# The Norm of Self-Interest and Its Effects on Social Action

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Four studies investigated whether people feel inhibited from engaging in social action incongruent with their apparent self-interest. Participants in Study 1 predicted that they would be evaluated negatively were they to take action on behalf of a cause in which they had no stake or in which they had a stake but held stake-incongruent attitudes. Participants in Study 2 reported both surprise and anger when a target person took action on behalf of a cause in which he or she had no stake or in which he or she held stake-incongruent attitudes. In Study 3, individuals felt more comfortable engaging in social action and expected others to respond more favorably toward their actions if the issue was described as more relevant to their own sex than to the opposite sex. In Study 4, the authors found that providing nonvested individuals with psychological standing rendered them as likely as vested individuals to undertake social action. The authors discuss the implications of these results for the relationship between vested interest, social action, and attitude–behavior consistency.

Social action rarely benefits all groups equally, and for this reason many influential theories of social behavior (e.g., Arrow, 1951; Downs, 1957; Mueller, 1979; Olson, 1965) suggest that support for social action will vary across groups, with those having the greatest stake being the most supportive. In fact, empirical investigations of the relation between support for, and vested interest in, social action reveal a more complex story. On one hand, vested interest does not seem to be highly related to attitudes toward social policies or their implementation (Sears, 1997; Sears & Funk, 1990, 1991). On the other hand, vested interest does seem to be highly related to behaviors taken on behalf of social policies (Green & Cowden, 1992). Thus, although individuals with a stake in a cause are not necessarily more likely to hold supportive attitudes toward it, they are much more likely to act on their supportive attitudes (e.g., Crano 1997a, 1997b; Green & Cowden, 1992; Regan & Fazio, 1977; Sivacek & Crano, 1982).

Green and Cowden's (1992) examination of Whites' attitudes toward school busing as a means of achieving racial integration illustrates the differential impact of vested interest on attitudes and behaviors. In the survey data they examined (see Sears, Hensler, & Speer, 1979), there was no observable effect of vested interest on attitudes, with those for whom the implementation of a school busing policy would have the greatest effect (parents) being no more opposed or supportive of this means of integrating public schools than those for whom the policy would have the least effect (nonparents). However, the survey respondents also answered questions about their participation in social action, and on these measures Green and Cowden (1992) found a strong effect of vested interest: Vested individuals were much more likely to report acting on their attitudes (e.g., to join antibusing organizations). Similarly, Sivacek and Crano (1982) found that students affected by a change in the drinking age were no more opposed to the change than were those who were old enough that their ability to drink would not be hindered by the new drinking age; however, those under the drinking age were more likely than those above the drinking age to get involved with a local group protesting the change.

Why might vested interest influence people's actions so much more than their attitudes? One popular answer (e.g., Green & Cowden, 1992; Perloff, 1987; Snyder, 1993) is that the cost of taking action on behalf of a cause is such that one needs not merely a supportive attitude but an incentive, which rarely exists when one does not have a stake in the cause. As Green and Cowden (1992) explained it, the opportunity to act in support of a cause (in contrast to merely giving an opinion about it) leads the sympathetic actor to ask "Is it worth it?" The answer to this question (especially if money or time is involved) is more likely to be affirmative, they argue, when the actor has a stake in the cause. Stated more generally, one may not need a vested interest in a cause to hold or express a supportive attitude, but one does require a level of motivation that only having a stake in the issue can provide to convert a supportive attitude into a supportive action.

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## The Norm of Self-Interest

We propose another possible reason why the link between self-interest and behavior is stronger than that between self-interest and attitudes. This asymmetrical relationship could reflect the influence of a social norm, one that specifies that people are and should be motivated by self-interest (Miller, 1999; Miller & Ratner, 1996). The motives that a culture considers normal and appropriate powerfully influence which behaviors its members will and will not engage in (Miller & Prentice, 1994); at least in individualistic cultures, no motive is considered more normal (or rational) than self-interest (Miller, 1999; Miller & Ratner, 1996).

The explanatory value of a self-interest norm for understanding social action rests with a single insight: Not everyone who cares about a cause will feel equally comfortable taking action on its behalf. The actor faced with the prospect of behavioral involvement in a social cause must ask not only, "Is it worth it?" but, "Is it appropriate?" The discomfort produced by the prospect of violating the norm of self-interest is especially acute and inhibiting for two groups of would-be actors. The first group consists of those people who lack a stake in a cause. Even if such people strongly support the cause and have the wherewithal to act, the norm of self-interest will inhibit them from doing so. The second group consists of those who do have a personal stake in the cause but whose position on the issue runs contrary to their self-interest. Despite feeling passionate about the cause and having a clear stake in it, the inconsistency between their attitudes and their perceived self-interest violates the norm of self-interest and will inhibit them from acting on their attitudes.

By way of analogy, the judicial concept of legal standing illustrates how the lack of vested interest may function to inhibit social action. The United States Supreme Court has decided that not everyone is entitled to bring forward a case for legal review (*Sierra Club v. Morton,* 1972). To qualify as having legal standing for judicial review, it is necessary for a person to show that he or she has suffered or will suffer some injury, economic or otherwise. So, for example, moral outrage at the socially or economically injurious behavior of another, without demonstrable personal injury, is insufficient grounds for a person or group to take legal action. Given this definition of legal standing, it always will be possible to point to the basis in self-interest of any instance of judicial action. Obviously, however, this would not be grounds for concluding that the human impulse to right wrongs is invariably confined to wrongs that affect the actor personally. The strength of the relationship between self-interest and legal action in the American legal context says more about the normative position of the court than it does about the motivating power of self-interest. We propose that a similar explanation might underlie the strength of the relationship between self-interest and social action: Namely, it says more about the normative position of the court of public opinion than about the motivating power of self-interest. The court of public opinion declares that a person must have psychological standing (vested interest) to undertake action on behalf of a cause or person. A supportive attitude, without a vested interest, will leave an individual uncomfortable taking action. So too will having a vested interest that diverges from the attitude the individual holds. Self-interest, thus, whether in the legal or social domain, can function as much to legitimate or justify behavior as to motivate it.

### *The Descriptive and Prescriptive Components of the Norm*

We propose that the norm of self-interest, like many norms, is both descriptive and prescriptive. The descriptive aspect of the self-interest norm is demonstrated by the layperson's strong belief that others' attitudes and behaviors are highly influenced by self-interest, whether the latter takes the form of monetary incentive or vested interest (Miller & Ratner, 1996, 1998). For instance, respondents in one study (Miller & Ratner, 1998, Study 1) expected women to hold more favorable attitudes than men toward government health plan coverage of abortions, even though the attitudes of male and female respondents toward the proposal did not, in fact, differ. Respondents in another study (Miller & Ratner, 1998, Study 2) expected those offered financial compensation for undertaking a prosocial act (e.g., blood donation) to be more willing to undertake it than those who were not offered money in return. The most impressive evidence for a descriptive norm of self-interest is the finding that the predictive power people accord self-interest is largely unaffected by the explanatory power it has for their own behavior. Thus, even when people's own attitudes toward a social policy are incongruent with their acknowledged level of vested interest in it (i.e., either too positive or too negative), they nevertheless believe that the attitudes of others will be self-interest congruent (Miller & Ratner, 1998).

