In this study, a number of respondents wrote comments to the effect that they support restrictions on certain forms of expression -- particularly violent television programming -- because of the harm it causes among young people.

Typical of that attitude were these comments expressed by woman who reported her age as "70s or above":

While I am a little too old to be much affected by violence and sex in the media, I have very strong feelings about it. I feel that the bombardment of violence on unsupervised juveniles and others who are emotionally unstable is criminal. I know that TV sets have an off button, but sometimes there is no one there to use it.

Another respondent, a woman in her 60s, wrote that:

I don't feel that violence on TV and in the movies make reasonably well-adjusted adults more violent, but it becomes less shocking and perhaps more acceptable. Children and emotionally unstable adults however are a different matter and I think violence can have an adverse affect on some of them.

A woman in her 30s wrote, "Less educated people seem to usually, but not always, (be) affected more by media and advertising, I think. I also think younger persons are more affected by violence in media and movies."

¹²³ Cohen, Mutz, Price and Gunther.

Several survey participants used the space on the questionnaire to explain their positions on freedom of expression issues. A man in his 50s explained that "I believe in freedom of speech for individuals but think the media should be more responsible with their reporting," a statement that falls in line with previous research showing that people tend to support individual expressive rights to a greater extent than media expressive rights.¹²⁴ In one of the longer comments, a woman in her 50s explained her ambivalence about some forms of expression.

I am uncertain how I feel about protection of individual rights when hate groups and hate crimes -- anti-black, anti-woman, homophobic, abortion terrorists -- seem to be increasing. I value free speech in the service of conscience and public dialogue and human rights, but I often feel this should not be a license for bigotry and hate to be generated and given permission that it's OK under free speech. However, I also fear that restriction of free speech for one segment could result in restriction for others. It's a complex issue.

While a few comments written by a few survey participants perhaps do not carry the same analytical weight as the results of all 275 completed questionnaires, they do help to provide insight into how the respondents were thinking when they addressed the questions about freedom of expression and perceived media effects.

Summary of Results

The completed questionnaires offer support for two of the four hypotheses in this study. To begin, roughly nine out of ten people who

¹²⁴ Wyatt, 36.

returned completed questionnaires perceived that they would be less affected by a variety of nine media messages than would be other people in general. To paraphrase Davison, whose postulation of the third-person effect inaugurated this area of study, the greatest effect of media messages wasn't on "me" but on "them," the unnamed third-persons.¹²⁵ These individuals exhibited a third-person effect. For individuals who exhibited a third-person effect, there was a statistically significant difference in the degree to which that person thought he or she would be affected by the media messages and the degree to which others would be affected by the same messages. For individuals who did not exhibit a third-person effect, there was no significant difference in perceived effect on self and on others for any of the media messages except one, and in that case the individuals believed others would be affected less. These results represent clear support for the proposition that the third-person effect exists.

Further, the more an individual exhibited a third-person effect, the more likely that person was to support restrictions on expression. That relationship was even stronger when support for expressive rights was compared with perceived media effect on self and perceived media effect on others. In particular, there was a strong correlation between the degree to which media messages were perceived to affect others and support for restrictions on expression; the more others are swayed by the media messages, the more support there was for restrictions on expression.

¹²⁵ Davison, 3.

There was no support in the data, however, for the hypothesis that heavy news media uses will be more likely to exhibit a third-person effect and, therefore, be more likely to support restrictions on expression. There was no significant correlation between news media use and perceived impact of media messages on self or on others, or between news media use and attitudes about expressive rights.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

Many researchers studying the third-person effect have speculated about the phenomenon's link with support for freedom of expression, but few have attempted to find empirical evidence of that link. Rucinski and Salmon, for instance, broached the subject in their study of third-person effects in the 1988 presidential campaign but went no further than to call for additional research into the ties between calls for regulation of media content and perceptions of media effects.¹²⁶ Gunther, in his study of the role the third-person effect plays in libel cases, speculated that "Individuals, for example, may censor information or try to insulate the audience, in an effort to counter anticipated persuasion."¹²⁷ A few researchers have attempted to link the concepts of the third-person effect and freedom of expression, such as Gunther's study of attitudes about pornography,¹²⁸ but they have adopted a narrow view of looking at one particular type of expression or have been based their research on non-probability samples. This study, however, attempted to take the broad view of examining the third-person effect in the

¹²⁶ Rucinski and Salmon, 365.

