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PARENTAL MEDIATION AND VOTING BEHAVIOR:  
THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL MEDIATION ON POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

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## ABSTRACT

The study of political socialization has been focused primarily on either the agent of socialization or the learner being socialized, while scant attention has been paid to how the socialization actually occurs. This study explored the communication between parent and child that may lead to political socialization, specifically, the communication engaged in between parent and child while viewing television news. Parental mediation is a quantitative construct designed to measure parent/child interactions about television. As it is primarily a media effects construct, this study used an established political media effect—political disaffection—as the outcome variable when measuring effects of parental mediation on political socialization. Path models indicating the direction and process of parental mediation effects were predicted. Data were collected from 261 undergraduate students who were eligible to vote in the 2004 presidential election. Results did not support the proposed path models. Results also did not support active parental mediation as an influence on either political disaffection or intent to vote. Results did, however find a small but significant relationship between parent-adolescent covieing of television news and intent to vote. Implications for future parental mediation study are discussed, as well as the study's limitations.

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The *Vanishing Voter Project*, conducted at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, found that "disgusted with politics" was the answer most often cited by non-registered voters when asked why they don't participate in voting (Patterson, 2002). In the 2000 presidential elections, voting rates for persons under 30 just barely exceeded 30%. This represents a continual downward trend since 1972's high point of 50%, despite continued nationwide efforts to mobilize younger voters through programs such as MTV's "Rock the Vote," and "Choose or Lose," and recently even "Smack Down Your Vote" partially sponsored by World Wrestling Entertainment. After interviewing nearly 100,000 Americans during the 2000 presidential campaign, Patterson (2004) came to the conclusion that "today's young adults are less politically interested and informed than any cohort of young people on record" (p. 11).

Among the wider electorate, roughly 50% continue to vote—also marking a steady decline. Patterson's *Vanishing Voter Project* found that survey respondents described the 2000 presidential campaign as depressing, too long, and focused on issues irrelevant to their lives. Patterson places a large portion of the blame on television news. Negative campaigning combined with a negative reporting bias has, he argues, left Americans with no appetite for the political process, and little enthusiasm for the candidates.

To study the effects of television on voting behavior, one must turn to the political socialization literature. Political socialization research focuses on the process through which people come to develop their political values and behaviors (Merelman, 1986). Television news is not only a child's first source of political information (Tolley, 1973;

Drew & Reeves, 1980), but continues throughout young adulthood to be a primary and significant source of political information and education (Buckingham, 1999).

Information alone has not, however, been shown to be significant in the formation of political attitudes (Tolley, 1973). Chaffee and Yang (1990) argue that interpersonal sources, in addition to media sources, are necessary to the political socialization process. Parental mediation of television news is one such interpersonal source, providing children with insight into their parents' attitudes toward the news program in general, and also the opportunity to exhibit political attitudes through discussion of the content in specific.

Parental mediation refers to the interactions between parents and children regarding television (Nathanson, 2001a), and media effects such as those described by Patterson (2002) can be either enhanced or diminished depending on the type of mediation engaged in by parents. As such, the effects of parental mediation of television news on the political socialization process should provide some insight as to the formation of attitudes that cause 70% of young adults to disenfranchise themselves through apathy.

While much of political socialization literature focuses on individual influences in the socialization process (i.e. how do parents, peers, media, historical events, school curriculum, etc. discretely help to form political attitudes in children?), recent qualitative studies have focused attention on the discussion that occurs in front of television news (Ribak, 1997; Calavita, 2003). These studies conceptualize parents, children, news media, and current events as interrelated, forming the environment in which socialization occurs. Ribak (1997) calls the conversation in front of television news a "moment of construction" (p. 74) in which political attitudes are formed and political behavior is

exhibited. Calavita's (2003) study asked young adults to recall their first political memories – these memories were most often cited as occurring with their parents as their parents reacted to news media. These instances of coviewing television news with parents and discussion of content are classified by communication scholars as parental mediation. Mediation is a three dimensional construct, and can refer to rules parents make regarding their children's viewing, active discussion of content (this discussion can be positive, negative, or neutral in valence), or simply coviewing television with children (Nathanson, 2001a). Mediation confers parental attitudes toward viewed content, and as such can either exacerbate or quell media effects depending on the type of mediation used.

Parents have long been considered the primary agents in the socialization of their children. Early research in political socialization concluded however, that parents rarely actively teach their children about politics, but rather place the children in a context where this learning can take place (Hyman, 1959). For modern families, this political context is met most often in their living rooms, in front of their television sets. Viewing television news as a family is a ritual many of the young adults in Calavita's (2003) study cited as having occurred in their homes. Ribak's (1997) examination of 400 Israeli families and 200 Palestinian families also came to the conclusion that families watch, and often discuss, the news together. In this light, looking at the differences in how parents watch and mediate television news with their children provides a natural next step in exploring the role of parents and television in the political socialization process.

Previous research has linked interpersonal communication and media effects in the process of political socialization (Chaffee, Nass, and Yang, 1991; Chaffee, McLeod, & Atkin 1971), but the effects of parental mediation strategies have not been fully

explored. In one of the few studies to add parental mediation to the socialization process, Austin and Pinkleton (2001) found family television news use to be a predictor of parental mediation tactics and active mediation to be a predictor of political discussion. While this study places parental mediation within the process of political socialization, it focuses on the perceptions of mediation as proffered by the parents, and does not explore the results of the reported mediation.

This paper proposes to take the next step of exploring the effects of parental mediation of television news programs on the political socialization process. Patterson (2002) points to television news--citing negative campaigning, a negative reporting bias, and an interpretive reporting style—as one of the primary factors turning voters away from politics by making the process unpleasant and the candidates unappetizing. This research will focus on a reflective survey of college students who are entering the 2004 presidential election as first-time voters, exploring the relationship between active parental mediation of television news experienced in adolescence and intent to vote in the current election. The remainder of this chapter will focus on exploration of the roles of both family and television in the political socialization process, followed by a review of the literature on parental mediation.

### Political Socialization

Hess and Torney (1967) define socialization as the process by which a junior member of a group is taught its values, attitudes and other behaviors. Political socialization is further refined as the process through which one generation transmits political norms and behaviors to the next generation (Sigel, 1965). The study of political socialization is the study of political learning (Jaros, 1973) and is concerned with

explaining how individuals acquire their political orientations and behaviors. The central concerns of political socialization are focused on who does the socializing and the process through which it is accomplished.

