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Political Third Parties' Representation In "the Big Three": 24-Hour Cable News Networks' Ideological Construction Of The American Political Duopoly

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POLITICAL THIRD PARTIES' REPRESENTATION IN "THE BIG THREE":
24-HOUR CABLE NEWS NETWORKS' IDEOLOGICAL
CONSTRUCTION OF THE AMERICAN
POLITICAL DUOPOLY

Bill Breault

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This thesis conducts content and functional analyses to investigate the amount and functions of third-party mentions in 24-hour cable news networks. Additionally, this thesis applies framing tactics, ideographs, and other rhetorical theory to examine strategies utilized to ideologically construct cognitions regarding the current American political duopoly.

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24-HOUR CABLE NEWS NETWORKS' IDEOLOGICAL
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POLITICAL DUOPOLY

BILL BREault

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
CONTENTS	ii
TABLES	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	12
Ideology, Political Communication, and Media Influence	12
Political Television and News Networks	15
News Framing and Agenda Setting	19
Content Analysis and Functional Analysis	23
Content Analysis	23
Functional Analysis	24
Content and Functional Analysis Regarding Television News and Politicians	25
The Big Three: Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN	27
Fox News Network	28
MSNBC (Microsoft and the National Broadcasting Company)	30
Cable News Network (CNN)	32
Television Media's Impact on Presidential Elections	34
Third Parties and News Networks	36
III. METHODS	39
Texts under Analysis: The Big Three	39
Data Analysis	42
Intercoder Reliability	45

Conclusion	46
IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS	48
Results	48
Brief Discussion	53
Rhetorical Analysis	55
Thematic Analysis of Present Ideographs	60
Commonality of <Republican> and <Democrat>	60
Central conflict: The battle between <Republicans>	
and <Democrats>	61
Unity and division	64
Presence and absence	67
Third party = “strange” or “surprising”	72
<Tea Party> actually <Republican>	75
Conclusion	76
V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	78
Contributions to Theory and Method	80
Limitations and Future Research	83
Conclusion	85
REFERENCES	87
APPENDIX: Character and Policy Utterances	93

TABLES

Table	Page
1. Frequency of Political Party Mentions	49
2. Functions of Third-Party Discussions on 24-Hour News Networks	51
3. Topics of Third-Party Discussions on 24-Hour News Networks	53

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

An underlying reason for research in the discipline of communication is to better understand the world around us, in an attempt to *better* the world around us. Specifically, communication surrounding politics is essential to inspect, because the impact of politics on everyday life is significant, especially in a democracy. “In a democracy there exists an unwritten contract between the people and their political leaders. Citizens support the political system because politicians provide certain benefits: peace, prosperity, government responsiveness, and competent, trustworthy leadership” (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1996, p. 3). As politics and political communication directly affect every individual that resides in America, it is imperative to examine the American political system as we know it. In particular, contemplating the existence of the two-party system and its impact on our democracy should be of prominence.

“Parties are seen as vehicles to represent differences in interests and ideas about how society should work and what policies should be adopted to have a responsive democracy” (Stonecash, 2013, p. 11). According to Stonecash (2013), parties concentrate on the informal arrangement of individuals who attempt to impact the direction of the party and the nominees chosen to represent the party. People attempting to sway a party’s central focus and agenda consist of party officials, interest groups and donors, and activists who advocate for particular political representatives and their

political ideologies (p. 11). A party is driven by these different players and their pursuit for social change.

Since anyone alive today can remember, two political parties have dominated American government: these are the Republicans and Democrats, the “right” and the “left,” or “conservatives” and “liberals.” For more than 150 years, the Democrats and Republicans have shared and controlled the core of American party politics (Gillespie, 2012); at the national level, no single endorsed candidate running for president under a political party besides Republican or Democrat has been elected to govern the presidential office in over a century (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1996). In fact, very few members representing a third-party have obtained a seat in the United States Congress in the last 50 years (Schraufnagel, 2011, p. 1). “Few people realize it, but there is very minimal third-party representation in state legislatures either. In 2008, a total of 20 out of a possible 7382 legislative seats in the 99 chambers of the 50 state legislatures were occupied by non-major party representatives” (p. 1). Clearly, American policymaking is substantially influenced by Republican and Democrat ideologies.

Why, then, are there merely two successful political parties dwarfing third-party ideals? Do only the Republican and the Democratic parties produce acceptable ideas and appropriate civil policies? Or are third parties consistently disorganized, with the result that they experience a shortage of proper resources and, thus, generate lesser-qualified candidates than the two major parties? Maybe the lack of third-party success in American history plays a critical role in the absence of politicians who are not riding the mighty donkeys and elephants! Is it possible that the Democrats and the Republicans embody all political ideologies that are commendable, and that outside opinions are

unnecessary? Many argue that American politics is controlled by the two-party system, or, the duopoly. In this thesis, I inspect the amount and type of coverage third-party presidential candidates receive in the media, and how the media portray third-party candidates when they are addressed.

A “third party” in American politics is essentially a political party that does not associate as a Republican or Democrat. Occasionally referred to as “minor parties,” “independent parties,” and “non-major parties” (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1996), these organizations aim to influence concrete principles established by America’s prevailing two-party system, adjust the range of content in political discourse, and fundamentally impact public policy by raising awareness about issues and alternatives that the duopoly has avoided or rejected (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1996).

Ultimately, third parties operate similarly to the major parties, as they connect populaces to government activity. “Third parties are one of the many vehicles people use to express their concerns. Like major parties, third parties aggregate citizens’ preferences into a political force and try to influence what governmental leaders do” (p. 9). Third-party voting options are often considered when an individual experiences dissatisfaction with Democrat and Republican action. Failures of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party can lead a person to resonate with an independent candidate or organization. Ranney and Kendall (1956) state that third parties are “safety valves for discontent” (p. 455). While the lines of partisan philosophies can often be blurred, a third party is a political movement that would not consider itself Republican or Democrat.

Although Republicans and Democrats hold the majority of political positions, a vast amount of third parties subsist in America. Currently, some of the more prevalent

third parties in American politics include the Tea Party, Libertarian Party, Green Party, Constitution Party, Socialist Workers Party, Party for Socialism and Liberation, Communist Party, and so on. However, on the state and national level, most often third party politicians are simply listed as “independent.” When considering national politics, I would argue that the only political third parties that have any real relevance are the Tea Party, the Libertarian Party, and the Green Party; one may also include the prevalence of independents, since candidates who decline to run as a Republican or a Democrat generally run as an “independent,” but do not truly affiliate with any political party.

Although third parties and their candidates exist throughout the country,

there are probably fewer than half a dozen minor parties that will qualify for the presidential ballot in more than five states. “It will be Democrats; Republicans; Libertarian; Green; Constitution; Party for Socialism and Liberation; Justice and Socialist Workers Party; and no others, probably,” he said in an e-mail. “The Socialist Party has a remote chance of also getting on as many as 5 states.”

(Singer, 2012, p. 1)

If third parties struggle to obtain access to the presidential ballot on more than five of the fifty United States, the duopoly will continue to prevail; third parties will continue to seem irrelevant and unelectable in the presidential election, and thus never be nationally recognized as feasible voting options. Many voters want their “vote to count” and not be “wasted” towards a candidate that will not win. Therefore, voters will continue to feel as though their vote is wasted when voting for a non-major party, and instead continue voting Republican or Democrat, even though that individual associates more with and prefers a different third-party candidate’s policies. The unfair ballot restrictions towards

third parties ultimately provide the voter with two voting practical options: Republican, or Democrat.

The President of the United States who belonged to a party besides the Democratic or Republican Parties' was Zachary Taylor, of the Whig Party, in 1848. At the time, the Whig Party was one of two major parties, and is therefore not considered a third party:

Indeed, not a single minor party has ever come close to winning the presidency, and only seven minor parties have won so much as a single state's Electoral College votes. Just five third parties (the Populists in 1892, Theodore Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party in 1912, the Progressives in 1924, George Wallace's American Independent Party in 1968, and Ross Perot's independent bid in 1992) have garnered more than 10 percent of the popular vote for president (Sabato & Larson, 2002, p.29)

No third party in the twentieth century has been able to successfully challenge the two dominant parties (Sabato & Larson, 2002); still, third-party candidates continual pursuit for the presidency is common. However, again, third parties' Electoral College success has been woeful. For example, the 2012 presidential election included both Green Party nominee Jill Stein, and Libertarian presidential candidate Gary Johnson. Nevertheless, in the last decade of American history, very few third-party candidates have had considerable success in the presidential race. Within the last century, the most successful third-party candidate was Teddy Roosevelt in 1912, who won 29% of the popular vote under the Bull Moose Party, yet still finished third in the election's popular vote (Dave Liep's Atlas, n.d.). One of the most successful third-party presidential candidates in

recent history was Ross Perot in 1992; while Perot received zero electoral votes, he won almost 20% of the popular vote. Whereas third-party candidates have had little success running for president, there have been a few third-party politicians at the national level, though, the majority of state legislators and governors alike have affiliated and still do affiliate with the major parties (Sabato & Larson, 2002). Presently, there are two third-party candidates in the United States Congress, Bernard Sanders, and Angus S. King Jr.; both of these politicians are listed as “independent” (Find your Representative, n.d.).

Third parties are constantly battling Republicans and Democrats for national visibility, media coverage, and ultimately election wins. “In party terms *duopoly* is a two-party system that is undergirded by discriminatory systemic measures designed to burden, disadvantage, or entirely shut out challenges to the major parties’ lock on electoral politics” (Gillespie, 2012, p. 2). Although Republicans and Democrats have established different boundaries, such as separate rules for third-party candidates on ballot accessing and funding, these two parties “have enacted and enforced duopolistic measures that stymie, disadvantage, or shut out the electoral initiatives of third parties and independents” (p. 1). In fact, Texas Representative Ron Paul, who ran for president as both a Libertarian and a Republican, in 2004, “offered a bill called the Voter Freedom Act to set national standards for presidential ballot access. In a statement in the *Congressional Record* that summer, Paul said that ‘supporters of the two-party monopoly regularly use ballot-access laws to keep third-party and independent candidates off ballots. Even candidates able to comply with onerous ballot-access rules must devote so many resources to simply getting on the ballot that their ability to communicate their ideas to the general public is severely limited’” (Singer, 2012, p. 1). Green Party’s co-

chairman of the ballot access committee, Phil Huckelberry, agrees, stating “The time, money and energy spent getting on the ballot is more than the time, money and energy spent once we are on the ballot in most of these states” (Singer, 2012, p. 1). These ballot access restrictions for third-parties have made presidential campaigns for them nearly impossible. Jim Clymer, longtime Constitution Party supporter, and the party’s vice presidential candidate in 2012 stated, “Elections are supposed to be 'free and equal,' and they are anything but 'free and equal' if they are setting up so many hurdles to us to just get on the ballot” (Singer, 2012, p. 1). Lastly, Republicans, Democrats, and other state officials have worked against third parties pursuing ballot access. An article written by Ron Paul discusses an example of this phenomenon:

Mr. Speaker, political operatives across the country are using state ballot access laws to deny voters the opportunity to support independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader. For example, one New York election lawyer publicly stated that partisan election lawyers should take advantage of New York’s complex and costly ballot access procedures to keep Mr. Nader off the New York ballot. Meanwhile, a state party chairman in Arizona has hired a team of lawyers for the sole purpose of keeping Mr. Nader off the Arizona ballot. The effort to keep Mr. Nader off the ballot shows how ballot access laws preserve the two-party monopoly over the political system by effectively disenfranchising supporters of third parties and independent candidates. While the campaign against Mr. Nader is an extreme case, supporters of the two-party monopoly regularly use ballot access laws to keep third party and independent candidates off ballots (Paul, 2004)

Additionally, “voters are socialized into a two-party norm that is constantly reinforced by the common portrayal of elections as contests between Democrats and Republicans. It is an extraordinary act for Americans to vote for a third-party candidate” (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1996, p. 3). However, since the two-party system’s formation in 1830, Americans have tolerated the two parties, but incessantly conveyed distaste for the duopoly (White & Mileur, 1992, p. xiii). The Republicans and Democrats have long maintained control over the American political system through deceptively manipulating the minds of American citizens with the notion that these are the only two voting options, and consequently have effectively limited different ideologies from entering American legislation.

Callaghan and Schnell (2005) discuss how policy making is a battle of competing viewpoints, and that through language—which reflects, advances, and interprets perspectives—social realities are created. Universally, all political players utilize language to supply citizens with influential cues about how an issue should be construed. Callaghan and Schnell advance this position, stating that this is a process “by which all political players, including the media, use linguistic cues to define and give meaning to issues and connect them to a larger political environment” (2005, p. 2).

Noticeably, the media play a critical role in American citizens’ political acceptance. As media surround the American people, media influence on political philosophy is apparent. “Historically, the functions, operations, and status of American political parties in election campaigns have been influenced by developments in communications technology”; specifically, television’s role triggered an alteration in party control through media messaging (Brewer, 2013, p. 237). Many different television

media, from news stations to entertainment programming, have encouraged particular American political perspectives. “A key development fueling the media focus on political action has been the rise and popularity of 24-hour cable news networks like CNN, Fox News Channel, and MSNBC” (Willis, 2007, p. 25). Through television media, individuals are inveigled into crediting only Republican and Democrat values, and therefore creating a socialization of political cognitions. In fact, many insist that the media directly regulate and set politicians’ and government’s agenda (Willis, p. 4). Consequently, political players strive for an abundant quantity of media attention to push their political agendas.

However, third-party actors struggle to obtain the spotlight in mainstream media, and thus their viewpoints go largely unnoticed. Many argue that the major parties and the political players within them deliberately oust any voice that stands in the way of their special interests and agendas; one way the duopoly accomplishes this is through media control. Critical Cultural Theory proposes that those with power and money construct a cooperative, elite group in media and government (Willis, 2007). This theory can be applied to political discourse in the media and can explain the lack of third-party representation in news media; since the Democratic and Republican parties possess the most financial backing and influence in American politics, Critical Cultural Theory helps explain how the media determine the public agenda in order to mobilize public backing concerning the special interests of the two dominant parties. Clearly, mainstream television news networks highlight and accentuate Democratic and Republican values, candidates, and agendas. Subsequently, news media can influence one’s political affiliation and voting behavior. Cognitive Learning Theory suggests that cognitive

processes are created by one's social experiences, which in turn ultimately influence one's behaviors and actions (Prati, 2012). Since mainstream news media concentrate on the two major parties, the populace is relatively unaware of third-party existence and the ideologies that independents embrace. Therefore, Cognitive Learning Theory helps explain why most Americans vote for Republican and Democratic candidates—Americans are indoctrinated with duopolistic predispositions. Evidently, the news media enhance the duopoly and are a central cause in voters choosing between Republican and Democrat options.

