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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

The Cognitive Conceptualization of Television News and the Practice of Politics

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Political Science

by

Joseph J. Braunwarth

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Shawn W. Rosenberg, Chair
Professor David Easton
Professor Mark Petracca

1999

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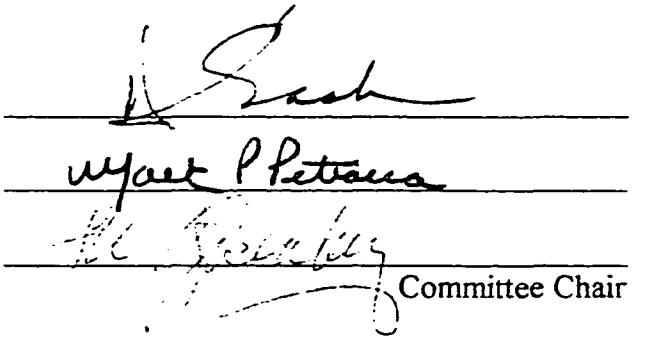

Committee Chair

University of California
1999

DEDICATION

To

My wife Mary

and

My son Zachary

without their patience and support
this would not have been possible

without their presence in my life
this would not have been worthwhile

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express appreciation to my committee chair, Professor Shawn Rosenberg. He has the attitude and substance of a genius. In addition I would like to thank my committee member and department chair, Professor Mark Petracca and, in particular, committee member Professor David Easton whose encouragement and advice added greatly to this endeavor; his service and intellect are inspirational.

CURRICULUM VITAE
Joseph J. Braunwarth

1989 B.A. Political Science and Business, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

1995 M.A. Political Science, University of California, Irvine

1999 Ph.D. Political Science, University of California, Irvine
Dissertation: *The Cognitive Conceptualization of Television News and the Practice of Politics*
Professor Shawn W. Rosenberg, Chair

Abstract
of the Dissertation

by

Joseph J. Braunwarth

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science
University of California, Irvine, 1999
Professor Shawn W. Rosenberg, Chair

This project examines the relationship between structures of adult cognition and the political information presented in mass mediated political communications, especially the television news media. This interplay is examined in light of the corresponding implications for the contemporary practice of politics. A full understanding of the influence of mass mediated political communications requires an examination of how these messages are interpreted by individuals as a function of their mode of cognitive reasoning. It is as a function of these modes of reasoning that adults interpret the political world, including political information disseminated by the news media and more direct political appeals. Subsequently, individuals are more or less able to notice that these media present a necessarily limited *re*presentation of the complexity of social reality and are subsequently more or less susceptible to the subtle and pervasive presentations of particular social and political definitions, categorizations, and representations in the mass media. The findings of this project carry vast implications regarding the ability of adults to assess the social world as well as the ability of society as a whole to adequately deal with complex social issues.

Chapter One

Introduction: Cognition and the News

This project examines how the mass news media constructs political information and how news spectators address these constructions. Specifically, it will be demonstrated that the interplay between distinct structures of adult cognition and the structure of politics as constructed by the mass news media and, in particular, by television news, has important implications for the contemporary practice of politics.

The topic of mediated political communication is central to the field of political science. The primary source of social and political information in contemporary society is the mass news media. In a large, diverse society such as the contemporary United States, it is the definition of politics constructed by the mass news media upon which news spectators must rely for their conception of the political world. Of these media, the medium of network television news plays a particularly important role in the construction of national politics for news spectators (Edelman, 1988; Ansolabehere, et al., 1993). However, the political issues re-presented on these media are transformed in the course of their mediation (Mander, 1978; Bennett, 1995; Lee and Solomon, 1990). These changes have important implications for the type and quality of political information presented.

While the mass media and the news media have received considerable academic attention, the differences in the way individuals makes sense of mediated political communications has been long overlooked. A more detailed understanding of how news media spectators understand the social world and, consequently, the political information

represented in the television news is integrally important both academically and politically.

This project will demonstrate that the mass news media, and in particular the medium of television, construct political reality in a way that is particularly persuasive for a large section of the population as a result of their mode of cognition.[1] This reciprocal relationship between the reality of politics constructed for news media spectators and the dominant mode of reasoning utilized by these spectators provides a means of explaining how and why a non-comprehensive and divisive political rhetoric is disseminated and accepted as the objective political reality which, in turn, contributes to a non-comprehensive and divisive political practice. A more robust understanding of this process is of primary importance to the topics of both individual understanding of social issues and how or even to what degree these issues can be adequately addressed in the political sphere.

The term "news media spectator" is used in this context quite self-consciously, in homage to both Walter Lippmann (1922) and Murray Edelman (1988) in whose intellectual tradition this work lies and as a means of accentuating the role of the audience in modern mass news media "communication." The term spectator is used here to indicate that the audience of these media are not full co-participants in the media's construction of political reality; the relationship between an individual and the mass news media is not really one of communicative interaction, but rather a one-on-many

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[1] This will be examined in more detail in chapter four.

transmission of information.

The reference to the mass news media as a single source of political information intimates the idea that the mass news media audience is not really one of consumers in the full sense of the word. While the audience obviously consumes information, the implicit meaning of the term consumer is that the audience has a number of choices of what type or kind of information to consume, such as that which would be advocated by the "free marketplace of ideas" argument attributed to John Stuart Mill (1956[1859]) and developed by the Lazarsfeld (et al., 1944, Berelson, et al., 1948) school of thought. The use of the term spectator further connotes that this is an ideal that is not met in contemporary society. This project is primarily concerned with the fragmented and decontextualized structure of news media messages which, as will be elaborated in chapter two, is largely shared by all mass news media outlets in the United States as a result of various forces common to them all. Thus, for the purposes of the argument presented here, the differences between different outlets of any particular medium and even between different news media are minimal.

Further, the use of the term spectators as a means of referring to the mass news media audience is also connotative of the orientation to politics that results from the interplay between how politics are constructed on the mass news media and how these news representations are reconstructed by news spectators. The mass news media present politics as something "out there" distant and distinct from the daily lives of the news spectator (Lee and Solomon, 1990; Graber, 1989). News spectators are encouraged to watch the spectacle of politics constructed in the mass news media, however this political

spectacle is presented as something that is occurring and changing but is ultimately something over which the individual atomized viewer at home has little or no control.[2] The term spectator thus infers that these individuals are not just media spectators but are also largely political spectators rather than "true" participants; they may be encouraged to show up for periodic elections and ratify a pre-selected choice of candidates offered, thus providing legitimacy to political rulers, however, further participation, of the type outlined in the discussion of the democratic ideals below, is implicitly discouraged.

Democratic Ideals

The news media is of central importance as a source of political information in a diverse, democratic society. As Walter Lippmann noted, "a free press is not a privilege, but an organic necessity in a great society. Without criticism and reliable and intelligent reporting, the government cannot govern" (address in London May 27, 1965 as quoted in Greenberg and Page, 1997 p. 174). One of the fundamental principles of democracy is that of political sovereignty or that, ultimately, the people rule. One central aspect of this is the people have access to accurate political information and insightful political interpretations. Without these, people cannot form political opinions in accord with their values and interests and no authentic popular will can be said to exist (Greenberg and Page, 1997 p. 9). It is thus the role of the news media to inform the citizenry of the actions of the state so they may be more effective citizens (Curran, 1991). In the United

[2] This will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

States the news media themselves proclaim this to be the case, for which, in exchange, they expect their first amendment rights to be upheld (Schiller, 1989; Glaser, 1984). Many speak of the importance of a free press that remains free of governmental restrictions so that it may fulfill its role as a "watchdog" over government; that it guard against the abuse of power by those in power. While this is certainly important, the discussion here will center on the value of the press in a democracy as the central means of the provision of political information to the public and, in particular, the transmission of a wide variety of views and opinions enabling citizen access to a diverse range of perspectives and opinions. Individuals are unable to determine what is in their own and in the collective best interest and act on these opinions in the course of the exercise of the democratic duties if they are not well informed (Croteau and Hoynes, 1994 p. 9). In a large, heterogenous democracy like the United States, it is only the mass news media which have the potential to provide individuals with this information. In other words, the press is an indispensable element in contemporary democracy. Without the press, ordinary citizens would have no way of knowing what was going on in the political sphere. Essentially, because democracy means popular sovereignty, the citizens of a democracy need full access to comprehensive access to information to make intelligent and informed political decisions (Lichtenberg, 1990 p. 110; Meiklejohn, 1960 pp. 8-28).

The founding fathers of the U.S. Constitution were sufficiently concerned about the role of the press in a democracy to provide protection for a free press in the first amendment of the Constitution ("Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom...of the press"). As Thomas Jefferson wrote in a letter to Edward Carrington:

> I am persuaded myself that the good sense of the people will always be found to be the best army. They may be led astray for a moment, but will soon correct themselves...[if given] full information of their affairs thro' the channel of the public papers, and...those papers should penetrate the whole mass of the people. The basis for our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left for me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter (1787).

James Madison also noted that, "to the press alone, chequered as it is with abuses, the world is indebted for all the triumphs which have been gained by reason and humanity over error and oppression" (Platt, 1992 p. 285 as found in Ross, 1996 p. 90)

Participatory Democracy

The theme enunciated by Jefferson and Madison is reflected in current democratic theory which emphasizes the importance of participation (e.g. Pateman, 1970; Warren, 1992). The central tenet of this type of democratic theory is that participation in democratic political life creates a citizenry that has both the interest and the ability necessary to govern themselves wisely. This is one of the driving arguments behind appeals for greater participation by the citizenry in the democratic political process: that democratic political participation such as making decisions or influencing decisions leads individuals to be more competent and responsible citizens.

> The foundations of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience. It is not belief that these things are complete but that if given a show they will grow and be able to generate progressively the knowledge and wisdom needed to guide collective action (John Dewey. *The Public and its Problems*. Holt, 1927, p. 211).

The basic assumption underlying the participatory democracy paradigm is that democratic experiences will transform individuals in democratic ways; they are more likely to become more public-spirited, tolerant, knowledgeable, and self-reflective than they would be otherwise (Warren, 1992 p. 8). In *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970), Pateman argues that in a system of participatory democracy, individuals develop a sense of civic mindedness (that the individual conceives of problems from the perspective of the community at large rather than from their own self-interested perspective); an increased sense of political efficacy (the sense that the individual is neither ignored by nor estranged from government); and are more likely to hold political opinions and take an interest in government affairs; in short, participatory democracy leads to a more informed, active, and involved citizenry (Held, 1996 pp. 267-268; Pateman, 1970 chs. 2, 6). Of particular importance to this theory of democracy is the idea that individuals should be adequately informed in order to act as responsible democrats. This requires that individuals be exposed to information that enables them to recognize diverse perspectives and viewpoints. As noted by Held (1996, p. 271), one of the key conditions for such a system is an open information system to ensure informed decisions.

The idea of participatory democracy is, in part, a response to those who claim that most individuals are either unwilling or unable to carry out their democratic responsibilities and undertake the difficult art of governing. These would include, for the purposes of the argument presented here, such "elite" theorists of democracy as Michels and Schumpeter; those that argue that the attention of the masses have been diverted by consumerism and other "false needs" such as Putnam and Marcuse; and, to a lesser

extent, more "classical" elite theorists such as Mosca and Pareto. This line of thought constituted the position of most Western philosophers and rulers prior to the 19th century, including the framers of the U.S. constitution who were concerned about maintaining a free press but who were also, like many of the philosophers and rulers of their time, skeptical of the ability of common citizens to undertake the difficult art of governing. Although the United States is often pointed to as a model of democracy throughout the world, its constitution is rarely described as democratic. The framers of the U.S. Constitution were so apprehensive about popular and majority rule that they made every effort to exclude the populace from directly exercising political power. For instance, the constitution only allows the members of the House of Representatives to be directly elected by the populace; Senators were elected by state legislators, the President was chosen by the electoral college, and the judiciary was, and still is, appointed. Even with this limited role, the electorate was restricted considerably, generally only white males with property were allowed to vote. Since that time, the U.S. constitution has been amended primarily to expand the electorate and to expand the areas over which the electorate has direct control.

As the role of the mass news media as a source of political information is of primary importance to the topic at hand, this topic will be examined in light of the democratic theory presented above. In order to develop this theoretical grounding, the ideas of John Stuart Mill will be examined as well as the way this line of thought is developed in the writings of John Dewey.

Mill

Mill believes very strongly in the idea of liberty in democracy. His most famous work, *On Liberty,* is oriented around the elaboration of the interconnections between freedom of expression and self-realization. This stems from an overriding concern for the development, to the greatest degree possible, of individuals' thought and conduct. To this end, he quotes his intellectual predecessor, Wilhelm von Humboldt, one of the eighteenth-century founders of the liberal tradition, as saying "the end of man...is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole" and the two requisites for this are "freedom and variety of situations" (Mill, 1956[1859] pp. 69-70). A very important aspect of the development of the individual, according to Mill, is the ability to participate in a democracy which will lead the individual to take an interest in government which will, in turn, lead to the development of an informed and evolving citizenry. Mill points out that this, in turn, affects the practice of democracy, as whatever affects the individual also affects others through this individual (ibid p. 16). In addition to conducting the business of public affairs, Mill thus judges government in "how far it promotes the good management of the affairs of society by means of the existing faculties, moral, intellectual, and active, of its various members" for he feels that participation in the practice of public affairs is "a great influence acting on the human mind" and thus governmental institutions are to be judged by "the degree in which they promote the general mental advancement of the community, including under that phrase advancement in intellect, in virtue, and in practical activity and efficiency" (J. S. Mill, 1910 as quoted in Pateman, 1970).

While Mill also discusses liberty of tastes and liberty of association, his primary emphasis is on "the inward domain of consciousness" which, he contends, demands "liberty of thought and feeling, absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects." Mill goes on to claim that the primary necessity for this to occur is "the liberty of expressing and publishing opinions" (p. 16). Mill thus asserts the need for "liberty of the press" and provides various arguments for the freedom of expression more generally. Mill provides the argument that the improvement of the individual can only come about in the course of exposure to a variety of opinions and views; "the necessity to the mental well-being of mankind (on which all their other well-being depends) of freedom of opinion, and freedom of the expression of opinion" (Mill, 1956[1859] p. 64). Mill essentially argues that it is necessary that individuals be exposed to a wide range of ideas in order to determine what is in their own and in society's best interest.

To Mill it is very important that all opinions be voiced and circulated; one can only improve oneself through freedom of opinion and through exposing oneself to the opinions of others. It is through the opportunity to challenge one's beliefs against those of others that enables individuals to affirm their own opinions. Those opinions which are not circulated or are oppressed may provide value as sources of comparison or, perhaps, may even be more justified than currently held opinions. According to Mill (Mill 1956 (1859),p. 21) no opinion can be silenced for if that opinion is, in fact, useful or "right" the world is then deprived of this resource; however, if the opinion is false, it is still useful as a means of clarifying truth through exposure and comparison to error. In the course of challenge, debate, and discussion one may find that other views are, if not better, equally

valid but simply based on different values and beliefs. It is in this process that other opinions may increasingly make sense (ibid). Mill's central point is that we need freedom of opinion and a diversity of ideas in practice and in circulation in order to become better democrats - to challenge the opinions of others and to challenge our opinions against those held by others. It is through this process that one can learn to recognize the relative nature of opinions and views; to recommend policy that reflects, if not necessarily the interests of all, perhaps the interests of the community of the whole, of the utilitarian interests of the largest number, or perhaps even one's own interests but, at least in this process of debate and discussion, one will presumably have some justifications for endorsing a particular policy option (ibid, pp. 112-113).

Mill's arguments have become widely recognized in terms of the free marketplace of ideas. In such a marketplace, individuals are exposed to a variety of ideas, opinions, and information, and have the ability to select what they desire. It is widely recognized that, in the case of contemporary political information, this marketplace is one that primarily occurs in the mass media (McKenna, 1976). What Mill argues is that we, as a society, have come to adopt certain beliefs as truths when these are really just opinions which have been passed down through generations. We subsequently develop and circulate various labels (i.e. bigot, liberal, communist, etc.) in order to simply discount or affirm various ideas. This will be examined in more detail in chapters three and four, however, it will be useful to preface those ideas here by briefly noting that it is up to the discretion of the media to decide what to present and how to present it. What is important about this for the purposes of the argument at hand is that in addition to *what* is

presented, it is also important to consider *how* things are presented.

Dewey

John Dewey can be considered as following in the intellectual footsteps of J. S. Mill as Dewey takes the view that democracy is not an end in itself, but is rather a means for individual discovery and self-actualization. Dewey argues that individuals are constructed as a result of their ability to participate in the democratic process; that the development of human nature can best occur in the context of a free and open democratic system which enables full access to and widespread participation in the political realm, as well as other contexts such as work and school. The ultimate aim of democracy, according to Dewey, is the production of free human beings associated with one another on terms of equality (Chomsky and Barsamian, 1994). Dewey thus claims that a truly democratic society is one which individuals participate with one another on equal terms and, in addition, there exists the opportunity for flexible and reciprocal interaction between individuals and social institutions.

> "The key-note of democracy as a way of life may be expressed, it seems to me, as the necessity for the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together: which is necessary from the standpoint of both the general social welfare and the full development of human beings as individuals" (Dewey, 1937 p. 37). In turn the "absence of participation tends to produce lack of interest and concern on the part of those shut out. The result is a corresponding lack of effective responsibility:" (ibid p. 75).

Dewey notes that the basic freedoms in our democracy are all, essentially, centered around the ideas of freedom of mind or belief. These are reflected in those

freedoms listed in the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights, of particular importance, according to Dewey, is the freedom of the press as an organ of communication. Dewey claims that these freedoms are guaranteed "because without them individuals are not free to develop and society is deprived of what they might contribute" (Dewey, 1937 p. 75). In *Democracy and Education* (1925), Dewey writes of the importance of exposing individuals to diverse views in a democracy. It is through communication that experience becomes shared between members of society; it is only in this way in which it becomes common experience (Dewey, 1925 p. 11).

According to Dewey, a truly democratic society is one which develops individual interest in social relationships and social control (Dewey, 1925 p. 115) but this can only be possible to the extent individuals are exposed to a broader perspective and have the potential to learn from instances of which one would otherwise be ignorant (ibid p. 145). The type of thinking described by Dewey requires not only exposure to what has been done in the political arena, but links must also be made between what has occurred and the consequences of these actions (ibid, p. 305). In *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), "Dewey wrote persuasively of the need for a system of 'effective and organized inquiry,' and for communication by which knowledge is 'published, shared, socially accessible,' so that it becomes a 'common possession' of the members of the public. Only then will an 'organized, articulate Public' come into being. Only then can democracy come into its own" (Dewey, 1927 pp. 176-184 as quoted in Page, 1996). In a large, diverse society such as the contemporary United States, this can only occur through the mass news media. Following this line of thought, the press is thus essential to individual autonomy

and self-expression (Lichtenberg, 1990 p. 102). Therefore, rather than competing for the lowest common denominator in mass communications, Dewey would claim that the mass news media must strive to provide information which compels the development of all members of society.

In sum, democratic theorists from J. S. Mill to Pateman discuss the circumstances necessary for the creation of democratic citizens. In general, this line of democratic theory maintains that if education and other circumstances are right, it becomes the imperative of democracy to create its citizenry, one aspect of which is that these democratic citizenry be well informed. Effective participatory democracy requires not only willingness on the part of the public, but a public which is aware of and understands the policies proposed and implemented. This role is one to which the mass news media must contribute, particularly in a large, modern, heterogenous society such as the United States (Groombridge, 1972).

> In its role as information source, the media ought not to tell viewers what to think. Instead, news should expose viewers to what others are thinking and doing. The role of the news media should be to present the views of diverse groups involved in or affected by any given issue. If citizens in a democracy are to make informed decisions, they must have access to the range of opinions available on potentially controversial matters. Ideally, people representing different perspectives in this range of opinion should have the opportunity to present their case and perhaps debate those with differing views. Thus, rather than providing a pre-digested view of current events, or one that equates "debate" with the views of the two major political parties, television news can serve as a forum that allows for a broad "exchange of ideas." By providing multiple perspectives on issues and events, television can expose us to the worlds and worldviews of a wide range of people (Croteau and Hoynes, 1994 p. 21).

Construction of Reality

The central theme of the preceding section is the elaboration of the social conditions necessary for the creation of a certain type of citizen; one that is well informed and able to participate effectively in a democratic context. The underlying emphasis on the quality of social discourse and its potential to construct certain types of individuals implies that the conditions necessary for the creation of democratic citizens are not fixed or absolute but continuously remade; that the quality of individual participation in society depends largely on how society is constructed for the individual. The key to this process, as elaborated both above and below, is the role of the mass media in the construction of both individuals and society. As the preceding section has emphasized one side of this reciprocal process, the construction of more effective citizens, this section will emphasize construction of social reality.

The idea of the social construction of reality is perhaps most popularly associated with the ideas of Berger and Luckmann (1966) who note that man is unique among the animals in that the world of man is open to construction and then stands objectified as the reality within which future action occurs; society is a creation of man, of human activity and, in turn, is the objective reality of man (Berger and Luckmann, 1966 p. 49). By simply acting in the social world according to our conception of how this world is, we are in fact making the world conform to our conceptions (Fishman, 1980 pp. 3-4). The recognition that reality is, in fact, a social construction provides, in itself, a critical potential for if reality is indeed a social construction it must necessarily be an ongoing construction and, then, the possibility for change and reformation always exists.

> The construction of reality is an active process. It involves recognition, definition, interpretation, action, and validation through interaction. Communication becomes the vehicle for the creation of society, culture, rules, regulations, behavior, and so on. From such a chain of actions grows a complex and constantly changing matrix of individual and societal expectations (Denton and Woodward, 1990 p. 24).

While the construction of society may occur in the course of individual level interaction, various institutions in society have a disproportionate amount of power to dictate one view of reality as meaningful. Power in this sense is defined as "the ability to define a situation in a particular way and to have others act in accordance with this definition. Reality may be a social construction, but we are not all equal participants in this construction" (Kollock and O'Brien, 1994 p. 303). In the context of the project at hand, this idea is perhaps most obvious in the case of the mass news media and their ability to construct the reality of politics for news spectators (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1990 p. 286; see also Hall, et al. 1978; Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1980; Bennett, 1982). Of particular importance to this study is the medium of television news, both because of its overwhelming popularity as a source of political information and because of the way this political information is constrained in the course of its representation on television.[3] "... We run our lives according to the pictures in our heads. As long as many of these images come from TV news, then the work of transforming events into news is an act of power that touches us all" (Altheide, 1976 pp. 11-12). In essence, what is being argued here is that the mass news media plays a central role in the construction of reality for news spectators. As Luke ntoes, "televised reality is reality" (Luke p. 140).

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[3] This will be examined in greater detail in chapter two.

Contemporary democracy is played out on the spectacle of television; participation is watching it on television. "Politics is lived as watching and listening to the electronic media. The "public sphere" is no longer the city square, an urban commons, city hall, or town meetings. It is instead a constantly shifting mediascape fused in the focal field of a remote Minicam broadcasting live to the viewers'/voters' television screens" (Luke, 1989 p. 145). To wish this was not the case does nothing to make it so. For instance, Habermas's conception of the public sphere emphasizes abstract and formal conversation which ignores the complexities and contradictions of meaning production as well as the complexities and contradictions of social settings (Habermas, 1984, 1987). One must resist the temptation to get hung up on some idyllic notion of face-to-face communication when we live in an electronically mediated world. "The concept of the public sphere must have evocative power, providing us with concrete visions of the democratic society which are enabling rather than disabling" (Dahlgren, 1991 pp. 6-9).

News Media Research

This project is concerned with how the news media construct political reality and how this reality is reconstructed by news spectators. What this project demonstrates is the importance of the reciprocal relationship between these two realms which hinges primarily on a theory of adult cognitive differentiation which will be elaborated in later chapters. Neither the role of the news in the construction of reality nor the topic of news media effects are new to political science. Consequently, this section will briefly

examine, in turn, these areas of research in order to more clearly elaborate what this project adds to the academic literature and how this will be demonstrated in the following chapters.

News Media as a Construction of Reality

Given the arguments above, it can thus be seen that in a large heterogenous society, the mass news media play a central role in the construction of the reality of politics for news spectators.[4] It is in this realm where one can judge whether the democratic ideals, as discussed above, are being met. In a society such as the United States, individuals have little direct contact with the realm of national politics and are therefore highly dependent upon the construction of political reality offered by the mass news media. As noted by Walter Lippmann (1922), the press is responsible for constructing "the pictures in our heads."

> There are two main aspects to what occurs. On the one hand, there is the provision of a consistent picture of the social world which may lead the audience to adopt this version of reality, a reality of 'facts' and of norms, values and expectations. On the other hand, there is a continuing and selective interaction between self and the media which plays a part in shaping the individual's own behavior and self-concept. We learn what our social environment is and respond to the knowledge that we acquire. (McQuail, 1977 p. 81)

Indeed, given the lack of perceived importance of political information to the daily lives of contemporary citizens, essentially all such information, either direct or indirect is gleaned from the mass news media (Quillian, 1991). "News stories often play a crucial

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[4] Data reinforcing this claim are presented in the next chapter.

part in shaping the perceptions of reality of millions of people in all walks of life" (Graber, 1989). The images of the world provided by the television news media are extremely persuasive because they are almost always accepted unquestioningly as accurate portrayals of reality and consequently, "serve as fictions to guide our thoughts and actions" (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1992 p. 55).

Given the power of the news media, from the perspective of the lay citizen, what is presented on the news media is the reality of politics. This line of thought draws heavily on the tradition of meaning-oriented journalistic scholarship most closely aligned with James Carey (1989) who defines communication as, "the symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed." The main theme of this line of thought is that the news media play a central role in the creation of cultural meaning, particularly in the realm of politics (Reeves and Campbell, 1994 pp. 6-7). Without alternative direct sources of information on the issue at hand, the news spectators are highly reliant on the reality created by the mass media. Furthermore, the foundations of meaning are largely social and one must make sense of the world in terms of "collective interaction, intersubjectivity, cultural patterns, and so forth" and when examining how political meanings come to be shared in contemporary society, the emphasis must first be placed on how meaning is constructed in the television news (Dahlgren 1988 p. 286).

Fishman (1980) uses the example of the construction of a crime wave in New York City to demonstrate the role of the news media as a pivotal component in the creation of a largely common reality for the public. He notes that the mass news media do not necessarily create specific criminal acts, but, depending on how these acts are

reported or constructed or *re*presented, the media create a reality of this topic in people's heads. Even while this reality may consist of "things of the mind", these things of the mind are very "real in their consequences" (Fishman, 1980 p. 11).

As the news spectators react to the reality presented, they in turn create reality; "we, as a people, are collectively and simultaneously the products and producers of our world" (Reeves and Campbell, 1994 p. 7). Subsequently, the reality of any particular issue differs depending on one's understanding of the social and political world and the resulting perspective through which one views this issue. Reality thus differs across groups; what is real is based on the knowledge of what is real or rather what is the truth.[5]

> Individuals, groups, and societies tend to place interpretations upon reality - interpretation which may or may not be true in an absolute sense. These definitions, explanations and assertions are constructed to help us make sense of those things and events that we experience and to help us decide how to respond to those experiences. In the face of uncertainty and ambiguity, those social constructions themselves are frequently based on "fashionable" and therefore changeable assumptions and value judgments (Northcott, 1992 pp. 1-2, as quoted in Rochefort and Cobb, 1994 pp. 5-6).

The claim made here is that it is how politics are constructed on the mass media and reconstructed by individual news spectators that dictate the degree to which the ideals of democracy are being met. Participatory democracy requires more than the opportunity for individuals to participate politically, not to downplay the significance of this opportunity as it is one which many around the world are denied. Nor is the requirement for participatory democracy met simply by the provision of information about political

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5 It will be demonstrated in chapter four that, as a limiting aspect, this, in part, depends on one's mode of cognition.

events and consequences. Rather, in order to meet the democratic ideals outlined above, political reality must be constructed in a way that allows news spectators to appreciate the link between the public and the private spheres (Pateman, 1970 p. 110). "It is a commonplace to assert that public communication lies at the heart of the democratic process; that citizens require, if their equal access to the vote is to have any substantive meaning, equal access also to sources of information and equal opportunities to participate in the debates from which political decisions rightly flow." Questions about the structure of the mass media are properly political questions (Garnham, 1986 p. 37)

What is thus important in a democracy is not that the news media present snippets of "accurate" information or that this information be presented in terms of the lowest common denominator of the audience in terms of interest or abilities, but that the political information be presented in a way that provides the electorate with the information necessary for them to carry out their democratic responsibilities and even compels the development of democratic citizens. This would include not only the presentation of political information in the context of the ongoing practice of politics as well as the larger socio-historical context upon which this political practice rests but also the presentation of a variety of views on social and political issues as well as a sense of the various perspectives and values underlying these views. The degree to which the mass news media meet these ideals is the subject of the following chapter.

News Media Effects

Given the importance of the mass news media in the construction of the reality of

politics it is useful to examine how the academic literature has examined the effects of these constructions on news spectators. This line of research began with an examination of the role of the mass media in attitude formation. Following World War II, scholars turned their attention to the mass news media and its power to influence and shape the political attitudes of the populace. This increasing attention was predicated on the increasing prominence of these media throughout society and the corresponding increase in the mediation of politics. Early news media studies hypothesized that such pervasive and seemingly powerful media must play a major role in the formation of political opinions and attitudes (Lazarsfeld, et al., 1944; Berelson, et al., 1948). These hypotheses were based on the assumption that such pervasive stimuli would influence all members of the population equally. The studies sought to measure how various news stimuli affected the political opinions and beliefs of the population of certain locales as a whole. However, these studies found no significant change in political attitudes or ideology that could be measured in response to specific media stimuli. In retrospect, this is not necessarily surprising given the methodological problems involved such as isolating news media reports as a causal factor in attitude change, accounting for pre-existing differences between subjects, and holding for self-reporting bias (Bartels, 1993).

In response to these earlier works Rivers, Schramm, and Christians (1957) provided the analogy of the news media's effect on public opinion to the formation of a river delta. They maintained that the media, like the river, continuously flows along depositing minute bits of information which, when compiled over a long enough period of time, form the soil of public opinion. Despite the work by Rivers, et al. and others like

it, many theorists continue to find media influence overrated. Typically these works are reminiscent of the "limited effects" media paradigm developed by Paul Lazarsfeld and others at Columbia University in the 1940s which was further developed by Katz. This approach emphasized the forces of individual selectivity, perception, and recall as a more than significant counterbalance to the limited forces of the media. However, during this same time, researchers at MIT were adopting development-communication theory - the view that communications were powerful agents of social change. Indeed this group, active during the Truman Administration, and their descendants formed the backbone of U.S. foreign policy whose objective was to thwart socialism while integrating non-socialist states into an international market economy - in which the U.S. would obviously be the dominant player. These theorists include: Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm, Ithiel de Sola Pool, Lucien Pye, etc. As there was still no clear experimental evidence demonstrating the power of the mass media to change opinions or attitudes, the 'limited-effects' adherents made up much of the field at home, however those engaging in foreign policy had no doubt that modern media and new information technologies had great potential influence. Likewise, the subjects of this influence, third world cultural figures, were similarly convinced that this tactic was effective.

Since the 1940s, other researchers it has become more widely accepted that the limited effects paradigm takes an overly simplistic view of news media effects and fails to address the more subtle and insidious nature of news media effects. For instance, Lee and Solomon (1991) note that, "the printed pages we read, and the broadcasts we tune in, are said to mirror society. But mass media also continue to *shape* our society -

reinforcing certain attitudes and actions while discouraging others" (ibid, p. 228).[6]

> Perhaps the most important thing to remember about watching television is that it is a cumulative process. Its real power comes not from an isolated program here or there but from the steady drumbeat of its day-in and day-out telecasts. The more habitual television watching becomes, the more taken for granted its images, the more it affects how we think and what we think about. Because we often watch television in a distracted state, we are only half aware of the picture dancing before our eyes. In like fashion, television's spoken text rarely invites studied reflection. Instead, its flow carries us along. As we drift lazily across the social and political landscapes, we pay less and less attention to any one programming segment and are therefore more and more susceptible to the psychological aggregate building up within us. Because the television set is on so often in the average American home, its sights and sounds become almost atmospheric. (Hart, 1994 p. 120)

However, this is not to say that the television news is accepted unquestioningly or has the power to change specific beliefs. People have been presented with information over the course a lifetime and have developed relatively well-founded opinions. We can assume that, for the most part, the presentation of episodic scenarios through the news media won't necessarily alter long term beliefs or schemas, particularly when these beliefs are based on personal experience or from respected sources (Graber, 1984 p. 76). Indeed, this would explain why much of the traditional political communication research mentioned above failed to find any specific changes in individual opinion or behavior as a

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6 There are numerous studies describing how the mass media presents stereotypical portrayals of women (DeLauretis, 1987), minorities (Stuart Hall, 1985), foreigners (Parenti, 1992), etc. A perfect example is one provided by John Wayne who once said in *The Searchers* (1956), "there's humans and then there's Comanches" (Parenti, 1992). The perpetuation of these stereotypes does not occur in just one show but in the huge amount of television presented over the course of a lifetime. For instance, George Gerbner's influential study (1986) found that "the inaccurate portrayals of American life provided to us by television" has led heavy television viewers to view the world as a more violent place in which people are solely looking out for their own best interests. These viewers also expressed more racist and sexist attitudes and overestimated the number of lawyers, physicians and athletes and underestimated the number of the elderly.

result of exposure to news media messages.

Subsequently, rather than looking at the news media as a direct source of attitude or opinion change, more contemporary studies have examined other news media effects and found widespread and important results.[7] One of the more powerful works empirically demonstrating the role of the television news media in politics has been Iyengar and Kinder (1987). The primary finding of Iyengar and Kinder is the agenda setting role of television news; that is, that while the mass news media may not tell us what to think, they do a very good job of telling us what to think about. Through a series of experiments, as well as an analysis of time series data, Iyengar and Kinder find that television news plays a major role in inferring which issue viewers feel is of primary importance. In presenting their results, they find that, "such a dramatic shift in priorities, induced by such a modest and unobtrusive alteration in television news coverage, constitutes powerful confirmation of the agenda-setting hypothesis." (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987 p. 18) This effect is neither momentary nor permanent, as individuals become concerned with what is accentuated today while they gradually forget about what was presented last month.

Doris Graber takes a distinctly psychological examination of how people assess the news media in her (1984) longitudinal panel study which examines how individuals "tame the information tide." Graber demonstrates that new spectators make sense of news stories in terms of personal understandings of the topic at hand (Graber p. 15). The

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[7] These studies will be introduced here and examined in more detail in the concluding chapter.

basic gist of Graber's work is that Graber finds that people think about the news schematically. While they usually fail to learn great detail from the mass media, what they do learn is integrated into their cognitive maps enabling them to navigate the political waters with a fair degree of ability. After all, the news is often episodic and fragmented to begin with, this requires that news stories be made sense of in light of an individual's schemas that have been constructed from direct and mediated experience over a lifetime.

Bennett's (1988) study addresses the paradox of the existence of both an abundance of news outlets and information sources and a mass public which remains confused and uninformed. Bennett believes that the problem lies not with the citizens, but with the nature of the news itself. He demonstrates that the news is fragmented, superficial, hard to remember, lacking in meaning, and only rarely provides solid explanations and clear conclusions (Bennett, 1988 p. 60). Subsequently, efforts to become informed can be counterproductive; the more news one consumes, the more narrow and stereotyped understandings of reality are reinforced (ibid p. 2). This is demonstrated in a study which examines the degree to which individuals accepted the news at face value despite certain discrepancies resulting from various news reporting practices.