*Who does the socializing? The role of the agent*

Political socialization assumes that junior members of a society are indoctrinated into the political world through contact with agents; political attitudes and behaviors are thus taught. Much of the early scholarship in political socialization focuses on the study of agents. From the beginning of political socialization scholarship, parents have been assumed as the primary socializing agents (Hyman, 1959). Research also centered on the school system (Hess & Torney, 1967; Langton & Jennings, 1969), individual schoolteachers (Hess & Torney, 1967), peers (Langton, 1969), and the media (Chaffee, Jackson-Beeck, Durall, & Wilson, 1977; Tolley, 1973). Empirical testing of agential influence has been difficult and controversial. Methodological issues plagued many of the early studies and conclusions were not easily drawn. For instance, many early studies were based on the primacy premise--children learn their political orientations very early and these orientations remain relatively unchanged throughout life. As such, research focused on very young children, and proved to be unreliable long term. Also, many studies focused on specific political knowledge rather than political attitudes or orientations. Working with older children, Jennings and Niemi (1974) did, however, find empirical evidence that parents are more influential than teachers or peers in a study that compared political associations between parent and child, teacher and child, and peer with the child. After reviewing the studies to date, Beck (1977) concluded that of these

agents, parental agency was dominant, noting, “there are no other agents which can compete with the parents in their impact on a wide variety of political orientations” (p. 139).

In the first summary of political socialization research, Hyman (1959) offers these two conclusions: parents are the primary agents of political socialization *and* parental influence is minimal. Jennings and Niemi’s (1968) research findings support the role of parents as agents of socialization, but with weak associations, and only in the case of partisanship. In fact, the only consistent political socialization measure that linked parental influence to children’s political orientations, albeit weakly, was party identification (Hyman, 1959; Jennings & Niemi, 1968; Connell 1971). Jennings and Niemi (1968) found, however, that parent/child partisan agreement effects were strengthened when parents *discussed* politics with their children. Beck (1977) concludes that the picture of parental influence on political socialization is one of extreme potential, but very little follow through, noting that the transfer of political values may not be a parental priority.

Mass media, and particularly television, were also expected to have a great deal of influence on the political socialization process. Children usually have their first contact with politics through the television (Drew & Reeves, 1980), and studies point to television news as an important source of political information for children (Connell, 1971; Tolley, 1973; Conway, Wycoff, Feldman, & Ahern, 2001). However, while children are gaining much in the way of political knowledge from television, they are not necessarily forming political attitudes strictly through television use. Chaffee, Ward, and Tipton (1970) found that while media attention increased campaign knowledge, it had no

impact on voting behavior. Tolley (1973) studied children's attitudes toward the Vietnam War, and found that while television was reported as the most important source of information about the war, television use could not predict attitudes toward the war.

In describing the influence of television on political socialization, Chaffee and Yang (1990) employ a bridge metaphor. Television provides a means of bringing the political into the home, and it provides a basic knowledge of politics that allows an individual to then put their knowledge to work through discussion. The authors note that while television is the medium through which most people learn about political issues, "Political socialization is not simply a transaction between the individual and the news media" (p. 270). Chaffee and Yang (1990) find that while television is important for political information, it remains incomplete and inadequate as a socializing agent—communication patterns at the interpersonal level contribute more to political identity than mere exposure to television. For initiates into the political system, television is the medium through which they can glean political information and knowledge of issues. In the political learning process, that information is then put to work through discussion. (Chaffee & Yang, 1990).

Beck (1977) describes three preconditions that must be met in order for an agent to have influence in the socialization process. The first precondition is exposure – the learner must come into contact with the agent. Another precondition is receptivity—the learner must be responsive to the agent's influence. The final precondition is communication. For political socialization to occur, the agent must engage in communication that has political content. Both parents and television easily meet the first two preconditions, but it is the final component that has been shown to be lacking. The

communication element brings television and parents together in the socializing process. Television news viewing brings the context of politics into the living room, providing a source for discussion. Parental mediation of television news places parents and television together as co-agents of socialization by satisfying the communication component.

*How is the socialization accomplished? The role of conversation*

In a review of political socialization research, Sigel (1995) notes, “virtually no literature exists that has actually studied and observed the manner by which ‘agents’ do or do not make influence attempts” (p. 18). If socialization is indeed a process, that process should be observable. Political socialization is not merely the accumulation of political knowledge but the development of attitudes. Sigel notes that one strategy may be to simply ask people how they came to develop their political beliefs and behaviors. Calavita’s (2003) qualitative study does just that.

Calavita’s (2003) study asked participants to recall their individual political development and the parts played by family and news media. Many of the answers given by respondents involved experiencing television news almost vicariously, through observation of their parents’ reactions to the news. For instance, one member of the study, Christopher, recounted observing his parents watch Nixon resign on TV. He recalls it as “a very sad day for the country,” as his predominant memory of the event was watching his mom cry while she watched the news (p. 30). Other study participants described seeing their parents get angry or excited while watching the news, which in turn focused the child’s attention on the incident. Calavita (2003) contends that family and news media use should not be considered discrete agents of socialization, but rather environments that enable an individual to develop politically.

In a study on families in Israel, Ribak (1997) asserts that political socialization occurs as and through conversation and that this conversation usually occurs during television news viewing. Her qualitative study examines the content of political conversations in Israeli living rooms—specifically between parent and child. Ribak found that watching and discussing the evening news was a daily occurrence for Israeli families. Departing from the traditional agent/learner construct, Ribak conceptualizes family political conversations as points of construction in the building of a political identity – identity construction that happens as and through conversation and for the adults as well as the children. She finds conversation prompted by the evening news in which parents and children demonstrate their political views and also continue to refine those views. Her findings support Calavita (2003) and are echoed in Chaffee and Yang (1990) as discussed above. Television provides the bridge—bringing the political into the home, providing an environment and a context for discussion and construction of political orientations. Once the television message crosses the bridge to the living room, it can be refined, enhanced, or even refuted through family communication. This environment, created when parents and children interact with television, falls under the construct of parental mediation.

#### Parental Mediation

Television effects on children have long been documented—cultivation effects can lead to increased aggression, affinity for violence, susceptibility to the persuasive messages of advertisements, and to an increase in fear of a “mean world” (Comstock, 1975). Children who are heavy viewers of television can also be susceptible to television’s portraits of reality – accepting these pictures as representative of the real

world. Parental mediation, or the interactions between parent and child about television (Nathanson, 2001a), can either heighten media effects, or counter them depending on the type of communication used. This section will explicate the concept of parental mediation, provide examples of each type of mediation, and finally address the effects of parental mediation.

### *Conceptualization*

The concept of parental mediation has been plagued by a lack of clarity and a need for consistency of terminology. Among the first formal terms for parental communication of approval or disapproval of television content is “guidance.” Reviewing the existing literature on parental attempts to counter television effects, Bybee, Robinson, and Turow (1982) found that parental guidance of television viewing can take three distinct forms: restrictive guidance, evaluative guidance, and unfocused guidance. Restrictive guidance refers to parental rules and restrictions concerning the amount of viewing and the material being viewed. Evaluative guidance refers to active discussion of content with the purpose of helping the child understand the program’s correspondence with reality. Evaluative guidance also includes moral assessment of the content—whether the characters are good or bad, and whether their behavior should be emulated or avoided. The final of the Bybee et al. categories is unfocused guidance, which refers to *both* coviewing—parents and children watching the same show at the same time and in the same room—and discussion that is not evaluative in nature.