The prescriptive or "ought" component of the self-interest norm is less well documented. One area of research that offers at least indirect evidence of its existence focuses on people's accounts for their behavior. To the extent that people feel that self-interest ought to guide their behavior, the "motive talk" (Mills, 1963) they engage in can be expected to emphasize the self-interested basis of their behavior as a means of normalizing it. Evidence for the preference of self-interest–based accounts appears in people's explanations of their prosocial deeds (Wuthnow, 1991). For example, explanations provided by volunteers focused on the benefits that they (the helpers) obtained from their volunteer activities ("It got me out of the house." or "I liked the other volunteers."; Wuthnow, 1991).

People not only explain their actions in self-interest terms, they also explain their attitudes in terms of self-interest, as is illustrated by research on the accounts given by Whites opposed to school busing as a means of achieving racial integration. As indicated earlier, research revealed little relationship between self-interest and attitudes toward busing. Yet Whites' accounts for their opposition to school busing focused primarily on utilitarian arguments—concern for their children's safety, diminished property values, inconvenience to kids and so forth (Sears & Funk, 1990). In sum, the fear of appearing deviant apparently can motivate social actors to manufacture self-interest–based accounts for their actions as well as their attitudes. These explanations, like other accounts (see Scott & Lyman, 1968), serve to neutralize and normalize what otherwise would be perceived as antinormative behavior.

### *The Present Studies*

In the present research, we explored the proposed link between the self-interest norm and social action. In Study 1, we sought to demonstrate that people fear that by taking actions that violate the norm of self-interest they will provoke negative reactions from

others. In Study 2, we sought to demonstrate that observers actually do react negatively to social actors who violate the norm of self-interest. Studies 3 and 4 incorporated an experimental manipulation of self-interest to show that those who feel less vested in a cause feel uncomfortable showing their support for it unless nonvested action is framed as appropriate.

## Study 1

The rationale underlying Study 1 is the assumption that the prospect of taking actions that violate the norm of self-interest produces discomfort in people. In Study 1, we focused on two distinct circumstances in which a person's attitudes, and hence potential behavior, stand in violation of the self-interest norm. The first occurs when the person supports a cause in which he or she lacks a vested interest. The second occurs when the person does have a vested interest in the cause in question but holds a position that runs contrary to the consensual definition of self-interest. In Study 1, we sought to demonstrate that would-be actors in both of these circumstances experience discomfort. Specifically, we tested the following two hypotheses: (a) People will experience more discomfort over the prospect of acting on attitudes that do not comport with their vested interest than over the prospect of acting on those that do and (b) people will anticipate more negative reactions from others when their actions do not comport with their self-interest than when they do.

### *Method*

#### *Participants and Design*

Participants were 134 (55 male and 79 female) undergraduates who completed a questionnaire study for course credit. Vested interest was indexed by the participants' sex, hence the design was a 2 (sex of participant: male vs. female) × 2 (attitude position: pro- vs. anticause) between-subjects design.

#### *Procedure*

Participants responded to a page-long series of questions as part of an hour-long study. The first question asked participants to indicate the extent to which they would "be in favor of/opposed to a new [government] health plan including coverage of abortions" on a scale of 1 (*strongly opposed*) to 7 (*strongly in favor*).

Participants next were asked a series of questions assessing (also on 7-point scales) the comfort they would experience were they to take various forms of social action based on their attitude toward this policy. First, participants were asked how comfortable they would feel signing a petition in support of their position. Next, participants were asked about the comfort they would feel attending a student meeting in support of their position. Following this they were asked about the reactions they would anticipate from others were they actually to attend the meeting. Specifically, they indicated to what extent others at the meeting would value their input to the discussion, to what extent the others at the meeting would be confused about their interest in attending the meeting, how comfortable they would be telling their friends they had attended the meeting, and to what extent their friends would be confused about their interest in attending the meeting.

Finally, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which the abortion-coverage issue affected men versus women on a scale of 1 (*only affects men*) to 4 (*affects men and women equally*) to 7 (*only affects women*). Each participant then returned the questionnaire to the experimenter, who recorded the participant's gender.

### *Results*

#### *Preliminary Analyses*

We predicted that people would feel uncomfortable acting on attitudes that appeared inconsistent with their self-interest. Consistent with predictions and previous findings (Miller & Ratner, 1998, Study 1), the attitudes of male and female participants toward the abortion-coverage proposal were moderately supportive and did not differ significantly from each other ($M$s = 3.80 for male participants and 4.33 for female participants), $F(1, 132) = 2.49$, $p > .10$. Also consistent with predictions and previous findings (Miller & Ratner, 1998, Study 1), participants perceived the issue to be one in which women were more vested than men ($M = 5.43$, which is significantly greater than the midpoint of 4.0), $t(133) = 19.15$, $p < .0001$. Male and female respondents did not differ in their ratings of the extent to which they perceived women to be vested in the issue relative to men.

For purposes of subsequent analyses, participants were classified as either "pro" or "anti" abortion coverage on the basis of whether their attitudes were to the left or right of the neutral point. The 20 participants who checked the neutral point were excluded from further analyses.

#### *Own Comfort With Action*

We hypothesized that men would feel less comfortable than women would acting on procoverage attitudes, but that the two genders would feel equally uncomfortable acting on anticoverage attitudes (which were stake incongruent for women and relatively stakeless for men). Participants' responses to the three comfort items (i.e., comfort signing a petition, attending a meeting, and telling friends) were averaged to create a summary comfort score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$).

A 2 (sex of participant: male vs. female) × 2 (attitude position: pro vs. anticoverage) ANOVA was performed on this summary comfort score. The main effect of participants' sex was nonsignificant, $F(1, 110) = 1.76$, $p > .15$. However, a marginally significant main effect of participants' attitude emerged, indicating a trend for procoverage participants ($M = 5.56$) to be more comfortable taking action than anticoverage participants ($M = 4.99$), $F(1, 110) = 2.84$, $p < .10$. This main effect was qualified by a significant Sex of Participant × Attitude Position interaction, $F(1, 110) = 5.83$, $p < .05$ (see Table 1). Consistent with predictions, among the procoverage participants, men were less comfortable acting on their attitudes than were women ($M$s = 4.95 and 5.92, respectively), $F(1, 110) = 8.17$, $p < .01$. As predicted, the comfort

Table 1
*The Effects of Participants' Sex and Attitude on Reactions to Social Action: Study 1*

| | Procoverage | | | | Anticoverage | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | | Male | | Female | | Male | |
| Measure | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Own comfort | 5.92 | 0.99 | 4.95 | 1.63 | 4.85 | 1.29 | 5.14 | 1.63 |
| Others' confusion | 2.29 | 1.12 | 3.68 | 1.29 | 3.26 | 1.16 | 3.14 | 1.36 |
| Value input | 5.10 | 1.11 | 4.28 | 1.59 | 4.20 | 1.41 | 4.81 | 1.47 |

of men and women who held anticoverage attitudes did not differ ($M$s = 5.14 and 4.85), $F < 1$.

Additional simple effects analyses revealed that women felt more comfortable acting on their procoverage attitudes than anticoverage attitudes, $F(1, 110) = 9.81$, $p < .01$. Men, on the other hand, were equally comfortable or uncomfortable acting on their attitudes regardless of whether their attitudes were pro- or anticoverage. Overall, this pattern of results provides preliminary support for the key predictions: (a) Vested participants were more comfortable acting on their attitudes when their attitudes were stake congruent than when they were stake incongruent and (b) nonvested participants were relatively uncomfortable taking action, regardless of their attitudes.