Iyengar (1991) examines the relationship between the complexity of information in which a news media message is framed and how news spectators attribute blame or responsibility for the issue at hand. Iyengar differentiates television news stories as either episodic or thematic. The former is largely event-oriented and presents issue in terms of

concrete instances and individuals. Iyengar finds that this type of framing tends to elicit individualistic attributions of responsibility. On the other hand, thematic framing places issue in a more general or abstract context and tends to elicit more societal attributions from the news audience. Iyengar finds that the television news is heavily episodic and this plays a significant role in news spectators' attribution of responsibility for both the problem and the solution of the issue at hand. This discourages viewers from attributing responsibility in a way that would allow for greater public control over representatives and policies. Iyengar concludes that, in the long run, episodic framing leads to trivialization of issues and erosion of electoral accountability.

> "The portrayal of recurring issues as unrelated events prevents the public from cumulating the evidence toward any logical, ultimate consequence. By diverting attention from societal and governmental responsibility, episodic framing glosses over national problems and allows public officials to ignore problems whose remedies entail burdens to their constituents (Iyengar, 1991 p. 143)."

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) also address the structure of news media messages and the effect these messages have on news spectators. They hypothesize that the mass news media's preoccupation with the strategy of political actors rather than the substance of political issues should affect the way news spectators address the realm of politics. Through a series of experiments of varying but limited levels of significance, Cappella and Jamieson find that the mass news media's repeated depiction of political actors as agents who act in their own self-interest rather than in the best interest of society as a whole engenders, among news spectators, a "spiral of cynicism" toward politics in general. The reason the news media present political actors in this manner will be

addressed in greater detail in the following chapter and the Cappella and Jamieson study as well as the other contemporary news studies addressed here will be re-examined in the final chapter in light of the findings of this dissertation.

For much of this century, news media research was hampered by overly-grandiose theories of news media influence leading to further methodological problems. The results of these early experiments were rarely clear and often contradicted each other. More recent research has employed more sophisticated methodological tools and theories resulting in demonstrations of media's power and influence in areas other than overt opinion or attitude change. These studies have resulted in an expanding pool of knowledge in this area that will, no doubt, beget further research gains.

Thesis

While the news media do undoubtedly play a central role in the construction of political reality, there is another side to this argument that also needs to be developed. What will be demonstrated below is that individuals have different conceptions of reality not merely as a function of different stimuli to which they have been exposed (such as that provided by the mass news media), but also as a function of the distinctly different ways individuals process this information. One of the central problems with most news media research is that the psychological side of the equation is severely undeveloped. The claim made here is that what is of primary importance to news media research is the manner in which individuals reconstruct the political reality presented in the news media. This both departs from and adds to earlier news media research. What will be

demonstrated in this dissertation is that all individuals do not reconstruct news media messages in the same manner.

Most political communications research treats the audience as an undifferentiated whole. To the extent differentiation within the audience has been acknowledged, this has generally been limited to gender, education, occupation, race, political affiliation, news media consumption, etc. (i.e. Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Iyengar, 1991; Graber, 1984). Traditionally, political science research has emphasized similar external demographic characteristics. In part this results from the discipline's emphasis on large-scale survey research and, in part, this reflects the discipline's liberal heritage which assumes that all individuals reason in a similar or identical manner. This dissertation contends that a full understanding of the influence of the mass mediated political communications requires an examination of how these messages are interpreted by individuals as a function of their mode of cognitive reasoning. This is examined here utilizing one particular line of research which has demonstrated that individuals reason differently (see Rosenberg, 1988; ibid, forthcoming; Braunwarth, 1996). These differences are explored through the use of in-depth interviews examining how individuals think about various social and political issues. This is to be distinguished from attitudinal differences; the point is not whether individual subjects are liberal or conservative, materialist or post-materialist, but whether individuals have the ability to orient to a more or less systematic understanding of the social world. This dissertation will show that these cognitive differences determine whether or not individuals are more or less susceptible to news media effects or manipulations. These cognitive differences reflect discrete levels of development. It is

as a function of these modes of reasoning that adults interpret the political world, including political information disseminated through the medium of television news.

This is not to suggest that individuals simply think on their own. They live in the context of a culture which provides the rhetoric and creates the categories and terms for various social stimuli. In the case of political information, this is primarily conducted in the realm of the mass news media. Individuals can obviously function in this social context, however they are limited in the degree to which they are able to cognitively reconstruct the various understandings and values underlying various stimuli; some simply mimic those stimuli and assess and act in the social world accordingly while others recognize the relative and reciprocal understandings and values underlying various positions and beliefs.

Traditional democratic theory assumes that citizens are able to access useful, objective political information through the news media, and carry out their democratic responsibilities accordingly (Curran, 1991; Lippmann, 1920; Glasser, 1984; Schiller, 1989). Those skeptical of the benign nature of this process assume that the news media is either too powerful or news spectators are too passive or ignorant or some combination of the two (Marcuse, 1964; Parenti, 1993; Schiller, 1989; Campbell, et al., 1960; Converse, 1964). The power of these arguments centers on the ability of individuals to glean accurate and useful political information from the news media. This dissertation will provide a means of explaining the degree to which this can be accomplished by drawing on adult developmental psychology to demonstrate that there are consistent and widespread differences in levels of adult cognitive reasoning. Individuals interpret the

reality of politics constructed on the news media as a function of their level of cognitive reasoning. It will be demonstrated that the mass news media provide a disservice to a large section of the population to the degree it dis-empowers news spectators by not providing the context and complexity necessary for all to draw the political conclusions that are in their own best interest. While the mass media are often thought of as a source of entertainment, they can also be a source of understanding; their broad appeal can be used to enable as well as to entertain. For many of the reasons that will be addressed in the following chapters, the news media in general, and the medium of television news in particular, fail in this regard.

A relatively small portion of the populace systematically evaluates political messages and places this information in the social context of competing values. Most individuals address the social world in the immediate, concrete present to which they link relevant concrete experiences and schematic understandings and make sense of the current situation in terms of their own understandings and schemas.[8] As this latter group of individuals address social reality at the level of the concrete immediacies as presented to them, they are limited in their ability to recognize the interconnected relationships between these experiences and are thus largely unable to notice that the news media presents a necessarily limited *re*presentation of the complexity of social and political reality as their social understanding occurs at the level of the individual representations and not at the relations and patterns between them. Subsequently, while often skeptical

[8] This cognitive argument will be examined in much greater detail in chapter four.

of sensationalism in the news media and cynical about politics in general, it will be demonstrated that these media spectators are quite susceptible to the subtle and pervasive presentations of particular social and political definitions, categorizations, and representations in the news media. This is most obvious to the extent the news media fail to provide a range of meanings for the issues they present, or fail to present these messages with some contextual information whereby the full range of meaning surrounding the issue might be better understood.[9] As the vast majority of the citizenry rely on the news media to present them with political information, this topic is of obvious importance regarding the ability of individuals to make effective political decisions.

The aim of this dissertation is to provide an understanding of the relationship between cognitive reasoning and the mass news media, in particular nationally televised news. The central question that will be addressed here is: is the audience captivated by what is presented in the news or do they recognize the complexity absent from the spectacle of, in particular, televisual politics? The easy lesson to be drawn from what follows is: that it largely depends on the individual's cognitive ability, but no answer is as simple as that. One cannot overlook the role played by the news providers, the political actors, and the medium of television itself. The reduction of politics to bumper-sticker slogans, self-interested definitions of reality, and the valorization of the image is not new to the latter half of the 20th century. What is new(s) is the degree to which this has come to constitute the reality of politics for society at large. This has been made possible in

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[9] See Graber (1984) or Edelman (1988).

large part by television and it is in this way that McLuhan' claim of "the medium is the message" has reached fruition.

Overview

In sum, the mass news media play a central role in a democracy, both as the primary source of political information in contemporary society and as a means of enabling democratic participation as outlined in the participatory theory of democracy above. Ideally, the mass news media should both keep individuals informed of what is occurring in the realm of politics and provide some context and recognition of the relative nature of various values and understandings that might allow news spectators to develop as democratic citizens. This dissertation will be looking at the mass news media in terms relative to its central role in democratic theory and democratic practice. This examination is driven by two different theoretical perspectives, social constructionism and cognitive developmentalism, which will be examined relative to one another.

Chapter two will examine how mass news media representations are constructed. The medium of television is accentuated because this is the primary source of political information for the majority of society and because the structure of the political representations on the television news are clearly constrained by various news production practices. This is examined through a complexity analysis of 200 television news stories.

Chapter three will examine the resulting construction of political reality offered by these mass news media. In particular, this chapter examines the political rhetoric that is represented on the television news. Attention is given to how the news influences the

political setting allowing and even compelling political actors to strategically define political issues. Working in tandem, these two forces result in the transmission of political rhetoric that ignores the complexity of social and political issues as well as the role of larger social forces. This is examined through a deconstructionist analysis of a California Ballot Initiative, Proposition 209, the "civil rights" initiative, as well as how this issue is represented on a network news broadcast.

Chapter four introduces the paradigm of cognitive development mentioned above. Aspects of the theory that particularly relate to how individuals address and process information about the social and political world are emphasized. In addition, this chapter also provides a theoretical elaboration, informed by cognitive developmentalism, of how individuals come to adopt different views of reality in contemporary society; the degree to which their ontological security is dependent on this view of reality; and the degree to which this is influenced by political representations on the news.

Chapter five empirically demonstrates that differences in cognitive reasoning make a profound difference in the subjects' ability to assess the social and political world through mediated political communications, in this case the medium of television news. The disembedded and decontextualized representation of political issues addressed in chapter two becomes particularly important when it is examined how news spectators cognitively assess this information. Subsequently this medium is used as the stimulus for the empirical analysis in this chapter.

Chapter six then examines the implications of these results and their significance in three areas: academic research, political practice, and democratic theory. In addition,

this chapter briefly examines the relative ratio of the different modes of cognition throughout the population as well as the potential for development on both the part of the news media and the news spectators.

Significance

This project is central to both political communication and cognitive development literatures. It provides a new focus and a new method. It examines the interplay between the structure of the message and the structure of its assimilation. In addition, it addresses this focus through a methodology that is both qualitative and interpretive. The powerful results obtained demonstrate the power, relevance and importance of this paradigm of audience differentiation (See Rosenberg, 1988; ibid, forthcoming). Given that the political communications literature is defined by subject rather than methodology as well as the potential usefulness of this research in an area to which attention has been lacking, it is expected that this work will play an integral role in this field. Not only will the application of this paradigm aid in the explanation of anomalous results found in the studies mentioned above, but this project also provides an application and validation of a cognitive developmental framework that applies the theoretical work of Piaget to adult cognitive development.

Chapter Two

The News Media

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the mass news media as this is the realm in which the reality of politics is constructed for the mass public. The medium of television news will be addressed in particular as this is the primary source of political information in contemporary society and, as such, this is the medium in which it is appropriate to examine the degree to which the individuals are being apprised of political practice in a manner that is conducive to their ability to undertake their democratic responsibilities as addressed in the previous chapter. This chapter will first address the relative importance of the television news as a source of political information. This will be examined not only in the context of other mass news media but also relative to interpersonal communication. This chapter will then address how political information is transformed in the course of its mediation through the television news and other mass news media. This transformation is the result of a number of factors - culture, economic, tradition, etc. - each of which will be examined in turn. It will be demonstrated that this transformation results in the presentation of political issues as, among other things, isolated pieces of information with little context of either contemporary political issues or larger social issues and values. Thus, it will be demonstrated here that the news media in general, and the network television news in particular, offer disembedded, decontextualized, and morselized representations of political issues which ignore the complexity of social and political issues as well as the role of larger social forces. In

order to empirically evaluate the degree to which the television news re-presents political issues in a fragmented manner, an analysis of 200 network television news stories is conducted and finds that only 23% provided any level of explanation of the context of the news representation and this was invariably cast in terms of very simple and uni-directional cause and effect terms. As will be explained in more detail in later chapters, these qualities of television news and other news media representations have very important implications for how individuals make sense of politics in contemporary society.

The argument that follows takes a different tack from most traditional television news media research examining news media influence. This chapter does not set out with the intention of demonstrating that the news media are biased to either the left or the right within the context of contemporary American politics as the answer to this question depends largely on the ideological position from which one is viewing the news media. An excellent example of this can be found through a brief examination of media watchdog groups who take it upon themselves to search out and expose bias in the news media. Accuracy in the Media (AIM) and Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) both claim to be driven by the higher ideals of fairness and accuracy yet each finds diametrically opposed biases in the news. AIM claims that the liberal media are completely controlled and corrupted by secular humanists pushing a various liberal agendas. On the other hand, FAIR claims that the news media is little more than a propaganda arm of the corporate and economic elite that own or otherwise control the news media and use them to push their conservative agenda (Reeves and Campbell, 1994

p. 31). A more fruitful way of examining this subject would be through a "logical" argument based on what one would expect news media messages to look like given an examination of the various factors influencing their production, rather than an observation-based theory of news media bias (Quillian, 1991). However, what is claimed here is that the news is biased structurally - against the complex representation of political issues.

The Importance of Television News

In Iyengar and Kinder's ground-breaking work on agenda setting in the mass media they begin by noting that, "our purpose here is to establish that television news is in fact an educator virtually without peer, that it shapes the American public's conception of political life in pervasive ways; that television news is news that matters." They maintain that the public is dependent upon the mass media and especially the medium of television news to inform them about many items of national and global importance with which they come into little direct contact. "This dependence gives the media an enormous capacity to shape public thinking" (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987 p. 2).[1] The relative importance of television news is in part due to the corresponding decline in social and political organizations which traditionally provided powerful social and political contexts for the construction of political understandings (Putnam, 1996; Schiller, 1989; Mander, 1978; etc.). For instance, in the political realm, this process has been

[1] This argument was first made, persuasively, by Walter Lippmann (1920).

exacerbated by the declining importance of political parties (Wattenberg, 1994; McCombs, et al., 1991 pp. 11-17).

Since the advent of television, individuals in the United States have become increasingly estranged from a non-mediated, direct experience of social reality (Putnam, 1995; McKibben, 1993; Mander, 1978). Much of this is due to the advent and widespread dissemination of television which has gradually eclipsed other sources of political information including personal communication (Lenart, 1994; Graber, 1984 p. 101). A 1991 study found that around 60% of the population claim that television is their *sole* source of political information. The balance either relied primarily on newspapers (around 20%) or on some mixture of news media sources (Ansolabehere, et al. 1993 p. 44). Similarly, a 1995 Roper poll reports that more than 70% of the U.S. public turns to television as its main source of news (*Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook*, 1995). According to a study by Graber (1984), radio, conversation, news magazines, etc. all ranked much farther behind the television news and newspapers as sources of political information (Graber, 1984 p. 84). These statistics are not really surprising once one considers that 98.6% of the households in the U.S. have at least one television set (Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1990) which, in the average American home, is turned on an average of seven to nine hours a day (McKibben, 1993 p. 18; Parenti, 1992 p. 10).

In addition, people tend to find the television news to be far more credible than the news presented in newspapers (55% v. 21%), while people find news radio or news magazines to be far less credible (both under 10%) (Ansolabehere, et al., 1993). In

addition, Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) find that the television news does a far better job at getting across low-salience issues and people often learn more from television than from other news media outlets. People actually learn more from television news than from newspapers for most issues (Bennett, 1995 p. 170). It appears that, as a result of its attention-grabbing format, the visual presence of a trusted commentator, and its ecumenical presentation of information, that television is by far the most important source of political information in contemporary society (Neuman, et al., 1992; Ansolabehere, et al., 1993; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; etc.). Social psychology has long noted that the more credible a source of information the more likely that the information offered will be accepted uncritically (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1992 pp. 85-90; Rosenberg, 1996, p. 57). In the case of the network television news, political information is presented as concrete material facts with no ambiguity or uncertainty about the validity, objectivity, or comprehensiveness of these facts. Thus, while the television news may be criticized as sensational and overdramatic, it is still relied upon by the vast majority of its audience as the primary means by which they are informed of what is occurring in the political realm. This reinforces the construction of an "objective" social and political reality and playing an integral role in the transmission and maintenance of various social norms and meanings (see Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Edelman, 1988; Ansolabehere, et al., 1993; Gamson, 1992 and many others).

Traditionally, political communication research has treated the influence of news media and interpersonal communication as competitive. Thus, it is also important that the power of the television news be evaluated relative to the power of interpersonal

communication as a source of political information. The importance of interpersonal communication in political communication research is in no small part due to the seminal research by Lazarsfeld, et al. in *The People's Choice* (1944) which sought to measure the direct effects of media stimuli on attitude change. What they found was that interpersonal communication was a far more powerful source of attitude change and persuasion. This prompted the development of the "minimal effects" paradigm of news media power and popularized the use of a "two-step" model of political information in which individuals relied on "opinion leaders" to monitor information and share their views with others. By structuring the argument in this way, the two sources of political information, the media and interpersonal communication, are situated as competing sources.

At the time *The People's Choice* was written, television was still a novel technology with little widespread use. Since that time, the public's exposure to television as a source of information, both overtly political and otherwise, has mushroomed dramatically. Through the use of experiments and surveys surrounding the 1988 Presidential election, Lenart (1994) clearly shows that the news media and interpersonal communications should be thought of as working in concert rather than conflict. To make the assumption that the media and interpersonal communication are working as competitors, one would have to assume that opinion leaders would have access to information that lay citizens did not and that these opinion leaders would take a persuasive stance in opposition to a " position" taken by the media. However, neither of these assumptions holds up under analysis. For instance, given the standards of

professional journalism as currently practiced, major news outlets go to great lengths to appear objective and neutral. Even if mediated news messages were to advocate a particular position, one must assume that this must work in the same direction as opinion leaders some significant portion of the time simply by chance (Lenart, 1994 p. 7).[2] In addition, the day-to-day machinations of politics, particularly at the national level, are not practiced in a way that is observable to those not directly involved; even Lazarsfeld's "opinion leaders" are going to receive their information directly from the news media before passing it on to other individuals. While this line of argumentation may seem a bit constrained, it is presented here in order to stress the importance of the mass news media in the construction of political reality for opinion leaders and lay citizens alike in contemporary society. People do not receive information that is free from the influence of the media merely because it has been passed through another individual. "Media communications not only reach every person directly but reach, and shape, and always have reached and shaped, the whole store of cognitive processing and information of each person one of us knows, or ever has known - and for the most part has read or even read about" (Quillian, 1991). In an extensive panel study of news processing, Graber (1984) found interpersonal communication to be a fairly rare source of political information despite the fact that panelists reported that they discussed two-thirds of the stories with other people. It appears that while interpersonal communication may have added details,

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[2] This argument is presented in order to evaluate the relative importance of interpersonal communication and the news media. This dissertation is not essentially concerned with how the news media changes attitudes or in what direction but with the structure of the message and how this sets the tone for political debate.

the information discussed had already been made known to the discussants via the mass news media (Graber, 1984 p. 85). Subsequently, this dissertation agrees with the position of Lenart (1994)[3] who describes interpersonal communication as a qualifier of news media effects rather than a competitor.

> Television has overridden the "two-step flow" and bypassed the "opinion leaders." Most of the talk that most Americans now see and hear about politics comes to them in passing as they sit in front of their television sets after the local news and weather forecast have been given and before their favorite "sit-com" or cop show comes on. So for them, if not for the small minority of political buffs, televised political reality *is* "real reality." (Ranney, 1983 p. 30)

Limitations of the News Media

The news media and, in particular, the national network television news, play an important role in the presentation of political information; their political representations largely shape and create the reality of mass politics.[4] As these media are so heavily relied upon as sources of political information, this is true whether one accepts their political representations at face value or not. However, the news media do not simply mirror what occurs in the political realm but necessarily *mediate* the information they *re*present. Given various structural, normative, and economic limitations, the political issues represented must be transformed in the course of their mediation. Due to the complexity of the meaning-rich social and political environment of a modern multi-cultural society and constraints in the news-gathering and dissemination process, the news media are

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[3] As well as Douglas, Westley, and Chaffee, 1970; Rogers, 1969; etc. as cited in Lenart, 1994, p. 7.

[4] See Ansolabehere, et al., 1993; Gamson, 1992; Graber, 1989 p. 353; Edelman, 1988; and others.

necessarily limited in the range of meaning that will be presented in their representation of reality; these representations are necessarily less than comprehensive. Thus, as news representations implicitly overlook alternative constructions of reality and disembed social and political issues from their historical and material context, these fragmented constructions fail to reflect the complexity and integration of the social and political world.[5] While there is certainly a world of politics that does not appear in the news - the minutiae of debate and compromise, the effects of past legislation, etc. - for the majority of Americans the only political reality of any relevance is the mediated reality of the nightly news and, to a lessor extent, other news media. Political legislation is lengthy and complex, the debate and compromise leading to its passage occur largely outside of the eyes of the public. What is accessible to news spectators are the sound-bites and snippets offered by the news providers and the political actors covered by the news media. For the purposes of the argument presented here, it matters little whether there is some kind of objective reality of political issues behind what is represented or whether the mediated messages are the sole reality, as it is these messages which construct the political reality of news media spectators. While the news media may be criticized as too sensational, too trivial, too negative, too cynical or too biased to the left or the right, they are still relied upon by the vast majority of its audience as the primary means by which they are informed of what is occurring in the political realm, as noted above (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Edelman, 1988; Ansolabehere, et al., 1993; Gamson, 1992). In other words, news

[5] See Mander, 1978; Bennett, 1995; Lee and Solomon, 1990; etc.

information is already distorted as it is transformed in order "fit" the information through the various news media; this information is necessarily pre-processed by news providers and shaped by various news traditions. These changes have important implications for the type and quality of political information presented.

News Media Reporting Practices

One of the primary forces shaping the news is the evolving tradition of the news media reporting practices of journalists. This has become particularly important with the rise of "professionalism" in journalism this century. As a result of this trend, journalists and news media organizations have adopted a number of news gathering practices, professional norms and codes of conduct all of which have a significant influence on how the news is gathered and presented (Bennett, 1995 pp. 117-127). For instance, the complexity and range of meaning surrounding whatever political issue reported must be processed to fit one of a small number of standardized formats or frameworks making a 'good story' (Bennett, 1995 p. 119; Gans, 1979). Gurevitch and Blumler (1990) note that the mass news media molds political information into "standardized formats and conventions which control what journalists can do in conveying ideas to the audience while at the same time reflecting how much time and space media organizations consider they can afford to devote to the examination of social and political issues (p. 283). Subsequently, political and social debate is presented as a conflict between dominant and recognizable social categories - the Democrats versus the Republicans, one ethnic group against another, the United States versus some other country, etc. Political actors, such as

the President, are presented as personally responsible for distant or abstract political events such as the success of foreign policy endeavors, the state of the nation, or the robustness of the economy. Relationships between political actors and between these actors and the relative populace are presented in hierarchical terms. Thus, the frames and formats used by the television news simplify a complex world into simplistic terms which in turn provide the basis for the news spectators' reconstructions of political reality.

News organization practices become further standardized through 'pack journalism' as editors send reporters to cover the same centers of politics and commerce in an attempt to gather a predictable daily amount of news no matter how many "significant" events occur that day. In addition, the practice of covering the same breaking news assures news editors that they will not be "scooped" by other news organizations (Bennett, 1995 p. 123; McCombs, et al., 1991 pp. 28-31). The over-riding emphasis on getting breaking news has further repercussions. The emphasis on time has eclipsed an emphasis on reporting practices such as researching the issue and developing a coherent understanding of the relevant information, facts, or data that would allow for even a cursory re-presentation of the issue with some sort of context. "Time works against understanding, coherence, and even meaning" (Postman and Powers, 1992 p. 48).

> The search for novelty and entertainment leads to fragmented discontinuous news that focuses on the present and ignores the past. The here and now is what counts most. When breaking news is published as quickly as possible, the background needed to place a story into context is often missing. Clarifications are usually buried in the back pages. On television, snippets of news may drive home an easily understandable theme, such as "Washington is a mess" or "The inner city is decaying," whereas individual news items may remain blurred. (Graber, 1997 p. 119)

Such pressures often lead to a reliance on official source and the reporting of "pseudo-events" such as "photo-ops" (Hansen, 1991; Graber, 1984 p. 91; ibid, 1997 p. 113; Bennett, 1995; etc.). These are political events which are planned for the sole purpose of being reported. They are staged by political actors who use powerful symbols and images to reinforce their construction of reality which often have little to do with actual political circumstances (Bennett, 1995 p. 91). In short, rather than providing other explanations of reality, accepted news media reporting practices require journalists to adhere to organizational norms and practices that transform complex social phenomena into simple, straightforward, formats (Bennett, 1995 p. 7; Neuman, Just, and Crigler, 1992 p. 112).[6]

Paradoxically, the result of this movement toward professionalism in journalism has been the passive re-presentation of political information as presented by political figures with little or no commentary or context. Unfortunately, this often results in the manipulation of the news media by political actors who use the news media as disseminators of their rhetorical claims and attacks (Bennett, 1995 pp. 162-163). In their presentation of the news, the press has a difficult time dealing with substantive political issues in the first place, in part because of their adherence to a self-described "norm of objectivity"[7] that virtually prohibits the analysis of issue stances. This is largely because

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[6] This phenomenon is strikingly presented by Iyengar (1991 p. 136) in his discussion of the episodic presentation of the television news. He also notes that to the extent an issue can't be reduced to concrete events, it will seldom be covered (p. 2).

[7] Bennett (1995), for one, feels this practice would be more accurately labeled a "norm of passivity."

the issue stances of political actors are tied up with ideological or partisan values and the "norm of objectivity" practiced by the U.S. press decries an analysis of these types of values as this could be construed as taking sides. This is conspicuously obvious when compared with the other formats where the press does not claim to be presenting objective news such as editorials, various talk radio formats, etc. However, in its presentation of the news, the mainstream mass news media is always concerned with appearing neutral (Patterson, 1994). Subsequently, the news media's claim of objectivity results in the largely uncritical representation of political rhetoric as objective news (Altheide, 1991). The important thing to keep in mind here is that this occurs not in spite of, but because of the news media's self-proclaimed norm of objectivity.

> In its modern conceptualization, particularly the celebration of data and numbers, the inability of self-scrutiny, and the denial of its own narrative conventions and subjective rituals, daily conventional journalism remains particularly susceptible to aiding and abetting whomever is wielding power. In other words, "neutrality," as it is practiced in modern journalism, is a powerful ideology that routinely masks a top-down perspective on social problems (Reeves and Campbell, 1994 p. 253).

This practice has undergone some changes over the last few decades. For instance, there has been a decrease in the amount of time allowed for political actors to talk about issues; however, this has not be supplemented by an increased evaluation or examination of various issue stances and proposals by the news media. Since the 1960's, the amount of space given to political actors to present their issue stances has been steadily decreasing. This can be demonstrated with a brief look at the change in the length of sound-bites on the television news. The sound-bites of political actors has decreased from 42 seconds in the 1968 election to 10 seconds in 1988 and, despite some

criticism of the trend at this time, the average 1992 election sound-bites were actually shortened down to 8 seconds on average (Adatto, 1990 as found in Patterson, 1994 p. 160; Hallin, Daniel C., 1991 as found in Bennett, 1995 p. 30; Postman and Powers, 1992). The problem with sound-bite length is not endemic to the broadcast media, during this same period, the length of candidates' quotes in newspapers was cut in half (Patterson, 1994 p. 160).

While the mass news media often show much deference to the political elite, the news media's criteria of what qualifies as newsworthy often differs from that of political actors. Political actors are interested in getting out their positions on those issues for which they have "issue ownership" and appealing to those groups on which they are counting on for support (Petrocik, 1996). They are seeking to create and define the issues of the day on which they see themselves as holding an advantage (Patterson, 1994). However, the newsworthiness of a story depends almost exclusively on whether a story meets a number of news values that the news media looks for when deciding how or whether to cover a story (Graber, 1997 ch. 4). These news values include such items as impact, timeliness, prominence, proximity, conflict, novelty, etc. This often results in coverage skewed towards controversies, disagreements, gaffes, sound-bites, personal issues, and unusual occurrences. Coverage is thus centered around these concerns and not necessarily around the issue's political or pedagogical significance. The emphasis on news values encourage the reporting of the sensational rather than the substantial. As noted by Massachusetts Congressman Barney Frank, "I am now enjoying the best press of my life. And it's because I am attacking people and being negative. I get much more

attention for three wisecracks and a point of order than I get for a full compromise to a difficult legislative solution" (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997 p. 30).

One of the primary ways the news media satisfies the "newsworthiness" criteria is through the "horse race" coverage of politics. This is coverage that emphasizes political tactics and competition rather than more substantial policy issues. Horse race coverage is largely driven by polls and is widely used by the mass news media as it allows news organizations to report a predictable piece of news that conveys novel information even while political actors continue to reiterate relatively static issue stances (Patterson, 1994). This emphasis on the "horse-race" of the campaign thus meets various criteria used by the press in their determination of what makes good news, however, these are not necessarily the same criteria of what makes good politics. For example, information that can have a great influence on many people, such as the long term effects of policies and technical economic decisions, are rarely reported in the news media. In their stead, elections and other conflicts are widely reported even while the effect of the outcome of these contests on people's lives is rarely presented. This infatuation with process and disdain for outcomes ensures that nothing of real import gets presented (Edelman, 1988 p. 92).

> Journalism has, for a century and a half, defined news as *events*, as happenings. 'Horse races' happen; 'horse races' are themselves filled with specific actions. Policy issues, on the other hand, do not happen; they merely exist. Substance has no events; issues generally remain static. So policy issues, or substance, have been traditionally defined as outside the orbit of real news (Robinson and Sheehan, 1983, as quoted in Patterson, 1994 p. 62)

Horse race coverage is most apparent during political campaigns where the news media emphasize who's ahead and who's behind, who's coming up and who's falling back,

but this type of coverage is also apparent in the coverage of politics more generally. In the realm of electoral politics, this means that the television news is better able to represent what political candidates are physically doing than the political or policy proposals of these candidates. This is a central contributing factor to the coverage of political elections emphasizing image and tactics while overlooking the issue stances of the candidates.[8] Indeed Brians and Wattenberg (1996) found that during political campaigns, voters learn more from political advertisements than they do from the television news media.[9] This is also obvious in the coverage of political debates where political pundits limit their "analyses" of political debates to how the candidates carried themselves or whether they were adroit in their responses rather than an examination of the actual substance of these responses. After all, in a democratic society, political debates should foster a discussion of the issues if voters are to make informed decisions based on ideological congruence with the candidate (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1992 p. 105).

Another example of the news media's emphasis on news-value-laden issues rather than more substantive political issues is the news media's emphasis on sensational aspects of character and personality (Hart, 1994). In early 1998, the press gave substantial coverage to the possible sexual relations between President Clinton and White House

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[8] See Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Parenti, 1993; Lee and Solomon, 1990; Schiller, 1989; etc. In a recent look at this phenomenon Cappella and Jamieson (1997), find that the news media's emphasis on political tactic rather than politic substance contributes directly to voter cynicism.

[9] See also Patterson and McLure (1976).

intern Monica Lewinski despite the fact that the "Gennifer Flowers incident" made little difference to voters in the 1992 election and similar accusations made by Paula Jones had little effect in the 1996 election. Indeed, the Monica Lewinski "scandal" has found little traction with the public despite its coverage in the press; although all three major networks devoted virtually their entire nightly national news broadcast to the incident when the story first broke. This type of sensational coverage has the ultimate effect of distracting us from other types of political knowledge, such as that of more substantial political issues. While there are those who believe that the character, integrity, trustworthy, competency, etc. of political actors are politically relevant issues, a 1991 Times Mirror poll finds that only 7 percent of respondents felt news organizations should pay more attention to a candidate's character than a candidate's issue stances or qualifications. However, the point of this section is that substantial coverage of political issues is often eclipsed by more sensational concerns. This may be purely logical from news media outlets who depend on the maximization of audience ratings for survival, as will be addressed below.

> The...political scene is large and complex, and political news coverage has to compete with coverage of other events. These factors mean that newspapers and television news programs tend to concentrate on the scandals and the more exciting political events rather than on everyday political activity and the deeper issues (Buck, 1997 p. 29).

In sum, the use of simplistic frames and formats, the reliance on a norm of objectivity that largely precludes an analysis of political issues, the predominance of "horse race" coverage, and the emphasis on the sensational over the substantial all serve to shape news media messages in various ways that are not without political implications.

In the following sections, other factors influencing the structure of news media representations are examined.

Economic Pressures

In the first half of the nineteenth century, many newspapers were owned and operated by political parties and the popular press represented a wide spectrum of views. However, by 1850, newspapers became much more expensive to operate leading to a reliance on advertising for continuing viability. This reliance on advertising favored a movement toward more "mainstream" publications and, as a result of these structural changes in the industry, the press became more closely aligned with ruling-class coalitions.[10] This trend toward centralization has continued in the twentieth century as fewer and fewer companies have come to control more and more of the broadcast and cable spectrum. Congress has passed legislation purported to "increase competition" by freeing the hands of media companies from federal regulation; however, this has resulted in the increasing monopolization of the communication industry. In his most recent book, Ben Bagdikian (1992) finds that just 20 corporations hold majority control of the newspaper, magazine, book, TV, and movie industries. Under these conditions, it is hard to imagine that anything presented in the mainstream media would or even could present anything that did not fall under the purview of corporate acceptability. One would not expect this to influence the horse race or sensational coverage of politics; however, one

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10 For more specific data on how this occurred in England, France, and Germany at about the same time see Curran, 1991 p. 39.

would expect this to result in the absence of information that might call into question various aspects of the economic, social, and political status quo upon which these corporations rely for their continued success and stability. "Potential sources of injustice flowing from global capitalism, with multinational corporations as the human agents, rarely appeared [on the news], and one would need to go beyond national media discourse to be aware of such frames" (Gamson, 1992 p. 41). Questions regarding the generation and distribution of wealth, class, social mobility, and the like would provide a context within which the representations of various political, economic, and social issues, which seem to flare up with little rhyme or reason, could be better understood. These "broad" questions examining the very bases of our society could themselves provide a way of presenting and examining the various issues that appear on the news in an integrative manner that would take into account much of the complexity of issues in contemporary society. Instead, all the public commonly hears about such topics is the occasional justification for some policy or position on the grounds that it promotes "free market" concerns with no comment or commentary on whether these concerns are advantageous, justifiable, or even what these concerns are in the first place. This is, in effect, the implementation of a generally positively-infused symbol as though this embodies some shared understanding that is necessarily good while precluding any examination of the bases of this symbol itself.[11]

Concentrated power over public information is inherently anti-democratic.

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[11] For an examination of how the organization structure of media outlets compels editorial and journalist compliance with only limited owner intervention, see Parenti (1992).

> If a nation has narrowly controlled information, it will soon have narrowly controlled politics... In a world of multiple problems, where diversity of ideas is essential for decent solutions, controlled information inhibited by uniform self-interest is the first and fatal enemy (Bagdikian, 1990 p. 74).

