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THE CONSEQUENCES OF MISTRUST IN THE NEWS MEDIA: MEDIA SKEPTICISM AS A MODERATOR IN MEDIA EFFECTS AND AS A FACTOR INFLUENCING NEWS MEDIA EXPOSURE

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ABSTRACT

THE CONSEQUENCES OF MISTRUST IN THE NEWS MEDIA: MEDIA SKEPTICISM AS A MODERATOR IN MEDIA EFFECTS AND AS A FACTOR INFLUENCING NEWS MEDIA EXPOSURE

Yariv Tsfati

Joseph N. Cappella

Survey data show that audience trust in the institutions of the news media is fading. Most research to date has focused on the reasons for this decline in audience trust and ignored its outcomes. This dissertation seeks to explore the consequences of audience skepticism toward media institutions. Specifically, it hypothesizes that mistrust in the media serves as a moderator for media effects and as a factor influencing media exposure selections. Both propositions were tested on five separate large sample data sets, including the National Election Study of 1996, General Social Survey, and three additional studies conducted at the Anneberg School for Communication during the 1996 and 2000 election years. The first proposition was tested in relation to news media agenda setting, spiral of silence, cultivation and priming effects. Findings show that media skepticism indeed moderated agenda setting and spiral of silence processes. Hypotheses about the moderating role of media skepticism in cultivation and priming were not supported.

Tests of the second proposition regarding the influence of media skepticism on news exposure selections showed skepticism to be negatively related to exposure to

mainstream news channels, but positively related to exposure to non-mainstream channels like Political Talk Radio and Internet news sources. Also, media skepticism interacted with need for cognition in their effects on mainstream media exposure, so that the effects of skepticism were stronger when need for cognition was low. Implications of the findings for media scholars, for journalists and for media literacy programs are discussed.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: A matter of trust.

In the past three decades communication researchers have become preoccupied with the increasingly negative attitudes audiences hold about the news media. As Cappella and Jamieson argue, "the cynicism that has undermined every social institution is undermining the institutions of news, which less than 25 years ago were the paragons of trust, even for those least trusting the government" (1997, p. 228). Survey data (Chilton Research Services, 1997) show that 47 percent of Americans think that the news media do not protect the interests of people like themselves. 42 percent think the media get in the way of society solving its problems. 67 percent complain that there is too much negative news in the media. Almost one-third of Americans say they do not think national TV networks report the news in a fair and objective way. 77 percent think the news media care more about being the first to report a story than about the accuracy of the story. And 47 percent say that the news media should have less influence on American life.

General Social Survey data reveal that confidence in the press changed from 28 percent having a "great deal" of confidence in 1976 to a low of 10 percent in 1994. By contrast, the rate of those having hardly any confidence in the press grew from a low of 14.6 percent in 1973 to a high of 41 percent in 1996. "From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s believability ratings for the major television networks (ABC, CBS, and ABC) declined from between 86 and 87 percent to between 76 and 77 percent and the ratings for familiar daily news correspondents dropped from 84 to 65 percent" (Moy & Pfau,

2001:19). As media scholar James Carey (1995, p. 393) put it, "above all, the press lost credibility and respect; it was no longer believed. As poll after poll showed, journalists have earned the distrust of the public...'My newspaper' of older usage became 'the newspaper'; it had severed its contact and allegiance with the public." Many other scholars, mainstream news outlets and media pundits have documented a decrease in public trust in the media over the past years (see American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1998; Gaziano, 1988; Liebeskind, 1997; Meyer, 1988; Kiousis, 2000).

The discovery that people mistrust the media gave rise to journalistic and academic discourse that tried to explain the drop in audience trust. Some put the blame on politicians, who increasingly slam the media (Domke et al., 1999). Others argued that audience mistrust is the product of mounting coverage about the media by the media, that results in heightened audience awareness of journalistic blunders and scandals (Johnson et al., 1994; Watts et al., 1999). According to other explanations (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), people are cynical about the media because the media themselves are cynical. Along with this explanation, audience mistrust is the outcome of a spiraling process of cynicism, in which journalists' "strategic framing" of politics leads to audience political cynicism which in turn feeds back on journalists. Journalists believe that politicians are deceptive, so they report cynically. Audiences end up cynical towards politicians and journalists alike, according to this "contagious cynicism" explanation.

Most research to date has focused on the *reasons* for the decline in audience trust in the media and for the rise in audience cynicism toward journalism. By contrast, very little attention has been devoted to the *consequences* of mistrust in the media. In other words, audiences' mistrust in the press has been treated mostly as a *dependent* variable, not as an

independent or *intervening* variable. Audience skepticism has been particularly ignored when it comes to media theory-building. Not many scholars studying the interactions between news messages and their receivers have incorporated audience mistrust of the media as a covariate into their models, despite accumulating social scientific evidence demonstrating the importance of trust in various social phenomena.

Trust as a consequential phenomenon.

The concept of trust is the key to our understanding of various human behaviors. For sociologists, trust is a prerequisite to the foundation of any form of human social organism (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984). Trust allows pairs of individuals to establish cooperative relationships whenever doing so is mutually beneficial (Rotter, 1980) and induces win-win solutions to prisoner-dilemma and other game-theoretic situations (Orbell & Dawes, 1991; Frank, 1988). Without some level of trust, no kind of collective behavior would be feasible. Trust is "the bedrock perception upon which society is possible" (Cappella, 2001).

In line with these sociological perspectives, political scientists agree that trust is necessary for a political system to function. They usually focus on institutional trust and argue that the lack of it endangers democracy. Mistrust in government, they often argue, may challenge the legitimacy of the political system and, ultimately, its very existence (Erber & Lau, 1990:226; Moy & Pfau, 2001; Verba et al., 1995). Interpersonal and institutional trust were found to be related to civic engagement (Putnam, 1993). High levels of political trust were found to be related to essential political behaviors such as taxpaying (Scholz & Lubell, 1998). On the other hand, low levels of political trust

(combined with other factors) were found to predict less desirable modes of "direct action", for example, participation in riots (see Gamson, 1968; Paige, 1971; Wolfsfeld, 1985). Whether mistrust in government is good or bad, whether it represents cynicism or realism (see Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, Chapter 2; Sniderman, 1981), are questions yet to be settled by scholars. One thing that is already clear, given numerous books and articles on the matter, is that citizens' trust in their fellow citizens and in democratic institutions affects various political attitudes and behaviors.

Sociologists and political scientists alike share the notion that trust is an essential form of what they call "social capital" (Paldam, 2000; Putnam, 1993, 1995). The analogy between trust and financial capital is direct.

> Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence. Like physical capital and human capital, social capital is not completely fungible... Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons. It is lodged neither in individuals nor in physical implements of production. (Coleman, 1990:302)

In distinguishing human capital from social capital Coleman (1990:304) argues that "the human capital resides in the nodes, and the social capital resides in the lines connecting the nodes". Trust is a social resource not only because it helps people achieve common goals, but also because it helps to reduce the costs of arbitration and enforcement. "Much of the economic backwardness in the world can be explained by the lack of mutual confidence" (Arrow, 1973: 357). Putnam found that in the civic northern regions of Italy, trust is a key ingredient in economic dynamism and government performance. In such systems, Putnam found, "cooperation is often required – between

legislature and executive, between workers and managers, among political parties...and so on. Yet explicit 'contracting' and 'monitoring' in such cases is often costly or impossible, and third party enforcement is impractical. Trust lubricates cooperation" (1993:170-171). By contrast, in the regions of southern Italy, characterized by fewer civic associations, less public engagement and lower interpersonal trust, Putnam found economic and political stagnation. He concluded that social capital, of which trust is an essential component, "bolsters the performance of the polity and the economy" (p. 176).

Feeling trusted, not merely trusting others, has important behavioral consequences. Mistrustful forms of supervision, in which supervisors make frequent checks on subordinates, have been shown to lead to anger and aggression against the supervisor (Day & Hamblin, 1964). An example of the potential damage of being mistrusted was provided by Harrell & Hartnagel (1974). Their subjects, participating in a simulated work situation, had the opportunity to steal from a second subject serving as a supervisor or to make money honestly. In half the cases the supervisor (a confederate) doubted the subjects' honesty and made frequent inspections of their work and in the other half the supervisor was trusting. Distrustful supervising was found to lead to greater theft. Thus, social trust becomes "social capital" not only through *higher* motivation of *trusting* people to cooperate, but also through *lower* motivation of *trusted* people to betray trust and inflict damage.

Psychologists have found that mistrust is related to distress, characterized by malaise, anxiety and depression (see Mirowsky & Ross, 1986). Interpersonal trust was found to be a predictor of successful psychotherapy (Johnson, & Talitman, 1997). In social psychology, trust was found to be related to teamwork (Porter & Lilly, 1996).

Psychologists studying intimate relationships found trust to be one of the most desired qualities in love relationships (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). In fact, lack of trust in such relationships may produce distress, reduce relational rewards, and lead to relationship dissolution (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Mikulincer, 1998). In other areas of social psychology, scholars interested in persuasion (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland, Kelly & Janis, 1953) found that perceived source credibility (a component of trust) increases the chances of attitude change as a result of exposure to a persuasive message. In other words, they found that trustworthy sources were more persuasive than untrustworthy ones.

Given the conceptualization of trust as social capital, it should come as no surprise that economists have found that trust facilitates various economic activities (Lorenz, 1999). For example, trust has been reported to reduce transaction costs (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996), i.e., the costs of monitoring and enforcing agreements, and in particular, the costs of drafting detailed contracts (money, time and energy). Recently, it was argued that trust plays an important role in electronic commerce (Ratnasingham, 1998). If you do not trust others, why would you log on to an Internet page, leave your credit card number, and expect that someone would ship you the merchandise you ordered?

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Trust has been used in even more diverse contexts. In education research, mistrust in schools was found to escalate parent-school conflicts (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). In management and organizational behavior, trust was found to be related to the effectiveness of managerial problem solving (Zand, 1972). Even those studying medicine found that trust plays an important role in health care settings (Davies & Rundall, 2000; Pask, 1995). Trust has also been used as an independent variable in the

disciplines of anthropology (e.g., Ekeh, 1974), international relations (e.g., Kydd, 2000), history and sociobiology, as well as in political science, sociology and psychology (see also Lewici & Bunker, 1996). In sum, it would not be exaggerating to say that that trust plays a part in almost every human interaction.

The bottom line of this short review is that trust has consequences in almost every aspect of social life. If trust in the therapist has an effect on the success of the therapeutic process and trust in the nurse has implications for the well-being of the patient, if trust in the boss has various consequences for organizations (Hubbell & Medved, 2001), then why should we not study whether trust in the news media has implications for news media processes? Indeed, it is rather surprising, given the essential role of trust in the social sciences, that mistrust in the media has received so little attention as an independent or intervening variable.

If trust and mistrust matter, then we should study their consequences for news media theories. The purpose of the current research project is to focus on a particular kind of mistrust – audience mistrust in the mainstream news media, which I call media skepticism – and to examine its intervening role in mass media processes. This dissertation brings trust into mass media studies not only as a *result* of communication, but also as an *intervening factor* that has important consequences for the interaction between the news media and their audience. In particular, I wish to examine how trust and mistrust in the news media intervene in media effects and in media exposure. The rationale for focusing on these two processes will be explained shortly. In the next section I review general definitions of trust, which leads me to the core of this dissertation: the application of the concept of trust in the context of news media theories.

Definitions of trust.

A keyword search for "trust" in the University of Pennsylvania Franklin Library Catalog resulted in 3751 volumes (as of June, 2001). Similar searches found thousands of journal articles about trust in various databases of various disciplines (e.g., 2248 hits in Sociological Abstracts, 5027 in PsychINFO and 3816 in ERIC). Having attracted so much research, the concept of trust has been defined and conceptualized in numerous ways. The following are a few examples of definitions of trust. Though probably not a representative sample, they give us an idea of how scholars in diverse areas have conceptualized trust:

1. Rotter (1967:651) states that trust is "an expectancy held by an individual or group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual can be relied upon".

2. Cappella et al. (1998:3) claim that "Interpersonal trust is an attitude toward other people who are not kin nor intimate". From survey questions used to measure trust, Cappella et al. deduce that "the central attributions of interpersonal trust" are "trustworthiness versus harmfulness and mutual interest versus self interest".

3. Deatutch (1960) maintains that trust is the willingness of an individual to behave in a manner that assumes another party will behave in accordance with expectations in a risky situation.

4. "In trust relations there are, at minimum, two parties....I will assume both to be purposive, having the aim of satisfying their interests...The placement of trust allows an action on the part of the trustee that would not have been possible otherwise...If the trustee is trustworthy, the person who places trust is better off than if trust were not placed, whereas if the trustee is not trustworthy, the trustor is worse off than if trust were not placed" (Coleman, 1990:96-98).

5. According to Gambetta, when we say that we trust someone, "we implicitly mean that the probability that he will perform an action that is beneficial or

at least not detrimental to us is high enough for us to consider engaging in some form of cooperation with him" (Gambetta, 1988:217).

6. "Trust is a type of expectation that alleviates the fear that one's exchange partner will act opportunistically" (Bradach & Eccles, 1989:104).

7. Zucker (1986:54) defines trust simply as "a set of expectations by all those in an exchange".

8. "Mistrust is an absence of faith in other people based on a belief that they are out for their own good and will exploit and victimize you in pursuit of their goals" (Mirowsky & Ross, 1986:42).

9. From a game theoretic perspective, Boyle & Bonacich (1970) have noted that participants in PD games "often do know something, or at least guess something, about what their opponent is like, and therefore the actual basis for prediction about what each player will do should include...these feelings about the opponent...We shall define interpersonal trust as the extent to which these 'feelings' encourage cooperative expectations...Trust is therefore the *difference* between Player's expectations of the probability that Opponent will cooperate and the degree of cooperation implied by the caution index" (p. 130).

10. In a breathtaking review of the issue, Seligman (1997) stresses the importance of isolating trust from similar concepts. "Central to the definition of trust (as opposed to confidence) is that it involves one in a relation where the acts, character, or intentions of the other cannot be confirmed" (p. 21). This is what trust shares with faith, which is a form of ontological trust "which bypasses all epistemological procedures of verification" (p. 22). On the other hand, trust and confidence both have to do with exchange systems. But confidence relates to "structurally determined situations" and trust is an "unconditional principal of generalized exchange" (p. 171). Unlike faith and confidence, Seligman argues, trust implies solidarity and unconditionality.

11. "Trust is the calculation of the likelihood of future cooperation...As trust declines people are increasingly unwilling to take risks" (Ratnasingham, 1998: 314).

12. From the critical perspective, trust is a "fragile way of responding to uncertainty...Conceiving of trust as merely the way in which people relate to each other without an understanding of trust as a normative principle located in social, political and cultural frameworks, falls short of a critical analytical approach that could shed light on the development of contemporary society" (Fenton, 2000:153, 157).

13. From an economic perspective, "if firms or contracts can be viewed as the *formal* mechanism for reducing uncertainty in economic transactions, 'trust' provides a category for analyzing the *informal* means of doing so. Trust, that is, refers to the mediation of economic risk by informal relations and rules" (Tonkiss, 2000:83).

14. For Fukuyama (1995), trust is "the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms. Those norms can be about deep 'value' questions like the nature of God or justice, but they also encompass secular norms like professional standards and codes of behavior" (p. 26).

15. Bianco, a political scientist, defines trust "in terms of retrospective evaluations". According to him, "trust is said to exist when constituents evaluate (or are prepared to evaluate) their representative's vote favorably, regardless of whether they believe that the vote is consistent with their interests (1994:23).

These definitions, though diverging on various characteristics of trust, also share some in common. Let us try to identify these common elements, to help us better understand what scholars mean when they talk about trust.

1. Relations. All definitions of trust use the concept to describe relations between at least two sides: a trustor, the side that places trust, and a trustee, the side being trusted. Many scholars talk specifically about individuals (in particular those talking about interpersonal trust, e.g., Cappella et al., 1998; Mirowsky & Ross, 1986). However, trust is also applied to groups (Rotter, 1967), to organizations and firms (Tonkiss, 2000), or simply to "parties" (Coleman, 1990).
2. Interests. Many scholars defining trust use concepts like "interests" or "goals" (e.g., definitions 2, 4, 8, 15). Almost all other definitions imply self-motivated actors. Hence, most scholars assume that those who engage in trust relations have

objectives, and that trust is related to succeeding or failing to attain these objectives.

3. Uncertainty from the side of the trustor. When conceptualizing trust, most scholars use phrases like "probability" (Gambetta, 1988) or "likelihood" (Ratnasingham, 1998). Some maintain that trust is a "guess" (Boyle & Bonacich, 1970). Still others define trust as a means to reduce risk, or to "alleviate fear" (Bradach & Eccles, 1989). All of these concepts stress that for trust to be relevant there has to be some uncertainty. As Seligman notes, when trust takes place, there is no empirical way for the trustor to verify the intentions or the character of the trustee.
4. Potential gains for the trustor. Why should trustors engage in trust relations when they cannot be certain about the intentions or character of the trustees? The reason, as many definitions of trust outline (e.g. Coleman, 1990), is that the trustor has something to gain. This something has to do with the interests or goals of the trustor, discussed above. The potential gains, or at least reduction of risks, for the trustors are implied in most of the definitions cited above.
5. Potential costs for the trustor. Opportunism (Bradach & Eccles, 1989), self-interest and harmfulness (Cappella et al., 1998), exploitation (Mirowsky & Ross, 1986), or at the very least, "lack of cooperation", are often used in definitions of trust to imply that the uncertainty about the trustee carries with it potential damages for the trustor. The trustee, also a party with objectives and interests,

might act in some way that would leave the trustor less well off than the trustor would have been had the trustee acted otherwise[1].

6. Expectations. The notion of expectations is invoked in many definitions of trust (e.g. definitions 1, 6, 7, 9, 14). Trust is often described as the expectation that the interaction with the trustee would lead to gains, rather than losses, to the trustor. Some note that these expectations are informal.
7. Trust is voluntary. In no definition is trust forced on the trustor. Many trust definitions stress that the trustor *willingly* engages in trust. As Seligman (2000) argues, "for trust to make sense what is required is the free and autonomous, hence the unknowable individual". The voluntary nature of trust is also reflected in Coleman's description of trust as a "decision under risk" (p. 99). However, the fact that trust is a free choice of trustors, does not mean it is totally rational. Though much of the literature about trust assumes total rationality, some, even from the perspective of game theory, describe it as a "feeling" (Boyle & Bonacich, 1970), an emotion. Since there is no way to verify the integrity of the trustee, trust is often no more than a hunch.
8. The importance of the trustee's credibility. Since the trustor cannot be certain about the intentions of the trustee, for trust to take place the trustee must be considered at least somewhat believable or credible, at least at some point during the trust relationship. That is why some definitions of trust stress the credibility

[1] It is important to stress, however, that lack of fulfillment of the expectations of the trustor does not necessarily imply that the trust has been exploited by an opportunistic trustee. Many times the trustee does not want the trust, and in other instances the trustee does not have a choice between keeping the trust and breaking the trust (see Coleman, 1990: 96).

of the trustee (Rotter, 1967). This believability, however, cannot be entirely confirmed, as implied by the uncertainty component of trust.

9. Time lag – All definitions of trust have some implied timeline. They either go from past to present (as in the "retrospective" definition of Bianco, 1994), or from present to future (e.g. definitions 5, 6, 8, 9, 11). Hence, trust relations take place over time.

In sum, definitions of trust stress that trust requires an interaction between *two parties with interests*, in *an uncertain situation* in which the trustor could *enjoy gains* or *suffer damages*. Trust is a *voluntary expectation* on the side of the trustor that the former would result from the interaction with the trustee, rather than the latter.

Trust in the relations between audiences and journalists.

As we have seen, the concept of trust has been applied in numerous contexts. Scholars have investigated interpersonal trust, but also trust in democratic institutions, trust in nurses and therapists, trust in spouses. The question is, can this concept of trust be applied to audiences and the news media in communication studies? Is trust at all relevant to the relations between journalists and audiences?

For some, like Fukuyama (1995), professional standards are encompassed in the definitions of trust. For example, "we trust the doctor not to do us deliberate injury because we expect him or her to live by the Hippocratic oath, and the standards of the medical profession" (p. 26). Journalism, like medicine, can be perceived as a profession. Sociologists suggest that, like other professional specialists (e.g. lawyers, social workers),

journalists "are people who routinize other people's emergencies" (Tuchman, 1973:110-11)[2]. Although, there is no licensing for journalists (unlike in other professions), journalism does have a detailed codebook of professional standards and norms. Some of these journalistic standards are formal, some even legal (e.g., in the form of libel laws), but many – perhaps most of them – are informal. The mere existence of professional standards and norms implies that, for Fukuyama, trust relations are a part of the interaction between the trustees – professional journalists – and their trustors, their clients – the audience. As Liebes (2001:295) argues, "trust in serious journalism is based on our belief in the professionalism of journalistic practice".

So, according to Fukuyama, trust relations between audiences and journalists exist by the definition of trust, given that journalism as a profession has well-known standards and norms, at least in the Western Liberal journalistic model[3]. However, most definitions of trust do not mention professional norms as a sufficient condition for trust relations. Some even argue that "trust is only relevant when one must enter into risks and one cannot control what is to happen in advance" (Ratnasingham, 1998:314). Does this typify the relationship between media and audiences? Indeed, can we talk about risks, as well as other features of trust described above, in the context of news media and their audiences? I maintain that we can. In order to explain this point, let us apply the characteristics of general trust, which we have learned from various definitions of the concept, to the specific context of media-audience interactions.

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[2] But this routinization is not as cynical as it might seem. Professionals are people who dedicate themselves to serve other people. And indeed, surveys of journalists (e.g. by Weaver) show that their motives are idealistic and that many of them have chosen journalism as a profession in order to serve the community.
[3] In other models of journalism, like the party-line model, different professional norms dictate different types of audience-journalist relations. In authoritarian regimes, everybody knows whom the reporter is affiliated with. This, of course, has consequences for trust, or lack thereof.

First of all, trust assumes two sides with interests. In the context of media-audience relations these sides are individual audience members, and the institutions of the news media in a given society. In our context the trustee is the institution of the media. Note that the media as an institution are composed of various people – journalists, editors, and other people working in news production. The trustor is a specific member of the audience. As in other trust relations, each side has interests. The interests of the audience member are diverse and change from one person to another. Some might tune in to the news to learn about the world, while others tune in to pass the time, to feel connected to others, to show that they are connected to others, to be entertained, to learn about the weather, and so on. The interests of news producers are also diverse. The media probably does not have "one interest" as an institution, but people working in the media undoubtedly have interests. These include profit for the owners, and the economic motives of the workers. Concepts like reputation and self-fulfillment also constitute motives for many people working in the media. Another motivation to work in journalism is the ability to acquire influence. In short, both journalists and audiences have interests, and they bring these interests to the interaction, as trust assumes.

Second, as we have seen, trust implies uncertainty on the side of the trustor. In the context of the news media, given that the media deal with the impersonal world (Mutz, 1998), audiences are always at least somewhat uncertain about news media content, in the sense that it is usually hard for them to verify media reports with non-media sources. It is not only hard for us to verify the validity of the *information* that appears in the media; it is even harder to verify the *character* and *intentions* of those working in the media. Hence, it is often hard to evaluate the fairness of media *interpretations* of reality.

Much of audience mistrust in the media is concerned not only with uncertainty about the soundness of media facts, but also with uncertainty about the intentions of people working in the media. Are journalists the honest watchdogs they claim to be, fulfilling their civic responsibilities? Or are they self-interested people who do not care at all about society, and who would not let anything stand in the way of their careers? The intentions and motivations of journalists, as well as the information they report, cannot be verified by audience members. Hence, the uncertainty feature of mistrust applies to audience-media relations.

Third, as we have seen, trust implies potential gains and losses for the trustors. In the context of media-audience relations these are minor. But they exist. Audiences can either fulfill their interests (mentioned above) or they can fall short of satisfying their goals as a result of their encounter with the media. The word "risk" used in some definitions of trust relates to the chances of fulfilling these interests and thereby achieving gains rather than losses. Admittedly, in mass media-audience contexts, the risks on the side of the audience are not as grave as in other scenarios. People might be wasting their time watching the news and find out that the information they got is wrong. Moreover, they might be misled by inaccurate or unfair news portrayals that have potential behavioral consequences. It was Lippmann (1922) who first distinguished the real world from the "pictures in our heads", pictures that are influenced by the mediated realities presented by news. He observed that many times our behavior is influenced not by reality, but rather by media-constructed images of the environment. In other words, Lippmann argued, our trust in the news media has behavioral consequences.

For example, citizens are often assumed to vote on the basis of their political information. Inaccurate or biased information can lead people to a different voting decision than correct information. In this sense, if the media violate their trust, many of our political choices and behaviors are probably "wrong". This is one of the "risks" we take when we trust the media. Another example comes from the now-famous "Invasion From Mars" show (Cantril, 1952). Those who trusted the media and thought that the Orson Welles play was part of a real news broadcast representing real events, panicked. Some fled, others prayed to God, preparing for their imminent death. A few outraged listeners, who had bought train tickets hoping to flee the invasion, wrote their radio stations after the broadcast asking for compensation. These are extreme examples of real losses caused by trust in the media. The point they try to emphasize is that relying on the media entails *some* risks (though not always dramatic) on the side of the audience.

Fourth, trust implies expectations of the trustee by the trustors. In media-audience contexts, audiences do have expectations of the news media. We learned from uses and gratifications that news audiences use news because they expect that the media will help them in fulfilling cognitive and integrative (but also other) needs. Audiences expect news to provide them with information, to help them "understand what goes on in...the world", and to help them "obtain useful information for daily life" (quotes from survey items used by Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1974). According to gratification research, audiences also expect the media to help them "strengthen credibility, stability and status with society and state" (see Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1974:166, 171). Hence, as with trust relations in general, audiences bring expectations to their encounters with the news media.

Fifth, since the trust of the audience, as in any other case of trust, is voluntary (no one forces us to trust the media), the perceived credibility of the press is immensely important for audience trust in the news media. As in any other case of trust, the expectation is that "the word of the other side can be relied upon" (Rotter, 1967). This is why factualness, credibility and accuracy are among the most basic components of journalistic ethics. Credibility is essential to journalists, for it is the key to audience trust. This may explain many journalistic norms, including verifying each piece of information, presenting "hard evidence" such as numbers, separating facts from comments, demanding proof from sources (especially non-authoritative sources), and publishing only stories that "seem believable" to journalists and editors. The media constantly declare that they are reliable (i.e., that they deserve trust). Each edition of Philadelphia's KYW3 *Eyewitness News* local news program starts with the slogan, "You are watching real people, real news!" *CNN Headline News* promotes its channel using the slogan "Real News. Real Fast." This exemplifies the hard work the media do to establish the impression that they are trustworthy. As Coleman notes, "the trustee may engage in actions explicitly designed to lead the potential trustor to place trust" (Coleman, 1990:96). The media do this almost all the time. While not a necessary condition for trust (the trustee might not want to be trusted according to Coleman), it shows that the relations between media and audience are indeed ones of trust.

Finally, we know from definitions of trust that trust relations require time (Coleman, 1990:98). This condition is also applicable in audience-media relations. Almost all audiences interact with the institutions of the media over time. In modern societies, no one encounters the news media only once. We first meet the media during early

childhood. We grow up with them. As we reach adulthood, they are still around. This is unquestionably a long-term relationship.

In sum, the concept of trust can be easily applied to news media contexts. Two distinguishable sides with interests and goals interact over a substantial period of time. The trusting audience cannot be certain about the "acts, character or intentions" (Seligman, 1997:21) of the media. Though the "risks" are often not as consequential as in other cases, audiences receive potential gains from their interaction with the media, but also potential losses. They willingly expect that the interaction will lead to gains rather than losses. As we have seen, they are often encouraged by journalists to hold this expectation.

The applicability of the concept of trust to news media studies makes even more sense taking into account what we know about the ways people interact with media. Research on parasocial interaction (PSI) shows that the relationships between audience members and media characters are similar in many ways to interpersonal relations. Parasocial interaction was defined as "interpersonal involvement of the media user with what he or she consumes" (Rubin et al., 1985). Parasocial interaction has been observed in news viewing in general (Levy, 1979; Palmgreen et al., 1980) and in local news in particular (Rubin et al., 1985). One study of PSI shows that, as in interpersonal relations, the strength of the parasocial relationship is linked to its length and its role in uncertainty reduction (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Though the concept of trust was not used directly in this study, the phenomena under discussion clearly resemble trust. Hence, from the PSI literature we learn that people develop relationships with media characters that are like interpersonal relationships, and in some cases, these relations resemble trust.

Indeed, more research has shown that people treat the media as they treat other people. Reeves and Nass conducted a series of experiments applying basic social psychological principles to human-media interactions and reached the conclusion that "all people automatically and unconsciously respond socially and naturally to media" (1996:7). For example, they found that subjects teamed together with a computer cooperated more with the computer than those not teamed, exactly as social psychology predicts about teamwork in human-human contexts (Chapter 13). Similarly, they found that various other psychological principles, ranging from politeness and etiquette to the way people respond to praise, apply when people interact with media. Though none of their experiments dealt specifically with trust, the scope of their argument is broad enough to suggest that the principles of trust may be transferred from the interpersonal to the media context. Since people trust each other, they are capable of trusting media, following the logic of the *Media Equation* (people treat media like they treat people).

In sum, the parasocial interaction literature and the Nass and Reeves studies both teach us that general social psychological rules originating from human contexts are also relevant in audience-media interactions. The notion of trust could thus be applied not only to interpersonal relations, but also to the interaction of people with media. Unlike in parasocial interaction, the object of interaction in this dissertation is the news media as an institution, not specific mediated personas (e.g. particular news journalists, fictional characters). This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. In the meantime it is sufficient to note that the logic of the PSI literature underlies the application of trust in audience-news media context.

Before moving further, a few things should be clarified. First, while audience-media relations do constitute trust relations, this is not an example of "mutual trust" (Coleman, 1990:177). Though journalists have some expectations from their audiences, one cannot say that they necessarily "trust" their audiences. In other words, though some confuse trust with mutual trust, the concepts are not the same, and the former is more relevant to the context of audience-media relations than the latter. This is not to say that there is no interdependence in the interaction between audiences and journalists. It could be argued that journalists need audiences no less than audiences need journalists. However, this is not in any way a symmetrical relationship (as described by Coleman in his discussion of mutual trust).

Second, as Seligman (1997) notes, trust is distinct from confidence and faith. However, in this dissertation I sometimes ignore Seligman's distinction and join "most social scientists" (p. 16) in conflating "trust" and "confidence". When I do so, however, I am referring to the common elements of these separate constructs. In the context of news media, some of the subtle distinctions between similar concepts are negligible. In fact, the Hebrew language has only one word for trust and confidence (*Emun*), and the word for faith (*Emuna*) stems from the same verb as trust.

Third, it is important to clarify that this dissertation does not attempt to *explain* audience trust or mistrust in the media. It follows from the social psychological literature about trust that mistrust is either the result of perceived violation of trust in the past, or of some information about the trustee that casts doubt on the trust. We cannot tell what the sources of audience perceptions of past violation of trust are. As I have mentioned, some have argued that this information comes from politicians, while others have argued that it

comes from meta-communicative sources in the media. It might be that mistrust in the media has even reached the status of a "meme" (Cappella, 2001) that spreads and reproduces mimetically in our culture through both interpersonal and mediated channels. In any case, the *sources* of information that have led people to alter their perceptions of the media over the past thirty years will not be discussed in this dissertation. The focus is rather on the *consequences* of media skepticism.

So far, we have demonstrated that trust has consequences in various fields. We have used various definitions of trust to examine what the concept means. We then showed that the concept of trust applies to audience-media contexts. Let us now turn to the literature about trust in order to examine the consequences of mistrust in the media.

The consequences of mistrust in the media.

As reviewed above, the literature on the impact of trust finds that trust leads to a higher likelihood of cooperation, and mistrust to a lower likelihood of cooperation. This finding holds in many contexts and across different disciplines. The reason for this reduced cooperation follows from the definition of trust. The mistrustor expects that the interaction with the mistrusted will lead to losses rather than gains. Fear of being exploited by an opportunistic trustee makes the mistrustor less willing to interact cooperatively with the mistrusted. Hence, the lower the trust in one's teammates, the lower the teamwork; the lower the trust in another businessperson, the lower the chances of a deal; the lower the trust in the therapist, the lower the probability of successful treatment; the lower the trust in democratic institutions, the lower the participation in civic activities. How do we apply this logic to media contexts? The lower the trust in the

media, the lower what? What would constitute "cooperative engagement" in audience-media interactions?

One possible translation of the term "cooperation" into news media contexts could be stated in terms of "influence". The media present a picture of the world, and if we cooperate with them we accept it. The news media actively try to convince us that the stories they tell about the world are real. They do this by using various rhetorical, visual, and even marketing devices. The rhetorical devices consist of what is known as the rhetoric of objectivity, which consists of third-person language, use of passive voice, use of quotations, and the like. The visual devices include the utilization of images (TV footage or stills) and of charts or graphs, both used as evidence to support the validity of the story. Even the appearance and voices of anchorpersons and journalists are carefully selected to enhance the credibility of the media stories. In many cases, pure marketing supplements the media's efforts to promote the credibility of their stories (again, the "Real People, Real News" example). In sum, the media try to persuade us that the stories they report are true.

A set of research questions that will be examined in Section 2 deals with whether those who mistrust the media are as likely to cooperate with the media by "buying" their stories. The hypotheses tested in this section all propose that media skepticism would act as a moderating factor in media effects. The concept of "effects" is used to describe cognitive or behavioral changes that result from exposure to the media. In the context of news, the notion of "effects" is most often used to describe cognitive changes that could in some way be conceptualized as acceptance of the mediated world portrayed by the

media. In section 2, I hypothesize that those who mistrust the media will be less likely than trusting audiences to be influenced by this mediated world.