### *Anticipated Reactions of Others*

*Anticipated confusion at attendance.* Responses to the items about the confusion that their attendance at the meeting would provoke in (a) others at the meeting and (b) participants' friends were significantly correlated ($r = .43$, $p < .0001$), and hence we averaged them to yield a single anticipated confusion score.[1] An analysis of variance (ANOVA) on this confusion score yielded a significant main effect of sex of participant: male participants thought that others would be more confused ($M = 3.43$) than did female participants ($M = 2.65$) by their attendance at a meeting in support of their position, $F(1, 110) = 7.32$, $p < .01$. No main effect of attitude position emerged, $F < 1$. However, the predicted Sex of Participant × Attitude Position interaction was obtained, $F(1, 110) = 10.44$, $p < .01$ (see Table 1). The pattern of results on the confusion measure paralleled that found on the comfort composite. Men expected that others would be more confused by their attendance at a procoverage meeting ($M = 3.68$) than did the women ($M = 2.29$), $F(1, 110) = 20.59$, $p < .01$, but there was no difference in the confusion men and women expected to follow from their attendance at an anticoverage meeting ($M$s = 3.14 and 3.26 for men and women, respectively), $F < 1$. Additional simple effects analyses indicated that the degree of confusion expected by men did not depend on their attitude, $F(1, 110) = 2.34$, *ns,* but that the confusion expected by women was significantly greater among those who held stake-incongruent (i.e., anticoverage) attitudes than those who held stake-congruent (i.e., procoverage) attitudes, $F(1, 110) = 10.05$, $p < .01$.

*Anticipated valuing of input.* No main effect of either sex of participant or attitude position emerged on the question that asked participants how much others at the meeting would value their input. Here too, however, the predicted Sex of Participant × Attitude Position interaction emerged, $F(1, 109) = 7.35$, $p < .01$ (see Table 1). Simple effects analyses indicated that among the procoverage participants, women thought that others at the meeting would value their input more than did men ($M$s = 5.10 and 4.28, respectively), $F(1, 109) = 5.55$, $p < .05$. There was no significant difference between the anticoverage women and men on this measure ($M$s = 4.20 for female participants and 4.81 for male participants, respectively), $F(1, 109) = 2.39$, $p > .10$. Additional simple effects analyses revealed that the procoverage women expected that others at their meeting would value their input more than did the anticoverage women, $F(1, 109) = 6.69$, $p < .05$. The pro- and anticoverage men did not differ in how much they expected others to value their input.

To summarize, the ANOVA results on the three main measures in Study 1 strongly supported the two principal hypotheses. Compared with female participants who held procoverage attitudes, male participants who held procoverage attitudes (a) expressed more discomfort at the prospect of acting on their procoverage attitudes, (b) anticipated being evaluated more negatively by observers should they act on their attitudes, and (c) expected their input to be valued less should they attend a procoverage meeting. Among anticoverage men and women there were no differences on these measures. Our explanation for this latter result is that although women who held an anticoverage position were perceived to have a greater stake than men were, they were nevertheless seen as holding a position that was contrary to that stake and, hence, like the men, as violating the norm of self-interest.

### *Regression Analysis*

We performed a regression analysis to test whether individuals' comfort engaging in social action (i.e., attending a meeting) was related more strongly to their expectation of how favorably others would respond to their action than to the strength of their own attitude toward the social issue. We regressed participants' anticipated comfort attending the meeting simultaneously onto (a) the confusion they expected their attendance at the meeting would generate in observers and (b) the strength of their attitude (assessed as the absolute value of the distance of their attitude from the midpoint of the 7-point scale). Supporting the predictions, this analysis revealed that the strength of participants' attitude did not predict how comfortable they would feel attending the meeting ($p = .45$), but that the degree of confusion they anticipated in others was a significant predictor of how comfortable they would feel attending the meeting ($p < .0001$). This result provides further evidence that people's hesitancy to participate in a cause for which they have considerable sympathy—but in which they have no stake or hold stake-incongruent attitudes—is due to the unfavorable reaction they anticipate from others.

### *Discussion*

In this sample of college students, men were as likely as women to report procoverage attitudes. Male and female supporters of abortion coverage, however, differed in how comfortable they would be taking actions on behalf of their procoverage attitudes. Female participants indicated that they would be more comfortable than male participants taking procoverage actions (i.e., signing a petition, attending a meeting, and telling their friends they attended a meeting in support of their position). This gender difference did not represent a more general gender (or vestedness) difference in comfort level, however, as women who were opposed to abortion coverage did not express more comfort in taking actions on behalf of that position than did like-minded men.

Our explanation for the observed sex difference is that holding a procoverage attitude was perceived as congruent with the vested interest of women but not of men, and hence procoverage men (unlike women) who acted on their attitudes would be viewed as violating the norm of self-interest. Three additional findings sup-

[1] The patterns of results obtained for both of these confusion items were similar, and therefore we averaged them for the sake of simplicity.

port this speculation. First, men and women both indicated that women would benefit more from the implementation of free abortion coverage than would men. Second, procoverage men anticipated that others would be more confused by their attending a procoverage meeting than did their female counterparts. Third, when women held attitudes seemingly incongruent with their self-interest (i.e., they were anticoverage), they were no more comfortable than men were acting on those attitudes. These results strongly support the hypothesis that fear of violating the norm of self-interest can inhibit the action of people whose attitudes deviate in one way or another from their perceived self-interest.

## Study 2

The reactions of the participants in Study 1 indicate that people fear social disapproval when they undertake a social action on behalf of a cause either in which they have no personal stake or toward which they hold stake-incongruent attitudes. But are people's assumptions about the fates of nonvested actors and vested actors who hold stake-incongruent attitudes accurate? Do observers actually react with suspicion and negativity to those who undertake social action divorced from self-interest? This was the question addressed in Study 2. Specifically, in Study 2 we tested the hypothesis that observers would react negatively to both nonvested individuals who acted on their attitudes (i.e., pro- and anticoverage men) and vested individuals who acted on attitudes that were perceived to be stake incongruent (i.e., anticoverage women).

### Method

#### Participants and Design

Ninety-three undergraduates completed a questionnaire as part of a ½-hr study in exchange for $5. We used a three-factor design with two between-subjects factors (sex of target person: male vs. female and sex of respondent: male vs. female) and one within-subjects factor (attitude of target person: pro- vs. antiabortion coverage).

#### Procedure

Participants responded to a four-page questionnaire that elicited their reactions to (a) a male or female target person holding an attitude in favor of a government-sponsored health plan including coverage of abortions and (b) a target person of the same gender holding an attitude in opposition to the plan. Half the participants were asked to consider a male target person and half to consider a female target person. Whether participants first were asked to consider the procoverage or the anticoverage target was counterbalanced.[2]

Participants began by indicating on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) the extent to which the target person made them feel "annoyed," "shocked," "suspicious," "resentful," "amazed," "angry," "confused," and "skeptical." Next, participants were asked to imagine that this same person attended a community meeting that had been organized to advocate for his or her position (i.e., either to support or oppose the health plan coverage). Participants, again using 7-point scales, were asked to indicate to what extent other people (both at the meeting and not at the meeting) would wonder why the person took the time to attend.