¹²⁷ Gunther, "What We Think Others Think," 370.

¹²⁸ Gunther, "Overrating the X-Rating."

broad context of numerous types of expression, ranging from satanism to political commentary.

This study was designed primarily to determine whether there is, in fact, a third-person effect, as has been found by previous research, and whether individuals who exhibit a third-person effect are more likely to support restrictions on expression. Secondly, this study also was designed to determine whether there is a link between media use patterns and both the third-person effect and support for freedom of expression.

The data in this study came from a random-sample mail survey of Knox County, Tennessee, residents. The survey and accompanying cover letters and follow-up mailings were created using Dillman's Total Design Method.¹²⁹ Respondents selected for the study were mailed an eight-page questionnaire accompanied by a cover letter and a postage-paid return envelope in May 1995. A week later, the respondents were mailed a postcard follow-up. A month after the initial mailing, those who had not returned completed questionnaires were mailed another copy of the questionnaire, along with another cover letter and a postage-paid return envelope. Completed questionnaires were received from 275 residents, a 40 percent response rate.

It is clear from an analysis of the results of this study that a vast majority of people exhibit a third-person effect; that is, they perceive that they are less affected by various media messages than are other people. In this study, 93 percent of the respondents reported that they would be affected less by a battery of nine media messages than would be other people in

¹²⁹ Dillman, Mail and Telephone Surveys.

general. In particular, for those respondents who exhibited a third-person effect, their perceived affect on themselves was significantly less than the perceived impact of the same messages on other people for each of the nine media effects questions; for those who did not exhibit a third-person effect, there was a statistically significant difference in perceived effect on self and on others for just one question, and on that question respondents thought they themselves would be affected to a greater extent than would others. These data present clear evidence that there is in fact a third-person effect, that people tend to think others are more affected by media messages than they are themselves.

Participants in this study also were asked to gauge their support for a battery of 12 expressive rights questions, with results from those questions used to create a freedom of expression scale. A correlation matrix shows that the more an individual exhibits a third-person effect -- that is, the stronger that individuals believe they are affected less by media messages than are other people -- the more likely those individuals are to support restrictions on expression. Further, the less an individual believed he or she was affected by the media messages, the more likely that individual is to support restriction on expression. Likewise, the more that individual perceived others would be affected by the media messages, the more likely that individual is to support restrictions on expression.

When the freedom of expression scale was broken down using factor analysis into separate scales for expression about issues with a moral aspect such as flag burning or sacrilege and expression about issues with a political aspect such as criticizing the president, the third-person effect was

positively related to support for restrictions on expression involving issues with a moral aspect.

This study was not designed to measure the underlying sociopsychological mechanism that could explain this link between the third-person effect and support for restrictions on expression. One possible explanation, however, is that people consider themselves to be largely immune to media messages, while others are not. To protect those other people from the harmful effects of the media messages, people will want to restrict messages that they perceive to be harmful to the others. Gunther, in his study of attitudes about pornography, speculated that "optimistic bias" could explain this situation.¹³⁰ According to Gunther, people who consider themselves to be immune from harmful messages might want to protect others either out of concerns for those other people, or because failure to limit the harmful effects could harm society itself.¹³¹

As stated in Chapter II, there are several other possible explanations for the link between the third-person effect and support for restrictions on expression. One is a "media effects schema" in which people hold a number of beliefs about the media, including the beliefs that the media exert strong effects and that the audience of media messages is gullible and susceptible to persuasion.¹³² Because the individual believes that such media content will exert a strong effect, and because the individual does not experience that

¹³⁰ Gunther, "Overrating the X-Rating," 29.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Perloff, "Third-Person Effect Research 1983-1992," 177.

strong effect, then the individual perceives that others must be affected. To protect those others, then, media messages must be restricted. Another possible explanation is attribution theory, which states that people distinguish between dispositional causes (internal to the individual) and situational causes (external to the individual). People assume their own actions are a response to circumstances and situations, while they attribute the actions of others to personal dispositions.¹³³ Using this rationale, individuals would see their own behavior as the outcome of rational thought, while they would see others as more susceptible to media messages and therefore would want to protect the others from their own uncontrollable responses to those messages.¹³⁴ A third possible explanation is the "disowning projection," which suggests that people indirectly project their own socially unacceptable attitudes onto others. In the third-person context, individuals exposed to persuasive communication would be influenced by this communication but would believe that it is bad to be influenced; because of that, the individuals would "project" that undesirable influence, saying that others would be affected more than they would be themselves. Using this rationale, people would be "projecting" onto others the perception that media messages are harmful and therefore must be restricted.