As stated above, a large reason people turn to third-party membership and independent candidates stems from dissatisfaction with the major parties. Personally, my dissatisfaction with policies and actions of the two-party system sparked my interests in third-party politics. I believe that there are more than two suitable solutions to complex world problems, which has led me to further explore the nature of American duopoly. Specifically, my experiences working with independent candidates on the local level have enlightened me about the barriers third parties face in American politics. Also, participating as an executive for a third-party organization has exposed me to many viewpoints outside of the norm, in which I discovered a predilection; through my personal encounters and research, I have come to believe that the notion that other ideologies rejected by two major parties could benefit society as a whole resonates with me. In fact, many argue that America's party system does not even consist of two major national parties. "They contend that there are just two branches of one party—two brands in effect, one Democratic, the other Republican, both offering nearly identical products to the voting consumer" (Gillespie, 2012, p. 16). These reasons have led me to

write a thesis in which I explore relevant literature of third parties and media portrayals, discuss the methods of content and functional analysis, and analyze three popular media sources. A goal of this thesis is to add to the body of knowledge concerning limited voting options and duopolistic control of governmental action.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted in the first chapter, third-party representation is overlooked in American culture. My personal experiences have led me to believe American ideology about third-parties stereotypes third-party principles, standards, and candidates as inadequate, or lesser than the major parties, which is one reason for the purpose of this study. Questioning society's adverse notions of third parties' functions and competence in the political system, and exploring the origin of these conceptions, could provide a greater understanding of the duopoly and its success. In this literature review, discuss political communication and media influence, political television, news networks, and third-party politics within the media.

Ideology, Political Communication, and Media Influence

People experience and understand their environments through communication. "Communication is the most vital phenomenon in the human existence. Man himself is a product of communication, he lives with and by it and his survival is emphatically dependent on it" (Semiu, 2013, p. 33). As politics is profoundly a communicative activity, people and their governments maintain connections among each other through communication (Hollihan, 2009). Political communication between government and its citizens delineates the way a government operates. Cap and Okluska (2013) define political communication as "all communicative acts whereby (representatives of)

different social groups and institutions pursue their (particular) interests, needs, aspirations, and values” (p. 7). Cap and Okluska state that political communication is an interaction within at least three spheres: 1) the state political system (e.g., governments, political parties, elections, debates); 2) governmental and non-governmental social institutions (e.g. businesses, NGOs, educational organizations, campaigns, and social movements); and/or 3) the media system. Since public audiences are exposed to a variety of political experiences, events, and messages within these three spheres, which a person must explain and understand, people thus obtain their political stances and information through these experiences and interactions. Therefore, political communication essentially dictates how one will mediate their ideologies.

People derive much of their ideological beliefs from their observed surroundings. However, many ideologies limit intuitions, or even display reality inaccurately. Hall (1986) defines ideology as “the mental frameworks, the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works” (p. 29). Given that meaning is socially constructed, Hall argues that ideological logics in public discourse create limiting social realities concerning the way the world operates. These ideological logics in the public domain show that media are one of the main sources of ideological construction, engaging rhetorics to construct social meaning. In this way, “Ideological constructions tender whole ‘logics’ as common sense of culture,” and “are a function of discourse and the logic of social processes” (Makus, 1990, pp. 498-500). Scholars have argued from several perspectives that social cognitions are produced through discourse and interaction

with historical circumstances. Ideologies cannot only embody false ideas, but they can also mask particular interests (Hollihan, 2009). Ideology theory highlights the influence that rhetorics have upon the construction of society's perceptions and individuals' cognitions.

We must examine the role of the media in duopoly, because "One of the chief sites of meaning production and interpretation is the media, reproductive of numerous ideologies" (Glapka, 2010, p. 47). Reception of media discourse constructs an individual's belief regarding power structures (Glapka), especially concerning the realm of politics. Individuals frequently gather information about issues and opinions through the media. In fact, mass media are considered central to the propagation of political information in most democracies (Moody, 2011). This, in turn, can affect one's knowledge, mindsets, actions, decision making, and ultimately voting behavior, by providing information concerning candidates and elections (Boyle, Schmierbach, & McLeod, 2007). With the average person consuming over 3,000 hours of media products each year (excluding social media networking) (Kendall, 2011), it seems logical that the excess of media products influence and have an effect on the way Americans think. Mass media have been collectively accepted to hold great power, providing publics with information on issues, and highlighting certain news items while ignoring others (Andina-Díaz, 2007). Mass media have even been seen as a tool for manipulation (Andina-Díaz). For example, media outlets employ the card-stacking technique, where all evidence supporting a media claim is emphasized, and evidence disparaging that claim is downplayed or even completely ignored. Thus, the media play a large role in one's political perspectives.

Mass media influence in the U.S. electoral processes continues to grow (Arterton, 1984). As Americans consider the election process to be important, the mass media dedicate extensive time, energy, and resources reporting the activities of presidential candidates. This is very significant, since “presidential campaign managers believe, almost uniformly, that their most efficient means of persuasive communication is these preestablished communications media” (Arterton, p. 1). Furthermore, Arterton states that a campaign’s daily schedule revolves around the pursuit for media attention.

Consequently, media assemble, organize, and filter presidential information, then expose this material to publics. Since a citizen’s political world is mostly created by the mass media (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992, p.1), and politicians rely on television to advertise their issue positions throughout election seasons (Dagnes, 2010), reports regarding the election provided by the media help citizens establish political understandings.

Political Television and News Networks

Political communication largely occurs on television; the television is a primary medium in the social construction of reality, since “television helps shape, reflect, and maintain culture” (McClain, 2011, p. 11). Considering that a majority of homes in America own at least one television, television is very prevalent in American culture. In fact, cable and satellite television reaches 91% of American households, and the average household could choose from approximately 119 channels (Arceneaux, Johnson, & Murphy, 2012); thus, a variety of news options are available to citizens. According to Hollihan (2009), the average household has almost three television sets, and at least one television is turned on for approximately seven hours per day. Additionally, the average child spends twenty-seven hours per week watching TV, with children spending more

time watching TV than they spend in school; many studies suggest that exposure to news on television has a substantial impact on children (Hollihan), and children gather their political knowledge while their parents are watching the news (Meadow, 1980). Furthermore, television takes up almost half of the time North Americans spend with media products, as the average U.S. household watches over 1,600 hours each year (Madger, 2009). Television is an outlet where people gather information about political issues and the governmental system. Since media, especially television, are responsible for social constructs, partisan standpoints are likely garnished by political communication on television.

Many scholars posit that television viewing contributes to social reality conceptualization, and extensively cultivates individual cognitions within a society. Gerbner (1998), describing cultivation theory, argues that television is a main source of socialization and everyday information. Cultivation theory describes how viewers instinctively and unintentionally create social perceptions of the world through television watching. This theory emphasizes that the social construction of reality is a result of growing up and living with natural television access. Understanding the role of social construction is important, because “compared to other media, television provides a relatively restricted set of choices for a relatively unrestricted variety of interests and publics” (p. 178). Additionally, the recurring ideologies, themes, and messages are inescapable for the steady viewer, and thus influence audiences to believe that what they witness on television is reality. Cultivation analysis begins by analyzing communication systems in television, identifying the most frequent, constant, and predominant messages and patterns of television content, and subsequently explaining the consequences of this

repeated exposure. As such, “television is the source of the most broadly shared images and messages in history. It is the mainstream of the common symbolic environment into which our children are born and in which we all live out our lives” (p. 177). Through cultivation theory, Gerbner illustrates how television saturates the symbolic world.

Credibility of news media is significant to audience members, which consists of both trustworthiness of the individual constructing the message and the actual medium where the news is collected (Kovacic, Erjavec, & Stular, 2010). Even with the rise of Internet news usage, one study stated that news information gathered through traditional media (e.g., television) was believed to be more credible than that gathered on the Internet. While news media credibility continues to plummet and the public’s trust in television news has reached all-time lows (Geary, 2005), citizens habitually use media that they find untrustworthy to collect political information (Moody, 2011).

News distribution took a major change in path when network television adopted news delivery. Prior to television news, the public gathered political information mainly through newspapers and radio broadcasts. Although many Americans report reading newspapers weekly, newspaper readership continues to decline (Graber, 2012; Hollihan, 2009), largely due to the availability of television news. Also, viewers reported that television coverage of political issues is more attention-grabbing, interesting, personally relevant, and emotionally involving than newspaper or magazine coverage (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992).

In 1948, television provided American households with broadcasted national political conventions for the first time, allowing citizens to actually witness an event via television that had formerly only been described in newspapers (Ammon, 2001). By the

early 1960s, Americans received more of their political information from television than newspapers (Ammon). To keep up with political developments in the 1990s, most Americans relied on news networks such as ABC, CBS, or NBC evening news broadcasts (Fox & Ramos, 2012). Since then, the number of cable news networks has enlarged, including diversified structures and programming. As television remains a main source for political information, journalists have responded and developed new tactics appropriate for communicating through this medium.

This transformation of news media has brought the rise of numerous television news networks. Twenty-four-hour cable news networks (e.g., CNN, MSNBC, Fox News), in particular, play a leading role in one's political knowledge and attitudes. With a combination of lengthy air-time and an extended headline service presentation style, these news stations provide a broader span of relevant news stories than other media (Graber, 2012). Additionally, the day and night repeat of broadcasts increases the chance a viewer will catch these relevant news stories. Dagnes (2010) states that the evening news audience exceeds 26 million viewers per night. News stories are valuable sources for developing one's political perspectives, especially when experts' testimonies are utilized to support a story's claim (Graber, 2012). The multiplicity of news choices has "helped bring about the fragmentation of the television news media and the stratification of cable news networks along ideological lines" (Arceneaux, Johnson, & Murphy, 2012, p. 174). By specifically exploiting the conflict between Republicans and Democrats, news media frame American politics as being strictly a two-party system, in turn cultivating a two-party norm.

News Framing and Agenda Setting

Framing is a rhetorical strategy utilized by the news media to create mass opinion about particular issues. Goffman's frame analysis (1974) can be applied to American politics to explain how the media frame presidential elections. Many rhetorical scholars have utilized frame analysis to explain phenomena in media studies, political science, psychology, sociology, and other fields (Kuypers, 2009; Snow & Benford, 1986). Framing indicates the social construction of concepts based on how individuals and societies perceive and communicate about reality. "Frames are interpretive schemata that allow individuals to make sense of their social world" (Baker, 2008, p. 5). Frames allow us to organize events and experiences, and guide action, either collective or individual (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986). In order to highlight and privilege certain matters over others to elevate them in salience, frames are used (Kendall, 2011). The media often execute the rhetorical strategy of framing, known as media framing. "The term media framing describes the process by which media packages information and entertainment prior to presenting the information to an audience" (Kendall, p. 8), which may affect a viewer's attitudes and judgments about an issue or political perception.

There are two aspects of framing that communication scholars deem important: frame building and frame setting. Frame building explores how the news is framed (Moy & Zhou, 2006). The media use several maneuvers and methods to frame the ideologies that they desire viewers to recognize. Moy and Zhou (2006) state one strategy is to use "cultural resonances," or frame matters as real and important, in a way that rings true to society's beliefs. Snow and Benford (1988) state that some frames resonate with cultural narrations through stories, myths, and folk tales and are an ingredient of one's cultural

heritage. Media often use characterization frames, creating perceptions of other individuals based on their framing techniques. Another rhetorical framing strategy is the repetition of frames. The media will not only over-display their framework, but also utilize several media to drill a message into the minds of viewers. The rhetorical tactic of framing is one way in which the media attempt to affect audience perceptions.

Frame setting examines how news frames affect audiences (Moy & Zhou, 2006). In order to understand this process, Moy and Zhou (2006) note that, “there is strong support for how variations in news frame can create substantial differences in audience members understanding and evaluation of issues” (p. 5). When viewers apply their existing schema to a frame, this may often influence and/or strengthen an ideology or national interest. However, viewers should not assume that what they see in the media accurately reflects real life. Media often mold information to construct a false picture of the way the world works, thus, creating a false social construct of reality. Framing leads viewers to make sense of the world by events that they see, though, even if they do not actually experience those events firsthand.

Framing is especially employed in the political world (e.g., Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In searching for political information and making sense of the political world, the media simplify cognitive frames to capture audiences and implant political ideologies within viewers. Whereas the frame may not determine the information or news sources individuals might believe, frames appearing in news media will likely shape aspects of the world that an individual understands, and thus are central to the development of meaning construction (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). Noticeably, politically charged frames can be powerful, by cultivating viewpoints and

ideologies among viewers. Callaghan and Schnell (2005) further discuss politically charged frames:

In a democratic society, frames can be generated by a variety of policy actors who are 'free' (politically speaking) to seek to change or protect the status quo by configuring issues to their advantage. Among central participants are elected officials, political parties, interest groups, the media, and citizens.... political players use language to give influential cues about how an issue is to be interpreted. This process by which all political players, including the media, use linguistic cues to define and give meaning to issues and connect them to a larger political environment has come to be known as framing. Essentially, frames set the boundaries of public policy debates.... Thus, in framing issues for American politics, contrary to pluralist theories of democracy, the frames of dominant players may be more powerful and crowd out other player's frames (pp. 3-7).

Political players frame issues and political ideologies to shape public beliefs, setting political agendas and ultimately enhancing their political power.

Some scholars claim that media directly regulate and set governments' and politicians' agendas (Willis, 2007). Substantial research on agenda setting theory concerning politics examines how and why political agendas change overtime (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Mortensen, 2010); moreover, many agenda setting theorists argue that when mass media accentuate an issue or topic, the audience receiving the message will consider the issue or topic to be significant (McCombs & Shaw; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). In other words, many scholars believe that media directly set the political agenda by telling audiences what to deem important at any given time; these framed agendas

ultimately aid in the creation of viewers' ideologies. Also, political scientists utilize agenda setting theory to define, explain, and portray how political players (government, parliament, political parties, etc.) establish their main concerns, provide attention to or disregard issues, and decide on stances concerning these subjects (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Summarizing agenda setting theory, Kiousis (2011) notes how "scholars have linked object types together by observing that the amount of attention media accord to political issues can alter the way candidates are evaluated in public opinion" (p. 360). Many agenda-setting studies empirically support and discuss priming, or the idea that increased media salience is associated to the expansion and expression of cognitions about issues, an effect that agenda-setting has on the public (Kiousis).

Kiousis (2011) states that because one's attitudes and behaviors are usually managed by cognitions, or what one knows, thinks, and believes, the agenda setting function of mass media has a significant impact. Many studies have shown the direct effect that the media have on the public's attitudes and understandings concerning political matters. For instance, Kiousis conducted a study which found that media salience was positively associated with both public salience and attitude strength about an issue. Additionally, Kiousis posits that media salience leads to stronger attitudes, which consequently lead to increased public salience about a viewpoint found in the media. Another study investigating agenda setting and political socialization found that news media attention, perceived issue salience, and opinion strength were all positively related in a sample of US adolescents (Kiousis, McDevitt, & Xu, 2005). Furthermore, while examining the 1996 U.S. presidential elections, Kiousis and McCombs (2004) found that media salience of common political figures was positively related to increased public

salience, as well as higher levels of attitude dispersion and attitude polarization concerning those political figures. Conclusively, ideologies portrayed in the news media have a strong effect on citizens' attitudes, values and beliefs, and often construct and set agendas within the political realm.