One can no more question the bases of our economic system on the mainstream media than one can examine the relative virtues of incest or cult membership. The "experts" have deemed these issues decided and the case closed. Michel Foucault has described how different societies at different times have always held various types of speech to be "prohibited speech" (Foucault, 1980). One could well argue that Foucault's arguments would apply with equal validity here. Far from criticizing or advocating alternatives, any examination of the justification of our economic system has no power or influence in any kind of a real sense as it has no public discourse in the political reality constructed by the mainstream news media. Power, in this case for the most part corporate, has allied science, in this case economics, to remove such issues from the realm of contemporary political debate (Foucault, 1984 pp. 73-74). This can be tied back to the argument made at the beginning of this chapter: in contemporary American society, if political information is not presented on the mainstream media, which for the majority of the population is the network television news, then it is simply not a part of mainstream (public) political debate or understanding. Consequently, the entire economic basis of our society is effectively removed as a source of social and political understanding. These concerns, which have the potentiality to provide a rich context to our understanding of contemporary social and political issues has been successfully and effectively removed from mainstream political debate, in no small part as a result of the

privately-controlled, "mercenary"[12] nature of the mass media system in the United States.

Other researchers take a bit more strident approach. For instance, the basic theme underlying the "historical-materialist" line of research (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Schiller, 1989; Parenti, 1992, 1993) is that news media organizations are owned and otherwise controlled by powerful business organizations resulting in the presentation of a message that reflects these interests. For instance, Parenti (1993) paints a picture of news bias that leaves no holds barred. He is not only convinced that the news media presents a distorted view of reality, but maintains that, "the major distortions are repeatable and systematic-the product not only of deliberate manipulation but of the ideological and economic conditions under which the media operate." (Parenti, 1993 p. 1) He depicts the press as consistently favoring the current social and economic power structure; corporate capitalism is lauded and racism, classism, and sexism are rampant. He maintains that the news media is able to provide legitimacy to different topics and candidates and subsequently essentially control the parameters of the political debate. "In sum, as highly skilled specialists, news manufacturers are more than merely conduits for official and moneyed interest. They help create, embellish, and give life to the news, with an array of stereotyped, often misleading, but well-executed images, tones, evasions, nuances, suppressions, and fabrications that lend confirmation to the ruling ideological viewpoint in a process that is not immediately recognized as being the propaganda it is." (Parenti p. 210)

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[12] This term is borrowed from Quillian's (1991) extensive argument of the political effects of a privately-controlled news media system.

To this point, this section has examined what types of political information are likely to remain ideologically excluded according to this "economic" model of news media control. However, this model is also of relevance to the larger argument of how political information is transformed in the course of its representation on the news media. In the United States, the major news media outlets are owned by large corporations. The primary concern of these corporations, like all corporations, is the maximization of shareholder return - not the fulfillment of some democratic ideal of facilitating the public's understanding and conceptualization of social and political issues. Although the print news media generate a small portion of their operating revenue from subscription fees, they, like the broadcast media, rely almost exclusively on advertising for revenue. It is the advertisers that are the true customers of the news media. Subsequently, rather than emphasizing the comprehensive presentation of political information, news media providers are primarily concerned with the maximization of an audience that can be sold to advertisers. While these two goals need not be exclusive in theory, in practice they often are as major news media outlets are loathe to offend or confuse an audience with controversial, complex, or dull stories. This is especially true of the broadcast media as many of those lost to another channel will be lost for an entire evening of programming (Graber, 1997 p. 104). As the resulting commercials are the *raison d'être* of the television news, the television news will want to present a product that will hold the audience's attention between commercials. What this typically means is an emphasis on short simple stories that are of interest to a large audience and have good pictures. News directors are careful not to alienate any of their audience, as Ted Turner notes,"the more

complex, the more forward-looking the story is here in the United States, to a large extent the smaller the ratings are." In the case of the print media, the trend has been toward short, simplistic "McNews Nuggets" designed to appeal to the widest possible audience in order to maximize circulation (Bennett, 1995). Similarly, some may think of television news magazines or "newsmags", such as *60 Minutes, Prime Time Live, 20/20, Dateline NBC*, etc. as the answer to the relatively short shrift given to news stories on the network television news programs. However, the production of these programs rests more on economic than altruistic concerns. As of 1993, these shows accounted for 15% of all prime time network programming as network underwriters have found that these shows generate significant advertising revenue at half the cost of entertainment programming (O'Connor, 1992 as cited in Bennett, 1995 p. 10). Unfortunately this has the result of an emphasis on soft rather than hard news, "playing up the docudrama and info-tainment angles, the TV newsmags put the soft focus on politics and the hard focus on drugs, crime, child abuse, diet fads, consumer rip-offs, celebrity scandals, and hidden-camera police sting operations" (Bennett, 1995 p. 10).

To the degree news coverage is heavily biased toward inherently superficial and sensational issues, other important issues that are more complicated and less directly obvious, such as global climate and population issues, are either overlooked entirely or, occasionally, limited aspects of these issues are addressed as they are successfully brought to the attention of the public sphere by a political entrepreneur or are triggered by a relevant event. Subsequently, not only is it very difficult to present complex or systematic information about any particular social or political issue, it becomes very

difficult to even show the importance of complex news stories such as the savings and loan scandal or the BCCI crisis (both of the late 1980's and early 1990's) as it is almost impossible to present these issues in simple terms (McKean, 1993). In sum:

> the media have increasingly abandoned their civic role as conduits of information and debate in favor of their more profitable role as entertainers....The "packaging" of news in order to make it attractive and entertaining has, in many cases, taken precedence over the content of the news. News media, especially television, have resorted to marketing techniques employed by commercial advertisers to "sell" their news "product" (Croteau and Hoynes, 1994 p. 19).

Televisual Limitations

The inherent problem with television, specifically, as a means of communicating political information is that form often supersedes substance. In our society, television news producers provide, and the audience has come to expect, information presented in a certain manner. This has typically been reflected in a preference for bold images featuring a concrete object. In other words, the ideal utilization of this medium, as it has come to be commonly used, is to advertise and sell products. Correspondingly, the medium of television is typically not used to present other types of information. As Jerry Mander (1978) notes, the medium of television news is "seriously biased away from coverage of highly detailed, complex, and subtle information" (Mander 1978, p. 274). To the degree an issue can be presented in a straightforward, linear manner, the better television can be used to re-present the issue. For example, in the political realm, the television news typically shows the highlights of a piece of legislation, but not necessary the subtleties of the process leading up to an agreement nor the nuances of the

implications of the legislation's passage.[13]

One very important constraint of the television news that is shared to a much lesser degree by newspapers is space. Unlike the pages of newspaper, the television news broadcast has a certain finite amount of space, in this case time, in which to present the news; this space cannot be expanded. This is particularly true of the 30-minute network news broadcast which is left with 22 minutes of broadcast time after commercials, less time than it would take to read aloud just the front page of most major newspapers. The television news is not limited to this format in theory, however this limitation exists in practice. For instance, CNN broadcasts news related information all day even while it limits its actual news broadcasts to the traditional 30-minute format. The *News Hour with Jim Lehrer* broadcasts a one-hour news show on PBS which allows it to provide more detail, however critics argue that the content of this show is very similar to that provided by the network news and that the low ratings for the show may be explained by the fact that people simply don't want more of the same thing (Bennett, 1995 p. 126). In any case, the 30 minute network news broadcast is, as noted above, by far the most widely utilized source of political information and it is this format in which television news technicians must be able to process the news. News representations must thus be processed into neat little snippets of information that are short enough to hold an audience's 'television attention span' and leave enough room for all of the other news that

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[13] For instance, in its analysis of the 1985 budget debate, The Media Institute (1986) found television coverage to be "woefully lacking in comprehensiveness." They also found the coverage to be equally unbalanced but that is the topic of another, but perhaps not unrelated, project.

the news director wants to present during that broadcast (Postman and Powers, 1992). The preference for the televisual in contemporary society has, in turn, impacted other mass news media outlets in this as well as other areas. For instance, newspapers are generally able to offer more "space", in terms of word count, to a news story than the television news. However, in an effort to remain viable in the era of television, newsroom decisions are increasingly made in response to economic concerns rather than concerns about informing the public. This has resulted in shorter stories, slick packaging and graphics, and a dearth of "serious news" (Bennett, 1995 pp. 9, 23).

Another quality of television which favors certain kinds of information over others is the medium's predilection for, and the audience's expectation of, moving visual images. Subsequently, the television news favors stories that have pictures of action as it is occurring. This criterion favors scenes of violent protest over shots of a political actor at some event and favors both of these over a report on a relatively non-televisable piece of legislation, despite the fact that it is often the consequences of the latter that have the greatest impact on the lives of the television news spectators. Indeed, the reliance on visual imagery is not just an attribute of the television news, but is itself the driving force in the creation of the television news (Altheide, 1991). News stories are constructed around the available pictures and it is this upon which a narration is imposed to fit. Rather than illustrating an important issue with the available visual imagery, it is the visuals rather than the narrative explanation driving the re-presentation (ibid). As it is the narration that provides a sense of context to the issue; one would expect this context to be accordingly absent to the degree relevant pictures are not available.

In addition, this emphasis on visual facts addresses only one range of a phenomenon, and thus tend to limit the power of the television news to explain complex events. For instance, pictures are inherently particularistic; one can photograph a man, but not men. This results in an emphasis on the concrete or the particular - church, tree, meeting, etc. - rather than on the abstract or the general - spiritual, nature, the movement, etc. Temporal dimensions and processes are likewise excluded as these items cannot be photographed (Postman and Powers, 1992).

In sum, as a result of these news-gathering practices, economic concerns, and televisual limitations, the television news, and the news media in general, are extremely limited in their capacity to represent the underlying complexity and integration of political issues shown on the news. Subsequently, the mass news media in contemporary society present a limited range of political information with little or no social, historical, or material context within which this information may be better understood. This will be demonstrated empirically in the following section and the implications of these findings of contemporary political practice will be examined in the next chapter.

> Like it or not, the news has become a mass-produced consumer product, bearing little resemblance to history-book images. Mass communication technologies, beginning with the wire services and progressing to satellite feeds, have combined with corporate profit motives to create a new form of 'lowest-common-denominator' information, lacking both critical perspective and coherent organizing principles" (Bennett, 1995 p. 39).

Complexity Analysis

The literature reviewed above has examined the various ways in which news

representations, on television and other mass news media, are transformed and disembedded in the course of their representation. However, rather than stopping here, an empirical analysis of network news stories was undertaken in order to determine the degree to which these stories are contextually presented. The nightly news broadcasts of each of the three networks, ABC, CBS, NBC, as well as CNN were examined during a five-night period in June of 1997. A total of 200 stories were analyzed.

Methodology

In order to determine the degree to which these news stories provide additional contextual information, it was necessary to devise a coding system that accurately delineated when a news presentation went beyond the basic presentation of the facts and provided some additional contextual information whereby the news spectator might be able to better understand the issue presented and its relation to other issues. It proved to be impossible to simply ask if the story provided additional context both because the subjective nature of this criterion led to relatively low inter-coder reliability rates. After some pilot study experimentation, it was eventually decided that the most effective course was to simply ask whether the news story, in addition to addressing the basic who, what, why, when, where, and how of the story and also asked *why* what was reported came to be. Or, in other words, this criterion asks if the story answers *why* is it that this happened, is happening, or is expected to happen? For the purposes of coding, this was referred to in shorthand as the "contextual why". The provision of this information provided a recognition of the complexity and interrelated nature of social and political issues; that

these occurrences are linked, at some level, to other occurrences and thus provided an additional level of analysis or some additional context to the basic factual reporting of the story.

This might be best clarified through a brief example of how this coding criterion was implemented. During this study, all four news media outlets reported that the possible appointment of General Ralston to the Chair of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff was in doubt because it was disclosed that the General engaged in an extra-marital affair while he was separated from his wife. The "contextual why" for this story is not "why is the appointment in trouble?", the answer to which is, "because he had an extra-marital affair." This is basic information in the re-presentation of the facts of the issue. The "contextual why" here is "why would an earlier affair affect the General's chances for this appointment?" The answer to this question, which was provided by all four news networks, was "because the army recently discharged a female bomber pilot (Lt. Flynn) for engaging in an extra-marital affair and lying about it when asked." This is a level of explanation beyond that necessary for a basic re-presentation of the facts. However, this is the reason for the story - is the military providing a double standard based on sex or rank?

In order to better understand the differences between the different types of stories, they were grouped into four categories: political, social, foreign, and human interest. Political issues included stories about political institutions, legislative issues, the crafting of fiscal policy, legal or judicial stories, etc. Social issues included stories about religious groups, health stories, technological stories, etc. Foreign stories included stories about

U.S. foreign policy, as well as all stories about foreign countries no matter what the specific topic. Human interest stories included all those stories about personal tragedies, famous individuals, etc. It was decided to not separate stories into further subcategories as stories often fit into more than one subcategory. In other words, the categories used here seem to be the lowest common denominator into which the news stories examined could be wholly classified. These categories might be better explained by example. For instance, a story about a flood would be coded as a social issue but a partisan debate about a flood relief bill would be coded as a political issue while a story about a woman who rescued her 14 cats from the flood in a rowboat would be coded as a human interest story.

Table 3.1

Relative Number of Different Types of Stories

Type	Number
Political	70 (33%)
Social	78 (37%)
Foreign	34 (16%)
Human Interest	27 (13%)
Total	209

The first 95 stories coded, 45% of the total, were coded by two, independent coders. There was complete agreement on the contextual coding of 92 of these 95 stories (97%) and, after consultation between the coders, the disposition of the remaining three stories was easily resolved. Because of this high level of inter-coder reliability, the

remaining stories were coded by a single coder who consulted the second coder if there was any doubt regarding the contextual scoring of any particular story. While only tangentially related to the overall point of this chapter, coders were also asked to code whether they thought the stories were presented in a "sensational" manner. Sensational stories were operationally defined as the use of dramatic style, language, or artistic expression that is intended to shock, startle, thrill, excite, etc. Although the determination of this measure is necessarily somewhat subjective as what seems sensational to one may seem factual to another, there was relatively high inter-coder reliability on this measure and nearly complete consensus on the relative sensationalism of the different types of stories analyzed.

Results

As you will note by the table below, there is a predictable differentiation of the contextual coding between the different types of stories.

Table 3.2

Contextual Coding of Stories

Type	Number	Contextual Why
Political	70	22 (31%)
Social	78	8 (24%)
Foreign	34	8 (24%)
Human Interest	27	2 (7%)
Total	209	49 (23%)

However, even in the political and social categories, the provision of contextual information seems woefully inadequate, particularly as those stories coded as answering the "contextual why" answered this question, without exception, in simple, linear, cause-and-effect terms with little or no recognition of the integrated or complex nature of social and political issues. For instance, it was not uncommon for a story to be coded as providing context even if this was simply an anchor lead-in that provided some context as a segue between stories

What is perhaps even more telling of the manner in which the news media re-presents political information is the data on sensationalism.

Table 3.3

Sensational Coding of Stories

Type	Number	Sensational
Political	70	50 (71%)
Social	78	41 (53%)
Foreign	34	21 (62%)
Human Interest	27	14 (52%)
Total	209	126 (60%)

Interestingly, those stories which are most important, at least by the standards delineated in this dissertation, are those presented in the most sensational manner. In addition to the factors influencing news media production, as mentioned above, it is entirely possible that the relatively high rates of sensational coding for political issues might be an example of the gradual replacement of the "descriptive" model of news reporting with the

"narrative" model news reporting over the last few decades (Patterson, 1994). This is exemplified by the replacement of the voice of the political actor with that of the journalist; however, rather than providing an analysis of the issue, the narration addresses newsworthiness concerns predicated on news values such as proximity, novelty, scandal, and conflict. This provides a likely explanation for the observation that those stories coded as sensational also tended to be coded as contextual; for instance, Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992), found that "context" in the news media was primarily achieved through "exciting and reinforcing visuals" (Neuman, Just and Crigler, 1992 p. 109).

In sum, this complexity analysis project has clearly demonstrated the central points made in this chapter: that the news is presented in a sensational manner with little or no context whereby the news spectator might better understand the complexity and interrelated nature of the social and political realm.

Interestingly, the latest edition of Doris Graber' s *Mass Media and American Politics* (1997, pp. 125-6) contained a somewhat comparable study. Graber analyzed 207 randomly selected news reports in a similar manner. She examined the degree to which the stories met each of the seven key story elements: who, what, where, when, why, how, and context. She found that only 34% of the stories she analyzed gave details regarding *how* the story developed while only 65% provided *contextual information*. The large difference in contextual scoring between the study done here and that done by Graber probably largely stems from the different ways in which this measure is defined in each study, as addressed below. Graber reaches the conclusion that contextual concerns were unfortunately scarce, particularly in the stories needing them most (Graber 1997, p. 125).

While the coding criteria used by Graber differs from those used here, prohibiting direct comparison of the data, the results of each study reach the same conclusion: the national network news does a poor job presenting the complexity and context of news stories. While Graber's study is, of course, interesting and relevant, there are few areas in which the two projects differ that merit further elaboration. For one, Graber examined whether news stories provided each of the six classic key elements of reporting (who. what, where, when, why, and how) as well as a context measure. One of the things Graber is able to add to the study presented above is the degree to which various stories met these various factors. Interestingly, only 51% of the stories addressed the "why" of reporting and only 34% addressed "how" the issue developed. The other four elements of reporting were met at least 93% of the time. The other interesting difference between Graber's study and the one presented above is the use of a simple "context" measure which Graber defines as "comparisons with similar past events or accounts of the impact of the events on various groups" (Graber, 1997 p. 125). This is interesting on two counts: first, the study presented in this dissertation had a very difficult time coding a simple measure of "context" without clearly specifying the criteria by which that measure could be satisfied and; second, to the degree Graber does specify what content is, i.e. similarity with past events or the impact of the event on various groups, this measure fails to get at what is examined in this chapter; specifically, the degree to which the news media address the larger social or political context within which the various issues reported achieve meaning or significance. However, Graber undertakes her study with different intentions. In this section of her book Graber is examining the degree to which the news making

process often fails to report issues of social or political importance in favor of trivia (ibid). Interestingly, in setting up her research, Graber also mentions that "often the human interest appeal of a story or its sensational aspects distract the audience from recognizing the story's real significance" (ibid). However Graber fails to examine either of these factors in her study. This brings us to two additional advantages of the study reported here as opposed to Graber's study: first, this study examines the degree to which the television news presents stories in a sensational manner; second, while Graber uses a more detailed differentiation of the stories, the category of human interest stories is conspicuously absent. Graber omitted all "feature stories" even though, according to the study done here, human interest stories make up 13% of what is offered as news by the primary source of political information in contemporary society, the network television news. This fact is somewhat notable in itself.

Another relevant study worth mentioning in relation to the complexity analysis presented above is Iyengar's (1991) study of news spectator attribution, although he undertakes his project with different ends. In his study of the effects of television news framing on attribution, Iyengar (1991) examines six issues with clear political ties: crime, terrorism, poverty, unemployment, racial inequality, and the Iran-contra scandal. One would expect that when compared with the rest of the material on the television news - fires, crashes, acts of God, etc. - these stories would be the most likely to be presented accompanied with some additional context. However, Iyengar finds that these news stories are "episodic" by a ratio of more than three to one. Unfortunately, it was difficult to glean more precise figures from this work as this data was only presented in a graphic

format, presumably because it was not the central theme of Iyengar's project. However, Iyengar's study is very relevant to this chapter as he examines how the news is framed in terms of providing additional context. He codes his news stories as either episodic, which he defines as focusing on specific acts and events, or thematic, which he defines as providing some additional context for the issue represented. Iyengar's analysis of episodic framing touches on many of the news production factors addressed here such as how commercial concerns result in an emphasis on episodic coverage with "good pictures" rather than thematic coverage which is relatively slow moving (ibid p. 138). Iyengar also addresses how episodic framing in campaigns has resulted in sound-bite coverage and an obsession with horse race mechanics over attention to policy (ibid p. 142). Iyengar concludes that "by simplifying complex issues to the level of anecdotal evidence, television news leads viewers to issue-specific attributions of responsibility, and these attributions tend to shield society and government from responsibility" (ibid pp. 136-137). In other words, the episodic framing of news stories compels news spectators to attribute responsibility to the specific foci of the story. "The portrayal of recurring issues as unrelated events prevents the public from cumulating the evidence toward any logical, ultimate consequence. By diverting attention from societal and governmental responsibility, episodic framing glosses over national problems and allows public officials to ignore problems whose remedies entail burdens to their constituents" (ibid p. 143). In short, while it is impossible to compare Iyengar's study with the one presented here on a point by point basis as they are significantly different in structure, the conclusions reached by both studies are remarkably similar. First, each study takes the

network television news as its object of analysis because of the predominance of the television news as the primary source of political information in contemporary society. Graber also addresses the television news in her study, presumably for this same reason, although this is not made explicit in this section of her book. Furthermore, both Iyengar's study and the study presented here are centrally concerned with the degree to which the television news media re-presents political information in a context that recognizes the complexity of social and political issues and both studies find the news media wanting in this area.

In sum, Graber's study, Iyengar's study, and the study presented here all have similarities that reinforce the central points of this chapter. They each examine network television news and they each empirically demonstrate the woefully inadequate contextualization of the political information re-presented, as one would expect given the concerns elaborated throughout this chapter. As such, these studies confirm the contentions made earlier, that, at best, it would seem that the news provides only the slightest recognition of the complexity and interrelated nature of social and political issues; that these occurrences are linked, at some level, to other occurrences. While much of the data and literature reviewed in this chapter have been specifically directed towards the television news media, they are applicable to varying degrees to all mass news media in the United States. Insofar as these ideas are not exclusive to the domain of television, neither are they exclusive to contemporary society. John Dewey was making similar points as early as 1927:

"A glance at the situation shows that the physical and external means of

> collecting information in regard to what is happening in the world have far outrun the intellectual phase of inquiry and organization of its results.... 'News' signifies something which has just happened, and which is new just because it deviates from the old and regular. But its *meaning* depends upon relation to what it imports, to what its social consequences are. This import cannot be determined unless the new is placed in relation to the old, to what has happened and been integrated into the course of events. Without coordination and consecutiveness, events are not events, but mere occurrences, intrusions... so much of what passes as news ... [is] completely... isolated from their connections (Dewey, 1927 pp. 179-180, emphasis Dewey's).

Conclusion

> "The world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. It has to be explored, reported, and imagined. Man is no Aristotelian god contemplating all existence at one glance" (Lippmann 1922, p. 29).

The topic of mediated political communication is central to the fields of political psychology and political science. Of particular importance is the mass news media as their political representations play a major role in shaping and creating political reality for news spectators. The primary source of political information in contemporary society, with the possible infrequent exception of some subgroups such as academics and artists who have access to other sources of information, is the mass news media. "News is worth studying because it plays a major part in creating the reality in which we live" (Tuchman, 1978). It is through a society's mass communication system that the members of that society receive the information upon which they form their political opinions. Much of the information fundamental to the formation of individual opinions, such as crime or unemployment rates, is nearly impossible to obtain on one's own. Other more

direct sources of information, such as personal experience and observation can only be made sense of by placing such experiences within the surrounding social and political framework, the knowledge of which is gained through the mass communication systems of the society.

> The substance of the news media and stuff of the real are wholly intertwined. If an event occurs and it is not distributed widely in the media, then it basically does not occur. Correlatively, if a non-event occurs on the media...then it basically must become a significant happening in spectacular discourse... (Luke, 1989 p. 143).

As the practice of politics is distant from the daily lives of the masses, they are, for all intents and purposes, totally reliant on the mass news media for information about politics. Save for day-to-day observations of various social phenomena that may impinge on some political issues, in a large, heterogenous society like the United States, individuals get their political information through the mass media, either directly or after it has first passed through another individual. The political reality of virtually all individuals is thus constructed in the mass news media. However, the various news stories of which this reality consists are necessarily transformed in the course of their mediation. Due to various news media traditions, economic pressures, and other televisual limitations, the news is largely represented in a sensational, simplistic, and strategic manner. This is demonstrated in an analysis of the complexity of over 200 stories appearing on the network television news over the course of one week.

Given the importance of the television news in the transmission of political information, the fact that it is both widely available and consumed may in itself be cause for concern. One could argue, as Hart (1994) does, that this has resulted in a situation in

which Americans think they know a lot about politics, in no small part due to consistent exposure to television, but are largely unaware or uncaring that there is a lot about politics that they don't know. "Not only does poor teaching fail to educate students, but it also hides their ignorance from them. That is now the case in politics. Despite its marvels, television does not tell us what we need to know." (Hart, 1994 p. 60). A similar conclusion was reached by Patterson and McClure who note that:

> Since the nightly news is too brief to treat fully the complexity of modern politics, too visual to present effectively most events, and too entertainment-minded to tell viewers much worth knowing, most network newscasts are neither very educational nor very powerful communicators (1976 p. 90.)

The television news beckons viewers with both entertainment and elucidation and the implicit promise that the news spectators are getting, if not all, at least the important news of the day; "and that's the way it is....". However, as demonstrated in this chapter, this information consists primarily of the highlights, strategies, and superficialities of politics while largely ignoring the complexity and context of political and social issues. This is important in a number of respects. Firstly, to the degree news representations fail to recognize the complexity and interconnectedness of political issues, individuals are inhibited in their ability to acquire a fuller range of political understanding which would better enable them to carry out their democratic responsibilities as addressed in chapter one. This situation is particularly grave given the widespread popularity of television and the particular problems associated with this medium. Secondly, the next chapter will demonstrate that this situation is a driving force in not just the re-presentation of political information but also in the generation of a particular type of political rhetoric that, in turn

plays a role in the practice of politics itself. In subsequent chapters this dissertation will consider how these representations are addressed by news spectators as a function of different modes of cognition. It will be demonstrated that those qualities of the television and other mass news media representations addressed above - the fact that they are disembedded from the larger socio-historical context, that they are presented with little or no substantial context, that they provide essentially fragmented pieces of political information - all play a particularly important role in the degree to which individuals, as a function of their distinct mode of cognition, accept the news media's construction of political reality as a relatively accurate or useful depiction of the practice of politics.

Chapter Three

Political Rhetoric

This chapter examines the reciprocal relationship between the structure of news media representations, especially those of television, and the structure of political rhetoric in the creation of a political debate that has come to consist largely of divisive and fragmented political claims. These simplistic constructions fail to acknowledge the complexity of social and political issues as well as the role of larger social forces. This creates a situation in which it is difficult, if not impossible, for political actors to take a long-term view and make difficult political decisions that address the complexity of chronic social and political problems.

As noted in the previous chapter, the network television news media in the United States re-presents political issues with little or no context. This chapter first examines how this creates an ideal medium for the fragmented and one-sided construction and definition of political issues by political actors and then analyzes how political actors attempt to strategically define social and political issues with no mention of alternative or opposing definitions. These claims are evaluated through an analysis of the symbolic political rhetoric of California State Ballot Initiative 209, "The California Civil Rights Initiative" as well as an analysis of how this initiative, and the political rhetoric surrounding it, were re-presented on the network television news. It is claimed that the reciprocal relationship between the disembedded and decontextualized representation of political issues on the television news and the simplistic and self-interested definition of

these issues by political actors contributes heavily to a superficial, divisive and non-comprehensive practice of politics. In later chapters, it will be examined how this is cognitively conceptualized by news media spectators.

Political issues are inherently complex; they are interrelated and multidimensional. The political world consists of various values and norms that are differently constructed and realized in different groups and individuals. Political developments and the language that describes them are complex because the aspects of the events, leaders, and policies that most directly affect current and future well-being are the focus of disputed claims and competing symbols. This can be more or less reflected in the definition or construction of the social representations of these issues.[1] However, by removing sound-bites and stories from a systematic social context, the television news medium, and the political actors appearing on it, are able to make claims about reality without further justification. In addition, value claims need no longer be made sense of in relational terms but can be presented as objective information. Even when there is consensus about what observably happened or was said, there are conflicting assumptions about the causes of events, the motives of officials and interest groups, and the consequences of courses of action. The various constructions of social realities can't be conceived of as 'facts' in any real way, but merely as interpretations or reflections of

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[1] The social representations of the group serves to coordinate and integrate individuals. Those aspects of reality common to a social group, but not necessarily to society as a whole have been labeled by Serge Moscovici as 'social representations'. Social representations are constructions of reality that take shape through communication and are shared by those who share a common orientation to the relevant topic (Moscovici, 1973).

various understandings of the social and political realm which are used for particular ends. As one aspect of a social issue is accentuated, those who benefit from that particular definition of the issue stand to benefit. The construction of problems, then, is as much a way of knowing and acting strategically as a form of description; and it is often a way of excluding systematic attention to history and to social structure as well.

The arguments of Herbert Marcuse (1964) provide a theoretical context in which the following analyses can be placed. His prescient analysis of the use of the mass media as the primary means by which individuals are strategically both motivated and appeased is particularly applicable to the depiction of contemporary political practice presented here. Marcuse argues, persuasively, that concerns for social justice in modern society have been eclipsed by our immersion in a cycle of need creation and satisfaction. He maintains that Daniel Bell's claim of the "end of ideology" in light of post-war prosperity and stability actually represents that culmination of our immersion in the totalitarianism of the one-dimensional satisfaction of material needs. According to Marcuse, this is typified by a corresponding increase in democratic un-freedoms as an increasing number of aspects of contemporary life are subject to this kind of control. Even in 1964, Marcuse recognized the strategic role of the television in the creation and dissemination of the 'false needs' with which we must be ultimately concerned in order for the smooth functioning of this one-dimensional society. In much the same way, the fragmented construction of political appeals allows political actors to construct political needs which they are in a position to satisfy, thus ensuring continual support. Rather than addressing big issues such as wealth generation and distribution, these political needs are made

available in incremental amounts which keeps the public servile but remote from the political process.

The Role of Political Actors

> Television has emerged as a crucial intermediary between the individual and society. Television news provides much of the intelligence on which voters' political judgments and choices rest. "Making the news" can therefore prove to be either a critical asset or a major liability for public officials and politicians. Those who succeed in shaping the content of television news also succeed in influencing how Americans think about politics (Ansolabehere, et al., 1993).

One very important tool in the practice of politics is the ability to control, manipulate, construct, or define various political issues. "In political conflict...issue definition and redefinition can serve as tools used by opposing sides to gain advantage" (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994 p. 5). Political actors have been trying to present their own self-interested definition of reality *as* reality for as long as there has been politics; there are however some aspects of television that makes this process both easier and more insidious in the age of television (Hart, 1994). For instance, as opposed to the media of rallies or speeches, the scale of message dissemination has increased exponentially with the advent of the mass media and this trend has culminated with the instantaneous televisual impact of television. Various claims about and definitions of political reality by political actors are directed toward various constituencies whose support the political actor hopes to garner. To the degree political actors rely exclusively on the mass media, they are correspondingly unable to exclusively target specific constituencies with specific concerns, nevertheless, in contemporary society, the primary and often only source of

access to these constituencies is through the mass media. Of these, the television news media is the primary point of access to the widest possible constituency (Denton and Woodward, 1990 p. 10). Television news not only reaches a large audience, but the setting of television news itself both defines and justifies the information presented as newsworthy (Edelman, 1964 p. 101). What is interesting in the context of the project at hand is not only the power of television to reach such a large audience but also the structure of the news representations resulting from the various factors impinging on the construction of the news in this medium.

For instance, the practice of following a 'norm of objectivity' leads to a reliance on "official" sources and the direct transmission of statements by political actors without substantial commentary or context.[2] In addition, as a result of television news' emphasis on concrete actors rather than more ambiguous forces, it is often the political actors themselves that are the subject of news reports. In this situation political actors have considerable leeway in the construction of the product that is presented to news media spectators. This is simply a matter of accessibility bias, people are more receptive to information that is easier to get. "In the world of politics, where people must rely heavily on the media for information, patterns of news coverage are critical determinants of accessibility" (Iyengar, 1991 p. 132). It is those political actors who are in a position to gain access to the news media or otherwise influence the political agenda who are able to

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[2] This 'norm of objectivity' also occasionally requires that the news media directly report the "face-value transmission" of political actors as 'official sources', even when these statements deliberately address only a portion of the truth or even lie directly (Parenti, 1993 p. 96; see also Bennett, 1995).

define political reality in a manner that furthers their own ends while appealing to popular symbols, beliefs, attitudes, and values. This is important because it is these definitions of reality which become the terms by which the public understands the social and political world (Edelman, 1971). "Control over the definitions of a situation is essential in creating and preserving political realities." (Denton and Woodward, 1990 pp. 28-29).

Due to the various economic pressures, reporting traditions, and televisual concerns addressed in the last chapter, the mass news media often represent political issues with little or no explanation or context. Thus, as political actors construct messages for the news, they are not compelled to recognize the inherent complexity of these issues, but, rather, try to strategically define issues that both fit the "sound bite" requirements of television and resonate with the audience. This process is easily manipulated by self-interested political actors who have no interest in recognizing the full complexity of issues but rather seek to define issues in a manner that maximizes their political support. It is usually not in the best interest of political actors to elicit alternative definitions of this reality by evoking alternative definitions of the political symbols utilized in their claims about the political world. Neither are they likely to address the complexity of the underlying issue and its interconnections with other issues nor are they likely to acknowledge the indeterminate nature of the variety of possible implications and effects that might result if one were to adopt their definition of the issue at hand. Even if political actors wanted to evoke these alternative conceptions of political issues and the variously constructed values and norms upon which these conceptions rest, they are constrained by the structure of television news messages.

In the context of contemporary American politics, this process is not left to chance but is carefully planned and orchestrated by professional political and media consultants (Denton and Woodward, 1990; Sabato, 1991). There are numerous articles in the campaign literature providing advice to political actors from these consultants; the essence of this advice is "keep it simple" (Hallin, 1992; Voss, 1994; Tron, 1995). The increasing control of campaign and other communication strategies by political consultants contributes heavily to the substitution of disembedded platitudes for more comprehensive communications. Consultants have institutionalized "ambiguous and symbolic" communications as standard operating procedure in contemporary American politics (Petracca, 1989). There are a number of possible reasons for this. First, these consultants may be acutely aware of the various limitations that have been imposed on the presentation of political information by the network news and other news media and plan their communicative strategies accordingly. For instance, Barrie Tron, a media consultant, provides advice that includes the importance of presenting moving action over the importance of providing detail. Other political media consultants explicitly point to the fact that the average sound bite on the nightly television news is somewhere between 9 and 12 seconds; a quarter of the average length of just 15 years earlier (Hallin, 1992; Voss, 1994). Given this "immutable fact of media life", political actors are forced to make the most of their limited time (Voss, 1994). This limitation forces political actors to present little more than a slogan when in years past they had time to explain the reasons for their position. It is also entirely possible that the mass viewing public is perceived of as lacking either the intellect or interest to digest anything more substantial

than bumper-sticker "sloganeering". David Voss, a professional media consultant, recommends tactics to be used for converting "a complex issue into a digestible explanation." Among other items, he recommends that politicians "try to create a catch phrase, putting your issues into plain English that connects with the voter" (Voss, 1994). However, at some level these consultants probably realize that given the lack of context contributed by the network television news, they are able to present a view of reality that furthers their objectives without referring to complicating relevancies and minutiae that might muddy the pitch. "God may be in the details, but the message is in the media and the visual media cannot easily explain ten detailed proposals" (Tron, 1995).

Essentially, the news has come to be presented in a manner that necessitates that political actors present their messages to the audience almost exclusively in terms of sound-bite rhetoric. It is the resulting manner in which politics is practiced by political actors and understood by the news spectators that is of interest in this chapter. What is new about contemporary politics is the degree to which it is publicly played out through a series of competing sound bites on a medium that offers little substantive commentary and no opportunity for feedback.