Whatever the underlying behavioral mechanism, this study supports the notion that people who perceive others are more affected by media messages want to restrict those messages, and the bigger that discrepancy is

¹³³ Rucinski and Salmon, 347.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 348.

between media effects on self and on others, the stronger the desire to restrict expression.

This study also examined news media use patterns in an attempt to determine whether heavy media uses would be more likely to exhibit a third-person effect and therefore be more likely to support restrictions on expression. Previous research had found a correlation between media use patterns and the third-person effect.¹³⁵ That research, however, looked at television and newspaper public affairs content. This study included a broader measure of news media use, including newspaper, television and radio. The results of this study, however, do not support the hypothesis that news media use is related to either the third-person effect or support for restrictions on expression. There was no significant correlation between news media use and perceived media impact on self or on others, or between news media use and support for expressive rights.

Theoretical and Societal Implications

The results of this study, supporting the existence of the third-person effect and linking that effect to support for restrictions on expression, have important ramifications for mass communication research and for public policy.

In regard to the former, this study adds to the considerable body of knowledge lending support to Davison's 1983 hypothesis that many people

¹³⁵ Rucinski and Salmon, 363.

believe mass media content affects others more than themselves.¹³⁶ As recounted in Chapter II, more than a decade of published research, based both on experiments and surveys, has established that many, if not most, people exhibit a third-person effect.

Further, the findings in this study linking the third-person effect to beliefs about censorship take an important empirical step. While a number of researchers have speculated that the third-person effect could explain why people want to censor media content, no one has taken the extra step of explicitly linking the two concepts.¹³⁷ If people believe that the media messages affect others more than themselves, then they may feel justified in restricting certain forms of expression to "protect" those other people from harm.

If the underlying reason explaining the third-person effect is that people who feel they are "experts" on a subject will see themselves as immune to media messages, while others who not "experts" will be strongly affected by those messages, then individuals who exhibit a third-person effect may consider themselves more capable of judging which media messages should be restricted.¹³⁸

The data in this study should not be overinterpreted; as even beginning researchers know, correlation is not causation. Because the third-person effect and perceived media effects on others correlate to a statistically

¹³⁶ Davison.

¹³⁷ Rucinski and Salmon, 346.

¹³⁸ Mutz, 12.

significant extent, one cannot say that the third-person effect causes support for restrictions on expression.

However, people do support restrictions on expression in line with their perceptions about media effects on themselves and on others. The more people think others are affected by media messages, and the greater the discrepancy between the perceived effect of those messages on the individual and on others, the more likely those people are to support restricting expression. This phenomenon is strongest when the media content depicts violence, sexual activity, or some other message with strong implications on societal mores.

Further, this study attempted to measure both segments of Davison's original third-person effect hypothesis -- both the attitudinal and the behavioral. As Perloff noted in his critique of ten years of third-person effect research, few researchers have considered both aspects of the phenomenon, concentrating on the attitudinal, the perceptual part of the effect.¹³⁹ Few have addressed the behavioral aspect of Davison's original hypothesis, which stated that because of the perception media messages affect others more, the individual will alter his or her behavior.

This study does not measure behavior. It does, however, link perceptions to attitudes that could explain behavior. An individual who perceives others are affected more by media messages and favors restricting certain forms of expression could reasonably be expected to behave in a consistent manner. For instance, an individual who exhibits a third-person

¹³⁹ Perloff, "Third-Person Effect Research, 1983-1992," 172.

effect and supports absolute restriction on flag burning could be expected to vote for a proposed constitutional amendment banning flag burning. For mass communication researchers, this confirmation of support for the link between the third-person effect and attitudes about freedom of expression presents a broad arena for further research, as will be described later in this chapter.