Much of the trust literature is framed in terms of risk reduction. I mentioned earlier that part of the risk that news audiences accept when they trust the media have to do with the potential effects of the media. For example, given the possibility that the information we use is inaccurate or slanted, we risk erroneous conclusions when we formulate political decisions based on mediated information. It follows that mistrust in the media might lead us to reduce these risks by refusing to accept the information. "Cooperation" in media contexts may thus be conceptualized as susceptibility to media influence. Following the literature on trust, mistrust should reduce cooperation, and mistrust in the media might lead to reduced media influence. Hence,

RQ 1: Does media skepticism moderate news media effects?

One possible translation of "cooperation" into media contexts, then, is that of "effects". Mistrust leads to reduced cooperation, and mistrust in the media leads to reduced media influence. Another possible translation of "cooperation" into media contexts could be expressed in terms of "exposure". The news media want us to attend to them so they can sell our attention to their advertisers. If we attend, we cooperate. If we do not want to cooperate, we do not attend. If this is an accurate application of "cooperation" in media contexts, mistrusting audiences should be less willing to engage at all with the mainstream media.

If mistrust leads to lower cooperation, then those mistrustful of the media might try to seek functional alternatives. If they find more trusted alternatives, they might attend to them in addition to or instead of the mainstream media. Section 3 of this dissertation examines the possibility that skepticism towards the media influences media exposure. However, in addition to examining the trust-based selectivity hypotheses, this section also deals with the conditions under which people might attend to the media even though they do not trust the media. Finally, it asks whether mistrustful audiences search their environment for functional alternatives to the media. In short, Section 3 deals with various hypotheses relating mistrust in the media to media exposure. All of these hypotheses are connected to the following research question:

RQ 2: Does media skepticism influence media exposure?

To sum up, this dissertation deals with the outcomes of audience mistrust in the media. Following the definitions of trust and the literature about trust, the two research questions examined in this dissertation deal with two plausible results of audience mistrust. Research Question 1 deals with the implications of audience mistrust in the media for theories of media effects. This research question will be examined in Section 2. Research Question 2 deals with the implications of mistrust in the media for media exposure. This Research Question will be examined in Section 3.

Summary.

Trust has consequences in almost every aspect of social life, from love to taxpaying, from child-parent attachment to political participation. In this chapter I proposed to import the idea that trust matters into news media research. The analysis of various definitions of trust shows that the concept of trust is indeed relevant for audience relations with journalists. These relations involve an interaction over time between two sides: trustors (audience members) and trustees (journalists). The audience cannot be certain of the character or intentions of journalists, and hence, of the quality of information they publish. This uncertainty is what makes trust relevant for news media contexts. If they trust the media, audiences willingly expect that the interaction will lead to gains rather than losses.

This chapter also laid the foundation for the hypotheses that will be tested in Sections 1 and 2 of this dissertation. Since trust is expected to reduce cooperative engagement, mistrust in the media is expected to reduce media influence and mainstream news media exposure by mistrusting audience members.

In the rest of this section I elaborate on the main concept used in this dissertation: news media skepticism. In Chapter 2, this concept is defined as general feelings of alienation and mistrust toward the mainstream news media. Prior conceptualizations and operationalizations of trust in the media are reviewed. The operational definition of media skepticism is presented and its validity examined. Chapter 3 deals with the valence of the concept. Given the essential role of the media in theories of liberal democracy, many have implied that audience mistrust in the media may hurt the democratic process by producing apathy. This issue is addressed by examining the correlates of media

skepticism. Chapter 4 reviews recent trends in media skepticism: data documenting the sharp drop in audience confidence in the media are presented, and related developments (such as an increased tendency of politicians in recent years to attack the media, and the development of anti-media and counter-media communication channels) are discussed.

Chapter 2: What is media skepticism?

Definition, operationalization, validity.

This chapter deals with things that are seemingly obvious. One might think the assumption that responses to survey questions about the media reflect actual perceptions and attitudes is perfectly reasonable and accept it prima facie. A reader who regards assumptions of this kind as self-evident could easily skip to the next chapter. I do not recommend doing so, however. In this chapter I define the concept, present its operationalization and discuss its conceptualization, reliability and validity. Some of the findings I obtained when examining the validity of the concept are interesting and important by themselves. In many respects, validating the concept of media skepticism, learning about its covariates, comparing quantitative measures with open-ended ones and so forth, is like getting acquainted with a partner before a long journey. Explicating the seemingly obvious is important for knowing what it is that we are investigating.

This chapter begins with a review of the ways in which audience trust in the media has been conceptualized and measured in the past. I then define the concept of media skepticism, present its operationalization, and examine its reliability and validity.

Conceptualizing audience trust in the media in past research.

The labels used by scholars to describe audience trust in the media have varied over the years. While early persuasion researchers used the concept of "source credibility", later

scholars used labels like "media cynicism" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), "trust in the media" (Gunther, 1988), or "perceived credibility" (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986) to describe very similar phenomena. As Table 2.1 shows, the very labels used carry with them important implicit or explicit assumptions and implications about how the concept is treated. In what follows I elaborate on the different concepts used by prior communication researchers and the implicit assumptions each contains.

Early persuasion research -- "source credibility". When investigating the way audience attitudes toward the media influenced persuasion, early scholars used the concept of "source credibility" (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland, Kelly & Janis, 1953:19-55). Their approach treated credibility as a unidimensional, objective and static characteristic of the source of communication, independent of the audience. Accordingly, scholars saw no problem in manipulating "credibility" in experimental designs. In Hovland's classic studies, for example, subjects were exposed to the same content delivered by "credible" and "untrustworthy" sources (e.g. Robert Oppenheimer vs. *Pravda* or *New England Journal of Biology and Medicine* vs. "A mass circulation pictorial magazine"). The assumption was that different sources were inherently credible or not and that all possible audiences perceived these traits similarly across the different sources.

The initial efforts by Hovland and his associates at Yale gave birth to a long history of source credibility studies in experimental social psychology (see Sternthal, Phillips & Dholakia, 1978, for a review). A meta-analysis (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993) located over 250 such studies using various source manipulations (credibility, expertise, ideological similarity and trustworthiness). These 250 studies contained 745 published effects. The

authors note that "most effects (80%) were from laboratory studies; 74% of the studies used college students as subjects. Dependent variables...were usually psychological characteristics (94%), rather than observed behavior..." (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993:105-6). Although they do not report an average effect size, Wilson & Sherrell claim that additional 6,697 non-significant effects would be required before their 372 significant findings could be attributed to chance. The general finding in this large family of source credibility studies was that enhanced credibility leads to greater attitude change.

As research in this area developed over the years, scholars devoted their attention to finding the conditions under which credibility has the greatest mediating role (Sternthal, Phillips & Dholakia, 1978). Perhaps the best-known contemporary offspring of the Hovland conceptualization is found in Petty & Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). ELM treats source credibility as a heuristic used only by low-involved audiences in their processes of decision-making (Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman, 1981). Although Petty and Cacioppo conceptualized credibility as a heuristic, they operationalized it again as a trait of the source (the credibility manipulation in this study was "a report prepared by a local high school" vs. "a report prepared by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, which was chaired by a professor of education at Princeton University"). However, this time credibility was thought to be used by the receivers only in some cases and not in others.

Why is the psychological literature about source credibility relevant for a study of media skepticism? One might argue that the Yale researchers and their followers were trying to come up with a general theory of persuasion that has little to do with audience attitudes toward the news media. But in fact, according to Wilson & Sherrell's (1993)

meta-analysis, relatively few (16%) of the "source credibility" studies dealt with oral, face-to-face presentations. Though the intention was to investigate all sources, most of the "credibility" researchers dealt with mediated messages. Newspaper articles, recorded audio messages, and in more recent studies, video messages, were usually the object of investigation in this line of research.

"Trust in the media". As we have seen, early persuasion researchers conceptualized credibility as a static and objective characteristic of the source. But gradually, more and more scholars began to define "credibility" in terms of the perceptions of the audience as opposed to the attributes of the press (Berlo, Lemert & Mertz, 1969; Gunther, 1992). Since the late 1960s, and especially during the 1980s, scholars have been treating and measuring "credibility" as a phenomenon that varies across individuals. The concept was now labeled "perceived news credibility", or alternatively, "trust in the media". While early psychological research referred to the credibility of *any* communication source, this more recent line of research deals with the credibility of *mass media news sources*. Most important, rather than manipulating credibility, the concept was now measured using surveys.

Efforts to tap individual perceptions of the credibility of news sources using surveys started in the mid-1960s. As Rubin, Palmgreen and Sypher (1994:234) note, "measures ranged from the unidimensional Roper-like questions of Westly and Sevrin (1964) to the multidimensional questions of Markham (1968)". Westly and Sevrin simply asked their respondents one question: "As between television, radio and newspapers, which one do you feel gives the most accurate and truthful news?". Markham (1968) had college students evaluate the credibility of videotaped newscasters on 55 semantic differential

items. He identified three reliability factors: reliable-logical, showmanship, and trustworthiness. Another study (McCroskey & Jenson, 1975) used 53 semantic differential items obtained from all previous measurement attempts and located five news "image" factors: competence (including items such as expert-inexpert; reliable-unreliable; informed-uninformed; believable-unbelievable), character (e.g. selfish-unselfish; cruel-kind; sympathetic-unsympathetic), sociability (e.g. friendly-unfriendly and good natured-irritable), composure (e.g. tense-relaxed) and extroversion (e.g. timid-bold and meek-aggressive). "Sources employed in this investigation were all news media sources: the three network television news programs, The New York Times, Time, Newsweek, the local newspaper you most often read, the local radio station to which you most often listen..." (p. 171).

A relatively recent effort aimed at tapping attitudes toward the media is a News Credibility Scale developed by Gaziano & McGrath (1986; see Rubin, Palmgreen & Sypher, 1994, pp. 234-7 for a review), who administered 16 items about attitudes toward newspapers and television to a national sample of 1,002 respondents. They identified two factors: credibility in 12 items, and social concerns in three (patriotic, immoral, sensationalizes). Based on this scale, news media credibility consists of fairness, bias, telling the whole story, accuracy, respect for privacy, looking after people's interests, separating fact and opinion, trustworthiness, factuality, concern for public interest, and having well-trained reporters. Meyer (1988) reinterpreted Gaziano & McGrath's factor analysis, as well as his own original data, and claimed that the 12 items could be sub-divided. The credibility measure, he argued, consists of five items only: fairness, perceived bias, telling the whole story, accuracy, and trustworthiness.

To sum up, no agreed-upon measurement tool emerged out of this line of research. Different scholars measured attitudes toward different news sources, with some comparing the credibility of different media and others referring to "the most familiar" newspaper or TV show, or to specific genres, programs, or even persons. In addition, scholars disagreed on the components of the concept: some scaling efforts included items measuring perceptions of credibility only, while others also included items measuring other perceptions, some of which were relatively remote from the issue of trust (e.g. showmanship, sociability, and character).

Media cynicism. Finally, in recent years the concept of "media cynicism" was introduced (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), implying more than merely perceptions of credibility problems. "Media cynicism" connotes lack of confidence, alienation, and even anger and disgust. When measuring this concept Cappella and Jamieson used survey items such as: "thinking about the news media – national television news, the daily newspaper you are most familiar with and newsmagazines – would you say the news media help society to solve its problems, OR the news media get in the way of society solving its problems?" This sort of measurement does not relate to specific media, nor to specific programs. It implicitly assumes that individuals have one opinion about the media as a whole, not only about the particular news sources they are familiar with. Also, the focus is on the media "getting in the way" of society, not solely on perceptions of trustworthiness. Cappella and Jamieson (1997, pp. 214-15) show that media cynicism is related to cynicism in other domains. In particular, media cynics tend to be cynical about politics in general.

In sum, the conceptualization of audience attitudes about the media changed dramatically in half a century of media research. Once, "credibility" was perceived to be an objective and static trait of the source of communication. Lately, "cynicism" is increasingly becoming an attribute of the audience that is pretty much independent of the source of communication.

What is media skepticism?

Although attitudes toward the media have been the focus of many studies, not many scholars, including the ones mentioned above, have offered a nominal definition of their concepts. I define my own concept, "media skepticism", as a *subjective feeling of alienation and mistrust toward the mainstream news media*. For example, media skepticism is the feeling that journalists are not fair and objective in their reports about society and that they do not always tell the whole story. It is the feeling that mainstream media news outlets would sacrifice accuracy and precision for personal and commercial gains. It is the perception that one cannot believe what one reads in the newspaper or watches on TV news. In other words, media skepticism refers to audience confidence in the way mainstream news institutions function in society.

The fact that I'm using a new concept does not mean that I wish to ignore the progress made in the past half-century of research and start from scratch. On the contrary, my concept is very similar, and in some cases almost identical, to many of the ways in which attitudes toward the media have been treated and measured in recent years. Like recent approaches, and unlike the "source credibility" tradition, I perceive media skepticism as relating to a subjective opinion of the audience and not to an objective trait

of the source. Unlike some of the early trust in the media studies, media skepticism relates to the media as a whole, rather than to a particular source. My concept is most similar to the one of media cynicism. It exceeds perceived credibility and includes feelings of alienation and anger toward the way the media function in society. Also, like media cynicism, my concept implies trait-like stability on the side of the audience, independent of the objective qualities of the source. I prefer "skepticism" to "cynicism", however, because it drops the negative valence of "cynicism" – I do not think mistrust in the media is inherently damaging or bad for society. In short, the concept of media skepticism builds on the progress made in the past decades of research in this area. I am not inventing a new concept so much as elaborating on an old one.

Media skepticism is in some senses what social psychologists might call an "attitude"[4]. In social psychology, attitudes represent "an enduring orientation to respond to something favorably or unfavorably" (Price, 1992: 49) or, "the affect for or against a psychological object" (Thurstone, 1931). Like most other "attitudes", media skepticism is a research construct. This means that it is at least partly constructed by researchers and their theories, interests and insights. Like all other attitudes, people's attitudes about the mainstream press are not directly observable. Like many other attitudes, we cannot be certain that the constructs we use exist in reality. That is, we do not know for sure that people indeed hold any "affect for or against" the "mainstream media". In fact, we cannot even tell if they hold any cognitive representation of such concepts as "the mainstream media". The reason we cannot be absolutely certain even about the existence

[4] Note that general trust was also defined as an attitude. For example, Cappella et al. (1998) define interpersonal trust as "an attitude toward other people who are not kin or intimate" (p. 3).

of attitudes toward the media is because current research tools do not allow direct access to the mental storehouse of attitudes and opinions (see Cappella & Jamieson, 1997: 60).

But the fact that we cannot observe many of our constructs directly does not mean that these constructs are merely inventions. Our lack of direct access to people's cognitions does not mean that any talk about attitudes is a wild guessing game that is detached from whatever operates beyond direct observation. On the contrary, much can be done to verify many of the assumptions made by researchers using attitudinal constructs like media skepticism. The conventions that have been developed in the social sciences for validating measures of unobserved phenomena involve comparison of the results of different measures of social phenomena, either conceptually similar or different. The strategy I use to validate my measures is no different from these conventions. But before I get to issues of validity I would like to further explicate a few of the assumptions I am making about my concept.

Media skepticism is subjective. Like most other attitudes (Wiebe, 1953), media skepticism relates to subjective and private predispositions. The important implication in the case of attitudes toward the media is their relative independence from any objective measure of media performance. The actual performance of the media (for instance, the "objective" degree of bias and accuracy in reporting) is mostly irrelevant for the current study. What counts here is not how the media behave in practice, but rather, how people perceive and evaluate media performance. Truly, we expect people to be *influenced* by the media's actual conduct when they make judgments about the media (an issue I address elsewhere). But this does not mean that their overall judgements about the media are determined solely by the media's actual performance. Indeed, the variance among

people attests to the subjectivity of their assessments. Subjectivity implies that (a) audiences might diverge in the ways they interpret the conduct of the media, or even in the criteria they use to evaluate the media, and (b) people's attitudes toward the media might be influenced by considerations other than the actual conduct and performance of those working in the media. Since I am mostly interested in the *consequences* of media skepticism and not in its sources, much of the research in the following chapters pretty much ignores the reasons and motivations for mistrust in the press. In any case, at this stage I would like to emphasize that media skepticism refers to the *perceived* credibility of the news media rather than to some "objective" assessment of the media's performance.

Media skepticism is targeted toward the mainstream media in general. As I already mentioned, attitudes usually refer to some "psychological object". In this study, the psychological object is the mainstream media in general. As Norris (1996) pointed out, television is not merely a message, it is an institution. People respond and react not only to given messages, but also to institutions of the news media as a whole. Thus, I am assuming that people have attitudes toward the news media in general, and not only toward specific channels, programs or journalists. Implicit in this is the assumption that when most people confront a construct like "the media" in survey questions, they know what the interviewer is talking about. In other words, I am assuming that *people have some mental schema for what "the media" are*, and that this construct operates whenever people confront the target, in survey (or any other) contexts.

Media skepticism is a relatively stable construct. Most attitudes are considered to be enduring and stable (Price, 1992: 49; Wiebe, 1953). Likewise, as an attitude toward

the news media, media skepticism is expected to be relatively stable. This implies that one's attitude toward the press in time *t* is expected to be highly correlated with the same person's attitude in some (*t-x*) point in time in the past and in some (*t+y*) time in the future. However, stability is only *relative*. Changes in media skepticism do occur. As mentioned above, people may change their evaluation of the media in response to changes in reality. The reason for such opinion changes might be the actual performance of journalists (or some discussion about it in the public sphere). But it might also be that people's affect toward the *messages conveyed by the media* influences their opinions about the media. In other words, people might come to dislike the messengers when they don't like the messages they convey. As I explained above, my interest is not in the reasons for media skepticism, but rather in its consequences. So for the purposes of my research it is probably enough to argue that both processes can occur simultaneously. More central to my research is to demonstrate the relative stability of people's skepticism toward the media. In other words, regardless of what determines people's attitudes towards the media (be it the media's performance, the content conveyed by the media, or any other consideration), these attitudes are neither erratic nor inconsistent. They do not change back and forth in response to every encounter between audiences and news texts. On the contrary, they are relatively consistent and stable[5]. Changes across short time spans are minimal, and changes across long time spans are gradual.

[5] A relatively recent testament to the stability of attitudes toward the media comes from an analysis by Bennet et al. (2001). Using NES 1998 data, they found that attitudes toward many of the objects of the Lewinsky scandal – such as the impeachment, Starr and the congressional inquiry – were not related to perceptions of media fairness. This shows, they argue, that attitudes toward the media are not susceptible to the object of media coverage.

The relative stability of media skepticism is consistent with the scholarly convention that its parent concept, general trust, is relatively stable. Trust is known to develop gradually, as a longitudinal process, sometimes spanning years (e.g. Lewici & Bunker, 1996). Each experience probably influences our future trust, but very few experiences can alter it dramatically and instantaneously. So in the same way that interpersonal trust would usually be only modestly affected after a single violation of trust, our media skepticism would not change tremendously after a single incident in which we detected inaccuracy or bias in media coverage. After such an incident we might be more suspicious toward the particular reporter or program, and our overall level of media skepticism might also rise slightly. But more evidence and a longer time span would be required to alter our enduring tendency to trust – or mistrust – the institutions of journalism in general.

At this point it might be useful to invoke the distinction between media skepticism as a perception and as an attitude. People can have various perceptions regarding specific media reports that they read in the press or watch on TV news. These evaluations are momentary, ad hoc judgments. One might feel that story x is credible and suspect that story y is totally inaccurate. These perceptions are not what I label *media skepticism,* but rather an instance of a specific perception of a specific problem with story y, and lack thereof in story x. As mentioned above, media skepticism applies to the evaluation of mainstream media institutions in general, and not to any particular medium, outlet, specific persona, or coverage of any specific event by any of these. In contrast to a perception of bias in report w on issue x by person y on day z, media skepticism is the feeling that, as a social institution, the media is biased in general. The perception of bias

in a particular report may vary as conditions w, x, y and z change. However, as a relatively enduring attitude toward the mainstream media as an institution, changes in media skepticism are expected to be modest across time. What an audience member thinks about the media today is not heavily influenced by any specific encounter with the media, but is rather some generalization of many encounters *with* the media and *about* the media. The aim here is not to study the relationship between the specific perceptions (of various reports in various outlets) and the general skepticism concept. The focus is entirely on the latter.

Operational definition.

Table 2.2 presents the survey items used as measures of media skepticism in the different data sets. The items include questions about the degree to which audiences trust the media "to report the news fairly", and about the amount of "confidence" they have in the people running the institutions of the press. They also include four of Gaziano & McGrath's (1986) News Credibility Scale items (fair, accurate, tell the whole story, can be trusted), an item asking whether the media help society or get in the way of society solving its problems, and an item asking whether the media care more about being the first to report a story or about being accurate in reporting the story.

Since I do not wish to reinvent audience attitudes toward the media, my operational definition of the concept is not very different from what has been done in the past by perceived news credibility and media cynicism scholars. Admittedly, the primary reason for this is that the study is based mostly on secondary analysis of existing data sets. However, even if I could change the measures of attitudes toward the media in these data

sets, I am not sure that I would. The reason is simply that the current items tap exactly the general feelings of mistrust of, and alienation from, the mainstream media, which I believe are the central components of media skepticism.

Reliability. Only one of the data sets used in this study contains all nine items (the Electronic Dialogue data). All items in this dataset were transformed so that they would vary between zero and one. In an exploratory factor analysis conducted on this data, all nine items loaded on the same factor. Cronbach's alpha for these nine items was .90, which corresponds to a multiple correlation of .68. The different items are thus highly correlated with one another. The requirement of internal consistency, necessary to demonstrate that I have at hand a reliable measurement tool, is met by the data.

Content validity. The issue of content validity relates to the connection between the items in Table 2.2 and the content world of media skepticism. Nominally, I defined media skepticism as subjective trust in the way the media function in society. Some of the items in Table 2.2 are pretty general, while others relate to specific aspects of media behavior. Basically, the items ask audiences to evaluate the news media according to the criteria generally used to evaluate journalistic work in society, which are basically the same criteria journalists themselves use to evaluate their own work. The survey questions in Table 2.2 all relate, in one way or another, to the professional norms of journalism. In what follows I briefly elaborate on these norms.

Credibility as a journalistic norm.

Factualness, credibility and accuracy are among the most basic components of journalistic ethics. The professional norm that journalism deals with facts and that these

facts should be as credible as possible provides the rationale for such journalistic practices as verifying each piece of information, presenting "hard evidence" such as numbers, separating facts from comments, requiring proof from sources, and publishing only stories that "seem believable" to journalists and editors. The journalistic norms of credibility and factualness are further sustained by media laws (especially libel laws) that demand accuracy in reporting and thus imply that people *should expect* to find factual information in the media.

The centrality of factualness and credibility in journalistic ethics is well discussed and thoroughly demonstrated by scholars studying journalism (e.g., see Sigal, 1986; Bird, 1990; Pauly, 1990; Schudson, 1978). One study (Eaton, 1990) focused on journalists' reactions to the Janet Cook scandal and found that these reactions stressed the norm of credibility using its violation. In other words, journalists who said they felt "humiliated", "assaulted", or "angry and sad" about the Janet Cook case stressed the norm that "whether it is our particular job to cover local government, a foreign war, a cocktail party or even a sports event, we (journalists) are bound together by a common love of truth" (as one journalist expressed it). The trust of the audience is the single most important asset that journalists have, according to their professional codes. Thus, the credibility of journalists and its mirror image, the trust of the audience, are crucial criteria for evaluating the performance of newsmakers. The fact that items tapping trust in the media are correlated so highly with survey items tapping the general performance of the media attest to the centrality of trust in audience evaluation of the press. Indeed, this is the reason I chose the concept of "skepticism" to describe audience attitudes toward the media.

Fairness and objectivity. Objectivity is another essential theme in traditional journalistic ethics, one that is considered to be "the cornerstone of the profession" (Bird, 1990:378). As so many scholars have noted, objectivity and fairness have become a central "strategic ritual" for journalists (Schudson, 1978; Schiller, 1981). Again, many journalistic practices and conventions are intended to emphasize these norms, for example: using third-person language that implies distance, using quotes for much the same purpose, reporting "both sides of the story", "balancing" by collecting reactions from those most likely to be hurt or otherwise affected by the story, and so forth. In sum, one of the critical professional norms in journalism is the norm of the journalist as the objective, fair and impartial observer, the detached, scientific information gatherer.

From the audience's viewpoint, norms of fairness and objectivity can be viewed as logical prerequisites for credibility and trust. If reporters are perceived to be unfair, it is impossible to trust the information they distribute. This is probably why perceptions of fairness load together with items measuring audience trust and perceptions of accuracy. When people trust the media, they also tend to believe in the media's fairness[6].

Social cause. According to its professional norms, journalism as an institution exists to serve a social cause, not a private one. Journalism is expected, both by journalists themselves and by society, to provide useful information. For example, active scrutiny of society, particularly government, is a fundamental obligation of journalists. As Ralph Barney noted (cited by McManus, 1997:286), "a first reason for journalists to exist is the

[6] Related to perceptions of fairness are perceptions of bias. However, note that the NCS bias item is not included in the skepticism items. This is because it lowered the reliability of the scale, and because it loaded on a different factor in the EFA. The way the bias item behaved implies a qualitatively different type of skepticism – although still correlated to general media skepticism. As I point out later, this component was left aside not only on empirical grounds but also because it is conceptually closer to ideological skepticism. And the fact that bias was the only item from the list that loaded together with ideology serves as empirical evidence for this conceptual suspicion.

gathering and distributing of information, most particularly information that others are taking pains to keep from being distributed". Journalists use the metaphor of a watchdog that deters corrupt politicians from wrong-doing while at the same time unveiling wrong-doings when they actually take place. Thus, besides the norms of objectivity and credibility, the journalistic profession also holds that its reporting aims at serving the public good. The media should help society, for example by watching out – and if necessary, criticizing – the powerful in society from taking inappropriate advantage of their power.

This is the rationale for including item 7 in the operational definition of media skepticism, and it is also the reason it loads so well with the other items. Audiences that trust the media, tend to believe that the media help society solve its problems. On the other hand, audiences who distrust the media tend to think the media get in the way of society solving its problems. Item 9 also refers to this norm by contrasting accuracy with being "first on the story," which connotes personal motivations that stand in opposition to the public good.

The items measuring media skepticism do not only measure how audiences think the media implement some basic aspects of their journalistic norms. The argument about content validity can be strengthened by showing that the items contain some of the basic ingredients of general trust applied towards journalists, as outlined in the previous chapter. First, as discussed in Chapter 1, trust is a set of expectations about fulfillment of goals and interests versus potential harms to these interests. In this light, asking whether the media help or get in the way of society can be viewed as asking whether the media beget gains or losses. Second, the potential opportunism of the trustee is a basic

ingredient in the problem of trust. Item 9 asks whether journalists care more about being the first to report a story or about being accurate in reporting a story. This is an example of measurement of perceptions of opportunism, which has to do with the motives and ambitions of the trustees. Third, the credibility of the trustees is an important component of the definition of trust. The News Credibility Scale taps perceptions of media credibility. In other words, some of the items measuring media skepticism contain basic elements from the definition of trust. They ask audiences, both directly and indirectly, whether they trust the media.

In sum, attitudes toward the media are measured using items tapping general evaluations of the media, but also evaluations of more specific domains of journalistic work, domains that correspond with the basic components of journalistic professional norms, constituting audience expectations of the media. In other words, the operational definition of media skepticism consists of audience evaluation of media performance in general, but also of more specific evaluations of whether the media do what they are expected to do. In terms of content validity, the operational definition of media skepticism covers a few basic components of audience expectations of media institutions: credibility, fairness, accuracy, and considerations of social good.

Convergent validity.

To estimate convergent validity I examined the correlation between the skepticism scale described above and another measure of skepticism obtained from a content analysis of statements respondents made about the media in an electronic discussion group. As explained in Appendix 1, the Electronic Dialogue panel was composed of a discussion

group, a control group, and a set-aside group. All discussion group members were invited to log on and attend a series of electronic discussions focusing on campaign issues. The discussants were divided to 60 groups, primarily according to scheduling matters. The ideological composition of the groups was controlled, so that 20 of the groups were ideologically conservative, 20 liberal, and 20 heterogeneous. In one of the nine events, held in December 2000, the functioning of the media in covering the presidential election was discussed. In all 60 groups the issues of fairness, responsibility and bias were raised by the moderators. The groups were also asked a more specific question about the functioning of the media on election night (referring specifically to the use of exit polls).

The transcripts of the discussions were content analyzed to identify the degree of media skepticism expressed by project participants. Each participant's comments[7] were coded for their valence for or against the media. Answers to moderators' questions in favor of the media, or other statements in the subsequent discussion that were positive in their attitude toward the media, were coded as "pro-media" statements, and vice versa for "con-media" statements. For example, any positive answer in response to the question, "In your opinion, have journalists and the press acted responsibly and fairly in covering the events that have occurred since election night?" was coded pro=1, con=0; any negative answer to this question was coded pro=0, con=1. Any positive answer to the question, "Do you think the coverage has been biased towards either of the presidential candidates, Bush or Gore?" was coded con=1, pro=0, and vice verse for positive responses. In addition to these snapshot yes/no answers to moderators' questions, pro-media statements included assertions that the media were fair and balanced, that the

[7] A comment is defined as a section of text entered into the on-line discussion space, followed by "enter."

media did their best in covering the elections under the unusual conditions, that the coverage was thorough and illuminating, that the media "only reported what happened", or simply general statements of appreciation of the media. Con-media statements included charges about unfairness, about the media being too negative and too eager to stir up conflict, about the media rushing to be first on the story at the expense of cautiousness and accuracy. Con statements also included charges about too much speculation in news coverage, about the media creating rather than reporting news, about repetition in news coverage, and about the negative social implications resulting from media coverage. Expressions of agreement[8] with pro-media statements were also coded as pro-media statements, while expressions of agreement with con-media statements were coded as con-media statements – and vice versa for expressions of disagreement. Quotes from the discussion transcripts exemplifying these categories are presented in Table 2.3.

Some of the comments got a "1" on both the pro- and con-media variables. For example, some respondents' answers for the fairness and responsibility question were "Yes and no"[9]. Another category was "depends". This category was used when respondents answered that the performance of the media depended on the particular network, program, or news persona, in a way that made it impossible for the coder to extract their general attitudes toward the media. When applied to samples of the media portion of the discussion, inter-coder reliabilities between two coders for this coding scheme ranged from a Kappa of .87 for the pro-media statements variable to a Kappa of .79 for the con-media statements variable.

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[8] For example, "James, I absolutely agree with you."
[9] For example, "Fairly, perhaps; the ones I have seen have tried to give different sides. Responsibly, no. They have created this media circus."

Results of the content analysis provided some evidence for convergent validity. The number of con-media statements was positively correlated with the survey skepticism measure (r=.43), while the number of pro-media statements was negatively correlated with the survey skepticism scale (r=-.38). However, using the number of statements as a measure of skepticism is somewhat problematic because it also reflects, in addition to media skepticism, the tendency to make statements in electronic discussion groups (people who talk more will have more statements, by definition). In this case, a measure of proportion (the number of con-media statements divided by the number of con-media plus the number of pro-media statements) is somewhat less biased. The bivariate correlation between the media skepticism scale and this proportion measure was .53 ($p<.001$). In other words, the survey measure of media skepticism was highly and positively correlated with expressions of media skepticism in an open-ended electronic discussion. Those who reported mistrust in the media in the survey tended to express the same in the electronic discussions, and those who reported trust in media in the survey tended also to express this trust in the electronic discussion.

Convergent validity requires a high correlation between two different methods of measuring the same phenomenon (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Although a higher correlation would admittedly have been better evidence of convergent validity, a correlation of .53 is adequate for this sort of data. This is especially the case since we are comparing anonymous responses to a computerized survey, on the one hand, to opinion expression in a group context, on the other. Strictly speaking, these are not two separate observations of the very same thing. For one thing, expression of skepticism in the group context might be enhanced or inhibited by the presence of other people in the chatroom (I

will discuss the possibility of social desirability later in this chapter). Second, the discussions focused on the conduct of the media in the coverage of election results – a relatively specific domain compared to the general manner in which the media skepticism scale is constructed. Many non-skeptics might have expressed skepticism in the discussion since they thought (despite their general trust in the media) that the media were wrong in the way they covered election results. Thus, the two observations of media skepticism correlate highly despite the fact that they come from two different social contexts and despite the fact they deal with somewhat different aspects of the phenomenon under discussion.

Discriminant validity.

Is media skepticism merely a function of some general mistrust?

One might argue that skepticism toward the media is merely a function of skepticism in general, i.e., that mistrust in the media is simply a symptom of some general tendency not to trust. This raises the empirical question of whether trust in the media is distinct from general social and institutional trust. Indeed, as Table 2.4 demonstrates, four different data sets show a positive (and in three cases significant) bivariate correlation between mistrust in the media and interpersonal mistrust. Those who mistrust the media tend to mistrust people in general. However, the correlation coefficients are small in magnitude, varying between .04 and .08. Only 51 percent of media skeptics in the PTR file scored above the median on the interpersonal mistrust scale. The corresponding percentages were 49 percent in the Electronic Dialogue dataset, 54 percent in the GSS data, and 37

percent in the NES data. In other words, all data at hand point to the fact that although skepticism is slightly associated with general interpersonal mistrust (as we should expect it to be), the two constructs are far from being identical. There are many media skeptics who score relatively high on interpersonal trust, and many mistrustful people who yet have high confidence in the media.