Content Analysis and Functional Analysis

Content Analysis. The purpose of a content analysis is to ask about the content of messages embedded within a particular text(s), such as their characteristics and amount (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). "To answer these types of questions, researchers use content analysis to identify, enumerate, and analyze occurrences of specific messages and message characteristics embedded in texts" (p. 236). Content analyses have been used throughout many areas of research, most commonly to examine mass-mediated and public messages (Frey, Botan, & Kreps 2000). Although content analyses can be qualitative in nature, a "content analysis may be briefly defined as the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1), which encompasses counting the specific occurrences of particular types of messages within texts (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). Essentially, "the goal of any quantitative content analysis is to produce counts of key categories, and measurements of the amounts of other variables" (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 14).

Frey, Botan, and Kreps (2000) outline the steps of a content analysis. A key aspect of a content analysis is to find a text that is a representative sample. In other words, researchers using a content analysis must develop a method of acquiring a sample, which is both representative of the set of texts from which it comes and adequately sizable to properly represent that set of texts. Once a sufficient sample has been chosen,

the researcher must identify appropriate message units to code, a process referred to as unitizing. After units are chosen, valid categories, in which the units can be classified, must be developed. The following step is analyzing the data. This involves counting the number of units in each category, as “knowing the number of units in each category informs [the researcher] about how often these types of messages are being communicated” (p. 243). In the following section, I will discuss how this thesis will utilize a content analysis.

Functional Analysis. In the functional approach, we examine how politicians utilize three different activities: acclaiming, attacking, and defending. Benoit (1999) outlines these:

Political television spots have three basic functions: (1) to enhance their own credentials as a desirable office-hoder (positive utterances or acclaims), (2) to downgrade their opponent’s credentials as an undesirable office-holder (negative utterances or attacks), (3) to respond to those attacks (rebuttals or defenses). Each of these functions may occur on policy (issue) or character (image) grounds. (p. 15)

Acclaiming occurs when a speech act attempts to self-praise. For example, an acclaim is an utterance that is intended to improve the reputation of the speaker, or the person being spoken about. In a specific way, “The functional theory of political campaign discourse argues that televised political spots may acclaim (positive spots) by crediting candidates with desirable policy stands and by attributing positive character traits to candidates (e.g., honest, integrity, experience) (Benoit, 1999, p. 17). There are many topics for acclaims, such as policy acclaims (e.g., lauding pas accomplishments, or promising future benefits),

or character traits (e.g., personal qualities or ideals) (Benoit). Attacking occurs when a speech act attempts to criticize. According to Benoit, “The functional theory of political campaign discourse argues that, like acclaims, persuasive attacks in political advertising may address issues, or policy considerations, or the image, or character of the candidate” (p. 19). As in acclaims, there are many different topics for attacks such as policy attacks (e.g., past deeds, or future plans or goals), and character attacks (e.g., leadership potential, personal qualities, and ideals) (Benoit). Lastly, defending occurs when a speech act attempts to guard or protect one’s image. Similar to attacks, there are several topics for defenses, such as policy defenses, and character defenses (Benoit). As the ultimate goal of a campaigner is to become an elected official, the functions of political television are critical to examine, in order to decipher what is being said about each political party and candidate.

Content and Functional Analysis Regarding Television News and Politicians.

Many content and functional analyses have been conducted concerning television and politicians. For example, Lowry (2008) examined ABC, CBS, and NBC news coverage of Republicans and Democrats, specifically the first six years of both George W. Bush and Bill Clinton’s presidencies. This study provided evidence for a partisan news bias, as one news network was more favorable to the Republican president, and the others were more favorable towards the Democratic president. In a content analysis conducted by Banning and Coleman (2009) examining visual representations of the candidates in the 2000 presidential election on ABC, CBS, and NBC, the findings conveyed that a Democratic media bias did not exist, as there was slightly more evidence of the visuals favoring the Republican candidate over the Democrat. Furthermore, there were

significantly more images of Bush than Gore, and more stories about Republicans than Democrats. Smith and Searles (2013) examined opinion shows on news networks during the 2008 presidential election. Their content analysis showed that opinion shows devoted most of their attention to attacking opposing candidates and praising like-minded candidates. Moreover, the exposure to this content made viewers less favorable towards the opposing candidate under scrutiny and more favorable towards the praised, like-minded candidate.

Benoit, Henson, and Sudbrock's (2011) functional analysis observed television campaign messages of the 2009 presidential primary debates. Their findings concluded that acclaim messages—messages that praise candidates—were more common than attack messages, which occurred more often than defense messages. Additionally, policy was discussed more often than character, and Republicans were more likely to attack other Republicans than Democrats; Democrats attacked members of both parties equally. A similar functional analysis of the Republican Presidential primary debates from the 2012 election discovered that acclaims were more common than attacks, which were more common than defenses (Glantz, Benoit, & Airne, 2013). Again, policy was discussed more often than character. Although many other previous content and functional analyses have focused on politicians and political advertisements on television, the majority of these analyses focused on Democratic and Republican politicians; to my knowledge, no content or functional analysis has ever focused on third-party politics in television news. Utilizing a content analysis could concretely establish the amount of third-party representation on major news networks. Additionally, a functional analysis could determine what exactly is being said about third parties on television news: are

third parties' actual issues or images being discussed, and are third parties represented positively, or negatively?

The Big Three: Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN

“Cable television has precipitated a tremendous expansion in channels and the development of nice news offerings that attract people favoring specific partisan and ideological perspectives” (Brewer, 2012). As a result, the vast amount of news network selections has led media to become fragmented, and polarized (Dagnes, 2010).

Arceneaux, Johnson, and Murphy (2012) argue that cable television news in the fragmented media era *is* partisan; the partisanship represented in news networks highlights and strengthens the divide between ideological sides (Dagnes, 2010).

Apparently, the viewing public is at some level aware of this partisanship. Individuals repeatedly return to the same media channels (Moody, 2011); in particular, many individuals who commonly tap into news networks have a favorite station that they prefer to watch. Undoubtedly, this phenomenon has plenty to do with the political affiliations of news networks. Evidence shows that individuals select news coverage, even for nonpolitical events, based on their partisan predispositions (Arceneaux, Johnson, & Murphy, 2012). Moreover, some argue that journalism has evolved, as news networks now craft their messages to appeal to audience's political memberships. Jones (2012) supplies the notion that news networks reflect audience desires based on values. In fact, representation within the news genre has changed entirely, from journalistic representation of current events to the political affiliations of audiences (Jones). In the contemporary media age, “it is necessary for cable channels to craft intensive

relationships with their viewers, connections that will encourage routine and repeated viewing” (Jones, p. 180).

Currently, many different news networks exist, providing viewers with different outlets through which they can receive political news on television. For example, “A key development fueling the media focus on political action has been the rise and popularity of 24-hour cable news networks like CNN, Fox News Channel, and MSNBC” (Willis, 2007). Specifically, CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC are important to investigate, as they are the three major cable news networks in the United States (Oyediji & Hou, 2010). Throughout daily programming, news networks report political information through a combination of news stories, interviews, and political commentaries.

CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC especially create this connection through the use of punditry, or their wingnut-anchors’ blatantly opinionated presentation style, where clear stances on political issues are pontificated. Whereas other types of television shows might make these connections to their audiences through consumer activities and product interests, news networks make these connections through ideological frameworks, reflecting, promoting, and adapting to audiences’ political desires and memberships within their programming.

Fox News Network. That Fox News is a Republican-charged media channel is not new knowledge. While Fox News claims to be “fair and balanced,” by often supporting Republican candidates and ideals, Fox consistently distorts news with a conservative spin (Brock & Havt, 2012) and is viewed as an outlet that advocates exclusively the Republican Party’s ideals (Dagnes, 2010). Since many believe the media, as a whole, to lean more liberally, or to side with the Democratic Party, Fox News

attempts to offset the left-leaning media bias. Therefore, through the use of political punditry, or wingnuts such as Sean Hannity, Greta Van Susteren, and Bill O'Reilly, "by asserting a liberal bias in the rest of the mainstream media, Fox News has carved for itself a niche audience of conservative viewers" (Dagnes, 2010, p. 81). As the most-watched news network in America, constantly winning the ratings race (Dagnes), and ranking number five among all cable networks in the second quarter of 2011 (Jones, 2012b), Fox News is an ideological institution (Brock & Havt, 2012) where many Americans obtain their political information:

Fox News is, consistently and across all of its programs, offering a conservative ideological voice and doing so under the heading of "news" is, at this date, an undeniable point. Scholars and media-watchdog groups have provided detailed evidence of Fox's overly ideological narratives in both its news and its opinion programs. The network itself even defends its conservatism by contending that it serves as a "counterweight" to the liberalism of mainstream news media outlets. And audiences too recognize Fox as conservative, as demonstrated by their opinions of the network, as well as by their viewing behaviors. (Jones, 2012a, p. 179)

Roger Ailes, Fox News chief, has said that Fox will continue to combat the media's liberal bias (Flournoy & Stewart, 1997). Furthermore, there are several critics and observers, including President Barack Obama, who argue that Fox News is heavily controlled and managed by conservative political players, making Fox News a megaphone of the Republican Party (Jones, 2012b). Even former Fox journalists declared that they were encouraged to cover news stories that favored the Republican

Party's image and principles, and other journalists surveyed acknowledged Fox News as a conservative news organization (Fico et al., 2008). Through this coverage and framework, Fox continually performs ideological narratives throughout each day—from morning until nighttime (Jones, 2012b).

MSNBC (Microsoft and the National Broadcasting Company). On the opposite side of the political spectrum exists MSNBC, whose news delivery is commonly known to support the Democratic Party. In fact, one will rarely hear Republican viewpoints on MSNBC, as MSNBC strongly supports the ideals of the Democratic Party, or liberal-leaning ideologies (Dagnes, 2010). MSNBC often focuses on punditry, where wingnuts such as Keith Olbermann are granted the opportunity to roar against the Republican Party and Republican politicians; Democratic-leaning, wingnut hosts Ed Schultz and Rachel Maddow currently coordinate MSNBC's punditry. MSNBC's orchestrated coverage of liberal-slanted news is not surprising, since, according to Jones (2012b)

When MSNBC finally embraced a full-fledged lineup of liberal commentators after the 2008 election to challenge Fox's ratings supremacy from the left, it changed its tagline to "The Place for Politics." More recently, the network branded itself with "Lean Forward," a label that Griffin argues "defines us and defines our competition," implying that Fox News offers backward-looking conservatism (p.150).

Furthermore, MSNBC is commonly known to be rivals with Bill O'Reilly and Fox News (Lisheron, 2007), and liberal pundit Rachel Maddow, "the most influential liberal pundit in the country," is a rival of pundit Sean Hannity from Fox News (Sanneh, 2013, p.48).

“At almost any time of the day, you can turn [MSNBC] on and encounter someone whose liberalism is earnest, upbeat, and perhaps a little wonky” (Sanneh, 2013, p. 48). In fact, MSNBC is commonly known to glorify not only the Democratic Party, but also President Barack Obama. One example is when MSNBC television host Martin Bashir caused a stir by claiming that “Republicans criticizing Barack Obama over the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) scandal are actually using the issue as racial dog whistle against the President” (*International Business Times*, 2013), or when MSNBC’s *Hardball* provided Obama the opportunity to defend Obamacare (Alter, 2013). One study conducted a framing analysis of Fox News and MSNBC regarding the framework of Obamacare. The findings exposed how MSNBC praised the “health care reform,” while Fox News mocked “Obamacare” (“Health care reform,” 2012). Essentially, “news coverage of Obama’s proposals in 2009-2010 was a clash of partisan framing between conservative and liberal media” (“Health care reform,” p. 1). Unmistakably, the battle between Republican supporting Fox News and Democratic supporting MSNBC is apparent. Moreover, MSNBC’s well-known pundit Keith Olbermann turned MSNBC into “an orgy of Bush-bashing,” because partisan commentary sells on cable (Spruiell, 2008, p. 40). Olbermann, on his show *Countdown*, would consistently verbally berate President Bush, Fox News, and Republican ideals (Spruiell). For example, on the fifth anniversary of 9/11, Olbermann called the GOP the “leading terrorist group in this country” and continued to speak negatively of President Bush. Furthermore, Olbermann was often found bashing presidential candidate John McCain (Spruiell). MSNBC’s president even admitted that taking a “hard-left turn” was a business decision, as ratings have generally lagged behind Fox News and CNN (Spruiell, p. 36). As “the 2012

election season was a triumph for MSNBC, whose viewers were treated to vigorous defenses of the Obama Presidency and skeptical, often gleeful reports on the various Republicans who wanted to end it” (Sanneh, 2013, p. 48), it is evident that MSNBC heightens the image of conflict between Democratic leaning MSNBC and Republican leaning Fox News.

Cable News Network (CNN). CNN’s presence is felt in every part of the world; its brand name synonymous with news from everywhere, all the time (Flournoy & Stewart, 1997). The prominence of CNN is inevitable, as the network covers six continents, therefore being accessible to half a billion people every day (Flournoy & Stewart). CNN is another extremely popular cable news network in America where the public often locates their political news and information. One can attribute the rise of cable news networks beginning with CNN, which became so profitable that it escalated the formation, utility, and viewership of other news networks (Dagnes, 2010). Whereas Fox News is a renowned Republican news outlet, and MSNBC is recognized as leaning towards the Democrats, many believe CNN to be more balanced. Supposedly, CNN has attempted to preserve an image of traditional journalistic professionalism:

After CNN’s primary slogan, “The Worldwide Leader in News,” the network has adopted lines such as “CNN = Politics” and “The Best Political Team on Television.” CNN benefits from political event viewing, such as political party nominating conventions, presidential speeches, the hotly contested Democratic presidential race in 2008 and, more recently, the competitive 2012 race for the Republican presidential nomination. (Jones, 2012b, p. 150)

While CNN’s president Ken Jautz states that their business model is grounded on

nonpartisan programming and quality journalism (Jones, 2012b), the Republican and Democratic parties appear to be the most noteworthy within CNN's political programming. However, many scholars posit that CNN slants liberally, by enhancing the Democratic Party's ideologies (Uscinski, 2007). Individuals who affiliate with one of the major parties often have a "favorite" network, and flock towards like-minded ideologies. These people are called niche viewers, described here:

While all of these news channels battle for audience attention (Dagnes, 2010), the argument is that, given greater choice in news programming and increased control in viewing options, people tend to seek out politically like-minded news (from cable, but also talk radio and the Internet), a process they dub "partisan selective exposure." Conservatives are seen as migrating to Fox News, while liberals show preferences for CNN and MSNBC, ultimately indicating—as research ignores—that liberals are attracted to news provided by any source besides Fox News. (Jones, 2012b)

Also, scholars have noted that Republicans and Democrats seek to manage mainstream broadcast media in hopes to control media promotion of their candidates, leaders, policy prescriptions, and activities (Brewer, 2012, p. 244). Furthermore, "broadcast media are important to parties as they seek to convey common messages to voters" (Brewer, p. 242). As news networks are crafted towards Republican and Democratic audiences, primarily discussing the two major parties and providing third parties with limited news coverage, audiences are cultivated into a two-party system, neglecting the presence of third-party politics.