By way of an aside, Marcusian theory also offers an elaboration on another aspect of political rhetoric, whether political actors are subsumed by these concerns or whether these appeals are constructed solely for strategic reasons. Obviously, both arguments are relevant to some degree. One can think of examples where the latter seems to predominate: George Bush's switch on the position of abortion when he became a Republican contender for President; California Governor Pete Wilson's switch to strong

positions opposing services for illegal immigrants and affirmative action from a more moderate political agenda; etc. However, Marcuse notes that those who control the machinations of one-dimensional need satisfaction are also controlled by the same cycle of need creation and satisfaction they help set in motion. Many political actors get involved in politics in the first place because they have strong views on political issues. However, beyond this, one could argue that, to the degree political actors become immersed in the one-sided competition for meaning over political issues, they too are controlled by simplistic, divisive, and often superficial political practice they advocate in order to garner support. Once political debate has been driven to this level, some satisfaction must be offered to the needs that have been generated. Political actors must be able to respond to issues that have been placed on the political agenda by other political actors or events. Their ability to work calmly on issues of long-term planning are sacrificed by their need to deal with matters that the media has chosen to accentuate at any given time (Peterson, 1988). Not only does television present complex issues in a superficial manner, but the reality of television is a reality in which it is much more difficult to construct complex long-term solutions, or even proposals, to complex political issues. "Television's world moves fast, its events are dramatic, and things are always changing rapidly. Like it or not, that is the world in which presidents, economic advisors, and administrations of either party must live as best they can" (Ranney, 1983 p. 131).

The Competition for Meaning and the Construction of Reality

Mediated political reality can be defined in different ways. Depending on how

this reality is defined and constructed, different issues and different policies become more or less important and correct. For example, those in favor of welfare cuts are going to cast their argument in terms of welfare cheats, wasteful spending, "family values", etc. as though one can be either for or against these things. Those on the other side of the issue are going to frame welfare in terms of helping the needy, the sick, and the children in such a way that news media spectators are left feeling that they are either for helping the needy, the sick, and the children or they're not. This is often done in a manner that preys on the fears and insecurities of news media spectators who often find it difficult to deal with rapidly changing norms and values of contemporary modern/postmodern society (Braunwarth, 1998).[3] The claim made here is that shared by Woodward and Denton (1990), who state that, "Our position is that public views on issues are mobilized rather than fixed. Issues are largely created, identified, and permeated throughout society. Neither issues nor specific positions on issues exist in a vacuum" (Denton and Woodward, 1990 p. 42). It is not so much that these constructions are whole cloth fabrications originating from nowhere; rather these different understandings can be substantiated by appeals to different understandings of reality, different value constructions and different objective political events. An example which highlights this point is the recent vote by the University of California regents who voted to bar race and gender considerations in school admissions, hiring, and contracting. The definition or meaning of this action differs dramatically depending on the point of view of the

[3] This is examined in more detail in chapter five.

observer. To some, this action is an overtly racist tactic that ignores a history of racial discrimination as well as the existence of contemporary racism and can be substantiated by pointing to the lack of proportional representation by minorities in professional and executive positions. To others, this vote is a laudable action that ends the preferential treatment leading to the factional 'tribalism' and the 'disuniting of America.' Within this latter frame of reference, the decision to end affirmative action in the UC system can be further defined as ending reverse discrimination; abolishing the undeserving advantage given to certain minorities; discontinuing a program that stigmatizes blacks; or ending the division of the lower class who share a common interest (Gamson, 1992 pp. 223-227). It can thus be seen that the meaning of any social action is highly dependant on how the issue is defined and these definitions are a function of the social identity and interests of the definer.

Political actors will often try to frame issues so that their definitions of the issues seem to have a straightforward and obvious appeal while opposing definitions appear fuzzy, ambiguous, and otherwise not compelling. These less concrete definitions are not typically a part of the mediated reality constructed for news media spectators as these definitions' spiritual, artistic, or abstract nature doesn't "fit" various news production practices. This is exacerbated by the fact that the narrative nature of the medium of television, its emphasis on concrete visual images, and its episodic nature, serve to emphasize the role of individuals and de-emphasize the role of broad social forces (Iyengar, 1991). Consequently, issues that are defined in terms of socially prevalent values and are framed in a simple, straightforward, individualistic manner should have a

broader appeal than an opposing position which is forced to rely on the justification of social forces that lack the concrete, concise, and visual appeal of the original claim.

The competition for meaning over California state ballot initiatives provide some excellent examples of this process at work in the political sphere. These initiatives are statewide public referenda on various social and political issues that are decided by majority vote. For instance, Proposition 184 ensured that anyone convicted of committing a third felony in the state of California would be sentenced to life imprisonment and was advertised as "three strikes and you're out." This had a straightforward linear appeal that conveniently ignored the complexities of this issue and played on common fears of crime and social deterioration. Anyone opposing this proposal was forced to rely on less direct justifications. The same argument can be applied to Proposition 187 which sought to discontinue all public services for illegal immigrants and was advertised as the "Save Our State" initiative claiming that the proposition will "STOP illegal immigration" and "save the state of California an estimated 5 billion dollars a year", etc. (1996 State of California official ballot pamphlet). This also has a relatively straightforward linear appeal that relies on many salient concerns such as those relating to a declining standard of living, demographic changes, etc.

No matter what the motivation, these fragmented constructions and definitions of political issues have a very real impact on the practice of politics as well as the lives and well being of everyone in society; politics is a rhetorical art and, from the perspective of the news spectator, political rhetoric *is* political reality (Edelman, 1988 p. 104). News

spectators may disagree with any particular claim or position, but, as a result of their reliance on the mass news media for access to political information, it is the political rhetoric presented thereon that makes up the reality of political debate. "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (W. I. Thomas, 1928 as quoted in Woodward and Denton, 1990, p. 27). The social construction of reality renders different realities somewhat relative, although this is not to say that every representation of the world is equally justifiable; some are based on unrealistic expectations or intractable dogma while others are based on idealistic wishes and utopian visions. For example, social representations can be differentiated by whether they emphasize equality of sacrifice and rewards or if primary importance is placed on economic efficiency and macroeconomic indicators. Of course justifiability may differ depending on one's view of the world.

> To blame vulnerable groups for the sufferings and guilt people experience in their daily lives is emotionally gratifying and politically popular, and so the construction of enemies underlies not only domination, oppression, and war, but the policy formation, the elections, and the other seemingly rational and even liberal activities of the contemporary state as well (Edelman, 1988 p. 89).

To this point, this chapter has discussed the importance of framing one's public rhetoric in terms that "play well" given the limitations of the mass news media and, in particular, the medium of television news. What has been stressed has been the importance of framing one's rhetoric in a sound-bite or bumper sticker format as well as the necessity of selectively utilizing popular and prevalent symbols in order to define one's position in a manner that has widespread appeal while furthering a particular end. It

will be helpful to examine a few examples of this process in order to demonstrate its currency in contemporary politics.

Political appeals usually address only one aspect of an issue and occasionally even tries to utilize a popular symbol in a manner contrary to how that symbol is popularly understood. Therefore, a close examination of the content of these appeals quite often uncovers other aspects of the issue or symbol that are not included in the original appeal and are conspicuous by their absence. Examples would include the "modernization" of weapons of mass destruction, a Central American "democracy" that murders 50,000 of its citizens, etc. (Lee and Solomon, 1991 p. 333). It is not uncommon in the political realm to gain acceptance for an unpopular definition of political reality by denying the basis of this definition. This process is particularly obvious when the rhetoric used to gain support for a political policy is the inverse of the policy's effects. Thus, it is occasionally claimed that to wage war is to promote peace; to give tax breaks to the rich is to help the poor; to remove children from single mothers is to promote family values; etc. The political world is subjective. Depending on one's perspective and understandings, the same symbol or issue may mean different things to different individuals.[4] It is the battle over the definition of the meaning of issues where political actors often gain popular support for their aims. Because of its widespread appeal, this competition for meaning is often played out for the public on the mass news media. However, for reasons mentioned above and in the last chapter, these media provide little context or comment on the

[4] This will be examined in greater length in the next chapter.

rhetoric they re-present.

The one-sided definition of political issues can result in the adoption of policies that do little to address the problem underlying the issue and occasionally may contribute to the problem itself. Chronic social issues are often constructed in a manner that address the outward manifestations of the underlying problem while perpetuating or even exacerbating the problem itself, often by trying to change the behavior of individuals while ignoring the conditions generating this behavior (Edelman, 1988 p. 25). For instance, imprisonment of individuals for various property, drug, or gang-related crimes not only fails to address the social conditions that led to the illegal behavior in the first place but also places these individuals in contact with other criminals; an unintended consequence of imprisoning criminals together is the creation of essentially a state-funded boarding school of crime. In addition, prison necessarily excludes a criminal from the rest of society, thus inhibiting positive integration into society. This is exacerbated by various get tough prison reform measures that seek to make prisons as uncomfortable as possible by removing televisions, exercise equipment, and the like. Similarly, one could argue that affirmative action programs, such as those addressed in California's Proposition 209, which were designed to combat racism, actually serve to engender racism by creating the perception that certain groups must need the affirmative action programs because they are inherently less able to compete.

> The construction of problems, then, is as much a way of knowing and acting strategically as a form of description; and it is often a way of excluding systematic attention to history and to social structure as well. The challenge, for those who act and for those who try to understand, is to recognize the range of meanings and of strategies implicit in each item that emerges from the radiation of

signifiers (Edelman, 1988 p. 36).

Proposition 209 Example

While it is impossible to examine the underlying ambiguity of all issues presented on the television news, this chapter will examine one issue, California's proposition 209, in some detail and then address how the politics of issue construction have been addressed in other works. A California state ballot initiative is an ideal entity for this type of analysis because these referenda are decided by popular vote. Thus, the construction of these referenda as well as the rhetoric surrounding them are intended to influence the public definition of the issue. This allows a straightforward analysis of political rhetoric directed toward the public.

The official title for California's Proposition 209 is "The California Civil Rights Initiative" and the official text of the proposition reads:

> The state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operations of public employment, public education, or public contracting.
>
> (1996 State of California official ballot pamphlet)

The text of this proposition demonstrates Edelman's claim that the symbolic presentation of politics, while appearing precise to the lay person, is actually quite ambiguous when the symbolic claims made are examined closely (Edelman, 1964). It is within this ambiguity that political actors seek to define issues in a way that presents their position in a positive light. The absence of a sole, uncontested definition of various political symbols coupled with their widespread recognition and use make these aspects

of the political sphere a particularly ripe arena for the competition over political meaning; particularly as these symbols are often infused with strong emotions, deeply-held political beliefs, and claims of identity. From this perspective, it is relatively easy to see how many of these political symbols easily invoke both their patent definition or meaning while referring to its exact opposite. This is particularly true of the some of the symbols presented in California's Proposition 209.

First, and most obvious, is the title. The title of Proposition 209 attempts to link this Proposition with a positively-infused political symbol while ostensibly seeking to do away with key aspects upon which this symbol is based.[5] This "tactic" was extended by a proposed television ad campaign that sought to align Proposition 209 with the late Rev. Martin Luther King by claiming that the time had come when African-American children are "judged on the content of their character rather than the color of their skin." This ad was eventually scuttled when threatened with legal action by the family of the late Rev. King (Spohn, 1997).

Other aspects of Proposition 209 invoke equally ambiguous meanings of which certain aspects are endorsed by political actors for their own benefit. The key phrase of the initiative describing what the proposed law would actually do is: "shall not discriminate against or give preferential treatment to...". The central terms here, "discriminate" and "preference" are themselves quite ambiguous. The wording of this

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Another example of this type of de-construction in the title of California initiatives is the "Californians for Statewide Smoking Restrictions" initiative which appeared on the 1994 California ballot. This initiative was bankrolled by the Phillip Morris tobacco company and, as one might suspect, would replace and weaken local smoking ordinances.

phrase serves to equate preference with discrimination. Discrimination has negative moral connotations because, as a political symbol, discrimination is referent of the practice of excluding a particular group, most commonly African-Americans, from many of the same rights and privileges enjoyed by another group, most often European-Americans. However, in the instance of Proposition 209, discrimination is equated with "reverse discrimination".

While it is not the intention of this dissertation to pass judgment on the "correctness" of one political tactic over another, it may be interesting to examine the degree to which the rhetorical claim made above "accurately" reflects the current state of affairs or, on the other hand, seeks to construct a definition of reality that is in the interest of the few as opposed to the many. One available indicator of the degree of discrimination and reverse discrimination is the number of cases heard by the U.S. District Courts of Appeals. In spite of the implicit claims made by the authors of Proposition 209, it is interesting to note that between 1990 and 1994 these courts have handled fewer than 100 cases of reverse discrimination while during this same period they dealt with more than 3,000 cases of discrimination (Spohn, 1997). It is hard to argue that the United States is now a "color-blind society" in which different races are competing on a "level playing field" when, while this proposition was under debate, it was reported in the national news that both Texaco and Denny's corporations were found to have engaged in systematic racial discrimination.

"Preference" is another symbolic term used in Proposition 209 that is inherently ambiguous. Looking at the text of the proposition, it would appear that its authors seek to

equate discrimination with preference. This tactic negatively loads preference in two ways: both through its conflation with discrimination and with the implication that preference for any group is unjust and will thus be eliminated by this proposed law. However, preference can also be identified with discrimination in the other direction; it can be argued that the affirmative action programs are intended to eliminate the "preferences" shown for white males that are endemic to our social structure and reflected in the preponderance of white males in professional occupations, among the upper echelons of the business world, etc. Preference is not and has not always been a term of negative connotation. Historically, society has always shown preference to one group or another whether it be veterans returning from war, various programs for the poor, Medicaid for seniors, etc. (Spohn, 1997). Here again there is the presentation of a political symbol whose meaning is ambiguous and is used by political actors to reinforce a particular view of reality while excluding referential meanings that might make this view more understandable in a broader social context.

A final political symbol linked with Proposition 209 that does not appear in either the text or the title of the proposition is "affirmative action"; this is made all the more conspicuous by its absence as this is ostensibly what this proposal would eliminate. The absence of this phrase again demonstrates the degree to which political actors will disembed their political rhetoric from the full interconnected range of social and political issues in order to reinforce a particular aspect of reality. By its absence, one could either argue that the authors either felt this symbol is largely positively connotative and any attention drawn to its proposed elimination would inhibit their aims or that they thought

the inclusion of this symbol would illuminate the incongruities inherent in their attempt to strategically define the reality of civil rights.

Network News Presentation

Given the preceding analysis it is clear that political issues and symbols are social constructions whose meaning is neither fixed nor absolute thus providing the opportunity for political actors, such as the authors of Proposition 209, to strategically define potent political symbols in a manner which furthers a particular goal. However, what makes this particularly interesting is how this is played out on the network television news. As will be demonstrated below, this news medium is an ideal arena for a particular but very important aspect of political competition, the competition for the definition of political reality. The competition over the meaning of issues and symbols is particularly important in this arena because of the lack of context or analysis which might call into question the validity or justifiability of one definition or another. The following indented paragraphs make up the full transcript of an October 31, 1996 NBC nightly news broadcast on California's Proposition 209. The introduction to the story emphasizes the 'horse race' aspect of Presidential campaigns.

> We are back tonight in Oakland, California, one of the stops along the Clinton campaign, but certainly not their last stop for tonight. It is notable that President Clinton is spending yet another night here in the state of California. It's kind of been a given for several weeks that the 54 electoral votes would go his way. But then Bob Dole made this state a huge priority, funneling a lot of his campaign money devoted to the South and the Midwest here to California. So we'll see what happens.

This segues to the Proposition 209 issue by noting that in addition to picking a President,

voters will also cast votes on a referendum the could decide the fate of affirmative action.

> When voters here in this state go to the polls on Tuesday, picking a president will not be the only choice they face. They will also cast their votes on a referendum that could decide the fate of affirmative action, really, in California and forecast its future in the rest of the country. NBC News correspondent Dan Lothian has our report.

While this does at least identify the proposition with affirmative action, the arguments for and against the proposition are then reduced to "bumper-sticker" slogans presented by various individuals:

> "People are scared of Proposition 209. It's too extreme."
> "Yes on 209."
> "I think 209 is right for the state."

Coverage then shifts to the relatively sensational and visual aspects of the Proposition 209 debate - public protests.

> Arguments to defend and dismantle affirmative action are equally passionate here in California, and the battle lines are often drawn out on the streets. Last week, 500 angry demonstrators, most of them students at UCLA, turned to civil disobedience, blocking a busy boulevard to make a loud statement against 209.
>
> " It's not about quotas. It's not about preferential treatment, but rather about opening the doors."

This quote is obviously intended to address the supporters' attempts to define the issue even though these definitional endeavors have not been shown on the newscast. Earlier protests are also mentioned:

> This isn't the first outcry. In September, protesters went on the attack on the campus of Cal State, Northridge, where former KKK grand wizard and Prop 209 supporter David Duke was debating affirmative action.

Finally, the correspondent provides some context for the issue:

> California has become a testing ground in the national debate over the future of affirmative action policies. It's the first state to launch a legislative attack against a premise established decades ago. Now what was viewed for years as leveling the playing field is seen by some as reverse discrimination.

And explains what Proposition 209 is:

> Prop 209, or the so-called civil rights initiative, proposes to end all race and gender considerations in public education, in contracting and in hiring.

These statements are the only context that is provided by NBC and merely provides a backdrop for the competition for meaning between the pro and the con camps.[6] Immediately, the viewer is presented with two political actors who are each trying to present their own definitions of the issue. They do not address the other position directly but appear to acknowledge that the other is trying to frame or define the issue in differing terms.

> We're not going back; we're moving forward. The programs that have succeeded have helped women, have helped families, have protected women in the workplace and have increased opportunities for women and minorities.
>
> Mr. SCOTT-MARTIN ("No On 209")

> We have quotas, and everybody knows it. All this nomenclature about goals and timetables and set-asides, these are buzzwords and we're going to end them.
>
> Mr. WARD CONNERLY ("Yes On 209")

This is essentially a presentation of competing assertions rather than an argument or debate encompassing reasons addressing the other's as well as one's own claims. This example epitomizes the competition for the definition of reality of social and political

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[6] According to the parameters of the "complexity analysis" presented above, this would be enough for this story to be coded as providing additional context.

issues by political actors who are given what is essentially an open forum to present their different definitions of reality with little or no possibility of calling into question the relative value of these definitions. The significance here is that these different constructions of this complex issue may play a significant role in the success or failure of any policy outcome intended to deal with such a contentious and complex issue.

In a further example of the news media facilitating the competition for meaning is evidenced when the news report simply presents examples from each camp's television ads:

> "Proposition 209 will protect men and women of every race against discrimination"
> "I strongly believe in civil rights..."
> "Vote no on 209."

Here again, the audience is presented with disembodied political slogans designed to attract support to one definition of the issue without addressing the opposing view. Following this, the *strategy* or politic tactics behind the advertising campaigns are addressed, but not the *content* of the ads themselves:

> The state Republican Party and the National Committee have poured some $2 million into radio and television ads.
>
> "...large statewide full saturation by using whatever we need to spend to get the message out." Mr. JOHN HERRINGTON (California GOP Chairman)
>
> The Yes on 209 campaign is also releasing its own television ads, but the counterattack is fierce. David Duke and the other controversial conservatives who have stepped forward in support of 209 are now being used in ads to defeat this racially charged initiative.

The news correspondent then presents Bob Dole's position on the issue:

> Presidential hopeful Bob Dole has elevated the debate on to his national

platform. Campaigning in Orange County this week, he made it clear that Prop 209 represents true equality. Affirmative action, which he once embraced, is now seen as a failure.
"But this was a blind alley in the search for equal justice."
Former Senator BOB DOLE (Republican Presidential Candidate)

Interestingly, the news report then presents what some feel is the motivating factor behind the symbolic rhetoric of the proposition's supporters. One should note that this is not context provided directly by the news providers, the newscast merely reports the claims made by the opposition with no commentary on these claims.

But some argue Republicans are using 209 as a wedge issue to stir emotions and drive up conservative support in a key state.
"They're trying to win elections--assembly, congressional, and presidential, to help Bob Dole just to win elections--by dividing California."
Ms. PAT EWING ("No On 209")

But Republicans deny that's the motive. For his part, President Clinton is on the record as opposing 209, but fighting the measure hasn't been the focus of his campaign down the stretch. The latest poll shows the battle over 209 is a virtual dead heat. At least a dozen states preparing similar initiatives are watching closely. Voters will have the final say, answering whether the current system is one of equality or reverse discrimination.

Dan Lothian, NBC News, Los Angeles.

This final section includes an attempt to represent the debate in terms of the common, Democrats v. the Republicans bifurcation of political opposition in the United States as well as a "horse-race" update on the outcome. Finally, there is unexplained reference to "equality or reverse discrimination" as though these are diametrically opposed to each other and are the only two options available for this issue.

This news report is notable to the extent it does provide some context and represents differing opinions on this issue. However, the simple re-presentation of the

rhetoric of the political actors with little or no commentary on behalf of NBC that might make the relative nature of these various definitions of this issue more understandable in the context of current and past social conditions does a great disservice to an issue as complex as affirmative action and the efforts to dismantle it. The justifications for and against affirmative action are not so easily differentiated as the news spectators would be led to believe by the political rhetoric presented above.

It is safe to say that most people want all individuals to be treated equally and given the same opportunities regardless of race. However, this is not easily translated onto the political space constructed above: should some form of affirmative action or outreach be encouraged in order to provide role models and break the ground for further minority advancement; should all affirmative action as well as racial pride endeavors like the recent "million man march" be discouraged or prohibited in order to discourage differentiation by race; etc.? This issue is complex and multi-faceted, however by accentuating one aspect of this issue and endorsing that definition as legitimate to the exclusion of all others, these political actors, working through the television news media, contribute to a bifurcation of issues and the creation of a divisive and simplistic political space upon which it becomes very difficult to construct meaningful reform or a recognition of the complexity or perhaps even the insolubility of some political issues. The result is that it becomes politically expedient to simply adopt a simplistic solution that fails to provide any meaningful long-term solutions while often creating hardship and alienation along the way.

This is not to imply that greater complexity will necessarily lead to greater

agreement on social policy; analysis can lead to paralysis. It is obviously easier to craft simplistic policy to meet simplistic concerns than to craft policy that addresses the multi-faceted aspects of any issue. However, it is reasonable to expect that policies which address the full complexity of an issue have the best chance to effectively address the issue or even solve the problem. At the very least, this should open the possibility for adjudication by reasoned argument, a key concern for Mill (1956). Subsequently, the claim made here is that complexity is not necessarily less divisive, however, it is necessarily not one-sided. Perhaps of even greater importance is the fact that we are currently concerned with political issues played out in the public sphere. In terms of democratic theory, as presented in chapter one, one can only assume that a public which can at least recognize the complexity of political issues is more likely to take opposing views into account and thus act in a manner conducive to the rigors of democracy.

To this point this chapter has demonstrated how political actors strategically define political issues and how these constructions are presented on the mass news media. Of particular importance is the medium of television, both because of its widespread appeal and because this medium provides the clearest example of the news media's failure to provide the complexity and depth of social and political issues. While a detailed analysis of one issue is useful in this regard, the argument could be made that the symbols underlying the issue of affirmative action may be overtly controversial because they incorporate inherently controversial topics such as race and discrimination. While it is possible that the preceding example provided a particularly rich illustration of the strategic definition of political issues, this line of research is not new and other

information and examples are available (Bosso, 1994; Portz, 1994; Edelman, 1964; Reeves and Campbell, 1994; Rochefort and Cobb, 1994).

The very idea of a social constructionist approach implies that there are many ways in which social reality could be constructed or defined. The point that is being stressed here is that political actors will strive to define or construct issues or problems in a way that furthers their ends. This is easily done on television because of its proclivity for sound bite rhetoric which is rarely presented with any substantive comment or context. This competition for meaning is somewhat common-sensical. For instance, the proposed imposition of a 'flat tax' can be addressed as a simplifed and equitable means of collecting income tax while at the same time can mean a regressive system of taxation resulting in a redistribution of resources from the socially and politically powerless poor to the socially and politically powerful rich. Neither definition is necessarily false and either definition may have broader appeal depending on how the competition for meaning is played out on the mass news media.

In another example, the debate surrounding the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), is essentially one over how the reality of this issue should be defined. For some, this is a policy that will open up U.S. workers to competition from cheap labor in foreign countries ultimately resulting in the loss of jobs domestically and a general decline in the quality of life in the United States. On the other hand, NAFTA proponents define this issue in terms of free trade, competitive advantage, lower prices, and a global marketplace (Bosso, 1994 pp. 185-186).

John Portz (1994) examines the competing definitions surrounding the problem of

the closing of manufacturing plants. One definition takes the position that the closing of the plant is necessary for the parent company's survival. In this definition, it would be the company's position that the closing is needed in order to ensure the long-term viability of the firm. However, the workers or the community in which the plant is located may try to define the problem in terms of the closing event itself. The event itself would thus become the problem and a logical course of action in the face of such a problem would be to prevent the plant from closing by offering financial incentives, updating the facilities, making the workforce more competitive, etc. Finally, this issue could be framed in terms of the consequences stemming from the closing of the plant. According to this definition of the problem, the solution would be in terms of finding other jobs for the displaced workers, bringing a new tenant into the facility, etc. (Portz, 1994 pp. 32-33) As can be clearly seen in these examples, the competition over the meaning of an issue has very real and direct payoffs for the different parties involved in the issue.

Murray Edelman in his 1964 book, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, provides an excellent example of the subjective nature of how issues and problems are constructed and the resulting competition for their definition. He describes, in great detail, the possible range of understandings and definition that are brought to bear on the issue of poverty in order to further one goal or another. Edelman shows that the responsibility for poverty can be defined in terms of individual or societal factors or some combination of the two. Depending on how this issue is defined, the needs of different interests are met. In his analysis of the rhetoric surrounding this issue, Edelman first makes the case that for most individuals, politics is a series of pictures in the mind placed by media (Edelman,

1964 p. 5). Edelman then describes how the content of the language used for mass public appeals and other calls for support is itself quite ambiguous and typically relies on popular symbols such as justice, democracy, and public interest in order to further various political ends (ibid p. 134). The actual meaning of the policies in question are often different than what is offered to the unorganized masses but ties in closely with the desired aims of the organized group or individual who has an identifiable stake in the resource allocation outcome. In this way mass support can be generated by symbolic placations (ibid ch. 8).

Another example of the strategic construction of the reality of political issues in the mass media is Reeves and Campbell's (1994) analysis of how the major television networks covered the Reagan administration's "war on drugs." What is perhaps most interesting, or at least most relevant, about this work is the elaboration of how the news media utilized three distinct narratives of the coverage of the same issue at different periods of the 1980's: the "trickle down" paradigm emphasizing the middle and upper class abuse of cocaine utilizing discourses of recovery; the "us v. them" "siege" paradigm emphasizing crack cocaine and activating discourses of discrimination; and a "post-crisis" paradigm in which the "war on drugs" became a central topic of Presidential politics (Reeves and Campbell, 1994 p. 18). The news media themselves thus clearly demonstrate that there are different ways of viewing and presenting the same issue. They themselves present a different picture of reality of the same issue but, by failing to present these realities as relative to one another, do a disservice to their audience as the audience is encouraged to accept, as reality, whatever particular definition of reality is presented.

This example also elaborates some of the dangers of such a practice as, in this case, the differing narratives were generated by political actors, most notably Reagan, to generate support through the polarization of the electorate along class and ethnic lines.

Rochefort and Cobb (1994) briefly address the 1992 Los Angeles Riots as an example of how an issue may be strategically defined in different ways. For instance, one can either address this issue in terms of racial and economic inequalities thus focusing attention on educational and economic opportunities, or one can call attention to the role of the police department and their inability to quell the riots thus evoking a completely different area of attribution (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994 p. 3).

Another work that is of relevance here is Shanto Iyengar's *Is Anyone Responsible?(*1991). Iyengar examines the relative impact of episodic and thematic framing of television news representations on public opinion and on news spectators' attributions of responsibility (Iyengar, 1991 p. 2). Iyengar demonstrates that the television news is heavily episodic which tends to elicit individualistic attributions of responsibility. In the course of this analysis, Iyengar examines a number of issues that reinforce the idea that political actors strategically define issues in the course of trying to achieve various political ends, a clear example of this is the issue of crime. When crime is framed in terms of the character traits of the individual, the news spectators are more likely to support solutions such as increased punitive punishment. However, when this issue is framed in more thematic terms and addresses more societal factors, viewers are more likely to call for solutions relating to improvements in the underlying socio-economic and political order. Similar framing and responses can be found for the issue of

terrorism. When terrorism is depicted as a general outcome, societal attributions are more likely to be elicited. However when terrorism is presented as a specific event or act, individualistic and punitive attributions are more likely to be found (ibid p. 39). On the issue of poverty, Iyengar finds that the episodic framing of poverty leads to attributions of individual responsibility (ibid p. 67). The episodic framing of poverty reduced support for welfare and increased public approval of leaders committed to slashing such programs (ibid p. 101). These results are very similar to those of Edelman (1964).

Concluding Comments

The representation of political issues as fragmented and isolated obfuscates the recognition and appraisal of the complexities of the social and political world. In this context, political actors are compelled to present their definition of reality in bumper-sticker platitudes that have a straightforward linear appeal and fit the "sound bite" requirements of the medium of television. The emphasis on news values and other practices of the mass news media make it very difficult for a political actor to explain the often complex reasons for endorsing a particular course of action, while, at the same time, these factors favor the coverage of facile attacks on that same position (Patterson, 1994). Alternative positions gain relatively easy access and become objectified through the news media's tendency to bifurcate contentious political issues. This results from one of the primary aspects of the news media's norm of objectivity which necessitates that the news present "both" sides of the story (as if there are always only two) as well as the news media's emphasis on controversy or conflict over substantive policy concerns. Given this

situation, it is relatively easy for political actors to attack complex proposals and legislation even though these proposals would presumably better reflect the complexity of political issues (Ranney, 1983). It is generally much easier for a political actor to attack a difficult stand on a contentious issue than to make such a stand himself. As it is usually in the best interest of any political actor to capitalize on an opponent who makes a tough decision, particularly when that stand is going to hurt some identifiable constituency to which the attacker can make his appeal, one would expect that this should drive politics to the lowest common denominator of simplistic, linear platitudes.

It is thus claimed here that the reciprocal relationship between the disembedded and decontextualized representation of political issues on the television news and the simplistic and self-interested definition of these issues by political actors contributes heavily to a superficial, divisive and non-comprehensive practice of politics. The following chapters will examine how these fragmented political representations are addressed by news media spectators.

Chapter Four

The News Spectator

This chapter addresses the individual side of this project: how news spectators conceptualize the political world, particularly that world constructed by the television news, as a function of various modes of reasoning. This chapter will first offer an overview of a theory of adult cognitive development which elaborates the basis for adult cognitive differences. This rests heavily on the theories of Jean Piaget which are amended to take into account the importance of differences in social contexts through the arguments of primarily Vygotsky and Mead. This theory is then utilized to examine the degree to which one's social identity relies on the various norms, values, categories, and stereotypes of a particular social context and how this makes one more or less susceptible to the simplistic or divisive political threats, of the type addressed in the previous chapter. This theoretical elaboration of how individuals reason is also important as this provides the basis for the hypotheses of the empirical experiment presented in the next chapter.

A Theory of Cognitive Development

This section will first provide a theoretical grounding for the model of cognitive development which will then be presented. This grounding lies primarily in the work of Jean Piaget and his development of the argument that cognition develops through a series of identifiable stages. While Piaget's arguments are very useful as a conceptualization of the development of cognitive structures, his theories leave an under-developed

conceptualization of the importance of the social realm in which the individual develops. To this end, this chapter will examine the importance of the social psychological theories of, primarily, Vygotsky and Mead. This social psychological approach is referred to elsewhere as structural pragmatics (Rosenberg, forthcoming) and will demonstrate the theoretical importance of the quality of information provided to individuals as they interact with the social realm from different levels of cognitive development. Given the emphasis of the overall project, this topic will be used to evaluate how news spectators, at different levels of cognitive development, conceptualize the political reality constructed on the mass news media.

Background

At the level of individual cognition, the philosophical analysis of knowledge has long focused on either an objective reality independent of the subjective individual mind or the subjective mind independent of objective reality (Rosenberg, 1988 ch. 3). The two main corpora of thought on this matter have avoided the problem of integrating these seemingly independent realms in the process of the acquisition of knowledge by emphasizing one at the expense of the other. In the Baconian, or empiricist, tradition, this dilemma is resolved by downplaying the role of the individual by assuming that there is no subjective interpretation of reality, individuals simply experience and come to know reality directly through their senses with no shading or coloring by the palette of the mind. According to this "Lockean" view, the mind is an empty vessel in which an individual's experiences are stored; the attitudes and beliefs of individuals differ only because they have been exposed to differing aspects of the world around them (Wilson,

1992 p. 32). The alternative viewpoint, that of the Cartesian or rationalist tradition, posits a structure to individual cognition that exists independently of an external reality which is understood only as a result of the development of the internal structure. The crux of this model begins and ends with the subjective mind, subsuming the importance of the objective world within which the mind operates. Advocates of such a view include Kant, with his emphasis on *a priori* knowledge and categories (Wilson, 1992 p. 32).

While both of these traditions have merit, a more fruitful analysis of the interplay between the subject and the object in individual cognition can be found in the epistemology of Jean Piaget.[1] Piaget begins his theory by rejecting both the empirical and rational philosophies of knowledge in their entirety while adopting aspects of each. He appreciates the realism and the geneticism of the empirical model, but rejects it as "geneticism without structure" and dismisses the rationalist line of thought as "structuralism without genesis" (Rosenberg, 1988 pp. 62-3). Piaget acknowledges the importance of both the subjective mind and the objective world in the process of knowledge acquisition. Not surprisingly, Piaget puts forward his own theory of knowledge which is a combination of the two approaches introduced above. Piaget maintains that individuals engage in subjective reasoning in an effort to make sense of the objective world to which they have been exposed; knowledge thus incorporates both an objective reality and a subjective meaning and that the acquisition of knowledge occurs

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For a more comprehensive presentation of this argument, please see Inhelder and Piaget *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (1958), Piaget *Structuralism* (1970), or Piaget *Biology and Knowledge* (1971).

through the interplay of these realms. Subsequently, according to Piaget, both subjective meaning and objective reality are related in knowledge, but also exist independent of the other (Rosenberg, 1988 p. 67).

The biological basis of Piaget's thought and theory is apparent in his elaboration of the idea of balance or equilibrium between the organism and the environment. Essentially Piaget maintains that individual reasoning is always at some stage of equilibrium with the social realm. At any given level of development, individuals develop a structure of reasoning that enables them to interact with the objective world. The structural aspect of Piaget's theories lies in the claim that these various modes of reasoning are shaped by underlying structures which delimit the type and quality of individual reasoning at that particular stage of cognitive development. Piaget defines structures as "the organizational forms of mental activity" (Piaget, 1967 p. 5). Much in the same way all individual organisms develop a process of physiological equilibration with their environment, these cognitive structures enable the individual to minimize the level of cognitive incoherence with their environment (Piaget, 1977 p. 178). In other words, the individual always seeks to avoid incoherence between the structure of individual reasoning and the structure of the social environment in favor of a state of equilibrium. Piaget's use of biological terminology and concepts can at first be a bit confusing to those not familiar with his theory. What Piaget means in his discussion of an equilibrium between the individual and the social whole is essentially an equilibrium or balance between the egocentrism of the individual and the constraints of the society. It is, after all, this society which makes up the environment within which the individual

seeks to satisfy various needs. For example, Chapman (1992) presents the ideal of cooperation as an example of a higher equilibrium where individual and group (parent) perspectives are balanced (p. 42).