From a societal viewpoint, the results of this study pose fascinating questions about public policy and media regulation. If restrictions on media content, as recounted in Chapter I, are based on a perception that others are affected by media messages, and if that belief is an artifact of the third-person effect, then policies aimed at protecting the public from harmful messages such as violent television programming may be based on an erroneous assumption of media effects.

However, the reader should not assume that such an erroneous assumption means all media content regulations are at the core faulty. Cohen and Gleason, in their book on social science research methods in communication law, recount the story of the sedition acts of World War I, when Supreme Court decisions in cases such as *Schenck v. U.S.* and *Abrams v. U.S.* permitted punishment for speech because of its political content.¹⁴⁰ To the communications researcher, it appears that the sedition laws were based on an erroneous powerful effects mass media paradigm. But the authors point out that the sedition laws, rather than trying to protect the unsuspecting public from the harmful, persuasive messages from socialists

¹⁴⁰ Jeremy Cohen and Timothy Gleason, Social Research in Communication and Law (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1990): 114.

and anarchists, actually were based on a desire to punish those groups and frighten the public from joining them.¹⁴¹

Similarly, one must be careful when attributing restrictions on expression solely to the belief that others are harmfully affected by those messages. Indeed, it might be argued that some restrictions on expression are aimed, as were the sedition laws, not at the audience but at the message itself. Restrictions on sexually explicit material, for instance, might be aimed at punishing those who make up the adult entertainment industry and frightening people (young girls, for instance) from wanting to enter the field. Likewise, support for restrictions on criticizing the military during the war might be aimed not at the audience who might be swayed to oppose the war effort, but to foster a shared sense of community and sacrifice.

Still, though, these findings should cast some doubt on the rationale behind most attempts at censorship. If that censorship is based on the misperception that others are affected by media messages while the individuals responsible for the restrictions are immune from those messages, then the basis for that censorship should be re-examined.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

No survey is conducted in a vacuum. This study was no exception. A number of events playing themselves out in the public arena may have had

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

an impact both on perceptions of media effects and on attitudes about expression.

This study was conducted shortly after the 1995 Oklahoma City federal building bombing, which elicited comments from many in the public eye, including President Clinton, that conservative talk radio commentators had helped to foster an atmosphere of paranoia and rage against the government.¹⁴² In addition, the well-publicized O.J. Simpson double-murder trial was under way in Los Angeles, with its attendant publicity about the extent of media coverage and the televising of the trial.¹⁴³ Finally, Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole brought additional attention to the issues of media effects and restrictions on expression with a campaign speech in which he assailed some Hollywood filmmakers, rap musicians and business interests that promote them, for the content of their films and music. His comments touched off a wide-ranging debate about the role of media in American society.¹⁴⁴ Separately or combined, these three events may have colored people's attitudes about media messages and expression.

In addition, the results of this study must be viewed in context of the response rate. Any survey runs the risk of missing a portion of the public; a telephone survey will miss those without telephones, an in-person survey will miss those not at home and the homeless, and a mail survey will miss

¹⁴² Donna Petrozzello, "Oklahoma City Backlash Hits Airwaves: Talk Show Hosts Dispute Clinton's Criticism," Broadcasting & Cable 125 (May 1, 1995): 6.

¹⁴³ Debra Gersh Hernandez, "O.J. Trial Coverage Hard to Avoid," Editor & Publisher 128 (April 22, 1995): 42.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Lacayo, "Violent Reaction," Time 145 (June 12, 1995): 24-30

those who have moved since the last compilation of addresses was published. With a 40 percent response rate, this study is in line with many other studies based on mail surveys, as noted in Chapter III. Still, the findings cannot be viewed as definitive. Further research, using a combination of survey and experimental methods, should address this latter concern.

The third-person effect and its link to freedom of expression present a rich arena for further research. Now that the link between perceptions of media effects and support for restrictions on expression has been established, further research should seek to determine the underlying cause for this link. Is it linked to attribution theory, or is it a result of optimistic bias or pluralistic ignorance, as stated in Chapter II? Further research should focus on the sociopsychological mechanism behind the link between the third-person effect and attitudes about expression. In addition, further research should focus on both the attitudinal and behavioral aspects of the third-person effect. In the context of expressive rights, researchers should attempt to determine not only attitudes about expressive rights, but also behavior linked to those attitudes.