Television Media's Impact on Presidential Elections. News organizations are a dominant force in the primary elections (Arterton, 1984) and play a key role in the election outcomes. According to *Washington Post's* Paul Farhi, MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News dedicated 75% of available airtime to the presidential campaign during the week of Super Tuesday in 2008. The media's contribution to duopoly is significant, since "The establishment media's real major influence — what truly shapes the election — is whom it chooses to shine its spotlight on" (Eddlem, 2012, p.11). Some research has also concluded that election news coverage is directly related to candidate poll standing (Fico et al., 2008). Evidently, news networks' election salience directly affects voter turnout and election outcomes.

In particular, one study examining the 2004 elections found that 90% of reporter packages (or, an appearance of reporter talking to a camera), 85% of anchor voice-overs, and 78% of reporter on-air supported claims by partisans attempting to make their cases (Fico et al., 2008). The study postulated that cable news networks favored particular candidates, candidates were not equally discussed, and partisan bias was evident: overall, John Kerry was favored. Additionally, Fico et al. found that Fox News had the most unbalanced stories, followed by CNN. Moreover, a content analysis conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2005) found that the majority of news stories found on CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC offered only a single viewpoint on a controversial political issue.

In another study, Geidner and Holbert (2011) state that political debates serve a significant role in political elections, and that Fox News reporting was found to directly influence individual's opinions of George W. Bush. Umstead (2012) states that different

networks displayed widely diverse patterns in their stability, or framework among the Republican and Democratic candidates in the 2000 and 2004; most television news stories were found to favor one candidate over another, specifically discussing Kerry or Bush, or favoring the Republicans or the Democrats.

Addressing the 2012 election coverage, Eddlem (2012) points out media bias against candidates, specifically Ron Paul. Although Ron Paul was popular among the public, ranking highly in most national polls, cable news networks continued to ignore his mere presence in the presidential race:

When Representatives Michele Bachmann of Minnesota and Ron Paul of Texas finished at the top of the August Iowa straw poll, the media chose to cover the Bachmann candidacy alone. The day after Bachmann finished first in the straw poll (with Ron Paul a mere 152 votes behind, out of 16,892 votes cast), she landed interviews on all five national Sunday political television shows. Meanwhile, Paul was booked on none. Within days, Bachmann was at the top of the national polls in the presidential race.... Paul had won a straw poll in a larger state, and by a more decisive margin, but Cain's agenda was more in line with the media narrative of a neoconservative being electable. Despite never holding elected office, Cain got non-stop media coverage, while Ron Paul's [California straw poll] win was hardly discussed at all by major media. (Eddlem, 2012, p.12)

While Eddlem's study is similar to this thesis, it only focuses on one candidate.

Additionally, Eddlem's study does not focus on *what* is being said about the candidates and their policies, nor the exact amount of third party coverage. Although Ron Paul's campaign was successful among the public, containing many faithful followers,

mainstream media's lack of and negative coverage did not fare well for Paul's presidential campaign.

Third Parties and News Networks

Unarguably, third parties in America have little success in contemporary politics. However, third parties continue to fight for media attention, fair governmental regulations, rules and boundaries (such as fair ballot access), and positive valence among American citizens. Despite efforts made by third parties to be recognized, heard, and even an option of which to vote, the two major parties continue to hold dominance in the American political system. In fact, third parties have always existed, and have not always been ignored by voters.

In recent U.S. history only rarely have third-party candidates broken the norm of stable two-party electoral competition. Electoral support for third parties in the United States has not always been so small. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the vote shares of third parties—such as Greenbacks, Populists, Progressives, and Prohibitionists—were more than twice as large as in recent years. Over the period 1890 to 1920, third-party candidates for the U.S. House, Governor, and U.S. Senator won more than 10% of the total vote in 16 states. In contrast, over the period 1940 to 1970, third-party candidates for these three offices never won 10% of the total vote in any state. More than five times as many third-party congressmen were elected to the U.S. House in the period 1890 to 1920 as compared to the period 1940 to 1970. Furthermore, in state legislatures third parties won a plurality of seats in either the upper or lower chamber of nine state legislatures during the first period (1890– 1920), compared

with none during the second period (1940–70). (Hirano & Snyder, 2007, p. 1)

Although cable news networks appear predominantly to focus on the two major parties, third parties in the American political system are constantly struggling for media attention, and ultimately ballot access and votes. Minimal literature attempting to tackle the issues concerning third-party decline and third-party media attention exist, as this phenomenon is largely overlooked (Hirano & Snyder, 2007, p.2). While “the introduction of the direct primaries and the adoption of the Australian ballot are commonly cited in the literature as explanations for why third parties have difficulty attracting electoral support.... [And] these institutional changes reduce third-party electoral support by reducing the incentives for candidates to affiliate with third parties,” Hirano and Snyder (2007) found little support for these hypotheses.

As stated above, news salience provided to issues and candidates affects the outcomes of elections and citizen viewpoints. This thesis demonstrates and reveals how mainstream media, such as 24-hour cable news networks, neglect third parties by providing minimal coverage, and focusing on the conflict between the two major parties. Examining how often third-party politics are discussed, and what exactly is said about third-party politics could potentially validate why third-party voting has declined in America’s duopoly. This study is important, as few scholars have previously discussed the absence of third parties in mainstream media, especially popular sources such as the big three cable news networks. Therefore, for the first part of my thesis, the following research questions will guide my analysis:

RQ1: How often are third parties mentioned in comparison to the major parties on the three major 24-hour news networks?

RQ2: When third parties are discussed on “The Big Three,” what are the functions of discussion? Specifically, how often are third parties being acclaimed, attacked, or defended (or, what is the valence regarding third party mentions)?

RQ3: When third parties are discussed on 24-hour cable news networks, are third-party policies or third-party politicians’ character the topic of discussion?

Following the content and functional analysis, this thesis conducts a rhetorical analysis, in order to unpack and investigate the findings from the previous analyses. In this rhetorical analysis, I display how “The Big Three’s” rhetorical framing strategies reinforce political cognitions regarding the duopoly. Essentially, I explore how these major news networks use rhetorical strategies to enhance the hegemonic duopoly, and stymie third parties abilities to become nationally recognized, and ultimately voted into presidency.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

As previously mentioned, third parties remain relatively unnoticed in the American political system. Politicians representing third parties in America rarely become elected, and third-party ideals appear to be underrepresented. By conducting a content analysis and a functional analysis, this thesis examines transcripts from Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN to determine how often third parties are mentioned, and what exactly is being said about third-party politics when they are discussed in the media. A content analysis is practical to this thesis to demonstrate how infrequently discussion surrounding third-party politics occurs on popular news networks. Additionally, a functional analysis is practical to this thesis, because the functional approach will distinguish what exactly is being said about third parties when they *are* mentioned on the major news networks. Following the content and functional analyses, a rhetorical analysis has been employed to reveal how “The Big Three’s” rhetorical strategies stymie third-party ideologies and presidential campaigns.

Texts under Analysis: The Big Three

This thesis examines what is commonly referred to as “The Big Three,” or Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC. As network television is the primary source of campaign information for the majority of voters (Banning & Coleman, 2009), cable news networks are important to examine when considering media bias and sway during election periods.

Furthermore,

news bias matters because the press plays a vital prescriptive role to help maintain a free society. Democracy requires that voters have access to the best possible information about the positions of issue advocates or candidates for election. The concern for news bias emerges from the assumption that bias affects political outcomes by influencing millions of voters exposed to news messages. (Fico et al., p. 321)

While conducting a content and functional analysis of political coverage on “The Big Three,” and within my analysis section of this thesis, I hope to be able to draw upon many of the theories discussed in the literature review, such as critical cultural theory, cultivation theory, framing and priming, agenda setting theory, and cognitive learning theory. I believe that through my findings from the content and functional analysis, I will be able to draw many parallels to the previously discussed media-related theories, especially when discussing The Big Three.

In particular, “The Big Three” have been chosen to inspect due to their popularity and enormous viewership. Other scholars agree, stating that CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC are important to investigate, as they are the three major cable news networks in the United States (Oyediji & Hou, 2010). Also, the expansion of 24-hour cable news networks such as CNN, Fox News Channel, and MSNBC has greatly increased media attention on political action (Willis, 2007). 24-hour cable news networks particularly play a leading role in one’s political knowledge and attitudes, especially since the evening news audience exceeds 26 million viewers per night (Dagnes, 2010). In fact, Fox News ranked number five among all cable networks in the second quarter of 2011

(Jones, 2012b), and CNN and MSNBC are not too far behind, barely trailing popular networks such as NICK, ESPN, and Disney in November of 2012 (Umstead, 2012).

My reason for choosing to study texts on all three of these networks is that not only have these cable news networks been found to provide biased reporting, included coverage of political parties, they also play a leading role in political information distribution and viewers' political attitudes. Since many viewers have a particular network that they prefer to watch, analyzing messages in all of The Big Three is warranted. For this thesis, I have chosen to examine each network for thirty hours; particularly, I will analyze three hours per day, for two separate workweeks. The rationale for this is to cover an extended period of time and to ensure a fruitful analysis of the findings. Furthermore, two separate weeks have been selected. First, the month of December 2011 has been chosen, as this is the month that precedes the Presidential primaries (specifically, December 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8). During this month, much discussion concerning the upcoming election and potential running mates was discussed. This time period is important to examine when considering third-party candidate options, as the news media predict whom to "watch out for" in the upcoming months of the election period. Second, the month of August 2012 has been chosen, as this is the month that precedes the Republican National Convention (specifically, August 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24). Also, August 2012 is closer to the presidential election period, which ensures rich discussions regarding presidential candidates. The time slots of 8-10pm EST will be under examination, as 8-10pm EST is considered "prime time." It is when many Americans are home from their workdays, and therefore is generally the most popular time of day to watch television. The three shows examined from Fox News were: 1) *The*

O'Reilly Factor; 2) *Fox Hannity*; and 3) *Fox On the Record with Greta Van Susteren*.

The three shows examined from MSNBC were: 1) *The Ed Show with Ed Schultz*; 2) *The Rachel Maddow Show*; and 3) *The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell*. The three shows examined from CNN were: 1) *Piers Morgan Tonight*; and 2) the 8 and 10pm airing of *Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees*.

The full cable news network transcripts will be accessed through the LexisNexis Academic database. While examining actual video footage may have been beneficial, I have chosen to analyze transcripts rather than video footage for several reasons: 1) there was an ease of transcript access with LexisNexis; 2) in the content and functional analysis I code each unit by sentence, which would have been very difficult to complete using actual video footage; and 3) time constraints to complete this thesis made examining transcripts over video footage more realistic and achievable.

Data Analysis

For this part of the thesis, both a quantitative content analysis and a functional analysis were conducted. These methods have been chosen, respectively, to determine not only how often third parties are discussed in relation to the major parties on popular cable news networks, but also the particular function of the messages surrounding third parties in the media. By examining transcripts of Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN, provided by the LexisNexis Academic database, from 8-10pm EST throughout the separate workweeks, utilizing content and functional analyses, a better understanding of third-party content in mainstream media should be established.

This analysis has focused on the amount of Republican, Democrat, and third-party coverage on these three cable news networks. For the content analysis, the coding units

of analysis examined included referential units, or character units. A referential unit is any event, person, or object referred to or alluded to within the content (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000); referential units can also include any meaning attached to a particular person. Therefore, any time a politician or candidate from a political party is physically represented on the show, anytime a politician or candidate from a political party is referred to on the show, and anytime a particular political party is mentioned on the show has been counted as a single unit. This study counted the number of referential units, and placed them into three different categories: Republican, Democrat, and third party. Important to note is that each representation, or single unit has only been counted per sentence; for example, if the word Democrat is mentioned two times in one sentence, Democrat will only be coded once. However, if five different Republican politicians were mentioned in one sentence, this has been counted as five units. The content analysis should provide a better understanding of how often third-party messages appear in cable news networks.

After the content analysis, a functional analysis will be conducted. As this study is focused on discovering *what* is being said about third parties and third-party candidates in the media, the functional analysis will only include the content concerning third party messages. The functional analysis should serve to identify the valence of the major news networks' messages, and whether the function of these messages focus more on third-party policy, or rather place emphasis on character traits. Specifically, a functional analysis is a type of content analysis, in the sense that a functional analysis calculates the amount of each function under examination. For example, the functional analysis will count how many times third-party policy was discussed compared a to third-party's

character, or how many times third-parties were acclaimed, as opposed to attacked or defended.

Any mention of third parties by news correspondents, politicians, third-party politicians, or anybody else represented on the news network will be coded during the functional analysis. The analytic procedure will consist of several steps, similar to Benoit's (1999) study. First, the messages surrounding third parties will be unitized into themes, as they emerge through the analysis. These themes will then be classified as an acclaim, attack, defense, or neutral/unclear. Themes that portray a candidate representing a third party, or the third party itself in a favorable light will be classified as acclaims. Themes that portray a candidate representing a third party, or the third party itself in an unfavorable light will be classified as attacks. Themes that respond to a prior attack on a candidate representing a third party, or the third party itself will be classified as defenses. Themes that are unbiased or undeterminable will be classified as neutral/unclear. Often, an utterance's valence is undeterminable in the news networks' transcripts; undeterminable valence frequently stems from the exclusion of nonverbals, making valence judgments difficult for the coder. Next, a judgment will be made about whether the previous theme primarily concerned a policy (issue) consideration or character trait (image), according to these guidelines: 1) utterances that concern governmental action (past, present, or future) and problems concerning governmental action will be considered policy themes; 2) utterances that address characteristics, traits, abilities, or attributes of a candidate representing a third party, or a third party itself, will be considered character themes.