Development

It is this emphasis on equilibrium which also gives Piaget's structural argument a developmental thrust. Individuals are not merely acted upon by their environment, but take an active role in reorganizing their conceptual interpretations of the objective world by developing more complex and abstract tools with which to act on their environment. Individuals internalize aspects of their environment which, in turn, are used to affect future interactions. The tools used in these interactions include such higher mental processes as language and signs (Piaget, 1977 pp. 15, 293). At any given level of development (Piaget presents four) an individual will have achieved a level of equilibration between the subjective and objective forces which adequately serves the needs of the individual in their interactions with the objective world at that level of development. Cognitive equilibrium is maintained as the individual adapts to their environment through the two primary processes of assimilation and accommodation (Piaget, 1977 pp. 6-7). The latter designating how the individual adapts to the external environment and the former designating how the individual assimilates novel stimuli or outside elements in a manner compatible with one's structure of reasoning which is itself a state of equilibration between the individual and the environment (ibid).

At earlier levels, reasoning structures are relatively basic as the individual is largely egocentric and the demands placed on them by the environment, while important,

are not very complex. These interactions are oriented toward such things as the need for food, water, warmth, or comfort. As the individual is exposed to novel environments or conditions of interaction which do not conform to one's current equilibrated structure of reasoning, to the extent these stimuli can not be ignored or otherwise dismissed, one will try to assimilate these stimuli into one's existing structure of cognition. However, to the extent these stimuli fail to conform to the rules or limitations imposed by the structure of one's current mode of cognition, this stimuli may remain incoherent or incomprehensible. At this point, the cognitive equilibrium of individuals no longer adequately assimilates new conditions of interaction and incompatibilities arise between one's subjective meaning and the objective reality (Piaget, 1977 pp 12, 40).

To the extent individuals are repeatedly exposed to "nonbalances", situations and stimuli where the external world does not conform to the expectations stemming from one's cognitive structure, or "perturbations" such as contradictions or gaps in knowledge (Piaget, 1975, p. 67; Chapman 1992, p. 45) which stymie individuals' efforts to achieve their goals, individuals may come to doubt their understanding of the external world. This may become the setting for cognitive development to the degree the individual subjectively reflects on how they think or understand the world rather than on what they think about. Piaget refers to this process as "reflexive abstraction" which he defines as, "simply taking your means of organizing as object...differentiating them out from the object world to understand them and take them as object" (Piaget, 1970 p. 28). This process of reflexive abstraction enables the development of a more complex cognitive structure that is better equilibrated with the more complex objective stimuli encountered

(ibid). It is through this process of reflexive abstraction in which equilibration can result in essentially new and better forms of thought, in terms of compatibility with the social structure, as coordinations among operations at one level become the "elements" to be coordinated at the next higher level. It is by means of increasingly more complex and integrated cognitive structures that individuals become able to engage in successful social intercourse in order to achieve their goals in the social sphere; individuals thus progress through a series of successive improvements of "increasing equilibration" between the individual and society (Piaget, 1975 pp. 4, 178). Piaget maintained that this process continues until the individual develops a structure of cognitive reasoning that essentially mirrors that of the objective physical realm which in Piaget's theory is the logico-mathematical terms of concrete operations characterized by generalizable and reversible classificatory and categorizational operations (Inhelder and Piaget, 1964 p. 15).

In order to clarify Piaget's theories and to provide a transition between these theories and the context of adult cognition with which this project is concerned, a hypothetical example will be provided at this point. Imagine an individual whose reasoning is structured in a manner which enables the individual to effectively engage the group of individuals with which the individual commonly comes into contact. However, in repeated instances of exposure to individuals outside of this relatively insular group, the individual finds that others in society do not behave in the manner this individual has come to expect: situations may not unfold as expected, the individual may be stymied in his attempt to attain certain goals, and other social interactions may simply not be understood. In the face of these surprising and baffling experiences, the individual may

either attempt to retreat to the extent they are able and try to limit social interaction to those with whom social interaction is played out in a more understandable manner or, to the extent the individual is repeatedly exposed to confusing social stimuli, the individual may be compelled to self-reflect on his own social understandings and take these as objects of analysis themselves. In other words, he may try to evaluate how he understands the social world rather than what he understands about the social world. Piaget refers to this as a process of reflexive abstraction and is the process by which one develops a new structure of reasoning at a higher level of equilibrium with social reality. In this way, it can be seen how a state of equilibrium both explains the construction of and development from structures of reasoning. This occurs through the twin processes of assimilation and accommodation. To the extent that external stimuli can not be assimilated given the constraints of one's structure of reasoning, this structure of reasoning must be re-equilibrated in order to develop a more complex and less egocentric structure of reasoning that can accommodate what were earlier seen as perturbations or nonbalances.

The theory of cognitive development propelled by the twin forces of assimilation and accommodation is not dissimilar from Hegel's dialectic model of cognition. Hegel posited that a sense of meaning orients actions, which can negate the original meaning. In other words, intellectual growth occurs through a series of theses and antitheses (Hegel, 1977). This is very similar to the force that drives an individual through Piaget's stages. According to Piaget, this reflexive interplay between these two realms provides the impetus for individuals to re-examine the nature of their understanding of the world

and propel them to achieve a more abstract equilibration between their subjective meaning and the objective world. This process continues until individuals obtain a stable representation of the world that mirrors reality to a degree that is constant between various situations and allows individuals to adequately interpret the activities in the world around them and, in turn, reflexively act upon that world.

The individual and Society

Piaget's conception of the structures of individual reasoning is social psychological to the extent he at least addresses the role of society in human cognitive development. However, Piaget emphasizes the psychological at the expense of the social. To the extent fault is found with Piaget here, it is his underdeveloped conception of the role of the society in cognitive development. To Piaget, the social realm is simply that thing to which all individual cognitive development eventually comes to mirror structurally. Piaget views development as complete at the stage of formal operations which is typified by such things as the ability to make deductions and implications, to reason from the general to the particular and back again, etc. (Gardner p. 103). In Piaget's experiments, all of his subjects eventually come to reason at the level of formal operations. However, this is probably in no small part due to the relatively well-off Swiss population from which Piaget's sample was drawn. Given his concern with logical operations rather than particular socio-cultural experiences, Piaget fails to address differences within or between cultures. This has also led to the criticism that Piaget's conceptualization of social structure relies exclusively on the concrete formal abstraction of science which is nothing other than a myth of the current socioeconomic order (Buck-

Morss, 1987). Following this line of thought, it could be claimed that Piaget's argument demonstrates that the ability to think abstractly is contingent on a certain level of development of the relevant society. This is particularly true of abstract commodity relations and Buck-Morss goes so far as to claim that Piaget is not testing for abstract thinking but for concrete economics; which may be abstract nonetheless. However, returning to the original point, Piaget has been criticized for seeing development as emerging essentially from within the individual and for failing to give equally strong emphasis to changes in socio-historical conditions (Riegel, 1975 p. 4)

Piaget felt that the driving force in this cognitive re-equilibration is an internal developmental drive to make sense of objective stimuli encountered. There are, however, a number of theorists who disagree with Piaget's emphasis on the primacy of the subjective over the objective realm. These theorists primarily follow in the footsteps of Marx who argued that individuals do not develop in isolation; they develop in a social context; they are socially determined. This argument was central to Marx's theorizing, who claimed that the objective forces of production delineated the relations of production and the construction of individuals in society. He maintained that the nature of individuals depends on their material conditions (Marx, 1978). One example of this trend is the Soviet psychological tradition which stresses the impact of social conditions on cognitive development. This is probably most clearly exemplified in the works of both Vygotsky (1962, 1981) and Leont'ev (1981) who maintain that development occurs through internalization. "In contrast to Piaget, we hypothesize that development does not proceed toward socialization, but towards the conversion of social relations into mental

functions" (Vygotsky 1962, p. 165). In this vein, Vygotsky notes the importance of various "cultural mediators" or tools, the most important of which being language, which are employed in social interaction and are the primary means by which the individual relates to reality and coordinates his own mental functions. Subsequently, one's mental development occurs only in the course of social activity.

Both Piaget and Vygotsky are concerned with the developmental process of childhood to adulthood; both accept a notion of a dialectic dynamic and something of a stage-like process. Where they differ, in general terms, is that Vygotsky is more concerned with how development occurs than with the stages through which it proceeds. Given his primary concern with the social realm as the primary force of development, Vygotsky emphasizes the effects of the external on the internal while Piaget emphasizes the internal as it interacts with the external. Piaget's theories essentially depict an autonomous individual interacting with the environment. This interaction is powered by the wherewithal of the individual and his structure of thinking. Connections between the internal and external realms are made through experience and it is the reflective thinking of the individual that powers developmental movement.

For Vygotsky, the focus is primarily on the role of the social as a force powering individual cognitive development. Development occurs through the internalization of external stimuli. However, while Vygotsky's focus is on the social, he also maintains that one has innate psychological capacities, such as the capacity to work with a skilled other at a higher level of development. This occurs in what Vygotsky refers to as the zone of proximal development. In one's zone of proximal development, one can do more with

others than one can do alone, but this can then be internalized and done later. To drastically simplify this argument, what Vygotsky maintains here is that cooperative interaction precedes development. This is opposed to the arguments of Piaget who views understanding as a personal issue. In essence, Piaget doesn't attribute any particular role to the external environment other than as the realm to which one's internal cognition adapts. To this end, the external social and political environment can be thought of a force compelling development, but not as playing an active role in the developmental process. Some individuals may, of course, develop sooner than others depending on the richness of the environment, but, for Piaget, the driving force in the developmental process is a subjective force. Vygotsky thus adds a valuable social element to this topic.

Adult Cognition

A handful of social and political psychologists have utilized Piaget's work with children as a basis for their own theories of adult cognitive development (Kohlberg, 1969; Perry, 1970; Kuhn, 1979; Kegan, 1982; Rosenberg, 1988; Commons, 1990). However, while Piaget contended that all "normal" children reach the level of formal operations (Inhelder and Piaget, 1958), in the application of his paradigm to the realm of adults it has become clear that not all individuals reach the same level of development. This can be explained by emphasizing the role of the social context on individual development as alluded to above. Depending on the environmental imperatives to which one is exposed, development can either be stimulated or arrested. In general, the more complex demands placed on the individual, the greater one is compelled to reach higher levels of cognitive reasoning.

Rosenberg (1988) identified three stages of adult cognitive reasoning: sequential, linear, and systematic. This orientation will be shared in this dissertation. These levels of development are invariant - an individual must pass through one level before advancing to a higher level. As these stages are concerned with the structure rather than the content of cognitive reasoning, these modes of reasoning apply to all subject matter. At this point it will be helpful to consider a few aspects of each level of reasoning, especially as they are relevant to the interplay between the news media and news media spectators. The overview of each mode of reasoning is followed by an example elaborating the points made. Emphasis will be given to the linear and systematic levels as they are most relevant to the study conducted. This overview is based on the analysis of individual reasoning first identified by Rosenberg (1988) and further developed in joint research by the political psychology cohort at the University of California, Irvine (Rosenberg, forthcoming).

Linear

Linear reasoning is so called because it perceives the social world as a series of linear trajectories of action (Rosenberg, 1988) or, what will be referred to here, for clarity sake, as linear frames of reference. When addressing the social world, the linear focus is on the immediate and the concrete; other aspects of the situation are then defined or made sense of relative to this initial anchor. Linear reasoning is able to build out from this concrete present to possible pasts and futures through simple causal, categorical, and normative linkages thus creating atemporal frames of reference for various concrete observations. This enables linear reasoning to go beyond the issue directly presented and

predict, infer, and construct hypothetical scenarios. However, the constituent units of these extrapolations are supplied by what has been learned by the linear reasoner through either direct or mediated experience.[2] The object of attention is thus conceptualized in terms of the concrete social processes to which the individual has been exposed. Each of the constituent pieces of information making up the linear frame of reference are addressed sequentially and in relation to the immediate concrete anchor of the issue at hand. The linkages between these pieces of information are typically singular and unidirectional; they are not defined in relation to one another but rather in terms of the immediate focus of the situation. The unidirectionality of these relationships naturally disposes linear reasoning to categorical and stereotypical reasoning. This aspect of linear reasoning will be addressed in more detail below.

Linear reasoning is capable of considering multiple actions or actors, although it is not able to simultaneously regard them with equal emphasis. Rather, attention will be given to one or the other loci and the other phenomenon will be made sense of relative to the anchor. Subsequently, linear reasoning is unable to simultaneously consider multiple relationships among those actions or objects.

This might be made more clear by examining how linear reasoning might

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This is essentially the argument presented by schema theory; over the course of a lifetime the linear reasoner acquires a repository of culturally available schemas or scripts of how society works. As relevant social phenomena are subsequently encountered, the linear reasoner uses these schemas in order to make sense of the topic at hand. For more information on schemas see Taylor and Fiske (1981), Conover and Feldman (1984), or Graber (1984). These works conceptualize schema reasoning as universal while the argument here is that schematic reasoning is endemic to linear reasoning. To extend the analogy, systematic reasoners may utilize schematic reasoning in their day to day lives but they would not be limited in their conception of the social world to schematic understandings.

conceptualize a news broadcast covering California's Proposition 209, the "civil rights initiative". This was an initiative decided by popular vote in the 1996 election which essentially sought to abolish all affirmative action programs sponsored by any California state institution. The news broadcast addresses the substance of the initiative by quoting various proponents and opponents of the proposition who present the current situation in terms of "quotas", "preferential treatment" and "reverse discrimination" on the one hand and "opening doors", "leveling the playing field", and "increased opportunities for women and minorities" on the other. A voter reasoning in a linear manner might make sense of this issue by addressing one possible focal point of this broadcast, the proposition itself, and linking other information, either presented in the broadcast or from personal experience, to this anchor. For instance, an individual might make sense of this proposition by linking information from the broadcast such as quotas, preferential treatment, and reverse discrimination (mediated personal experience) and reason that, as these things are bad, the proposition must be good as it seeks to do away with these practices (normative link). To this he might link his own personal experience of having to work hard in order to better himself without have been given any preferential treatment (personal experience) and further reason that if he can do it, anyone can (categorical link). This may also have a normative dimension based upon consistent and repeated exposure, through the mass media, to an idealized depiction of the value of individual advancement.

Different individuals may of course draw upon different experiences and schemas and reach different conclusions. This article makes no claims about the content of linear reasoning, it simply asserts that this content will be processed according to the same

underlying structure. For instance, another individual reasoning in a linear manner might see the same news broadcast and note that David Duke is identified as supporting the proposition and as the news spectator has been told through earlier media reports that David Duke is racist (mediated personal experience), he might thus conclude that this measure is racist (causal link) and, as Republicans are supporting it, they must also be racist (categorical link). However, he does not have the ability to link these variously associated phenomena to another frame of reference.

These linear frames of reference are the context within which linear reasoning addresses and makes sense of the social and political world; these are the social and political reality for one reasoning in a linear manner. Individuals may develop more or less elaborate understandings of various issues, that is they may know a little or a lot about any particular topic. However, as it is at the level of concrete action where linear reasoning is carried out, this mode of reasoning offers no general or over-arching frame of reference by which one may examine these specific frames of reference as objects of analysis themselves. In terms of the example presented above, either of these individuals might be aware of the beliefs or understandings of the other as a result of training or exposure, but as these different positions are not conceptualized simultaneously in relation to the other in terms of some overarching systematic understanding of social reality, primacy must be given to one position and the other must be devalued accordingly.

Linear reasoning is not oriented to the linkages between these linear frames of reference, they are seen as relatively isolated and, as these relatively isolated contexts

surrounding different issues make up the social reality of linear reasoning, this reality is necessarily fragmented and discontinuous; social issues seem to flare up here and there with little rhyme or reason. However, linear reasoning does not conceive of this world as fragmented, rather, these various understandings of social issues are simply the way the world is; they are the totality of the reality of linear reasoning.

Systematic

For the purposes of the argument presented here, the central difference between linear and systematic reasoning is the degree to which either is immersed in the immediacies of concrete exposure to various issues. As opposed to linear reasoning, systematic reasoning is able to take various frames of reference, such as those presented above, as objects of analysis in themselves. This allows systematic reasoning to examine the interconnected links and relationships between these various frames of reference and, in so doing, recognize and make sense of these contexts as relative aspects of a system of interrelated phenomena. Rather than addressing these frames of reference from the concrete present, this concrete present is interpreted relative to the larger social values and meanings upon which these more concrete and particular conceptions of the world rely. However, it is not that one gradually learns to recognize the reciprocal relationships between social actions and thus concurrently assess multiple anchors, rather one is able to do these things because one assesses social reality from an abstract systematic construction or definition of the social world as opposed to the immediate concrete present. Subsequently, systematic reasoning is able to recognize that the meanings and values drawn on as individuals assess the immediacies of social action are actually

differently constructed by different individuals, groups, and cultures. These values and meanings are evaluated relative to one another and defined within the context of the system of which they are a part. The systematic reasoner is thus able to assess the social world from the perspective of this interconnected web of meanings and values. This allows the systematic reasoner to reflect upon the nature of the relationship between various social actions and social actors and actively interpret the meaning of the linear associations experienced or presented. As one examines the world in a systematic fashion, one is thus better able to examine and question the economic and social assumptions upon which various views of society are based. Subsequently, it is important to differentiate systematic reasoning from a well-organized belief "system" or structure such as "liberal" or "conservative" ideological orientations. As noted by Graber (1984), the political world is discontinuous and incongruous. The variation of possible values and meanings ensure that any ideological constraint imposed on one's view of the world would, in a way, act as fetters limiting one's breadth of understanding of the various understandings of the political realm. It is through the employment of systematic reasoning that one is "naturally" able to recognized this multiplicity of meaning. This is demonstrated below.

For instance, an individual reasoning in a systematic manner would, for example, be able to place specifics of the situation relative to one another in light of some integrated interpretive frame of reference. This means items may be associated in a way other than presented and, consequently, specific items may be redefined in terms of the larger interpretive sphere. In terms of the Proposition 209 example presented earlier, one

individual may reconstruct the information presented in the news broadcast in terms of racism as a larger social force that both enables and constrains the ability of individuals to succeed in society. Subsequently arguments such as quotas, preferential treatment, reverse discrimination, etc. may be redefined as merely efforts to obfuscate a history of racial discrimination as well as the existence of contemporary racism in society. Furthermore, these ideas as well as the arguments revolving around opening doors, leveling the playing field, and increased opportunities, may be all defined relative to another in terms of the overarching frame of reference: racism as a social force that continues to affect the ability of individuals to succeed.

In addition, this individual should have the ability to recognize that many of our social norms are shaped by a strong sense of individual reliance which causes many in society to emphasize the power of individual self reliance while devaluing the role of larger social forces. This would provide an integrative social framework allowing the systematic reasoning individual to recognize make sense of the prevalent backlash against the beneficiaries of affirmative action programs and recognize the appeal of abolishing affirmative action programs from the perspective of both those who are threatened by reverse discrimination and those who are stigmatized by such views.

While systematic reasoning may recognize and understand either view as the product of a particular subject or culture, this does not necessarily lead to a situation of moral relativism. Rather, the individual can accept or disagree with either overarching view on economic, spiritual, selfish, or any other grounds. Nevertheless, meaning is more relative for systematic reasoning while for linear reasoning it is simply objective

while only preferences are relative. As systematic reasoning recognizes the relative nature of the meanings and values surrounding any particular issue, one is less likely to accept the exclusive certainty of a particular position, definition, or solution which may seem quite obviously true and right to one reasoning in a linear manner. This is not to say that one reasoning in a systematic manner can not have beliefs or preferences; it is just that these are defended relative to the creation or definition of a system of interconnected meanings, values, and norms. This then provides the context for immediate experience as well as one's own sense of self in relation to the social world.

Systematic reasoning, of course, draws on personal experience and schematic understandings in day-to-day life. However, the important difference between systematic and linear reasoning is that the former is able to transcend the discontinuous concrete immediacies with which one is bombarded as they address the social realm. Subsequently, systematic reasoning should be able to recognize the essentially fragmented nature of the political reality constructed by the mass news media. As demonstrated by the hypothetical example above, systematic reasoning is able to recognize the relative nature of variously constructed meanings and values. To the extent news media representations define social or political issues in terms of certain meanings or values, one might expect that a news spectator reasoning in a systematic manner to notice the absence of relative meanings or values and thus recognize the representation's selective aspects. However, insofar as linear reasoning is immersed in the concrete assessment of news media presentations, one would expect that it will correspondingly fail to recognize the representation's selective aspects. One would thus expect that those

reasoning in a systematic manner are likely to recognize that the news media present a particular view of reality; while one would expect that one reasoning in a linear manner to address news media representations from the perspective of their personal orientation to the issue.

Sequential

Sequential reasoning is typified as egocentric reasoning. Sequential reasoning conceptualizes social objects in terms of immediate, unfolding sequences; motives are attached to these sequences and are primarily triggered by needs or feelings as attributes of the immediate circumstances. Subsequently, the sequential reasoner is oriented to the concrete events of the moment. Rather than engaging in complex, abstract rationalizations, sequential reasoning orients to values such as "what is good" in terms of immediate, personal consequences. The social and political world is one of unfolding sequences that are immediately accessible to the individual. Sequential reasoning will pay attention to these sequences to the extent they are directly relevant to the individual, but there is relatively little abstracted from any particular sequences that might be applied to other situations. For instance, there is little conception of abstract rules or categories save to the extent they have a direct impact on the individual and are thus directly reinforced. In chapters two and three it was discussed how the practice of politics is presented on the news media as something occurring "out there", separate from the daily lives of news spectators and as something over which they have little control. From the perspective of sequential reasoning, this is not merely a matter of presentation, but politics is quite literally perceived as something "out there" with little payoff or

implications for the individual and of little relevance or importance. Various political actions may be observed and various actors, such as the President, may be perceived as aspects of these actions, but these different observed concrete sequences of political action are not likely to be made sense of relative to each (Rosenberg, 1988 p. 103).

To use the example of the network news presentation of proposition 209 presented above, sequential reasoning may observe the sequence of events played out on the television screen but is then likely to simply ignore this issue entirely as the issues of reverse discrimination and leveling the playing field are likely to be relatively incomprehensible (Rosenberg 1988, p. 114). As will be examined below, racial and other social categories are too abstract to be of much relevance to the daily world of sequential reasoning (ibid p. 109). Politics, and its representation on the news is simply too abstract to be of much relevance to sequential reasoning; to the extent an individual reasoning in a sequential manner may try to make sense of these issues, it will be done in terms of personal understandings and payoffs.

Individuals reasoning in this manner are only likely to be found in relatively stable environments in which they can learn appropriate understandable sequences of action which allow them to adequately adapt to the demands of life. To the extent this is possible, individuals must live in an environment in which they are sheltered from direct demands of complex modern society (Rosenberg, 1988 p.113).

There has not yet been any research which has evaluated the adult reasoning levels of a representative cross-section of the population which would allow one to make any predictions about the relative ratio of different modes of reasoning with any

acceptable level of probability. This dissertation as well as previous research[3] suggests that contemporary society is largely populated by individuals reasoning in a linear manner largely because, to use the terminology of Piaget, this would seem to be the common level of equilibration between the individual and contemporary modern society. As pointed out above, the limitations of sequential reasoning largely preclude frequent interactions with non-immediate individuals and institutions in contemporary society. In order to successfully deal with the abstract complexity of modern society on a repeated basis, one would need engage in a level of abstract thought which is beyond the ability of sequential reasoning. For instance, one would need to be able to utilize information from past experiences in novel situations and as well as recognize the subjectivity of other individuals and recognize that these others have views and perspectives which differ from one's own. In other words, if one were to engage the complexity of the modern world reasoning in a sequential manner, the world would seem incoherent or incomprehensible and one would fail to be successful in one's endeavors. At that point one could either retreat into more familiar contexts, if possible, or one could engage in process of reflexive abstraction and examine how one thinks about the world and develop a more complex cognitive structure that is better equilibrated with the more complex objective stimuli encountered. In short, sequential reasoning may develop into linear reasoning. Linear reasoning is generally a very appropriate level of equilibration for dealing with society as traditional structured. To the degree society is structured in terms of concrete rules for

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[3] See Rosenberg (1988) or Rosenberg (forthcoming).

behavior, institutions are hierarchically organized, politics are presented in terms of simple cause and effect, etc.; society is structured in terms that are understandable and manipulable by linear reasoning. This idealized depiction of society is, obviously, threatened on a number of fronts leaving those reasoning in a linear manner often feeling bewildered and occasionally threatened.[4] In spite of the difficulties encountered by linear reasoning as it seeks to make sense of a rapidly changing social world, relatively few individuals develop a systematic mode of reasoning, as the development of systematic reasoning is contingent upon the acquisition of broad areas of responsibility or exposure to other socially provocative experiences. Individuals would not only have to be exposed to the abstract principles behind the concrete rules of social interaction, for example, but would be compelled to utilize these principles in the course of their social activities and not many individuals are compelled to engage this type of stimuli. This group would probably include, for example, the political theorists who, insofar as they assume everyone reasons in the manner as they do, may create theory that fails to adequately take into account the motivations of the majority of the populace. This topic will be addressed further in chapter six.

Social Reality

As noted above, this project self-consciously addresses the realm of the social psychological. Therefore, at this point, this chapter will examine some aspects of

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[4] This topic is addressed in greater detail below. See also Rosenberg, forthcoming, ch. 1

contemporary society that are both important and relevant to individual cognitive development. The groundwork for this section has already been laid with the introduction of the arguments of L. S. Vygotsky on the importance of addressing the role of particular social contexts on individual cognitive development. Vygotsky (1981), maintains that the development of thought is determined by one's socio-historical surroundings and the language available to individuals. Meaning results from social interaction; while subjective, it does not wholly reside in the subject. In the absence of other people this takes the form of 'inner speech' with an imagined other. It is through this process that objective phenomena take on meaning.

This line of thought is most recognizable to American social psychology through the lectures and writings of George Herbert Mead. Mead maintained that the mind is a product of society; the self can only be recognized in relation to an other.

> A person is a personality because he belongs to a community, because he takes over the institutions of that community into his own conduct. He takes its language as a medium by which he gets his personality, and then through a process of taking the different roles that all the others furnish he comes to get the attitude of the members of the community. Such, in a certain sense, is the structure of a man's personality. There are certain common responses which each individual has toward certain common things, and insofar as those common responses are awakened in the individual when he is affecting other persons he arouses his own self. The structure, then, on which the self is built is this response which is common to all, for one has to be a member of a community to be a self. (Mead, 1962 p. 162)

Mead maintains that in taking the attitude of the other, we become objects for ourselves; the self exists only as it takes the role of others. As individuals repeatedly take the role of the other in social interaction the individual eventually comes to adopt the position of the

"generalized other" representing the view or views that are shared throughout the community. In this manner individuals come to expect and adopt culturally appropriate responses and internalize generalized categories and situations to which they are exposed.[5] Mead notes that there is a dynamic interaction between individuals and society; each element is both caused and causal. Consequently, the quality of the self develops as a function of the quality of his or her societal interaction. As individuals develop they recognize and internalize a more robust and broader conception of the "generalized other." This allows them to take the self as an object in an ever broader way allowing them greater control of the self and leading to the development of a more socialized self.

Mead's concept of a more socialized self is not dissimilar from Piaget's conception of increasing equilibration between the individual and society. Each theorist examines the social psychology of development but each emphasizes one side or the other of the social psychology coin. Essentially, Mead provides a means of conceptualizing how a particular social environment compels development while Piaget provides a means of conceptualizing how individual cognition adapts and changes to its environment.

However, not everyone is exposed to the same environment in modern, heterogenous societies. This has important implications for the application of individual development to the context of contemporary political practice. In contemporary societies,

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It can be argued that Mead's theory of the "generalized other" rejects the pluralist view that all groups have an equal ability to define policy in favor of a situation in which groups who are both powerful and powerless interact symbolically, solidifying each other's positions; following Mead's line of thought, symbolic interactions complement economic and social disparities (Edelman, 1988 p. 96).

individuals are exposed to different stimuli, have different interests, and hold different roles in society and, consequently, adopt different orientations to society (Habermas, 1978). As noted in chapter one, different individuals construct reality differently. What may be objectively real to one may reflect a significantly different situation for another, as was demonstrated above in the hypothetical example dealing with how different individuals might reconstruct the same news report in very different ways. Intersubjectively agreed upon meaning may exist between individuals with a common orientation to an issue, but not necessarily between these groups. This is particularly true of political issues; it can be argued that issues are political simply because their meanings are disputed. Consequently, the meaning of various social issues may differ as one's social identity differs. In other words, because society is differentiated, individuals adopt differing perspectives on reality. The immersion of individuals in these different constructions of reality has very different implications depending on one's mode of cognition.

The differentiation of modern society into these different social contexts has particular importance for linear reasoning. As noted above in the theoretical elaboration of different stages of cognitive development, linear reasoning addresses the social world in the immediate, concrete present. To this linear reasoning is able to link relevant concrete experiences and schematic understandings and make sense of the current situation in terms of concrete social orientations. However, this mode of reasoning is limited in it's ability to recognize the interconnected relationships between these experiences. This quality of linear reasoning results in two important implications for

how linear reasoning addresses the fragmented and divisive political rhetoric represented on the television news. The first is that linear reasoning is quite susceptible to the subtle and pervasive presentations of particular social and political definitions, categorizations, and representations that are prevalent in mass society, the bases of which are often found in the mass media (Parenti, 1992; Ansolabehere, et al., 1993; etc.). The second is that those individuals reasoning in a linear manner tend to construct their social identity on the basis of the particular context in which they are socialized. This understanding of the self and society is based on concrete experience. One's social group provides an experiential setting and, therefore, provides a set of determinations of what is right and true. The particular social and political situation in which these individuals are immersed takes on a normatively valued quality that is tied to one's own social identity. Therefore threats to these social contexts are often quite persuasive. The social world is thus commonly constructed in categorical terms and, as individuals come to construct their own social identity on the basis of these categories, they are correspondingly susceptible to simplistic or divisive political appeals playing on these categories or stereotypes. The cognitive bases of these two topics are examined below.

Categorical Construction of Social and Political Reality

This section addresses the importance of social categorization to linear reasoning. The categorical construction of the social world is particularly salient for linear reasoning because of how linear reasoning addresses the social world. Linear reasoning addresses the social world from the perspective of an immediate concrete anchor, or locus of

attention, which is made sense of by linking to it other information or knowledge accessible to the individual. This type of reasoning lends itself to categorical thought because it naturally constructs concrete, rather than logical, categories in which the anchoring concern becomes the category which includes all that is attached or associated with it. This type of reasoning is therefore "naturally" predisposed to stereotypical construction when a social group becomes the concrete anchoring concern. In this situation, individuals can only be identified as associated with the group and thus acquire group characteristics. As noted above, linear reasoning may address either a group or an individual, but is unable to address both equally and simultaneously. For instance, if attention is focused on a group, the conceptualization of this group will be applied to all members of that group as these members are defined relative to the conceptual anchor, the group in this instance. Likewise, linear reasoning may focus on an individual member of a group. In this case, group membership is conceptualized as an attribute of the individual. There may, of course, be examples in which linear thought recognizes that there are individual members that are anomalous to the conception of the group, but as the relationship between the group and it's individual members is not defined reciprocally, this will not change the conception of the group. Subsequently, a social group or category will be conceived of as a relatively static and uniform entity constructed on the basis of personal and mediated information to which one has been exposed. As the categorical construction of the social world is an integral aspect of linear reasoning, linear reasoning is "naturally" predisposed to the evaluative and affective aspects of this process. This will be examined in the social identity group categorization

theory of Hogg and Abrams (1988) and the intergroup relations arguments of Sherif (1962) and Tajfel (1982).

According to Hogg and Abrams' (1988) theory of social identity group categorization, people categorize the world in order to simplify perception as there is simply too much happening for anyone to grasp the complexity of social reality in any kind of detail. This categorization of society includes the categorization of the self. Different categories are then constructed on the basis of their similitude and dissimilitude with the self. Consequently, how one categorizes oneself and others is deeply intertwined with the conception of the self. Groups play a central role in this process and are depicted as relatively stable and enduring categories and group members are seen as embodying the characteristics of the group.[6] Hogg and Abrams provide the explanation that social groups become affectively loaded because they are linked to social identity: what is like me is good.[7] Individuals thus select or construct those interpretations of reality that reinforce the preconceptions and views of the in-group, including ensuring that the in-group is defined vis-a-vis other groups in a manner that maximizes self-esteem or, if the group is commonly prejudiced against, perhaps justifies a sense of subordination. Social identity thus consists not just of who one thinks one is but also of the labels applied by

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The group categorization approach is a fairly simplistic depiction of the acquisition of social identity by members of a heterogenous society, although one that is commonly used in large-scale survey research which is limited in its ability to capture individual nuances.

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It is interesting that Hogg and Abrams fail to evaluate the inverse of this dictum: that the view of the other might also reflect on the self. Following this line of thought individuals may also come to believe that if what is like me is not good, I am not good.

others. This is why adolescents find it so important to belong to the right group; the accompanying label provided by others becomes an aspect of the self.

Social psychology has long noted that in a situation that is competitive or otherwise has an evaluative component, individuals will emphasize the differences between the ingroup and the outgroup in a manner that accentuates the positive aspects of the former and the negative aspects of the latter (Sherif, 1962). Individuals also attribute ingroup success to skill or other intrinsic characteristics while attributing outgroup success to luck or other environmental factors and vice versa (Doise, 1986). In addition, normative claims are made about groups that serve to increase the salience of differences between groups while decreasing differences within groups. This is referred to by Tajfel as the "accentuation effect" (Tajfel, 1982).[8] Tajfel also discovered that the simple generation of the group itself, even in an artificial lab setting with no competition led subjects to favor the ingroup over the outgroup. No threat need be present, the simple construction of boundaries or categories has an inherent evaluative component (ibid). This categorical conception of social reality, which is so central to linear reasoning,

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This conceptualization of social identity and social representations is congruent with the social attribution theory of Hewstone and Jaspers ("Social Dimensions of Attribution" in *The Social Dimension*, 1984) which essentially maintains that people tend to make positive and negative attributions as a result of group identification. The group categorization approach is also very similar to the process of interpellation as presented by Althusser ("Ideology and the State" in *Lenin and Philosophy*, 1971). Althusser borrows the term from Freud who derived the term from the Latin for 'interrupting' or 'hailing'. The idea is that one recognizes oneself as a member of a group as one is identified as a member of that group. This then becomes an internalized category through which one recognizes the self as the self. Teresa de Lauretis (*Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, 1987) defines interpellation as, "the process whereby a social representation is accepted and absorbed by an individual as her (or his) own representation, and so becomes, for that individual, real, even though it is in fact imaginary" (De Lauretis, p. 12).

results in a conception of different groups as not merely less similar, but also less worthy. This is the basis of racist or stereotypical thought.