More current research has confirmed three distinct types of television guidance (Austin, Knaus, & Meneguelli, 1998; Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999), and though the dimensions of parental interaction have remained, the term “guidance”

has more recently given way to “mediation,” and the unfocused category has been altered. This transition has not been smooth and disparities in use are still frequent owing to a lack of a clear common vocabulary. Restrictive guidance has been termed rule making (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001), and restrictive mediation (Atkin, Greenberg, & Baldwin, 1991; Nathanson, 2001a). Unfocused guidance is associated with current terms including coviewing (Austin, Roberts, Nass, 1990), social coviewing (Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999), and nonrestrictive guidance, but the original addition of non-evaluative discussion has been removed from the conceptual definition. Valkenburg et al (1999) found that upon closer inspection, the original unfocused guidance category was more of a “left over” category, and suggested it be left behind in favor of the concept of coviewing. Evaluative guidance is termed active mediation (Nathanson, 2001a), instructive mediation (Valkenburg et al, 1999), and, confusingly, parental mediation (Austin, 1993). Nathanson’s (2001a) recent call for conceptual clarity notes that adding to the confusion in terms is the inclusion of general parenting styles and disciplinary patterns under the rubric of mediation. She adds that while certainly related and relevant, inclusion of these types of communication under the heading of mediation makes the concept too broad for meaningful study.

Heeding the calls for order and clarity, this study will make use of the common three-dimensional construct, under the heading of parental mediation (Nathanson, 1999). Parental mediation will here refer to interactions between parents and children about television (Nathanson, 1999), and under this general heading are three forms of parental mediation: restrictive mediation, coviewing, and active mediation. Each of these

mediation types works to filter television messages through parental attitudes, and as such each of them function as parental mediation.

### *Restrictive mediation*

As stated above, restrictive mediation refers to the rules and restrictions parents place on their children's television viewing habits (Bybee et al, 1982). This includes prohibiting certain programming and setting time limits—determining what can be watched, when, and for how long (Weaver & Barbour, 1992). Replication studies of Bybee et al's three dimensions of parental mediation found restrictive mediation valid across different American populations (Abelman & Petty, 1989), and Dutch populations (van der Voort, Nikken, & van Lil, 1992). Research in restrictive mediation indicates that parents who believe television has harmful effects are most likely to set rules regarding viewing (van der Voort et al, 1992; Nathanson, 2001b). Nathanson (2001b) reports that restrictive mediation is also used by parents who feel that some television content is beneficial while other program content is harmful. These parents may restrict some programming but encourage others. While restrictive mediation has been identified as a conceptual construct under parental mediation, it is rarely studied. As this study is interested in active discussion, restrictive mediation won't be tested here.

### *Coviewing*

Valkenburg et al (1999) identify coviewing as occasions when adults and children share the experience of watching television together without discussion. Coviewing has been reported as the most frequently used type of mediation (Valkenburg et al, 1999). It tends to increase with age (Dorr, Kovaric, & Doubleday, 1989; St. Peters, Fitch, Huston, Wright & Eakins, 1991), and occurs more often as children watching adult

shows with parents, rather than parents watching children's shows (St. Peters et al, 1991). News, sports, and dramas were reported by St. Peters et al as the most frequently covieved programs.

On the surface, coviewing may not seem like communicative mediation, but coviewing has been shown to have attitudinal and educational effects. Research suggests that coviewing by parents implies a tacit approval of content (Austin & Mielli, 1994; Nathanson, 1997; Nathanson 1999; Nathanson, 2001b; Nathanson, 2002). The mere presence of an adult during children's viewing seems to lend importance to the content and may make a child pay more attention (Calvert, Huston, Watkins, & Wright, 1982; Salomon, 1977).

Given coviewing's orienting nature, parents and children watching television news together would seem to be an effective means of accomplishing political education. In general, television news viewing is associated with more interest in and knowledge about politics in younger children (Atkin & Gantz, 1978; Conway et al. 1981). However, as children get older and move toward early adulthood, reliance on television news is associated with *lower* levels of knowledge, interest, and participation in politics (Chaffee & Yang, 1990). Additionally, Graber (1988) contends that watching television news enables the viewer to feel that they have somehow participated in the political world and as such provides a substitute for actual participation. Coviewing, also a vicarious interaction, may exacerbate this effect through display of parents' interest and involvement in watching political news, but lack of discussion and display of political behavior. Austin and Pinkleton (2001) argue that coviewing is associated more with

behaviors related to enjoyment of the shared experience, and less with political socialization behavior.

### *Active Mediation*

The final type of mediation is the one most often associated with parental mediation studies, and constitutes the focus for this project. Active mediation is the discussion between parent and child of television content (Valkenburg et al, 1999). Messaris' (1982) qualitative study of the ways in which parents discuss television with their children is considered the seminal work in active mediation. Messaris (1982) found that discussion involves three tasks. First, parents can help children with categorization – distinguishing one program from another, programs from commercial advertisements, and the distinction between reality and television, for example. Messaris notes that “the crucial lesson that a child presumably derives from such discussions is that the things shown on TV are of a different kind from the rest of his or her experience” (p. 583). The second form that discussion can take is to confirm or deny the accuracy of television portrayals. For example, are gender roles really as they are depicted, or is life in a big city really as dangerous as it looks? Messaris notes that the population of television is wealthier and more attractive than their real-life counterparts and parents often feel the need to discuss this exaggeration with their children. The final mode of discussion found by Messaris (1982) centers on parental supplementation of television information. This involves the parent adding information to further understanding of the content. This can be moral in nature, for instance parents can add their views on birth, death, sex, marriage, divorce, etc as they come up in the content of the program being viewed. Parental supplementation can also be educational in valence—Messaris gives examples of mothers

adding information on American pioneers in connection with viewing “Little House on the Prairie,” slavery and the south while watching “Roots,” and information on Judaism in connection with viewing “Holocaust.”

Nathanson (2001c) notes that active parental mediation is typically believed to be an intervention method capable of preventing unwanted media effects. Messaris (1982) argues that more active mediation—distinguishing reality from fiction, providing critical comments, and adding supplemental information—results in more sophisticated television consumers. Active mediation has been found to increase skepticism of television messages (Austin, 1993, Austin & Pinkleton, 2001), reduce the effects of violent content (Nathanson, 1999), and expand children’s understanding of gender and occupational roles (Messaris & Kerr, 1984; Rothschild & Morgan, 1987).

Active mediation of television news puts the parent’s political attitudes on display and brings us full circle to the political socialization “moment of construction” discussed by Ribak (1997) when examining political discourse in Israeli families. The news provides the topic, and the ensuing discussion provides examples of active socialization. Calavita’s (2003) qualitative study interviewing generation x students reports recollections of children witnessing parental political commitments through discussion of television news – commitments that the subjects themselves point to as increasing their own interest and participation in politics as young adults.