Similarly, bivariate correlations of media skepticism with confidence in various social and democratic institutions are presented in Table 2.5. As the table shows, media skepticism is positively and significantly associated with mistrust in the Supreme Court, Congress, the executive branch of the federal government, organized labor, organized religion, and education. This time the correlations are moderate in their magnitude, varying between .10 and .40, with most of them in the .20 range. Those who mistrust the media *tend* not to trust other institutions. But again, not all media skeptics report mistrust toward other social and democratic institutions. In the GSS file only 39.6 percent of media skeptics had "hardly any" confidence in the federal government, 43.4 percent in Congress, and 25.7 percent in the Supreme Court. In the EDialogue data, the figures are similar. Of the media skeptics in this dataset, only 51.1 percent had low confidence in Congress, 32.8 percent in the Supreme court, 41.8 percent in local government, and 63 percent in the presidency. In short, many people who mistrust the media trust other social institutions and vice versa. In fact, in both data sets the media-skepticism items even loaded separately from most other items in the confidence-in-institutions battery in an exploratory factor analysis[10]. Media skepticism is associated with social, interpersonal

[10] In the GSS confidence battery, the press loaded with television and organized labor on one factor and all other social institutions – the Supreme Court, Congress, education, the executive branch of the federal government, medicine, organized religion and the army – on a separate factor. In the EDialogue data

and institutional mistrust, as we should expect it to be. However, it is far from being empirically identical to other forms of trust.

Is media skepticism merely a function of political ideology?

Much research in the past has pointed out the association between media skepticism and political ideology (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). It is well known that conservatives tend to be more mistrustful of the media than their liberal counterparts. Based on this association one could argue that expressing mistrust in the media in a survey context does not really reflect an attitude toward the media per se. Rather, one might argue that media skepticism is a political statement grounded in people's political ideologies. People's conservatism makes them say that the media are liberally biased. If they are liberals they say that they trust the media, not because they really trust journalists, but rather in order to protect the media from attacks from the right. In sum, another threat to the validity of media skepticism is the possibility that it might be merely an artifact of political ideology.

Indeed, media skepticism is associated with political ideology. But, again, the bivariate association is not large. The bivariate Pearson r's, presented in Table 2.6, vary between -.11 and -.25[11], at best a moderate correlation. The association between media skepticism and political ideology seems to be larger in magnitude than the association between skepticism and interpersonal mistrust, and smaller than the association between

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confidence battery, television loaded with the press, organized labor and the presidency on one factor and all the other institutions – Congress, local government, the Supreme Court, organized religion and medicine – on a different factor.

[11] Note that the party-ideology variable is coded +5 for extreme liberals through -5 for extreme conservatives.

skepticism and institutional mistrust. Another way to look at the bivariate association between media skepticism and political ideology is simply to calculate the rate of skepticism within the different political ideology categories.

Table 2.7 shows that the rate of media skeptics among conservatives was much higher than their rate among liberals or moderates in all four data sets. 54 to 74 percent of conservatives, but only 42 to 56 percent of liberals, were mistrustful of the media, depending on the specific data set. The difference between the rate of conservative skeptics and liberal skeptics varied between 8.7 and 17.5 percent, always in favor of conservatives, who tend to be much more mistrustful of the media than liberals.

But the higher rate of media skepticism among conservatives does not by itself indicate that media skepticism is merely an artifact of political ideology. On the contrary, the table points out the prevalence of media skepticism, not only among conservatives, but also among moderates and liberals. In fact, in three of the four data sets, more than a half of the liberals were media skeptics. When one looks at the absolute numbers, without comparing liberals to conservatives, one is forced to realize that media skepticism is not limited to conservatives. It is not merely supporters of the right citing the criticisms of their leaders. It is also liberals, many of whom label themselves extreme liberals, who slam the media in public opinion surveys. Conservatives do tend to be more skeptical of the media than liberals, it's true. But this does not mean that media skepticism is merely a function of one's political positions[12].

[12] In addition, ideology loaded separately from most media skepticism items in a principal component factor analysis. All media credibility items created one factor, except bias, which loaded with ideology on a separate factor.

Is media skepticism merely a function of political extremity?

Some have argued that it is not the *direction* of political attitudes, but rather their *extremity* that influences audience mistrust in the media. For example, Gunther (1988) reported that extreme liberals and conservatives trusted the media less than their moderate counterparts. He also reported a curvilinear association between trust in media coverage of an issue and attitude about the issues, with extremists (but also neutrals) less likely to trust the media than moderates. He uses social judgement theory to explain these findings. People of high attitude extremity "attend closely to the information, ideas and opinions represented in the media coverage. But much of that content, reflecting a range of opinion necessarily diverges from the partisan's extreme attitude. Thus, much of it is unacceptable content...People of highly polarized attitudes will have a wider latitude of rejection"[13] (1988:279-80). For Gunther, extremism implies involvement, and involvement means more information rejection. Indeed, involvement with issues is known to be associated with media coverage of issues (e.g. Vallone et al., 1985, who reported that both pro-Israelis and pro-Arabs were likely to perceive bias in media coverage of the Beirut massacre compared to neutrals, but each side perceived bias in the other direction). Also, it was found (Gunther, 1992) that group members perceive media bias in the coverage of their groups (e.g., blacks perceive bias in the coverage of blacks, union members in the coverage of union members, and so forth). All of these relate to the idea that extremity of attitudes explains audience mistrust in the media.

[13] Later, however, Stam and Dube (1994) argued that Gunther confounded attitude intensity and involvement. They found no evidence for a curvilinear relationship between trust in the media and attitude direction and intensity. However, they did find attitude closure to be non-linearly related with trust in the media.

Much of this literature is not directly relevant to this dissertation, for it deals with media coverage of particular groups and topics. I might be a union member and mistrust the way the media portray the unions. At the same time, I might very well trust the way media covers large corporations and big money. Overall, although I do not like the way my group is portrayed, I might be a non-skeptic. Nevertheless, could it still be that political extremity confounds the measurement of media skepticism? To test whether media skepticism is distinguished from attitude extremity I correlated the two measures in the four data sets. The estimated correlations are presented in Table 2.8. As the table shows, the correlation between political extremity is positive in direction, but only modest in magnitude. That is, extreme conservatives and liberals tended to mistrust the media somewhat more than moderates, but the association explained at best only a fraction of the variance in skepticism ($.12^2$=.014). The measures used in this dissertation do not merely reflect attitude extremity.

Confirmatory measurement model.

To test my argument about discriminant and convergent validity in its completeness I estimated a confirmatory measurement model described in Figure 2.1. Media skepticism is modeled as a latent variable affecting eight indicators noted by x_i (the i's parallel the presentation of the items in Table 2.2). The model allows for covariances between all the error terms of the Gaziano & McGrath News Credibility Scale items (items 2, 3, 4 and 5 in Table 2.2). The reason for allowing for these correlated errors is that separate items from the same scale probably share a method factor (just by using similar wordings, appearing in the same table, and so forth). The coefficient for x2 (the NCS fair item) was

forced to 1.0 in order to scale the latent variable. To examine the discriminant and convergent validity of the latent factor (skepticism), it was allowed to correlate with four exogenous variables: interpersonal trust (TRUST), political extremity (EXTREME), the party-ideology index (INDEX1) and the content analysis scores for the proportion of con-media statements in the open-ended discussion (STATED). Correlations were allowed between all of these exogenous factors, which are assumed to be perfectly measured (due to lack of appropriate multiple indicators). It is easy to show that this model is identified by using identification rules for measurement models with correlated errors.

In terms of fit, the model cannot be rejected by the data. The chi-square test for the null hypothesis that the model-implied covariance matrix equals the population covariance matrix was 57.44 with 42 degrees of freedom ($p>.05$; we want a p-value higher than .05 in this case).This is good news in light of the relatively large N and the large number of degrees of freedom. Other fit statistics showed almost perfect fit (values lower than .90 for these fit indices would indicate problematic fits).

Figure 2.1 presents standardized estimates for this measurement model. This means that the coefficients for the factor loadings are standardized regression coefficients, and the coefficients for the covariances can be interpreted as regular correlations. All factor loadings were significantly different from zero. Removing either of the indicators resulted in lower fit. The factor loadings are also relatively high in magnitude, except for the coefficient for x9 (first on the story/accurate in reporting the story). Though the loading for this indicator was low, forcing it to be zero damaged the fit of the model.

Our test for convergent validity is the correlation between media skepticism and the content analysis-based measure of attitudes toward the media as expressed in the

electronic discussion. The confirmatory model estimated this correlation to be .58, a relatively high correlation. Our test for discriminant validity is the correlation between skepticism and measures of different constructs – interpersonal trust, political ideology and political extremity. The estimates for these correlations, according to the measurement model, were -.08, -.35 and .13. In other words, media skepticism was not significantly correlated with interpersonal trust. The correlation between skepticism and political extremity was low. The correlation between skepticism and ideology was only moderate (note that after correcting for attenuation the correlation is higher than the estimate presented in Table 2.6). This moderate correlation might be considered a bit high for demonstrating discriminant validity. This is why ideology will be controlled for in all models.

Another measurement model that addresses the same issues is presented in Figure 2.2. This time, the eight indicators used in the model presented in Figure 2.1 are collapsed into two measures: Gaziano and McGrath's News Credibility Scale constitutes one measure, and the rest of the mistrust items constitute another. The reduction in the number of degrees of freedom and free parameters leads to a much higher p-value. The other fit indices show almost perfect fit. The correlations between skepticism and the other constructs are similar in magnitude to those reported in Figure 2.1. In other words, the measurement structure and the tests for validity discussed above are consistent with the data.

Is media skepticism merely a function of respondents' social desirability?

The problem of social desirability, namely the problem of people answering questions according to a social norm instead of giving their true opinions, has concerned many

attitude scholars since the beginning of public opinion polling. The answers people give to pollsters, it is often argued, may merely be reflections of what the interviewer wants to hear, rather than the respondents' real attitudes. Could it be that, in the case of media skepticism, respondents give the mistrustful answer by default, due to the prevailing social norm of cynicism toward the media?

Some of the responses we got from the electronic discussion participants seem to raise suspicions about social desirability (the public view of journalists and the media is so negative that respondents could be influenced to adjust their expressed attitudes to match the norms). For one thing, the expressed media skepticism scores (based on the proportion of con-media arguments in the discussion) were significantly higher than the survey media skepticism scores, the ones measured five months before the discussions (Wilcoxon's Sign-rank $Z=-4.42$; $p<.000$) and the ones measured right after the discussions (Wilcoxon's Sign-rank $Z=-5.46$; $p<.001$)[14]. About 67 percent of respondents had a high media skepticism "discussion" score compared with their survey score. However, these comparisons are somewhat flawed, due to the use of different metrics – a proportion and a scale averaging nine different survey items. Although they both measure the same phenomena, they are substantially different in their structure (the discussion-based measure tends to give more extreme scores – either 1 or 0).

[14] A non-parametric test was used because the distributions of the two measures are not equal. Both measures vary between 0 and 1, but the distributions are clearly different: the survey scale is approximately normal (the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic was .05 ($p=.20$), rejecting the null hypotheses of non-normality) while the discussion-based measure is highly skewed (the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic was.20 ($p<.001$). The null cannot be rejected, indicating a very low probability that the distribution is normal, with 36% of respondents having a score of 1 (indicating that all their statements were con-media) and 11% having a score of 0 (indicating all statements were pro-media). The corresponding T-tests yielded the same qualitative results.

The actual content of the comments provides even more clues to suggest social desirability in the public discussions. A look at the comments shows a qualitative asymmetry between the pro-media and con-media comments. While almost all negative comments about the media were unequivocal, many of the pro-media comments were more relative and cautious in their position. In other words, media skeptics expressed their opinions clearly. On the other hand, media supporters, while expressing support for the media, were more conditional.

A few quotes exemplify this point. Moderators in all 60 electronic discussions asked about the conduct of the media in covering election results. The question wording was, "In your opinion, have journalists and the press acted responsibly and fairly in covering the events that have occurred since election night?" The positive answers to this question included such responses as:

- "I think they have done better than I expected." (Will, 22gird)
- "Yes, everyone is at a loss, and they try hard to do right." (Lillian, 40mango)
- "They have tried to." (John, 10cross)
- "Yes, in most cases." (William, 24hale)
- "Pretty good but I get most of my news from PBS." (Elizabeth, 57salve)
- "Yes. I think so. Things have changed so rapidly that they just seem to able to keep up without much bias." (Doreen, 31jog)
- "They did the best they could under these weird conditions." (James, 3auger)
- "I suppose so, but you can tell which ones are Democrats and which ones are Republicans." (Helen, 54ride)
- "Overall, I think the news people have done a pretty good job on a subject we are getting sick of hearing." (Jimmy, 13dictum)

- "I really do think they are trying...Things have been changing while they are still reporting on the last development. (Candy, 60tile)

When moderators asked whether the media were biased toward either Bush or Gore in their coverage of the campaign, the relatively positive responses included:

- "I think they tried their best...It is hard to be unbiased." (Mark, 54ride)
- "The media will blast anyone they get a chance to. It knows no party affiliation." (Robert, 29iota)
- "The commentators tried to be balanced and fair, but sometimes the temper of their voices showed personal feelings." (Joel, 10cross)
- "Both sides have been presented the best they can." (Tina, 47open)

In the last section of the media-related discussion, moderators asked specifically about media projections of election results based on exit polls on election night. Audiences with relatively high trust in the media tended to say things like:

- "I don't think they had any other choice." (Martha, 49pear)
- "Based on the history of exit polls and election returns they did what they have always done." (Mike, 34knock)
- "Since it has always been done this way in the past, I suppose they thought it was perfectly acceptable." (Anthony, 50pinto)
- "Sure, based on the info they had. They just didn't have a clue it would be this close and called it early, like they usually do quite safely." (Rose, 56rice)
- "They were doing what they always do...trying to be the first to 'get it right.'" (Henry, 31jog)
- "It is their job to beat out the competition." (Joe, 58sedge)

In sum, many of the pro-media comments were only *relatively* supportive of the media. The media acted responsibly and fairly, but only relative to expectations, given the unprecedented situation, or in comparison to what they usually do. Many pro-media statements were in fact excuses for the problematic election coverage by the media. Many of those who were relatively supportive of the media in the discussions stressed that it was unrealistic to expect that all journalistic norms could be fulfilled in practice. No one could be truly objective in such situations, some argued; journalists should just do their best. The media were not perfect, but they *tried* to provide the most accurate information they had at hand, given the constraints under which they operated.

In sum, in social contexts media skeptics were clearer and more unconditional in their attitude toward the media than media supporters. There are a few ways to interpret this information, however. For example, it could be due to the context of the specific discussion – the failure of the media in mistakenly calling the election for Gore and later for Bush (when the Florida vote was practically a tie), and the unprecedented legal contest over election results. In this specific context, which was addressed in the discussions, it could be that many of those who usually trust the media were more skeptical, given the more problematic conduct of the media (in the coverage of the particular events of November, 2000). It could also be that this context forced some regular non-skeptics to be more cautious in their support and to provide excuses for the media, rather than expressing outright support.

But it is also possible that social desirability came into play. That is, that the norm of mistrust in the media affected trusting audiences so that they expressed less trustful opinions in the focus group than they did in the online survey. When surrounded by other

people, those who trusted the media might have been influenced by social anti-media sentiments, and hence less willing to express outright support for the media.

This is only a suspicion, however, and even if it is justified, it attests not only to the problem of social desirability in a group context, but also to the fact that it is at least partially solved in the more confidential and anonymous electronic survey context. The fact that people are at least somewhat influenced by the "social answer" when they respond to questions is neither new nor surprising. Some gap, by reason of social desirability, between true opinion and expressed opinion potentially exists every time people answer public opinion polls. It does not mean that we should disregard all answers people give to pollsters. In fact, attitudes toward the press are not very intimate, and the sanctions for violating the social norm of media skepticism are surely less intimidating then the sanctions for expressing attitudes that stand in contrast to other social norms (e.g., expressing racism, admitting sexual misconduct, and so forth). In sum, to the extent that people are affected by social norms when answering survey questions about their trust in the media, social desirability is probably not a serious problem. In this respect this study is not unique compared to what is acceptable in the social sciences.

Stability.

One could argue that people's skepticism toward the media changes frequently, rapidly and arbitrarily. However, talking about media skepticism as an attitude assumes that it is relatively stable. The stability of people's attitudes toward the media can be empirically assessed by correlating measures of skepticism at different points in time. EDialogue respondents were given the media skepticism battery twice: in the Wave 4 pre-survey

conducted in late July and early August 2000, and in the Wave 8 post-survey conducted in December 2000. The correlation between the two different measurements of the same skepticism scale was .63 ($p<.001$)[15]. The higher a respondent scored on the media skepticism scale in July, the higher he or she tended to score on the same scale in December.

In order to assess the stability of responses to the scale, we can also examine the differences between the Wave 8 and Wave 4 skepticism scores. The cumulative distribution of the absolute values of these difference scores (representing change in skepticism in absolute values) is presented in Table 2.9. The numbers in the left-hand column represent degrees of change on the 0-1 skepticism scale (composed of the nine items presented in Table 2.2), and the numbers in the right-hand column represent the cumulative frequency, that is, the rate of cases falling in the corresponding category of change or lower. As the table shows, the distribution of change is heavily skewed to smaller values. In other words, most respondents did not change their assessments of the media at all, or changed them only slightly. For almost 30 percent of all respondents the shift was .05 or less on the 0-1-skepticism scale. For more than half, the scores shifted by.10 or less. About 80 percent of all respondents changed their minds by less than .20 on the scale. More extreme opinion changes were relatively rare. The average change was .12, the median was .10, and the mode was .03. In short, changes in media skepticism were relatively minor. Those who did not trust the media in July did not trust them in December. This is in spite of the drastic changes in the political reality in the five months between Wave 4 and Wave 8. A roller-coaster presidential race, two party conventions,

[15] After correction for attenuation using a reliability of .90, this correlation would be .63/sqrt(.9*.9)=.70. Half of the variance in skepticism could thus be explained by previous skepticism.

three presidential debates, the failure of the media to accurately project the winner on election night, accusations of media bias in favor of Gore's Florida recount claims, and accusations from the other side that the media were portraying Gore as a sore loser in his legal battle – all of these left little impact on audiences' evaluations of the media. Most people changed their assessments only slightly. In fact, the aggregate level changes were not in any particular direction. The distribution of differences between Wave 4 and Wave 8 (as opposed to the distribution of the absolute values of change, presented in Table 2.9) was almost normal around zero, with an average, median and mode of about zero. So there was, on average, almost no change in media skepticism.

To the extent that we can generalize from the EDialogue two-wave data, media skepticism is, like any other attitude, relatively stable. Today's attitudes about the media are similar to yesterday's attitudes. Tomorrow's attitudes about the media will probably be associated with today's. Some degree of change is, of course, expected. In the case of the EDialogue data, however, the changes were minor. Very few people appear to have changed their evaluations dramatically. There were only five cases with a difference score of more than ± 0.50. In sum, attitudes toward the media are not whims that change with every minor political event and every failure of the media in covering political life. On the contrary, they are relatively stable, enduring attitudes.

Another strategy to evaluate the stability of media skepticism is to examine aggregate changes in longitudinal cross-sectional studies. This is done in Figures 2.3 and 2.4. Figure 2.3 presents seven-day moving averages for the media evaluation item across the two months-long primary season Rolling Cross Section APPC 2000 data. Moving averages were used to smooth the data in order to correct for random sampling variation.

The pattern is fairly stable. Statistically speaking, it is almost a straight line. The small variations across time can probably be dismissed as stemming from differences in sample sizes across time, especially lower Ns in late December (probably) due to the holidays. On the other hand, Figure 2.4 presents the trend of public lack of confidence in the press across 24 years. As is evident from the graph, mistrust in the media increased dramatically over this long time span. The two graphs juxtaposed demonstrate the stability of media skepticism on the aggregate level. Over short time spans, changes in skepticism are minor. Over years and decades changes are significant. But these changes are neither erratic nor arbitrary. The slow and gradual shifts in skepticism demonstrate its relative stability.

In their book, *The Rational Public*, Page and Shapiro (1992) debunk the myth of capricious, frequent and rapid public opinion change. They distinguish between "abrupt" changes in aggregate public opinion of ten percent or more per year, "fluctuations" that are "two or more significant (opinion) changes in opposite directions within two years or three or more within four years"[16], and "gradual" changes that are defined as "any significant shifts in opinion that are neither abrupt nor parts of fluctuations" (p. 53). Using their criteria, it is easy to show that aggregate media skepticism scores neither change abruptly nor fluctuate. Thus, media skepticism changes gradually, like most other public opinion changes explored by Page and Shapiro. Such gradual changes are not capricious, the authors argue. They represent understandable public reactions to changes in values and life circumstances.

[16] Aggregate opinion changes are said to be significant if they are changes of six percentage points or more (p. 53).

Page and Shapiro claim that opinion stability is manifested by the fact that "collective public opinion on a given issue at one moment in time is a very strong predictor on that same issue at a later time" (p.65). It is easy to show that this assertion applies to media skepticism. Using GSS's 22 measurement points as a time series, trend alone explains 87 percent of the variance in aggregate-level mistrust in the media[17]. Adding first- and second-order lag operators increases the explained variance to 93 percent[18]. This means that knowing the year, and given the rates of skepticism for that and the previous year, you could almost perfectly predict the rate of skepticism for the following year. This is exactly what stability implies – that knowledge of today can accurately predict tomorrow.

In sum, individual panel data along with aggregate-level longitudinal data demonstrate that media skepticism is a relatively stable phenomenon. People do not erratically and arbitrarily change their opinion over short spans of time. One's evaluation of the media in July is positively and highly correlated with his or her evaluation of the media in December. Aggregate-level longitudinal data over short time spans is basically constant. Nonetheless, societies change their aggregate perceptions over long spans of time. Since these changes are gradual and persistent, however, they support the claim for stability.

Do people have a schema for the media?

In order to have attitudes toward the media, people must have some generalized conception of what "the media" are, as well as beliefs about how they operate. Hence, I

[17] B_p=1.2; SE=.10; p<.000.
[18] Durbin-Watson statistic for this equation was 2.10.

am assuming that people have a mental schema for the mainstream news media in general. Though clearly a realistic assumption, it is not directly verifiable, as are other assumptions I made above. However, there is much in the survey data and in the electronic discussion transcripts to suggest that the assumption that people have a mental schema for "the media" is probably a valid one. To begin with, the rate of the missing data, or "don't know" answers, to the media-related survey questions is normal. The refusal rate for the EDialogue media battery varied between zero and one percent (among those who completed the Wave 4 survey; almost all items having a refusal rate of .4 to .6 percent). In the NES data, the refusal rate for the trust in media item was .4% and the "don't know" rate was .2%. In the APPC data, the refusal rate for the trust in media item was .4% and the "don't know" rate was practically zero (only two cases out of 2,576 respondents gave a "don't know" answer). There is nothing about these numbers to suggest that respondents did not understand the questions or the concept of media presented in the questions.

In addition, there is much in the discussion transcripts to suggest that people have some conception of "the media", and that their understanding of the concept is probably not far from its use in the current research. 267 EDialogue discussants who participated in the media discussion were asked by the moderator to evaluate whether "media" or "the press and journalists" behaved fairly and responsibly in their election coverage. Almost none of the participants asked the moderator to clarify what was meant by "the press and journalists" or by "the media". The only exception was a participant who said in response to the fairness question, "Which journalists? CNBC-FOX News-MSNBC – yes; NBC – no; ABC – no; CBS – no, no, no" – a response that implies a distinction between cable

and broadcast networks. Of the 1,600 relevant comments[19] analyzed from the media discussion transcripts only 70 comments (about 4 percent) mentioned any specific news outlet, media persona, or particular show when engaging in discussion about the media. Almost none of the electronic discussions concentrated on any particular outlet or broadcaster. When participants did mention particular channels or journalists, they usually did so in order to demonstrate their arguments about the media in general[20]. Most of the media outlets mentioned by discussants were mainstream media outlets[21]. Of the newspersons mentioned, people like Dan Rather, Peter Jennings and Tom Brokaw were the most frequently mentioned[22]. The fact that these were used as exemplars of the mainstream media attests that audiences and scholars pretty much agree on what the concept of "the news media" includes. Altogether, references to specific news outlets, specific shows, or particular journalists were marginal. The transcripts show that people are able to engage in a discussion about the media in general without slipping to any

[19] All moderator comments were coded as irrelevant. Logging in and out of the channel was also coded irrelevant. The same is true with regard to welcoming late participants, or with comments about connection speed or about typing. Dropping off all irrelevant comments reduced the number of comments from 2,232 to 1,600.

[20] However, some said they only attended to some channels so couldn't judge the media in general. For example, "I only watch Fox", "I've mostly watched CNN, they've done OK in my opinion", "I've been watching CNN and they seem impartial", "I'll have to check them out. I generally stick with NBC".

[21] Rush Limbaugh was mentioned only once. MSN (Microsoft News – an online news outlet) was mentioned only once. NPR was mentioned once. These were all the references to non-mainstream sources. By comparison, the large networks – ABC, NBC and CBS – and their anchormen were mentioned 27 times. The cable news networks – CNN, FOX News Network and MSNBC – were mentioned 36 times.

[22] For example, when one participant was asked to give an example of bias in the media, he said, "When Dan Rather sighs when announcing some victory for Bush". Another one in a different discussion said, "As you know, most anchors, Rather, Brokaw, Jennings are Democrats, and I think they try not to show their own politics, but they all have slipped at one time or another". Another one said he "thought Peter Jennings was a ghost" when announcing a Bush victory.

particular level. This provides some evidence that most people have some mental schema for "the media", just as we scholars do[23].

Discussion.

Many of the assumptions I made at the beginning of this chapter received some empirical support. First, in open-ended discussions, people talked about the media in general, not just specific shows, channels and contents. I interpreted this fact as suggesting that people probably have a mental schema for the media. Second, people have a relatively enduring tendency to respond either positively or negatively toward the media. That is, people have attitudes toward the media. Media skepticism was defined as general feelings of alienation and mistrust toward the mainstream media.

In terms of content validity, the operational definition of media skepticism simply asks people to rate the work of the media using the criteria used in social discourse and by journalists themselves to evaluate the media's work. Because of the centrality of credibility and audience trust in journalistic professional norms I labeled my concept "media skepticism".

This chapter also examined the discriminant and convergent validity of media skepticism. I argued that media skepticism does not merely reflect a general tendency not to trust. Although the modest positive (and significant) correlations between media skepticism and interpersonal and institutional mistrust point to the probability that

[23] In addition, even if some respondents find the concept of "the news media" obscure, most survey questions used in this study probably make it easier for them to answer these media related questions. This is because the question wordings provide some clarification about who "the mainstream media" are. Both the EDialogue and the PTR surveys explain that the news media are "national television news, the daily newspaper you are most familiar with, and newsmagazines".

general mistrust is a component of media skepticism, I argued that skepticism is not merely a reflection of general mistrust. Media skepticism was also empirically distinct from political ideology or its extremity. Though conservatives tend to be more mistrustful of the media than liberals, not all conservatives are media skeptics and not all liberals are trustful of the media. In fact, most data show that most liberals rank themselves as media skeptics. There appears to be an ideological component to media skepticism, but skepticism certainly does not overlap with ideological and party lines. The ideological component of media skepticism makes sense, given a skeptical component in the conservative ideology. Conservatism tends to be suspicious of any social institution and to stress individual responsibility and freedom as the solution to social problems.

The relative stability of media skepticism over time also attests to its relative independence from other political judgments. If media skepticism scores were only audience reactions to the content of specific media reports, it would seem plausible to expect that it would change with every change in current media reports. The fact that attitudes toward the media are relatively enduring shows that the reported attitudes are toward the "messenger" (the institutions of the media), not just reflections of changing attitudes toward changing messages.

Survey items measuring media skepticism are only modestly correlated to ideology and interpersonal trust, and moderately correlated to institutional trust, but they tend to converge highly with other media skepticism items. The skepticism scale was also highly correlated with what respondents said about the media in open-ended electronic focus groups. That is to say, I believe I demonstrate both discriminant and convergent validity for the operational definition of media skepticism.

The causes of media skepticism, important as they are, are not the focus of this dissertation. The object of the current study is not to explain why some people mistrust the media or to determine the factors that influence audience trust, but rather to determine its consequences. Thus, the associations between media skepticism, on the one hand, and ideology, general mistrust, the political events reported in the media at a specific point in time, and so forth, will be treated in what follows as unexplained covariances.

Table 2.1 Conceptualizing audience attitudes toward the media over the years

	Assumption	Operationalization	Implications
"Source credibility" Early persuasion research (1950-1970) Hovland & Weiss (1951); Hovland, Janis & Kelly (1953)	Credibility is a static trait of communication sources	Experimental manipulations, e.g. Pravda = "untrustworthy" Oppenheimer = "trustworthy" A woman movie gossip columnist = "untrustworthy" Fortune Magazine = "trustworthy"	• The voice of the audience remains unheard. Credibility is assumed to be constant across individuals. • No theoretical justification for the selection of "credible" or "untrustworthy" sources for experimental manipulations. Scholars were taking these concepts at face value.
"Perceived news credibility" (1970 – and mainly 1980s) Gaziano & McGrath (1986), Robinson & Kohut (1988) Gunther et al. (1994)	Credibility is contingent on the perceptions of the individual	Survey questions. Mainly scales utilizing items such as "biased-unbiased", "fair-unfair", "accurate-inaccurate", "tells the whole story", "does/does not look after reader's interests". The scale, originally developed by Gaziano & McGrath (1986) and later elaborated by others, refers to specific outlets ("the newspaper you are most familiar with") or media (TV vs. the press).	• Audience perceptions of credibility vary among different individuals and media outlets.
"Media cynicism" (1990's) Cappella & Jamieson (1997)	Cynicism is consistent within individuals, unrelated to the sources	**Survey questions, e.g.** "Thinking about the news media – national television news, the daily newspaper you are most familiar with and newsmagazines – would you say the news media help society to solve its problems, OR the news media get in the way of society solving its problems?"	• Cynicism is perceived to be almost a "trait" of the audience. • Cynicism applies to the mainstream media as a whole, not distinguishing between specific outlets. The only implicit distinction is between "mainstream" and other media.

Table 2.2: Survey items measuring media skepticism

Question wording	Answer categories	Dataset
1. How much of the time do you think you can trust media organizations to report the news fairly?	1. Just about always 2. Most of the time 3. Only some of the time 4. None of the time	NES ED
Thinking about the news media in general – that is, national television news, the daily newspaper you are most familiar with, and newsmagazines – please indicate whether you think they: 2. Are fair 3. Tell the whole story 4. Are accurate 5. Can be trusted	1-5 scale	ED
6. All in all, how would you rate the job the press has done in covering the presidential election so far?	A Excellent B Good C Fair F Poor	ED APPC
7. Thinking about the news media – national television news, the daily newspaper you are most familiar with and newsmagazines – would you say the news media help society to solve its problems, OR the news media get in the way of society solving its problems?	1. The news media help society to solve its problems 2. The news media get in the way of society solving its problems.	ED PTR
8. Here is a list of various institutions in this country. How much confidence would you say you have in the people now running these institutions?	1. A great deal 2. Some 3. Not much 4. None at all	ED GSS
9. Which do you think the news media care more about, in general?	1. Being the first to report a story 2. Being accurate in reporting a story	ED

Table 2.3: Electronic Dialogue quotes exemplifying the content analysis coding scheme.

Type of statement	Example	Source
Pro arguments		
The media were fair and balanced	"Seemed to be pretty balanced on the news – one rep from each side".	32Jove
	"I feel the media has covered both sides equally".	49Pear
The media did their best in covering the elections under the unusual conditions	"They did the best they could under these weird conditions".	3Auger
The coverage was thorough and illuminating	"Very opinionated comments".	43Native
	"It's been a bonanza for the pundits, but I'm grateful for the analyses of the court proceedings, because the points were so technical".	3Auger
The media only reflected reality	"The press has only reported what happened".	14Elemen
General statements of appreciation to the media	"Media coverage has been very good".	35Krona
Con arguments		
Charges about unfairness	"Party affiliation of broadcasters clearly comes through".	57Slave
	"The press is definitely biased and leaning towards the left".	1Atrium
Media were too negative and too eager to stir up conflict	"I think they tend to inflame the issues".	12Deuce
The media only cared about being first on the story, at the expense of cautiousness and accuracy	"They were too quick. All wanted to be first".	4Blade
Too much speculation in news coverage	"The press job is to report facts, not to conjecture, speculate, spin."	7Cirrus
The media tried to create news, not only to report it	"Sometimes they seem to try to make the news instead of reporting".	46Oath
Repetition in news coverage	"I'm tired of them interrupting daytime TV and repeating the same story over and over!"	2Ankle
Negative social implications resulted from media coverage	"The press has deepened the rift in the peoples of the nation".	1Atrium
"Pro+Con" argument	"Fairly perhaps, the ones I have seen have tried to give different sides. Responsibly, no. They have created this media circus".	45Oar
"Depends" argument	"Depends on the network.".	45Oar
	"It depends on the reporter".	51Quad

Table 2.4: Bivariate Pearson correlations between media skepticism and interpersonal mistrust.

	PTR	NES 1996	GSS	ED2K
Bivariate correlation between media skepticism and interpersonal mistrust	.06**	.08***	.04**	.05
	2,120	2,238	21,685	667

** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 2.5: Bivariate Pearson correlations between media skepticism and confidence in various social institutions.

	Executive branch[1]	Congress	Supreme court	Local government	Education	Organized labor	Organized religion
Bivariate R GSS data 1972-1996 (n=25,612)	.15***	.26***	.22***		.20***	.23***	.12***
Bivariate R EDialogue data 2000 (n=665)	.41***	.29***	.23***	.24***	.31***	.30***	.10***

*** p<.001. In the GSS, the question is about confidence in "the executive branch of the federal government"; the EDialogue question is simply about confidence in the "presidency".