Next, participants completed the same ratings for a target person—of the same sex—who held the opposite position on abortion coverage. Finally, participants provided their own attitude toward the proposed plan as well as their estimates of the average attitude of female and male respondents. In addition, they indicated their own sex and reported which sex they thought would benefit more from the proposed health plan coverage on a scale of 1 (*only men*) to 4 (*men and women equally*) to 7 (*only women*).

### Results

#### Preliminary Analyses

The actual attitudes of the participants were moderately pro-abortion-coverage and did not differ by gender (actual attitude $M$s = 4.92 and 4.82 for female and male respondents, respectively), $F < 1$, *ns*. However, consistent with our earlier findings (Miller & Ratner, 1998), participants estimated that women would be significantly more in favor of health plan coverage of abortion than would men (estimated attitude $M$s = 4.85 and 3.92 for women and men, respectively), $t(92) = 5.38$, $p < .0001$. The latter finding was consistent with participants' view that women would benefit more than men would from the plan ($M = 4.74$, which is significantly greater than the midpoint of the scale), $t(92) = 8.46$, $p < .0001$.

#### Reactions to the Target Person

The responses to nine ratings scales were combined into two composite scores. The first of these was a confusion score comprising responses to the following six items: surprised, shocked, amazed, suspicious, confused, and skeptical (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$ and .86 for the targets with pro- and anti-abortion-coverage attitudes, respectively). The second composite was an anger score comprising responses to the remaining three items: annoyed, resentful, and angry (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$ and .86 for the pro- and anti-abortion-coverage target persons). The correlation between these surprise and anger subscales for the procoverage target persons was moderately strong and positive, $r = .54$, $p < .001$. The correlation between the surprise and anger subscales for the anticoverage targets was smaller, although also significant, $r = .29$, $p < .01$. We performed a 2 (sex of target person: male vs. female) × 2 (sex of respondent: male vs. female) × 2 (attitude position of target person: pro- vs. anticoverage) ANOVA on each of the two composite scores to test the hypothesis that people would respond with more negativity to those actors whose attitudes did not appear to be based in self-interest (i.e., the anticoverage females and the pro- and anticoverage males). We expected this pattern to be obtained for both the vested and nonvested respondents (i.e., both the women and men).

*Confusion differences.* No significant main effect of sex of target, sex of respondent, or attitude of target emerged on the confusion composite score. However, the predicted two-way interaction between Sex of Target × Attitude Position was significant, $F(1, 88) = 27.82$, $p < .0001$ (see Table 2). Simple effects analyses revealed that participants were more confused by the procoverage position of the male target than of the female target ($M$s = 2.66 and 1.52), $F(1, 88) = 35.19$, $p < .01$, but less confused by the anticoverage position of the male target than of the female target ($M$s = 1.96 and 2.48), $F(1, 88) = 7.22$, $p < .01$. Further, whereas participants were more confused by the woman who held an anticoverage than a procoverage attitude, $F(1, 88) = 24.75$, $p <$

[2] The order in which the two (i.e., pro- and anticoverage) scenarios were presented to participants did not qualify any of the main effects or interactions reported below and is therefore not discussed further.

Table 2
*The Effects of Target's Sex and Attitude on Observers' Reactions to Social Action: Study 2*

| | Procoverage | | | | Anticoverage | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | | Male | | Female | | Male | |
| Measure | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Own confusion | 1.52 | 0.74 | 2.66 | 1.49 | 2.48 | 1.36 | 1.96 | 0.91 |
| Own anger | 1.68 | 1.10 | 1.78 | 1.46 | 2.38 | 1.42 | 3.48 | 1.94 |
| Others at meeting wonder | 3.00 | 1.83 | 3.89 | 1.63 | 2.70 | 1.75 | 2.98 | 1.67 |
| Others not at meeting wonder | 3.52 | 1.66 | 4.30 | 1.49 | 3.72 | 1.47 | 3.49 | 1.65 |

.01, they were more confused by the man who held a procoverage attitude than an anticoverage attitude, $F(1, 88) = 13.22$, $p < .01$. As predicted, this Sex of Target × Attitude Position interaction was not qualified by a three-way interaction with Sex of Respondent. Both male and female respondents reported greater confusion at a target person who held attitudes seemingly not based in self-interest. In addition, a significant, unpredicted two-way interaction was obtained between sex of target and sex of respondent, $F(1, 88) = 4.81$, $p < .05$, indicating that, whereas men were equally surprised or unsurprised by the male ($M = 2.08$) and female ($M = 1.88$) target persons, $F < 1$, the female respondents were more surprised by the male ($M = 2.58$) than female ($M = 1.92$) target persons, $F(1, 88) = 5.89$, $p < .05$.

*Anger differences.* Analyses conducted on the anger composite scale revealed a main effect of target position, indicating that participants reacted with more anger at a person holding an anticoverage position than at one holding a procoverage position ($M = 2.93$ and 1.73 in the anticoverage and procoverage cells, respectively), $F(1, 88) = 21.31$, $p < .0001$. (This result possibly reflects the fact that participants' own attitudes were moderately procoverage.) In addition, a significant main effect of sex of target indicated that participants reacted with greater anger to a male target than a female target ($M$s = 2.63 for the male target person and 2.03 for the female target person respectively), $F(1, 88) = 7.64$, $p < .01$. Qualifying these main effects, however, was the predicted Sex of Target × Attitude Position interaction, $F(1, 88) = 4.03$, $p < .05$ (see Table 2). The anger participants felt toward anticoverage targets was especially great when the target was male (i.e., nonvested; $M$s = 3.48 and 2.38 for the male and female target persons holding anticoverage attitudes, respectively), $F(1, 88) = 10.26$, $p < .01$. The case was quite different for targets with procoverage attitudes: The degree of anger they generated was relatively low and did not differ by target gender, $F < 1$. As predicted, the Sex of Target × Attitude Position interaction was not qualified by a three-way interaction with sex of respondent.

### *Ratings of Target's Motives*

Separate three-way ANOVAs were performed on the two measures that assessed participants' reactions to the target person's attendance at a meeting in support of his or her position. A main effect of attitude position emerged on the item that asked "How much would others at the meeting wonder why the person attended?" Participants believed that others at the meeting would wonder more about the motives of a person attending a proabortion coverage meeting ($M = 3.48$) than one who attended an antiabortion coverage meeting ($M = 2.86$), $F(1, 88) = 8.74$, $p < .01$, perhaps because participants assumed that many anticoverage individuals hold that attitude as a result of strong religious convictions. The only other effect to approach significance on this measure was a main effect of sex of target ($M$s = 3.44 and 2.85 for male and female targets, respectively), $F(1, 88) = 2.59$, $p = .11$. No other main effects or interactions emerged on this measure.

On the question "How much would others not at the meeting wonder why the person attended?" no main effects emerged, but there was a significant Sex of Target × Attitude Position interaction, $F(1, 88) = 5.55$, $p < .05$ (see Table 2). Simple effects analyses indicated that participants believed that individuals would wonder more about the attendance of a man ($M = 4.30$) than of a woman ($M = 3.52$) at a procoverage meeting, $F(1, 88) = 4.14$, $p < .05$, but anticipated no difference in individuals' reactions to men and women who attended an anticoverage meeting, $F < 1$. No other significant main effects or interactions emerged on this measure.