When providing active mediation of television, parents provide their own spin on the content – using examples and making connections unique to their personal world-view. As such, television content is filtered for the child through the parent’s values and norms. In a more recent study on how parents actively mediate, Austin, Bolls, Fujioka, &

Engelbertson (1999) found that discussion is valenced in nature, and can be positive or negative. Positive active mediation consists of parental commentary that provides positive reinforcement of television messages. For example, a parent may point out good behavior or admirable personal characteristics of a television character. A positive mediation style appears to be less strategic than negative active mediation, and more a product of happenstance not too far removed from coviewing (Austin et al, 1999).

Negative active mediation refers to parental discussion that contradicts television content. A parent may point out that the television situation is not representative of reality, or that they have a dislike for the behavior of a particular character, for example. Negative mediation is associated with both parental skepticism and parental concerns over the effects of television (Austin et al, 1999, Fujioka & Austin, 2002). Atkin, Heeter and Baldwin (1989) report that parents engage in discussion of television content most often when it conflicts with their values. Negative mediation requires more effort on the part of the parents, and is more strategic in nature than positive mediation (Fujioka & Austin, 2002).

*Active mediation and political disaffection: the political socialization process*

Robinson (1976) hypothesized that a negative bias in television news reporting increased political distrust and cynicism. Robinson (1976) coins the term “videomalaise,” to encapsulate these feelings of cynicism, political powerlessness, and a general distaste for the process brought on by an increasingly negative news media. It is this very malaise that Patterson (2002) argues is keeping Americans from the polls.

Patterson (2002) found that Americans are increasingly unimpressed with their choices in presidential candidates. Patterson (2004) blames in part an interpretive rather

than descriptive journalism style, noting that during the 2000 campaign, “journalists covering Bush and Gore spoke six minutes for every one minute that the candidates spoke” (p. 13). The role of the journalist has been elevated to that of analyst, while the candidate is reduced to a sound bite. Patterson (2004) states that the combination of a negative press bias and the reduction of the candidate in favor of the journalist creates a situation where it is nearly impossible for a candidate to come out of the campaign being viewed favorably—leaving voters to choose the least bad candidate. Political disaffection—negative views of politicians, the political system, and the campaigning process (Pinkleton & Austin, 2002)—is the effect Patterson (2002) attributes to these negative media tactics. Active mediation of television news—parents directly discussing news broadcast content—may help to lessen the media effects Patterson describes. Active parental mediation is associated with a more critical, skeptical viewer (Austin, 1993; Austin, Bolls, Fujioka, & Engelbertson, 1999; Austin and Pinkleton, 2001). This media sophistication and learned skepticism of news media in general may contribute to a lessening of political disaffection.

Austin and Pinkleton (2001) conceptualize the parent as a catalyst in the child’s political socialization process through use of active mediation. They propose a model in which television news viewing and the parent’s own level of skepticism serve as a prompt toward active mediation and discussion of politics. Austin and Pinkleton’s (2001) model focused on the parental side of the equation, this study proposes the other side—the effects of television news discussion on the adolescent’s political attitudes and

behaviors. As seen in Figure 1, this study proposes a test of parental mediation as part of the process of political socialization by looking at how active mediation affects the outcome variable of political disaffection.

As discussed earlier, active parental mediation—and particularly negative active parental mediation—stems from a skepticism of media messages and parental concern as to media effects. Active mediation is also associated with the development of media skepticism and sophistication in the child. Austin (1993) posited that children ascribe a greater skepticism to adults who mediate as adults are presumed to be more knowledgeable about television messages. Austin (1993) found active mediation predictive, albeit weakly, of media skepticism in adolescents. Again, active mediation has been shown to be effective in lessening the effects of violent content (Nathanson, 1999) and is linked with a better understanding of the real world versus the television representation of reality (Messaris & Kerr, 1984; Rothschild & Morgan, 1987).

An understanding, or at least an acknowledgement, that political information depicted on television news is not necessarily accurate or unbiased should have a lessening effect on political disaffection. Negative media tactics, as discussed by Patterson (2002), have been correlated with political cynicism and political negativism, aspects of political disaffection. An active mediation strategy challenging the reality of political news—the authenticity of a particular characterization of a politician, for example—should, by way of skepticism, lessen the media effects attributed to these tactics. Active parental mediation, then, should show a mediating relationship, by way of media skepticism, between television news use and political disaffection. As shown in

Figure 1, the first portion of the path model explicated here is a positive relationship between active mediation and media skepticism.

*H1: There is a positive correlation between active parental mediation of television news during adolescence and media skepticism.*

Austin and Pinkleton (2001) found media skepticism on the part of the parents to be a significant factor in engagement of political discussion. Through active discussion of television content, skepticism of media messages may be passed from parent to child. This skepticism in turn creates a more sophisticated media consumer (Messaris, 1982; Nathanson, 2001c) and provides insulation to undesirable media effects. Increased skepticism of a negatively biased news media should lessen political disaffection effects.

*H2: There is a negative correlation between media skepticism and political disaffection.*

A reduction in negative media effects and the production a more sophisticated viewer should have positive influences on political attitudes and behavior. Austin and Pinkleton (1995) found that media skepticism is associated with increased feelings of political efficacy – leaving the more sophisticated viewer more apt to participate in politics as they believe their participation can make a difference. Thus, with regard to political participation through voting, Figure 2 displays the proposed model of parental mediation effects on voting behavior.

*H3: There is a positive correlation between media skepticism and intent to vote.*

## CHAPTER II. METHOD

### Participants

The sample consisted of 261 participants culled from large undergraduate Speech courses at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Participants were compensated for their contribution to the study through fulfillment of course research participation requirements or through extra credit. Participant criteria required that the subjects be young adults eligible to vote in the 2004 American Presidential elections and between the ages of 18 and 24. The overall mean age of the sample was 19.67 ( $SD = 1.55$ ). Males were represented with a slight majority ( $n = 139$ ), and females made up the rest of the sample ( $n = 121$ ); one participant did not report their sex. This represents a deviation from the gender distribution for the University, where females have a majority (56%). The student population at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa is ethnically diverse and represents a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. Table 1 provides the percentages for ethnic status of the general population of students at the University. Table 2 presents the frequencies and percentages of the participants in this sample. The greatest number of participants described themselves as being of mixed ethnicity (32%), followed by Japanese (21%) and Caucasian (20%).

The large majority of participants reported living in a two-parent, biological family when they were in high school ( $n = 195$  or 75%). Other family structures reported include single mother families (11.9%), step families (5.4%), and single father families (2.3%). The *other* category made up an additional 5.4%. Education levels for both parents were also reported; graduates of a four-year college program represented the

largest group for both mothers (34.5%) and fathers (36%) of the participants. Table 3 displays the frequencies for parental education levels.