Table 2.6: Bivariate Pearson correlations between media skepticism and political ideology

	PTR	NES 1996	GSS	APPC	ED2K
Bivariate correlation between media skepticism and political ideology	-.15***	-.25***	.11***	-.17***	-.20***
	n=1,578	n=1,524	n=23,222	n=2,399	n=673

** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 2.7: Media skepticism and political ideology (percent of skeptics by ideological group)

	Liberals	Moderates	Conservatives
PTR	54.3%	54.3%	69.0%
NES 1996	56.4%	60.7%	73.9%
APPC	50.5%	50.2%	59.2%
ED2K	42.2%	41.4%	54.8%

In all data sets the association between media skepticism and political ideology was significant at the p<.001 level. In the ideological categories, "Liberals" include "Very liberals" and "Conservatives" include "Very Conservatives" (in the NES data, "Liberals" include "Extremely Liberal", "Liberal" and "Slightly Liberal").

Table 2.8: Bivariate Pearson correlations between media skepticism and political extremity.

	PTR	NES 1996	GSS	APPC	ED2K
Bivariate correlation between media skepticism and political extremity?	.02	.08**	.11***	.12***	.09*
	n=1,578	n=1,509	n=23,222	n=2,399	n=673

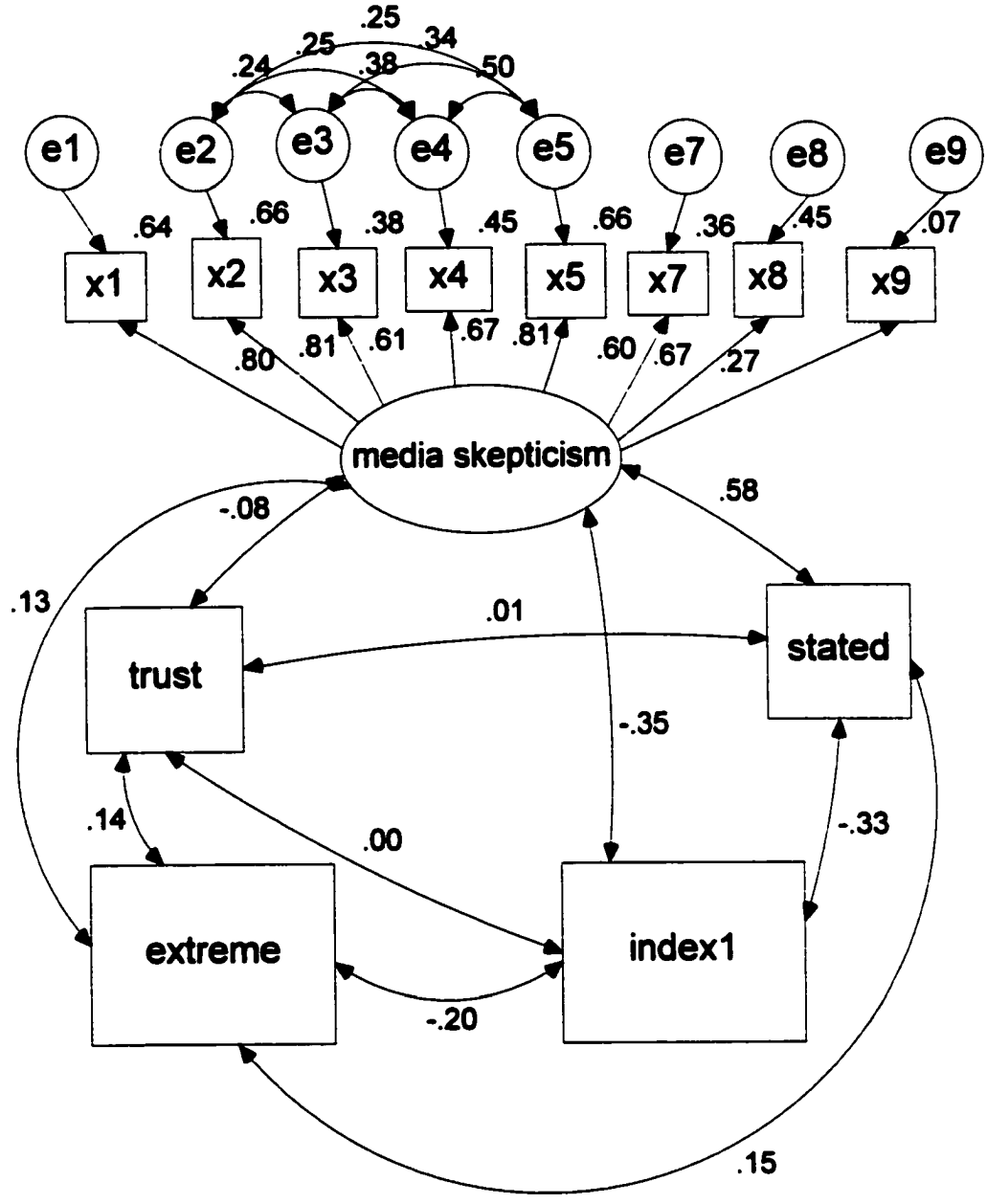
* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 2.9: Cumulative frequency of media skepticism change (N=499).

Media skepticism change (in absolute values)	Cumulative frequency
.05	29.1
.10	51.1
.15	68.7
.20	80.4
.25	88.4
.30	93.4
.35	95.8
.40	98.0
.45	99.0

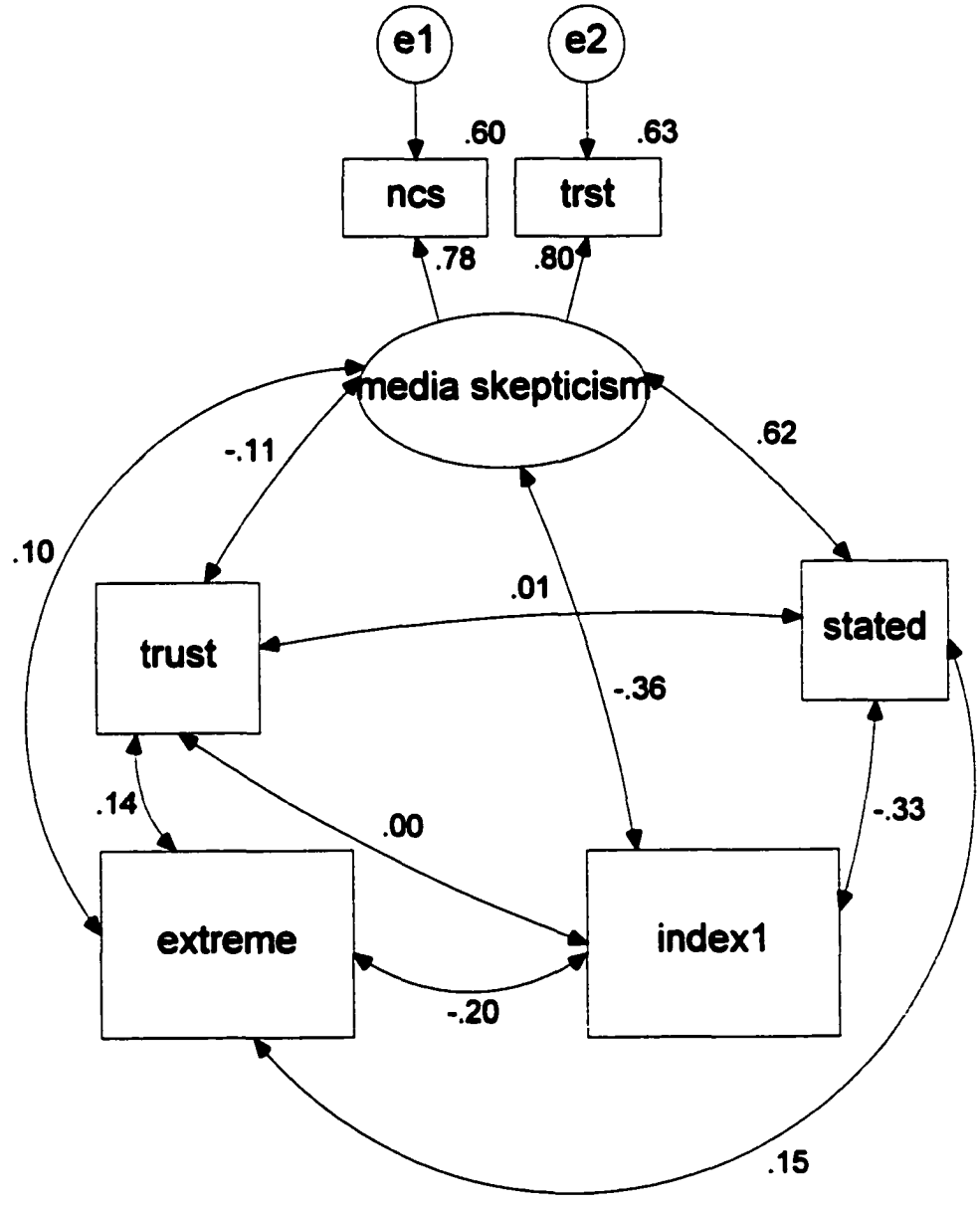
Note: media skepticism change is operationalized as the absolute value of the difference between the Wave-8 and Wave-4 skepticism scores.

Figure 2.1: Measurement model for media skepticism (N=256)



Chi-square=57.44 (df=42), p=.06; NFI=.99; TLI=.99; IFI=.99; 1-RMSEA=.97
All coefficients for factor loadings are significant at the p< .05 level.
All correlation estimates are significant at the p<.05,
except trust-media skepticism, trust-index and trust-stated

Figure 2.2: Measurement model for media skepticism (N=256)



Chi-square=3.08 (df=3), p=.38; NFI=.99; TLI=1.00; IFI=1.00; 1-RMSEA=.99

Figure 2.3: Audience evaluations of media campaign coverage, 5-day MA, Dec 1999 - Jan 2000 (4=A, 0=F; APPC data)

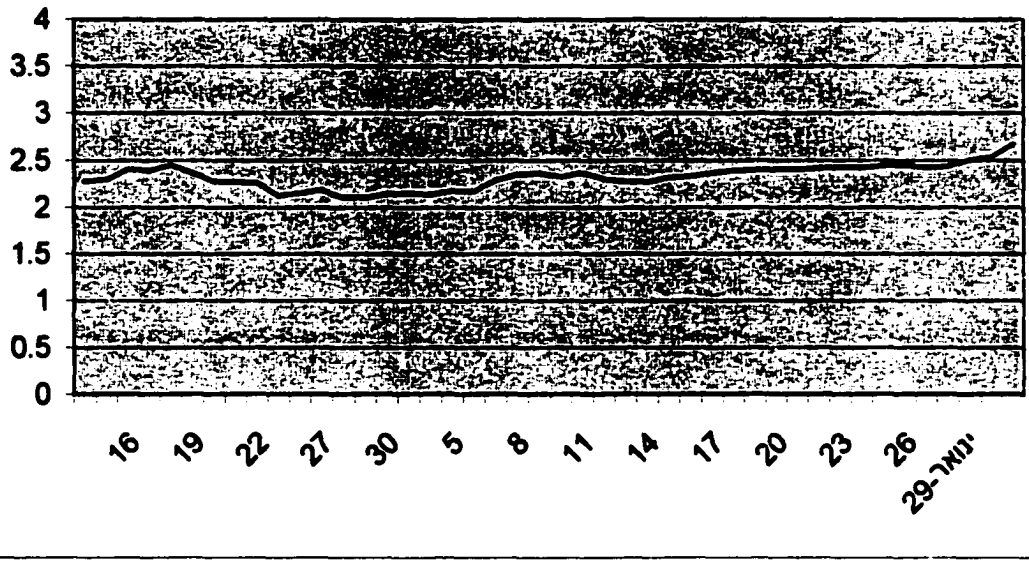
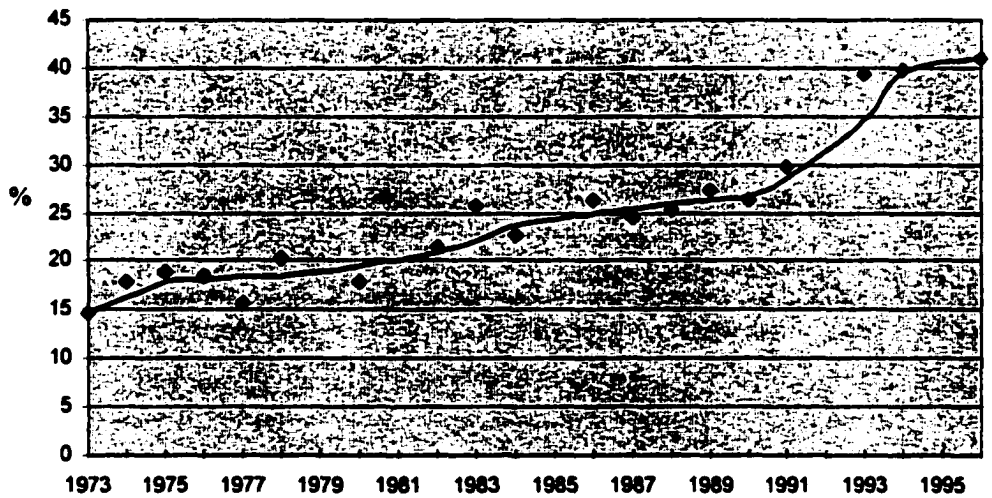


Figure 2.4: GSS respondents having hardly any confidence in the press (1973-1996)



Chapter 3: The valence of audience attitudes toward the media.

For years, political scientists have debated whether the loss of citizen political trust is good or bad for democracy. The tone of most scholars writing on political mistrust has been negative. A citizen who is overready to disapprove of government, they argue, may be overready to contest it, or to refuse to comply with it. Others are concerned that political alienation could translate into political apathy. A citizen who thinks all politicians are corrupt might be less willing to invest her time and energy and to participate in politics, by voting or other means. However, some have challenged this point of view. For example, political scientist Paul Sniderman (1981), in his landmark study of political alienation, argues that alienation is not necessarily bad:

> The mood of disillusion which has settled over the country is disquieting. Yet as we may be too quick to welcome popular support for public institutions, we may be too ready to worry about its loss. What could we have though, one might ask, if people have not become more cynical? The last two decades have seen political scandal, assassination, riot, war, Watergate. If people could have watched this parade of horrors without having their confidence disturbed, they would have proven themselves incapable of judgment, and we should have had to abandon the idea of citizenship (p. 3).

The threat posed by political alienation was overestimated, Sniderman claims, "not because the changes in public attitudes toward political institutions are superficial or merely expressive," but rather "because they may to a very considerable degree reflect a temper of mind congenial to pluralistic society" (p. 153). He found that those disaffected with politics were as likely, and in some cases more likely, to be attentive to politics and to participate in the political process. They were no more likely than those most

supportive of government to engage in adversarial forms of protest, which pose a potential threat to democratic stability. In short, those alienated from politics are no worse citizens than their more trusting counterparts.

Sniderman also maintains that political alienation might be advantageous for democracy by facilitating elite responsiveness. "Political leaders will sooner or later find themselves committed to a course of action that touches off public dissatisfaction" (p. 164), he says. A wave of political alienation is one way that democratic elites learn that they have made a serious mistake. Sniderman also claims that in a way, political alienation strengthens democratic norms. "It embodies a short list of political sins in democratic society...that is readily comprehensible and therefore broadly serviceable. It teaches citizens at large what to look out for and what to guard against" (p. 161). In short, he claims, some forms of political alienation might be beneficial to democratic societies.

This dissertation does not deal with political alienation in general, but rather with alienation towards the news media in particular. However, the debate over the positive or negative implications of alienation for democracy can easily be applied to the context of mistrust in the media.

The news media are expected to play an important role in democratic societies. According to the discursive model of public opinion (Price, 1992), it is the media that facilitate the creation of communities, that set the agenda, and that provide information and food for thought (Bryce, 1888; Tarde, 1898; Lowell, 1914; Habermas, 1989[1962]). The news media bear the responsibility for feeding public opinion the raw materials necessary for its formation and change. These include precise facts, a spectrum of opinions, and a variety of "important" issues. This is possibly the reason so many

scholars have been apprehensive of negative public attitudes toward the media. Many have described the drop in audience trust in the news media as part of a "crisis of confidence" that has plagued America in recent years (see Sniderman, 1981). If people do not trust the media, it would seem the media cannot fulfill their crucial role in democratic practice. Mistrust in the media might alienate people from the democratic process: those who mistrust media reports of politics could turn away, refuse to take part in democratic life, or tune out of the public sphere altogether.

However, the opposite argument can also be made. "The public does not believe everything it encounters in the media. Such skepticism is not necessarily bad; there can be dangers in uncritical acceptance of media fare" (Gaziano, 1988:278). The work of journalists is rarely perfect. We want our fellow citizens to reach political decisions based on political information. To the extent that they do so, we want the information they rely on to be accurate. From this perspective, mistrust of the media might in fact be healthy for democracy. Critical citizens who are not satisfied with mediocre information and hold higher expectations of news providers might be better citizens. Rational citizens who doubt the quality of media reports might in fact reach more informed decisions.

Cappella & Jamieson (1997) suggested we should distinguish between cynicism and skepticism. Cynics are disposed to believe in the insincerity of human actions and express this disposition by sneers and sarcasm. Skeptics, on the other hand, are merely uncertain and wary. Confronted by unclear evidence, skeptics raise questions and doubts. "The skeptic says 'I don't think that is true. I'm going to check this out'. The cynic says 'I know that's not true. It couldn't be. I'm going to slam him'" (p. 26). Cappella and Jamieson argue that skepticism is healthy, while cynicism is detrimental to democratic

life. We want our fellow citizens to ask questions and to demand better information. We don't want them, however, to treat *all* information as untrustworthy and to block themselves completely from the public sphere due to their mistrust.

According to Sniderman, political alienation is different from cynicism in general. The politically alienated people he studied were involved in attempts to change the political system via democratic protest, whereas cynicism implies that change is impossible because human beings are by nature insincere.

> In ordinary usage a cynic is a person who "knows" that people who say that they act for altruistic reasons in fact act for selfish ones. A cynic is anything but surprised to discover others acting in their own interest, despite their protestation that they are acting in the interest of others. For a cynic to protest that this is wrong would make no more sense than for a physicist to protest that a stone falls. But protest is just what the politically cynical do: they complain; they criticize; they may even become indignant. (p. 161)

Sniderman maintains, then, that protest is senseless for real cynics: they just know that this is the way the world was, is, and will be. Since the politically alienated are politically active and attempt to change the system, they cannot be truly cynical. The same logic can be applied in the context of trust and mistrust in the media.

So how can we determine whether audiences are skeptical or cynical? The strategy I will use to examine this question is straightforward. Simply, I will try, much as Sniderman has done with political alienation, to investigate the democratic qualities of those who do not trust the media. If those mistrustful audiences are informed, involved and active citizens, then mistrust of the media may not be a bad thing. If, on the other hand, the more mistrustful are uninformed and inactive, if they do not participate but only complain, then mistrust in the press is more likely to be harmful. The guideline to this

strategy is normative. The assumption is that informed and active citizens are better citizens.

The question remains, then: is audience mistrust in the press good or bad for democracy? Given the essential role that the press is expected to fulfill in our ideal conceptions of the public sphere, we are inclined, as adherents of democracy, to hope that people will have faith in the press. At the same time, as communication scholars, each of us has many reservations about the functioning of the media. We acknowledge that the job done by current media systems in conveying relevant and accurate political information is far from perfect. But at the same time, we worry when ordinary citizens voice similar concerns.

There is probably nothing inherently good or bad for democracy in having positive or negative attitudes about the producers of news. Sometimes the media deserve praise, at other times criticism. Skeptical audiences make their best efforts to isolate the former from the latter. Cynical audiences, however, are disposed toward criticism at all times and distrust the media even when the media present information that is necessary for their political decision-making. The danger is not their disbelief per se, but the fact that it could draw them away from public life. They might become apathetic to all sorts of political information, or detached from political participation altogether. Media cynicism could potentially translate into political apathy. It is these potentially harmful side effects of cynicism toward the media that I shall look for in this chapter in order to determine the valence of audience attitudes toward the media. I will do this using four survey data sets.

Study 1: The APPC 2000 data.

The main research question of this chapter deals with the meaning of audience mistrust of the media. Who are these skeptical and mistrustful audiences? What kind of citizens are they? Are they more likely to be involved and to participate in politics than others? If so, their skepticism may not be a bad sign. If, on the other hand, they only complain, but do not take any political action, their mistrust is more likely to be unhelpful to democracy.

In order to examine these questions the main dependent variable was cross-tabulated with measures of political participation and involvement. The results are presented in Figures 3.1 and 3.2[24]. In all cases, "low media evaluation" is defined as giving the media a "D" or an "F" for the way they covered the campaign. "High media evaluation" is defined as giving the media a score of "C" or higher. As Figure 3.1 shows, those who gave the media lower grades were more likely than others to vote. 87% of those who gave the media a "D" or lower were registered to vote at the time of interview, compared to 78% of those who gave the media higher scores. 80% of those who gave the media a low grade voted in the 1996 presidential election, compared to only 66% of the rest of the respondents. 66% of the media skeptics reported "always" voting, compared to only 44% of the other respondents. In all cases, the differences were statistically significant ($p<.05$; $p<.01$; $p<.01$ respectively).

Figure 3.2 presents the average political knowledge, interest and discussion scores by evaluation of the media. Those holding negative attitudes toward the news media scored higher on political discussion. They discussed politics an average of 2.27 days per week,

[24] To save space, I present in this section only the results from the national sample. The same analyses were run for all other samples and yielded similar patterns. As expected, repeating the same analysis with the combined file only amplified the levels of statistical significance of the differences.

compared to an average of only 1.28 days a week for other respondents (t=1.97; p=.05). Political knowledge and involvement were also associated with media evaluations. Respondents who gave the media a "D" or an "F" were more knowledgeable, on average, than those who gave the media higher grades (t=-5; p<.001). They also scored higher on the political interest item (t=4.07; p<0.001).

The same pattern holds true with respect to awareness of the candidates. Significantly more media skeptics than non-skeptics had heard about Bauer (47% compared to 31%, p<.001), Bradley (83% compared to 71%, p=.008), Buchanan (91% compared to 79%, p<.001), Forbes (80% compared to 69%, p=.01), Keyes (57% compared to 34%, p<.001) and McCain (81% compared to 59%, p<.001). In contrast, the differences between the two groups in awareness of Clinton, Gore and Bush were not significant.

To sum up, those who thought that the media did a "poor" or a "very poor" job in covering the campaign were significantly more likely to vote, to know who the candidates were, to have some knowledge about candidate's campaign promises and biographies, to discuss politics with other people, and to report close following of and interest in the campaign. Those who evaluated the media more positively tended both to talk less and to know less about politics. They also tended to participate less than their skeptical counterparts.

Are these differences merely an artifact of demographic differences between skeptics and non-skeptics? Or do they accurately reflect genuine differences that hold over and above the effects of alternative explanations? Answering this question requires multivariate analysis, which allows for tighter controls. For this purpose, cumulative

logistic regression models were run with attitudes toward the press as the dependent variable. Cumulative logit is the most highly recommended method for ordered categorical dependent variables (Allison, 1999; McCullagh, 1980). Unlike OLS, it does not require that the dependent variable be continuous or normally distributed. Cumulative logit also make no assumptions about the distance between the observed categories. Education, political involvement, discussion, knowledge, and a voting index were used as the independent variables. Media exposure, political ideology, and a set of demographic variables (including race, sex, Hispanicity, age and religiosity) were used as control variables. The results are presented at Table 3.1. The b coefficients represent the effect of the covariates on the cumulative odds of being in a higher category (giving the media an "A" vs. giving the media a lower grade; giving the media "A" or "B" vs. lower grades, and so forth).

Consistent with previous research (e.g. Cappella & Jamieson, 1997:211) political ideology was significantly associated with media evaluations. Liberals were more likely to give the media higher grades and conservatives were more likely to give the media lower grades. Much research points out that media skepticism is explained by the political attitudes of individuals (Gunther, 1988; Stamm & Dube, 1994). From this perspective, people are biased in their perceptions of the press because of their own views about political issues. Conservatives are more likely to be skeptical, according to this hypothesis, because of the allegations regarding "liberal biases" in the mainstream press forwarded by conservative politicians in recent years (Watts et al., 1999).

But even after controlling for all demographic and political ideology, the more knowledgeable, involved and participating respondents gave lower grades to the media.

The more knowledgeable a respondent was, the lower the grade he or she gave to the media. For any dividing point we choose, each one-unit increase on the knowledge scale corresponds with an eight percent ($100(e^b-1)$) decrease in the odds of assigning a higher grade to the media. All other things being equal, likely voters were also more likely to give the media lower grades. Likely voters were 42 percent *less* likely to give the media a *higher* grade. In addition, the coefficient for political involvement is significant: the higher the reported level of political interest, the lower the evaluation given to the media. In contrast, the coefficient of political discussion is not significant in any of the models. After controlling for knowledge, interest, participation and demographics, the bivariate association between political discussion and attitude toward the media disappears. In sum, the general pattern that emerges from Table 3.1 is similar to what we found in the bivariate analysis. Media skeptics are more likely to be politically involved and informed, as compared to non-skeptics.

Study 2: The PTR data.

Respondents were asked whether they thought the media "help society" or "get in the way of society solving its problems". Those who answered that the media help society were coded "0". Those who answered that the media get in the way of society were coded "1". Again, the two groups were compared on various measures of political involvement. The results are presented in Table 3.2. Generally, the patterns are similar to those obtained from the APPC data. Respondents who claimed the media get in the way of society reported significantly more voting, more political discussion, and more political participation. Media skeptics demonstrated a higher level of civics knowledge than their

non-skeptical counterparts. However, media skeptics in this study were not significantly more likely be aware of political figures (unlike in the APPC data). Also, there was no significant difference between media skeptics and non-skeptics in issue knowledge.

Again, one needs to study the associations controlling for possible alternative demographic and political explanations. This is in order to make sure that the associations between knowledge, participation and skepticism are not spuriously caused by media skeptics' tendency to be more conservative than non-skeptics, and by the association of conservatism with knowledge and participation. For this reason, logistic regression models were run controlling for partisanship, ideology, education, age, sex and race. The covariates – discussion, participation and knowledge – were entered to the regression separately due to problems of multicollinearity. The results, presented in Table 3.3, show that even after controlling for demographic and political factors, media skeptics are significantly more likely than non-skeptics to discuss politics, to vote and to otherwise participate in politics. They also tend to demonstrate more civic knowledge than non-skeptics ($p=.06$). However, the coefficients for candidate awareness and issue knowledge were not statistically significant.

Study 3: The Electronic Dialogue data.

Pearson correlations between media skepticism and political involvement, knowledge and participation measures are presented in Table 3.4. The positive sign of all coefficients indicates that enhanced media skepticism is associated with more political knowledge, involvement and participation. However, the coefficients for voting, political involvement and candidate awareness are not statistically significant. Discussion,

knowledge and both measures of participation (community and political) produced significant associations. These patterns are identical to what we found in the previous data sets.

Turning to the multivariate analysis, since the dependent variable is a continuous scale (rather than a single ordered categorical item), an OLS regression model was used, with skepticism as the dependent variable and the political scales, along with other demographics and political ideology, as covariates. The results are presented in Table 3.5. Again, conservatism was associated with media skepticism. But even controlling for ideology, community participation, political discussion and political knowledge had significant effects on the dependent variable. The more knowledgeable a respondent was, the lower his or her evaluations of the media. The more a respondent reported discussing politics, the higher she or he scaled on the skepticism scale. Community participation (including items tapping civic capital) also had a significant effect on media skepticism: the more people participate in neighborhood activities the higher their media skepticism. However, the association of political involvement (news attention and close following of politics) and media skepticism was in the opposite direction. Unlike in the PTR or APPC data, involved Electronic Dialogue respondents tended to be less skeptical of the media.

Study 4: NES 1996 data.

Table 3.6 presents means of various political variables by media skepticism. The table shows that skeptics scored higher than non-skeptics on political discussion, voting, political participation, knowledge and political interest. However, the differences between skeptics and non-skeptics were not statistically significant from zero for the

knowledge and interest measures. The overall patterns are identical to what we found in all previous data sets.

An OLS regression model, with skepticism as the dependent variable, is presented in Table 3.7. Again, conservatism was associated with media skepticism. But even controlling for ideology and demographics, political participation and political discussion had significant effects on the dependent variable. The more a respondent reported discussing politics, the higher she or he scored on the skepticism scale, as did those who participated more in politics. The effects of voting, interest and knowledge were not significant in this analysis.

Discussion.

In sum, analysis of data from four independent sources (two telephone surveys, one face to face survey, and one administered through the Web) utilizing different measures and sampling designs yielded a similar conclusion: media skeptics are not apathetic toward politics. The correlations between skepticism and the political involvement measures I used (tapping knowledge, voting, participation, and political discussion) tended to be positive rather than negative. Those who think positively about the media are less likely be knowledgeable about or to participate in politics than those who think negatively about the media. It thus appears that negative attitudes toward the press are not hurting democracy by producing apathy. On the contrary, those who are skeptical about the media tend to be more involved, to make more efforts to gain political information, and to try more frequently to influence politics through participation. These associations hold even after tightly controlling for demographic and political factors, negating possible

claims regarding spuriousness. Only in three cases (candidate awareness and political involvement in the E-Dialogue data, interest in the NES data) were the signs of the coefficients in the opposite directions, and two of these three coefficients were not statistically significant. The overwhelming finding is that media skeptics know more about politics, talk more about politics, and participate more in politics. Somewhat paradoxically, media skeptics are closer to what is normatively expected of democratic citizens, in our ideal conceptions of democracy.

Explanations. Why is this the case? Why do those who think negatively about the media participate more, know more, and involve themselves more in politics than those who think positively about the media? Before answering this question, we must first address the issue of causal direction. Could it be that cynicism or skepticism about the functioning of the press causes people to gain more knowledge, be more involved, or be more likely to participate? It is hard to imagine that this is the case. One could argue that dislike of the media causes people to make a greater effort to obtain more information from non-media sources, which might be of better quality than that found in the media. Hence, media skeptics might be more knowledgeable because they invest more effort in acquiring such information. Alternatively, it could be argued that audiences who hate the media, hate them so badly that they go out to participate just to teach journalists a lesson. However, though these possibilities cannot be empirically negated, they do not seem very plausible either intuitively or theoretically.

The direction of this association is probably from knowledge, involvement and participation to media skepticism, and not the other way around. Three explanations can be offered for this association. The first has to do with the differing capabilities of

informed and uninformed citizens, the second with higher expectations of involved citizens, and the third with media satiety among the informed and involved citizens.

Objective capabilities. It could be argued that the educated, involved and informed citizens are more critical than others about the news media simply because they are more capable of evaluating the media's work. Educated citizens who have acquired critical reading skills in college have learned not to believe all they read in the papers. Knowledgeable and involved citizens can more easily compare media coverage to other sources of information. Thus they are more likely to critically evaluate media reports and discern inaccuracies when they encounter them. In addition, involved people who participate more in politics might be better able to compare first-hand experiences (from rallies, demonstrations or other events) to the coverage of these experiences in the media. Thus, based on their personal experience, they are more likely than others to understand the ways in which the media distort real world events in their coverage. In sum, knowledge, participation and involvement could be associated with critical media evaluations since participating and involved citizens are better equipped to handle media materials.

Higher expectations. It could also be that involved citizens are more critical of the media because they *expect* more of the media, compared to other citizens. Those who vote more frequently might need different qualities of political information than one can find in the news, just in order to reach informed decisions. For those who know politics, media presentation of the world might seem shallow and superficial. They might want more than what the media provide, given that the media might aim at more uninvolved and apathetic general audiences. In sum, according to this explanation, involved citizens

give the media poorer grades because they feel they need better coverage than the media give them.

Media satiety. It is also possible that involved citizens are simply fed up with media practices. They are so familiar with media genres, frames and personas that they can sometimes guess in advance what the people in the media are going to say and how they are going to say it. According to Cappella & Jamieson's (1997, chapter 9) "contagious cynicism" hypothesis, people are cynical about the media because the media themselves are cynical (see also Kiousis, 2000). It is possible to build on this hypothesis and to claim that informed people are getting tired of years of watching the same strategic frames, the same worn-out expressions, and practically the same stories. In other words, informed and involved people watch so much news that eventually they despise journalists. However, the association between media exposure and media evaluation, reported in Tables 3.1 and 3.5, does not settle very well with this "media satiety" explanation. The positive sign of the slope coefficient for the media exposure variable indicates that more exposure is associated with more *positive* media evaluations (this association will be explored in much more detail in Section 3).

In sum, three explanations could be offered for the negative association between political involvement and attitudes toward the media: differing capabilities, higher expectations, and media satiety. These explanations are of course not mutually exclusive. They could be working simultaneously. For example, politically involved individuals could be better able to judge the media, and at the same time have higher expectations of the news.

Conclusions.