To explore “The Big Three’s” accentuation of the predominant duopolistic ideology, the 90 hours of news network’s transcripts were also rhetorically analyzed. Utilizing McGee’s (1980) idea of the “ideograph,” the content and functional analyses data was first analyzed by identifying what was present, or emerging themes, and second what was absent, or noticeably lacking. An ideograph can be defined as “the basic structural elements, the building blocks, of ideology,” which contain strong and abstract cultural meanings (McGee, p. 7). I suggest that <Republican> and <Democrat> are ideographs, because these two words are easily identifiable, contain a multitude of meanings, and unite individuals within American society. I identified four overarching themes within the discourse that were worthy of rhetorical analysis and with which <Republican> and <Democrat> strongly correlate; these themes will be discussed within the rhetorical analysis section of this thesis.

Intercoder Reliability. To calculate reliability for the content analysis, a female graduate student served as a second coder. The second coder recorded nine of the ninety transcripts included in the sample, about 10%, as intercoder reliability has also been previously coded on 10% of the primary investigator’s (the author of this thesis) sample in similar studies (Benoit, 2011); exactly three transcripts from each of the news networks under examination were selected. The three transcripts from each news network were randomly chosen by the second coder, who had no previous knowledge of the transcripts until each one was randomly selected. Of the 126 units of analysis coded for the functional analysis, the graduate student coder analyzed 14 units of analysis. The second coder dedicated about an hour learning the coding procedures, through both training from the primary investigator and examining the primary investigator’s

codebook. The training session included an introduction to the units of analysis, an overview of Republican, Democrat, and third-party material and information, and one full transcript worth of practice alongside the primary investigator. Subsequently, the transcripts were provided to the second coder from the sample to code independently, and were not unitized for the second coder in hopes to additionally reach unitizing reliability. Immediately after the coding was completed, both coders compared and discussed their results. Concerning any coding disagreements, the primary investigator made final decisions; however, the judgments were first discussed as a team, and generally agreed upon.

To ensure intercoder reliability, the two coders first calculated unitizing reliability utilizing Guetzkow's U (1950). Regarding accurate identification of the unit of analysis, reliability analysis signified almost perfect agreement ($k = .988$). Additionally, Cohen's *kappa* (1960) was calculated "because this statistic controls for agreement by chance" (Benoit, 2011, p. 38). The reliability coefficient for the content analysis was also almost perfect ($k = .987$), as the categorizing reliability's total observed agreement was 99.4%. For the functional analysis, reliability measurements indicated perfect agreement for both functions and topics ($k = 1.00$).

Conclusion

By looking at the themes that emerge and the findings from this research, I hope to establish a stronger understanding regarding third-party representation in America. By identifying how mainstream media, such as 24-hour cable news networks, expose third parties with minimal coverage, and focus on America's duopoly, these findings could substantiate why third-party voting has declined. Moreover, the exact communicative

messages surrounding third parties in mainstream media are important, as the media's biased reporting has influence on the ideologies represented in our country. Since research on third parties and the media are limited, this particular thesis is important.

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Results

Research question one concerned the frequency with which third parties were mentioned in comparison to the major parties on the three 24-hour major news networks. To answer research question one, a cross-tab was calculated comparing the frequency of political party mentions. Examples of political party mentions that referenced Republicans or the Republican party included: “These are positions that Republicans cannot actually talk about, because the American people finds it wildly insane and unpopular?” and “And again, even Mitt Romney, you know, parsing it a little bit” (O’Donnell, August 20, 2012, p. 1). Examples of political party mentions that referenced Democrats or the Democratic party included: “He used to joke with the moderate Democrats that he would come to their state to help them get re-elected, or he would stay away from their state, if that would help them even more,” and “Today, President Obama made an unscheduled appearance in the White House briefing room, where he was asked about the secret tax returns” (O’Donnell, August 20, 2012, p. 1). Examples of political party mentions that referenced third-party politicians or third parties included: “Meanwhile, in Indiana, Tea Party candidate Richard Mourdock took out the conservative but not yet conservative enough Richard Lugar, a 36-year veteran of the Senate,” and “It could not be the first time the Tea Party gave Harry Reid a big gift” (Schultz, August 21, 2012, p. 1).

Although relatively similar, the results varied on each 24-hour news network. During discussions of politics and political parties during the time frame of programming analyzed in this study, Fox News Network mentioned Republican candidates and politicians, and the Republican Party 58.2% of the time, Democratic candidates and politicians, and the Democratic Party 40.4% of the time, and third-party candidates and politicians, and third parties 1.4% of the time. MSNBC mentioned Republican candidates and politicians, and the Republican Party 81.1% of the time, Democratic candidates and politicians, and the Democratic Party 17.8% of the time, and third-party candidates and politicians, and third parties 1.0% of the time. CNN mentioned Republican candidates and politicians, and the Republican Party 78.0% of the time, Democratic candidates and politicians, and the Democratic Party 21.1% of the time, and third-party candidates and politicians, and third parties 0.8% of the time. For the purpose of research question one, the numbers for “The Big Three” were combined, indicating that the major parties’ candidates and politicians were mentioned 98.9% of the time, whereas third parties were mentioned 1.1% of the time. Overall, “The Big Three” mentioned Republicans 2.84 times more than Democrats and 65.2 times more than third parties. A *chi-square* goodness of fit test indicated a significant difference among major-party mentions compared to third-party mentions. ($X^2 [1, 10738.65] = 10736.67, p < .001$)

Table 1
Frequency of Political Party Mentions

	Major Parties	Republicans	Democrats	Third Parties
Fox News	98.6% (3611)	58.2% (2132)	40.4% (1479)	01.4% (51)
MSNBC	99.0% (5432)	81.1% (4457)	17.8% (975)	01.0% (58)
CNN	99.2% (2068)	78.0% (1628)	21.1% (440)	00.8% (17)
Total	98.9% (11111)	73.1% (8217)	25.8% (2894)	01.1% (126)

Utilizing functional theory (Benoit, 1999), research question two concerned the function of third party mentions to determine if third parties are portrayed positively or negatively. To answer research question two, a cross-tab was calculated comparing the frequency of acclaims, attacks, and defenses among third party mentions during 24-hour news network news. An example of acclaim utterances concerning third-party mentions includes: "...maybe it is a third-party run of Sarah Steelman that I can get behind" (Susteren, August 21, 2012, p. 1). In this statement, the news anchor approves and supports the idea of Steelman running as a third-party candidate. An example of attack utterances concerning third-party mentions includes: "So, you might think Republicans and maybe even the Tea Party would have learned their lesson" (Schultz, August 21, 2012, p. 1). In this statement, the news anchor blatantly criticizes Tea Party members' cognitive aptitude. An example of a defense utterance concerning third-party mentions includes: "The fact that the President hasn't met with really the leadership in his own party, which they've groused about or the leadership in the Republican Party to come to terms, stop the fiscal cliff deal, that's the fault of the Tea Party? I just – I find that to be so unfathomable" (O'Reilly, August 23, 2012, p. 1). Prior to this defense statement, one news anchor utilizes an attack utterance, stating "And so any Tea Party Republican who made that choice made a bad decision." In the defense statement, another news anchor defends the Tea Party, asserting that the Tea Party is not to blame.

During discussions of third-party politicians and third parties during the time frame of programming analyzed in this study, Fox News Network utilized acclaim utterances 13.7% of the time, attack utterances 3.9% of the time, and defense utterances

2.0% of the time. Utterances concerning third parties that were either neutral statements or coded as unclear occurred 80.3% of the time. When discussing third-party candidates and politicians or third parties, MSNBC utilized acclaim utterances 20.7% of the time, attack utterances 5.2% of the time, and defenses 0.0% of the time. Utterances concerning third parties that were either neutral statements or coded as unclear occurred 74.1% of the time. When discussing third-party candidates and politicians or third parties, CNN utilized acclaim utterances 0.0% of the time, attack utterances 11.8% of the time, and defense utterances 0.0% of the time. Utterances concerning third parties that were either neutral statements or coded as unclear occurred 88.2% of the time. Overall, “The Big Three” utilized attacks 2.7 times more than acclaims and 19 times more than defenses. A *chi-square* goodness of fit test indicated a significant difference among the functions of third-party discussion. ($X^2 [3, 203.63] = 199.34, p < .001$)

Table 2
Functions of Third-Party Discussions on 24-hour News Networks

	Acclaims	Attacks	Defenses	Neutral/Unclear
Fox News	03.9% (2)	13.7% (7)	02.0% (1)	80.3% (41)
MSNBC	05.2% (3)	20.7% (12)	00.0% (0)	74.1% (43)
CNN	11.8% (2)	00.0% (0)	00.0% (0)	88.2% (15)
Total	05.6% (7)	15.1% (19)	00.7% (1)	80.2% (101)

Utilizing functional theory (Benoit, 1999), research question three concerned the function of third-party mentions to determine whether discussion surrounding third parties is more focused on policy and issue, or character and image. To answer research question three, a cross-tab was calculated comparing the frequency of policy and character utterances regarding mentions of third-party candidates and politicians or third parties. An example of a policy utterance concerning third-party mentions includes:

“And so any Tea Party Republican who made that choice made a bad decision” (O’Reilly, August 23, 2012, p. 1). In this statement, the news anchor blatantly attacks the policy, or issue decisions made by Tea Party members. An example of a character utterance concerning third-party mentions includes: “But when you're talking about Tea Party Republicans who number one, don't have any governing experience. Number two are not very well-versed in economic issues....” (O’Reilly, August 23, 2012, p. 1). In this statement, the news anchor blatantly attacks the character of Tea Party members, asserting that Tea Party members’ lack of experience and knowledge make them an inadequate voting option.

During discussions of third-party politicians and third parties, Fox News Network utilized policy utterances 50% of the time, and character utterances 50% of the time. When discussing third-party candidates and politicians or third parties, MSNBC utilized policy utterances 6.7% of the time, and character utterances 93.3% of the time. When discussing third-party candidates and politicians or third parties, CNN utilized policy utterances 0% of the time, and character utterances 100% of the time. The results for this section only include the 28 utterances that discussed policy or character; the remaining 98 utterances concerning third-party politicians that were coded as neutral or unclear have been excluded from the above calculations. Overall, “The Big Three” utilized character utterances 3.5 times more than policy utterances. A *chi-square* goodness of fit test indicated a significant difference among the topics of third-party discussion. ($X^2 [1, 8.33] = 7.26, p < .004$)

Table 3
Topics of Third-Party Discussions on 24-hour News Networks

	Policy	Character
Fox News	50.0% (5)	50.0% (5)
MSNBC	06.7% (1)	93.3% (14)
CNN	00.0% (0)	100% (2)
Total	21.4% (6)	78.6% (21)

Additionally, Benoit's (1999) functional theory generally emphasizes certain aspects of character and policy. For example, identifying how often character utterances focused on personal qualities, leadership abilities, or ideals, and how often policy utterances focused on past deeds, future plans, or general goals. However, the findings for this portion of the functional analysis were insignificant, or inadequate, and therefore will not be included in this study. Nevertheless, the numbers of the specifics on character and policy utterances can be found in the appendix.

Brief Discussion. The results of this content analysis suggest that the major parties were the main discussion topics during the primary 24-hour news networks' prime time broadcast. In fact, every existing third party combined only accounted for approximately 1% of these news networks' content; almost the entirety of these news networks' political content focused on the actions and events of the two major parties, and the conflict between Republicans and Democrats. While most of the content during the primary 24-hour news networks' prime time broadcast focused on Republicans, Democrats and the Democratic Party were still quite prevalent throughout the daily broadcasts. One reason Republicans were likely discussed more than Democrats can be explained by the Republican presidential frontrunner race, the Republican debates, and

the Republican National Convention that were occurring during the sampled dates under examination. Since Obama was the clear presidential frontrunner for the Democratic Party at the time, the Democratic Party generated less news than the Republican presidential race. This study provides important indications of how popular news media disregard third-party politics, and rather focus on the two major parties.

While these results are important and establish the frequency with which third parties are represented on “The Big Three,” these findings do not expose the themes emerging from the messages in these third-party mentions. Therefore, a functional analysis was conducted in order to better determine third-party valence, functions, and topics of these messages. The majority of the third-party mentions were simply brief comments about the Tea Party or an independent politician. Additionally, many of the third-party mentions were undeterminable, and thus did not fit into any of the functional categories. Nevertheless, when categorized by function, the majority of the third-party mentions from the primary cable news networks were attacks. While less frequent, there were some acclaim utterances regarding third-party politics.

Furthermore, the most popular topic of discussion regarding third-party politics was character, rather than third-party issues and policies. This is problematic, because many Americans are already unaware of third-parties’ policies. If “The Big Three,” who are three of the most popular, powerful, and influential news sources for American politics, only discuss character of third-party politicians, and rarely discussed third-parties’ policies and ideologies (in CNN’s case, *never* discussed third-parties’ policies), Americans who utilize “The Big Three” for their political news will never be exposed to different policies outside of the major parties actions and ideologies. Furthermore, most

of the attacks were attacks on third-party politicians' character. By rarely mentioning third-party politicians, but attacking their character *when* mention them, this is also problematic. I believe this to be problematic, because by consistently attacking third-party politicians, when mentioning third parties, this sheds third parties in a negative light. If third-party politicians' character is consistently being attacked, viewers will never be exposed to positive aspects of third-party politicians and their political ideologies, and rather view all third-party politicians to be undesirable people, thus, undesirable voting options. However, as there were very few mentions of third-party politics overall, these findings could drastically differ provided more third-party related evidence. From these results, a rhetorical criticism will be conducted to further analyze the implications of these findings.

Rhetorical Analysis

To supplement the content analysis and functional analysis findings, a rhetorical analysis was employed to uncover some of the recurring themes regarding third parties and duopoly found within the news networks' transcripts. Specifically, I sought to rhetorically analyze the themes that emerged throughout the news networks' transcripts regarding third-party coverage. The content and functional analyses revealed thematic content of media reports on political parties with ideological implications. First, the news networks' transcripts contained an overabundance of discussion surrounding two ideographs, <Republicans> and <Democrats>, and their variants, such as Republicans, Democrats, the GOP, conservatives, liberals, etc. Second, the news networks' transcripts contained a scarcity of discussion surrounding political third parties. Rhetorically examining the emerging themes is necessary to obtain a better understanding of how the

media utilizes ideographs to foster Americans' ideologies surrounding the duopoly and third-party politics.

This thesis is an effort to challenge rhetorical mechanisms at work by mainstream media, which in turn foster widespread public approval for America's political duopoly. Utilizing McGee's (1980) notion of the ideograph, I assert that the utilization of a pair of ideographs have created a rhetorical landscape in which voting Republican and Democrat has become "commonsense," or the unquestioned acceptance of cultural beliefs, according to Gramsci's (1971) description of common sense as a mechanism to perpetuate hegemonic ideology (Zompetti, 2012). Specifically, I suggest that the ideograph of <Republican>, coupled with the ideograph of <Democrat>, continually reinforces the ideology in which the acceptance of voting either Republican or Democrat is increasingly viewed as the "right thing to do," or as part of the collective political norm. The arrangement of these two ideographs within the transcripts additionally revealed a few themes: 1) an overabundance of <Republican> and <Democrat> (and, other words and proper nouns that fall into those ideographs); 2) an accentuation of the conflict, or battle between the two major parties; 3) affiliating or voting for a third party as "strange" or "surprising"; and 4) Tea Partiers are essentially Republicans. In a discussion of the use of <Republican> and <Democrat> as ideographs throughout the news network's transcripts, an assessment as such is imperative.