Participants reported a wide range of television viewing habits. The average amount of television viewed in high school was 14.08 hours per week ( $SD = 13.31$ , minimum 0 hours per week, and maximum 100 hours per week). Hours participants currently spend watching television also had a wide range, with an average report of 9.33 hours per week ( $SD = 10.45$ , minimum of 0 hours per week and maximum of 100 hours per week). Hours spent watching television with parents during high school averaged 4.80 hours ( $SD = 5.99$ ). Hours spent watching television news with parents averaged 2.62 per week ( $SD = 5.78$ ).

Given the age of the participants, the majority should be first time voters in the 2004 presidential elections. The study took place in the last few weeks before Election Day, 2004. The timing of the study made the presidential elections and voting a salient topic for the participants.

#### Instrumentation

Participants completed a three-part survey. Part one of the survey measured political attitudes. For part two, participants were asked to answer three open-ended questions about their interactions with a parent or parental figure while watching television news. Participants were asked to recall a time during high school (defined as grades 9-12) when they watched news with their parents, describe any conversation they remembered taking place, and report with whom the interaction occurred. Two likert-type items measured the degree of ease with which the participant could recall the situation, and the typicality of the described interaction. Once participants had been situated

through the open-ended questions, parental mediation scales were employed in part three of the survey.

Asking the college student to focus on a particular time period in adolescence follows the pattern of Nathanson's (1999) study of parental mediation, choosing high school as an easily defined period of adolescence that is focused on a time when the participants were still living at home. Parent-adolescent communication behavior is often measured through asking college students to remember past events, and this study continues in this manner.

Participants report that mothers were the parent most likely to mediate ( $n=85$ , 32.6%), followed by reports of both parents mediating together ( $n=75$ , 28.7%), fathers mediating alone ( $n=41$ , 15.7%), and other family members as mediators ( $n=11$ , 4.2%). Participants reported a moderate degree of ease in recall of the mediation event described ( $M = 2.97$  on a scale of 1 to 5,  $SD = 1.48$ ). On a 1 to 5 scale anchored by "rarely" and "often," participants also reported a moderate degree of typicality of the recalled mediation event ( $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ).

### *Parental Mediation*

Parental mediation scales were used to measure both coviewing and active mediation. Coviewing was measured using a single-item on a 5-point scale. This measurement is consistent with many recent studies that have measured coviewing using a single-item (Nathanson, 2002; Austin et al, 1999; Dorr et al, 1989). The item for this study is worded to reflect coviewing strictly of television news. Active mediation was measured with a four-item likert type scale adapted from Austin (1993) to reflect the

same genre-specific mediation. Austin (1993) reports a moderate reliability ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

The full scale can be found in Appendix A.

### *Media Skepticism*

Media skepticism was measured using Austin and Pinkleton's (2001) scale. This two-item general media skepticism index was designed to be clearly distinct from political cynicism measures. Originally intended to measure skepticism of television advertising, the scale was adapted here to measure skepticism of television news programming. For example, where the original item was worded "television advertisements are honest," the adaptation was phrased as "television news programs are honest." Answers were provided on a one to five Likert scale anchored by strongly disagree and strongly agree.

### *Political Disaffection*

Political disaffection refers to a combination of cynicism and negativism with regard to politics and political campaign tactics, and is frequently coupled with a low level of political involvement (Austin & Pinkleton, 1999). Anchored by "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree," participants are asked to respond to two indices measuring cynicism and negativism toward politics and the political process. Responses were made using 5-point scales. The full political disaffection scale can be found in Appendix B.

Cynicism is defined as a feeling of distrust and a lack of confidence in the political system, public leaders, and public institutions (Pinkleton & Austin, 2002). The cynicism index consists of 8 items, and includes items ranging from "politicians are trustworthy," to "Government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves." Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman (1998) report an alpha of .85 for this index.

The negativism index was employed by Pinkleton & Austin (2002), and consists of four items with a reported alpha of .74. The index measures attitudes toward political campaigns and includes such items as, “political campaigns are too negative.”

*Intent to vote*

Intent to vote is measured on an estimated percentage likelihood scale from 0 to 10. This is consistent with previous measures of vote intention. Often, the estimate is combined with two other items measuring past voting behavior, done in order to establish voting likelihood, but these items are not applicable to a sample of first-time voters. All participants were eligible voters for the 2004 presidential election; 73.6% were registered to vote.

### CHAPTER III. RESULTS

Before testing the hypotheses, preliminary analyses were performed to examine scale reliability. This chapter presents the results of the preliminary analysis, followed by hypothesis testing results. Implications of the results as per the proposed models are also discussed.

Confirmatory factor analysis procedures were performed on active mediation, and the dependent variables political cynicism and political negativism. These data were consistent with the proposed scales, in which internal consistency and parallelism yielded non-egregious errors. A four-item unidimensional solution was observed for active mediation ( $M = 10.95$ ,  $SD = 4.41$ ) which was reliable ( $\alpha = .90$ ). An eight-item unidimensional solution was obtained for political cynicism ( $M = 27.57$ ,  $SD = 4.80$ ). This scale was also reliable ( $\alpha = .84$ ). A four-item unidimensional solution was determined for the political negativism scale and it also proved reliable ( $M = 13.75$ ,  $SD = 2.91$ ,  $\alpha = .81$ ). Confirmatory factor analysis could not be performed for the skepticism scale. Instead, a reliability analysis was conducted for the two items comprising the media skepticism measure. The media skepticism scale is reliable ( $\alpha = .71$ ) with a mean of 6.13,  $SD = 1.75$ . The intent to vote item yielded a mean of 6.65,  $SD = 4.07$ .

Hypothesis one predicted a positive association between parental mediation and media skepticism. As active mediation necessarily coexists with coviewing, a partial correlation between active mediation and media skepticism was conducted, with coviewing held as a covariate. Correlational analysis results do not support the predicted relationship between parental mediation and media skepticism. Hypothesis two predicted a negative association between media skepticism and political disaffection. Correlational

analysis also fails to support this relationship. The first predicted model, then, fails to find support. Results of the correlational analysis can be found in Table 4.

The second model, predicting a causal chain from mediation to voting behavior is based on the first. As described above, the first portion of the model, a positive relationship between parental mediation and media skepticism is not supported.

Hypothesis three, the second half of the model, predicts a positive correlation between media skepticism and voting behavior. Correlational analysis also fails to support this hypothesis. Results of the correlational analysis are presented in Table 5.

Without substantial correlations, the proposed path models cannot be tested; therefore both path models fail to be supported by the data. Bypassing the model, and looking at more direct relationships, active mediation also failed to correlate with either political disaffection or intent to vote. Again, as active mediation must coexist with coviewing, partial correlations between active mediation and both outcome variables were conducted, holding coviewing as a covariate in each case. Active mediation failed to correlate with either political disaffection or intent to vote. Coviewing alone shows a small correlation with intent to vote that is significant,  $r(258) = .20, p < .001$ .

## CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION

This study sought to place parental mediation in the process of political socialization by examining associations between active mediation and political attitudes and behaviors. The proposed path model predicted that by increasing media skepticism in the adolescent, active parental mediation would negatively correlate with political disaffection. Results of this study failed to find support for this path.

### *Findings*

Hypothesis one predicted a positive association between active mediation and media skepticism. This expectation was in accordance with earlier findings by Austin (1993) in which active mediation was found to be a predictor of skepticism in adolescents. Results of this study failed to replicate the earlier reported associations.

Hypothesis two predicted a negative relationship between media skepticism and political disaffection. It was expected that a more skeptical, sophisticated, and critical viewer would be less susceptible to media effects such as political cynicism and political negativism. Findings from this study failed to support this hypothesis.

The second proposed path, parental mediation leading to increased skepticism, which in turn leads to increased intent to vote, also could not be supported with the results of this study. As stated above, the first half of the model, positive associations between active mediation and media skepticism were not borne out through the data. Hypothesis three, the second half of the model, predicted that an increase in media skepticism would be associated with an increase in intent to vote. This, too, found no support in this study.

A direct relationship between active mediation and either political disaffection or intent to vote also failed to find support. The final relationship to emerge from this study was unexpected but worth noting. Findings support a small but significant positive correlation between parental coviewing of television news during high school and reported intent to vote.

#### *Methodological concerns*

The failure of the first proposed path model may have been due to a poor skepticism measure. The scale used was very general and was adapted from a measure of parental skepticism of television advertising. While used successfully by Austin and Pinkelton (2001) as part of a model creating a path to parent-child discussion of politics from the parent's perspective, it may not have been a good fit when placed on the other side of the equation. A general media skepticism seems to lead parents to actively and negatively mediate, but this general skepticism does not translate into a specific skepticism of television news engendered in the adolescent, as measured in this study.

Another factor that may have influenced the failure of the first hypothesis could be a discrepancy between parental perspective and the perspective of the adolescent. Parents often report extensive mediation while their children report very little. This has been attributed to social desirability on the part of the parents (Austin et al, 1999), but can also be attributed to a difference in salience. The parent is taking the active role, and therefore may feel as though they are making a large effort, while the adolescent may notice only occasional comments (Nathanson, 2001b). Hypothesis one was based on findings as reported by parents, while the study focused on adolescent reports. This discrepancy could in part contribute to a lack of support for the proposed hypothesis.

Another factor related to the failure of the first path model may have been the choice of political disaffection as an outcome variable. Parental mediation is first and foremost a media effects construct. The important first step seemed to be to keep the focus on television media effects—of which, political disaffection was the most prominent, supported, and timely. Despite conceptualization issues in the literature, at its core parental mediation has remained a study of the ways in which parents negotiate television viewing in their families. Parental mediation strategies have the potential to enhance or reduce media effects depending on the type used. It was expected that an active mediation strategy, which has been associated with a reduction in media effects, would correlate with less political disaffection. These expectations, however, were not borne out in the data. This may be due to the use of a very general active mediation scale. Active parental mediation has been found to be valanced in nature. Parental attitudes toward television, parental concerns about media effects, and parental skepticism concerning television advertisements have all been found to influence the nature of the mediation. Parents can provide positive comments, which reinforce positive aspects of the viewed content, or they can engage in negative discussion that refutes the content. Recent studies also suggest a third neutral tone for active mediation. The active mediation scale used in this study did not consider valence, it may be that negative active mediation, rather than active mediation in general would be the more appropriate predictor variable in this case.

The second proposed path model stepped away from the media effects construct, and proposed a more direct model of parental mediation and political socialization through the dependent variable intent to vote. Measurement problems may have had a

hand in these findings as well. As discussed above, the first segment of the path failed to find support, leading to a failure of the second segment. However, a direct relationship between active mediation and intent to vote also fell short. Austin and Pinkleton (2001) found that of coviewing, positive active mediation, and negative active mediation, *only* negative mediation predicted parent-child political discussion. Given this, and as discussed above, it may have been more fruitful to use a negatively valenced mediation scale here as well.

### *Theoretical implications*

This study found a small but significant correlation between coviewing and intent to vote, lending some support to the media effects approach taken by this study. Calavita's (2003) qualitative examination of the relationships between parents, children, television, and politics, paints a picture of almost vicarious political socialization. Television news is presented as an adult evening ritual that occurs in the presence of the child. When young adults were asked to provide their childhood political memories or to describe how they believed they formed their political attitudes, most pointed to those times during the dinner hour when a parent had the news on and the child simply coviewed – absorbing not only the television content, but the parent's attitude toward it. These findings are consistent with Hyman's (1959) observation that parents don't so much actively teach their children about politics, but rather place the children in a context where political learning can take place. The results of this study suggest that the living room environment, with parent and child watching the news together, can be considered one such context wherein political socialization occurs.

In previous studies, the mere presence of an adult watching television with a child has been shown to make the program being viewed more salient for the child (Salomon, 1977). Messaris and Kerr (1984) found that children who experienced coviewing with their parents were less likely to distinguish differences in television programming content and the real world. Rothschild and Morgan (1987) found that coviewing reinforced stereotypes portrayed on television. Also, Nathanson (1997, 1999) found evidence to suggest that coviewing violent television is linked to more aggression in children. Nathanson (1999) notes that although other forms of mediation may signal disagreement with content, coviewing reinforces content by signaling that “content is important, useful, and worthy of sustained attention” (p. 127). It may be that with politics, this influence outweighs other potential media effects. For an adolescent, watching television news with a parent may make paying attention to and participating in politics seem more pertinent.

While the results of this study converge with the established and relatively inactive view of parental political socialization attempts, they diverge from the expected outcomes of parental mediation. Active mediation is usually seen as a tool parents can use to both enhance the educational benefits of television, and reduce negative media effects, whereas coviewing is generally associated with an enhancement of media effects. Yet, the results of this study would seem to privilege coviewing over active mediation when examining the relationships with intent to vote. This could be explained by the previously mentioned lack of valence in the active mediation scale. Another explanation for this finding may be the very broad nature of television news.

Previous studies have found that active parental mediation reports are more pronounced when measured within specific programming genres rather than over-all

television viewing. Parents may restrictively or actively mediate primetime adult dramas, for instance, while not mediating Public Broadcasting's educational television in any way. For this reason, mediation studies may ask parents and children about specific programming—an aggression study, for instance, focused on the mediation that occurs for action adventure programs, action cartoons, and classic cartoons (Nathanson, 2001b). Given this past restriction to specific genre, it seemed logical for this study to look solely at active mediation of television news programming. However, this specificity, while helpful when establishing patterns of active mediation of *fictional* programming, may not translate into non-fictional, information-oriented programming. Television news may be a special case unto itself—part educational television, part adult drama, part entertainment.