### *Discussion*

The findings of Study 2 closely paralleled those of Study 1. Although men supported a government plan offering abortion coverage as strongly as women did, participants expected men to support it less (and to benefit from it less) than women would. One consequence of this misperception was that participants reacted with significantly more confusion to a procoverage man than to a procoverage woman. Thus, the discomfort that procoverage men in Study 1 indicated they would experience were they to act on their attitudes appears justified. The results of Study 2 also shed light on the reluctance of both anticoverage men and anticoverage women in Study 1 to act on their attitudes. Observers in Study 2 reported that they would be especially angry at the action of an anticoverage men but would also be confused and somewhat angered by the action of an anticoverage woman.

In summary, Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that people's attitudes and actions are expected to conform to their self-interest and that, when they do not, they provoke discomfort in the actor and confusion and anger in observers. These findings point to a novel account of people's reluctance to act on behalf of causes for which they have sympathy but in which they have no stake: Without a stake in a cause, people lack the psychological standing to act—feeling, in effect, that it is not their place to act. Furthermore, even if they do have a stake in the cause, people will feel uncomfortable taking action unless their attitudes appear congruent with their vested interest.

## Overview of Studies 3 and 4

The following two studies addressed more directly the role that the norm of self-interest plays in the reluctance of those without a stake in a cause to take action on behalf of that cause. In both Studies 3 and 4, we experimentally manipulated vestedness, such that half of the participants were led to believe that the issue was more personally relevant for their own sex and half that the issue was more relevant for the opposite sex. Although we believe that the discomfort men in Study 1 reported feeling reflects their relative lack of vestedness, an alternative interpretation of those

results is that men are less comfortable in general than women are in engaging in social action. By experimentally manipulating which sex is vested, we are able to unconfound effects of vestedness from effects of gender. We predicted that each sex would feel less comfortable taking action when the opposite sex rather than their own sex had a greater vested interest in the target issue. In Study 3, we sought to demonstrate that both male and female supporters of a cause will be less comfortable taking action on behalf of that cause when they are nonvested. Study 4 was designed to show that the discomfort nonvested supporters of a cause feel acting on their attitudes can be reduced by framing the call to action in a manner that provides them with psychological standing.

## Study 3

### *Method*

#### *Participants and Design*

Sixty-five Princeton University undergraduates (33 women, 32 men) participated in a study concerning "social and political attitudes" to obtain course credit. The study used a 2 (sex of participant: male vs. female) × 2 (vested sex: male vs. female) between-subjects design.

#### *Procedure*

Undergraduates participated individually in a brief study concerning students' attitudes toward several social and political issues. All participants were presented with a two-page questionnaire in which they read about the bogus issue described below and then answered a number of questions about their perceived vestedness in the issue, attitudes toward the issue, and comfort attending a meeting in support of their position.

*Manipulation of vested interest.* Participants were randomly assigned to read that either their own sex (vested) or the opposite sex (nonvested) was at risk for a gastrointestinal illness for which federal funding might be cut. Individuals in the women-at-risk condition read the following passage:

> Since 1990, scientists at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have been conducting research pertaining to a particular set of gastrointestinal symptoms that develops in *one out of every seven* American women at some point in their lives. These symptoms appear to be caused by an enzyme deficiency that is found only in women. The symptoms include painful digestion of certain foods, nausea, and an increased vulnerability to ulcers. NIH researchers are developing an imitation (or "agonist") of this enzyme to be taken by women who have the enzyme deficiency and symptoms. The NIH has made considerable progress and expects to have the enzyme supplement available within the next 4 years.
>
> The House Appropriations Committee of the United States Congress is currently considering a proposal (Proposition 174) to reduce the NIH budget by 75% to provide money for a campaign sponsored by the Department of Transportation to increase seat belt use by putting the slogan "Don't Forget to Buckle Up" on highway billboards across the country. Opponents of this plan point out that the few regions that already have "Buckle Up" billboards do not show increased seat belt utilization rates.
>
> Researchers at the NIH say that the proposed budget cut would slow down their research tremendously: With one fourth of their original budget, the enzyme supplement would not be available for 14–16 years.

Participants in the men-at-risk condition read the same description, but with the word "men" inserted where "women" appears in the above paragraphs.

*Dependent measures.* Participants' attitudes toward the issue were measured with the item "To what extent are you in favor of or against the Proposition 174 proposal (i.e., shifting ¾ of the NIH money to the Buckle Up billboards)?" on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly against*) to 7 (*strongly in favor*). Two items assessed participants' perceptions of vestedness: (a) "Which sex suffers more from the enzyme deficiency the NIH is studying?" measured on a scale ranging from 1 (*men*) to 4 (*affects both sexes equally*) to 7 (*women*), and (b) "How much could it affect you personally if the NIH does not have the enzyme supplement ready for another 15 years?" measured on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Participants were asked to what extent they thought female (and then male) respondents to the survey were in favor or against the budget reallocation proposal (on 7-point scales). Several questions asked participants how they would feel about attending a meeting in support of their position: (a) "How comfortable would you feel attending a meeting of concerned citizens who share your position (i.e., either pro- or anti-) on this issue?" (b) "To what extent do you think others at such a meeting would value your input?" and (c) "To what extent do you think others at the meeting would be confused about your interest in attending the meeting?" In addition, all participants reported their own sex.

### *Results*

#### *Manipulation Checks*

As expected, participants in the women-at-risk condition thought women would be more affected by the proposed budget change ($M = 6.63$) than did participants in the men-at-risk condition ($M = 1.55$), $F(1, 63) = 889.71$, $p < .0001$. Participants who read that their own sex was at risk for the disease indicated that the budget change was more personally relevant to them than did participants who read that the opposite sex was at risk for the disease ($M$s = 4.76 and 2.55, respectively), $F(1, 63) = 29.21$, $p < .0001$. These effects were equally strong for both the male and female respondents. Both male and female respondents' reports of personal relevance were positively correlated with their reports of the extent to which their own sex suffered from the enzyme deficiency ($r$s = .58 and .56 for male and female participants, respectively, $p$s $< .0001$.)

#### *Attitudes*

Consistent with predictions, the attitudes of vested and nonvested participants toward the budget reallocation were moderately negative ($M$s = 1.88 and 2.03, respectively) and did not differ significantly, $F < 1$.

#### *Assumed Impact of Self-Interest*

Whereas participants' own attitudes revealed a nonsignificant impact of vestedness on attitudes, respondents expected that their peers would be more opposed to the budget reallocation if their peers' own sex suffered from the enzyme deficiency than if the opposite sex suffered from it. Participants expected that men would be more opposed ($M = 2.15$) than would women ($M = 3.76$) when men were at risk, $t(32) = 5.77$, $p < .0001$. Similarly, participants expected that women would be more opposed to the reallocation ($M = 2.78$) than men would be ($M = 3.47$) when women were at risk, $t(31) = 2.61$, $p < .05$.

#### *Measures Pertaining to Taking Action*

A majority of the participants (62 out of 65) were opposed to the budget reallocation. The two participants who reported neutral

Table 3
*The Effects of Sex of Participant and Sex at Risk on Anticipated Reactions to Social Action: Study 3*

| | Female participant | | | | Male participant | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Women at risk | | Men at risk | | Women at risk | | Men at risk | |
| Measure | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Own comfort | 4.88 | 1.69 | 3.56 | 1.59 | 3.29 | 1.44 | 4.67 | 1.99 |
| Others' confusion | 3.00 | 1.46 | 4.00 | 1.51 | 5.00 | 1.24 | 3.60 | 1.40 |
| Value input | 4.65 | 1.22 | 3.63 | 1.36 | 3.79 | 1.31 | 4.93 | 1.83 |

attitudes (a 4 on the 7-point scale) and the one who reported a favorable attitude (a 5 on the 7-point scale) were excluded from the analyses that follow.