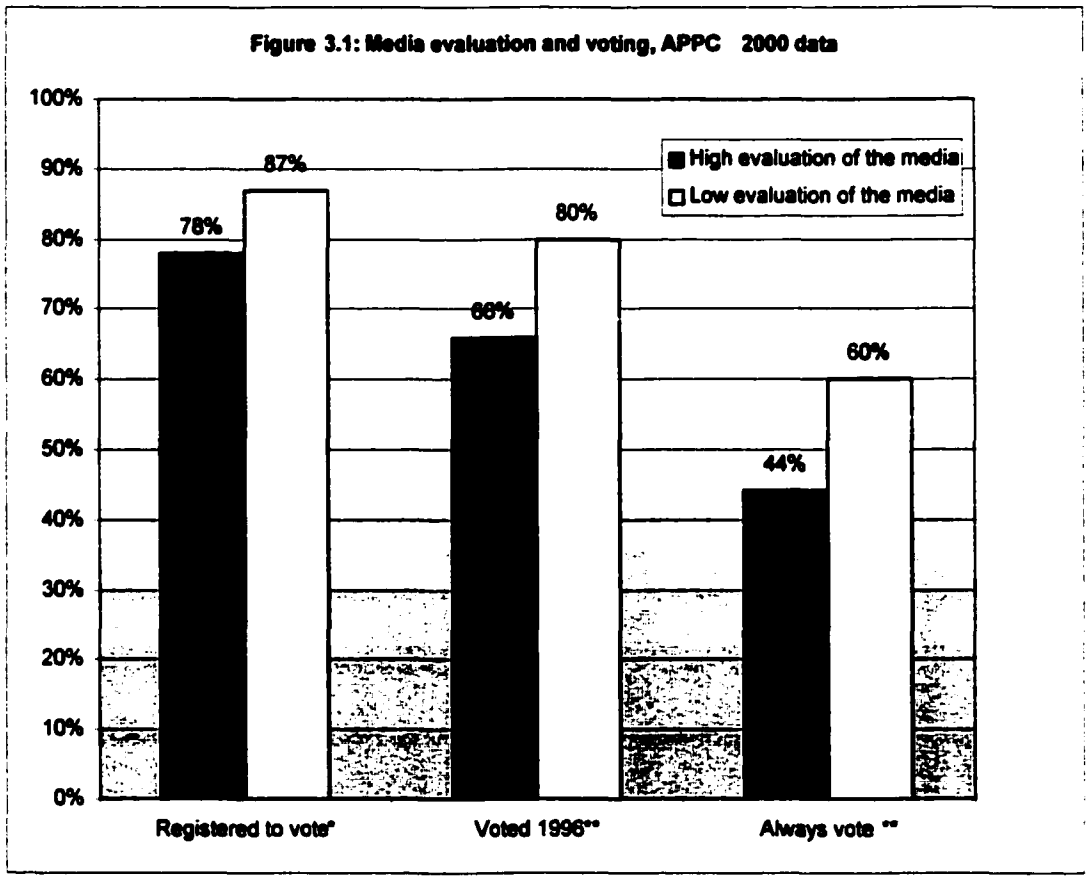
In the introduction, I argued that cynicism is detrimental, while skepticism is healthy, for democratic life. Which of these terms, cynicism or skepticism, better describes negative audience evaluations of the media? This is the main question I addressed in this chapter. The strategy I used in order to answer it was simply to compare respondents who evaluate the media positively to those who evaluated them negatively.

Critical audiences were more likely to vote or to otherwise participate, compared to those who evaluated the media positively. Those who evaluated the news media negatively also tended to be more involved, to discuss politics more often, and to be more informed about politics and more aware of the candidates than their less critical counterparts. Most of these differences held over and above demographic variables and political ideology, in three independent data sets, utilizing different sampling schemes and different measures of skepticism.

Since audience skepticism about the media is associated with many normatively desirable outcomes, it cannot be said to be detrimental to democracy. Citizens who are critical about the media tend to be better citizens – more interested, more knowledgeable and more involved – than others. Although it is not possible to empirically infer causality, it seems more logical that the direction of the association is "involvement → media skepticism" rather than "media skepticism → involvement". Involved citizens are more critical of the media than uninvolved citizens, probably because they are better equipped to assess the quality of the media's work, and because they have higher expectations of the media than uninvolved citizens.

Some scholars see audience mistrust of the media as posing a problem for modern democracy. If people do not trust their information sources, they implicitly argue, democracy cannot function in a mass society. But audience criticisms about the press do not necessarily mean that democracy is damaged. The interpretation of audience mistrust of the media could be much more optimistic. Audiences are not dupes. They do not believe every word they read in the newspaper. They are critical. They are not satisfied with the quality of the news they are getting. They are aware of the limitations of journalism. They need better information.

Communication researchers, who dedicate so much time and energy to evaluate news content critically, should not look down at audiences when they do the same. Rather, we should be glad that many active and involved members of the audience have internalized the very critical-reading strategies we advocate. On the other hand, the line between cynicism and skepticism is very hard to draw empirically. Although those who give the media lower grades *tend to be* politically involved and active, not all of them are. We should keep that in mind when we investigate audience attitudes toward the media.



Note: * p<.05, ** p<.01.

Figure 3.2: Media evaluation and political knowledge, interest, discussion, APPC 2000 data

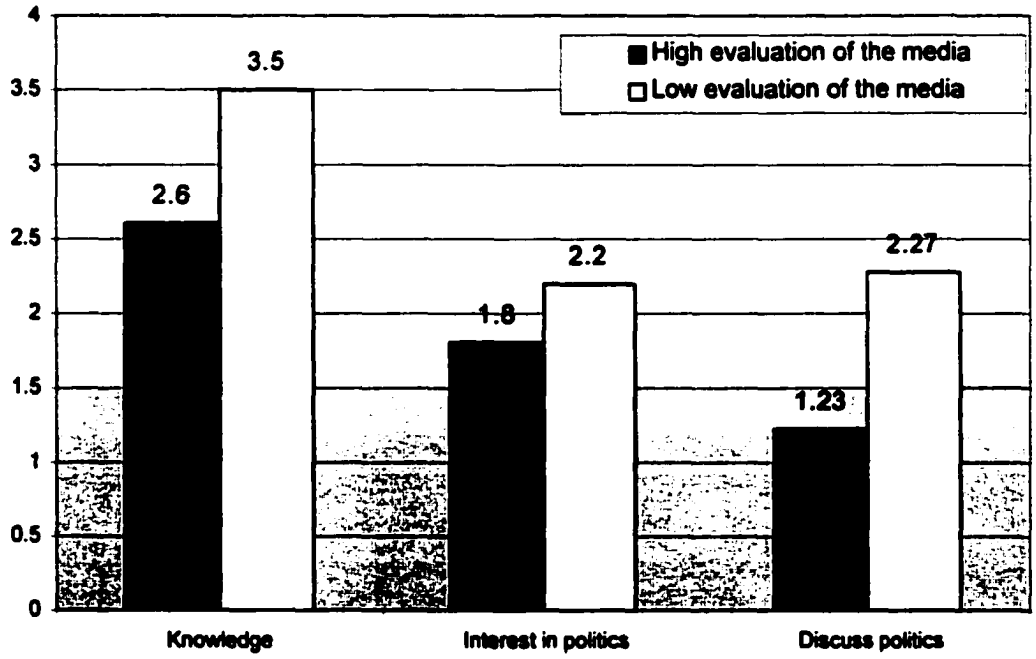


Table 3.1: Cumulative logistic regression predicting media evaluation grades (A=4; F=0); APPC 2000 data.

	b (s.e.)	e^b
Political ideology (5=very liberal, 0=very conservative)	.23*** (.04)	1.26
Sex (male=1)	-.21** (.07)	.80
Race (white=1)	.01 (.16)	.99
Hispanic (=1)	.08 (.50)	1.09
Born-again Christians (=1)	.06 (.08)	1.06
Age	.00 (.00)	1.00
Education (years of schooling)	-.00 (.00)	.99
Media exposure (mean days in the past week)	.19*** (.02)	1.21
Political discussion (mean days past week)	.00 (.00)	1.00
Political involvement (4=high; 1=low)	-.11* (.04)	.88
Political knowledge (6=high; 0=low)	-.07** (.02)	.92
Likelihood of voting	-.53** (.02)	.58
R square	.11	
N	2349	

Notes: * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 3.2: Mean scores on political measures, by media skepticism, PTR data.

	Political discussion (4=often; 1=never)	Voting (4=always 1=seldom)	Political participation[25] (4=high; 0=none)
Media help society (N=968)	2.88	3.03	.91
Media get in the way (N=646)	2.94	3.19	.98
T	2.85**	5.70***	2.47**

	Civic knowledge (2=high; 0=low)	Issue knowledge (4=high; 0=none)	Candidate awareness[26] (8=recognize all; 0=recognize none)
Media help society (N=968)	1.21	1.14	7.39
Media get in the way (N=646)	1.26	1.15	7.42
T	2.90***	.43	1.36

Note: ** p<.01; *** p<.001

[25] This scale is the sum of four items, asking whether in the past 12 months respondents contacted or wrote to a public official, attended a public hearing or a town meeting, contacted a newspaper or television station about an issue that concerned them, or contributed money to a political candidate or organization. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .67. Answering "yes" was coded as "1", and "no" as "0". The four items were summed up.

[26] This item measures awareness of eight political figures: Clinton, Dole, Gingrich, Hillary Clinton, Buchanan, Forbes, Lamar Alexander and Bill Bennet.

Table 3.3: Six weighted logistic regression models predicting attitudes toward the media (1=media get in the way; 0=media help society), PTR data

	Political discussion (4=often; 1=never)	Voting (4=always 1=seldom)	Political participation (4=high; 0=none)
B (s.e.)	.15	.14**	.12*
	(.06)	(.05)	(.04)
e^b	1.16	1.15	1.12
Cox & Snell R^2	.04	.04	.04
Unweighted N	1536	1472	1536

	Civic knowledge (2=high; 0=low)	Issue knowledge (4=high; 0=none)	Candidate awareness (8=recognize all; 0=recognize none)
B (s.e.)	1.15#	.03	-.03
	(.07)	(.06)	(.05)
e^b	1.16	1.03	1.00
Cox & Snell R^2	.04	.03	.04
Unweighted N	1536	1535	1535

Notes: All models control for age, sex, education, ideology, partisanship and race. #p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01.

Table 3.4: Pearson correlations between media skepticism scale with other political measures, EDialogue 2000 data.

	Political discussion	Voting scale[27]	Political participation[28]	Political involvement
Media skepticism	.10**	.06	.10**	.03
N	669	.669	669	673

	Political knowledge	Community participation	Candidate awareness[29]
Media skepticism	.09*	.15***	.02
N	668	669	673

Note: ** p<.01; *** p<.001

[27] Average of four items: voting in 1996, voting registration, evaluation of the chances of their voting in the next election, and a question asking "How often do you say you vote?" All items were coded "1" for high voting and "0" for low voting. All loaded on the same factor. Reliability for this scale was .84.

[28] Eight participation items (Attended any political meetings; Done any other work for a candidate; Given money to a candidate; Worn a candidate's campaign button or put a campaign sticker on your car; Contacted a public official about an issue; Talked to any people and tried to show them why they should vote for a political candidate; Contacted a newspaper or television station about an issue; Tried to get another person to sign a petition) were coded "1" for "participated in the past 12 months" and "0" for "did not participate". The item not included was "Attended a public hearing or town meeting". The scale is the average of the eight items (0-1 scale). Reliability was α=.62.

[29] Respondents were asked if they had ever heard of eight political figures (Bill Bradley, Pat Buchanan, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Alan Keyes, John McCain and Ross Perot). All items were coded "0" for "haven't heard of" and "1" for "heard of". The Alan Keyes item did not load together with the others, and hence was not added to the scale. The rest of the items were averaged. Reliability for the scale was α=.83.

Table 3.5: OLS regression predicting media skepticism, Electronic Dialogue data.

	b (s.e.)
Political ideology (5=extreme liberal, -5= extreme conservative)	-.01*** (.00)
Sex (male=1)	-.02# (.01)
Race (white=1)	.00 (.02)
Age	.00 (.00)
Education (years of schooling)	-.00 (.00)
Media exposure (mean days in the past week)	-.00 (.00)
Political participation	.06 (.04)
Community participation	.08** (.03)
Political discussion (mean days past week)	.02* (.00)
Political involvement	-.02* (.01)
Political knowledge	.15** (.05)
Voting scale	.00 (.03)
Candidate awareness	-.03 (.08)
R square	.10
N	618

Notes: # p<.1; * p<.05; ** p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 3.6: Mean scores on political measures, by media skepticism, NES data.

	Political discussion (days in the past week)	Voting (1=voted; 0=did not vote)	Political participation[30] (4=high; 0=none)	Political knowledge (4=high; 0=low)	Political interest
Non-skeptics (N=557)	1.75	.73	.08	2.19	2.77
Skeptics (N=967)	2.12	.78	.11	2.22	2.90
T	3.27**	1.99*	3.06**	.40	1.39

Note: * p<.05; ** p<.01

[30] This scale is the average of five items, asking whether in the past 12 months respondents had contacted or written to a public official, talked to others and tried to persuade them about their vote, attended a public hearing or a town meeting, contacted a newspaper or television station about an issue that concerned them, or contributed money to a political candidate or organization. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .58. Answering "yes" was coded as "1", and "no" as "0". The four items were averaged.

Table 3.7: OLS regression predicting media skepticism, NES 1996 data.

	b (s.e.)
Political ideology (5=extreme liberal, -5= extreme conservative)	-.06*** (.00)
Sex (male=1)	-.04 (.03)
Race (white=1)	-.00 (.05)
Age	-.00 (.00)
Education (years of schooling)	-.01 (.00)
Political participation	.19* (.10)
Political discussion (mean days past week)	.02** (.00)
Political involvement	-.01 (.01)
Political knowledge	.01 (.02)
Voted in 1996	.01 (.05)
R square	.07
N	1,504

Notes: * p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; ***p<.001

Chapter 4: Recent trends in media skepticism.

The aim of this chapter is to review how audiences have perceived the media over the years. The main argument is that in the past decade or so the relationship between audiences and the media has drastically changed. Historically, the decline in the prestige of journalism was, according to Carey (1969, 1995), related to the transformation from the "intellectual" role journalists used to play in society to their current "communicative" role. "Journalism was traditionally conceived as a literary genre rather than as a species of technical writing" (Carey, 1969, p. 32). From critics, interpreters or contemporary historians, journalists were transformed into "manipulators of symbols" or "brokers in meanings" who fulfill a technical function of "reporting". The institutionalization of journalism as a profession, a process that had started in the second half of the nineteenth century, thus resulted in the dispossession of journalism from its once reputable position. The creation of a professional canon of norms and standards of objectivity, such as reporting all sides of a story and separating facts from interpretation, resulted in what Carey called the "conversion downwards" of journalism, since these norms were impossible to fulfill under the constraints of commercial communication systems.

Criticisms of the people responsible for the dissemination of news might be as old as the press itself. Cappella and Jamieson (1997: 29) mention that "founder Benjamin Franklin, printer and publisher, was among the country's earliest press cynics." Kohut and Toth (1998:111) remind us that "even Thomas Jefferson, the founding father to whom our press owes perhaps the most of all, was two-minded about the fiercely partisan

press of his time." They point out that the same Jefferson, whose preference for "newspapers without a government" over "a government without newspapers" is very well known, also said, "nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle" (cited on p. 116).

Perhaps the best-known of the early twentieth-century media skeptics was Walter Lippmann, who in 1922 asserted that "news and truth are not the same thing" (p. 358). The Hutchins commission (1947) was interested not only in the validity of "the truth" conveyed by the mass media, but also in the fact that the news media did not represent and reflect a variety of ideas and opinions. The mere establishment of the commission signified that by the mid-1940s there were many who thought that the press was a part of the problem, rather than the panacea of American democracy.

But most of those early concerns regarding the functioning of the mass media were expressed by the elite, rather than by the general public. As far as we can tell from historical accounts and early surveys, the public was mostly trustful of the press prior to the 1970s. For example, a review of polls probing Americans' opinions about the press from the mid-1930s to the late 1960s found widespread belief in press fairness (Erskine, 1970-71).

The public's attitude toward the media was not measured longitudinally until the early 1970s, when polling institutions like NORC and Harris started to include "confidence in the press" items in their surveys. NORC's General Social Survey (GSS) data show that confidence in the press changed from 28 percent having a "great deal" of confidence in 1976 to a low of 10 percent in 1994. The rate of those having hardly any confidence in the press had grown from a low of 14.6 percent in 1973 to a high of 41

percent in 1996. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 present the percentage of GSS respondents who reported having "hardly any" confidence in television or in the press. The data were smoothed using Tukey's 35R'H hanning technique to correct for random variation. The graph shows that lack of confidence in the media grew only moderately from the 1970s through the mid-1980s, but has dramatically increased in recent years. The sharpest increase in media skepticism was recorded between 1991 and 1996, during which time the rate of those reporting hardly any confidence in the press jumped from about 25 to 40 percent, and in TV from 30 to about 43 percent.

The same patterns, but with somewhat different numbers[31], emerge from the Harris and Gallup polls. The Harris surveys show that the rate of people having a "great deal" of confidence in the press decreased from around 30 percent in the early 1970s to about 12 percent in 2000. The rate of respondents having "hardly any" confidence in the press increased from around 12 percent in 1966 to more than 25 percent in the late 1990s. Gallup polls found that that the percentage of the public saying they had a "great deal" or a "fair" amount of "trust and confidence" in the mass media to report the news "fully, accurately and fairly" fell from 70 to 55 between 1972 and 1998, while the percentage replying "not very much" or "none at all" increased from 30 to 44 (Bennet et al., 2001).

Media skepticism is not specific to the United States. Figure 4.3 presents the frequencies of World Value Survey respondents having "not at all" or "not very much" confidence in the press by country[32]. The figure shows that, in fact, Americans are

[31] The different numbers probably stem from differences in treating non-response and missing data, and a few inconsistencies between the two sources in sampling and weighting procedures.

[32] These surveys, conducted in 43 countries in 1990-91, were designed to facilitate cross-national comparisons of political phenomena. A great deal of effort was invested in insuring comparability across the different contexts, especially with regard to sampling procedures and to question wordings.

relatively trustful of their media systems. British respondents were the most skeptical about their press, with more than 86 percent of them rating themselves on the skeptical side of the four-point confidence-in-the-press continuum. In other Western European countries more than half of the population were skeptical toward the media. Media skepticism was also a problem in other developed democracies (Japan, Canada), as well as in post-communist regimes (Belarus, Bulgaria, Russia, Romania, etc.). While there is clearly much work to be done in explaining the cross-national variations in trust in the press, the data presented demonstrate that media skepticism is clearly not a problem specific to the US.

Audience attitudes about the news media have changed drastically in the past decade. Three processes are implicated in this change. **First,** audience skepticism has become widespread. Moreover, criticism of the press is not restricted to the elite, but is expressed by a large proportion of the public. **Second,** the functioning of the media has become a political issue. Politicians and social critics have made a habit of blaming the media for almost anything wrong that happens in the country. Many audience members have adopted this point of view, and the news media themselves increasingly cover these allegations and devote more space to critical discussion of the functioning of the news media. **Third,** in the past decade we have witnessed the development of alternatives to the mainstream news media. The Internet, on the one hand, and genres such as political talk radio, on the other, thrive and compete with the traditional mainstream media for the trust of audiences. Unsurprisingly, much of the content of these new channels is cynical

about the mainstream news media. In the rest of this chapter I elaborate on each of these processes in turn.

The people and the press.

As Figures 4.1 and 4.2 indicate, the number of Americans having hardly any confidence in the press has tripled between 1972 and 1996. In the five years between 1991 and 1996, the rate of GSS respondents having hardly any confidence in the press rose from about 25 percent to more than 40 percent. Similar trends have been documented by numerous independent polls. Watts et al. (1999) reported that "in January 1988, for example, 12% of randomly sampled respondents claimed news media exhibit a liberal bias in presidential election coverage. By November 1996, over two fifths of randomly sampled respondents claimed that the news media have a liberal bias in election coverage, a substantial increase" (p. 145). Moy and Pfau (2001) found that "from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s believability ratings for the major television networks (ABC, CBS, and ABC) declined from between 86 and 87 percent to between 76 and 77 percent and the ratings for familiar daily news correspondents dropped from 84 to 65 percent" (p. 19). Some additional longitudinal data comes from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Their data show that

> [t]he majority of Americans who believed a decade ago that the press usually gets the facts straight has become a minority. In 1985, only one in three Americans felt that the media were often inaccurate. By 1992, the public was split: 44 percent said "often inaccurate", but 49 percent said "usually gets the facts straight." In 1997, 56 percent said the press is often inaccurate. Sixty-seven percent believe the media are unfair in presenting the news on social and political issues; in 1985, 53 percent thought news organizations were unfair. (Kohut & Toth, 1998)

Similarly, many other scholars, mainstream news outlets and media pundits have documented a decrease in public trust in the media over the past years (see American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1998; Bennet et al., 2001; Liebeskind, 1997; Meyer, 1988; Kiousis, 2000).

An ABC News poll (Chilton Research Services, 1997) shows that 47 percent of Americans think the news media do not protect the interests of people like them. 42 percent think the media get in the way of society solving its problems. 67 percent complain that there is too much negative news in the media. Almost one-third of Americans say they do not think national TV networks report the news in a fair and objective way. 77 percent think the news media care more about being the first to report a story than about the accuracy of the story. 47 percent say that the news media should have less influence on American life (compared to only 23 percent who say the media should have more influence). 20 percent say that network news shows are too critical of the government in Washington, 60 percent say they are not critical enough, and only about 20 percent say the amount of government criticism is about right. The same poll found that many respondents raised concerns about invasion of privacy and about attempts to cover up stories.

The decline in public confidence in the media over the past 30 years did not take place in isolation: during the same period the public lost confidence in other social and democratic institutions as well. As Figure 4.4 shows, increasing rates of survey respondents reported hardly any confidence in the people running Congress, the Executive Branch, organized labor, religion or the educational system in 1996, compared

to 1973. However, the trend line for confidence in the press is steeper and more consistent than that for any other institution, as is evident from Figure 4.4. The figure demonstrates that media skepticism does not merely reflect a growing tendency to mistrust social institutions: it is leading this trend.

To sum up: whereas in the past, criticism of the press was expressed only by a few members of the elite, it is now expressed by a large proportion of the American public, and increasingly so. Huge proportions of the audience now have serious reservations about the news media.

News as a political issue.

In recent years the functioning of the press has also become a political issue (Johnson et al., 1996). Watts et al. (1999) present news content-analysis findings demonstrating that the media are increasingly becoming the targets of attacks by politicians. This trend is also evident when one looks for references to "the media" at the Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse. This archive has the most exhaustive collection of candidate speeches, campaign ads, and presidential debates that currently exists. I conducted searches for the use of words like "the media", "the press", "journalists" and "the networks" across the years. The numbers of hits and the proportions of items referring to the media out of the yearly total number of items are presented in Table 4.1 and Figure 4.4. The main finding is that campaign discourse about the press was indeed much higher in the 1990s than at any time before. Candidates tended to talk more often about the media, and especially to argue that the media are biased and unfair. This is especially true for Republican candidates.

In 1976, Republican candidate Gerald Ford maintained that the media were doing a fair job: "I say with great sincerity that I feel the broadcasters have been fair, evenhanded. I might have changed a little story here and there. As I've said, I've made a mistake or two, but overall I think the electronic news media has handled this election with great fairness, great equity, and in the highest tradition of your profession" (delivered at a press conference in Portland, Oregon, on October 25, 1976). In sharp contrast to Ford's complimentary treatment of the media, George Bush – the Republican candidate and incumbent president in 1992 – was constantly attacking the media. For example, on November 2, 1992 in Madison, NJ, he said: "I love these signs, 'Annoy the Media. Reelect Bush'. And every one of you know what that means. Every one of you know that there has not been objectivity in the coverage. Every one of you know it. And they are having their own debates, all these talking heads: 'Have we been fair? Well, this is the way we do it. That's the way we do it.' And everyone knows that they're covering up the fact this has been the most biased year in the history of presidential politics. But we don't need them anymore. We don't need them...And we are going to show them wrong".

Like Bush in 1992, Republican candidate Bob Dole complained, in 1996, that the media treated him unfairly. For example, on October 24, 1996, Dole said in a campaign speech in Florida: "Something's wrong in America. Now, we know the liberal media is not going to report on all these things because they want him (Clinton) re-elected. They like it the way it is. But the country does not belong to the liberal media, nor does it belong to Bill Clinton. It belongs to the people of the United States". On October 18, 1996 Dole said: "They have spent $91 million attacking me...and he (Clinton) said, 'Oh,

we don't believe in a negative campaign'. If I would run one negative ad, the liberal media in this country's, 'Oh, no, there goes Bob Dole again being negative.' He's spent $91 million being negative".

In sum, there is much more political discourse about the media today than in the past. Conservative candidates are charging the media with bias. The media themselves, Watts et al. argue, are "turning the spotlight inward," devoting more and more time and space to critical evaluation of the functioning of journalism and journalists. Watts et al.'s content analysis data show that media items over the years contain more "self coverage" (e.g. reports about the way the media cover the campaign), as well as more allegations of media bias, than in the past. "An increase in the amount of coverage on the topic of media bias would seem to be a natural result of the increasing focus by journalists, candidates and political pundits on the role of news media in political campaigns", Watts et al. argue (1999:148). The fact that news is increasingly becoming a political issue is also reflected in the rise of news programs and media outlets that are primarily devoted to covering the media, including CNN's *Reliable Sources*, National Public Radio's *On the Media*, CNBC's *Equal Time*, and the news magazine *Brill's Content*.

In sum, there is now much more discourse about the media in the public sphere than in the past. Politicians have stopped regarding news simply as a mirror reflecting social events and realities. Many of them argue that the media are one of the problems facing society. The media, in turn, report these accusations and charges and devote much more space than in the past to coverage of media ethics and practices. As a result, there is much more information available to the public about how the media work, what their norms

and standards are, how they make mistakes, and how they can be manipulated by other political actors.

This kind of discourse might have led scholars to attenuate the wording of survey questions tapping audience attitudes toward the press. Back in the 1960s, there was no reason to ask people whether thought that the media got in the way of society. But now, when accusations about the media have become a part of political discourse, there is little wonder that scholars want to check whether audiences agree with these accusations.

New media channels and media skepticism.

Another development that has changed the nature of the relationship between audiences and the mainstream news media has to do with the development of new media such as the Internet, and new media genres such as talk radio, that compete with the mainstream media for the trust of the audience.

Online media skepticism. In recent years the World Wide Web has witnessed a mushrooming of Internet sites devoted to anti-media material. Some of these sites are affiliated with media watchdog organizations (yet another anti-media phenomenon of recent years). Other sites simply present themselves as alternative news sources, and their anti-media messages are more implicit than explicit. Both types of sites present two main kinds of information. The first is *information about the allegedly distorted mainstream media.* "Why is it necessary for the media to have a watchdog?" asks one such Web site, and answers:

> Quite frankly, the news media don't always get their stories right. What's worse, many of them don't even seem to care...All the major media surveys for the past 20 years have shown that 80 to 90 percent of the mainstream media consistently vote for Democrats...But how do you know the media's political opinions influence their reporting? Many of them are actually admitting it these days. They admit they're anti-business, pro-big government, anti-family and anti-religion. (from Accuracy in the Media's Web page)

On the other hand, a liberal media watchdog web site argues that

> the so-called Liberal Media is owned by large Conservative corporations that dictate control over biased news reporting in major newspapers and on major television networks. The media is Conservative just like it's owners and sponsors. You're getting the "News" the way that they want you to see it. (The Liberal Slant Web page, 5/15/00)

The second type of information, which is the more prevalent one, *aims at refuting facts and reports presented by the media*. The Web site's creators take a mainstream media report, or some part of it, and present evidence that shows why the information in the media is wrong. For example a Web site called "Media Research Center" exposed that the media's portrayal of Million Mom March leader Donna Dees-Thomases was false. According to the site, the media portrayed Dees-Thomases as a suburban homemaker who had never been politically active until she saw the footage of the August 1999 California day-care center shooting on TV. But the site argues that Dees-Thomases was apparently not the "clueless unorganized housewife" described by the media: rather, she was active in politics and had worked in the media for years. Thus, according to this Web site, the media were misinforming their audiences by portraying Dees-Thomases as a naïve mother.

This is just one example. Media watchdog Web sites contain ample information about the way the media distort political "facts". However, charges are made not only about the credibility of the facts found in the media, but also about the style and tone of their presentation. For example, a conservative site complains that the networks presented McCain's endorsement of George W. Bush as "grudging" and that mainstream coverage of candidates' positions on social security "ridicule Bush's Social Security reform plans" while calling Gore's scheme "conservative", thereby giving him an advantage. Another typical criticism is that the mainstream media choose not to report important news. For example, the Media Research Center site claims that the media are burying evidence "casting doubt on the environmental establishment's line on global warming", and that "media outlets ignore ads which underline McCain's support for tobacco tax, attacks on pro-lifers".

A very common criticism has to do with the alleged "double standards" of the media. For example, a liberal Web site called FAIR asks why the media dedicated so much attention to Ahmed Ressaman, an alleged Arab millennium terrorist, while ignoring Kevin Ray Patterson and Charles Dennis Kiles, who were arrested for allegedly plotting to blow up a TV tower and an electrical station, supposedly in hopes of sparking a Y2K-related militia uprising. Anti-media Internet sites often present content analysis-like information (such as rates of references to candidates, distribution of politicians who are the target of attacks by late night TV hosts, etc.) designed to demonstrate that the media are biased, and quotes from journalists "admitting" that their work is affected by their political views.

In sum, media-cynical Internet resources claim that the media are biased because media outlets are either held captive by corporate America (the leftist argument), or because they serve as a channel through which liberal journalists can disseminate their political views (the rightists argument). The sites not only attack journalists, but also analyze the motivations of the mainstream media, present counter-evidence, and promote alternative agendas. As noted above, these criticisms come from both the left and the right sides of the political map.

Thus, the development of the Internet has created a convenient arena for attacks on the credibility of the mainstream media. The overall message, as stated by one of the sites, is that people should "get news from the net, not the networks". And indeed, Internet users can get alternative information, accompanied by harsh criticism of the norms, standards and practices of media personnel.

Media skepcism and PTR. In addition to the development of the Internet, the early 1990s saw a remarkable increase in the number of radio stations employing a full-time talk format. Cappella, Turow and Jamieson (1996, p. 5) estimate that the number of radio stations offering talk radio programs grew from less than 500 in the late 1980s to more than 1,000 in the mid-1990s. A nationwide survey conducted by the Times Mirror Center for The People and The Press (1993) found that nearly half of all adults tuned in to talk radio relatively frequently, and one in six listened regularly.

"There is little question concerning the tone of political talk radio: it is decidedly negative toward most institutions" (Pfau et al., 1998:732). Political Talk Radio offered yet another arena for attacks on the mainstream media. Cappella and Jamieson (1997, p. 212) argue that "talk radio can be seen as serving the public's need for different forms of

news". And indeed, content analysis data (Pfau et al., 1998) show that the content of PTR is significantly more negative in tone toward five democratic institutions than are print, traditional TV and nontraditional TV (TV magazines, and shows like Oprah Winfrey, David Letterman and The Tonight Show). In particular, PTR content was significantly more negative toward the *media*. Pfau et al. (1998:737-8) also reported survey results showing that talk radio listeners ranked significantly lower on confidence in the media, controlling for demographic and political variables. Similar results were reported by Cappella and Jamieson (1997), who found that media cynics tended to be PTR listeners.

Much of the content of political talk radio deals with problems related to the mainstream media. Perhaps the most notorious critic of the mainstream media on the radio is Rush Limbaugh. An analysis of transcripts of Limbaugh's programs from September and October 1996 (Park, 1997) shows that Rush referred to the media in each of the 47 shows analyzed. In many cases (more than 40 percent of references to the media), Limbaugh used the mainstream media to back up his own views – for example, quoting data from newspaper reports. However, many of his other references to the media (27 percent) were direct attacks, and an additional 31 percent were cases in which Limbaugh reframed the presentation of the mainstream press. The average number of direct attacks on the media per show was 1.11. In addition, there was an average of 1.23 cases of reframing of media stories per show.

The arguments Limbaugh raises against the media are many. He claims that they are biased and unfair in their treatment of candidates (e.g. that the New York Times is "one big campaign poster for Clinton", 4/10/96) and that they use different standards when reporting on Republicans and Democrats. He argues that journalists are "out of touch

with mainstream America" (9/17/96) and that some of the feminist reporters are "anti-male". Limbaugh smears reporters, attacks their credibility and personal reputations, and ridicules journalists' ethics. In addition, like the anti-media web sites, Limbaugh often argues with the facts presented in the mainstream press. On other occasions, he tries to reshape the presentation of media information to suit his ideological aims.

In sum, talk radio shows such as Limbaugh's are yet another easily accessible and very popular media outlet for anti-media and counter-media materials. The growth of PTR in recent year is thus potentially related to the dramatic increase in public media skepticism.

Summary.

This chapter dealt with trends in audience evaluations of the news media in recent years. Public opinion surveys overwhelmingly show that news audiences are becoming increasingly critical of the mainstream media. More and more people say that they do not trust the press, that the media are biased, and that journalists are unethical and self-motivated. In the past decade, mistrust of the press has reached huge proportions.

Two related processes that took place in recent years were mentioned. First, the functioning of the media has become a political issue, and politicians' assaults on the media are reported daily in the media. In addition, technological developments have created channels that host ample counter-media and anti-media information. Whereas in the past journalists were seen as respectable, one can now find information against the media both on the airwaves and over the Internet. The prestige that reporters once held has evaporated.

Most scholars have focused to date on the reasons for this drop in audience faith in the institutions of the news media, offering a variety of explanations for the decline in audience trust. However, the consequences of audience media skepticism have been largely ignored. This dissertation seeks to fill this void in communication research and to explore the *outcomes* of audience mistrust in the media. In other words, while others have asked, "*Why do people mistrust the media?*" this dissertation asks, "*So what if people mistrust the media?*"

A review of the literature about trust pointed out that it matters in various aspects of social life. In general, trust is associated with a higher likelihood of cooperation and mistrust with a lower likelihood of cooperation between the trustor and the trustee. In media contexts, cooperation could be stated in terms of influence. That is, journalists want to have an impact on audiences. They want them to believe that the social realities depicted by the media are true. If audiences trust the media, they will accept the media's social portrayals and will be influenced by the media. If, on the other hand, they are skeptical, they are likely to remain uninfluenced by their interaction with news. This hypothesis will be examined in the next section.

This chapter presented evidence about the drop in audience trust in the media. The next section examines the consequences of the drop in audience trust on the influence of the news media.

Table 4.1: Campaign discourse about the media, 1960-1996, by year.