Television news covers a broad spectrum of topics, not just political events. Participants of this study were asked to provide an example of a time when they watched television news with their parents. The topics viewed ranged from significant events such as September 11 to local weather reports. When examining parental mediation of television news, a more sophisticated, content specific approach may be necessary. Parents may not, for instance, mediate straight news coverage such as a local murder, weather, or even troop movements in Iraq. Parents may, however, mediate quite actively while watching a less objective news program such as CNN's *Crossfire*, or the Sunday morning interview programs. A more politically specific approach may be necessary for validity when investigating political outcomes of television news use.

Television news is also vested with authority. Returning to the path models, media skepticism may have failed to be engendered by active mediation because of a

dichotomy of parental reactions when it comes to the news. While children may experience parents who argue vehemently with certain opinion-centered news programs, these same parents may also quietly concentrate on the more objective reports. While parents may be skeptical of news objectivity, television news is still the first source consulted in an emergency such as September 11 or even severe weather. Dependency upon television news, and the authority given to it, may override any skepticism produced by the occasional disagreement with content. The overall salience for the child, then, may be that television news is important and worth paying attention to, regardless of the amount or valence of active mediation engaged in. This may further explain why covieing alone produced a significant finding in this study.

#### *Implications for future study*

The results of this study bolster the assertions of previous studies envisioning the combination of television news, parents, and children as an environment in which political socialization can take place. However, the failure of this study to find significant results with active mediation and media skepticism has many implications on research methods in this area—especially when applied to politics. As discussed above, a general television news use measure may not be appropriate when studying political socialization. Political talk shows, for instance, cannot be lumped together with movie reviews, weather reports, and celebrity weddings, all under the heading of news use. When studying the effects of news viewing habits on political socialization, any meaningful study will have to clearly distinguish different genres of news. A taxonomy of news programming is needed to distinguish political content from more general news and entertainment. Further qualitative analysis may also be necessary to clearly establish

what types of television news use families engage in, before attempting to look at any effects this news usage may have.

One of the strengths of this study was the addition of the open-ended questions asking participants to record an instance they recalled of viewing the news with their parents. As discussed above, the answers moved beyond the standard measures of television use and provided concrete examples of what participants are actually viewing. The reports of typicality and vividness of these recollections, however, were not high—a limitation of the retrospective nature of this study. Other limitations of this study stem from a lack of applicable, established parental mediation scales. The skepticism scale, and the active mediation scale, while reliable, did not prove particularly valid. Again, both were developed for particular genre, skepticism for advertisements, and active mediation for fictional television programming. Neither translated well for informational television programming. Scale development specifically for use with television news will be necessary for any future study of this type.

This study sought only to establish a relationship between parental mediation and political socialization as a first step in establishing family discussion of television news as part of the political socialization process. While interposing variables certainly exist, it would be awkward to try to impose those variables before the relationship itself was established. For this reason, factors such as parental education and/or socio-economic status were not considered as mediating variables at this stage of study.

Future directions for study of parental mediation and political socialization should move beyond media effects and delve more deeply into political orientations and attitudes. Parental discussion of political content demonstrates not only an interest in

politics, but also puts parental political attitudes on display. One method of establishing political socialization is comparing the political orientations of the agent and the learner. One fruitful avenue for research may be to examine the effects of parental mediation on both the child's knowledge of the parent's political attitudes, and similarity of political orientations between the mediating parent and the child.

### Conclusion

Political socialization involves three key elements: an agent, a learner, and communication. Most of the research to date focuses on either the agent or the learner, with comparatively little attention paid to the communication element. When and how this communication occurs, as well as what form it takes when it does occur, has yet to be fully examined. Recent qualitative studies, Ribak's (1997) ethnographic look at Israeli families and Calavita's (2003) interviews with young adults, have attempted to bridge this gap. Their findings suggest that political communication in families occurs in front of television news, often as part of daily family viewing rituals.

Given the results of the above-mentioned qualitative studies, parental mediation, with its focus on interactions between parents and children about television content, seemed a natural fit as a first attempt to quantifiably study part of the communication element of political socialization. Through mediation, parents can lend salience to the content, refute the content, or simply add their voice to the dialogue. A coviewing parent has been found to enhance interest in the content for the child by suggesting a tacit approval and promoting a sense of importance to the content. Parents actively discussing content with their children are able to add their opinion to the opinions coming from the

television—refuting the content if they wish or providing additional information—filtering the messages through their own beliefs and attitudes.

Results of this study failed to find a link between active parental mediation and expected political socialization outcomes, however the small but significant correlation between coviewing and intent to vote does reinforce earlier qualitative findings, and suggests that further research involving parental mediation and political socialization is warranted.

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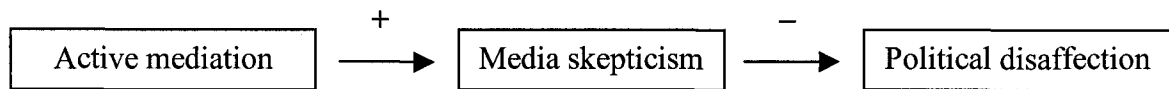
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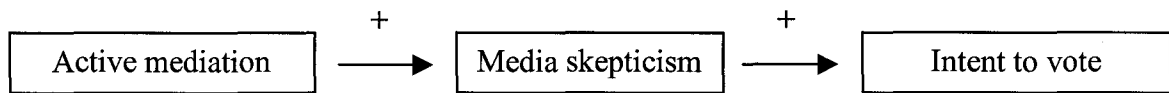
### Figure Captions

*Figure 1.* Hypothesized model of active parental mediation and political disaffection

*Figure 2.* Hypothesized model of active parental mediation and intent to vote



Hypothesized model of active parental mediation and political disaffection



Hypothesized model of active parental mediation and intent to vote

Table 1

*University of Hawaii at Manoa student ethnicity percentages*

Ethnicity status	Percentage
Caucasian	21%
Japanese	18%
Filipino	13%
Hawaiian	14%
Chinese	6%
Other	28%

Note. Information retrieved from UH Institutional Research Office. (2003, February).