*Comfort attending a meeting.* An ANOVA testing the effects of Sex of Participant × Sex at Risk on how comfortable participants would feel attending a meeting in support of their position revealed no significant main effects ($F$s < 1) but a significant interaction, $F(1, 58) = 9.83$, $p < .01$ (see Table 3). Simple effects analyses revealed the predicted pattern: Male respondents felt more comfortable attending a meeting when they read that men ($M = 4.67$) rather than women (M = 3.29) were at risk, $F(1, 58) = 4.83$, $p < .05$, and female respondents felt more comfortable attending a meeting when they had read that women ($M = 4.88$) rather than men ($M = 3.56$) were at risk, $F(1, 58) = 5.02$, $p < .05$. The pattern of responses given by male and female participants did not differ: Both men and women reported feeling more comfortable taking action when their own sex was at risk.

*Others' confusion if attended a meeting.* A second ANOVA tested effects of Sex of Participant × Sex at Risk on how confused participants thought others would be if they attended a meeting. Consistent with predictions, participants' expectations of how confused others would be depended on whether their own or the opposite sex was at risk for the enzyme deficiency, $F(1, 58) = 4.95$, $p < .05$ (see Table 3). Both male and female participants thought that others would be more confused by their attendance at a meeting if the opposite sex rather than their own sex was at risk for the enzyme deficiency. Simple effects analyses revealed that men thought that others would be more confused by their attendance at a meeting when women ($M = 5.00$) rather than men ($M = 3.60$) were at risk, $F(1, 58) = 7.13$, $p < .05$. Conversely, women thought that others would be more confused by their attendance when they read that men ($M = 4.0$) rather than women ($M = 3.0$) were at risk, $F(1, 58) = 4.14$, $p < .05$.

*Others' value input.* Finally, an analysis tested the effects of Sex of Participant × Sex at Risk on participants' expectations of how much others at the meeting would value their input. As predicted, the main effects were nonsignificant but the interaction was significant, $F(1, 58) = 8.70$, $p < .01$. Simple effects analyses revealed that both male and female participants believed that others would be more receptive to their input if their own sex were at risk (see Table 3). Whereas men thought that others would value their input more when they read that men ($M = 4.93$) rather than women ($M = 3.79$) were at risk, $F(1, 58) = 4.56$, $p < .05$, women thought that others would value their input more when they read that women ($M = 4.65$) rather than men ($M = 3.63$) were at risk, $F(1, 58) = 4.12$, $p < .05$.

*Personal relevance measures.* An additional analysis examined the effects of two types of perceived relevance on comfort taking action: (a) perceived relevance to the participant's own sex and (b) perceived relevance for the participant personally. We regressed participants' comfort attending a meeting simultaneously onto both (a) perceived personal relevance and (b) perceived relevance of the enzyme deficiency for their own sex. Whereas perceived relevance to their own sex emerged as a significant predictor of comfort attending a meeting ($p < .05$), perceived personal relevance did not. This result suggests that people's perception of how others will respond to their social activism will be shaped more by how vested they appear to others than by how vested they perceive themselves to be.

### *Discussion*

The results of Study 3 indicate that both male and female respondents feel less comfortable acting on their attitudes toward social causes in which they lack a clear vested interest. Studies 1 to 3 all point to the fact that people who lack a clear vested interest in a cause may be hesitant to join it even if they have strong motivation to do so. The reason for this, we claim, is that a norm exists that specifies that people should behave in accordance with their self-interest. When people have beliefs or attitudes that do not correspond to their self-interest, they feel they lack the psychological standing to take action. One implication of this analysis is that if people who lack a vested interest in a cause that they were favorable toward could be provided with standing through some means other than vested interest, then they should be liberated to act on their attitudes. We pursued this possibility in Study 4.

## Study 4

In Study 4, we examined more directly the hypothesis that the reason nonvested supporters of a cause are less likely to act on its behalf is because they perceive that it is not their place to act. Specifically, we manipulated the framing of the request to take action such that it either did or did not legitimate the participation of nonvested individuals. If nonvested supporters of a cause are hesitant to participate in a cause because they feel they lack the psychological standing to do so, then granting them standing should facilitate their taking action. In addition, in Study 4, we examined several different types of actions that individuals could take in support of a cause. We predicted that nonvested individuals would feel more comfortable showing their support in ways that were relatively anonymous (even if those actions required a bit more effort) than in ways that were more public (even if relatively effortless, such as signing a petition). Contrary to previous accounts (e.g., Green & Cowden, 1992) that explain nonvested inaction as based in an unwillingness to devote time or energy for a cause in which one lacks a vested interest, we predicted that nonvested individuals would be willing to spend time helping an organization if that action were less likely to incur social disapproval (e.g., if the behavior were anonymous or if the request legitimized action by nonvested individuals).

### *Method*

#### *Participants and Design*

Ninety Princeton University undergraduates (44 women, 46 men) were recruited for a study concerning "social and political attitudes" in exchange

for $3. The study used a 2 (sex of participant: male vs. female) × 2 (vested sex: male vs. female) × 2 (framing: standard vs. inclusive) between-subjects design.

### Procedure

Undergraduates participated individually in a brief study that they were told concerned students' attitudes toward several social and political issues. The first two of these issues were widely debated current political issues (capital punishment and a law requiring sex offenders' names to be made public). The third issue concerned the same (bogus) proposed funding cut used in Study 3. As before, half of the participants read that the budget change would reduce money for research on an enzyme deficiency found in men and half read the budget change would reduce money for research on an enzyme deficiency found in women.

For each of these three social and political issues, participants were asked to indicate on 7-point scales (a) how much they were in favor of the proposed plan, (b) how wise they thought the plan would be, and (c) how much the proposed plan could affect them personally.

When the participant completed these items for all three social issues, the experimenter presented the cover story for the next part of the study. The experimenter told the participant that the researchers had learned about the "Proposition 174" issue from a local group that was protesting the proposed budget change. Participants were told that this local group had asked the experimenters to provide the participants in the research study with the opportunity to help them with their cause after completing the experiment. The experimenter told the participants that they were under no obligation to help this organization and then handed them a petition, a questionnaire, and a page on which they could write a statement of their opinion about the proposed plan. The experimenter placed the packet of materials in front of the participant and gestured to the cover page that included a bogus letter, addressed to the experimenters, explaining what materials were in the packets to be handed out to the students. In addition to enhancing the credibility of the cover story, the cover page permitted the experimenter to remain unaware of the experimental condition. The experimenter then left the room to allow each participant to consider the materials privately.

*Framing manipulation.* On the first page of the materials, participants in the standard framing condition read that the name of the local organization soliciting their help was Princeton Opponents of Proposition 174. Participants in the inclusive (legitimating) framing condition read that the name of the organization was Princeton Men and Women Opposed to Proposition 174. The name appeared on each of the subsequent pages in the set of materials.

*Measures.* Participants were provided with a list of several behaviors they could engage in to help this "local group" protest the Proposition 174 budget change. They could (a) sign the group's anti-Proposition-174 petition, (b) write a statement of their opinion about Proposition 174, and (c) complete an anonymous five-item survey concerning their attitudes toward the budget change proposed in Proposition 174. Participants were asked to place all materials (regardless of whether or not they had been completed) through the slit of a large collection box.