Year	Total number of items	Number of items referring to "the media"	Number of items referring to "the press"	Number of items referring to journalists, reporters or the networks	Any reference ("media" or "the press" or "journalist" or "reporter" or "the networks")
1960	566	1 (0.00%)	22 (3.89%)	4 (0.00%)	25 (4.41%)
1964	202	0 (0.00%)	4 (1.98%)	3 (1.48%)	7 (3.46%)
1968	272	9 (3.30%)	24 (8.82%)	16 (5.88%)	43 (15.8%)
1972	205	3 (1.46%)	20 (9.77%)	11 (5.36%)	31 (15.12%)
1976	290	15 (5.17%)	4 (1.37%)	6 (2.06%)	20 (6.89%)
1980	299	9 (3.01%)	12 (4.01%)	4 (1.33%)	21 (7.02%)
1984	249	8 (3.21%)	11 (4.41%)	7 (2.81%)	21 (8.43%)
1988	208	3 (1.44%)	4 (1.92%)	4 (1.92%)	7 (3.36%)
1992	206	42 (20.38%)	27 (13.10%)	21 (10.19%)	70 (33.98%)
1996	286	33 (11.53%)	9 (3.14%)	19 (6.64%)	57 (19.93%)

Source: Annenberg / Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse.

Figure 4.1: GSS respondents having hardly any confidence in television (1973-1996)

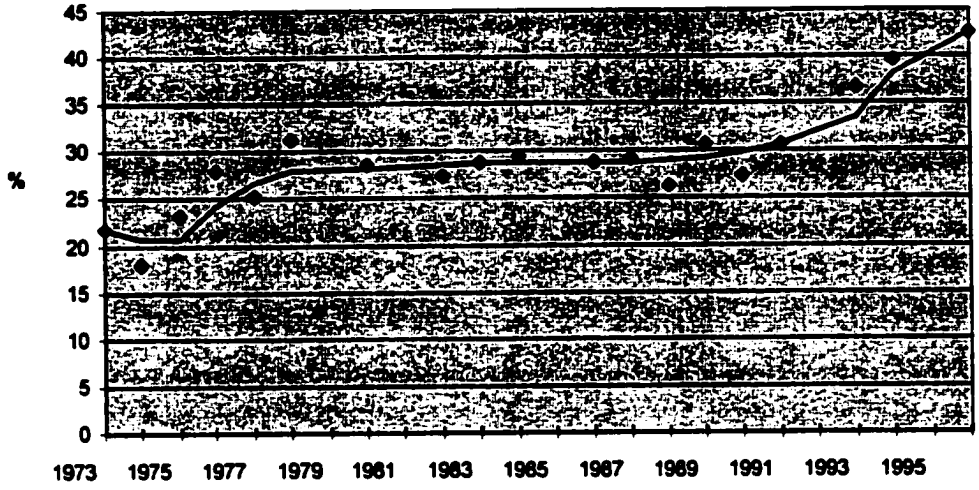


Figure 4.2: GSS respondents having hardly any confidence in the press (1973-1996)

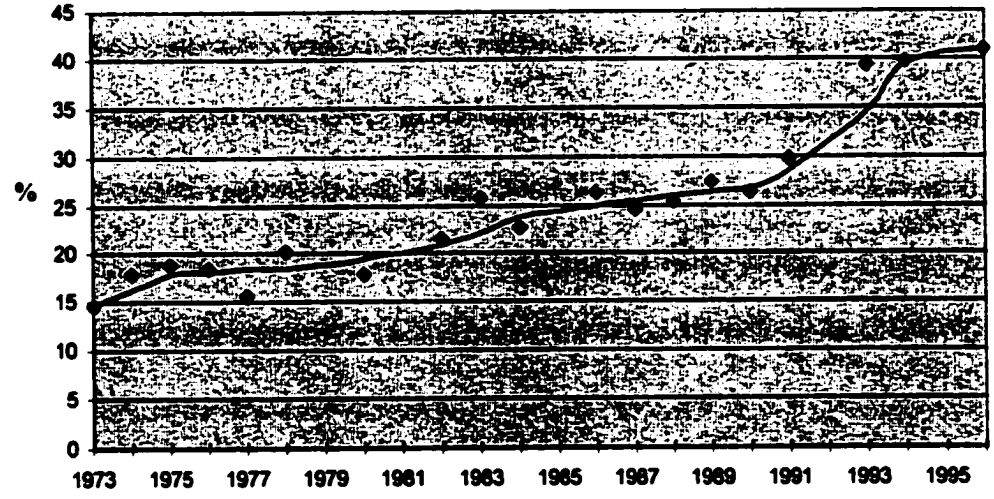
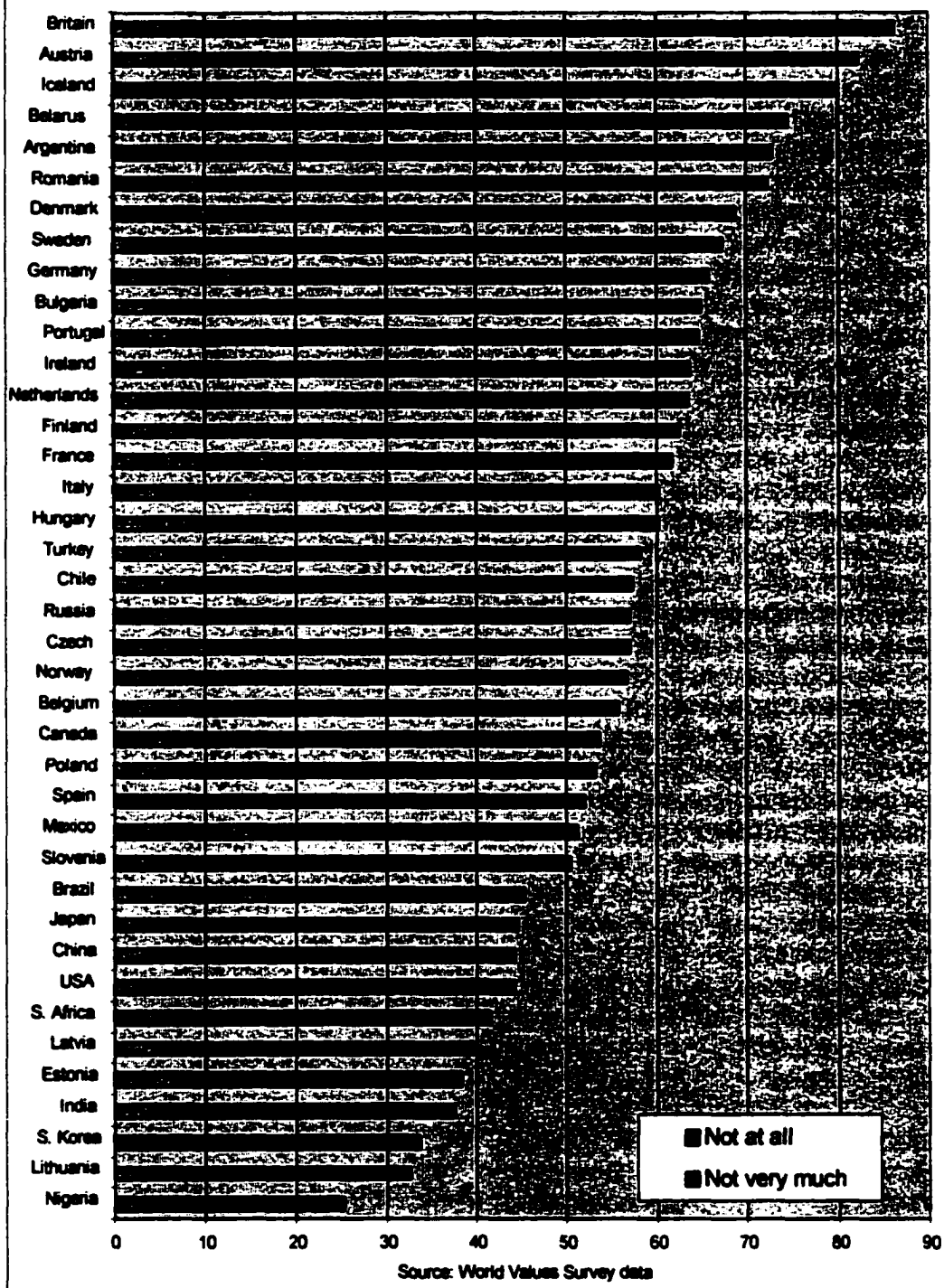


Figure 4.3: How much confidence do you have in the press
A cross-national comparison (percents, 1990-1991)



Source: World Values Survey data

Figure 4.4: GSS respondents having "hardly any" confidence in various social institutions (1973-1996, percents)

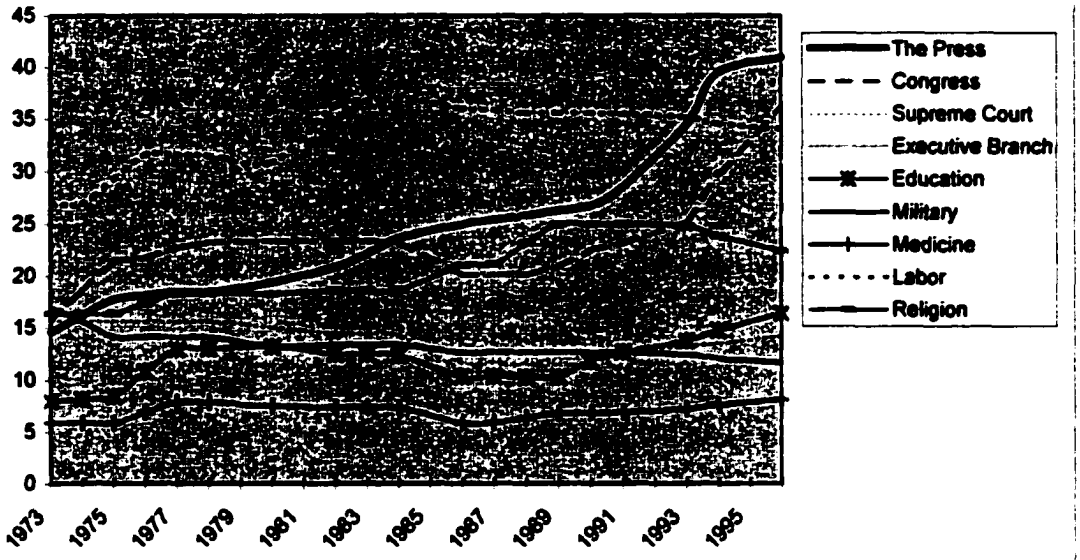
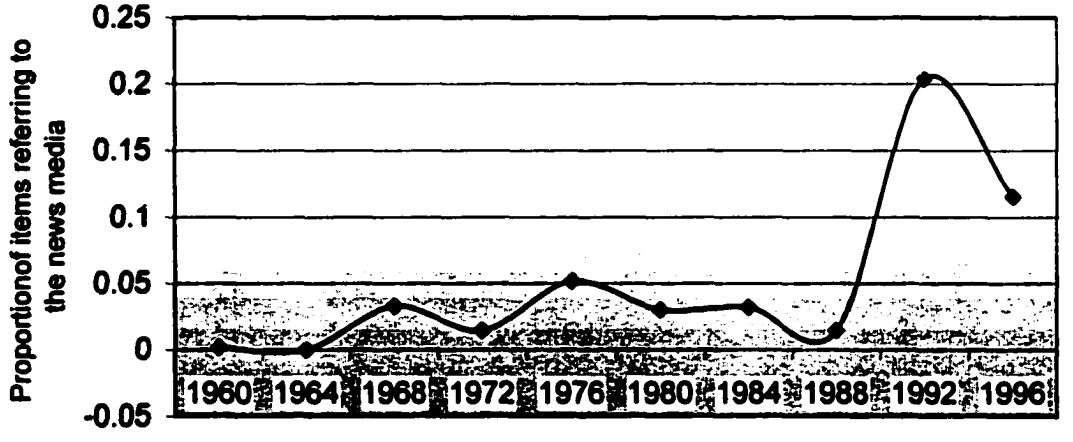


Figure 4.5: Candidate references to the news media, 1960-1996



Source: Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse

SECTION 2: MEDIA SKEPTICISM AND MEDIA EFFECTS.

Chapter 5: Resisting media effects – the theoretical rationale.

In Chapter 1, we defined trust as an interaction over time, between two parties with interests, in an uncertain situation. Trust is the expectation on the side of the trustor that the interaction with the trustee will lead to gains rather than losses. We have also seen that the concept of trust can be applied in the context of audience-media relations. Two sides – audiences (the trustors) and media institutions (the trustees) – interact over long periods of time. Given that news deals with the non-immediate environment, there is hardly ever an empirical way for the audience to confirm the validity of media reports using non-media sources. It is even harder for audiences to verify the fairness of media interpretations of reality, or the intentions or character of journalists. This uncertainty is what makes trust relevant for audiences' relations with the news media.

In audience-media relations, trust implies that audiences expect the media to live by the standards of their profession (Liebes, 2001). Aware of the uncertainty built into the interaction, media institutions, for their part, strive to cultivate the perception that they are trustworthy and credible, i.e., that they sell "real news". To this end they use various means, from the journalistic requirement that every news story be verified, to the selection of credible-looking people with credible-sounding voices to serve as anchorpersons. In sum, we found in Chapter 1 that trust was relevant for audience-media relations.

Research about trust in various fields has shown that mistrust has consequences. In general, the outcome of mistrust involves a reduced tendency to cooperate, and the outcome of trust involves successful cooperation. In Chapter 1, I argued that one way to translate "cooperation" into the domain of news media studies is in terms of influence. The trustors, journalists, want to persuade audiences that the stories they tell are accurate reflections of the non-immediate environment: that they sell "real news". When people trust the media they are more likely to accept the media's portrayals of the world despite the uncertainty in the situation, and despite the risk and potential costs of journalistic deception. In short, they are more likely to be influenced by the media. On the other hand, when people are skeptical of the news media they are more likely to reject their portrayals of the world, and hence more likely to remain unaffected by the media.

This section of the dissertation deals with the influence of audience mistrust in the news media on media effects. In other words, the question asked in this section is, Do the media affect people who do not trust them? In the current chapter I introduce this topic. I begin with a brief review of the literature about news media effects. I then present my hypothesis about media skepticism and media effects, discuss its theoretical orientation, and outline the possible cognitive mechanisms behind it. The following chapters test specific hypotheses about the part played by skepticism in various theories of media effects. Chapter 6 deals with the role of media skepticism in agenda-setting. Chapter 7 deals with the role of skepticism in spiral-of-silence. Chapter 8 deals with the role of skepticism in cultivation, and Chapter 9 deals with its role in priming. The findings are synthesized in Chapter 10, which concludes this section.

Powerful media or powerful audience? A synopsis of the literature on media effects. Media effects refer to cognitive, affective or behavioral changes that result from exposure to mass media (Caspi, 1995). These changes can be intended or unintended on the part of the sources of communication. They can be conscious or unconscious on the part of the audience. Changes resulting from exposure to mass media can occur at the individual or the societal level, in the long or the short run. Media effects can take the form of attitude formation, conversion or reinforcement. In sum, any definition of media effects refers to changes that happen as a result of exposure to mass communication. In the context of news, cognitive effects on individual audience members have been emphasized. Scholars have focused on constructs such as attitudes, opinions and perceptions when studying news media effects.

Over the years, research on media effects has oscillated between perceptions of powerful media and powerful audiences (Livingstone, 1997; Katz, 1980, 1987; Weimann, 2000). Since the 1970s, various communication research traditions have returned to the conception of powerful effects (Noelle-Neumann, 1973). Agenda-setting research (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) conceptualizes the media as having control over what people think about. Priming research (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) claims that the agenda of the media influences the criteria people use when making political judgments. Accounts of "framing effects" see the media as influencing *the way* in which people think about political issues. Cultivation scholars (e.g. Gerbner & Gross, 1976) argue that long hours of exposure to the media's distorted images have an effect on audiences' perceptions of social reality. In spiral-of-silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1984) the media's impact

stems from their influence on the perceived climate of opinion. According to this theory, the media silence audiences that are afraid of social sanctions by telling them what others think.

All of these theories share the perception that the media are powerful. Unlike the early conception of a "stimulus-response" linear model of media effects, these relatively recent research traditions all claim that the influence of the media is sophisticated rather than straightforward. Agenda-setting, priming, framing, cultivation and spiral-of-silence theories all propose media effects that appear small at first glance, but are actually influential. The scholarly narrative describing media effects (e.g. Weimann, 2000, Chapter 2), as reflected in these theories, is that the effects of the media are neither direct, uniform, nor immediate. The media cannot brainwash audiences or inject their persuasive message into audiences' heads. Nonetheless, according to these theories, the media subtly influence audience perceptions of social realities and problems. These are not trivial or minimal effects, according to these theories, since they have significant social consequences. However, when emphasizing the power of the media to exert influence over audiences, these theories disregard, at least to some extent, the active role played by the audience in the process of communication.

The notion of the "active audience" has been a part of media research for decades. In diffusion research (e.g. Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), the activity of the audience is manifested through interpersonal communication, namely, by the fact that people talk with other people about media contents. In gratifications research (e.g. Katz et al., 1974), audience activity is seen in people's selection of media content that corresponds to their social and psychological needs. Claims about "selective perception" of the media (e.g.

Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974) also portray an active audience; this time the activity is conceptualized by some kind of psychological filter or defense mechanism. Reception theory (e.g. Morley, 1980; Livingstone, 1998) demonstrates that people confront media content with their everyday life experiences, and that media consumption is influenced by its context. According to reception theorists, audiences have the ability to "resist" media content and to interpret it in an "oppositional" manner. In short, media research has shown that rather than being passive recipients of some magic bullet or hypodermic-needle-like media, audiences are critical and active agents who play a significant role in the mass communication process.

The review of survey data regarding media skepticism demonstrates that audiences are not only "active": they also hold negative beliefs about both news media and journalists. Many do not believe all they read in the newspaper or watch on TV. A great part of the audience thinks that journalists are biased and self-motivated. If people do not trust the news media, why should they be influenced by them? In a nutshell, my first main research hypothesis posits that they should not. It expects skeptical audiences to be less influenced and non-skeptical audiences to be more influenced by the media.

Hypothesizing that media effects are moderated by audience trust in the media may seem intuitive, even trivial. After all, why should people be influenced by the media when they don't trust them? Nevertheless, the moderating role of mistrust in media effects has rarely been tested in practice[33].

The idea that people are more influenced by what they consider credible is certainly not a new one. The intellectual forefather of my hypotheses is, of course, the source

[33] Wanta & Hu (1994) and Miller & Krosnick (2000) are examples of such rare studies.

credibility tradition in social psychological studies of persuasion, initiated by Hovland in Yale (see Sternthal et al., 1978, for a review). In one of Hovland's classic studies (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), subjects were exposed to exactly the same content delivered by "credible" and "untrustworthy" sources (Robert Oppenheimer vs. *Pravda*, *New England Journal of Biology and Medicine* vs. "A mass circulation pictorial magazine", etc.). Hovland and Weiss found that "changes in opinion are significantly related to the trustworthiness of the source used in the communication" (p. 647), and concluded that source credibility induced what they called "effective communication".

The family of "consistency" theories that were very popular in the field of psychology in the 1950s laid the theoretical foundations for the "source credibility" literature. These theories include the "cognitive dissonance" literature (Festinger, 1957), "congruity theory" (Osgod & Tannenbaum, 1955) and "balance theory" (Heider, 1946). Each of these theories stresses that humans strive for cognitive consistency and balance (Zajonc, 1960). Figure 5.1 presents the source credibility hypothesis as a simple consistency triangle. A natural affinity between a source and a message was assumed, thus a positive "sign"[34] between a message and a source was considered a given. Hence, a positive correlation was expected between attitudes toward the source and attitudes toward the message. In Figure 5.1, if there is a positive "sign" between the individual and the source, there should also be a positive "sign" between the individual and the message. If the "sign" linking the individual and the source is negative, then the "sign" linking the individual and the message should also be negative. These are the only possible sign combinations that do not violate consistency and create imbalance. In the source

[34] The signs in Figure 5.1 represent the direction of attitudes. Positive signs represent a positive attitude and negative signs represent negative attitudes.

credibility framework, the "sign" representing the association between the individual and the message represents the persuasive power of the message.

In other words, these theories postulated that people strive to be consistent. When they do not trust the source, they do not accept the message. Accordingly, the overwhelming finding of the source credibility literature is that perceived source credibility moderates the persuasion process (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland, Kelly & Janis, 1953; Sternthal, Phillips & Dholakia, 1978). A meta-analysis (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993) located over 250 "source credibility" studies, and found that the general finding in this literature has been that enhanced credibility leads to greater attitude change. Though they do not report an average effect size, Wilson and Sherrell claim that additional 6,697 non-significant effects are required before their 372 significant findings could be attributed to chance.

My hypothesis about media skepticism and media effects is analogous to the source credibility literature in linking trustworthiness with influence. However, importing the ideas of the "source credibility" tradition into the study of news effects requires some adjustments and clarifications (see Table 5.1). First, source credibility studies refer only to persuasion effects. Contemporary research on media effects does not expect straightforward persuasion effects to occur unless the media violate their standards of balancing one-sided messages (Zaller, 1996). News is not intended to persuade, and there does not seem to be much evidence indicating that news persuades in practice (McGuire, 1986). Thus, the theories I deal with do not argue that news persuades people in a straightforward manner. Nonetheless, according to these theories – agenda-setting, spiral-of-silence, priming and cultivation – the media subtly influence audience perceptions of

social realities and problems. Hence, while source credibility studies related to persuasive situations, this section deals with other, more delicate influences.

Most source credibility studies utilized experimental designs rather than surveys. My hypotheses will be tested with survey data analysis. Most source credibility scholars used simplistic operational definitions of credibility and persuasion. They manipulated credibility using various cues, and did not measure audience perceptions (some of the early experiments did not even check their manipulations). Unlike them, I do not conceptualize credibility as a unidimensional and static attribute of a source, but rather as a relatively stable set of beliefs of individual audience members about a family of media sources.

Postulates and assumptions.

In order to hypothesize about media skepticism and media effects, I have to make three assumptions – two about the audience and the third about the news media:

1. People have relatively stable attitudes toward the news media.
2. People want to be as correctly informed about the world as possible, given limited energy and cognitive resources.
3. The content of the news media is a stream of messages that portray the world beyond the audience's immediate environment.

My first assumption relates to the literature on people's attitudes about the media. I am simply assuming that audiences have opinionss about the media. People either trust the news media, mistrust them, or are somewhere in the middle. Note that I am assuming that people have attitudes about the news media in general, not just about specific

channels, programs or journalists. In addition, like any other opinion, there is some stability assumed here. Today's attitude about the media is assumed to be similar to yesterday's attitude. Tomorrow's attitudes about the media will be essentially the same as today's. Some degree of change is inevitable, of course, but overall attitudes toward the media are relatively stable (as demonstrated empirically in Chapter 2).

The second assumption states that when investing energy in scanning the political world, people strive for correct information. This assumption relates to many of the assumptions proposed by rational choice scholars. Some of the earlier rational choice models even assumed that people are fully and correctly politically informed, while later approaches (like the bounded-rationality approach, see Calvert, 1985) realized that actors do not and cannot obtain complete information. My second assumption does not negate the bounded rationality approach. It does not suggest that people are fully informed. It simply states that people *want* to be informed, and that they strive for *accurate* (as opposed to full and complete) information about the world. Neither am I suggesting that people spend unlimited resources on collecting correct information. Rather, I postulate that *when people collect information*, they want it to be as accurate as possible.

In short, Assumption 2 takes into account rational choice's notion of utility maximization. People aren't able to collect and process complete information. They want to make reasoned decisions while spending the minimum amount of resources possible (Carmines & Kuklinski, 1991; Sniderman, Brody & Tetlock, 1991). Thus, when they do gather information, they want to maximize its accuracy. As Lupia and McCubbins (1998:20) state, "information is valuable only when it improves the accuracy of predictions about the consequences of choices". Correct information maximizes the

accuracy of political decisions. Thus, people strive to get a correct representation of the world, given the limited resources they are willing to spend on collecting information.

The third assumption is also straightforward. Like others, I postulate that most news content is composed of a stream of information about the world beyond the immediate environments of individual audience members. Journalists claim that news aims at portraying what is going on in the world, and almost all audience members would agree that that is what the news is supposed to do. The news media contain a lot of political information about society. They present the collective conditions to individual audience members. Whenever news stories describe specific events (say, a criminal incident, or a road accident), these events are presumed to be relevant to general collective processes.

Thus, I am assuming that news messages consist of bits of information about the world beyond the audience's direct experience. Note, however, that I am not assuming anything about the *accuracy* of the messages. News institutions are expected, both by their members and by their audiences, to describe society, and they constantly try to meet these expectations by providing messages that portray society.

I also postulate that contemporary mainstream news messages are not "persuasive messages". That is, they are not created with the overt intention of political persuasion in favor of one political side or another. This postulate reflects current journalistic norms and practices. For instance, the journalistic norms of fairness and balance require that journalists present all sides of a story. As Zaller (1996) notes, news messages are not a univocal voice, but rather, a stream of crosscutting and competing messages. The implication is that simple effects of opinion change, e.g., in favor of one candidate or another, are very rarely expected. In sum, I assume that news messages aim at providing

a portrayal of the political world, and that they actually do so (with some undetermined and irrelevant degree of accuracy). They do not aim at simple political persuasion. Their sole persuasive aim is to enhance the credibility of their reports.

The four media effects I investigate in the following chapters in fact share my second assumption about the content of the news media (see Mutz, 1998). Agenda-setting and priming research assumes that the media tell us what the most important problems of society are. Spiral-of-silence theory assumes that the media convey information about what other people think. Cultivation theory assumes that the media provide a stream of messages about the world outside. These theories are thus united in the perception that the media tell stories and convey information about the world. Two of these theories assume in addition some degree of distortion in these media messages. Spiral-of-silence assumes that the mediated climate of opinion often distorts the social climate of opinion. Cultivation theory argues that the mediated reality is different from real-world reality.

Thus far I have said three things: people have attitudes toward the media, people want to be correctly informed about the world, and the media portray the world. The rest of the explanation for my hypothesis could be viewed as an extension of Figure 5.1: when people's attitudes about the media are negative, accepting the media's picture of the world would create an imbalance. Hence, people can either reject the media's portrayals of the world or change their attitudes toward the media. Since these attitudes are expected to be relatively stable, rejection of the media's messages will be the more frequent outcome. Given that people strive for accurate information, they will not accept portrayals of the world from untrusted sources. Hence, my main hypothesis for this section posits that media skepticism will moderate media effects. This hypothesis can be

viewed as an extension of the source credibility hypothesis. In this case, however, the sources are the news media, and instead of persuasive messages, the issue is the media's portrayal of the world. The media want us to accept their portrayals of the world. When we do not trust the media we do not accept these portrayals.

In sum, the cognitive mechanism behind the hypothesized moderating role of audience mistrust in media effects could be that of cognitive consistency, the very same one used by the source credibility scholars to explain their findings. Yet this is not the only possible explanation for the hypothesized moderation of media effects. In recent years scholars are increasingly explaining media effects in terms of "activation" of cognitive constructs in memory (sometimes called "nodes") in response to media messages (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Shrum, forthcoming). The media make certain information salient and depress the importance of other information, causing certain cognitive constructs to be more or less accessible. If this is the process behind media effects such as agenda-setting and cultivation, then trust in the sources might intervene in the process by enhancing the accessibility of certain constructs in people's memories.

It could thus be that trust in the media has an effect on the media's ability to enhance the cognitive accessibility of constructs discussed in the media. We know from the accessibility literature that accessibility is influenced by prior attitudes: behaviors congruent with prior attitudes are more easily accessible in people's memories (McFarland & Fletcher, 1981). So it could be that trust, as an attitude, enhances the accessibility of the constructs discussed by a message source (Olson & Cal, 1984). In

other words, another possible explanation for my hypothesis is that audience trust in the media moderates media effects by influencing the cognitive accessibility of constructs.

Summary.

There are a few sound reasons for predicting that skepticism will moderate media effects. First, the definition of trust, as well as the extensive research on trust in diverse fields, imply that mistrust leads to reduced cooperation and to a reduced influence of the mis-trustee on the mis-trustor. Second, the source credibility tradition has demonstrated that perceived untrustworthiness leads to reduced influence in the case of persuasion. Third, the cognitive mechanisms of consistency or accessibility provide possible explanations of the process behind the role of trust in media effects.

The following chapters examine the moderating role of skepticism in agenda-setting, spiral-of-silence, cultivation and priming. Hypotheses 1.1 through 1.4 are summarized in Table 5.2. These hypotheses will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters. I hypothesize that skepticism toward the media will moderate media effects. When audiences are skeptical (or cynical) about the news media, the media lose much of their power. When people do not trust their news sources, they are unlikely to passively adopt their agendas. When they are skeptical of journalists, they are not likely to accept their presentation of the distribution of opinion in society. When people mistrust the institutions of news, they are not expected to be cultivated by news-mediated realities. When they mistrust the press, they do not accept their standards when they make political decisions. In short, I hypothesize that skeptical audiences have the ability to resist the media's influence. These hypotheses will be examined in the next chapters.

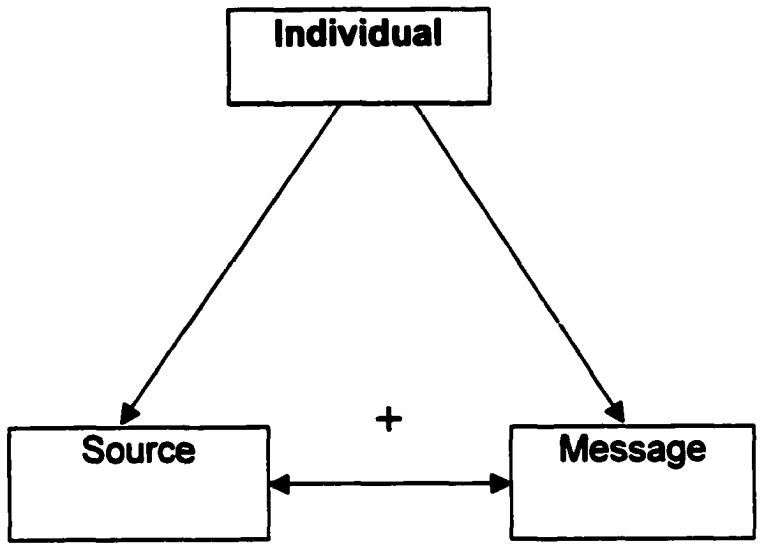
Table 5.1: Source credibility studies and the proposed research.

	The "source credibility" tradition	The current research
Focus	Persuasion	Agenda-setting Cultivation Spiral-of-silence Priming
Methodology	Experimental	Survey data analysis (longitudinal and cross-sectional)
Source	Any source	News media sources
Operational definition of credibility	Experimental manipulation – credibility cues (presenting the source to the subjects as "credible" or "not-credible")	Survey items tapping attitudes toward the news media (in particular, trust in the media)

Table 5.2: A summary of the hypotheses regarding skepticism and media effects.

		Hypothesis
H1.1		Agenda-setting will be stronger for relatively trustful audiences. Audiences that are skeptical about the media will be relatively uninfluenced by their agenda.
	H1.1a	The positive association between aggregate public agenda and media agenda will be stronger for non-skeptical audiences than for skeptics.
	H1.1b	Media skepticism will interact with exposure in its effect on personal agenda. The positive association between exposure to the media and acceptance of their agenda will be stronger for non-skeptics than for skeptics.
H1.2		Positive attitudes toward the media will be associated with the perception of a climate of opinion similar to the one presented in the media. Those skeptical toward the media will be more likely to reject the media's climate of opinion than non-skeptical respondents.
H1.3		Skepticism toward the media will moderate the cultivation process.
	H1.3a	Media-skepticism will interact with television exposure in its effect on social mistrust perceptions. The effect of TV viewing on social mistrust will be weaker for those skeptical towards television than for those not skeptical toward television.
	H1.3b	The effect of TV viewing on perceptions of women as having more limited capacities than men will be weaker for those skeptical toward television than for those not skeptical toward television.
	H1.3c	The effect of TV viewing on political "moderateness" will be weaker for those skeptical toward television than for those not skeptical toward television.
	H1.3d	There will be a three-way interaction between television viewing, media skepticism and demographic factors in their effect on the outcome measure. Whereas non-skeptical viewers are expected to be "mainstreamed", skeptical and heavy television viewers are expected to remain unaffected by TV's mainstream.
H1.4		Media skepticism will moderate priming effects.
	H1.4a	The priming effect will be weaker for media skeptics than for non-skeptics (an exposure*issue performance* media skepticism interaction).
	H1.4b	There will be a four-way knowledge*skepticism*exposure*issue-performance interaction such that the priming effect will be stronger for knowledgeable and trusting audiences, compared to all other groups.

Figure 5.1: The consistency explanation to the source credibility hypothesis



Chapter 6: Media skepticism and agenda setting.

"Rather than focusing on positive or negative attitudes toward an issue, as most public opinion research does, agenda setting scholars focus on the salience of an issue" (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, 8). Agenda setting research asserts that "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*" (Cohen, 1963:13). As Dearing and Rogers (1996:8-16) argue, agenda setting has acquired the status of a "paradigm". In recent years, some 25 annual scholarly publications on the topic turn up in communication research. There are many excellent reviews of agenda setting studies available (e.g., Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs, 1981; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Rogers & Dearing, 1988). For this reason, the present review will be relatively brief.

The basic "media agenda → public agenda" hypothesis has not changed much since it was formulated and examined by McCombs & Shaw (1972) in their landmark Chapel Hill study.