Further research should build on this study and previous studies and focus on the relationship between the third-person effect and various forms of expression, including political commentary, sex- and violence-related television programming and movies, and political correctness. This study shows that there is an abundant area for future research.

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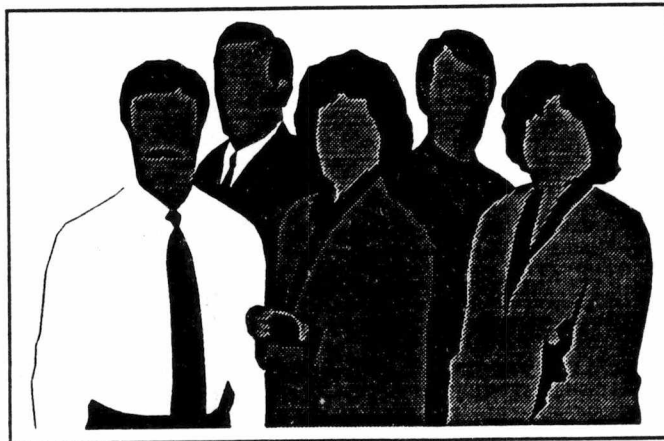
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APPENDIX

Questionnaire and Cover Letters

Media and Their Effect:

How What We Read and Watch Affects Our World



**College of Communications
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996**

To begin, we'd like to ask you a series of questions about rights and responsibilities, both for individuals and for the mass media. Please circle the number that most closely corresponds to your answer.

Should a person be protected by law when ...

Criticizing the president or other high government officials?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Advocating Satanism or other religious cults in public?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Burning the flag to protest actions of the government?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Using words or phrases that would offend people from a different racial or ethnic group?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Taking God's name in vain or saying other sacrilegious things?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Buying magazines, books or videotapes that feature sexually explicit material?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Should the news media (such as newspapers, radio, television and magazines) be protected by law when they ...

Advertise products that are legal but harmful to the public, such as tobacco products?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Criticize U.S. government leaders?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Criticize the military during a war or other international conflict?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Project the winners of an election while people are still voting?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Distribute material of a sexual nature, such as X-rated pictures or movies, to consenting adults?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Keep their sources confidential if a court demands to know the identity of that source?

- (1) PROTECTED ALL OF THE TIME
- (2) PROTECTED MOST OF THE TIME
- (3) PROTECTED SOME OF THE TIME
- (4) PROTECTED VERY LITTLE
- (5) NOT PROTECTED AT ALL

Next, we'd like to ask you some questions about your news media consumption.

In the past seven days, on how many days did you read a newspaper?

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| (0) NONE | (4) FOUR |
| (1) ONE | (5) FIVE |
| (2) TWO | (6) SIX |
| (3) THREE | (7) SEVEN |

Generally, how much attention do you pay to news stories, rather than features like Dear Abby, the comics, or advertisements, when you read the newspaper?

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| (1) A LOT | (4) VERY LITTLE |
| (2) QUITE A BIT | (5) NONE |
| (3) SOME | (6) DON'T READ THE PAPER |

In the past seven days, on how many days did you watch a local television newscast (such as at noon, 6 p.m. or 11 p.m.)?

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| (0) NONE | (4) FOUR |
| (1) ONE | (5) FIVE |
| (2) TWO | (6) SIX |
| (3) THREE | (7) SEVEN |

In the past seven days, on how many days did you watch a national television newscast (such as the 6:30 p.m. network news or a CNN newscast)?

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| (0) NONE | (4) FOUR |
| (1) ONE | (5) FIVE |
| (2) TWO | (6) SIX |
| (3) THREE | (7) SEVEN |

Generally, how much attention do you pay to the news when you watch a newscast on TV?

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| (1) A LOT | (4) VERY LITTLE |
| (2) QUITE A BIT | (5) NONE |
| (3) SOME | (6) DON'T WATCH TV NEWS |

In the past seven days, on how many days did you watch a TV news magazine show such as 60 Minutes, Dateline NBC or Primetime Live?