After the participant called the experimenter back into the room, the experimenter handed the participant an additional set of questions about each of the three social issues. These items included a manipulation check to assess whether participants could identify which sex (allegedly) suffered from the enzyme deficiency that the NIH was studying. Finally, participants were asked for the name of the organization that had been soliciting their help, probed for suspicion, and fully debriefed.

## Results

### Manipulation Checks

Twelve participants (5 women, 7 men) were excluded from analyses because of suspicion about the cover story. Another three participants (2 in the vested condition and 1 in the nonvested condition) were excluded because they indicated that they supported Proposition 174, thereby rendering the dependent measures (all focused on opposition) inappropriate.

All participants correctly identified which sex suffered from the enzyme deficiency that the NIH was investigating. An additional check on the vestedness manipulation was performed by comparing vested and nonvested participants' responses to the question that asked how much it could affect them personally if funding were taken away from the NIH research project. As expected, participants who read that their own sex was at risk for the disease indicated that the budget change could affect them more than did participants who read that the opposite sex was at risk for the disease ($M$s = 3.91 and 2.69), $t(69) = 3.41$, $p < .01$.

Most (86%) of the participants accurately reported in which framing condition they had been (i.e., whether the group was called Princeton Opponents of Proposition 174 versus Princeton Men and Women Opposed to Proposition 174). Only 1 participant misidentified her condition, but 9 indicated they did not remember which condition they had been in. The participant who incorrectly reported her condition was dropped from the analyses; the other participants were included in the analyses. (Analyses that excluded these participants revealed a virtually identical pattern of results.)

### Attitudes

We performed a two-way ANOVA to determine whether participants' attitudes toward Proposition 174 differed as a function of vestedness and framing. As expected, neither the main effects nor the interaction between these variables reached significance. Most importantly, both vested and nonvested participants expressed comparably high levels of opposition to the proposal to take money away from the NIH research program ($M$s = 1.60 and 1.83, for the vested and nonvested conditions, respectively, with lower numbers indicating greater opposition to the proposal), $F(1, 67) = 2.40$, *ns*.

### Behavioral Measures

Separate analyses were conducted to examine whether the predicted Vestedness × Framing interaction emerged on each of the participants' behavioral responses: (a) willingness to complete the anonymous five-item survey, (b) willingness to sign the petition, and (c) willingness to write a statement in support of the anti-Proposition-174 position (see Table 4).

Table 4
*The Effects of Vestedness and Framing on Willingness to Volunteer: Study 4*

| | Vested | | | | Nonvested | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Standard | | Inclusive | | Standard | | Inclusive | |
| Behavior | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* |
| Completed survey | 100 | 18 | 100 | 17 | 100 | 18 | 100 | 18 |
| Signed petition | 94 | 17 | 94 | 16 | 72 | 13 | 83 | 15 |
| Wrote statement | 50 | 9 | 53 | 9 | 22 | 4 | 72 | 13 |

*Survey.* All 71 of the participants (100%) completed the anonymous five-item survey presented to them, a response rate that clearly precluded finding any effects of the framing manipulation.

*Petition.* Ten of the participants (14%) declined to sign the anti-Proposition-174 petition. The percentage that agreed to sign the petition differed significantly between the vested and nonvested groups (94% of the vested vs. 78% of the nonvested participants), $\chi^2(1) = 4.00$, $p < .05$. That the nonvested participants were less willing to sign the petition than to complete the survey does not seem to be due to any difference in material cost. Signing the petition actually required less time and effort from participants than completing the survey. What we believe accounted for this difference is the fact that the petition-signing response, unlike the anonymous survey, was public, and as such inhibited those who lacked a stake from acting. The prediction that the inclusive frame would encourage nonvested individuals to sign the petition received some support, although the effect of the framing manipulation was nonsignificant (see Table 4).

*Statement.* The lowest response rate was generated by the request to write a statement in support of the organization's position (see Table 4). Only thirty-five (49%) of the 71 participants agreed to write a statement expressing their opinion toward Proposition 174. Overall, then, only about half of the participants who completed an anonymous survey in support of the cause were willing to write a statement in its support. That the writing of a statement was more effortful than completing the survey may have accounted for some of the difference in the response rate but not all of it. The public aspect of the handwritten statement also seemed important, especially to the nonvested who, on the basis of the results of Studies 1 and 2, had most to fear from public scrutiny. Indeed, whereas 50% of the vested participants in the standard framing condition agreed to write the statement, only 22% of the nonvested participants agreed to do so. A focused contrast analysis (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1985) indicates that this difference in rates of participation by the vested and nonvested respondents is significant, $Z = 1.83$, $p < .05$. The theory that the latter's low response rate was due to their feeling that it was inappropriate for them to take such an assertive action on behalf of a cause in which they had no stake is supported by the fact that the response rate of nonvested participants in the inclusive (action-legitimating) framing condition was almost three times greater (72%), $Z = 3.47$, $p < .001$. The difference between the percentage of vested and nonvested participants who wrote a statement in the inclusive framing condition was nonsignificant, $Z = 1.19$, *ns*. Consistent with predictions, then, the impact that vestedness had on participants' willingness to write a statement in support of their attitude depended very much on how appropriate their supportive action was perceived to be.

### *Discussion*

The results of Study 4 support the claim that the inaction of nonvested individuals is often due more to the presence of avoidance tendencies than the absence of approach tendencies. First, the willingness of nonvested individuals to take an action did not decrease as a function of the effort or cost of the action as would be expected if it depended solely on the amount of approach motivation required. In fact, nonvested individuals actually were more willing to perform the more time-consuming act of completing the questionnaire than that of signing the petition. It is difficult to square these findings with the idea that the difference between vested and nonvested participants lies in the strength of their respective approach motivations. From the perspective of a differential avoidance-motivation account, however, these findings are easily explained. Even though signing a petition involves little effort and hence requires minimal approach motivation, it increases the nonvested actor's avoidance tendencies as it exposes him or her to public scrutiny. Further, the results of Study 4 indicated that framing the request for action (changing the name of the organization) in such a way as to reduce avoidance tendencies increased the willingness to act among nonvested individuals. In effect, the inclusive framing manipulation in Study 4 served not to facilitate action but to disinhibit it. It removed an obstacle (expectation of appearing deviant) rather than provided an incentive (expectation of personal gain).

## General Discussion

Why do people who hold favorable attitudes toward a cause, but who lack a stake in it, feel disinclined to take action on their attitudes? The traditional answer to this question has focused on the material costliness of actions, as opposed to attitudes, leading people to reflect much more on their self-interest when the question of action is considered (Green & Cowden, 1992; Regan & Fazio, 1977; Sivacek & Crano, 1982). The request for an opinion requires only that people ask themselves, "What do I think?" whereas the more consequential request to take action requires people to ask a deeper question, "What's in it for me?" The first question may not reliably produce differences between vested and nonvested individuals but the second surely does. Compared with vested individuals, nonvested individuals reasonably will see themselves as having less to gain by taking action.