> McCombs and Shaw analyzed local and national media coverage of the 1968 election, quantifying the relative attention given to such issues as public welfare, civil rights, and the war in Vietnam. They also measured the relative attention given to these issues in aggregate from a small sample of local voters. They found significant rank order correlations between the media coverage and the public ordering of issues and concluded that this provided evidence of media agenda setting. (Neuman, 1990:160-1)

Dearing & Rogers (1996:40) call this method "the hierarchy approach". They cite many other studies that investigate the isomorphism between the hierarchy of the main issues on the media agenda and public agenda at a certain point in time.

But the strategies used by scholars to examine this hypothesis have varied and diversified since the seminal McCombs and Shaw paper. Some have used longitudinal designs that focused on two or three issues and documented the rise and fall of these issues in terms of media and public salience over time. Some of these studies (Trumbo, 1995; Zhu, 1992) demonstrated that the time order is indeed from media agenda to public agenda and not the other way around. Others used experimental designs, manipulating the media agenda and measuring its effect on laboratory subjects (e.g. Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). These experiments have found similar associations and led to similar conclusions. Still others have used the case study approach, focusing on a single issue and showing that when the issue received media attention, it also received the attention of the public.

Dearing and Rogers conclude their review of agenda setting by stressing that the theory has received much empirical support:

> Of the 112 empirical studies of the agenda setting process we reviewed, 60% support a media agenda-public agenda relationship. Most of these studies were cross-sectional. Subsequent longitudinal investigations continue to support this generalization...When the media give heavy news coverage to an issue, the public usually responds by according the issue a higher salience on the public agenda. This relationship of the media agenda to the public agenda seems to hold under a variety of conditions, for a diversity of issues, and when explored with diverse research methods. (p. 92)

Although most scholars concur that the media agenda is related to the public agenda, there are disagreements about the nature of the association. While McCombs and Shaw's original model offered a linear association (between media salience and public salience),

later scholars have suggested that the association might be non-linear (see Brosius & Kepplinger, 1992; Zhu et al., 1993). For example, Neumann (1990) used the logistic curve to model how the public responds to media coverage. According to this model, public reaction to the media is low when media coverage is low. It rises rapidly once the coverage accumulates to a certain takeoff threshold, and eventually levels off after reaching saturation point. Another non-linear agenda setting model was proposed by Watt et al. (1993). They suggested a model using an exponentially declining curve to explain agenda setting, based on cognitive theories about memory. As time from media coverage passes, people gradually forget about prior issues. Their issue-priority judgments change accordingly.

In sum, agenda setting research asserts that the media have a strong effect on the salience assigned to issues by individuals. But why should people adopt the agenda of the media when they don't trust the media? If audiences are active and critical, they may resist the agenda offered by the media. Indeed, Rogers and Dearing (1988:569) suggested that perceived media credibility should moderate the agenda setting process: "A particular individual may regard the media in general, or the particular medium to which the individual is exposed, as low in credibility...The individual is informed about the news item by the media, but is not convinced that the item is important".

But although Rogers and Dearing suggested perceived credibility as a possible moderator in agenda setting effects, not much empirical agenda setting research has been conducted utilizing or controlling for trust in the media. Only a handful of studies have so far tested for the moderating role of media skepticism (or similar constructs) in agenda setting, and the results are inconclusive. One study found that agenda setting was not

moderated by perceived credibility (Miller & Wante, 1996). Another found the moderating effect of trust to be statistically insignificant, though in the predicted direction (Wanta, 1997). However, in a series of agenda setting experiments, Iyengar and Kinder (1985) found that "viewers who regarded the networks as impartial and accurate sources of information were more influenced by the news than those with less faith in ABC, NBC, or CBS" (p. 135). In another study, this time using a correlational design, Wanta & Hu (1994) found that individuals who perceived the media as more credible were more susceptible to being influenced by the media in their personal agenda of issues in an Illinois election. Similarly, my hypothesis in this chapter proposes that agenda setting effects will be moderated by audience attitudes toward the media:

> H1.1: Agenda setting will be stronger for relatively trustful audiences. Audiences that are skeptical toward the media will be relatively uninfluenced by their agenda.

As noted earlier, the strategies available to examine the agenda setting hypothesis are many. First, it is possible to use the hierarchical aggregate approach and look for a correlation between the aggregate media agenda and the public agenda at a specific point in time. If H1.1 is correct, then such an association will occur for trustful audiences but not for skeptical audiences. Therefore,

> H1.1a: The positive association between aggregate public agenda and media agenda will be stronger for non-skeptical audiences than for skeptical ones.

In addition, some agenda setting research suggests that the degree of exposure is positively related to the degree to which individuals accept the media agenda as their

personal agenda of issues (Weaver, McCombs & Spellman, 1975; Einsiedel, Salmone & Schneider, 1984; Wanta & Hu, 1994). But since we expect media skepticism to moderate media effects, it is possible to predict that this association will not hold for skeptical audiences. Therefore,

> H1.1b: Media skepticism will interact with exposure in their effect on personal agenda. The positive association between exposure to the media and acceptance of their agenda will be stronger for non-skeptics than for skeptics.

In sum, my first set of hypotheses seeks to find out whether media skepticism interferes with the agenda setting process.

Intervening and conditional variables. The dependent variable in agenda setting research – public perceptions of the important problems facing the nation – can be influenced by factors other than the media agenda. These factors should thus be taken into account in the statistical models.

First, there is the role of **personal experience with the issues**. "An individual's close familiarity with an issue, such as being unemployed or losing a close friend to cancer, is a way in which a person's personal experience with an issue overrides the influence of the media in determining what's important to that person" (Dearing & Rogers, 1996:52). And indeed, research shows that the less direct experience people have with the issues, the greater the agenda-setting influence of the media. However, personal experience with an issue could also *enhance* the media's influence on the individual's agenda. This is because personal experience can sensitize an individual to mass media information about the issue. For example, someone who was affected by an automobile

accident might come to see this issue as "the most important problem facing our country" because he or she learns from the media that many other people have also been affected by road accidents. In sum, issue relevance and issue experience are factors that should be taken into account in our models.

Second, as Dearing & Rogers (1996:51) note, "the most widely studied intervening variable in agenda setting research is the amount of **interpersonal discussion** about an issue in the news". One can think a given issue is important, not because of the media, but because he or she has discussed the issue with other people. Social interaction has been found to be an important factor influencing issue priority, together with media coverage (Zhu et al., 1993). Since political conversation is correlated with media skepticism (see Chapter 3), I must control for political discussion in the agenda setting models in order to avoid false associations (e.g. political conversation rather than media skepticism is causing resistance to media agendas). In other words, to vigorously test H1 I need to make sure that my agenda setting models control for interpersonal political discussion.

Study 1: the PTR data.

All Wave 1 PTR respondents were asked for their most important problem (MIP). The question wording was, "In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing the country today?" Responses were coded into one of 40 categories developed by Princeton

Survey Associates. Only the first problem mentioned by respondents was included in the analysis[35].

Print media content analysis. The content analysis data used in this study was collected by the PTR research team in 1996[36]. A team of five Annenberg graduate students developed a detailed coding scheme (32 categories with a total of 152 sub-categories) for the media agenda in February 1996. They then used this coding scheme and coded for issues covered on the front pages of the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal[37] and Washington Times in the period between February 5 and February 23, 1996. A time lag of three weeks between this tracking of media agenda and the measurement of the public agenda in Wave 1 was allowed. The unit of analysis was the news story, and each story could fall into a single category only. Inter-coder reliability for this content analysis was Krippendorff's alpha of .80 for the 32-category scheme and .79 for the detailed category scheme.

Television network content analysis. The same 32-issue categorization was applied for the network TV evening news agenda for the same time interval. Instead of applying the coding scheme to the news contents directly, it was applied on the Tyndall Reports, which are weekly reports that monitor the nightly newscasts of the three broadcast networks (ABC, CBS and NBC). The statistics measure the amount of time (in

[35] Respondents were not probed for additional problems. However, interviewers were instructed to record additional problems when respondents mentioned any. Only a fraction of respondents mentioned more than one problem. Taking these additional problems into account in the analysis would have caused an asymmetry among respondents, hence they were ignored.

[36] I am grateful to GangHeong Lee and Brian Southwell for helping me figure out exactly what was done almost five years ago.

[37] Wall Street Journal items were assigned a weight of .50 in the final calculation of the media agenda. This is due to the larger number of stories on its front page, and because of the heavier emphasis assigned to economic and business-related issues in this newspaper.

minutes) devoted to each issue. Three Annenberg graduate students content analyzed these reports and coded each story into one of the issue categories. There was a positive correlation between TV and print agendas ($r=.43$, $p<.10$) providing some validation for both independent content analyses endeavors (print and TV).

"Hierarchical" agenda setting. Results from the content analyses and from the public opinion survey are presented in Table 6.1. Overall, these data reproduce McCombs and Shaw's finding of a rank order correlation between public agenda and media agenda. The aggregate public agenda was significantly correlated with the print [Spearman's rho=.58 ($p<.05$)] and network evening news agendas [Spearman's rho=.52 ($p<.05$)]. A combined rank order for the media agenda was also highly correlated with the public agenda [Spearman's rho=.71 ($p<.01$)]. In other words, the PTR data replicates the classic "hierarchical" agenda setting finding. The higher a given issue ranks on media attention, the higher it ranks on the public agenda. In February 1996, economic issues dominated the agenda of the media. Three weeks later, economic issues dominated the agendas of the audience. By contrast, gender-related issues and issues related to the elderly received almost no media attention in February 1996. They also were not considered to be important problems by the audience, as Table 6.1 shows.

Does audience trust in the media moderate the agenda setting effect of the media? Hypothesis H1.1a predicts a stronger hierarchical agenda setting effect for non-skeptics than for media-skeptics. This hypothesis is examined in Table 6.2. The table presents the rank order correlations between media and public agendas by media skepticism. No matter how you measure media agenda (number of stories in the print media, minutes of TV network news, or a combined measure of both), the rank order correlation is higher

for the non-skeptics than for the skeptics, as hypothesis H1.1a predicted. For example, the correlation between total media agenda and public agenda was .70 for audiences who trusted the media, and only .58 for media skeptics.

To test for the statistical significance of the difference between the rank order correlations of media skeptics and non-skeptics, both correlations were transformed into Fisher's Z scores[38]. The difference between the two transformed scores was taken, and a confidence interval was built around the difference. If zero is not included in the confidence interval (as is the case in all three cases if one uses an α of .05), then the null hypothesis may be rejected (i.e., the difference between the correlations is significantly different from zero). In other words, the difference between the agenda setting correlations of skeptics and non-skeptics is statistically significant. To the extent that we interpret these correlations as evidence for an agenda setting effect of the media on audiences (and for numerous reasons this interpretation is not an obvious one), we can conclude that this presumed effect is stronger for non-skeptics than for media-skeptics. Those who said that "the media help society" were closer to the media's agenda in their rank ordering of issues than those who argued that "the media get in the way of society solving its problems".

However, the significant difference between the correlations of media and public agendas of skeptics and non-skeptics could be, at least potentially, caused by factors other than media skepticism. The immediate suspect, of course, is political ideology. How can we be certain that the difference in agenda setting between skeptics and non-

[38] As Zar (1972) argues, in large samples the distribution of Spearman's rho approximates that of Pearson's r. Hence, the same procedures for hypothesis testing (including the one I use here to test for the difference between two independent correlation coefficients) may be applied.

skeptics is not due to the fact that skeptics tend to be conservatives and non-skeptics to be liberal? This apprehension is further advanced by the actual differences in issue rank orders, which at times do mirror the ideological positions of conservative and liberal respondents. For example, media skeptics were more likely to mention dissatisfaction with politicians and morality ("conservative" issues, especially in the Clinton era) as the most important problems, while non-skeptics were more likely to mention environmental issues and health care ("liberal" issues). This suggests that at least part of the moderating role of media skepticism in agenda setting (demonstrated above) may be accounted for by ideological differences between skeptics and non-skeptics (see Chapter 2).

Thus, in order to substantiate the claim that media skepticism moderates agenda setting, one would need to introduce statistical controls into the data analysis. However, applying controls to the current design (e.g., by calculating and comparing the rank order correlations between public and media agendas for liberal, moderate and conservative skeptics and non-skeptics) would involve substantial reductions of the sample sizes used in the calculation of each of the correlations. But this would not allow us to accurately measure public ranks for some of the issues, which are based on relatively small Ns even without controls.

The classical hierarchical approach therefore has limited power to test for the hypothesized associations while controlling for intervening factors. An individual level design would be preferable in this respect. However, there is no agreed-on method to measure agenda setting susceptibility at the individual level (see Wanta, 1996:8-19). Many of the suggested individual-level agenda setting susceptibility or propensity measures that have been tried in the past require more data than I have at hand. For

example, they require respondents to rank the importance of an array of issues rather than identify one "most important problem" (see Wanta, 1996; McLeod et al., 1974).

Individual level modeling. One approach is simply to test whether media skepticism is associated with the likelihood of individuals giving the "media answer" to the MIP question. Fortunately, this could be done while controlling for possible intervening variables. This is the approach I take in Table 6.3. The table provides logistic regression results for models predicting individual-level mentioning of the top media issues as MIP using media skepticism as an independent variable, while controlling for a variety of potential intervening factors.

Model 1, for example, predicts mentioning the economy as the MIP. As noted above, economic issues dominated the media agenda at the time of study. More than 25 percent of the time dedicated to the 18 main issue categories on national network evening news programs was spent on economic issues. More than 17 percent of the print news stories on these main issues dealt with economic matters. Agenda setting predicts that the media increases the likelihood that people will mention economy, in this media context, as the MIP. Model 1 shows that, as predicted by some agenda setting scholars, media exposure was positively related to agreement with the media that economy was the MIP. The more one was exposed to news, the greater the odds that she or he thought, like the media, that economy was the MIP.

H1.1a predicted that agenda setting would be moderated by media skepticism. As Model 1 shows, media skepticism significantly reduces the likelihood of identifying the economy as the MIP. Even when controlling for ideology, political extremity, issue knowledge, demographics and political involvement, the odds of media skeptics saying

that economy was the MIP were only .78 times the odds of non-skeptics saying that economy was the MIP. Those who thought "the media get in the way of society" were less likely to agree with the media that the economy was the most important issue at the time of study. Those thinking that "the media help society solve its problems" were more likely to assign importance to economic issues, as media coverage did three weeks earlier.

However, other issues besides the economy also received a lot of media attention at the time of the study. How robust are the findings to the dichotomization of the MIP question? In other words, if other issues besides the economy received vast media attention, should the dependent variable ("agreement with media agenda" on the conceptual level) be defined using other issue combinations?

Models 2, 3 and 4 test for the sensitivity of Model 1 results (described above) to the coding of the dependent variables. Only issues that received high media attention were considered as possible candidates for assignment as "media issues". In Model 2, all people who said that the "economy" or "foreign policy" (the number-two issue on the media agenda) were the MIPs were coded "1", while all other respondents were coded "0". As in Model 1, media skepticism was negatively and significantly associated with the outcome measures. Those who trusted the media were more likely to say that economic or foreign policy issues (which together received the attention of 42 percent of print stories and 41 percent of TV minutes) were the most important issues facing the country.

If we add crime, the issue that was number two on the TV agenda, to the media MIP list, the results (presented in Model 4) almost precisely replicate those of Models 1 and 2.

Again the coefficient for media skepticism is negative and significant[39]. However, when the dependent variable is coded to include dissatisfaction with politicians (the number-two issue on the newspaper agenda and on the combined TV and newspaper agenda) instead of crime, the results change slightly. Media skepticism in this case (reported in model 3), is still negatively, but this time not significantly, associated with the dependent variable. The overall effect size, one can conclude, varies between -.08 and -.28, depending on the coding of the dependent variable. This corresponds to an odds ratio of between .75 and .91, always in favor of non-skeptics, whose odds of agreeing with media agenda are always higher. Thus, it seems we can conclude that even after controlling for the contribution of ideology, political involvement, issue knowledge, news exposure and demographics, media skepticism is associated with a lower likelihood of agreement with the media on the most important problems.

Another possible test for agenda setting, though not a highly recommended one, would be to give respondents "agenda setting" scores, based on the media rank of their MIPs. For example, those who said the economy was the MIP would receive the highest score, and those who cited gender-related issues and issues relating to the elderly would get the lowest scores. These scores would then be used as dependent variables in statistical models predicting how prominent "my issue" was on the media's agenda.

Models using this approach are presented in Table 6.4. The MIP question was recoded in three different ways, corresponding to Models 1, 2 and 3. First, respondents received as "agenda setting" scores the number of TV minutes that were devoted to their

[39] Note that other coefficients change substantially: most dramatically, a sign reversal takes place for the race and sex coefficients. This probably reflects the fact that females and non-whites are more concerned about crime, since their likelihood of being victimized is greater.

MIP at the time of the content analysis (this is the dependent variable in Model 1). In the second model, each respondent's "agenda setting score" was the number of stories devoted to subjects' MIP on the front pages of the four newspapers examined. In the third model the "agenda setting score" consisted of the general media rank order that the MIP reported by subjects received (the rank scores presented in Table 6.1). In other words, those selecting economy received an "agenda setting score" of 18, and those selecting gender-related or elderly-related issues received a score of 1.5.

As the table shows, the agenda setting score was not related to media skepticism. In other words, mentioning issues that received more media attention was not significantly related to mistrust in the media. Nor was it significantly associated with media exposure. However, the coefficients were in the predicted direction (negative for media skepticism, implying that mistrust is associated with lower agenda setting scores; positive for media exposure, implying that exposure is associated with acceptance of media agenda). Agenda setting, according to this formulation, is associated positively with education and negatively with involvement. That is, higher education and lower levels of political involvement were associated with mentioning topics that received media attention.

However, as McCombs et al. (1995) noted, agenda setting effects have rarely been found when assigning media ranks to individuals. This is because it would be too strict to expect that individuals perfectly mirror the ranking of issues covered in the media. In any case, if we use this strict formulation we find that skeptics do not differ significantly from non-skeptics on their average issue ranking score. That is, their MIPs do not receive, on average, more TV time or newspaper stories, than the MIPs mentioned by non-skeptics.

Exposure*skepticism interaction. Does media skepticism interact with media exposure in their effect on audience personal agendas? H1.1b predicts that it does, so there would be a stronger positive effect of exposure on mentioning the media's MIP for non-skeptics than for media skeptics. The rationale behind this hypothesis is the same one that guides my other hypotheses. Assuming that agenda setting is a function of the amount of media exposure (this is not a necessary assumption, and research on this topic produced mixed results), this hypothesis predicts that this effect will be stronger for people who trust the media than for media skeptics.

Hypothesis 1.1b is examined in Table 6.5. As the table shows, the skepticism * exposure interaction is indeed statistically significant in three out of the four models. In other words, media skepticism does intervene in the association between exposure and perception of the MIP. The interpretation of the interaction is presented in Figure 6.1 (the other models produce similar patterns, as is evident from the similar signs and magnitudes of the coefficients). The Y-axis in this figure represents the predicted probability of agreement with the media on the most important problem (economy, in this case), while the X-axis represents the amount of news-media exposure. As the figure shows, the pattern of interaction is different than the one predicted by H1.1b. In fact, it is exactly the opposite pattern. The "agenda setting" slope of media-skeptics is steeper than that of non-skeptics. All non-skeptics have a higher probability of giving the "media answer" to the MIP question, as predicted by H1.1a. But the gap between skeptics and non-skeptics is narrow for heavily exposed respondents and wide for those with relatively little exposure.

Similar interaction terms were tried on OLS models with the "agenda setting scores" described above (see Table 6.4). In all three cases (models with number of stories, minutes of TV news, and general media rank), the skepticism * exposure interaction was not statistically significant.

Summary. To sum up, the PTR data present some evidence for the moderating effect of media skepticism in agenda setting. On the aggregate level, the rank order correlations of media and public agenda are stronger for non-skeptics than for non-skeptics. On the individual level, skeptics have lower probabilities of answering the MIP question with the media answer. This later association holds even when controlling for political ideology, extremity, knowledge and involvement, and various demographic factors. A stricter approach, involving the assignment of an agenda setting score to each respondent (based on the attention that the media devoted to his or her MIP), did not yield significant effects of media skepticism on agenda setting. Also, H1.1b did not receive full support. Yet the pattern of interaction, though different than the predicted one, still does not negate the moderating role of media skepticism in agenda setting. Non-skeptics had a higher probability of mentioning the "media answer" as the MIP. However, higher news exposure brought skeptics closer to their non-skeptical counterparts. In other words, skeptics have a lower probability of agreement with the media on the most important problem, but less so when they consume large amounts of news.

Study 2: NES 1996 Data.

National Election Study respondents, interviewed about six months after Wave 1 of the PTR study (during the election season of 1996) were also asked for their MIP. Again, content analysis of print and TV news media was employed to determine the media agenda at that time. Print media content analysis included all stories from the front pages of the New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today and The Wall Street Journal[40], from the period between August 11 and October 7, 1996. A revised version of the PTR coding scheme[41] containing 16 issue categories and 99 sub-categories was employed. Inter-coder reliability for a sample of newspaper articles was Krippendorff's alpha of .85 for the 16-category scheme and .78 for the detailed category scheme. TV content analysis again consisted of recoding the figures reported in the Tyndall reports, covering the contents of national network TV news programs for the period between August 12 and October 25, 1996. Basically, this procedure tried to replicate the methods used by the PTR research team in 1996. The time span of media content analysis (both print and TV) is longer in this study because of a longer time in the field for the NES survey, compared to the Wave 1 survey of the PTR study.

Results. Table 6.6 presents the results of media content analysis and public issue agendas. As in Study 1, the data reproduce McCombs and Shaw's finding of hierarchical agenda setting. Public agenda correlated with TV agenda [Spearman's rho=.44 ($p<.10$)], with newspaper agenda [Spearman's rho=.78 ($p<.01$)], and with a combined measure of media agenda [Spearman's rho=.58 ($p<.05$)] (the measure was the sum of TV minutes

[40] As in the previous study, each Wall Street Journal story was counted as half a story in the calculation of the media agenda because of the higher number of stories on its front page of this paper and its heavier emphasis on economy.
[41] The revision consisted primarily of canceling irrelevant and unused categories.

and number of newspaper stories). As in Study 1, these rank order correlations were higher for media skeptics than for non-skeptics.

Table 6.7 examines the hypothesis that the rank order "agenda setting" correlation is stronger for non-skeptics than for those who mistrust the media. The table, like Table 6.2 in Study 1, presents the rank order correlations between media and public agenda by media skepticism. No matter how you measure the media agenda (number of stories in the print media, minutes of TV network news, or a combined measure of both), the rank order correlation is higher for the non-skeptics then for the skeptics, as hypothesis H1.1a predicts. For example, the correlation between total media agenda and public agenda was .70 for audiences who trusted the media, and only .51 for media skeptics. As the table shows, Fisher transformation was again used to test for the statistical significance of the difference between the independent correlations. As in Study 1, the differences between the correlations of skeptics and non-skeptics were statistically significant. In other words, the rank order correlation between media and public agendas was weaker for those saying they "almost never" or "none of the time" trusted the media "to report the news fairly", than for respondents who said they could trust the media at least "some of the time".

Again, the relationship between agenda setting and media skepticism needs to be assessed with tighter statistical controls in order to negate alternative explanations – mainly, that ideology influences personal agendas and causes the differences between skeptics and non-skeptics. As in Study 1, this problem was addressed by moving from the aggregate to the individual level and trying to predict, using logistic regression, whether media skepticism was associated with giving the media answer to the MIP question. This is done in Table 6.8.

Model 1 of Table 6.8 presents a logit model predicting which respondents would answer that "foreign policy and defense issues" were the most important problem facing the country (these issues received a lot of attention at the time of the study and were ranked number one on the combined media agenda as well as on the TV agenda measure). As predicted by H1.1a, media skepticism was negatively associated with the outcome measure. Each one-unit increase on the skepticism scale is associated with a 36 percent decrease ($100*(e^{b}-1)$) in the odds of saying that foreign policy or national defense issues are the most important problem. This association was statistically significant ($p<.05$).

However, unlike in Study 1, these results were sensitive to the dichotomization of the dependent variable. When other combinations of media MIP answers were coded as "1" and used as outcome variables, the coefficient for media skepticism was non-significant. In two of the models (Model 3 and Model 4), the coefficient for skepticism was even positive. In other words, media skepticism was associated with saying that foreign policy was the MIP, but it was not related to mentioning other issues prominent in the media agenda as most important. Also, additional unreported models used the agenda setting "score" approach described above, and found no significant association between media skepticism and the agenda setting ranks, which were based on the attention that subjects' MIP received in the media (these models paralleled the ones presented in Table 6.4 of this chapter). Again, this formulation of agenda setting is the strictest one. As in the previous study, neither agenda setting nor the hypothesized moderating role skepticism gained support from the data.

Exposure * skepticism interaction. Hypothesis 1.1b predicted an exposure * skepticism interaction, and postulated that the effect of exposure on issue importance would be stronger for non-skeptics than for skeptics. Table 6.9 presents models testing this interaction on the NES 1996 data. The table shows that exposure did not, in any of the four models, significantly interact with media skepticism in their effect on respondents' issue salience. In other words, the NES data did not find evidence for the predicted association, nor did it replicate the reverse interaction patterns that were found in Study 1. The patterns of the coefficients in Model 1 (i.e., their size and magnitude) are similar to those found in Study 1, indicating a stronger association between exposure and issue salience for skeptics. But again, the coefficients are not statistically significant, hence we cannot reject the null interaction hypotheses in these cases.

Summary. The National Election Study of 1996 provides some evidence for the moderating role of media skepticism in agenda setting. The rank order correlation between public and media agenda was stronger for non-skeptics than for media skeptics. Also, agreeing with the media that foreign issues stood at the top of the nation's agenda was negatively associated with media skepticism, even after controlling for ideology, extremity, political discussion, knowledge involvement and demographic factors. However, this latter result was sensitive to the dichotomization of the MIP question, indicating that skeptics tended to disagree with non-skeptics and with the media about the number-one problem but not about other problems that also received extensive attention at the time of the study. Again, as in Study 1, stricter tests involving the assignment of agenda setting scores to individuals (based on the media attention dedicated to their MIP) did not yield support for agenda setting or for H1.1a. In addition, the association between

media skepticism and agenda setting did not interact with the amount of exposure, and the agenda setting effects of the amount of exposure were not related to media skepticism.

Study 3: The Electronic Dialogue data.

All baseline respondents were asked, "What is the most important problem facing our country today?" The baseline interview was in the field between February 28 and March 10, 2000. The open-ended answers were coded by a group of Annenberg graduate students (EDialogue research assistants) into a 45-category issue variable[42]. This is parallel to what is done by an interviewer in a telephone survey. Reliability for this coding endeavor was not reported. Given the electronic format and the nature of the question, many respondents (291 out of about 2015 completing the baseline) gave more than one answer to this question. Since picking just one answer out of an array of problems would be an arbitrary decision in this case, all answers were taken into account in the analysis. However, weighting was used to reduce the influence of respondents who provided more than one answer. For example, the weight of a respondent mentioning four problems was given one-fourth of the weight of a respondent mentioning only one problem[43].

Again, content analysis of print and TV news media was employed to determine the media agenda at that time. Print media content analyses included, as in the previous

[42] I am grateful to Emily West for helping me access and understand the data.
[43] Unweighted analysis results with similar patterns. At the aggregate level the differences are minor. At the individual level the p-values tended to be higher in the unweighted version.

study, all stories from the front pages of the New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today and The Wall Street Journal[44], from the period between February 15 and March 7, 2000. A revised version of the previous coding schemes[45], containing 19 issue categories and 105 sub-categories, was employed. Inter-coder reliability for a sample of newspaper articles was Krippendorf'fs alpha of .80 for the 19-category scheme and .75 for the detailed category scheme. For the TV news content analysis, the Tyndall reports for all weekday evening newscasts from February 14 through March 6 were used. The correlation between the TV and print issue rank order was .45 ($p<.05$).

Results. Table 6.10 presents the results of media content analysis and public issue agendas. As in the previous studies, the data reproduce McCombs and Shaw's finding of hierarchical agenda setting. However, this time the correlations were much smaller, and sometimes not significantly different from zero. Public agenda correlated with TV agenda [Spearman's rho=.45 ($p<.10$)], newspaper agenda [Spearman's rho=.08 ($p>.10$)], and a combined measure of media agenda [Spearman's rho=.13 ($p>.10$)] (the measure was the sum of TV minutes and number of newspaper stories). The reasons for these low correlations are related to the fact that the economy received a good deal of attention in the media, but not much attention in the public agenda. In addition, issues ranking relatively high on the public agenda, like education and health care, received relatively little media coverage.

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[44] As in the previous study, each Wall Street Journal story was counted as half a story in calculating the media agenda because of the higher number of stories on the front page of this paper and its heavier emphasis on economy.

[45] The revision consisted primarily of adding new issues (e.g., Elian Gonzales, computer crimes) and deleting irrelevant categories from 1996.

Table 6.11 examines the hypothesis that the rank order "agenda setting" correlation is stronger for non-skeptics than for those who mistrust the media (H1.1a). The table presents the rank order correlations between media and public agenda by media skepticism. Unlike in the previous studies, the newspaper agenda setting rank order correlation was stronger for skeptics than for non-skeptics. This is the exact opposite of what H1.1a predicts. On the other hand, the agenda setting correlations for TV and for the combined measure were stronger for non-skeptics than for skeptics, as predicted by H1.1a. A similar procedure to that used in the previous studies was applied to test for the significance of the difference between the correlations for skeptics and non-skeptics. Only in the case of TV agenda setting were the correlations for skeptics and non-skeptics significantly different from each other ($p<.10$). In other words, the rank order correlation between TV agenda and public agenda was significantly higher for non-skeptics, as predicted by H1.1a. However, there were no significant differences between skeptics and non-skeptics in the total media agenda or in newspaper agenda correlations with public agenda. A possible explanation is that the aggregate effects were much smaller this time than in the other studies. In order for moderation to occur, there must be a main effect. Methodologically, Fisher's transformation makes it harder to detect differences between smaller correlations. Theoretically, moderation of agenda setting by media skepticism implies that the population at large should be affected. Given a very small association between media agenda and public agenda, it is impossible to talk about moderation.

Moving to the individual level, Table 6.12 presents logistic regression models predicting individual answers to the MIP questions, controlling for demographics, political ideology, extremity knowledge and involvement. The four models correspond to

four conceptualizations of the dependent variable. The models predicting mentioning crime (among other salient issues) as the most important problem also controlled for prior experience with crime and for feeling unsafe in one's neighborhood (these measures were not available in the other data sets). The reason for including these variables, as well as that of employment throughout the chapter, is that agenda setting research asserts that personal life experiences also exert an influence on people's agendas.

In all four models, skepticism was negatively associated with the dependent variable. That is, the higher the skepticism, the lower the agreement with the media on important issues[46]. In one case out of four (Model 2), the effect of skepticism was not statistically significant. The estimated adjusted odds ratio for skepticism in Model 1 was .08. This means that a one-unit increase on the skepticism scale (the maximal increase, given the 0-1 coding of the skepticism variable in the ED data) was associated with a decrease of 92 percent in the odds of saying that the economy was the most important problem. The estimated adjusted odds ratio for media skepticism in Model 4 is .55. This means that a one-unit increase in skepticism is associated with a decrease of 45 percent in the odds of mentioning one of the top four media problems as a MIP. The estimated odds ratio, according to Table 6.12, probably varies between .08 and .62.

In sum, although at the aggregate level there was only partial support for H1.1, the individual models provide a consistent answer: the higher the skepticism, the lower the likelihood of agreeing with the media. It seems as if, in this case, agenda setting does not

[46] As mentioned earlier, the unweighted analysis resulted in similar patternsn, though the p-values for the coefficients for skepticism were higher. The following are the results from the unweighted analysis: In Model 1, b=-1.87; se=1.59; p=.23; exp(b)=.15. In Model 2, b=-.55; se=.62; p=.37; exp(b)=.57. In Model 3, b=-1.40; se=.59; p=.01; exp(b)=.24. In Model 4, b=-.70; se=.53; p=.19; exp(b)=.49.

work so well at the aggregate level. But at the individual level, people who mistrust the media are less likely to mention media issues as the most important problems.

Exposure * skepticism interaction. Hypothesis 1.1b predicted an exposure * skepticism interaction, with a stronger effect of exposure on issue importance for non-skeptics than for skeptics. As in the previous studies, this hypothesis was examined using logistic regression models, presented in Table 6.13. As before, the dependent variables were coded "1" for providing one of the media problems as an answer to the MIP question. Centering was used to reduce multicollinearity. In all models, there was no significant skepticism by media exposure interaction. That is, skeptics were less likely than non-skeptics to agree with the media on the most important problem, regardless of the amount of exposure. H1.1b did not receive support from the EDialogue data.

Summary. The EDialogue data also contain partial evidence in favor of H1.1a. The aggregate correlations between media and public agenda were smaller in March 2000 than in September and February of 1996. However, the correlation between TV agenda and public agenda was stronger for non-skeptics, as H1.1a predicted. On the other hand, there was no significant difference between skeptics and non-skeptics in the correlation between public agenda and media agenda in the case of either the newspaper agenda or the combined newspaper and TV measure. Though the aggregate level correlations were smaller, the individual level analysis showed that, as predicted by H1.1a and as was the case in the previous data sets, skeptics were less likely to answer the MIP question with the media's answer. Even after various controls, skeptics were less likely to mention the problems raised by the media – this time economy, crime, and foreign affairs/defense – than non-skeptics.

As in Study 2, and unlike in Study 1, there was no evidence for a significant skepticism by amount of exposure interaction. That is, skeptics were less likely to mention the media issues as MIP regardless of the amount of news coverage they got. Those watching the news more frequently were neither closer nor further away from their non-skeptical counterparts, at least when it came to the odds of answering that these four issues were, in their opinion, the nation's most important problems.

Conclusion.