Individuals reasoning in a linear manner can, of course, be taught not to denigrate outgroups. Schools, for instance, teach students to be more tolerant of otherwise negatively valued outgroups. However, this is generally limited to the specific group one is taught not to hate; as the outgroup targets change, these teachings do not necessarily follow (Hanks, 1996; Sullivan, et al., 1982). For instance, students may be taught not to hate African-Americans but this does not naturally spill over into not hating Communists. Individuals can of course be encouraged to, for example, follow a religious ideal of loving others as a larger category of people however this becomes difficult to utilize consistently as more concrete and visible categories are more salient for linear reasoning as a result of how this mode of reasoning conceptualizes the social world.[9] Similarly, the less visible categorical distinctions are, the less likely these distinctions will naturally become cognitively and affectively salient for one reasoning in a linear manner. They are simply less apparent in the concrete reality which is the typical focus of linear reasoning. For instance, at the time of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, an entire generation of young adults in that nation thought of themselves as Yugoslavians and not Croatians, Serbians, Montenegrans, etc. As these ethnic differences were not necessarily concrete or visible, during the early stages of the ensuing conflict, political leaders had to provide

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Interestingly, the category of people as a whole is less immediate than other categories, but more immediate than the category of all creatures, perhaps explaining why they are not also included in this ideal.

external reinforcement to kill former neighbors or burn their houses until these categories became, for the individuals, concrete differentiations of the social world (Cohen, 1993 p. 175). As the dominant social definition of a particular social identity is generally defined in linear terms, the majority of individuals are likely to develop a social identity that is congruent with this definition. This is particularly true in situations such as ethnocentrism where one's positive self-image is linked to the group with which one identifies. Subsequently, these individual variations should not obscure the omnipresence of social categorization.

These social categories and groups are the dominant means by which individuals, particularly those reasoning in a linear manner, make sense of the blooming, buzzing confusion of social life; they are the primary symbolic representations of society. The reason is simply that the social categorization process is the manner in which linear reasoning thinks about the social world. The claim made here is that these individuals can never escape these prejudices; this is simply the way linear reasoning works. That is why these prejudices can be so easily manipulated by political actors. However, not all adults are limited to this type of categorical reasoning. For instance, this process is less powerful in the realm of sequential reasoning. Sequential reasoning is largely concerned with individual concrete objects as part of moments of a specific sequence of events. Other individuals are important to sequential reasoning only in terms of the events with which these individuals are associated and which have some impact on the daily life of the sequential reasoner. This precludes the generation of the type of abstract conceptual relationships necessary to categorize various individuals into social categories.

Categorization requires abstracting wants out of sequence so that they can be utilized as concrete anchors or as associated attributes. As sequential reasoning thinks of particulars as events in a specific sequence, it is very difficult for sequential reasoning to identify different individuals in terms of some physical or behavioral trait that must be held constant over different situations in order to place different individuals in different observed situations according to this common trait (Rosenberg, 1988 p. 109). To the extent these categories are learned, they are likely to be learned in terms of some particular sequence of events and are not likely to be retained across different action sequences. Sequential reasoning would require ongoing reinforcement in order to maintain racist behavior as an individual reasoning in this manner would otherwise be less concerned with one's skin color than with any personal positive payoff they might get from interacting with another individual; in other words, leadership is needed to motivate and sustain prejudice. Such a situation is typified by an individual interacting with other individuals of another race because of some personal payoff such as friendship or material reward. Such immediate and concrete rewards are likely to take precedence over relatively more abstract group differences. Individuals reasoning in this manner must therefore learn through external reinforcement not to associate with, for example, members of a particular race. This is one example of how sequential reasoning differs from linear reasoning in which social categories take on a more "natural" importance. Systematic reasoning, on the other hand, is able to transcend the immediate material and social context and view these various perspectives as relative to one another. Those reasoning in a systematic manner, insofar as they have the ability to reflect on the nature

and structure of their social identity, will develop a more coherent but more abstract sense of the self in relation to the social world.

While it seems somewhat self evident that individuals' social identities are constructed on the basis of the particular socializing agents or factors to which they have been exposed, what is important to the following argument is the fact that because of the structures of linear reasoning, individuals who reason in this manner are not only oriented to a particular view of social reality, but they are unable to recognize the world from a systematic perspective. Rather, the social world is conceptualized as one of competing groups in which one's own views predominate and other orientations will be false, bad, alien, etc. Consequently, the validity of various positions may be disputed. What may be objectively real to one may reflect a significantly different situation for another. This has obvious political implications. Within this world the position of the beholder is privileged as the beholder knows that his/her view of reality is quite obviously real and true. From the perspective of the beholder, other positions must somehow either not know, understand, or otherwise grasp the in-group position for if they did they would obviously adopt or endorse it.

While there may be a recognition that the beliefs of others may differ from one's own and that these beliefs should be respected, someone reasoning in a linear manner will be unable to recognize the differential construction and validity of these values and will develop preferences and procedures for dealing with the beliefs of others as encountered. Individuals can, of course, recognize how and why others hold differing perceptions of reality. However, if information is presented that threatens the values or norms that are

integral to the formation of one's social identity, linear reasoning will engage in a process of rationalization to deal with the conflict.

For instance, it would not be unreasonable for a college undergraduate, reasoning in a linear manner, to truly believe that their school is the best school in the country. This may in fact be an important part of this individuals' self-conception. However, it may be pointed out that this school has low academic standards, a losing football team, etc. Subsequently, in order to maintain one's positive conception of one's school and one's self, the threatening information will either be ignored, explained away, or otherwise dismissed as simply unable to grasp the validity of the in-group position. However, if this is not possible, linear reasoning may devalue the alternative through cognitive balancing, an alteration of the perceived circumstances, or the imposition of other judgment criteria.[10] For instance, if scholastics are the problem, the individual may point to the school's athletic record; if the problem is athletics, the individual may emphasize scholastics, etc. The best linear reasoning can accomplish in this situation is a conception of the social realm in which it is recognized that other groups are in some fundamental or otherwise substantial way different and are thus entitled to their own beliefs and views as long as this does not interfere with the beliefs and views of the linear actor.

Individuals reasoning in a linear manner construct themselves and their view of reality on the basis of the particular experiences to which they have been exposed. The

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These responses were consistently found among linear reasoners in the course of coding a series of cognitive developmental interviews for another project supervised by Shawn Rosenberg at the University of California, Irvine.

social world takes on an ordered quality on the basis of the regularities to which the individual comes into contact, either directly or via mediated communications. These immediate social contexts provide specific moral standards and the set of prescriptions for how action ought to be conducted. The corresponding collage of rules, definitions, categories, etc. give the social realm its ordered quality and, as the construction of the self is deeply intertwined with this social world, acquire value onto themselves. These conventions, norms, rules, and laws are doubly powerful as they also serve to aid in the maintenance of what is normal by defining and punishing what is abnormal. While these rules need not be self-consciously conceptualized in this manner, they are nevertheless powerful as they are seen as essential to the maintenance of the conventional social reality which provides the setting within which individual reasoning operates. The resulting patterns and regularities of the social world have a direct and real impact on the individual, not just as social information but as the social reality in which the individual operates. Consequently, what is common or normal becomes normatively good; what "is" becomes confused with what "should be". It is in this context that the individual learns the set of prescriptions for how action ought to be conducted which, in turn, becomes the basis for moral standards and value construction.

However, these social contexts are not impervious to change. Contemporary society is very complex and changing rapidly. Some theorists (Lyotard, 1979; Jameson, 1995) feel that society has reached a condition of postmodernity. This essentially maintains that the growth of technology and consumerism has resulted in a social condition that is in constant flux, endorsing and relishing individual and social change

and difference. It is maintained here that while this postmodern condition may be an accurate description of certain social and artistic contexts[11] this condition does not, at least yet, typify the whole or even a significant minority of contemporary society but rather exists as a description of what might be. Society's imperviousness to the spread of postmodernism may result from the existence of a critical mass of individuals in contemporary society who are unable or otherwise unwilling to adapt to a condition of such radical social flux. Rather, these individuals cling to the social narratives that make their social context understandable, as would be predicted by the elaboration of linear reasoning presented above.

The position adopted here is that of theorists such as Giddens (1990) who maintain that contemporary society is in the throes of late or advanced capitalism and is displaying the logical ends of modernity. Giddens notes that contemporary modernity is neither staid nor monolithic but is multidimensional and dynamic. Indeed, he claims that late modernity is multi-dimensionally dynamic in that society has broken with traditional forms of dynamism; specifically, Marx's capitalism, Durkheim's industrialism, and Weber's rationalization (Giddens, 1990 p. 12). These factors result in a situation in which modern society can no longer be typified by the enlightenment but by a juggernaut or runaway engine of enormous power. This social engine can be collectively guided to some extent but continuously threatens to rush out of control (ibid).

In the face of this fragmentation of social order and the undermining of this source

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[11] For example, see *Vineland* (1990) by Pynchon or the 1992 film *Hard Boiled* by John Woo.

of identity, individuals reasoning in a linear manner are often compelled to reconstruct their own identities in an effort to respond to the dynamic nature of modernity. For many this constitutes a direct and immediate threat to their identity and ontological security. In such a situation an individual may, to the degree possible, try to retreat from society and its changes. However, as this is usually quite difficult in contemporary society, these individuals will more likely seek to reaffirm the world in understandable terms. This response is inherently maladaptive in the long run as it refuses to acknowledge how society has actually changed and seeks to reaffirm a system that has already changed (Rosenberg, chapter one, forthcoming). For instance, in the desire to reaffirm a traditional view of society, one may join a traditional social movement that attempts to reestablish and reconstruct traditional social routines. The adoption of such religious or political dogma allows a means by which individuals can guide their own actions and propose remedies for concomitant social problems (ibid). The emotional investment in such a group or movement is again based on an understanding of the self in relation to society. As noted above, those values which one holds dear are intimately tied to one's conception of who one is, what is right, and what is good. In the situation outlined here, these are not merely preferences but take the form of a moral obligation to fight for what one believes to be good and true. To threaten or question the corresponding group or movement is to threaten or question the ontological basis for one's endorsement of the value of the group or movement.

Political Threat

To the extent individuals are threatened by changes in society, they can often be motivated to respond to the perceived source of these changes. Political actors may endeavor to activate these sentiments in order to motivate political responses; however, once triggered, these motivations are not easily controlled. For instance, a political actor may use divisive and decontextualized rhetoric in order to convince individuals that they are threatened by structural economic changes such as those which manifest themselves in the necessity of both spouses having to work outside of the home or in the perception that one is less well off than one's parents, etc. Individuals may then be motivated to direct the response generated toward the perceived (visible) cause of these changes - increases in imports, American jobs moving overseas, illegal immigrants taking jobs here, etc. This may result in the generation of much of the populist support behind California's proposition 187, as well as engender such actions as union workers killing a Chinese man in Michigan because they thought he was Japanese, citizen vigilante groups patrolling a California airport near the Mexican border in search of illegal immigrants, etc. These actions no doubt largely stem from the negative valuation and fear of outgroups typical of the linear conception of social reality.

Political actors often manipulate the construction of political claims in a manner that is particularly compelling to linear reasoning as a result of linear reasoning's predisposition to a normatively-laden, categorical conception of the social world, as addressed above. For instance, political actors commonly attempt to play on peoples' fears by blaming societal ills on those individuals or groups outside of mainstream

society. Objects of such attacks have included such groups as Communists, religious "fanatics", racial or ethnic minorities, various immigrant groups, etc. These attacks are constructed so that they have direct, straightforward, "common-sensical" appeal with either the explicit or implicit claim that their political opponent supports or is supported by such "un-American" groups. This forces political opponents to either adopt a similar position or attempt to present an opposing view that, at least in the short and medium runs, lacks the immediate impact of the initial attack. It is not the masses who demand and receive, the masses respond to symbols, not facts; political action shapes wants, not vice versa (Edelman, 1964 p. 172).

What is driving this argument is how one reasoning in a linear manner develops one's identity on the basis of a particular social context which comes to be seen as normal and right. This often provides a point of access for political actors. In an effort to generate political support, political actors must create or define a political reality that resonates with the audience. Political actors often do this by creating the impression that the social contexts relied upon by linear reasoning are threatened and endorsing policies that seek to limit the perceived source or outward manifestation of this threat. However, as demonstrated in chapter three, social and political issues are rarely so simple or straightforward. Many social and political issues are chronic. Simple solutions are not only not likely to be found, but any "solution" is often impossible without dramatically affecting other aspects of society. Subsequently, political actors must be able to strategically define problems and solutions in order to generate political support, as was demonstrated in chapter three through the examination of California's Proposition 209.

The medium of television news also plays a large role in this process. As demonstrated in chapter two, the representation of political issues on the television news almost necessarily represents only limited aspects of political issues. In addition, the news media, and the mass media more generally, play a large role in the development of shared understandings of society of the type upon which linear reasoning depends; for the majority of individuals, the mass media are the primary sources of what is perceived as "normal" in contemporary society. What becomes news in this context are perceived threats to normal social and political contexts as developed by the mass media itself. "Such social policy as a "get tough on crime" program, for example, can be easily sold by relating it to the prime-time picture of crime as acts committed by the psychopathic and the greedy, rather than dealing with situational determinants such as poverty and unemployment" (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1992 p. 55). Therefore, if a political actor can construct an issue that addresses a plausible threat to this social context, he is likely to get access to the public through the news media as this is then news and, as was demonstrated in chapter three, news media access is a very valuable commodity in the game of politics.

Obviously not everyone reacts to these political appeals in the manner presented above. What is argued here is that individuals are more or less susceptible to these political appeals as a function of cognition. Beyond this, the degree of fervor with which social changes are met rely in part on personality differences, differences in individual socialization, different life experiences, etc.

From the perspective of sequential reasoning, abstract categories or stereotypes

have little value or relevance in themselves as they have little direct personal impact. Sequential reasoning is correspondingly less threatened by social changes than linear reasoning. As the sequential world is one of a series of interactions that are associated with positive or negative implications for the actor, there is little personal investment in any particular state of the world save for its immediate effects on the actor. If a new routine becomes available with an easy outcome, the sequential reasoner will easily shift to the new state of affairs. Rules and regulations are less important in this context as the sequential reasoner is more concerned with the outcomes of the sequence of action. Rules are abstractions which may be placed in relation to sequences of concrete action. Sequential reasoning thinks only in terms of the concrete sequences themselves. From this point of view it is far less important whether anyone in punished especially the sequential reasoner himself.

As a result of its more systematic conceptualization of society, systematic reasoning conceives of the social world as one in which social categories are differently conceptualized by different individuals and groups. Rather than simply endorsing certain social definitions or values as right and true, systematic reasoning recognizes that these meanings and values are differently constructed by different individuals depending on the system of meaning in which they are immersed. Subsequently, no one definition of a social category is likely to carry much weight on its own, rather it will be recognized that categories are meaningful to the extent they are differently defined and have different evaluative weight as they are used in different circumstances.

Consequently, as a result of its more abstract orientation to social reality,

systematic reasoning should be able recognize that any particular social issue may be conceptualized differently by different individuals or groups. Consequently while various depictions of reality, such as those represented on the mass media, may by perceived as direct threats to what a linear reasoner may believe to be true and therefore value as good, systematic reasoning should be able to address such views as objects of analysis themselves and evaluate the justifiability of such representations in terms of some larger, more systematic, assessment of the social world. As these more abstract assessments of the social world are constructed in terms of various social meanings and values defined relative to one another, systematic reasoning should be correspondingly less compelled by selective definitions of reality as necessarily true and right. However, this is not to say that these definitions are not endorsed on other grounds.

These differences in the conceptualization of the social world which underlie the difference between the adoption of dogma as a retreat from the complexities of modern life and the development of commitments in a complex world.[12] An individual reasoning in a systematic manner may certainly have strong beliefs about how things should be done in the social world or even their place in this world. These may be based on a set of values or morals that the individual can likely describe and defend stemming from the fact that the individual has reached these commitments in a self-conscious manner based upon a systematic understanding of the social realm rather than through the blind adoption of those values of the particular social context in which one has been socialized

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For an elaboration of this subject not explicitly linked to systematic reasoning, see Perry, 1970, pp. 153-176.

Despite the recognition of the limits of various claims of what is good, right, and just, one reasoning in a systematic manner is not limited to uncertainty and doubt in one's interactions with the social world. Rather, a recognition of the complexity of the social world can have a liberating effect to the extent the individual is freed from earlier externally imposed constraints allowing one to make commitments based on a more systematic recognition of one's relation to the social world. In part, this comes from an ability to tolerate paradox and incongruities in the social and political world as well as other aspects of this mode of reasoning. On the other hand, analysis can lead to paralysis; if one chooses to open oneself to a constant analysis of the basis of one's understanding of the world, one may find it rather difficult to make decisions in the face of the resulting complexity.

In sum, through an examination of the differences between different modes of reasoning and a detailed analysis of the structures of linear reasoning, this chapter has elaborated how, theoretically, the fragmented political reality offered by the television news both construct and threaten the political reality of news spectators reasoning in a linear manner. Aided by this hypothetical understanding of the interplay between the structure of the message and the structure of linear cognition, one can better explain how and why political practice carried out in the public forum is divisive, simplistic, and fragmented. The next chapter will examine, in an empirical setting, the degree to which differences in cognition facilitate a recognition of the fragmented representation of political information on the television news.

Chapter Five

An Empirical Analysis

This chapter examines, in an empirical setting, the different ways in which people interpret television news media messages. Utilizing the paradigm of adult cognitive development presented in the previous chapter, this chapter will examine the reciprocal relationship between the medium of television news and the individual news spectator in the construction of political reality. First, the role of the television news in the construction of political reality is examined from a cognitive developmental perspective. It will then be elaborated how and why individuals, as a function of their mode of cognition, are more or less susceptible to the fragmented and divisive political representations offered by the television news. At this point, the inquiry yields the hypothesis that, depending on their level of cognitive development, individuals will either accept the reality of politics constructed by the mass news media or they will have the ability to examine this reality from a broader systematic perspective thus enabling the recognition of the limited nature of news representations.

This hypothesis is examined in a controlled experiment. Through extensive interviews, subjects' level of cognitive development is assessed. It is then demonstrated that these differences in cognitive reasoning make a profound difference in the degree to which subjects accept the political reality constructed by the medium of television news. These findings carry important implications regarding the ability of adults to assess the political world as well as the ability of society as a whole to come to terms with and act

upon the complex issues facing contemporary society.

Fragmented Realities

The role of the mass news media in the construction of reality was discussed at length in chapters two and three. However, this process might be better understood if it was examined in light of the elaboration of different modes of cognition presented in the last chapter. Aided by the understanding of how mass news spectators might reconstruct news representations differently, it seems likely that differences in individual cognition are centrally important to the power of the mass news media to construct political reality. What is of particular importance in this context is the reciprocal relationship between the episodic or fragmented nature of television news messages and the fragmented nature of linear reasoning. Theoretically, it seems likely that the messages presented on the television news provide powerful anchors for the linear frames of reference or action contexts central to linear reasoning. As noted in the last chapter, linear reasoning addresses the social and political world in terms of the specific concrete relationships to which they are exposed, rather than from a more abstract, systematic perspective. Subsequently, there is little cause for linear reasoning to dismiss or discount the political representations solely because of their fragmented structure. From the perspective of linear reasoning, the power of the news media occurs not in spite of the fragmented and decontextualized structure of its representations, but rather because of these qualities. To the degree its fragmented representations are accepted as political reality, linear reasoning should, correspondingly, fail to notice the "arbitrary" nature of the television news as a

source of information. Consequently, to the degree news representations fail to address the complexity of the social and political world or the underlying causes of social events (Lee and Solomon, 1990), news spectators reasoning in a linear manner will also fail to recognize these concerns and accept the simplistic and often divisive constructions and solutions of complex social and political problems as political reality.. In other words, it is hypothesized here that the fragmentary depiction of social reality in the news media is congruent with the fragmentary social and political understandings of linear reasoning.

For instance, by calling attention to certain aspects of the social world in lieu of others, the news media plays a powerful role highlighting what is currently important in the political world for the linear reasoning news spectator. One could go on to claim that it is the absence of a sense of this interconnectedness both on behalf of the news and the spectator that allows the television news media to play such a powerful role in highlighting what is currently important in the political world for the linear reasoning news spectator. It is in this context that the agenda setting role of the news media achieves its power; issues that linear reasoning news spectators feel are important are so largely because they are addressed as such in the mass news media (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987 p. 18).[1] The social and political world experienced by these news spectators thus changes according to what issues are politicized. In addition, news media messages are unlikely to be recognized as directly relevant to the news spectator's daily life as the issues addressed in the television news are presented as something occurring 'out there' in

[1] See also Rosenberg (1996).

some remote political realm; political games and players are presented as completely distinct from the daily lives of average citizens even though the effects of these political actions may have great immediate consequences (Edelman, 1988; Bennett, 1995).

Insofar as television news messages are presented with no historical or material context, these messages can be assessed in terms of the particular social meanings, concrete experiences, and schemas of the news spectator. One would expect this to be particularly true of news spectators reasoning in a linear manner for the reasons addressed above. Because linear reasoning is anchored in the concrete present and should therefore fail to notice what is absent from news media representations, one would expect that a news spectator reasoning in a linear manner will reconstruct television news representations in terms of that individual's understandings of the political world and their knowledge of that particular issue. However, as most political issues are distant from one's immediate concerns and the news is generally conceived of as objective, individuals often come to adopt those meanings consistently presented in the news media. In other words, as linear reasoning news spectators have no personal experience or schemas to draw upon as they make sense of the political reality constructed by the mass news media, we can hypothesize that these individuals largely accept the reality of politics constructed for them.

One aspect of this is that in the process of the reconstruction of political information there is great incentive to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty thus reassuring

individuals that their own definition of political reality makes sense.[2]

> It is characteristic of large numbers of people in our society that they see and think in terms of stereotypes, personalization, and oversimplifications, that they cannot recognize or tolerate ambiguous and complex situations, and that they accordingly respond chiefly to symbols that oversimplify and distort. This...is especially likely to occur where there is insecurity occasioned by failure to adjust to real or perceived problems (Edelman, 1964).

In this way the news media play a key role in the perpetuation of stereotypes and the presentation of information that might be threatening to the social categories upon which linear reasoning relies for the construction of a social identity. The messages are accepted by the audience because they gel with earlier stereotyped media presentations (Graber, 1984). Therefore, depending on the degree to which political actors on the news media are able to construct and define an issue that dovetails with common understandings and fears or aspirations, the news spectator may come to believe "we" need to get tough on crime or crack down on illegal immigrants or exclude (or include) race as a factor in hiring or admissions, etc. What is seen as 'popular wisdom' on these issues is therefore largely both constructed and reinforced by the news media.[3] Consequently, efforts to become informed can be counterproductive; the more news one consumes, the more narrow and stereotyped understandings of reality are reinforced

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See M. Rokeach, "Generalized Mental Rigidity as a Factor in ethnocentrism," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol 43, 1948, pp. 259-277; A. H. Maslow, "The Authoritarian Character of Structure," *Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol 18, 1943, p. 403; Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, 1941; R. K. Merton, *Mass Persuasion*, 1950; else Frenkel-Brunswik, "Interaction of Psychological and Sociological Factors in Political Behavior," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 46, 1952, pp. 44-65; Adorno, et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*. 1950; etc.

[3] See Iyengar and Kinder (1987), Bennett (1988), Ansolabehere, et al. (1993), etc.

(Bennett, 1995 p. 2).

Rather than predicting changes in behavior or opinion, it will be shown here that a better understanding of the reciprocal relationship between the structure of news media messages and the way these messages are reconstructed by news spectators helps explain the perpetuation of fragmented and divisive political rhetoric that fails to address the full complexity of political issues. This is examined below in an empirical context. Again, it is important to remember that the persuasiveness of these news media representations should largely depend on the audience reasoning in a linear manner. This is because systematic reasoning, as a function of the structure of this mode of cognition rather than knowledge about the subject, should be more likely to notice that these issues have been strategically defined or otherwise taken out of context; that the issue is much more complex than what is implied in its representation. Linear reasoning, however, should largely fail to notice the disembedded and decontextualized structure of these news media representations. In short, the failure to recognize the disembedded structure of these news media messages facilitates the continued fragmented construction and dissemination of political claims leading to a fragmented and divisive practice of politics.

Experiment

Given the importance of the news media in the construction of political reality and the theoretical importance of how this reality might be reconstructed differently depending on one's mode of cognition, this project set out to examine, in an experimental setting, how news spectators reasoning at different cognitive levels made sense of

television news media representation.

Hypotheses:

A. Orientation toward Specific television news representations.

H_0: Null hypothesis: there will be no difference in the manner in which those reasoning in a linear manner and those reasoning in a systematic manner make sense of specific television news representations.

H_1: Subjects reasoning in a linear manner should make sense of the topic of news media representations solely in terms of, or directly related to, the information presented in the news media representation.

H_2: Rather than being limited to the information presented in the news representation, subjects reasoning in a systematic manner will be able to recognize that the news representation necessarily presents a particular, subjective view(s) of reality. Further this will allow these subjects to recognize the contextual assumptions and omissions necessary to present a particular, subjective construction of reality.

B. Attitude toward the news media (in general).

The same hypotheses should apply toward subjects' conceptualizations of the news media in general.

Subjects

The experimental pool consisted of 36 subjects; 13 undergraduates and 8 graduate students drawn from ranks at the University of California at Irvine; as well as 15 adults

drawn from the general population of Los Angeles County. This population is relatively but necessarily small. The aim of this project is to examine a few subjects very closely, rather than examining many subjects superficially.

Procedure

The entire interview was recorded on an audio tape recorder. Subjects were first informed that this was a study looking at news reporting and presentation and were asked, "what is your attitude towards the news media?" Coding measures and procedures are addressed in the methodology section below.

Subjects were then shown one of two network news stories. The first story addressed the topic of New Jersey's welfare reform efforts and aired on NBC in April of 1995. The story essentially compared New Jersey's efforts with what has been proposed in the Republican's 'contract with America.' However the story failed to examine any of the negative aspects of the welfare reform efforts or, indeed, even mention the possibility that negative implications exist. This is of concern as the reform includes cutting off additional welfare benefits to mothers who have additional children while on welfare, cutting off welfare for all teen mothers, and cutting off welfare for all recipients after five years. Additionally, the reporters accentuated certain numbers to make results seem more conclusive than they actually were, no mention was made of any position opposing the welfare reform, and the camera shots were almost exclusively of black welfare recipients. The following constitutes the full transcript of the story:

Story I (2 min 15 sec.):
Tom Brokaw introduction:
One of the highest priorities here in Washington and across

the country is overhauling this country's welfare system; Republicans and Democrats alike are eager for solutions and one place they might start looking is New Jersey, that's where NBC's Sara James is.

scenes of New Jersey streets

scene of Governor Christie Todd Whitman being sworn into office

Correspondent Sara James:

In the welfare debate, New Jersey has become a testing ground and Republican Governor Christie Todd Whitman a champion of reform. But the overhaul began even before she took office.

in print on screen: deny extra cash benefits to women who have additional children while on welfare

In August of '93, New Jersey became the first state to deny extra cash benefits to women who had additional children while on welfare, exactly what Republicans propose in their Contract With America

Dana McCoy of Camden, New Jersey, expecting her fourth child, says she'll get by without the extra $64 a month

Dana McCoy (black woman) shown talking:

Sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do, I mean you can't sit on welfare all your life.

Correspondent Sara James:

Some 5,000 women have been denied the extra benefit. While this measure has saved New Jersey about 2 million dollars, out of its welfare budget of 400 million, reformers say that isn't the goal, they point instead to a 13% drop in the birth rate for mothers on welfare.

in print on screen: require welfare recipients to get jobs

The Republican contract would also require welfare recipients to get jobs. In New Jersey job training and education are mandatory so recipients can find work.

Robin Cooper studies for her GED

Robin Cooper (white, overweight woman with bad complexion shown talking:

I had to do it plus I wanted to do it... to get somewhere in life.

scene of mainly black faces at tables around a room listening to a black female teacher

Correspondent Sara James:

And in this Trenton center welfare clients learn job skills.

in print on screen: cuts in welfare spending

Of New Jersey's 350,000 welfare recipients, 10,000 found

jobs last year and got off welfare. The Republican contract calls for cuts in welfare spending, but in New Jersey reform has cost an additional 50 million dollars

scene of Wayne Bryant, Dem. New Jersey state legislator shown talking:

We don't mind spending money if it's in those areas that you believe will actually get the results of getting people off welfare

in print on screen: deny benefits to teenage mothers

in print on screen: deny benefits to any recipient after five years

Correspondent Sara James:

The Republican contract goes farther than New Jerseys, it would deny benefits to teenage mothers with savings earmarked for orphanages and end benefits to any recipient after five years. Reformers here know fixing the system will take time and cost money, lessons they say lawmakers will soon learn in Washington

signing off:

Sara James, NBC News, Camden, New Jersey.

Both this story and the other stimulus present different aspects of the issue of federal funding cuts. Each story presented a particular view of reality without acknowledging, in even a limited way, any information which was critical of this perspective. Neither story examined the complexities of the political debates leading to the proposals examined, nor was there any mention that there might be more to the issue than what was presented. Using the paradigm developed by Iyengar (1991), both of these stimuli would presumably be considered "thematic" rather than "episodic." In other words, rather than simply relying on "good pictures" of a specific event, these reports are lengthier and present "talking heads" who provide at least some additional information on the issue presented. Relatively complex stimuli were chosen in order to facilitate a more complex response. In addition, these news stories contain a number of discrepancies or biases at differing levels of complexity. This should aid in assessing the ability of the

subjects to detect various sorts of news biases.

Immediately after each story the subjects were asked:

Are there any comments you would like to make on the reporting of the story?
Do you see any bias in the way the story was presented?
How could the story have been presented differently?

These questions proved to be adequate in getting the subjects to express biases they may have noticed or concerns they may have had about the presentation of the issue.[4] The dependent variables consisted of subjects' responses to these questions as well as their response to the preliminary question regarding their attitude toward the news media.

Each subject was then given a cognitive development interview in order to determine their mode of cognitive reasoning. This interview consisted of a series of questions and scenarios specifically designed to determine the underlying structure of the subjects' cognitive reasoning. Open-ended questions were posed and an attempt was made to probe the meanings and understandings implicit in the claims made by the interviewee. These were followed with the introduction of alternatives or scenarios intended to lead the interviewee to address evaluative concerns defined at different levels of development (sequential, linear, and systematic). These hypothetical scenarios ranged from concrete individual appeals to appeals based on the differential construction of beliefs and values in different communities. In a nutshell, the role of the experimenter

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It proved to be impossible to differentiate responses to each of these questions as some subjects simply had very rich responses after the first question while others needed a question or two in order to fully elucidate their concerns regarding the stimuli presented. These differences were unrelated to any of the other measures examined.

was to lead the subjects to examine their own understandings in juxtaposition to alternative conceptions of reality. This really forced subjects to make sense of these alternative conceptions of reality relative to one another. Subjects were either able to accomplish this from the perspective of some abstract, systematic conceptualization of reality or, if this was not possible, they were forced to simply endorse one position and reject the alternative. This allowed for a rather stringent test of the singularity of the structure of an individual's cognitive reasoning. The following is the interview protocol. Please note that the protocol allows for different queries depending on the subject's conceptualization of the issue.

Interview Protocol

The dilemma and introductory question

You've just seen New Jersey's welfare reform proposal. If you were a resident of New Jersey would you *support* or would you *oppose* this proposal? Why or Why not?

What is welfare? (What is it all about, What is its purpose, etc.)

Follow up questions if the interviewee supports the proposal.

1. Concrete Example (sequential/linear manipulation)

I'd like you tell me the name of a woman you know who is married and has small children.

Let's say that *Person named*'s husband dies suddenly. He was just entering his prime earning years and they did not yet have an opportunity to save much money. Unfortunately not only did *Person named* find herself alone, but she found herself facing significant financial difficulties. She was unable to work because the only jobs she could get did not pay enough for her to able to afford child care. She was forced to move into a small apartment and go on welfare. *Person named* discovers she is pregnant. However, because of the enactment of the welfare reform measure we just saw, she knows she won't get any more money when the baby is born and will be unable to make ends meet.

How would you feel about this situation? Should she get the

welfare money?

Would this influence your support for the welfare reform proposal? Why or why not?

1a. Follow up to 1. Use if subject mentioned RACE or as necessary.

New Jersey is still in the throes of an economic recession. The vast majority of the people on welfare in New Jersey are White and have been forced to go one welfare because they have lost their jobs as a result of the states' economic problems. These people believe in hard work but found themselves suddenly without a job when the aerospace and other industries shut down. They can't find work right away and become frustrated and depressed.

Do these facts influence your support for the welfare proposal? Why or why not?

2. Authority of leaders and norms. (linear manipulation)

Let's say that the state then brings in some religious and civic leaders who say that the citizens of New Jersey have an obligation to take care of those who would be removed from welfare by this proposal. These authorities feel that as members of the community, the citizens of New Jersey have a moral obligation to lend a helping hand to those who need welfare assistance. Everyone benefits from the social system in which they live and are therefore obligated to help those who are down on their luck so that they can become productive members of the community.

Would the opinion of these religious and civic leaders influence your support for the welfare proposal? Why or why not? *(probe importance of the norm and the authority figures; if necessary name Clinton, Dole, Council of Catholic Bishops, etc.)*

3. Community (linear/systematic manipulation)

New Jersey is relatively conservative state. Let's say the situation is different. Let's say we are dealing with Minnesota which is a relatively liberal and very homogenous state. Minnesotans feel that New Jersey's welfare reform proposal goes against their communities' beliefs and values and they want to retain their more comprehensive welfare system. Given this, do think it would be a mistake to incorporate New Jersey's proposal into the Contract with American and impose these reforms on Minnesota? Why or why not?

3a. Equality

(follow up to 3 as needed to determine linear or systematic orientation)

One of the founding values of this country is equality. The United States has a long tradition of helping everyone in society to be productive and healthy. We impose taxes to provide a quality education for everyone regardless of need. Even though we don't have comprehensive medical insurance we still don't turn away the sick and the injured from our hospitals. During the great depression we provided assistance through numerous programs to the vast multitudes who suddenly found themselves without anything but the shirt on their backs. In times of disaster we provide disaster relief to those who are affected. Given these values that we hold so dear, don't you think it would be a mistake for New Jersey to deprive welfare benefits from those who need it most? Why or why not?

Follow up questions if the interviewee opposes the proposal.

1. Concrete Example (sequential/linear manipulation)

I'd like you tell me the name of a woman you know who is married and has small children.

Let's say that *Person named*'s husband dies suddenly. He was just entering his prime earning years and they did not yet have an opportunity to save much money. *Person named* has job skills but chooses not to work because she knows that she can get enough money on welfare to get by.

How would you feel about this situation? Should she get the welfare money?

Would this influence your opposition to the welfare reform proposal? Why or why not?

What if *Person named* subsequently finds herself pregnant because she knew that she would get an increase in welfare benefits that will help take care of the baby?

What if she got pregnant because she wanted the extra money and knew that this would decrease her chances of getting kicked off the welfare roles?

1a. Follow up to 1. Use if subject mentioned RACE or as necessary.

Lets say it turns out that the vast majority of the people on welfare in New Jersey are Black. Apparently, getting welfare is a commonly accepted practice in the Black Community in New Jersey. As a matter of fact, welfare recipients are usually on welfare for a number of years. If

you remember from the news story, only 10,000 out of 350,000 people get off welfare last year.

Does this influence your opposition to the proposal to scale back welfare? Why or why not?

2. Authority of leaders and norms. (linear manipulation)

Let's say that the state then brings in some religious and civic leaders who say that the citizens of New Jersey are under no obligation to take care of those who would be removed from welfare by this proposal. These authorities feel that the citizens of New Jersey have earned their money through their own hard work and it is therefore unfair for them to be forced to give money to the poor just because they are poor. They propose that if people want to help those in need they should do so voluntarily through private charity. The religious and civic leaders maintain that in order for welfare recipients to learn to be independent, the state needs to stop supporting them. These leaders maintain that reliance on welfare decreases one's personal integrity and undermine's one's self-respect.