The present analysis offers another account for the disinclination of nonvested actors to act on cause-supportive attitudes. This account focuses not on the absence of approach motivation in nonvested actors but on the presence of avoidance motivation. Rather than the contemplation of social action leading them to say to themselves, "It's not my job," we claim that this contemplation leads them to say, "It's not my place" or "It's none of my business." The present studies provide various sources of direct and indirect data supporting the claim that a norm of self-interest discourages public involvement in causes in which one has no stake and contributes to the relation between self-interest and behavior being stronger than that between self-interest and attitudes. For example, Studies 1 to 3 found that people recognize that public action is puzzling and likely to draw unwanted attention, and possibly anger, when it is not anchored in self-interest. Further, participants in Studies 1 and 3 expressed the belief that their participation in the cause would not be valued by others if their attitudes were divorced from self-interest. Finally, the results of Study 4 demonstrated that framing the social action so as to make it legitimate for nonvested individuals to participate dramatically increased the willingness of nonvested individuals to act.

### *Implications for Understanding the Link Between Self-Interest and Public Behavior*

The social psychological literature on vested interest has posed two intriguing questions for the field. The first is why vestedness in an issue predicts behavior better than it does attitudes. The second is why attitudes predict behavior better among those who

are vested in the issue than among those who are not. The present analysis provides insight into both of these questions.

### *Why Does Vested Interest Predict Behavior Better Than Attitudes?*

In attempting to answer this question, it is useful to distinguish among the three forms that a low relation between vested interest and attitudes can take. In the first case, a weak relationship exists because, although most vested actors hold attitudes congruent with their vestedness, most nonvested actors hold the same attitudes. This was the situation in Studies 3 and 4, in which virtually everyone, irrespective of their stake in the cause, strongly supported it (i.e., continued funding for health-related research). This is also the case in most of the studies that report a stronger impact of vested interest on behavior than on attitudes (e.g., Green & Cowden 1992; Regan & Fazio, 1977; Sivacek & Crano, 1982). Our analysis interprets the fact that the vested individuals are more likely to act on their stake-congruent attitudes than the nonvested are to act on their equivalent, but stakeless, attitudes as due to the inhibitory influence that their lack of standing exerted on the latter group.

In a second case, a low relationship exists between vestedness and attitudes because vested actors hold attitudes that are stake incongruent and nonvested actors hold similar attitudes. This would be the case if, say, most women, despite believing that procoverage was more favorable to women, personally opposed that position as did most men. Our analysis would predict that here, too, vestedness would predict behavior better than attitudes because the people most likely to act would once again be procoverage women. The anticoverage women and the men (either anti- or procoverage) would be inhibited from acting. The difference between this case and the previous one is that there would be many fewer actual actors here because there would be many fewer women who hold attitudes congruent with their vested interest. Women who held attitudes opposed to their group's vested interest (anticoverage women) would be fearful that taking attitude-congruent (but stake-incongruent) actions would provoke negative reactions from their peers. As the results of Study 2 indicate, these negative reactions would be different than those experienced by pro- or anticoverage men but would be action inhibiting all the same.

In a third case, a weak relationship exists between vestedness and attitudes because there is neither an attitudinal difference between vested and nonvested individuals nor a clear modal attitude in either group. In such a case (e.g., where pro- and anticoverage men and women are equally numerous) one would still expect to find vested interest predicting behavior as the individuals with the stake-congruent attitudes (procoverage women) would be the most likely to act. Once again, the anticoverage women would be inhibited from acting as would the pro- and anticoverage men, though for different reasons and possibly to different degrees.

In summary, there are various empirical forms that a weak relation between vestedness and social attitudes can take. Irrespective of which form is involved, however, the fear of publicly acting in support of causes in which one has no stake or in which one's stake counter-indicates action will powerfully inhibit nonvested actors from engaging in social action.

### *Why Do Attitudes Predict Behaviors Better Among Vested Than Among Nonvested Actors?*

The present account can also help explain why previous research has found greater attitude–behavior consistency among vested than among nonvested individuals (Crano, 1997a; 1997b; Regan & Fazio, 1977; Sivacek & Crano, 1982). First, note that there are two types of attitude–behavior consistency: *correlational consistency* (are people ordered in the same way on both the attitude and behavior measures?) and *literal consistency* (do people do what their attitudes imply they will do?; see Miller, Monin, & Prentice, 2000; Schuman & Johnson, 1976). Correlational consistency is indexed by the magnitude of the correlation coefficient relating a measure of attitude and a measure of behavior in a population—the higher the correlation, the greater the consistency. Literal consistency is indexed by the difference between the level of behavior implied by an individual's or group's attitudes and that exhibited by their overt behavior—the smaller the difference, the greater the consistency. These two forms of consistency are largely independent of each other.

The concept of literal consistency is helpful in discriminating among the three hypothetical cases described in the previous section. In the first case, for example, we have an instance in which there is high literal consistency between the (procoverage) attitudes and (procoverage) actions of the vested group (women) but low literal consistency between the (procoverage) attitudes and nonaction of the nonvested group (men). In the second and third cases described above, there is not even high literal consistency among women, as the support for the procoverage cause shown in their actions is not mirrored in their attitudes (which are anticoverage in one case and mixed in the other). The absence of even literal consistency among vested actors with stake-incongruent attitudes (e.g., anticoverage women) suggests a modification is in order to the common claim that the relationship between attitudes and behaviors is stronger in the case of vested than nonvested actors (e.g., Crano, 1997a, 1997b; Regan & Fazio, 1977; Sivacek & Crano, 1982). The magnitude of attitude–behavior consistency exhibited by vested individuals will depend on the extent to which their attitudes appear consistent with, rather than contrary to, their self-interest.

Our analysis also offers some insight into the role vested interest plays in attitude–behavioral correlational consistency, at least when the vested status and behavior in question are public. When most vested actors hold stake-congruent attitudes and nonvested actors hold either the same or different attitudes, one can expect a substantially higher attitude–behavior correlation among the vested than among the nonvested. The reason for this is that vested individuals with stake-congruent attitudes will not be inhibited from taking action but nonvested individuals with the same attitudes will be inhibited from acting because of a lack of standing. Although vested actors with stake-congruent attitudes are more likely than those with stake-incongruent attitudes to perform attitude-consistent behavior because of the public reaction they expect, even the latter group may be more likely to act than their nonvested peers. As we saw in Study 2, women's perceived stake in the procoverage proposal resulted in observers reacting with anger to a target woman who publicly supported the anticoverage position but with less anger than they did to an anticoverage male target. For a woman to take an anticoverage position was clearly politically incorrect in the college population we studied, but she

at least had a standing on the issue that gave her a degree of entitlement that a similarly thinking male did not have. To publicly support a politically incorrect position in which you do not even have a stake is especially frowned on.

### Conclusion

Finally, in addition to their implications for understanding the relation between self-interest and attitude–behavior consistency, our results offer a different perspective on the finding that appeals to self-interest are effective at increasing and sustaining volunteerism (Perloff, 1987; Snyder, 1993). No doubt appeals to self-interest are effective, at least partially, because they provide an incentive to help. But the present results suggest that their effectiveness may also stem from the fact that they provide an excuse for helping. In effect, they provide people with the license to act on their sympathies. Lacking a self-interested account, people may feel they lack both the moral authorization and the psychological cover to act. The claim that self-interest serves to disinhibit the impulse to help as well as to facilitate the incentive to help underscores a point made by Kurt Lewin (1951) many years ago. When confronted with people behaving in undesirable ways (e.g., not volunteering), it is generally more effective to remove obstacles that inhibit them from taking the desired action than to provide them with additional reasons for taking the desired action.

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