To begin, McGee (1980) asserts that certain words are "the basic structural elements, the building blocks, of ideology," which are "pregnant" with meaning (p. 7). Additionally, the clearest entrance to rhetoric, and therefore to ideology, is through the discourse used to produce the rhetoric (McGee), especially through powerful media

outlets such as “The Big Three.” This particular vocabulary to which McGee is referring has been coined as “ideographs.” Considering political communication and language, an American’s vocabulary of specific ideographs is demonstrated in their ideological meanings, “easily mistaken for the technical terminology of political philosophy” (p. 5). According to McGee, since these ideographs are so packed with meaning, ideographs control, influence, and determine individuals’ political reality, ultimately shaping their political ideology. Ideographs, such as <Republican> and <Democrat>, occur throughout “The Big Three’s” discourse, functioning noticeably as instruments of “political consciousness” (McGee, p. 7). What I mean by this is that, through the overutilization and emphasis of <Republican>, <Democrat>, and other representations of these two political parties, political cognizance regarding “proper” voting options (which “The Big Three” appear to regard as Republican or Democrat) in American democracy is produced.

McGee (1980) presumes that ideographs within a society are easily identifiable. “They are the most commonplace and hallowed terms in rhetorical discourse. Focused keyword searches in full-text computer databases such as Lexis/Nexis can aid the rapid description of the incidence and scope of public usage of key ideographs” (Cloud, 1998, p. 389); both Republican and Democrat appeared as keywords in almost every transcript in the sample. However, regarding third parties, only the Tea Party was found in the keywords, and even then it only occurred in a few instances. These abstract, pregnant-with-meaning keywords trick the public symbolically. To expand, McGee states that,

if we are trying to describe the trick-of-the-mind which deludes us into believing that we “think” with/through/for a “society” to which we “belong,” we need a

theoretical model which accounts for both “ideology” and “myth,” a model which neither denies human capacity to control “power” through the manipulation of symbols nor begs Marx’s essential questions regarding the influence of “power” on creating and maintaining political consciousness (McGee, 1980, p. 4).

Keywords such as <Republican> and <Democrat> provide analytical links between rhetoric—what is understood as set, practical, and strategic discourse—and ideology—the arrangements or schemes of ideas within real and practical speech acts. Thus, ideographical elements of power and social control, and collectivity are critical to understand and examine.

Furthermore, ideographs work to collectivize human beings through broad, abstract, common, and easily recognizable words that induce a cognitive connection within that culture. A culture’s collectivized beliefs and behaviors are unlike that of a more isolated culture (McGee). This happens because “the collectivity is said to have ‘a mind of its own’ distinct from the individual qua individual” (McGee, p. 2). When individuals within a particular culture behave and think collectively, that individual has been misled into accepting that culture’s delusions of what the public opinion, or predominant public philosophy is (McGee). Through “The Big Three’s” constant use of <Republican> and <Democrat>, viewers are trained to believe “collectively” that voting Republican or Democrat is the appropriate, culturally acceptable decision. In fact, according to this ideology, voting for <Republicans> or <Democrats> is their *only* option.

The construction of collectivity through vocabulary and symbolism leads to human behavior, and ultimately action. McGee (1980) states that “human beings are

‘conditioned,’ not directly to belief and behavior, but to a vocabulary of concepts that function as guides, warrants, reasons, or excuses for behavior and belief” (p. 6).

Moreover, Condit and Lucaites (1993) assert that ideographs embody genuine praxis, or commitment to behaviors and actions justified by the “rhetorical process of public argumentation in which various organized and articulate interest groups negotiate the problems of resource distribution in the collective life of the community” (p. xiv). As the prevailing “Big Three” possess a niche audience of viewers (especially Fox News and MSNBC) who habitually watch one major news network over another, the American political duopoly, under the aegis of “The Big Three,” remains dominant; through the news networks’ overuse of <Republican> and <Democrat>, American voters have been collectivized to continually elect members belonging to the major parties. It is clear that voters have been collectivized to vote for Republicans and Democrats over third-party candidates, because even when a third party gains ballot access, Republicans and Democrats have been almost exclusively chosen to represent American citizens. As Semiu (2013) states, humans are a “product of communication,” and ideology is socially constructed (Hall, 1986). In this rhetorical analysis, I argue that “The Big Three’s” communicative overuse of <Republican> and <Democrat> socially construct American voters to select Republicans and Democrats over third parties, because viewers are a product of the communicative rhetoric and framing strategies utilized by these news networks. Thus, media coverage polarizes American voters and causes audiences to vote in a particular way (Levendusky, 2013).

Thematic Analysis of Present Ideographs.

Commonality of <Republican> and <Democrat>. The first theme I will discuss in which ideographs are prevalent and at work is the overabundance of <Republican> and <Democrat>, and other words that refer to these two political parties found within the sample. One of the most significant findings from the content analysis was how infrequently third parties were discussed within “The Big Three:” barely over 1% of the overall discourse. Although third-party mentions appeared occasionally, over half of the transcripts did not even once contain a third-party mention, whereas political discourse on “The Big Three” instead encompassed events and ideologies of <Republican> and <Democrat>. For example, “...do you know any people who voted Democrat who are moving over to the Republican side, or vice versa? Give me a sense of where New Hampshire is going” (Susteren, August 20, 2012, p. 1). Here, Americans identify with these key terms, and coupled together within this context are framed as though voters will necessarily choose between either a <Republican> or <Democrat> in the election. The utterance, “If the Republican had been elected in [the Democrat’s] place six years ago, he would have voted against every one of those things,” is another example (Susteren, August 20, 2012, p. 1). This statement generally and abstractly utilizes the term <Republican> to indicate that *any* <Republican> candidate would have better performed than the <Democrat> elected; however, a third-party candidate is never mentioned or considered. Another example can be found in this utterance: “This is not a Democratic or Republican issue. This is an issue about women’s health care” (Schultz, August 23, 2012, p. 1). Again, the framing of this utterance utilizing these two common ideographs

together assert that only <Republican> and <Democrat> issues are of importance, not, of course, incorporating or considering third-party existence.

The previous examples display how the public is ideologically constructed by rhetorical ideographs in an attempt to exhibit what “The Big Three” frames as noteworthy: <Republicans> and <Democrats>. While these are only a few examples, the emphasis on and commonality of the major parties—and exclusion of third-party discussion—was a recurring theme throughout the 90-hours news-network transcripts. This illustrates how <Republican> and <Democrat> serve as powerful ideographs that became a locus of the ideology of the “proper” political parties and of which American democracy is comprised. In the examples provided above, the terms <Republican> and <Democrat> do not have specific referents. Instead, these ideographs refer to abstractions, which can have many different meanings depending on their precise context; no concrete politician or policy is discussed, rather those who affiliate with a major party will be incessantly promoted. Through this rhetorical discourse, the overuse of <Republican> and <Democrat> also collectivize individuals through their abstract meaning, in an attempt to represent public contestation regarding social obligations, such as voting for the correct candidate who will better represent the American public on particular issues of importance. Together, the words <Republican> and <Democrat> simultaneously code American political duopoly as the appropriate selections, or answers to political and social crisis.

Central conflict: The battle between <Republicans> and <Democrats>. The second theme revealed within the transcripts that utilized <Republican> and <Democrat> ideographs is potentially the most noteworthy. Again, the coupling of <Democrat> and

<Republican> revealed an important theme: the combination of these ideographs highlighted the central conflict, or the “battle” between the two major parties, thus creating “commonsense” (Gramsci, 1971) that voters should, or even *must* choose between “one or the other”: <Republicans> or <Democrats>. Particularly, “The Big Three’s” discourse surrounding the representations of the American political duopoly was constant within the broadcasting, thus continually accentuating the battle between the prevailing, overriding major parties. One example can be found in this statement on Fox News: “And coming up next, controversy on the campaign trail as Democrats are attempting to tie top Republicans to the controversial comments made by Missouri Senate candidate Todd Akin” (Hannity, August 21, 2012, p. 1). Here, the news anchor literally pinpoints the fact that controversy exists between <Republicans> and <Democrats> by demonstrating how <Democrats> are trying to capitalize on a controversial remark made by a <Republican>. Here are a few other examples of the central conflict displayed on Fox News:

1. Now, meanwhile today, another hot topic at the impromptu press conference was whether or not that Obama supporters are engaging in gutter politics by suggesting that the GOP hopeful is in fact a felon, a murderer and worse; and, 2.

Democrats strategy is to “kill Romney.” (Hannity, August 20, 2012)

These two utterances clearly display how <Republicans> and <Democrats> are in an election battle against one another, and the tactics the major parties plan to utilize in hopes to triumph over the other. The discourse here frames the Obama/Romney battle to be of utmost importance, completely disregarding third-party presidential candidates, such as Gary Johnson and Jill Stein, and their actions and policies.

MSNBC also accentuated the duopoly by framing the American political system as a fight between the two major parties. Here are a few examples:

1. On election day, that one sure beat seat for Republicans went to the Democrats, easy; and 2. Indeed, today, Democrats have labeled the human life amendment portion of the GOP platform the Akin plank. Romney wants this to stop. (Schultz, August 21, 2012, p. 1).

The first quote highlights the central conflict between the two major parties by explicating that the <Democrats> beat the <Republicans> in the election. However, no indication of third parties arose in this discussion. The second quote emphasizes the conflict between the <Republicans> and the <Democrats> by heightening the aftermath of a controversial remark made by <Republican> Todd Akin. In this quote, the news anchor notes how <Democrats> are taking advantage of the <GOP's> mistake, how the <Democrats> have created a specific term to negatively frame this mistake, and how the <Republican> Romney is unhappy about the <Democrat's> combative actions.

CNN also consistently framed the central conflict, or battle between the opposing duopolistic forces. Two examples from CNN's discourse are as follows:

1. [The] Republican congressman's remarks on rape and abortion could give Democrats a boost; and 2. You look at the polls, and I just went back and looked at them, the last poll that we did about this issue, and it really does split 50/50, about whether or not Democrats and Republicans -- whether or not each candidate and each campaign is really being fair to the other. So I think what it tells us is that people just kind of throw up their hands and say, it's politics. (Cooper, August 20, 2012, p. 1)

Here, the first quote exhibits the American political system as a battle between two, and only two opposing forces. Emphasizing the <Republican's> mistake, coupled with the fact that this mistake can boost the <Democrats> in the polls ignores the existence of other third parties' status in the political system and thus reinforces the American political duopoly. The second quote emphasizes the duopolistic battle through explicit discourse regarding whether or not <Republicans> and <Democrats> are "being fair" in their campaigning against one another. Moreover, the phrase "its politics" further underscores how normal, common, or typical this conflict is between the two major parties.

The above examples demonstrate the rhetorical use of ideographs to frame representations of the <Republican> and <Democrat> cultures within America, which are closely associated with a conflict regarding which of the two are an overall better voting option, snubbing third-party politics almost entirely. "The Big Three" continuously couple <Republican> and <Democrat> in the longstanding, overarching depiction of a battle between America's two fundamental political parties. The rhetoric used to construct this depiction ultimately limits American politics to only <Republican> and <Democratic> ideologies.

Unity and division. Furthermore, the rhetorical use of <Republican> and <Democrat> as ideographs function to unite, while at the same time divide the American public. McGee (1980) argues that ideographic usages both unite and divide human beings, and "the functions of uniting and separating would be represented by specific vocabularies, actual words or terms," such as <Republican> or <Democrat> (p. 8). Additionally, I argue that the abstract words, or symbols of <Republican> and

<Democrat> “define a collectivity” in America, because such terms “do not exist in other societies” (p. 8). Through the use of <Republican> and <Democrat>, and by accentuating the central conflict between these two political parties, “The Big Three” help divide American citizens into these two subgroups. McGee even mentions that Republicans and Democrats are “united by the ideographs that represent the political entity ‘United States’ and separated by a disagreement as to the practical meaning of such ideographs” (McGee, p. 8). This fundamentally and politically philosophical divide marks these two subgroups in American society, in which the battle between them is used to justify the perpetuation of that divide and consider these political ideologies “shared values.”

While at face value it may appear as though by voting for or affiliating with the <Republican> or <Democratic> party, one is agreeing with the “shared values” of most other <Republican> or <Democrat> ideologies, according to McGee (1980), these ideographs “hinder, and perhaps make impossible ‘pure thought,’” and “are bound within the culture which they define” (p. 9). In other words, these ideographs unitize societies by enhancing beliefs of belonging, when really individuals in these collectivized publics may contain drastically different thoughts; however, “language gets in the way of thinking, separates us from ‘ideas’ we may have which cannot be surely expressed, even to ourselves, in the usages with imprison us” (p. 9). One reason this unity occurs is the social or political values, rather than rational or ethical functions of these ideographs (McGee). As Cloud (1998) explains, “By encapsulating values which are perceived to be widely shared by the community, but which are in fact highly abstract and defined in very different ways by individuals, ideographs provide a potent persuasive tool for the

political speaker” (p. 389). Since ideographs such as <Republican> and <Democrat> are definitive of the culture that Americans have inherited, these ideographic meanings and representations are additionally conditions of the culture in which an American is born; thus one must accept these material ideas in order to “belong” (McGee, 1980).

The “material ideas” of affiliating with or even just voting for a <Republican> or <Democrat> include many abstractions, such as the parties actual policies, issues, political ideologies, and so forth. One central abstraction of <Democrat>, for example, is the overarching battle against <Republicans> discussed previously, especially within the rhetoric of “The Big Three.” While I only functionally analyzed utterances regarding third parties, niche views of the political party leaning “The Big Three” consume an overabundance of attack messages towards the “opposing” political party. For example, MSNBC faithful, Democrat-leaning niche viewers consume many attack messages towards <Republicans> from their favorite wingnut pundits such as, “Republicans are running like rats from a sinking ship” (Schultz, December 9, 2011, p. 1), and “so tonight, a crazy Republican congressman has made it even more difficult for Mitt Romney to have a crazy Republican congressman as his running mate” (O’Donnell, August 20, 2012, p. 1). Here, socialized through the ideographs <Republican> and <Democrat>, united viewers attain framed illustrations of divergence from the other, “contrasting” major political party. In “The Big Three’s” discourse, <Republicans> are rhetorically positioned against <Democrats>, thus, one who has been socially constructed to side with, or votes for a <Republican> must not be, like, or correlate with <Democrats>, and vice versa.