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| (0) NONE | (4) FOUR |
| (1) ONE | (5) FIVE |
| (2) TWO | (6) SIX |
| (3) THREE | (7) SEVEN |

In the past seven days, on how many days did you listen to a talk show on radio in which listeners are urged to call in and express their views?

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| (0) NONE | (4) FOUR |
| (1) ONE | (5) FIVE |
| (2) TWO | (6) SIX |
| (3) THREE | (7) SEVEN |

Now, we'd like to ask you a few questions about what effects the mass media have on attitudes and opinions. Each item consists of a statement, followed by a range of numbers from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning you strongly agree with the statement and 5 meaning you strongly disagree with the statement. Please circle the number that most closely corresponds to your feelings.

(1) = Strongly Agree	(2) = Somewhat Agree	(3) = Neither Agree nor Disagree
(4) = Somewhat Disagree	(5) = Strongly Disagree	

My opinion of a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if I read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report criticizing the official's performance.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

My opinion of a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if I read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report concerning allegations of misbehavior in the official's private life.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

My opinion of a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if I read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report alleging criminal activity by the official.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Watching a television program that depicts physical violence tends to make me more violent in my personal life.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Watching a motion picture that depicts physical violence tends to make me more violent in my personal life.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Seeing a film or reading a magazine with sexually explicit content would affect my moral values concerning sex.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Seeing a film or reading a magazine with sexually explicit content would have a negative impact on my attitudes about members of the opposite sex.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

TV commercials and other advertisements for particular products often persuade me to purchase those products when I shop.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

When I'm deciding which candidates to support during elections, negative campaign ads often persuade me to change my mind.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

(1) = Strongly Agree	(2) = Somewhat Agree	(3) = Neither Agree nor Disagree
(4) = Somewhat Disagree	(5) = Strongly Disagree	

Watching a television program that depicts physical violence tends to make other people in general more violent in their personal lives.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

When other people are deciding which candidates to support during elections, negative campaign ads often persuade them to change their minds.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

The opinions of other people in general toward a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if they read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report concerning allegations of misbehavior in the official's private life.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

The opinions of other people in general toward a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if they read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report alleging criminal activity by the official.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Watching a motion picture that depicts physical violence tends to make other people in general more violent in their personal lives.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

The opinions of other people in general toward a political leader (such as the President or the Governor) would be lowered if they read a newspaper article or heard a broadcast report criticizing the official's performance.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Seeing a film or reading a magazine with sexually explicit content would affect the moral values of other people in general concerning sex.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Seeing a film or reading a magazine with sexually explicit content would have a negative impact on the attitudes of other people in general about members of the opposite sex.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

TV commercials and other advertisements for particular products often persuade other people to purchase those products when they shop.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Finally, we'd like to ask a few things about you to help us in our statistical analysis of our results. Remember -- your answers to this questionnaire will remain confidential, and nothing we ask in this section can or will be used to identify you.

Your sex:

- (1) MALE
- (2) FEMALE

Your race:

- (1) WHITE
- (2) AFRICAN-AMERICAN
- (3) ASIAN
- (4) HISPANIC
- (5) OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY _____)

Your age:

- (1) TEENS
- (2) 20-29
- (3) 30-39
- (4) 40-49
- (5) 50-59
- (6) 60-69
- (7) 70 OR ABOVE

Your marital status:

- (1) SINGLE
- (2) MARRIED
- (3) SEPARATED
- (4) DIVORCED
- (5) WIDOWED

What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?

- (1) SOME FORMAL SCHOOLING, BUT NO HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
- (2) HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
- (3) SOME COLLEGE
- (4) COLLEGE DEGREE
- (5) SOME GRADUATE WORK
- (6) GRADUATE DEGREE

Which do you consider yourself to be?

- (1) DEMOCRAT
- (2) REPUBLICAN
- (3) INDEPENDENT
- (4) OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY _____)

Which of these best describes your usual stand on political issues?

- (1) CONSERVATIVE
- (2) MODERATE
- (3) LIBERAL

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your time and effort are greatly appreciated.
Please use the rest of this page for any additional comments you wish to make. Please
return this form in the enclosed postage-paid envelope or mail to Mark Paxton, 426
Communications Building, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
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May 15, 1995

John Doe
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Americans today are being faced with an unprecedented amount of information being delivered by the mass media. Television, newspapers, radio, movies, books, and other forms of mass communication are delivering information faster and in greater bulk than ever before. But despite this increase in information, we still know too little about how the mass media affect the ways we view our world.