Would the opinions of these religious and civic leaders influence your decision to oppose the welfare proposal? Why or why not? *(probe importance of the norm and the authority figures; if necessary name Clinton, Dole, Council of Catholic Bishops, etc.)*

3. Community (linear/systematic manipulation)

New Jersey is very different than Southern California. We live in a community which has many different sorts of people and our community is always changing. New Jersey is a relatively homogenous and Conservative community. This proposal reflects their communities' beliefs and values. Given this, don't you think New Jersey should be allowed to implement whatever welfare reform proposals they should want? Why or why not

3a. Individualism

(follow up to 3 as needed to determine linear or systematic orientation)

Two of the main founding principles of this nation are liberty and freedom. People originally came here and are still coming here because they want to be able to have the opportunity to better themselves while remaining free from the shackles of oppressive governments. This strong sense of individualism and self-reliance means that, in the United States, people should rely on their own resources to better themselves. If they are in need they should pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and get to work. Given these values that we hold so dear, shouldn't we encourage policies like New Jersey's welfare reform proposal? Why or why not?

Subjects were then shown the second network news story stimulus. This story also aired in April of 1995 and was presented on ABC. This story examined the possible effects of proposed federal funding cuts on the residents of Sacramento, California. While this story failed to mention any possible benefits that may be derived from reducing levels of federal funding, it did briefly show a government employee who complained that there was too much waste. The story examined how conditions improved at a public housing project, supposedly as a result of increased federal spending, and speculated that things would return to the way they were if this funding were cut. In this story the reporters also accentuated certain numbers and terms so as to make their arguments sound more convincing. As opposed to the New Jersey welfare story, in which children's faces were conspicuously absent despite the fact that the story examined the "benefits" of cutting welfare benefits for mothers with children, the Sacramento funding cuts story either showed or referred to children in virtually every scene. Also, while the New Jersey story interviewed welfare recipients who supported the cuts (including a black woman who felt she could get by without the extra money she would be forced to forgo when her fourth child was born because "you can't sit on welfare all your life"), in the Sacramento story everyone who spoke was opposed to the federal funding cuts. However, it was also interesting that while a wide variety of ethnic groups were shown among the people affected by the funding cuts, predominantly non-white faces were presented when examining the proposed cuts for a public housing project while a white family was interviewed when the story discussed forthcoming federal disaster relief funds for homeowners who suffered as a result of recent flooding. The

following constitutes the full transcript of the story:

Story II (4 min 25 sec.):
Peter Jennings introduction:

One of the things we try to do when we go on the road is to put some flesh and bones on the decisions made back in Washington. Last November the Republican landslide stopped short of Sacramento, the two Democrats who represented this city in the House of Representatives for a long time both won re-elections. Understandable then that their constituents here are somewhat uneasy about the financial intentions of the new Congress. Here's ABC's Ken Kashowahara:

scenes of Sacramento skyline
Correspondent Ken Kashowahara:

It is a company town, where bureaucracy is not a dirty word but a way of life. One out of every three Sacramentans works for the government: the state, the county, the city, the military. They have an insiders view of what's wrong.

scenes of individuals talking to camera
white male:

I work for the government and I know there is a lot of waste

Correspondent Ken Kashowahara:

Too much paperwork, too many ineffective programs, misplaced spending priorities; they also have an insiders view of what Washington should and should not do about it.

white female:

We need to spend more money on education.

white female:

We should be putting money more into special programs.

Correspondent Ken Kashowahara:

But Congress is threatening to do just the opposite, proposing to rescind between sixteen and seventeen billion dollars of money approved but not spent, Sacramento could lose more than fourteen million dollars and nowhere will the impact of that be greater than here in the public housing projects.

scene of Ken Kashowahara walking alongside housing project and white and black kids playing, riding bikes, etc.

The 10,000 low-income residents living here could lose six of the 30 million dollars they were promised and that could

affect how they live, their children's education and their own safety; neighborhood police officers would be among the first to go.

white police officers talking to camera

When we came down into these projects it was a combat zone.

scenes of white police officers arresting black gang members

Correspondent Ken Kashowahara:

Shootings were common then, gangs battled for control of the cocaine trade and residents were caught in the cross-fire. That was two years ago....

scenes of black youths playing basketball, black kids playing games

this is now. The increased police presence has cut violent crime by 55%, vandalism by 47%.

white police officers talking to camera:

These were some of the worst areas of the city and now they're frankly some of the best.

Correspondent Ken Kashowahara:

scenes of black kids playing games

With the gangs and the drug dealers gone, the kids in the hood, as they call themselves now have recreational and drug prevention programs but they could be eliminated too...

scenes of a black tutor with black students

as could four tutors whose salaries are paid for with federal funds.

Resident Lia Sebron knows what will happen if the funds are cut.

dark-skinned(?) women shown talking to the camera:

It will slowly and surely go back to the way it was.

scenes of work being done and scenes of units in need of repair

Correspondent Ken Kashowahara:

Where they live concerns them too, more than two million dollars, a third of the budget to renovate, repair and maintain their units may be cut.

scene of black women talking in here apartment:

The roaches are bad, they fall from the ceiling, they're in the bed with the babies.

"professional looking" black women talking to the camera:

It sends a message that you're not important, you're poor you may not be important or you may not be as important as some other issues and I think the cuts may send that message.

scenes of kids in school:
Correspondent Ken Kashowahara:
figures in print on screen:

At neighborhood schools, officials are preparing for a 5% cut in the federally-funded nutrition program, the equivalent of feeding fifteen hundred kids and a 20% cut in special education programs called chapter one, designed to help slow learners.

Carol Bly (white female), school principal:

Our students are successful because we have safety nets all around them, without the chapter one programs we would have major holes in our nets, children would be falling through.

Correspondent Ken Kashowahara:

Without federal help, Theresa Cooper fears her daughters may fall through.

Theresa Cooper (black woman) talking to camera:

They're only at the third grade, two months ago, one of them, she was not at the third grade level, O.K. and now she is.

scenes of high school kids of various races at computers
figures in print on screen
Correspondent Ken Kashowahara:

For the high-school kids a one million dollar vocational program which benefits 10,000 students was targeted for elimination altogether. The federally funded summer youth jobs program faces a 20% projected cut in its 3 1/2 million dollar budget, that's five hundred jobs. Marilyn Madrano is applying for one of the two thousand positions.

Marilyn Madrano (Hispanic female) talking to camera:

It's better than staying out on the streets and having something to do for the summer.

scenes of flood damage
Correspondent Ken Kashowahara:

There is one bright spot in the Sacramento neighborhoods devastated by this year's floods, along with cutbacks Congress is proposing to provide about six million dollars in disaster relief mostly for California, that's good news for 3,000 Sacramentans like Susan and Dennis Holyfield who have applied for federal assistance to repair their homes.

Susan Holyfield (white female) talking to camera:

Well when you're a victim you've just hope that somebody's just going to be out there to help you.

Correspondent Ken Kashowahara:

For the flood victims there is hope, they are the exceptions; for the others there is fear that without the federal assistance they were promised, they will become victims too

scene of Asian kids reading aloud from a book

signing off:

Ken Kashowahara, ABC news, Sacramento.

After seeing the story, subjects and were again asked:

Are there any comments you would like to make on the reporting of the story?
Do you see any bias in the way the story was presented?
How could the story have been presented differently?

This was not designed to be a naturalistic study. The interview was structured in a way that would enable the subjects to assess the stimuli in as cognitively complex a manner as possible. First, the artificial nature of the experiment itself ensured that the subjects were at least as attentive to the news media stories as they would be under more natural circumstances. The subjects were primed to this end to the extent they were informed that this was a study on "news reporting and presentation", were asked to pay close attention to the stories, and were told they were going to be asked question about what they saw. Subjects were first asked about their attitude towards the media before the stimuli were shown. Therefore, any skepticism towards the news media in general should be salient as the subjects assess the stimuli. In addition, after being probed about any bias or discrepancies in the first story the subjects should have been primed to take an especially critical look at the second story. On top of that, the two stimuli were separated by the cognitive developmental interview. This interview introduced a series of scenarios which compelled the subjects to at least be thinking about the larger social values and

issues surrounding the first story, and thus provide the tools necessary for the subjects to take a much more critical and analytical look at the second stimulus, to the extent they were able. Finally, while efforts were of course made to make the setting as comfortable as possible (many of the experiments were conducted in the homes of the subjects) the artificiality of the setting was enhanced by the presence of the experimenter, a tape recorder, clipboard, etc. Given all of these reasons, it can be assumed that, in the comfort of their own home where the nightly news competes with many other items for one's attention, the percentage of news media spectators who fail to notice any news media discrepancies would be much higher.

Measures

Levels of Cognition

The Responses to the interview determining cognitive level were coded as follows:

Sequential

Sequential thinkers do not analyze the causes and effects of poverty but rather focus on the specific things acts observed by or presented to the subject. The understanding of this issue is limited to specific events involving particular individuals doing particular things however there is no sense of order or causality to these events. Consequently, the sequential subject is easily attracted to plausible scenarios presented in the interview and shift their position accordingly. There may be a sense that certain things should be done, for instance people should get a job or children should not suffer, but these things are not linked to or expressed in terms of larger social beliefs or norms or

presented as things that are valuable to society as a whole.

Linear

Welfare is clearly evaluated in terms of simple cause and effect. There is a clear sense of a single cause of poverty, which is usually conceptualized as something necessarily or inherently true and correct. There is a strong tendency to endorsed the preferred view and discount any other. When evaluating solutions to the problem of poverty, there is a clear correspondence between a specific solution and a specific cause. The subject's definition of the "correct" problem and solution generally override any alternatives presented. There is a general inability to examine these views relative to one another. To the extent an alternative is presented as more compelling, the subject may switch his/her position on the issue but then the new position is simple defined as more correct than the subject's previous position. There is a similar inability to make sense of to the extent social norms or beliefs are utilized they are generally assumed to be universal.

Systematic

Welfare is evaluated as a complex problem with a number of possible causes and solutions. There is a general recognition that there is a need to consider multiple and interactive causes or solutions as well as single ones. These variables are evaluated relative to one another and in terms of larger social beliefs or norms (such as class, democracy, capitalism, classical liberalism, etc.). The subject may come to endorse a particular position as useful, but there is an conscious recognition that no particular position may be right for all circumstances or even the best answer most of the time.

Community and race may be utilized in terms of a recognition that different groups have different experiences and may have developed different norms or beliefs regarding the issue at hand. Simultaneously there may be a recognition that these beliefs and norms are probably not universally adopted within the group. These norms or beliefs may therefore be criticized as merely justifications used to further a particular position or they might also be used in recognizing that what might be appropriate in one situation, might not work in another.

Conceptualization of the News Media

Subjects' responses to the question about their attitude toward the news media in general and to questions about each individual stimuli were coded as either sensational, presentational, or contextual.

Sensational

Sensational concerns are defined as responses addressing the manner of presentation rather than the specific content presented. Sensational stories were operationally defined as the use of dramatic style, language, or artistic expression that is intended to shock, startle, thrill, excite, etc. Included in this category are concerns that the television news media or a particular story is overly sensational and emphasizes the spectacular or the violent. This is likely to be expressed in terms of broad generalizations with no reference to any particular issue or political dimension and with limited explanation or justification. To the degree a justification is offered this will take the form of the media's desire to attract a larger audience rather than the idea that things are presented in a manner that reinforces particular social or political views.

Presentational

Presentational concerns are defined as concerns that either draw directly from, relate to directly, or are directly implied by the information presented in the news media representation. These concerns are expressed in simple concrete terms. For instance, this may include concerns such as the perpetuation of negative stereotypes of groups addressed in the news broadcast. To the degree the absence of opposing political views are noticed, this would be cast in terms of the dominant political debate. In other words, a presentational concern would include noticing that either the Democrat or the Republican position is not presented but would not include concerns regarding the range of political debate as dictated by these parties. In the experiment, these concerns often reflected a salient aspect of the subjects' orientation to the objective world.

Contextual

Contextual concerns are defined as concerns that go beyond the way an issue is presented and rather take this as an object of analysis within a larger social context. This includes the ability to recognize the degree to which a news media message is presented in a social or historical context. In other words, this would include concerns that a particular representation fails to acknowledge the complex and interrelated nature of various social issues. That is, that it presents a certain representation of reality as *the* view of reality without examining this view in relation to other possible representations. This includes such concerns as noting that the information presented reinforces a particular view of society or a recognition that the information seems to be presented in a manner that was intended to have some specified effect on the audience. This could also

include such concerns as the idea that the news media was not presenting all of the relevant information or that there were important and relevant events occurring in the "off space" that were not being shown to the audience. For instance, one subject commented that the information presented in the news media had a large impact on how people viewed themselves and others and did an excellent job of provoking a sense of fear by emphasizing violent events and thus playing into the social imagination of what people are like.

Coding

The task of determining the level of cognitive reasoning of the subjects was made easier by the fact that the determination of the reasoning level of 13 of those coded as linear and 4 of those coded as systematic was confirmed in the course of their participation in other studies at the University of California, Irvine. Of the remaining 14 subjects (6 linear, 6 systematic, and 2 uncodable), 4 were clearly linear and one was clearly uncodable. Either the entire or excerpted remaining 9 interviews were additionally coded by one of two outside coders. Each of these additional coders are very familiar with this coding paradigm as a result of ongoing work at the University of California, Irvine. In each of these 9 cases the second coder agreed with the author's original coding.

In comparison to determining levels of reasoning, the task of coding responses to news media stimuli was much easier. Given the description of the levels presented above, it was relatively simple to determine the coding for each of the three responses: sensational, presentational, and contextual. Sensational concerns were particularly easy

to determine and, as noted for reasons above, it is not at all surprising that all subjects expressed such concerns given the nature of their participation in a study on news media reporting. In addition, it was relatively simple to categorize further responses as either presentational or contextual; the responses were either directly related to information presented in the stimulus or the respondent addressed the stimulus as an object of analysis in terms beyond what was presented. An outside coder was occasionally consulted and in every instance there was complete agreement between the two coders.

Results

Modes of Cognition

19 subjects were found to reason in a linear manner and 8 were found to reason in a systematic manner. Two subjects were unable to be coded as either linear or systematic due to insufficiently elaborated responses on the cognitive developmental interview. In addition to these two, the responses of five additional subjects are not included in the following results due to a decision to exclude non-native English speakers for fear language skills would confound scoring determinations. In the course of this research, no adults were found who reasoned in a sequential manner. However, this can be explained by the use of selective sampling techniques. This sample was not randomly selected and was not intended to be representative of the general population Rather, an effort was made to maximize the number of subjects who were suspected to reason in a systematic manner. Consequently, it is suspected that the experimental pool contains a higher ratio of systematic reasoners than would be found in the general population.

A. Orientation to specific television news broadcasts

Table 5.1

STORY ONE: NEW JERSEY WELFARE REFORM

		Bias Observed		
		Sensational	**Presentational**	**Contextual**
Mode of Reasoning	**Linear** *n=19*	**16** *84%*	**17** *89%*	**0** *0%*
	Systematic *n=10*	**10** *100%*	**10** *100%*	**10** *100%*

Number of subjects, by mode of cognition, who recognized various aspects of news "bias" when exposed to "New Jersey Welfare Reform" story.

Table 5.2

STORY TWO: SACRAMENTO FUNDING CUTS

		Bias Observed		
		Sensational	**Presentational**	**Contextual**
Mode of Reasoning	**Linear** *n=19*	**16** *84%*	**15** *79%*	**0** *0%*
	Systematic *n=10*	**10** *100%*	**10** *100%*	**10** *100%*

Number of subjects, by mode of cognition, who recognized various aspects of news "bias" when exposed to "Sacramento Funding Cuts" story.

Hypothesis Ho:

As you will note, there is an obvious and observable difference between the linear and systematic conceptualization of each of the news stimuli. In order to be confirm this observation, a chi-square test determined that there is, in fact, a difference between the two groups, even at $p<.001$. Consequently, we can safely reject the null hypothesis and note that those reasoning in a systematic manner do conceptualize specific news stories differently than do those who reason in a linear manner. The significance of these results might be better understood through a closer examination of the data.

Hypothesis H1:

Two of the linear reasoning subjects in the first story and four of the linear reasoning subjects in the second story failed to notice any discrepancies in the presentation of the stories. Only one of these subjects mentioned more than sensational concerns when asked about their attitude towards the news media. When asked if they saw any bias or if the story could have been presented differently, they responded by saying:

"sounded pretty good"

"a good report, they said everything they had to say"

and other similar statements. These results are notable as the other subjects felt that the stories did contain a number of biases at various levels of abstraction.

The remaining 17 linear reasoning subjects in story one and 15 linear reasoning subjects in story two expressed "presentational bias." It may be recalled that this is bias that directly relates to the information presented in the news story itself or stems from

salient concerns directly linked to relevant aspect of the news story. These comments included such concerns as:

> They tried to make the New Jersey reform look positive.
>
> They showed lots of black people.
>
> They mislead and they stereotype people on welfare...not everybody who gets on welfare or tries to get on welfare is, you know, ignorant, unintelligent, black, or a minority person.
>
> That one individual is not necessarily representative of everyone that's on welfare.
>
> They could show other states; do a kind of state by state comparison, but (pause) it's only really going on in one state, isn't it?
>
> [I] would like more details on the study.

While these individuals were critical of the message presented by the news media they did so on the terms presented by the news messages. When probed it became clear that these concerns were not based in a systematic context. That is, they failed to make sense of these perceived biases in terms of the social implications of a particular representation of reality. Furthermore, even though aspects of these representations of reality were seen as discrepant, no attempt was made to make sense of these discrepancies in terms of differential value construction, ideology, or class. It is worth noting that not one of those subjects reasoning in a linear manner raised contextual concerns when asked about either of the news stimuli while all of those subjects reasoning in a systematic manner expressed such concerns.

Hypothesis H2:

The concerns expressed by the systematic subjects differed dramatically from

those expressed by the linear subjects. In addition to noting many of the concerns expressed by the linear reasoning subjects, subjects reasoning in a systematic manner were also very conscious of the absence of any social context surrounding the views expressed. This is referred to here as "contextual bias." These subjects noted not just that the news stories favored one side over the other but also the conspicuous absence of other information necessary for a more adequate understanding of the issue at hand. Some examples:

> It's presented as an example of a policy that matches some of what the Republicans are asking for without getting deeper into the particular situation in New Jersey and of course without showing any kind of debate preceding the decision to enforce some of the programs that are supported by the federal Republicans.

> I would want to know a lot more about how the welfare system works, what changes have gone on over a long period of time and some analysis of why those changes have occurred and a better understanding of the effects of those changes.

Subjects who reasoned in a systematic manner were able to place these messages in a larger systematic context and recognize that social issues are complex and that there are important and relevant ramifications and implications contained in these appeals that are neither presented nor implied by these news media broadcasts. They were consciously aware of the disembedded nature of news media messages and the implications for the dissemination of political information without a relevant social context; they seemed to have the ability to recognize that television news media messages are presented and may have some appeal on a linear level. Some examples:

> It's very easy to sort of present one side of the story and people who believe in that side of the story just use it as confirming evidence. People

who don't just say it is bullshit, political bullshit.

It was interesting that they didn't show a single white welfare recipient when, if I'm not mistaken, most welfare recipients in America are white...It definitely serves the interests of those who want to cut welfare if that was done intentionally...It creates the whole mentality that if everyone on welfare is black, which that report seems to indicate, then it's not necessarily a problem with our economy than it is a problem with a person or a problem with a people, in which case it is nothing really that should concern mainstream America or upper-class America at least.

The news media gives you two minutes to tell you where a story starts and where it finishes but generally the problem is much bigger, you know the deeper you look the deeper you are going to see the cause of the problem. If you just look at this is welfare and this is the problem but there's a lot of, a couple of dozen issues I would imagine that go into affecting the welfare issue and depending on how deep you want to look into it you're going to see that it is incredibly more complex than you can present in two minutes on CNN. Every solution that comes out you can spend two minutes talking about it on CNN and it's going to come out looking great or come out looking horrible depending what you're trying to do.

They covered the Republican national plan as opposed to a state plan in cutting off of teenage mothers and there wasn't much sense of what consequence that would have...There was no time to digest the consequence of that in a country that has over a million teenagers giving birth each year. Five years and it's over kind of plan has a knee-jerk level appeal.

When commenting on the various political positions presented, or the lack thereof, linear subjects invariably cast the debate in the bipolar terms of Republican versus Democrat. For instance, a typical comment was:

It mentioned the Republicans, but I don't recall any counterpoint.

Systematic subjects, however, also mentioned other perspectives. For instance, one subject who was found to reason in a systematic manner contrasted New Jersey's welfare plan with the Republican "contract with America" plan. Another subject had to phrase

her concerns in a hypothetical format in order to address concerns about the news story's depiction of one particular view of reality:

> If, suppose, I know this is not the case, but suppose you have two views on welfare reform, only two, and suppose it were a Republican and a Democrat view; the fact that the Republican perspective made it to the television and used New Jersey as an example silences this Democrat view or this opposing view or any other views that don't coincide with that. Just the silencing of those other perspectives involves a power differential.

Differences between the two stories

As you will note, the two tables presenting responses to the specific news stimuli appear to be virtually identical. A chi-square test confirmed that there was no difference in responses to the two stories, even at $p<.001$. Consequently, it can be claimed with a high degree of confidence that no differences were found in the complexity by which each stimuli was evaluated. This finding is important in itself. If the differences between subjects were based on the complexity of one's cognitive *content*, one would expect the subject to move to a more systemic analysis of the second stimulus. As this was not observed, the implication is that it is *structural* differences in cognitive reasoning underlying the differences between respondents. This also explains why subjects failed to comment more critically on those messages that supposedly differed from their own political beliefs. The strength of one's ideological inclinations failed to have any effect on the assessment of either story despite the fact that it could be argued that these stories represent the two poles of contemporary American political debate.

B. Orientation toward television news broadcasts in general

Table 5.3

ORIENTATION TO NEWS MEDIA IN GENERAL

Bias Observed

Mode of Reasoning	Sensational	Presentational	Contextual
Linear	19	11	0
n=19	*84%*	*58%*	*0%*
Systematic	10	10	10
n=10	*100%*	*100%*	*100%*

Number of subjects, by mode of cognition, who expressed concerns regarding various aspects of news "bias" when asked about the news media in general.

Hypothesis Ho:

Again, there is a clear difference, both observed and statistically significant between the linear and systematic responses when subjects were asked about their attitude toward the news media in general.

Hypothesis H1:

When asked about their attitude towards the news media, every one of the subjects expressed "sensational" concerns. The following was a very typical response:

> Sometimes I think they overkill on things like this Simpson thing and I think they go for more spectacular things rather than news that you really need to know.

Other theorists have expressed similar findings. For instance, Doris Graber (1984, p. 76) found that her subjects were aware the news was superficial and sensational and therefore

made corrections regarding details, perspective, and interpretation based on prior knowledge. She notes that such generalizations can, of course, lead to misconceptions. In addition, Gamson (1992) provides a lengthy analysis of the widespread adoption of a "chic cynicism" toward the news media in contemporary society.

Eight of the subjects coded as reasoning in a linear manner limited themselves to sensational concerns and the others went on to express "presentational" concerns. As noted above, these concerns often reflected a salient aspect of the subjects' orientation to the objective world. For instance one subject, a self-proclaimed Conservative, maintained that the news media was liberally biased. However when asked about what she meant by this, the subject was neither able to specify examples or why the news might, in fact, be liberally biased; the assumption just seemed to be that of course this was the case. Again, it is worth repeating that not one of the subjects reasoning in a linear manner expressed any contextual concerns when asked about their attitude toward the news media.

Hypothesis H_2:

All of the subjects coded as reasoning in a systematic manner raised more substantial or "contextual" concerns when asked about their attitude towards the news media. It would seem that by the nature of their reasoning process, these individuals are able place the news media in a systematic social context allowing them to examine the function of the media in a way not immediately available for the other subjects. For instance, one subject commented on the agenda-setting role of the news media and explained that he felt the politicization of certain issues served to create a common

orientation for the nation.

> .. media provides a nationalist function as a force for national integrity... and promotes a sense of patriotism, not only for political events but also for sporting events, just by naming U.S. championships, world championships, ...

Conclusion

These results are, obviously, quite powerful. All of the systematic subjects were able to consistently recognize the disembedded and decontextualized nature of news media broadcasts. This ability was not shared with the linear subjects. This result has several important implications. First, this result is consistent with the adult cognitive developmental model; second, this is consistent with claims regarding the inherent limitations of television news media broadcasts, and; third, this result reinforces the importance of cognitive differentiation as a determining factor in how individuals make sense of television news.

While the messages presented on the news may be disputed by linear reasoning news spectators who hold strong views on the subject or who are highly skeptical of the news media, the terms on which the message is disputed will be determined by the concrete information presented in the news media message and the news media spectator's views on this subject. However, systematic reasoning news spectators have the potential, by nature of their mode of cognition, to recognize the disembedded nature of the news broadcast and, rather than simply filling in information based on some partisan position of how the world is, speak of the implications of presenting various subjective views of reality. Those who reason in a linear manner make assumptions

about the issue based on their own view of what is normal and true while those who reason in a systematic manner are better able to recognize that what is normal, true, and good differ across different groups and individuals. For example, in the experiment presented here, the ability of linear subjects to pick up on the more obvious "presentational" biases of the news stories depended largely on whether the subjects were skeptical of the news production process to begin with or whether they possessed a highly salient schema regarding the issue presented.

These results strongly suggest that systematic reasoning is able to view reality as an interrelated system of values and norms that are differently constructed and realized in different groups and individuals. The systematic recognition of these differential constructions of reality allows for a critical stance from which to interpret news media presentations. Systematic reasoning is thus able to recognize the value assumptions necessary in order to endorse a particular view of reality as meaningful, including that presented in the news media.

Given these findings, one can safely assume that news spectators reasoning in a linear manner will address news representation as presented and make sense of these news representations in terms of their schemas and understandings of the issue. Thus, they are unlikely to notice that the representation is fragmented or lacking in context save for those areas in which they have particular knowledge. Subsequently, the structural, normative, and economic factors influencing the news media's construction of reality, as addressed in chapter two, are likely to have a direct impact on how linear reasoning news spectators conceptualize and, in turn, act in the political world. However, due to the

nature of their reasoning and the way this shapes their interaction with the macro social world, those news spectators reasoning in a systematic manner are likely to notice that these news representations are constrained and fragmented. Similarly, these different modes of reasoning should have a profound effect on the degree to which individuals are motivated by divisive and one-sided political rhetoric, such as that surrounding various California Ballot Propositions as addressed in chapter three. In addition, one would expect that one reasoning in a linear manner to be powerfully swayed by the construction of stereotypes and scapegoats as they are likely to address these constructs as they are presented rather than simultaneously perceiving other possible constructs conspicuously absent from the presentation. The news media and especially the television news are thus likely to play an extremely powerful role in the linear construction of political reality. While systematic reasoning may still value the news media as a source of information, those reasoning in this manner are less likely to be as influenced by the various "biases" of the news.

In sum, these data clearly demonstrate the relationship between the disembedded re-presentation of political information on the network television news and linear reasoning and, in so doing, identify the mechanism necessary for the news media to play such a powerful role in the construction of political reality for news spectators reasoning in a linear manner. This relationship, to a large degree, sets the tone and tenor of popular political debate in turn impacting the practice of politics and its various outcomes. This and other implications and ramifications of these findings will be elaborated in the following, concluding, chapter.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

To this point, this dissertation has shed light on how the television news media selects and constructs political issues and information; how this is utilized by political actors; how this is adopted and reconstructed by news media spectators at different levels of cognition; and how the resulting understandings, in turn, influence political practice and the cycle repeats itself. This concluding chapter addresses the significance of these findings in three areas: the academic literature on the news media, democratic theory, and contemporary political practice. In order to better evaluate the significance of the claims made in these areas, this chapter will also address the relative ratios of various modes of reasoning in the general population as well as the role of television news in fostering or inhibiting cognitive development.

Relative Ratio of Various Modes of Cognition

Many of the points made below are more or less important depending on the relative ratio of various modes of reasoning throughout the society. In order to discuss the importance of these findings for the political system at large, it becomes necessary to extrapolate what has been found regarding the political cognition of the subjects examined in the study presented in the previous chapter for the population as a whole. The study upon which these conclusions are based was not designed to be representative

of the population as a whole at the outset.[1] It thus becomes somewhat difficult to talk about differences of individual cognition and the implications for political practice beyond the realm of the theoretical. What remains is the possibility of utilizing other research examining the relative nature of political reasoning in the hopes of employing a proxy that will enable the extrapolation of the results presented here for the population at large. Given the unique nature of the research at hand, it will be impossible to discuss differences in individual cognition in absolute terms, however the use of other research will enable the discussion, in relative terms, of the ability of citizens to conceptualize social and political issues and thus shed light on the corresponding usefulness of the model presented here.

One of the first places to start is, of course, what must be considered the classic and orienting research of differences in individual political reasoning. In this case, this would be the political belief system research of Campbell, et al. (1960) and the subsequent and, for the purposes at hand, perhaps more direct work of Converse (1964). These works examine the ideology or "belief systems" of the general population. Rather than using in-depth interviews, these studies examined attitudes utilizing survey research techniques. What this research basically finds is that individuals fail to think about politics in any kind of an ideologically coherent manner; that the attitudes expressed display little relationship to each other; and that these attitudes are not stable over time. These results call into question the ability of individuals to uphold their democratic

[1] This was addressed in detail in the methods section of the previous chapter.

responsibilities and, given the perceived success and importance of democracy as an institution of the 1950's and early 1960's, these results were of great concern to political scientists of the time and spawned much further research in this area. While much of this research (Nie, et al., 1976; Klingemann, 1979; etc.) called into question various nuances of the methodology and the like, the primary findings of the original work remain relatively unchanged.

Specifically, Converse found that only 2 1/2% of individuals had belief systems structured in an ideologically coherent manner. In these cases the subjects correctly referred to themselves as either liberal or conservative and their political attitudes or opinions corresponded accordingly. Converse finds that another 42% of the sample orient to political issues as a function of identification with a particular group, while more than half of the subjects either use ideological labels inaccurately or incomprehensibly or exhibit no discernable structure to their political beliefs at all.

The importance of this research stems largely from the fact that until this time, most academics, operating according to the liberal perspective underlying American academic research, assumed that individuals think about politics in a similar manner. However, the results of these studies were quite troubling in that the findings suggested that this is not, in fact, the case. Thus, at a minimum, this body of research demonstrates that individuals do not think about politics in the same way.

The problem with drawing any firm conclusions using this research as a proxy for the relative ratio of various types of politics reasoning examined here, is that the belief system research examines political attitudes, not reasoning. However, this research is

still very telling in that the attitudes examined display little relationship to each other, are not integrated ideologically, and are not stable over time. What is of concern to the project here is how individuals 'make sense of politics'. The belief system research suggests that to the degree individuals make sense of politics at all, they largely fail to do so in an integrative manner.

An additional, but minor, problem with the use of this research as a proxy for the relative ratio of various modes of reasoning is that it can be argued that ideologically structured thought may be exemplary of a linear orientation to the political sphere, while those reasoning in a systematic manner may actually recognize and acknowledge the relative merit and limitations of restricting oneself to one or the other popular ideological orientations. However, it is impossible to determine how such responses might be coded in Converse's study. Similarly, it is highly unlikely that anyone reasoning in a linear manner with even a remote acquaintance with politics or current events could be coded as "no issue content." Indeed, as noted in chapter five, a group orientation to the social and political sphere is exemplary of a primary aspect of linear reasoning. However, at worst case, this research is at least somewhat applicable to the problem at hand in that it concludes, justifiably given the data, that over half of the population displays either an unrecognizable or erroneous coherence in their political attitudes. As demonstrated theoretically in chapter four and empirically in chapter five, this is certainly not indicative of systematic reasoning as the hallmark of systematic reasoning is the fact that the world is conceived of as an interrelated system whereby political information is assessed and made sense of. Given the concern expressed above, it may be a bit presumptive to draw

any definite correlations between Converse's categories and the particular modes of reasoning employed here, one can safely assume, using the belief system literature as a proxy, that possibly 10% of the population reasons in a systematic manner. In addition, recognizing that Converse's "no issue content" group includes at least some linear reasoning individuals who are simply ignorant of politics, one can assume that perhaps one-quarter of the population reasons in a sequential manner, while the balance between these two consists of individuals who reason in a linear manner.[2] This would jive with the theoretical elaboration of the ratio of different modes of cognition in contemporary society, as addressed in chapter four.

As the work presented in this dissertation addresses a heretofore unexamined aspect of political science, it is very difficult to find a study that explicitly deals with how individuals make sense of the news from different cognitive perspectives to use as a proxy for the relative distribution of different modes of cognition throughout the population. Graber's (1984) *Processing the News* seems promising as she addresses why "some" of her panelists were able to assess the news in terms of "complex causal linkages" while others were not. However, the difficulty in using Graber (1984) as a proxy for stages of sequential-linear-systematic cognitive development are two-fold. First, Graber's study, like this one, consciously borrows from Lane's (1962) in-depth interview methodology in order to clarify and examine specific types of reasoning rather than examine rates among the population as a whole; subsequently, her sample is also

[2] These numbers were determined in conjunction with Shawn Rosenberg, personal communication, 1998.

necessarily small and un-representative. The second difficulty lies in the ability to equate Graber's findings of panelist responses to the different modes of reasoning as presented here; as mentioned above, it would appear that all of the panelists studied by Graber are processing the news in a linear manner.

A perhaps more applicable line of research to the theory of cognitive development presented here is that of Kohlberg (Kohlberg, 1984; ibid, 1969; Kuhn, et al., 1977) in that this more explicitly examines the nature of cognitive development. Like Piaget and the model offered in chapter four, Kohlberg's research claims that cognitive development involves basic transformations of cognitive structure and that development is a process of interaction between the structure of the organism and the environment (Kohlberg, 1969 p. 348; Kuhn, et al., 1977, p. 101). What Kohlberg basically claims is that while cognitive development is a necessary but not sufficient requirement for moral development, cognition and moral judgment have a common structural base (Kohlberg, 1969 p. 389; Kuhn, et al., 1977 p. 157). This structural base changes through a series of invariant stages as the individual develops. The most promising study in this area, for use as a proxy for the relative levels of cognitive development, is that provided by Kuhn, Langer, Kohlberg, and Haan (1977). This study examines the relative levels of logical and moral judgment in a sample of 265 adolescents and adults between the ages of 10 and 50. Utilizing a series of tests adapted from Inhelder and Piaget (1958), Kuhn, et al. first wanted to determine to what degree the logical development of adults corresponded to Piaget's levels of concrete and formal operations. The relationship between logical and moral development was then examined through the use of the standard Kohlberg

interview.