This rhetoric utilized by “The Big Three” pins American voters against the “other.” Gramsci (1975) describes this rhetorical strategy as “divide and conquer.” Essentially, Gramsci explains how power structures with cultural ideological command and sway, such as “The Big Three,” create opposition and even resentment between subgroups in order to distract these subgroups (such as <Republicans> and <Democrats>) from dominant ideologies controlled by the powerful. Individuals who accept these notions also fall into the progression of preserving and continuing an ideology that fosters the abstract views surrounding <Republicans> and <Democrats>, and the American political duopoly as “proper” voting choices, but not of course, considering third-party politics in which are not included in this ideology.

Gerbner’s (1998) cultivation theory can be applied to media representations of the central conflict between <Republicans> and <Democrats>, as well as instruct us on how rhetoric creates unity and division between <Republican> and <Democrat> cultures within American democracy and their “shared values.” Gerbner states that the consumption of these media representations of society construct and validate one’s expectations of social interactions with others, which ultimately means adaptation to mainstream political ideology. What “The Big Three” frame and deem essential are rhetorical, and thus perceived by the American public to be principal. In constructing the American political duopoly as the two “proper” voting options, the rhetoric of <Republican> and <Democrat> collectivizes individuals and constructs the social responsibility for siding with “one” or the “other.”

Presence and absence. As previously discussed, the content analysis discovered that only 1% of all political party mentions within “The Big Three’s” discourse were

dedicated to third parties, and rather <Republicans> and <Democrats> consumed most of the political dialogue. Furthermore, the findings from the functional analysis indicated that the majority of third-party mentions were neither acclaims, attacks, or defenses, nor discussed in relation to policies or character; rather, the majority of third-party mentions were coded as neutral, mostly because these utterances regarding third-party politics were brief mentions in passing. Relating back to the commonality of <Republican> and <Democrat> within “The Big Three” theme, Derrida’s (1976) notions of presence and absence can explain how the rhetorical overuse of <Republican> and <Democrat> impacts the American voters’ ideologies about third parties.

Derrida’s notion of presence and absence can be explained as follows: essentially, Derrida (1976) states that the rhetorical absence of something is important to scrutinize, because what is absent is just as ideologically important as what is present. Derrida’s notions of presence and absence dissect a specific view that accepts absolute presence and absolute absence. What I mean by this is that one assumes that either something exists or does not exist, but truly what is absent leaves what Derrida refers to as “traces” of what is present, and something can be present while still appearing to be absent. Thus, much meaning comes from what is left unsaid, what exists but is not mentioned, what is outside the collectivity yet faintly present, what is slightly alluded to, and so forth. Since what is absent exists, when slightly alluded to, this absence leaves traces, or clues that there is something beyond what is present. Furthermore, if there is no absolute presence or absolute absence of something, then peculiarities between what is present and what is absent are impossible, because what is present may be present with what is absent, even

though what is absent is not wholly, or absolutely present, and what is absent is thus only minimally present. Derrida (1976) describes this conception as follows:

But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness (p. 145).

In other words, what is present is present to substitute for what is absent; thus, the void filling what is absent is supplemented by what is present. Furthermore, what is present is constructed as an illustration of the presence to emphasize an unavoidable absence within the presence. The presence is not equipped or blessed with an absoluteness or wholeness in advance. Derrida essentially argues that, if what is present is an intention, what is present cannot be absolutely liberated from the traces of these intentions. For example, an objective statement such as “I am eating fish” inevitably implies many other opposing propositions such as, “I am *not* eating meat” or “I am *not* drinking.” Here, the implied negatives include meaning of “traces” that are found in the positive statement. While the positive statement reinforces the exactness of what is present, this positive statement also implicitly reinforces the existent lack of presence that needs to be supplemented.

Within “The Big Three’s” transcripts, traces of third-party politics were present. However, while present, third-party mentions were extremely rare, thus considered

absent, but not wholly or absolutely absent. On the contrary, the recurring mentions of ideographs <Republican> and <Democrat> were present, though, not wholly or absolutely present, because there were in fact some mentions of these “absent” independents and third parties alike. The regular and repetitive mentions of <Republican> and <Democrat> supplements the absence of third parties, and thus, rhetorically structures ideology regarding third parties and their irrelevance in American democracy. What I mean by this is that the rhetorically framed meaning regarding third parties within “The Big Three’s” discourse comes from what is unsaid, what exists but is not mentioned, and what is outside the <Republican> and <Democratic> collectivity that is faintly alluded to. Since third parties were present in 1% of “The Big Three’s” discourse, this absence of third parties leaves traces, residual of their presence. I assert that these third party mentions are literally “traces,” hints, and clues of third party existence, because the functional analysis found that the majority of utterances involving third-party politics were brief mentions in passing. For example:

1. There’s a lot of independent voters in Ohio (Schultz, December 6, 2011, p. 1);
2. He will be a featured speaker at the Tea Party backed True the Vote Ohio summit (Schultz, August 23, 2012, p. 1);
3. The group’s Tea Party organizers say they wanted to be everybody, coast to coast. (Schultz, August 23, 2012, p. 1)

All three utterances above exemplify how third-party politics are briefly mentioned in passing, as no further discussion surrounding third parties preceded or followed these utterances. Additionally, most of the third-party utterances neither attacked, acclaimed, defended, nor went into any discussion regarding policy and characters surrounding these third-party ideals and candidates; thus, these brief mentions, or traces of third-party

politics by “The Big Three” ultimately deem non-Republican and Democrat issues unimportant in American democracy.

Moreover, since <Republicans> and <Democrats> are not absolutely present, and third-parties are not absolutely absent, according to Derrida (1976), distinctions between what is present (<Republicans> and <Democrats>) and what is absent (third parties) is impossible. The presence of <Republicans> and <Democrats> also illuminates the American political duopoly through the expectedly framed absence of third-party discussion. Since “The Big Three” intentionally frame the duopoly, yet leave “traces” of third-party politics, third parties cannot be absolutely liberated from the traces of these deliberate messages. For example, Fox News’ anchor’s question, “...do you know any people who voted Democrat who are moving over to the Republican side, or vice versa?” (Susteren, August 20, 2012, p. 1) implicitly suggests that <Republican> voters will not vote for third-party candidates, and likewise <Democratic> voters will not vote for third-party candidates. Again, the implied negatives (the exclusion of third parties as “proper” voting options) in this utterance also include meaning of third-party traces that are found in this intentional statement. The absent consideration of third parties here indicates that citizens should not vote for a third party.

While the positive statements regarding <Republicans> and <Democrats> reinforce the exactness of what is present, the duopoly, the overabundance of positive statements regarding <Republicans> and <Democrats> also supplement, or implicitly reinforce the existent lack of presence of third-party politics. By rhetorically accentuating the importance of voting <Republican> or <Democrat>, these implied negatives regarding the unimportance of third parties are a large part of American

political ideological construction. Considering ideological construction, the absence of third-party politics within “The Big Three’s” rhetorical discourse is as ideologically significant as the presence of the ideographs <Republican> and <Democrat>.

By replacing any discussion regarding third parties with representations of the American political duopoly, the supplement (<Republicans> and <Democrats>) supplement and reinforce ideologies that <Republicans> and <Democrats> are the “proper” voting options, and third parties are not; <Republicans> and <Democrat’s> use in “The Big Three’s” discourse are assigned “in the structure by the mark of” third parties “emptiness” (Derrida, 1976, p. 145).

Third party = “strange” or “surprising.” A third theme which was revealed within “The Big Three’s” discourse designates the act of affiliating with or voting for third parties as opposed to <Republicans> and <Democrats> as “strange,” uncommon, and sometimes even completely erroneous. Many of the few third-party mentions included representations of this theme, insofar as expressing that votes towards third parties are useless, and, rather, independent voters will end up shifting towards and supporting the dominant ideology by selecting either a <Republican> or <Democratic> candidate. Examples of this were found on all three cable news networks. One example is in the utterance, “A couple of other quick things, Anderson. In the poll, independent voters, those who define themselves as independents, they will matter hugely in this election. And if you come up here and look now, at the moment, a statistical dead heat among independents” (Morgan, December 6, 2011, p. 1). This first quote proclaims that independent voters, or individuals who do not affiliate as <Republicans> or <Democrats>, will in fact side with “one or the other.” Here, third-party candidates such

as Libertarian and Green party presidential nominees are not mentioned as potential options for the independent voters; rather, independent voters “matter hugely” in deciding whether <Republicans> or <Democrats> prevail. Another example was found in the utterance,

I know that most of the polls do not show Gingrich moving up among independents and Democrats. He’s doing well specifically among Republicans. But, Sean, I’m going to tell you, right now, in the work that I’m doing over the last ten days, Gingrich has begun to move up among those people in the center because they are looking for someone not just with ideas but with solutions (Hannity, December 6, 2011).

This second quote also leaves “traces,” (Derrida, 1976) or hints of independent existence, however proclaims that independent voters will in fact side with “one or the other.” This quote asserts that independent voters are searching for the correct, suitable presidential candidate, and, through Derrida’s (1976) notion of “absence,” implies that voting for one of the third-party candidates is uncommon among independent voters. A third quote also exemplifies the notion: “It is those Independents as always who determine an election” (O’Reilly, August 23, 2012, p. 1). This statement also frames independent voters selecting third-party candidates as uncommon. Here, the news anchor indicates that independents will select a <Republican> or a <Democrat> over the third-party candidates. Here is another example: “I’m looking for breakdown of Independent voters, Rick, and in both the CBS poll and I believe in the Fox poll, Quinnipiac, show that Romney actually does much better than the President among Independent voters” (O’Reilly, August 23, 2012, p. 1). Lastly, this fourth quote explicitly states that

independent voters will choose <Republican> Romney over America's current <Democrat> president. Through "absence," third-party candidates are supplemented by notions of <Republican> and <Democrat>, which implicitly claims that an independent voter will not select one of the third-party candidates, and rather frame independent voters' selections of the "present," <Republican> or <Democrat> (Derrida, 1976).

Additionally, "The Big Three" frame the existence of independent candidates in America's democracy as "strange," or "surprising." One example of this is in the utterance, "The first bomb allegedly dropped in Rhode Island. Governor Lincoln Chafee, neither Republican nor Democrat but Independent, called the state house Christmas tree a holiday tree (O'Reilly, December 1, 2011, p. 1). In this statement, CNN anchor Carol Costello utilizes the ideographs <Republican> and <Democrat> to point out that Chafee is an independent, almost implying as if his affiliation as an independent is out of the ordinary, "strange," or "surprising." Another example can be found in the statement, "even if she has to run as a third-party candidate" (Susteren, August 21, 2012, p. 1). In this statement, interviewee Sarah Palin claims that running as a third-party candidate, rather than a <Republican> or <Democrat> is uncommon, "strange," or "surprising."

"When a claim is warranted by" such terms, or ideographs much like <Republican> and <Democrat>, "it is presumed that human beings will react predictably and automatically" (McGee, 1980, p. 6). Much like McGee's notion of surprised Americans, not when a young man agrees to go to war "to kill for God, country, and apple pie, and no other particularly good reason, but, rather, when other young men displayed good common sense by moving to Montreal instead..." through the utilization of ideographs <Republican> and <Democrat>, Americans are "surprised" when another

votes for a third-party candidate over the two collectively idealized “proper” major-party options. This rhetoric creates human assumption as to “proper” voting options, and the American public, generally speaking, fails to question this good “commonsense” (Gramsci, 1971). Additionally, “We make a rhetoric to war to persuade us of war’s necessity, but then forget that it is a rhetoric—and regard negative popular judgments of it as unpatriotic cowardice” (McGee, 1980, p. 6). Similarly, rhetorical mechanisms, especially those employed by mainstream media outlets such as “The Big Three,” frame <Republican> and <Democrat> as necessary voting options. Americans then overlook these rhetorical messages, and thus regard “negative popular judgments,” such as voting for a third-party candidate, as “strange,” and “surprising.”

<Tea Party> actually <Republican>. The last theme found within the “The Big Three’s” news transcripts involves discussions concerning the <Tea Party>. While <Tea Party> was not separately content analyzed from other third parties, through my analysis I noticed that a large majority of the third-party mentions counted in the content analysis were <Tea-Party> mentions. However, the <Tea Party> has been consistently framed as a <Republican> affiliate, and thus, is arguably not truly a third party at all; instead, there was a clear connection between the <Tea Party> and <Republicans>. Several utterances exemplify this clear connection between <Tea Party> and <Republicans>. Here are two statements demonstrating this theme: “And one of the things that happened this year is you continually saw Tea Party Republicans—and keep in mind this is not your normal middle-of-the-road Republicans” (O’Reilly, August 23, 2012, p. 1), and, “But when you’re talking about Tea Party Republicans...” (Maddow, August 23, 2012, p. 1). Here, these quotes overtly call members of the <Tea Party> “Tea Party Republicans,” which

immediately and strappingly ties members of the <Tea Party> directly to the <Republican> Party, almost as if the <Tea Party> is a subgroup of <Republicans>. Here is another example of this theme found within the news transcripts: “And while it may seem that much of the Tea Party movement has withered away or just turned into a name brand part of standard Republican politics these days” (Maddow, August 23, 2012, p. 1). This quote explicitly states that the <Tea Party> is actually a part of the <Republican> Party, and thus, not a solitary political party, but rather a subgroup of <Republicans>. These utterances, I argue, portray the <Tea Party> as not a third party, or a third voting option in American democracy, but rather a collectivized subgroup of <Republicans>. Additionally, no <Tea Party> candidate ran for president in the 2012 election, and thus one who affiliates with the <Tea Party> ultimately votes <Republican>. The ideograph <Tea Party> coupled with <Republican> rhetorically stifles the <Tea Party> as an independent being. Assuming that the <Tea Party> is actually a subgroup of <Republicans>, the third-party mentions counted with the transcripts drop considerably below 1%.

Conclusion

Conclusively, <Republican> and <Democrat> are the primary ideographs around which the viable, “proper” voting-options in rhetorical discourse are organized. Indeed, “The Big Three’s” transcripts effectively demonstrate a strong correlation between the ideographs <Republican> and <Democrat>. A key component of ideographs is that they are not directed toward ideas, but instead are principally directed towards the illustrative social practices that rhetorically frame cultural ideologies within a society. The overabundance of <Republican> and <Democrat> ideographs in news media thus

ideologically bind people to the American political duopoly, or create unity among the American public, even when ideas and agendas within that society conflict. This thesis deliberately problematizes the language used throughout “The Big Three’s” discourse by demonstrating how a pair of ideographs, <Republican> and <Democrat>, operate symbiotically in their collective influence of ideologically creating regarding “proper” voting options and political party affiliation discourse; here, <Republican> and <Democrat> exhibit the conventionally agreed-upon premises of expected political behavior, and therefore function as ideographs. McGee (1980) states that an ideology establishes mass belief and thus hampers the surfacing of new political outlooks; through powerful media outlets such as “The Big Three’s” utilization of easily identifiable ideographs, the media socially construct political cognitions by accentuating the American political duopoly.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, a fundamental motive for research is to better understand the world that surrounds us, in hopes to *better* the world around us. More specifically, research in the discipline of communication aims to discover ways in which humans think, interact, and understand their surroundings. Conducting research regarding political communication is imperative in understanding the American political system and democracy, which has a significant impact in Americans' everyday lives. Thus, examination of the longstanding American political duopoly is imperative because the major parties' motives, policies, and ideologies dictate much of our lives. Additionally, examination of the duopoly is important, because third parties continually struggle for recognition, and ultimately votes in the American democracy. For these reasons, this thesis is critical to the continuing body of political communication research.