Your household is one of a small number in Knox County in which people are being asked to give their opinions on these matters. Your household was drawn in a random sample of the entire county. So that the results truly represent the thinking of the people of Knox County, it is important that each questionnaire be completed and returned as soon as possible. It is also important that we have approximately the same number of men and women participating in this study. Therefore, we'd like the questionnaire for your household to be completed by the adult who had the most recent birthday.

You may be assured of complete confidentiality. The addressed, postage-paid envelope in which you will return your questionnaire has an identification number on it for mailing purposes only. This is so we can check your name off our mailing list when you return the questionnaire. Your name will never be placed on the questionnaire, and we will separate your questionnaire from the envelope as soon as it arrives, so there will be no way to determine which answers your specific household gave. Your return of this questionnaire signifies your informed consent to participate in this survey.

The results of this research will help in determining what effect the mass media have on our society. These results will be presented in a report that will be available to the public. You may receive a summary of the results by writing "copy of results requested" on the back of the return envelope. Please do not put this information on the questionnaire itself.

I would be most happy to answer any questions you might have. Please write or call. The telephone number is 974-5155.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Mark Paxton
Project Director

May 23, 1995

Last week I sent a questionnaire seeking your opinions about how the mass media affect our lives. Your name was drawn from a random sample of households in Knox County.

If you have already completed and returned it to us, please accept our sincerest thanks. If not, please do so today. Because the questionnaire has been sent to a small, but representative, sample of Knox County residents, it is extremely important that your answers also be included in the study if the results are to represent the opinions of Knox County residents accurately.

If by some chance you did not receive the questionnaire, or it was misplaced, please call me right now at 974-5155 and I will get another one in the mail to you today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Paxton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark Paxton
Project Director

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE



COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATIONS

School of Journalism
330 Communications Building
Knoxville, TN 37996-0330
(615) 974-5155
FAX (615) 974-3896

June 13, 1995

John Doe
123 Main St.
Knoxville, TN 37922

Last month I wrote to you seeking your opinion on the ways in which the mass media affect how we view the world. As of today, we have not received your completed questionnaire. If you have already returned your questionnaire, please accept our sincere thanks.

This research is being conducted to help us gain a better understanding of how the mass media affect people.

I am writing to you again because of the significance each questionnaire has to the usefulness of this study. Your name was drawn through a scientific sampling process in which every household in Knox County had an equal chance of being selected. For the results to be truly representative of the opinions of all Knox County residents, it is essential that each person in the sample return a completed questionnaire.

As mentioned in our last letter, the questionnaire from your household should be completed by the adult who had the most recent birthday. If there is only one adult in the household, that person should complete the survey, regardless of whose name is on the envelope. Your completion of the questionnaire constitutes your informed consent to participate in this survey.

In the event that your questionnaire has been misplaced, a replacement is enclosed. If you have mailed your completed questionnaire in the past few days and it has crossed in the mail with this letter, please do not fill out a duplicate.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions about this survey, please feel free to call me at 974-5155 or at my home number, 531-3888.

Cordially,

Mark Paxton
Project Director

VITA

Mark Paxton was born in Logan, West Virginia, on February 24, 1957. He attended schools in the Raleigh County and Wayne County, West Virginia, school systems and graduated from Vinson High School in Huntington, West Virginia, in 1975. He entered Marshall University in August 1975 and graduated magna cum laude in December 1978 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism. In January 1979, he began work as a reporter at the Charleston (West Virginia) Daily Mail and in 1980 began work as a reporter at the Nashville (Tennessee) Banner. In 1982, he accepted a job with The Associated Press. In the next ten years, he worked as a reporter, editor, correspondent and news editor at the AP bureaus in Charleston and Huntington. In August 1992, he left daily journalism to enter the doctoral program in Communications at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. At the university, he served as a graduate assistant in the College of Human Ecology for one year and as a graduate teaching associate in the School of Journalism for two years. In August 1995, he began work as an assistant professor of journalism in the Department of Communications at Southwest Missouri State University. He received the doctoral degree the University of Tennessee in December 1995.