*University of Hawaii at Manoa Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.*

Retrieved January 6, 2005, from

[http://www.hawaii.edu/ovcao/pdf/manoa\\_profile\\_students\\_enrollment](http://www.hawaii.edu/ovcao/pdf/manoa_profile_students_enrollment)

Table 2

*Frequencies and percentages of participant ethnicity*

Ethnicity status	Frequency	Percentage
Mixed	83	31.8
Japanese	54	20.7
Caucasian	52	19.9
Chinese	20	7.7
Filipino	19	7.3
Other	15	5.7
Hawaiian	14	5.4
Korean	2	.8

Table 3

*Frequencies and percentages of parental education levels**Mother's education levels*

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
Less than High school	12	4.6
High school grad	43	16.5
Some college	56	21.5
Associates degree	28	10.7
Trade diploma	9	3.4
Four-year college	90	34.5
Post-graduate	20	7.7

*Father's education levels*

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
Less than High school	9	3.4
High school grad	41	15.7
Some college	49	18.8
Associates degree	21	8.0
Trade diploma	10	3.8
Four-year college	94	36.0
Post-graduate	34	13.0

Table 4

*Correlational analysis results for active mediation-political disaffection model (N = 260)*

	Active Mediation	Media Skepticism
Active Mediation	--	--
Media Skepticism	.024	--
Political Cynicism	-.01	.01
Political Negativism	-.07	.09

Table 5

*Correlational analysis results for active mediation – intent to vote model (N = 260)*

	Active Mediation	Media Skepticism
Active Mediation	--	--
Media Skepticism	.024	--
Intent to Vote	.12	.03

## Appendix A

## Modified Active Parental Mediation Scales (Austin, 1993)

(Instructions) The following items concern general interactions you may have had with a parent or guardian about television news programs during high school. Please focus your answers to the time period between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, when you lived with a parent or guardian.

Please indicate the extent to which you perceive each of the following items describe television news related activities in your home.

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
1. In high school, I watched television news with a parent or guardian.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My parent or guardian tried to help me understand what I saw on television news.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My parent or guardian explained to me what something on the television news really meant.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My parent or guardian told me that something I saw on the television news wasn't really so.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My parent or guardian suggested that I should learn more about something I saw on television news.	1	2	3	4	5

## Appendix B

## Political Disaffection Scales

(Instructions) The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate your attitudes toward politics and voting. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement that follows.

## Political Cynicism:

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. Politicians care only about themselves or special interests.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Politicians are out of touch with ordinary citizens.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Politicians lose touch after being elected.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Politicians are trustworthy.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Politicians are dishonest	1	2	3	4	5
6. Government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Politicians are concerned with their own interests.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Politicians lie.	1	2	3	4	5

## Political negativism:

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. Campaigns are too negative.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Political ads are usually against something rather than for something.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Political ads are too negative.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Political campaigns are too mean spirited.	1	2	3	4	5

## APPENDIX C

### Survey Instrument – Study Information Sheet

**Study Title:** “Parental Mediation and Voting Behavior: The Effects of Parental Mediation on Political Socialization”

**Study Investigator:** Michelle Jerney-Davis, Department of Speech, University of Hawaii,  
2560 Campus Road, George Hall 326, Honolulu, Hawaii, 96822  
Phone: 956-8202

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to provide further knowledge on how political attitudes are formed. This research is being conducted as partial requirement of a masters thesis.

#### **Survey Structure**

This is a self-administered survey that you can complete on your own. The time requirement for filling out this survey is approximately 15 minutes. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. Participants in this study are college students between the ages of 18 and 24. The study asks for descriptions of political attitudes and descriptions of television news use during adolescence. Participants are asked to complete a short survey by recalling a time in high school when they watched television news with their parent or guardian, and circling answers for a series of scale-item questions.

#### **Confidentiality**

The information gathered through the surveys will be used for academic purposes only. Completed surveys will be stored in a locked file for the duration of the research project, and will be destroyed upon completion of the project. Research data will be strictly confidential, however agencies with research oversight, such as the UH Committee on Human Studies, will have the authority to review research data.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Participation**

There are no potential risks or personal benefits that may accrue from your participation.

#### **Additional Inquiries**

Your participation in this research is requested. If you have any questions regarding the survey, please contact Michelle Jerney-Davis at 734-6363. Also, if you have comment or complaints about your treatment in this research project, you can contact: Committee on Human Studies, University of Hawai'i, 2540 Maile Way, Honolulu, HI, 96822;  
Phone: 956-5007



- 1. Please describe a time in high school when you watched television news with a parent or guardian. Provide the topic of the news program and indicate your approximate age at the time of the interaction.**
- 2. During the above interaction, did your parent or guardian discuss any part of the news program with you? If yes, what do you remember about the conversation?**
- 3. With whom did the interaction described above take place (mother, father, step-mother, etc.)?**

Very difficult					Very easy
1	2	3	4	5	

Rarely                      Often

1    2    3    4    5

## Part Two, continued

**D.** The following items concern general interactions you may have had with a parent or guardian about television news programs during high school. As before, please focus your answers to the time period between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, when you lived with a parent or guardian.

**Please indicate the extent to which you perceive each of the following items describe television news related activities in your home. Please circle only one number on the scales provided.**

- |  | Strongly<br>disagree |   |   |   | Strongly<br>agree |
|--|----------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| 1. In high school, I watched television news with a parent or guardian.  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 2. My parent or guardian tried to help me understand what I saw on television news.  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 3. My parent or guardian explained to me what something on the television news really meant.   | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 4. My parent or guardian told me that something I saw on the television news wasn't really so.   | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 5. My parent or guardian suggested that I should learn more about something I saw on television news.                                  | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                 |
| 6. In high school, approximately how many hours per week would you estimate you spent watching television?                             |                      |   |   |   |                   |
| _____  |                      |   |   |   |                   |
| 7. In high school, approximately how many hours per week would you estimate you spent watching television with a parent/parent figure? |                      |   |   |   |                   |
| _____  |                      |   |   |   |                   |
| 8. In high school, approximately how many hours per week would you estimate you spent watching television news with your parents?      |                      |   |   |   |                   |
| _____  |                      |   |   |   |                   |
| 9. How many hours per week would you estimate you currently spend watching television?   |                      |   |   |   |                   |
| _____  |                      |   |   |   |                   |

## Background Information

**E.** Please provide some general background information about yourself. These questions are simply to establish the demographics of the sample. Your answers are strictly confidential. Please circle or write in your answer where appropriate.

**1. What is your age?** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. What is your sex?**    Male    Female

**3. What is your ethnicity?**

Caucasian

Chinese

Filipino

Hawaiian

Japanese

Korean

Mixed

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. What is your mother's education level?**

Less than a high school diploma

High school graduate

Some college

Associate's degree

Trade school diploma

Four-year college degree

Post graduate studies

**5. What is your father's education level?**

Less than a high school diploma

High school graduate

Some college

Associate's degree

Trade school diploma

Four year college degree

Post graduate studies

**6. Which best describes your family type while you were in high school?**

Two-Parent, biological family

Step-family

Single Mother family

Single Father family

Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Are you eligible to vote in the Nov 2, 2004 Presidential Elections?**

Yes

No

Don't Know

**8. Are you registered to vote?**

Yes

No

Don't Know

## APPENDIX D

## Protection of Human Subjects – IRB Information

CHS # 13262 – “Parental Mediation and Voting Behavior: The Effects of Parental Mediation on Political Socialization”

Principle investigator: Michelle Jerney-Davis

Assurance Identification number: F-3526

Expiration date: October 15, 2005

IRB registration number: IORG0000169

Exemption status: Human subjects are involved, but this activity qualifies for exemption under Section 101(b), paragraph 2.