In particular, this thesis began by examining why third parties have received minimal recognition in American politics. Since the media have been noted to be powerful and ideological in nature, a content analysis served to uncover exactly how often third parties were mentioned within the three most popular and powerful cable news networks in America: Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN, otherwise known as "The Big Three." Findings from the content analysis indicated that both the Republican and Democratic parties received most of the attention and focus from "The Big Three," and

that third parties received less than 1% of the political news coverage. Next, a functional analysis was employed to identify what exactly *was* being said about third parties when they *were* mentioned. Granted the sample for the functional analysis was small, due to a relatively small number of third-party mentions, but the functional analysis revealed that the majority of third party mentions were brief mentions in passing, and thus had no valence. However, when valence within these messages was present, third parties were most often being attacked by “The Big Three,” and not spoken with much regard within the discourse. Also, when “The Big Three” *did* discuss third parties, the discussion included mostly character utterances as opposed to actually discussing the policies that third parties upheld. In fact, CNN did not once discuss a third party’s policies in an entire thirty hours of broadcasting. This is problematic, because viewers are then unable to learn about different viewpoints held by third parties, and instead are force-fed the same two culturally established ideologies over and over.

Lastly, a rhetorical analysis was employed in order to reveal the themes which emerged and uncover the rhetorical strategies in which “The Big Three” utilized to frame those themes and ultimately construct political ideologies. Through the use of ideographs, or culturally understood terminology with which Americans easily identify, “The Big Three” utilized <Republican> and <Democrat> to construct political ideologies and dictate Americans’ political behavior through abstract assumptions surrounding these ideographs (McGee, 1980). The themes including the commonality of <Republican> and <Democrat>, highlighting the central conflict between <Republicans> and <Democrats>, affiliating or voting third party considered “strange” or “surprising,” and <Tea Party> actually meaning <Republican> were stressed through workings of unity and division,

and presence and absence (Derrida, 1976), which aided in the powerful, ideological accentuation of the American political duopoly.

Contributions to Theory and Method

This thesis was beneficial on many fronts. First and foremost, very little research, especially communication research, has involved or included third-party politics. This could be due to the fact that there is an actual lack of third party relevance in American democracy. Moreover, insufficient research regarding third parties and media studies exists. Examining third parties within the media is of extreme importance, since media have been proven to be very powerful and ideological, and correlations likely exist concerning why third parties are practically non-existent in American politics. By selecting three of the most ideological news outlets in America, this thesis attests that “The Big Three” are a noteworthy reason for third party deficiency of coverage in American politics.

Secondly, this thesis supplements both the content and functional methods, as well as rhetorical methods of communication research. To begin, no content or functional analysis has ever examined third-party politics. Also, to my knowledge, functional theory has never been applied to “The Big Three,” or other cable news networks; rather, functional analysis has mostly been utilized in the examination of political campaigns, and it has been applied to actual political candidates’ utterances, instead of news networks’ discourse about those candidates and their respective parties. My research thus enhances both content and functional methods, and provides a new lens to which functional theory can be utilized. This thesis also adds to rhetorical methods of communication research, enhanced by, of course, Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Derrida, and

Michael Calvin McGee. By rhetorically examining current mainstream media, as well as applying the conception of American political duopoly, this thesis can be considered new research which enhances these classic rhetorical approaches in contemporary society. When considering the importance of these rhetorical approaches regarding the impact on ideology and human behavior, this thesis ultimately contributes to the understanding of the deterioration of American democracy. What I mean by this is that if democracy presumes allowance of each citizen's individual voice, opinion, and personal political ideology, the stronghold of the American political duopoly hampers real democracy. The duopoly's control over American politics limits the range of voting options and acceptable political ideologies, and thus real democracy is not sustained, because outside viewpoints are unwelcome. Lastly, no previous research has analyzed <Republican> and <Democrat> as ideographs. However, I argue that <Republican> and <Democrat> are potentially the most important ideographs within the American political communication. I maintain this claim because of how these ideographs heavily influence politics and Americans' everyday lives, and how these two ideographs mainly construct most of what Americans know about two-party politics.

By revealing and analyzing the absence of third-party politics in American democracy, another contribution of this thesis is that it adds a new component to political communication. As discussed in the analysis, I assert that communicative rhetorical strategies employed by "The Big Three" abstractly and conceptually unite Americans, yet at the same time pit Americans against one another. However, as the United States is constituted of fifty distinct units, the ultimate goal is to achieve prosperity through unity, yet at the same time through individualism in which the United States of America was

established. Allowing other ideologies to enter American politics, such as third-party ideologies, not only encourages individualism but also allows for new potential political policies which may have utility towards our ultimate goal of prosperity. Perhaps third parties contain new political policies and ideologies that the major parties may have overlooked or not yet thought of, and that can help America become a more prosperous nation. Although the functional analysis in this thesis only inspected third-party utterances, the rhetorical analysis recognized a strong, unhealthy division between what normatively should be a united nation, which definitively stifles the ultimate goal of individualism, true unity, and thus national prosperity. By enlightening the American public about political communication processes through this analysis, hopefully America can move one step closer towards reducing the central conflict division between the two major parties and potentially even consider new, fresh ideas (such as third-party ideologies), in hopes of improving American society as a whole and giving voice to those who have previously been muted.

Lastly, this thesis contributed to the knowledge of mainstream media, particularly news networks such as “The Big Three.” Again, analyzing news media is vital, especially in terms of politics, because news media are important and powerful in American culture; thus, scrutinizing the arguably controlling, apparent news bias and ideology is critical. While past research has noted how major parties attack one another, and considering this thesis’ exposure of the central conflict between the major parties, the heightening of the American political duopoly within mainstream media is evident. This thesis adds to the limited body of communication research concerning mainstream media’s absence of third parties, and ideological creation of the American political

duopoly.

Limitations and Future Research

While this thesis added to the body of research in many ways, as with most research, limitations of this study were present. First, the sample size for the functional analysis was relatively small, which may limit the viability of the conclusions made by this thesis regarding valence in third-party media utterances. Although this thesis did verify that the representations of third parties in “The Big Three” were trifling, findings regarding *what* was actually said about third parties in “The Big Three” warrants further examination. Furthermore, this thesis obtained news networks’ transcripts to be analyzed; this method could potentially have limited the overall findings regarding valence, since most of the functional analysis counts were coded into the neutral/unclear category. What I mean by this is that, by reading the transcripts as opposed to actually watching the programming, the observation of communicative nonverbals was absent. I presume that the absence of nonverbal communication could possibly have exposed some of the neutral/unclear utterances as attacks, acclaims, or even defenses. For example, maybe the news anchor made some sort of gesture or rolled his/her eyes while mentioning a third party, thus an analysis only of the transcripts may hide the communicative valence of the actual comments.

Also, choosing a different time period to analyze third-party utterances could potentially have supplied more data to work with. Since the major parties dominate presidential elections, choosing a year in which the presidential elections are not occurring might reveal additional exposure to third parties within “The Big Three.” However, as this thesis was particularly interested in presidential elections and national

politics, this time period was chosen accordingly, and thus revealed that third parties were overlooked when national elections were often the hot topics within mainstream media.

Grouping Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN as one unit, or “The Big Three” could also have been a possible limitation. While there are many similarities among the three, and the findings from this thesis found “The Big Three” to be similar in their discussion, or rather lack of discussion surrounding third-party politics, individually analyzing these news networks could provide a more accurate and fruitful analysis of third-party media research.

Another limitation this thesis is subject to is the exclusion of other media sources, such as newspapers, radio, various online media, blogs, and so forth. Examining these rhetorical outlets may reveal different findings than which was found within 24-hour cable news networks. Moreover, this thesis excluded other rhetorical, ideological apparatuses aside from media, and thus only makes assertions regarding the accentuated American political duopoly within the media. This is also a limitation because the findings from this thesis are most likely not unique to “The Big Three.” Here, I am suggesting that the findings from this study likely occur in other media formats, whether that is other television news networks, or other forms of media. By only examining “The Big Three,” I have only pointed out these trends and implications within these three news networks, while the findings would likely be similar in other popular media sources as well.

Further research examining the American political duopoly could help patch some of these limitations, as well as aid in the critique of America’s longstanding political

duopoly. To begin, researching other media outlets such as popular online media could enhance some of the arguments and findings made by this thesis, whether that be through content analyses, functional analyses, rhetorical analyses, or other methods. Additionally, applying functional theory to other media would be helpful in examining media portrayals of third parties. Also, rhetorically critiquing other ideological apparatuses, such as the American public school system, family, or the workplace would be an important next step in researching American political duopolistic ideologies. Since reinforcement of the American duopoly may be sustained in other venues besides “The Big Three,” further research is necessary to gain a better understanding of ideology’s connection to American political duopoly, and the public’s opinion about third parties. Concerning ideographs, future research could utilize <Republican> and <Democrat> to aid and expand this thesis’ assertions. For example, the McGee’s (1980) ideographical notions of diachronic and synchronic were not applied in the rhetorical analysis, and could have strong implications on political ideologies. Specifically, analyzing how Americans are born with assumptions of <Republican> and <Democrat>, and how these ideographs are used historically to create political assumptions would be key. Ultimately, since minimal research regarding third parties, especially with the application of the methods used in this thesis, has been completed, future research is absolutely necessary.

Conclusion

The American political duopoly has mostly prevailed for over a century. My overall concern with this, and thus the reason I wrote this thesis, is that numerous political ideologies outside of the major parties exist, some of which are consistent with my own political philosophy. Are the Republicans and Democrats, in the majority of

situations, truly the best voting options for Americans? Regardless, the critical rhetorical analysis has provided evidence that answering the previous question is quite unlikely. This prevents other political ideologies from entering into American politics, even though some of these third-party ideas could be useful and ultimately aid American society as whole. Thus, I suggest that informing others about multiple ideas, rather than being tied down to just two continuously, America can become an even greater nation, and a better place in which we can all live.

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APPENDIX

CHARACTER AND POLICY UTTERANCES

MSNBC

Attacks: 12

- Char: 12
 - Personal Quality: 7
 - Leadership Ability: 2
 - Ideals: 3
- Policy: 0
 - Past Deed: 0
 - Future Plan: 0
 - General Goal: 0

Acclaims: 3

- Char: 2
 - Personal Quality: 2
 - Leadership Ability: 0
 - Ideals: 0
- Policy: 1
 - Past Deed: 0
 - Leadership Ability: 0
 - General Goal: 1

Defense: 0

- Char: 0
- Policy: 0

Neutral Statements/Did not fit into category: 43

- Or, if unclear.

Total: 58

DATES

M 8-20-12 9pm: 2 [AT/CHAR/PQ] and [AC/CHAR/PQ]

M 8-21-12 8pm: 20 [AT/CHAR/LA], [AT/CHAR/PQ] x 2, [AC/CHAR/PQ]

- N: 16

- M 8-21-12 10pm: 1
 - N: 1
- M 8-22-12 9pm: 4 [AT/CHAR/PQ]
 - N: 3
- M 8-22-12 10pm: 1
 - N: 1
- M 8-23-12 9pm: 5 [AT/CHAR/ID]
 - N: 4
- M 8-23-12 10pm: 2 [AC/POL/GG]
 - N: 1
- M 12-1-11 8pm: 2 [AT/CHAR/ID] x 2
- M 12-5-11 8pm: 2
 - N: 2
- M 12-5-11 10PM: 2
 - N: 2
- M 12-6-11 8pm: 3 [AT/CHAR/LA]
 - N: 2
- M 12-6-11 10pm: 3 [AT/CHAR/PQ] x2
 - N: 1
- M: 12-7-11 9pm: 1
 - N: 1
- M 12-8-11 8pm: 9 [AT/CHAR/PQ]
 - N: 8
- M 12-8-11 10pm: 1
 - N: 1

Fox News Network

Attacks: 7

- Char: 4
 - Personal Quality: 3
 - Leadership Ability: 1
 - Ideals: 0
- Policy: 3
 - Past Deed: 2
 - Future Plan: 1
 - General Goal: 0

Acclaims: 2

- Char: 1
 - Personal Quality: 1
 - Leadership Ability: 0
 - Ideals: 0
- Policy: 1
 - Past Deed: 0
 - Future Plan: 1
 - General Goal: 0

Defense: 1

- Char: 0
- Policy: 1
 - Past Deed: 0
 - Future Plan: 0
 - General Goal: 1

Neutral Statements/Did not fit into category: 41

- Or, if unclear.

Total: 51

DATES

F 8-20-12 10pm: 2

- N: 2

F 8-21-12 10pm: 3 [AC/POL/FP]

- N: 2

F 8-22-12 10pm: 1

- N: 1

- F 8-23-12 8pm: 9 [AT/CHAR/LA], [AT/POL/PD], [D/POL/GG], [AT/CHAR/PQ]
• N: 5
- F 8-24-12 9pm: 3
• N: 3
- F 12-1-11 8pm: 9
• N: 9
- F 12-1-11 9pm: 1
• N: 1
- F 12-1-11 10pm: 3 [AT/POL/FP]
• N: 2
- F 12-5-11 10pm: 1 [AC/CHAR/PQ]
- F 12-6-11 8pm: 3
• N: 3
- F 12-6-11 9pm: 4
• N: 4
- F 12-6-11 10pm: 2
• N: 2
- F 12-7-11 8pm: 9 [AT/POL/PD], [AT/CHAR/PQ] x 2
• N: 6
- F 12-7-11 9pm: 1
• N: 1

CNN

Attacks: 0

- Char: 0
- Policy: 0

Acclaims: 2

- Char: 2
 - Personal Quality: 2
 - Leadership Ability: 0
 - Ideals: 0
- Policy: 0

Defense: 0

- Char: 0
- Policy: 0

Neutral Statements/Did not fit into category: 15

- Or, if unclear.

Total: 17

DATES

C 8-20-12 8pm: 1 [AC/CHAR/PQ]

C 8-20-12 10pm: 1 [AC/CHAR/PQ]

C 8-22-12 8pm: 1

- N: 1

C 8-22-12 9pm: 5

- N: 5

C 8-22-12 10pm: 1

- N: 1

C 8-24-12 8pm: 4

- N: 4

C 8-24-12 10pm: 4

- N: 4