It might be useful to briefly examine how Piaget's concrete and formal operations categories correspond to the sequential-linear-systematic model used here. Concrete operations is typified by a subjects application of his cognitive operations to different dimensions of reality without attempting to integrate results obtained on successive dimensions (Kuhn, et al. p. 101) and for the sake of argument, it can assumed that the level of concrete operations corresponds to linear reasoning. In any case, it may be possible that this classification encompasses aspects of sequential reasoning, however, it most certainly would not encompass any areas of systematic reasoning. Formal operations, is, in part, typified by a recognition of the inconsistencies of reality. As this level was Piaget's highest level of logical operations, one may first assume that this classification would correspond to systematic reasoning; however, as described in Piaget (1958) and Kuhn, et al. (1977), this classification certainly overlaps with aspects of linear reasoning. To summarize, sequential reasoning, as presented here, encompasses both Piaget's pre-operational and concrete-operational stages. Similarly, linear reasoning might be coded by Piaget as both concrete-operational and formal-operational while systematic reasoning would be a subset of Piaget's formal-operational stage. It may be most fruitful for the sake of the exercise at hand to conceive of formal operations as a necessary but not exclusive indicator of systematic reasoning. Subsequently, these rough correspondences provide the opportunity to discuss the relative ratio of various levels of cognition of the model used here. Kuhn, et al. find that only 30% of adults (16+ years) are at a level of formal operations (ibid, p. 99). The vast majority were at a level of

concrete operations while a few (approximately 3%) are at a preoperational or intuitive level of thought (p. 131). Thus, given that formal operational thought constitutes a "gateway" to systematic reasoning, one can safely assume that less that 30% of adults reason in a systematic manner.[3]

Significance for the academic literature

The empirical study in the chapter five found that differences in cognitive reasoning make a large difference in the degree to which individuals accept the fragmented depiction of politics in the television news or are able to recognize these "biases". These results clearly demonstrated one of the central tenets of this dissertation: that differences in cognitive reasoning make a profound difference in subjects' ability to assess the social and political world through mediated political communications, in this case the medium of television news. This is centrally important to democratic practice as these media largely construct the political reality for the masses in contemporary society.

In this empirical study, all subjects were presented with essentially fragmented information, however their assessment of these messages differed markedly. This demonstrates that the linear reasoning focus on the specific concrete connections presented precludes a recognition of the problems associated with the fragmented structure of the news representations. Subsequently, television news stories are not seen as baffling or confusing. Rather, even while critical of sensationalism in the television

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[3] For a more detailed analysis of the overlap between Piagetian cognitive stages and the cognitive stages employed here, see Rosenberg, 1988.

news, these individuals are left with the feeling that they are now informed. However, those reasoning in a systematic manner actively reconstruct these messages in a broader frame of reference. This liberates them from the fragmentary depiction of the news. They are subsequently less susceptible to biases presented on and by the news media and also less susceptible to various news media effects, such as agenda setting and the like. This is important in itself. News media research typically assumes that people are able to evaluate an issue based on the information presented to them in the news media coupled with whatever knowledge they might have about that particular topic. That is, people reason about issues based on what has been presented to them. Operating on this assumption, one would expect that if subjects are presented with fragmented information, they will respond in a fragmented manner. What is found here is that this largely depends on one's mode of reasoning. While this may be true for those reasoning in a linear manner, there are also individuals who, as a result of how they think about the social and political world, are going to recognize the inherent limitations in the structure or form of what is presented to them, allowing them to critically evaluate the message accordingly.

The key point of all of this is that this paradigm provides a means of explaining some of the differences in anomalous data found in other major news studies. A number of news studies with relatively strong findings, such as those of Iyengar and Kinder (1987), Graber (1984), Neuman, et al. (1992), Bennett (1988), Iyengar (1991), Cappella and Jamieson (1997), etc. find that the effects they examine are not shared equally by all of their subjects. Perhaps this can be partly explained by differences in cognition within these subject pools.

For instance, the primary finding of Iyengar and Kinder's (1987) landmark study is a validation of the agenda setting role of television news. Essentially, this research maintains that the power of the medium of television rests not in its ability to alter opinions or behavior but to dictate what are the issues of importance on the public political agenda. Through a series of sequential and assemblage experiments, as well as an analysis of time series data, Iyengar and Kinder find that the television news plays a major role in dictating which issues viewers feel are of primary importance. In presenting their results, they find that, "such a dramatic shift in priorities, induced by such a modest and unobtrusive alteration in television news coverage, constitutes a powerful confirmation of the agenda-setting hypothesis." (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987, p. 18). The research and findings presented here, suggests that the ability to alter the political agenda of news spectators so powerfully depends on two factors. First, a specific kind of news presentation: that the television news must present political information as atomized pieces of information with little or no context for it is the lack of this interconnectedness between issues that gives the news media the power to highlight new political developments. Second, a specific kind of subjective reconstruction: given the results of the empirical study in the previous chapter, one must assume that the agenda setting power of the news media is particularly influential for linear reasoning. If news spectators addressed the news from a systematic perspective within which various political values and norms were defined relative to one another, political developments would be less surprising and the television news would appear, correspondingly, less able to dictate the political agenda. And, indeed, Iyengar and Kinder find that some of their

subjects were considerably less influenced by the otherwise powerful agenda-setting effects of the news. Given the paradigm and research presented here, the possibility is certainly raised that these individuals who were not affected by the agenda setting experiments were reasoning in a systematic manner. While not necessarily accurate predictors of various modes of reasoning, it is however not surprising that Iyengar and Kinder find that less-educated, non-partisan, and non-active individuals are more susceptible to the agenda-setting effects of television news (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987 p. 59). It is thus claimed here that the results achieved by Iyengar and Kinder reflect the predominance of linear reasoning among their subject pool.

A similar conclusion can be reached regarding the panelists in Graber's (1984) work. Graber's elaboration of how news spectators process the news is in many ways an elaboration of the linear reasoning as depicted here. For instance, Graber talks of how panelists viewed problems from the vantage point of the present and, with one exception, were able to project these issues into future contexts (Graber, 1984 p. 193). Graber also notes that panelists were able to view problems from the vantage points of others, but few used this approach unless the interviewer asked them to do so and, even then, some panelists balked at using other vantage points at all. Linear reasoning can of course take the perspective of others, but only with the implicit understanding that this is the perspective of the "other" that is only conceived of as relative to the privileged position of one's own immediate perception of political reality. However, Graber does briefly note that not all of her panelists always think about the news in the same manner (ibid, p. 158). Graber talks of how the subjects she examined typically use simple cause and effect

causal linkages in their schematic processing of the news. However, approximately 10% of the time a more "complex" cause and effect linkage was employed. Unfortunately the data is not elaborated in a way that would allow one to make the claim that these differences could be explained by differences in cognitive structure among the panelists.

Essentially, Graber's work is an affirmation of schema theory; she maintains that, as the news is episodic and fragmented to begin with, news stories are made sense of in terms of the news spectators' schemas that have been constructed from direct and mediated experiences over the course of a lifetime. This is typical of the linear orientation to the concrete news stimuli rather than of the systematic perspective. However, at no point does this dissertation make the claim that the use of schemas is the exclusive domain of linear reasoning. Rather, one would expect systematic reasoning to also use schemas and other cognitive shortcuts in the course of their daily life; what is claimed here is that they either have the ability to address the world in a systematic manner or they do not. This also presents the possibility that the schemas utilized are qualitatively different. A specific causal connection - good people do good things - is a linear schema. Adopting a conservative interpretation of events is systematic. Different forms of reasoning may yield different forms of schematization (Rosenberg, personal communication). However, while it is not clearly delineated in Graber's work and therefore impossible to confirm with a high degree of confidence, it would appear that none of her panelists necessarily examined politics from a systematic perspective.

Much of the argument presented by Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992), as it applies to how individuals make sense of the news, is not dissimilar from that presented

by Graber. Rather than using the term "schema", Neuman, et al. use "frame" but otherwise each work seems to similarly describe a "linear" conceptualization of the news media. For instance, Neuman, et al. mention how individuals link news stories to the individuals' frames of reference and how different individuals may make sense of the same story in different ways depending on the social context in which they are immersed, etc (Neuman, Just, and Crigler, 1992 p. 39). However, Neuman, Just, and Crigler also talk of differences in cognitive skill playing a role in the degree to which individuals were able to learn from the news (ibid, p. 99) but fail to elaborate a theory or model of cognitive differentiation in their work. One would expect that the application of the model presented here would explain much of the differences they find as a result of "differences in cognitive skills."

The differences in modes of cognition and the effect this has on how news spectators assess the news can also be used to explain some of the findings of Bennett (1988). Bennett examines the degree to which news spectators were "prisoners of the news" and subsequently unable to recognize the various news biases he describes throughout his book. Bennett finds that "the overwhelming majority of those who evaluated [a particular] story" accepted the story at face value despite the fact that there were obvious clues and discrepancies that should have caused doubts about the authenticity of the story (Bennett, 1988 p. 150). Bennett claims that "most people are prisoners of the news who find it difficult to think analytically or critically about news events" because news spectators largely accept what political authorities tell them via the news; news spectators have a "difficult time making connections between news

stories...when most news reports are both fragmented and lacking in analysis" (ibid, p. 153). These traits are what one would expect of linear reasoning. It is this mode of reasoning, presumably, which drives the results of Bennett's study. "Only a small minority (20 percent) expressed any doubts about the sincerity of the story or the motives behind the message". Given the results of the empirical study in the previous chapter, it is entirely possible that these doubters may have been able to see beyond the immediacies of the story as presented as a result of the systematic nature of their reasoning.

Iyengar (1991) claims that the television news' event-oriented episodic framing, which presents issues in terms of concrete instances, tends to elicit individualistic attributions of responsibility toward aberrant individuals or groups in society. By simplifying complex issues to the level of anecdotal evidence, television news leads viewers to issue-specific attributions of responsibility, and these attributions tend to shield society and government from responsibility (Iyengar, 1991 pp. 136-137)." Examining this from the perspective of cognitive differentiation presented here, it is entirely possible that much of what Iyengar is discussing is as much a result of the predominance of linear reasoning on the part of the news spectators as it is a result of the episodic manner in which the television news presents issues.[4] In other words, it's not simply a matter of thematic versus episodic presentations, although this is certainly extremely important, but also that the immediate and concrete nature of episodic coverage is ideally suited as a source of political information for linear reasoning.

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[4] This topic will be examined in more detail below.

Iyengar defines the thematic potential of news coverage as placing political issues in some general context (ibid, p. 2), and finds that the most informed and knowledgeable news spectators are those who are most receptive to thematic framing. In addition, Iyengar found that episodic news presentations unexpectedly elicited societal attributions for a varying but significant minority of his subjects. It is entirely possible that these effects, at least on the micro side, can be attributed to systematic reasoning. In sum, utilizing the paradigm developed here, it is entirely possible that what is driving Iyengar's findings are differences in modes of cognition among his subjects and it is these differences that explain his "unexpected results" (ibid, p. 121).

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) provide a theory of cognition that is, in many ways, similar to the model of cognitive development presented here, especially in regards to the linear mode of reasoning. They claim that access to knowledge depends on how this knowledge is activated and that the framing of news media stories makes some information more accessible to activation than others. Rather than using a language of concrete events that are linked in a linear fashion, Cappella and Jamieson describe their theory in terms of news that activates nodal linkages (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997 p. 59). These "nodes" are also referred to as concepts or memory constructs. To perhaps oversimplify their argument, Cappella and Jamieson claim that the press' emphasis on conflict and strategy leads to a "spiral of cynicism" which turns voters away from the political process. This is demonstrated in a number of experiments, however, the results of these studies are far from universal. These results may stem from many factors, but, through the use of the paradigm of cognitive differences as elaborated here, it would

appear that, as a baseline, one would expect news spectators who are reasoning in the way predicted by Cappella and Jamieson to be reasoning in a linear manner for various reasons. For one, Cappella and Jamieson describe the nodal points of knowledge as linked in a linear manner to the point of activation. They also note that these linkages are often hierarchical, or, to use the terms in which linear reasoning was described earlier, singular and unidirectional. However, they do not claim that all associations among these memory constructs are hierarchical, perhaps leaving open the possibility of a systematic organization among concepts. Cappella and Jamieson also speak of political sophisticates who have more developed knowledge structures, process the news differently, and possess more developed political schemata. While impossible to determine from the information and methodology presented in *Spiral of Cynicism*, it is of course possible that these differences could reflect structural differences in cognition such as those differentiating linear from systematic reasoning.

In addition, Cappella and Jamieson note that the nodal points of knowledge are largely provided by the television news, "most voters get most of their news about politics from television" (ibid, p. 92); etc. They claim that many of the political pictures in our heads are provided by the television news; what we know and what we can easily access is heavily influenced by the media. Finally, the emphasis on the strategic and cynical framing of the news throughout their work directly implies that the construction of simplistic and divisive characterizations of political issues on the television news which is often more salient and thus more easily activated and accessible to news spectators. This is in keeping with chapter two, above, which elaborates how the news is

framed in a manner which fails to capture the complexity of political issues. In the case of *Spiral of Cynicism*, Cappella and Jamieson claim that the news is presented in a way that accentuates the cynical and self-interested motivations of political actors.[5] In any case, as was demonstrated in the experiment in the previous chapter, this fragmented and disembedded representation of political issues in the television news is clearly persuasive for linear reasoning in a manner that does not hold true for systematic reasoning.

Murray Edelman (1964, 1977, 1988), claims that the simplistic symbolic presentation of political issues by the news media serves to reassure the public while enabling political actors to appease those organized groups who stand to gain or lose from the political process. As this is a democratic system in which there is competition for political position, different meanings and symbols are presented to the public as politicians engage in a competition for the construction of political reality and a competition for votes. The presentation and representation of contradictory messages corresponding to contradictory beliefs often leads to an ambivalence towards chronic social problems (Edelman, 1977). What I have argued is that the existence of this, less than ideal, state of affairs is heavily dependent on news spectators largely reasoning in a linear manner. In addition, this process is not benign but, as politics is increasingly played out in a public forum on the news media[6], these simplistic and often divisive political claims become the reality of politics for news spectators and political actors

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[5] Much of this is very similar to Patterson's (1994) elaboration of the predominance of strategic rather than substantive reporting of the news.

[6] See chapters two and three.

who, in turn, influence further political practice. This is particularly obvious in the case of issues decided by public referenda such as the California ballot propositions discussed in chapter three. Given the experimental findings of the previous chapter, one can safely assume that the simplistic and devise political debate surrounding public referenda, such as Proposition 209, will be particularly influential to those news spectators reasoning in a linear manner. In addition, according to Edelman, the acceptance of this type of divisive rhetorical claims as the reality of race politics actually leads to a pervasive ambivalence to such issues.

While the findings of this project have a significant impact on a number of areas of academic research, what is perhaps more important is the significance of this paradigm for democratic theory and political practice.

Significance for Normative Democratic Theory

The first chapter of this dissertation presented some democratic ideals by which one might judge contemporary political debate. Informed by the intervening inquiry into the two sides of this debate - how the reality of politics is constructed in the mass news media and how this reality is reconstructed by news spectators - this section of the final chapter will briefly examine the degree to which these democratic ideals have been met.

As the network television news is the primary source of political information in contemporary society, the quality of this information has significant consequences for both the functioning of a democratic polity and the creation of democratic citizens. However, given the findings of this dissertation, one is left with no option other than to

conclude that the network television news has failed to live up to the ideals set out in chapter one. Rather than constructing a rich mosaic of political practice, the fragmented representation of political issues on this medium would seem to largely nullify any pedagogical element there may be to politics. In other words, because it doesn't provide the necessary information that can be utilized by news spectators in order to make critical and interpretive decisions in the political sphere, the television news is fundamentally depoliticizing and disempowering.

> Although they are the major channels of political communication, the mass media dance to other tunes than those of democratic communications alone. Through their acceptance of the imperatives of competition, and in their adherence to a self-generated and self-imposed set of professional standards, they shape their contributions to the political process in ways that may well fall short of the democratic ideals they claim to serve (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1990 p. 283).

As discussed in detail in chapter one, the theoretical requirements of democratic citizenry in a multicultural contemporary society would seem to require that individuals be able to recognize that others' understandings or opinions of issues will differ from their own and that issues and values are differently defined. They must also be able to critically evaluate these different positions as well as integrate these understandings and recognize how each position is relative to the other, etc. However, these types of concerns are neither characteristic of television news representations nor of linear reasoning. To the degree news spectators are unable to systematically reconstruct the divisive and fragmented reality of politics constructed by the mass media, they are essentially disabled as democratic citizens. In other words, as these news spectators are incapable of recognizing the fragmented and divisive nature of news media messages,

they are consequently unable to recognize the complexity of political issues. Ideally, democracy is essentially a vehicle for participation and self-governance. However, if the reality of politics constructed and reconstructed inhibits independent, informed, and critical judgment, one's ability to participate democratically is similarly compromised. In short, the paradigm analyzed here provides a means of explaining how and why a simplistic and often divisive political rhetoric is disseminated and accepted as objective political reality. A more robust understanding of this process is of primary importance to the topics of both individual understanding of social and political issues and how or even to what degree these issues can be adequately addressed in the political sphere.

This is not to imply that those individuals reasoning in a systematic manner will necessarily be "better" democrats in terms of the interests of society as a whole. Individuals reasoning is systematic fashion have obviously operated in totalitarian contexts with totalitarian aims. However, the argument presented here is not framed in terms of outcomes, but in terms of procedure. Democracy, at least as practiced, is about procedures or processes, not outcomes; democracy can have hideous outcomes, it doesn't preclude mistakes. While systematic reasoning will not necessarily result in "better" decisions, individuals reasoning in this manner are, however, more likely to recognize the complexity of the political realm. This is particularly important in a democratic context, where individuals reasoning in a systematic manner would theoretically make better democratic citizens. The reasons for this are presented in detail in chapter five and affect such areas of democratic citizenship as one's ability to recognize the differential construction of values and beliefs, to differentiate between what is and what should be, to

resist political appeals that are not in one's own best interest (or in the best interest of society as a whole), etc. It should also be kept in mind that the political reality in which systematic reasoning operates is still one of divisive and fragmented political rhetoric which often pits one group against another. A situation, in short, in which it becomes difficult to pursue less immediately salient and concrete perspectives on political issues. In addition, there is no guarantee that systematic reasoning individuals will agree about which is the best course of action to follow in any particular situation. The democratic government of the United States was not designed to operate quickly or efficiently. All political actors are subject to the process of debate and compromise in the crafting of policy.

Significance for political practice

The point here is to stress the importance of a systematic re-presentation and a systematic understanding of social and political issues in order that these issues be realistically addressed and practical proposals made for how they should be dealt with by society. Given that the ideals of a democratic system can only be realized if its citizenry is well informed, the inability of those reasoning in a linear manner to recognize the shortcomings of their primary source of political information is of primary importance; doubly so for, as will be demonstrated below, it seems the vast majority of the adult population reasons at a linear level. This also has serious implications for the practice of politics.

As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, news spectators reasoning in a

linear manner address the fragmented representation of political issues on the television news as the reality of political practice. This, in turn, provides an explanation for the basis and perpetuation of a simplistic political debate and practice. The fragmented construction of political and social problems in the news media implicitly overlooks other problems, solutions, and issues. Political practice and political actors are presented in concrete understandable terms that necessarily overlook the complexity of contemporary political practice. Rather than placing these social issues in the context of a web of competing values and norms, the emphasis is on concrete current events presented in terms of relatively simply causal antecedents and a debate between expected causal outcomes.

In addition to this simplistic construction of politics, this process also provides the basis for a divisive political debate and practice. The relationship between the structure of linear reasoning and the structure of the political representations offered by the television news facilitate a divisive political rhetoric and practice, especially to the extent politics is conducted in the public sphere. This results both from how the news media frame issues and their practice of reporting what political actors say as objective news. For instance, as for the former, essentially all issues dealing with American politics, no matter how complex, are likely to be bifurcated into a conflict between the Democrats and the Republicans. However, this obviously overlooks the nuances of all the possible actors at the table and serves to create division where one need not necessarily exist (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). As for the latter, the public political landscape is largely shaped by political actors who strategically define issues in order to generate political

support (see chapter three). This results in the creation of issues and the passage of legislation in order to meet the demands of political expediency rather than the best interest of society at large. These, of course, have important effects on the social and political landscape. However, from a systematic perspective, these various constructions can be put in a social context as merely one definition of a political issue that is interrelated with many other definitions and many other issues. To view an issue solely in economic, religious, humanitarian, or other terms is to overlook the interrelated nature of these various ways of viewing society.

In this context it becomes difficult to express systematic concerns in contemporary American politics as these politics are presented in very linear frames. In order to engage the political debate as presented, the systematic reasoning individual is forced to phrase one's argument in linear terms. However, as it is often the linear nature of the debate that is of concern, such engagement seem neither compelling nor fulfilling. Those reasoning in a systematic manner are thus turned off by the spectacle of politics much in the same way that Hart (1994) demonstrates how "clever" people find themselves unable to involve themselves with the spectacle of politics as played out on television. "Clever people are...immunized from political participation, in part because they are so frustrated and in part because they look at politics from so many vantage points simultaneously. They have a special intricacy, a capacity for distinguishing the real from the unreal,..." (Hart, 1994 p. 156) As long as politics are carried out on a linear level, citizens will continue to be swayed by political messages that, while appealing at face value, may carry vast unexamined negative implications.

The paradigm presented here also proves especially useful in explaining why and how political views that are antithetical to the dominant political and economic elite are so effectively suppressed by the television news, and all mass news media, and are consequently absent from contemporary mass political debate. The news is able to control the course of political debate in this country by controlling what kinds of information gets presented in major news outlets, presenting the news in accepted formats, and limiting the time that would be necessary to present alternative arguments that contradict the common understandings that have been normalized through the news media. Compounding the news media's influence is the fact that the dominant mode of reasoning which to place this information in the context of a broader abstract conceptualization of society whereby it might be better understood. This would help explain why the citizenry remain largely ignorant of the arguments put forth by such individuals as Michael Parenti and Noam Chomsky; why the U.S. government is able to pursue a foreign policy that caters to the needs of big business while shrouding this in a cloak of democratic ideals; why political campaigns such as those of Dr. Benjamin Spock and Ralph Nader remain invisible to the vast majority of the populace; etc.

This orientation is reflected in the views of many media theorists who, by different paths, warn that the structure of a privately owned and controlled mass news media system such as that found in the United States leads to various news media biases. Ben Bagdikian's critique (1992) is from the point of view of free enterprise - he feels that the narrow, monopolistic control of the news media is the problem, while Michael Parenti (1988) argues that the problem is class oriented - he feels that, through implicit and

explicit censorship, the ruling class ensures that its ideas are the ideas of the age. These biases carry negative implications for the practice of contemporary democracy, at least from the perspective of the traditional democratic theory that assumes the mass news media should provide a broad range of political information in order to assist citizens in the exercise of their democratic responsibilities, as addressed above. Because of the scope of these arguments, it would be extremely difficult to empirically validate many of these claims save by comparing specific information presented in the news with specific information found elsewhere.[7] While academics such as Ben Bagdikian, Michael Parenti, Noam Chomsky, Norman Solomon, W. Lance Bennett, etc. have made careers out of examining the biases inherent in the United State's mass news media system, they fail to explain why a majority of the population, while occasionally critical of news sensationalism or cynical towards politics in general, continue to rely on the television news as a relatively objective purveyor of political information. These scholars contend that the television news media present a skewed or limited *re*presentation of the complexity of social reality but are also unable to explain why some individuals accept the narrow range of meanings presented on the television news and others do not. The argument woven throughout this dissertation would claim that the proclivity to accept the reality of politics constructed on the mass media as *the* reality of politics is driven by cognitive mode.

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[7] Bagdikian (1992) tries to do just this with the example of the McCarthy hearings; Parenti (1978) does this with the example of the U.S.'s treatment of the Marcos regime; Chomsky presents a series of examples in a number of works (Chomsky, 1992, 1994.)

Developmental Potential

This dissertation has sought to explain both how reality is socially constructed and how this comes to be differently realized. The systematic recognition of these differential constructions of reality allows for a critical stance from which to interpret news media presentations. However, the linear presentation of the news fails to provide any impetus for both cognitive development and a more thorough understanding of the complexity of political issues. To the degree the news media fail to foster cognitive development, they therefore fail to fulfill the ideals of liberal democratic theory.

The main thrust of this dissertation is to carve out new ground dealing with how news spectators make sense of television news messages and news media messages in general. It has been found that, as a result of the interplay between the structure of the medium of the television news and the structure of linear reasoning, this has troubling implications for the practice of politics. As these two realms are reciprocally constructed, it thus becomes interesting to speculate what effects the former might have on the latter. It should be kept in mind that the claim made here is that these two realms are complementary, it has not been demonstrated that the structure of television news messages has an effect on the spectators' modes of cognition. However, there is some justification in pursuing this line of analysis as the model of cognitive development presented above claims that, theoretically, the more varied and different experiences to which one is exposed, the greater the impetus for cognitive development. Given the pervasive nature of the mass news media and its potential to demonstrate the relevance of the complexity of the social and political world to the masses, this would, at least

theoretically, be a major force in stimulating development.

However, as demonstrated in chapter two, this question is largely moot as, if anything, the mainstream news media are becoming more fragmented, homogenous, and sensationalized. The linear presentation of the news fails to provide any impetus for both cognitive development and a more thorough understanding of the complexity of social and political issues. A number of researchers have actually found that consumption of television news actually has a deleterious effect on the acquisition of political information and a positive effect on ignorance, apathy, and cynicism (Hart, 1994).[8] This results from many factors: the increasing monopolization and homogenization of various news media which results in increased economic constraints as news media outlets are increasingly controlled by larger and larger corporations; the perceived necessity of television, and other media, to attract new audiences with flashier productions, shorter "snapshots" of issues, more technical effects, etc.; the steady eclipse of "substantial" by "strategic" reporting; the continual reduction in the length of the average sound bite; etc. In addition, the news media are not the only institution that might stimulate cognitive development, they are only one element in a broader environment that also fails to facilitate development. Much of society is hierarchically, bureaucratically organized, even the university, which has ideals of stimulating cognitive development, is hierarchically

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[8] See also Robinson, J. P. and D. Davis. "Television News and the Informed Public: An Information Processing Approach" in *Journal of Communication*. 40:3, 1990, pp. 106-119; Neuman, W. R. *The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge and Opinion in the American Electorate*. Harvard University Press, 1986; Davis, D. K. "News and Politics" in D. Swanson and D. Nimmo (eds.) *New Directions in Political Communication: A Resource Book*. Sage, 1990, pp. 147-184.

structured in a way that might suggest the development of linear rule following rather than encourage the development of critical thinking.

However, changing the structure of news media messages, particularly those of television, so that they provided more context for political issues, recognized the interrelated and indeterminate nature of various issues, etc. would presumably challenge many new spectators' understandings of political reality. One could further speculate that this may cause some news spectators to reflexively examine their understanding of social and political reality perhaps compelling the generation of a "systematic" equilibrium between the individuals' cognition and the social and political world. This is, of course, not to imply that changing the structure of television news messages will automatically change the citizenry who will automatically change the political system, it could be that news spectators are simply turned off by such a presentation. However, theoretically, this would not only be a start but also a key aspect of this process. As virtually the only source of macro-level political information in contemporary society, the television news, and the mass news media in general, have the potential to provide the information necessary for effective mass democratic participation (Groombridge, 1972 p. 125).

Conclusion

This dissertation has demonstrated that the news media's construction of political reality is particularly persuasive for those individuals reasoning in a linear manner. More specifically, many of the problems inherent in the news media's construction of political reality, it's lack of complexity, comprehensiveness, context, etc., are not generally noted

by news spectators reasoning in a linear manner. It has been shown how the construction of political reality on the television news, as well the contemporary mass news media more generally, inhibits the full understanding of the complexity of social and political issues resulting in manipulation by demagogues and other negative implications for democracy. Nevertheless, the network television news is firmly entrenched in its ways for a number of reasons. Lacking an ideological diversity of outlets, news providers are uncomfortable engaging in in-depth analysis or even coverage of issues for fear of violating their norms of objectivity. In addition, the for-profit orientation of news media outlets imposes many limitations as does the nature of the medium of television itself, as addressed in chapter two. However, this is not to say that the representation of the news could not be improved in a number of substantial ways. The diversity of television news outlets brought about by cable and satellite technologies have not yet created any alternative to the standard fare, but now that the news "roadblock" of the nightly news has been removed from the television lineup and viewers have begun deserting the network news for sit-com re-runs and video infomercials on other channels, it is not unreasonable to expect that the network news will have to start providing better and more thorough coverage of the news itself in order to compete for the hard-core news junkie audience that remains. While Graber's (1997) claim that the diversity of news outlets has already resulted in diversity of fare seems unwarranted, it is not unreasonable to expect that this type of "narrow casting" may become a staple of the future. Also, given the public outcry over the horse-race coverage of the elections and the public's increasing impatience with coverage centered around personality, scandal, and character, it would not be surprising if

television news media outlets began to be swayed by such criticism and changed their fare appropriately (Thomas E. Patterson, 1998, personal communication).

In addition to hopes for the future, there also often exists a tendency to call on some idyllic past when the news media was neither so sensational nor so simplistic and citizens were free and equal creatures working side by side by day and dancing around the maypole by evening. For instance, the partisan papers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century addressed political issues in a more complex manner and were also more ideologically slanted in their coverage. The complexity of their language and phrasing are almost unrecognizable as newspaper writing when compare alongside contemporary newspaper prose. Habermas (1984), for one, lauded the press in the late 18th c. as a forum of rational, reasoned debate between private citizens and decries the modern press as stupefying and stultifying (Curran, 1991). However, as Thomas Wolfe says, "you can't go home again." This is most obviously the case here as this mythical past to which some may argue we should return is simply that, myth. As noted by Michel Foucault:

> I think there is a widespread and facile tendency, which one should combat, to designate that which has just occurred as the primary enemy, as if this were always the principal form of oppression from which one had to liberate oneself....There is in this hatred of the present or the immediate past a dangerous tendency to invoke a completely mythical past (Foucault, 1984 pp. 248-250).

Does this mean that reforms can not be made that can improve the mass news media's coverage of the complexity of political issues? This is most certainly not the case. One can certainly imagine a more comprehensive coverage of the complexity of

social and political issues that recognizes the limits of our understandings of these issues and our efforts to deal with the same. It would seem that only through the generation of a public forum that addresses these concerns and is accessible to all can one hope to thwart the demagoguery of political actors who seek to gain power by creating and exacerbating divisions among the electorate and the facilitation of this process by the simplistic and disembedded political representations on the television news. Without such a public forum we are limited to allowing the few to occupy the center stage because of their skill in manipulating the spectacle of the news, while requiring the rest to remain occasionally attentive but otherwise quiescent spectators of the show. The democratic ideals of the United States can surely be better met if the majority were given the tools to more meaningfully and effectively contribute to the democratic political process.

> The public will begin to re-awaken when they are addressed as a conversational partner and are encouraged to join the talk rather than sit passively as spectators before a discussion conducted by journalists and experts (Reeves and Campbell, 1994).

If democracy is to have any hope of functioning in any kind of a real sense, this 'spectacle' of political blandishments continuously reported as news must be penetrated. It is to this end that this dissertation seeks to illuminate how people cognitively conceptualize the political realm and, in turn, cast light on the mechanisms by which the spectacle is created. This is of particular concern in a democracy where politics both impinges on many facets of individuals daily reality and, in turn, the individuals, at least theoretically, have both access to and control over the political system.

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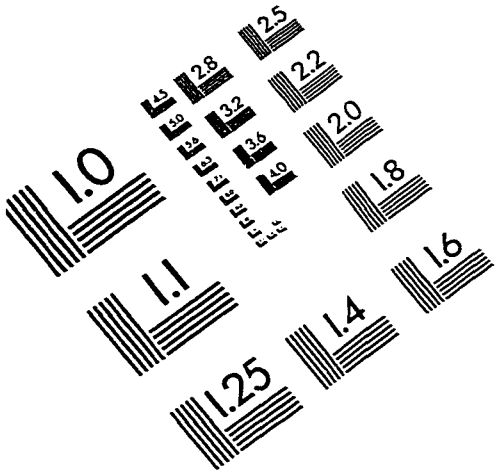

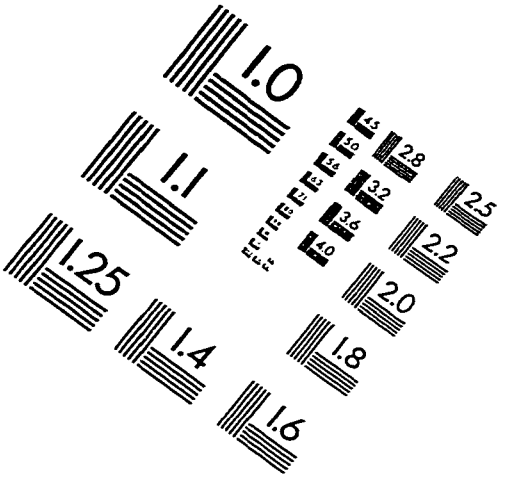

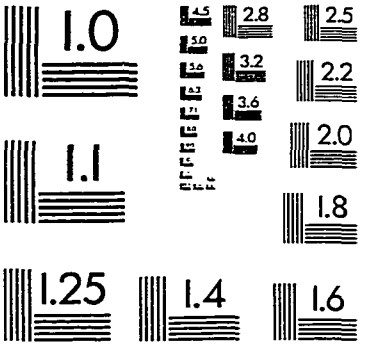

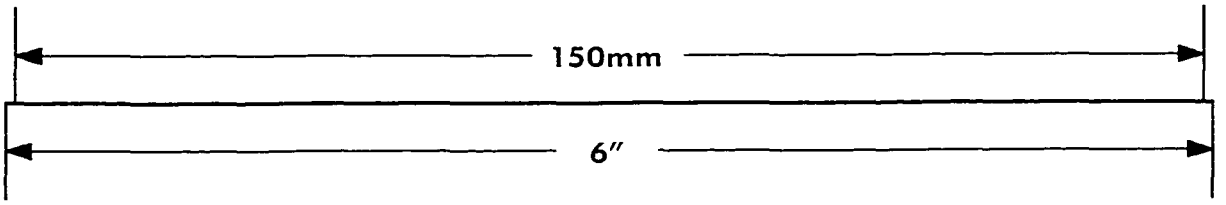

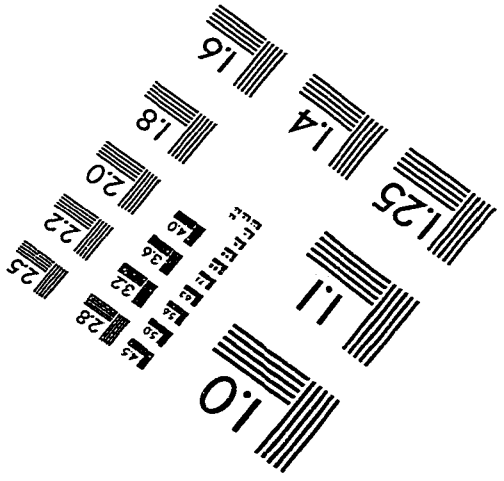

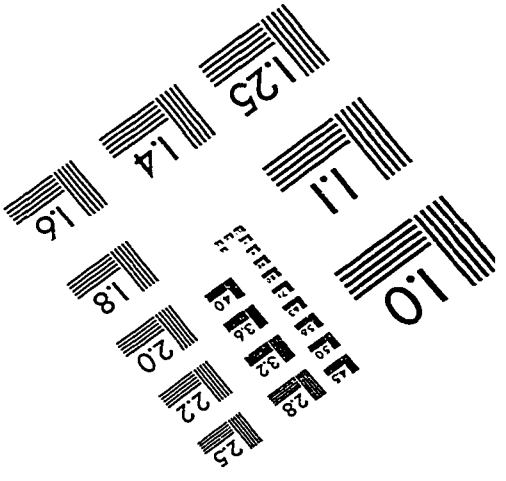

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