The intention of this chapter was not to test the already well-tested agenda setting theory. However, some of the findings reported above replicate findings by agenda setting scholars, and may be interpreted as evidence consistent with agenda setting. Most importantly, three separate studies originating in different contexts demonstrated a rank order correlation between media and public agenda. The magnitude of the agenda setting correlation was not consistent across data, nor was the magnitude of the moderating effect of media skepticism. However, these effects should not be expected to be constant, according to agenda setting research. We know by now from numerous studies that the magnitude of agenda setting effects varies with changing conditions. For example, media discussion about issues that have already been on the media agenda for a long time (and have passed saturation point) are expected to affect the public agenda less than coverage of relatively new issues. On the other hand, it takes time for the public to be affected by the media. While in all three studies the measurement of media agenda (via content analysis) was lagged, the length of the time lag varied across studies, for practical reasons such as the differing lengths of field period in the three different studies.

Measurement inconsistencies could be another source of inconsistency in the findings. The conversion of the open-ended answers to the most important problem question was executed by three different agencies (Princeton Survey Research for the PTR data; NES; EDialogue research assistants) using different methods and issue categories. It could be, for example, that the low agenda setting correlation in the EDialogue data was due to lack of issue categories for "computer safety" and "transportation", issues that received some media coverage at the time of study. Lack of defined categories for media issues could have led to situations in which respondents actually mentioned issues that were coded as "other", leading to potential reduction in the agenda setting effect as a result of a measurement error.

Another potential source of inconsistency between studies lies in the media content analysis end of the process. However, in this case, the potential for inconsistencies was reduced by applying very similar coding schemes and content analytical procedures in all three studies. The identical procedures could not be replicated because reality changes, and the issues that received media attention in 1996 were not the very same issues that received media attention in 2000. Furthermore, sometimes the ways we construct and collapse the issue category scheme, either at the audience end (coding of open-ended survey questions) or at the content analysis stage, have implications on the magnitude of agenda setting effects and on the moderating effect of skepticism in the process. Collapsing "the deficit" together with "inflation" or "unemployment" into "economy"

may sometimes blur important context-specific distinctions that may increase or reduce the effects of agenda setting[47].

In sum, different conditions in changing realities, as well as differing study artifacts, could be the sources of inconsistency between studies. We cannot expect to get exactly the same results when applying similar procedures to similar data collected in different ways, in different contexts. However, we should expect similar patterns, and that's what we got. In the three different data sets we found a rank order between media and public agenda, and with one exception, this correlation was stronger for non-skeptics. Also, in all three data sets, mentioning the number-one media issue was negatively and significantly related to media skepticism, and there was some support for the same association when testing for the sensitivity of the analysis to the coding of the dependent variable. The only substantial inconsistency between the data sets was when we tested for a skepticism by media exposure interaction.

Of course, a mere correlation between media and public agenda is not in any way sufficient to substantiate the causality necessary to deduce that a "media effect" has taken place. However, in this chapter I did not intend to "prove" that agenda setting is right. The issue was the moderating effect of media skepticism, assuming agenda setting works. Agenda setting scholars would probably interpret the correlation between media and public agenda as an "effect" of the media on the public. To the extent that it is indeed a media effect, we have learned that it is at least somewhat moderated by media skepticism. We have also learned that skeptics are less likely to mention issues ranking at the top of

[47] Being aware of these issues I tried different combinations of categories in each of the studies, and examined their effects on hypotheses testing. In most cases, though the numbers changed, the patterns were the same.

the media agenda as their answer to the "most important problem" question. This latter association holds over and above controls for political ideology, extremity, political discussion, knowledge and involvement. Also controlled in the logistic models were variables relating to personal experience with media problems like employment and crime. In sum, H1.1a was generally supported by the data.

On the other hand, the studies did not find any evidence supporting H1.1b. This hypothesis predicted an interaction between skepticism and the amount of media exposure. The slope for the association between skepticism and exposure was supposed to be steeper for non-skeptics than for skeptics. However, in the first study (the PTR data), the pattern of interaction revealed by the analysis was different from the one expected: while non-skeptics were more likely to mention media problems as their MIP in all levels of exposure, the slope was actually *steeper* for the *skeptics*. In the two other studies (using EDialogue and NES data), this interaction was not significantly different from zero. The reason for this inconsistency remains unclear and could well be related to any of the methodological factors mentioned above. In any event, none of the interaction models supported H1.1b. The fact that H1.1b did not gain support from the data does not negate the possibility that skepticism moderates media agenda setting effects pointed out by the supporting evidence for H1.1a.

Our interpretation of the results should depend on our interpretation of the agenda setting process in general. If we think of agenda setting as being contingent on repeated and continuous exposure, as cultivation is often thought of, then the interaction findings do not settle easily with the idea that skepticism is moderating this process. On the other hand, if we think that agenda setting is not necessarily dependent on the amount of

exposure, than the lack of skepticism * exposure interaction does not conflict with the moderating role of skepticism in the process. In other words, if we think agenda setting may occur as a result of people's brief encounter with the headlines on their way to work, or as they watch TV in passing en route from the kitchen to the bedroom, the null skepticism by exposure interaction settles pretty well with the hypothesized moderating role of skepticism in agenda setting. The intensity of exposure is not related to the moderation process: those mistrusting the media are less likely to accept their agenda, regardless of how much they watch.

While some have suggested that agenda setting is a function of exposure length, this is not necessarily the case. Rather than the result of an intensive engagement, the media may affect everybody's agenda: both those who watch much of the time and those who watch little. That is why there is no mention of the amount of exposure in McCombs and Shaw's classic agenda setting model, or in the work of many others studying agenda setting effects. In this view, the pattern of interaction, demonstrated in Study 1 but not replicated in the other studies, does not stand in contrast to H1. The fact that skeptics who spend a lot of time with the media are closer to the media than those who are less exposed does not negate the possibility that skepticism moderates agenda setting, if we accept the view that agenda setting is not necessarily a function of length of exposure.

The main limitation of the reported studies stems from their cross-sectional nature. In other words, it might be that dissatisfaction with the media agenda is the *cause*, rather than the *result,* of media skepticism. The time lag between the measurement of media and public agendas is the only response I have to this problem in my studies. Admittedly, this is not enough. A much stronger demonstration of the moderating effect of skepticism on

agenda setting could and should be demonstrated utilizing longitudinal designs. Over time, skeptics' agendas should be less likely than those of non-skeptics to match the media's agenda. Though two of the data sets I use in this dissertation contain a longitudinal component, so that longitudinal testing of skepticism's moderating role in agenda setting is at least potentially possible, I was not able to utilize the data for this purpose here due to various, mostly practical, reasons. For example, the primary season data I have at hand spans too short a time period and contains too few cases to allow for a longitudinal examination of the moderating role of skepticism in agenda setting (only one-fourth of respondents answered the skepticism question). Once the entire APPC 2000 data set is available for analysis, scholars should certainly use it for this purpose. The EDialogue data spans longer periods of time, but the limited resources of a dissertation project, especially coding-wise, do not allow for coding the media agenda over such a long period. Future research, however, should use these data to examine the association between public agenda and media agenda by skepticism over time.

To sum up: this chapter has found that agenda setting is moderated by media skepticism. An important thing to note is that while agenda setting was *weaker* for media skeptics than for non-skeptics, it was not in any way absent. Even among skeptics there was a positive, and sometimes pretty high, correlation between media agenda and public agenda. This shows that skeptics did not altogether reject the issues reported by the media, nor did they have an entirely different agenda from that of the mainstream media. Resistance to media agenda setting does not mean that skeptics' agenda is the *opposite* of the mainstream media's. They do not say to themselves, "If this issue is heavily covered in the media, then it is the least important problem facing our nation!" While skeptics

were less likely to mention heavily-covered issues as their most important problem, many of them still did so.

This chapter has demonstrated that skepticism moderates the agenda setting process. In the next chapter we turn to zthe moderating role of skepticism in another media effect, the one emerging from the literature on the spiral of silence.

Figure 6.1: Interpreting the exposure*skepticism interaction (Model 1, Table 5)

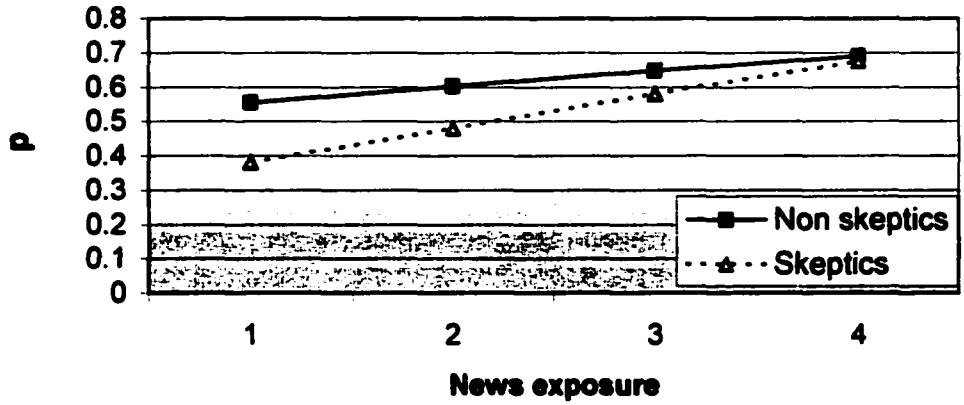

Table 6.1: Media agenda (by medium) and public agenda (by media skepticism), Feb. 1996 (PTR data).

	TV agenda (Minutes)	NP agenda (N of stories)	NP+TV combined media rank order	All respondents (% mentioning topic as MIP) N=1587	Non-skeptics (% mentioning topic as MIP) n=567	Skeptics (% mentioning topic as MIP) n=763
Economy/ unemployment	57.38	44	1	19.20	21.70	16.70
Foreign policy	31.70	63	2	2.70	3.40	1.90
Dissatisfaction with politicians	13.10	32	3	7.60	5.20	9.40
Morality	4.80	10	4	9.60	6.50	11.50
Crime	35.56	9	5	12.90	12.00	13.80
Education	11.30	17	6	2.60	3.40	1.80
Environment	13.50	9	7	.90	1.40	.70
Health care	15.10	7	8	3.20	3.50	3.30
Racism	9.99	11	9	3.10	3.20	3.30
Budget deficit	4.30	14	10	9.20	9.10	9.20
Taxes	0	14	11.50	2.50	2.70	2.10
Welfare reform	0	14	11.5	2.60	3.00	2.40
AIDS	12.90	0	13	.80	.60	1.10
Immigration	2.50	4	14	.60	1.10	0.20
Drugs	0	4	15	5.30	7.30	3.80
Poverty	3.10	0	16	1.80	1.30	2.00
Women's issues	0	0	17.50	.30	.00	0.50
Issues related to the elderly	0	0	17.50	.60	0.40	0.80

Table 6.2: The association between media agenda and public agenda, by media skepticism; Spearman's rank order correlations and tests for the significance of the differences between skeptics and non-skeptics (PTR data, Feb. 1996).

	TV	NP	TV + NP	Non-skeptics (n=567)	Skeptics (n=763)	Fisher's Z_{nskep}	Fisher's Z_{skep}	Zdiff nskep - skep	s.e.^	p diff
TV	1.00	.43#	.81**	.50*	.38	.55	.40	.14	.05	P<.01
NP		1.00	.80**	.60**	.47*	.69	.51	.18	.05	P<.001
TV+NP			1.00	.70**	.58*	.87	.66	.21	.05	P<.001
Non-skeptics				1.00	.89**					
Skeptics					1.00					

Note: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01

^ The standard error was calculated using the formula

$$\sigma_{z_1 - z_2} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N_1 - 3} + \frac{1}{N_2 - 3}}$$

When N_1=567, N_2=762. A stricter calculation using N_1=N_2=18 (the number of issue pairs), would have yielded a non-significant result.

Table 6.3: Logistic regression models predicting mentioning dominant media issues as "most important problem" (PTR Wave 1 data, 1996).

	Model 1 MIP=economy		Model 2 MIP=economy or foreign affairs		Model 3 MIP=economy, foreign affairs, or dissatisfaction with politicians		Model 4 MIP= economy, foreign affairs, or crime	
	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b
Media skepticism	-.24# (.13)	.78	-.28* (.12)	.75	-.08 (.11)	.91	-.18# (.11)	.83
Sex (male=1)	.29* (.13)	1.34	.25* (.12)	1.29	.39*** (.11)	1.47	-.08 (.11)	.91
Years of education	.05# (.03)	1.05	.02 (.02)	1.01	.01 (.02)	1.01	.00 (.02)	1.00
Race (white=1)	.06 (.18)	1.07	.10 (.17)	1.10	.19 (.16)	1.20	-.18 (.15)	.83
Political ideology	.08*** (.02)	1.08	.08*** (.02)	1.08	.05** (.01)	1.05	.05** (.01)	1.05
Political extremity	-.02 (.04)	.97	-.04 (.03)	.95	-.04 (.03)	.95	-.03 (.03)	.96
Issue knowledge	.09 (.07)	1.10	.01 (.06)	1.01	-.04 (.06)	.95	.11* (.06)	1.12
Political involvement	-.13* (.06)	.87	-.08 (.05)	.91	-.03 (.05)	.96	-.10* (.05)	.90
News media exposure	.28* (.11)	1.33	.28** (.10)	1.33	.24* (.09)	1.25	.16# (.09)	1.17
Unweighted N	1466		1466		1466		1466	
R^2	.04		.04		.02		.02	
Cases correctly classified	79.81%		77.01%		68.96%		64.67%	

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01.

Table 6.4: OLS regression models predicting individual agenda setting scores (PTR Wave 1 data, 1996).

	Model 1: Dependent variable: TV minutes devoted to subject's MIP	Model 2: Dependent variable: NP stories devoted to subject's MIP	Model 3: Dependent variable: general media rank of subject's MIP
Media skepticism	-1.08 (1.19)	-.25 (.85)	-.01 (.25)
Sex (male=1)	-1.10 (1.17)	2.31** (.84)	-.08 (.25)
Years of education	.55* (.26)	.57** (.19)	.14* (.05)
Race (white=1)	-1.60 (1.65)	1.33 (1.18)	-.07 (.36)
Political ideology	.23 (.18)	.18 (.13)	-.00 (.36)
Political extremity	.08 (.36)	.12 (.26)	.01 (.08)
Issue knowledge	1.55 (.63)	.65 (.45)	.25# (.13)
Political involvement	-1.82*** (.51)	-.81* (.37)	-.27* (.11)
News media exposure	.45 .96	1.05 (.69)	.09 (.21)
Unweighted N	1289	1289	1289
R^2	.02	.02	.01

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01

Table 6.5: Testing for exposure * skepticism interaction. Logistic regression models predicting mentioning dominant media issues as "most important problem" (PTR Wave 1 data, 1996)

	Model 1 MIP=economy		Model 2 MIP=economy or foreign affairs		Model 3 MIP=economy, foreign affairs, or dissatisfaction with politicians		Model 4 MIP= economy, foreign affairs, or crime	
	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b
Media skepticism	-.25** (.06)	.77	-.35*** (.05)	.69	-.09# (.05)	.91	-.19*** (.05)	.82
News media exposure	.31*** (.05)	1.37	.30*** (.05)	1.36	.25** (.04)	1.29	.09* (.04)	1.09
Media skepticism * exposure	.21* (.10)	1.23	.29** (.09)	1.33	.24** (.08)	1.28	.10 (.08)	1.11
Unweighted N	1471		1471		1471		1471	
R^2	.05		.05		.03		.02	
Cases correctly classified	81.13%		78.25%		70.53%		64.94%	

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01.
The models control for political ideology, issue knowledge, political involvement and demographic factors. Centering was used in all models to reduce multicollinearity (the coefficients presented are those of the centered terms).

Table 6.6: Media agenda (by medium) and public agenda (by media skepticism), (NES 1996 Data)

	TV agenda (Minutes)	NP agenda (N of stories)	NP+TV combined media rank order	All respondents (% mentioning topic as MIP) N=747	Non-skeptics ^ (% mentioning topic as MIP) n=75	Skeptics ^ (% mentioning topic as MIP) n=670
Foreign policy	327	134	1	6.30	7.10	4.10
Economy / taxes / unemployment	165	158	2	29.30	24.30	24.70
Crime	174	58	3	13.80	14.10	19.20
Morality	130	36	4	7.50	7.20	15.10
Education	119	46	5	6.70	7.70	2.70
Drugs	67	19	6	4.70	5.30	2.70
Smoking, tobacco industry	72	8	7	.00	.00	.00
Dissatisfaction with politicians	20	43	8	5.10	5.00	9.60
Welfare / welfare reform	23	18	9	7.50	8.20	6.80
Health care	22	18	10	4.40	4.70	5.50
Race	22	13	11	1.90	2.30	.00
Immigration	21	10	12	0.90	1.00	1.40
Environment	9	13	13	3.70	4.20	1.40
Poverty	15	4	14	4.10	4.50	4.10
Elderly, social security	0	3	15	4.00	4.50	2.70

^ Media skeptics are defined in this study as respondents who said they could trust the media "to report the news fairly" "none of the time" or "almost never". Non-skeptics are those who said they could trust the media "just about always", "most of the time", or "some of the time". The same patterns resulted when the mid-point category was removed from the analysis. Treating the mid-point category respondents as skeptics resulted in insignificant differences between skeptics and non-skeptics.

Table 6.7: The association between media agenda and public agenda, by media skepticism: Spearman's rank order correlations and tests for the significance of the differences between skeptics and non-skeptics (NES 1996 data)

	TV	NP	TV+NP	Non-skeptics (n=567)	Skeptics (n=763)	Fisher's Z_{nskep}	Fisher's Z_{skep}	Zdiff $_{nskep - skep}$	s.e.^	p diff
TV	1.00	.77**	.95**	.62*	.41	.72	.43	.29	.12	P<.05
NP		1.00	.89**	.82**	.65**	1.15	.77	.38	.12	P<.01
TV+NP			1.00	.70**	.51#	.86	.56	.30	.12	P<.05
Non-skeptics				1.00	.82**					
Skeptics					1.00					

Note: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01.
^ The standard error was calculated using the formula

$$\sigma_{z_1 - z_2} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N_1 - 3} + \frac{1}{N_2 - 3}}$$

When N_1=75, N_2=670. A stricter calculation using N_1=N_2=15 (the number of issue pairs) would have yielded a non-significant result.

Table 6.8: Logistic regression models predicting mentioning dominant media issues as "most important problem" (NES 1996 data)

	Model 1 MIP=foreign policy		Model 2 MIP=economy or foreign affairs		Model 3 MIP=economy, foreign affairs, or crime		Model 4 MIP=economy, foreign affairs, crime or morality	
	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b
Media skepticism	-.44* (.20)	.64	-.06 (.02)	.93	.06 (.09)	1.07	.12 (.08)	1.13
Sex (male=1)	.32 (.30)	1.38	.29# (.17)	1.37	-.03 (.14)	.96	-.13 (.13)	.87
Years of education	-.04 (.06)	.95	-.05 (.03)	.94	-.06* (.02)	.93	-.03 (.02)	.95
Race (white=1)	-.00 (.46)	.99	-.30 (.23)	.73	-.23 (.19)	.72	-.23 (.19)	.76
Employment (=1)	-30 (.33)	.73	.18 (.19)	1.20	.05 (.15)	1.05	-.06 (.14)	.94
Political ideology	.00 (.05)	1.00	.04 (.02)	1.04	-.02 (.05)	.97	.08 (.05)	1.08
Political extremity	.01 (.10)	1.01	.01 (.05)	1.00	-.02 (.04)	.97	-.01 (.04)	.98
Political discussion	-.02 (.07)	.97	.01 (.04)	1.01	-.01 (.03)	.98	-.00 (.03)	.99
Political knowledge	.23 (.19)	1.26	-.04 (.08)	.95	.04 (.07)	1.04	.01 (.06)	1.01
Political involvement	-.06 (.18)	.93	.03 (.10)	1.04	.07 (.08)	1.07	.07 (.08)	1.08
News media exposure	.09 (.09)	1.09	.03 (.05)	1.03	-.04 (.04)	.97	-.05 (.04)	.94
N	1,500		1,500		1,500		1,500	
R^2	.03		.02		.01		.01	
Cases correctly classified	96.87%		89.40%		82.60%		78.87%	

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01.

Table 6.9: Testing for exposure * skepticism interaction. Logistic regression models predicting mentioning dominant media issues as "most important problem" (NES 1996 data)

	Model 1 MIP=foreign policy		Model 2 MIP=economy or foreign affairs		Model 3 MIP=economy, foreign affairs, or crime		Model 4 MIP=economy, foreign affairs, crime or morality	
	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b
Media skepticism	-.42# (.23)	.65	.01 (.05)	1.01	.07 (.09)	1.07	.11 (.09)	1.01
News media exposure	.09 (.10)	1.09	.03 (.06)	1.01	-.03 (.04)	.96	-.04 (.04)	.95
Skepticism * exposure interaction	.03 (.11)	1.03	.03 (.06)	1.03	.00 (.04)	1.00	-.00 (.04	.99
N	1,352		1,352		1,352		1,352	
R^2	.05		.02		.01		.01	
Cases correctly classified	97.12%		90.07%		83.21%		79.22%	

Notes: # p<.10.
The models control for political ideology, issue knowledge, political involvement and demographic factors. Centering was used in all models to reduce multicollinearity (the coefficients presented are those of the centered terms).

Table 6.10: Media agenda (by medium) and public agenda (by media skepticism), March 2000 (EDialogue data)

	TV agenda (Minutes)	NP agenda (N of stories)	NP+TV combined media rank order	All respondents (% mentioning topic as MIP) N=1489	Non-skeptics (% mentioning topic as MIP) n=276	Skeptics (% mentioning topic as MIP) n=291
Economy	52	146	1	2.15	2.17	1.03
Crime	42	115	2	23.30	23.91	20.62
Foreign affairs	35	41	3	7.59	8.33	5.15
Morality	20	36	4	17.39	10.87	24.74
Transportation	7	38	5	.00	.00	.00
Race	8	22	6	3.29	4.35	3.09
Energy	5	22	7.5	1.34	.36	1.37
Environment	9	18	7.5	2.35	.36	1.72
Computer safety	4	19	9.5	.00	.00	.00
Politicians	14	9	9.5	4.84	3.26	6.53
Drugs	5	16	12	5.37	8.33	3.44
Elderly	4	17	12	3.43	3.99	5.84
Taxes	21	0	12	3.56	2.54	4.81
Education	9	11	14	9.74	10.14	7.22
Health care	8	6	15	9.74	14.86	11.00
Poverty + Homelessness	0	7	16	5.57	6.16	3.44
Gender	3	3	17.5	.00	.00	.00
Immigration	6	0	17.5	.34	.36	.34

Table 6.11: Association between media agenda and public agenda, by media skepticism; Spearman's rank order correlations and tests for the significance of the differences between skeptics and non-skeptics (EDialogue data; March 2000)

	NP	TV	TV + NP	Non-skeptics (n=276)	Skeptics (n=291)	Fisher's Z_{nskep}	Fisher's Z_{skep}	Zdiff nskep - skep	s.e.^	p diff
NP	1.00	.45*	.67**	.40	.46#	.42	.49	-.07	.08	p>.10
TV		1.00	.93**	.12	.03	.12	.03	.11	.08	p<.10
TV+NP			1.00	.13	.12	.13	.12	.01	.08	p>.10
Non-skeptics				1.00	.80**					
Skeptics					1.00					

Note: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01.
^ The standard error was calculated using the formula

$$\sigma_{z_1 - z_2} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N_1 - 3} + \frac{1}{N_2 - 3}}$$

When N_1=276, N_2=291. A stricter calculation using N_1=N_2=18 (the number of issue pairs) would have yielded the same null results.

Table 6.12: Logistic regression models predicting mentioning dominant media issues as "most important problem" (EDialogue March 2000 data)

	Model 1 MIP= Economy		Model 2 MIP= Economy or crime		Model 3 MIP= economy, foreign affairs, or crime		Model 4 MIP= economy, foreign affairs, crime or morality	
	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b
Media skepticism	-2.46*	.08	-.47	.62	-1.33***	.26	-.58#	.55
	(1.01)		(.36)		(.34)		(.31)	
Sex (male=1)	1.87**	6.50	.07	1.07	.13	1.14	.08	1.08
	(.52)		(.14)		(.13)		(.12)	
Years of education	.24*	1.28	-.04	.95	-.01	.98	.04	1.04
	(.12)		(.04)		(.04)		(.03)	
Race (white=1)	-.15	.85	.00	1.00	.14	1.14	.02	1.02
	(.58)		(.21)		(.19)		(.18)	
Political ideology	-.34**	.70	.03	1.03	.07***	1.08	-.05**	.94
	(.11)		(.02)		(.02)		(.01)	
Political extremity	-33*	.71	.01	1.02	.03	1.03	.08*	1.08
	(.16)		(.04)		(.04)		(.03)	
Political discussion	.28#	1.33	-.04	.95	-.02	.97	-.02	.97
	(.17)		(.06)		(.06)		(.05)	
Political knowledge	-2.35*	.09	-.90*	.40	-1.11**	.32	.39	1.47
	(1.19)		(.45)		(.43)		(.40)	
Political involvement	-.75**	.47	.02	1.02	-.02	.97	-.23**	.78
	(.27)		(.08)		(.08)		(.07)	
News media exposure	.02	1.03	-.24***	.78	-.17***	.87	-.11*	.89
	(.15)		(.05)		(.04)		(.04)	
Employed (=1)	-.47	.62	-.48***	.61	-.14	.86	.01	1.01
	(.40)		(.13)		(.13)		(.12)	
Prior experience w/violent crime (=1)			-.29*	.61	-.24#	78	.20	1.22
			(.14)		(.13)		(.12)	
Feeling unsafe at home, neighborhood			.13	1.14	.14	1.15	.21*	1.24
			(.11)		(.10)		(.10)	
Unweighted N	630		469		469		469	
R^2	.03		.06		.06		.01	
Cases correctly classified	98.26%		75.08%		69.15%		57.07%	

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01.

Table 6.13: Testing for exposure * skepticism interaction. Logistic regression models predicting mentioning dominant media issues as "most important problem" (EDialogue March 2000 data)

	Model 1 MIP=economy		Model 2 MIP=economy or crime		Model 3 MIP=economy, foreign affairs, or crime		Model 4 MIP=economy, foreign affairs, crime or morality	
	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b	B (s.e.)	E^b
Media skepticism	-2.39 (2.04)	.24	-.48 (.73)	.61	-1.32# (.69)	.26	-.60 (.62)	.54
News media exposure	.10 (.33)	.87	-.24* (.10)	.78	-.17* (.09)	.84	-.11 (.08)	.89
Skepticism * exposure interaction	1.25 (1.37)	8.17	-.04 (.43)	.95	.28 (.41)	1.32	.10 (.36)	1.24
N	630		469		469		469	
R^2	.03		.06		.07		.04	
Cases correctly classified	98.26%		75.08%		69.44%		55.35%	

Notes: # p<.10.
The models control for political ideology, political extremity, political discussion, issue knowledge, political involvement and demographic factors. Centering was used in all models to reduce multicollinearity (the coefficients presented are those of the centered terms).

Chapter 7: Media Skepticism and Climate of Opinion Perception.

The spiral of silence theory was proposed by German pollster Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974, 1976, 1984) more than a quarter of a century ago. Since then, it has become one of the most influential theories of public opinion. Briefly, it states that the people employ a "quasi-statistical sense" to scan the environment for the distribution of opinions in society. The major source of this perceived "climate of opinion" is the mass media, which sometimes distort the actual distribution of opinions. This leads to a spiralling process of silencing those who perceive themselves as unsupported, for fear of social isolation. This group, which may at times even constitute a majority, will be less willing to stand up for their views in public, and so abandon the arena to the other camp. Thus, "a minority convinced in their future dominance and therefore willing to express themselves...will most probably become the dominant opinion, which cannot be contradicted without the risk of sanctions: it will change from a factional opinion to public opinion" (Noelle-Neumann, 1974: 50).

If audiences are active and skeptical toward the media, we should examine how they react to the mediated opinion climate. Do they resist the media's presentation of the climate of opinion and read it "oppositionally"? Do they confront polls and other media reports with knowledge gathered from their social environment? Given the possibility of resistance, attitudes towards the media should be studied as a crucial intervening variable in studies of poll effects.

Indeed, Noelle-Neumann argued that the "observation of the environment has two sources; public opinion is nourished from two springs: the individual undertakes direct observation in his own environment, and receives information about the environment from the mass media" (1984: 155). But her conceptions of "powerful media" have somehow worked to turn the spotlight away from audience activity and closer to media influence. Neither Noelle-Neumann nor many of her followers, who study the effects of election polls on public opinion, control for audience skepticism and mistrust of the media's portrayals of the climate of opinion. This is an interesting paradox, since Noelle-Neumann herself is highly skeptical of the mass media.

A review of the literature suggests that empirical evidence supporting the spiral of silence theory is lacking. "Noelle-Neumann's theory, it is safe to say, has met with less than empirical support" (Price & Allen, 1990:371). In fact, the theory consists of a set of at least three main hypotheses, two of which were hardly tested:

1. "Media cultivation of climate of opinion" hypothesis: The media influences audiences' perceptions of the social climate of opinion.
2. The "silence" hypothesis: When people perceive themselves to be in the minority, they will choose to remain silent rather than expressing their views.
3. The "silence → demobilization" hypothesis: Choosing to remain silent in fact means abandoning the arena in favor of the other camp. Silence means fewer attempts to persuade others, less participation, and less political efficacy.

The theory further describes a rather exact scenario in which each of these hypotheses recurrently takes place in a spiraling manner, resulting in an opinion change in a specific direction (the perceived minority turns into an actual minority).

Since testing the full range of the spiral of silence theory would necessitate a complex and expensive design, most scholars have focused on one or another of its

components when searching for empirical validation for the theory. While the first and third components of the theory have been generally neglected, the "silence hypothesis" has produced a rather impressive body of research. Some of these tests (e.g. Taylor, 1982) have found that holders of minority opinion (defined objectively or subjectively) often seem *more* and not *less* willing to express their opinion. Others have demonstrated that it is the fear of being isolated by specific reference groups, not the fear of some general societal force, that influences individuals' opinion expression (Glynn & McLeod, 1985; Glynn & Park, 1997; Krassa, 1988; Oshagan, 1996; Salmon & Kline, 1985). Still others have shown that "people's social and demographic characteristics, the nature of the issue under consideration, and the salience of the issue to the individual, not a general fear of social isolation, are primary determinants of willingness to express an opinion" (Price & Allen, 1990:373). On the other hand, however, more than a few other studies have provided data that supports the silence hypothesis. Most of these studies originated outside the US. In fact, a meta-analysis summarizing 35 studies (Glynn et al., 1997) has shown a very small ($r = .055$ with a confidence interval from .02 to .08) yet statistically significant relationship between the degree to which a person believes that others hold similar opinions and the willingness to express those opinions.

Even if the silence hypothesis holds, however (and the evidence is far from conclusive), there is much work to be done in examining the other two hypotheses. The focus here will be on the first hypothesis, which proposes that people are influenced by the mass media in their perception of the climate of opinion. Although a few studies have demonstrated that the media can influence the perception of the distribution of opinion in society (e.g. Glynn & McLeod, 1985; Mutz & Soss, 1977; Mutz, 1998), most of these

works find interaction effects rather than simple main effects. In other words, they show that the media are more likely to influence perception of the climate of opinion under certain conditions rather than others. Hence, investigation of Noelle-Neumann's strong effects hypothesis might bring us closer to limited effects conclusions. Why should people accept the media's description of the climate of opinion when they do not trust the media? Why would they be influenced by the media's dominant opinion if they think that journalists distort reality in their presentation of the world?

The following hypothesis can thus be formulated:

H1.2: Positive attitudes toward the media will be associated with the perception of a climate of opinion similar to the one presented in the media, controlling for demographic and media-related factors. On the other hand, media skeptics will be more likely to reject the media's climate of opinion, as compared with non-skeptical respondents.

To sum up, the second hypothesis argues that skepticism toward the media will moderate audiences' acceptance of the media climate of opinion.

Study 1: NES 1996 data.

The media were unanimous in their presentation of the climate of opinion during the presidential campaign of 1996. All polls published in the months prior to the elections gave Clinton the lead[48]. In all but one or two cases[49] Clinton's lead was outside the margin of error. In almost all cases, Clinton had what journalists often called a double-digit lead[50] of between 10 and 20 points[51]. The media portrayed this as a "big lead"[52], or a

[48] See "One constant in race has been Clinton's lead", USA Today, November 4, 1996.
[49] See "Lone poll shows Clinton lead below 4 points", Los Angeles Times, November 4, 1996, p. 15.
[50] E.g. "Race for control of the house still too close to call", USA Today, October 29, 1996, p. 11A.

"solid"[53], "wide"[54], "sizeable"[55], or "comfortable"[56] lead. As The Los Angeles Times wrote a week before Election Day[57] that voters appeared "poised to present President Clinton with a decisive victory". Journalists portrayed Clinton as "buoyed by polls"[58], and Dole as "trailing"[59] or "far behind"[60]. According to journalists, Dole was "fighting a hopeless battle"[61]. CNN commentator and Chicago Sun-Times journalist Robert Novak even said that "there's just no way he [Dole] can, in my opinion, even get close to 270 electoral votes" [62].

In sum, media reports about the climate of opinion in 1996 unanimously and consistently predicted that Clinton would win the elections by a wide margin of over 10%. In this context, according to H1.2, media skepticism is expected to be associated

[51] The following table provides a few examples of such polls, published by the media:

Polling agency	Poll date	Clinton	Dole
Time/CNN	Oct 12	53%	35%
Time/CNN	Sept 6	54%	40%
Time/CNN	Aug 9	57%	36%
ABC News/ Washington Post	Sept 5	51%	37%
ABC News/ Washington Post	Aug 4	47%	31%
ABC News/ Washington Post	June 23	53%	43%
New York Times/ CBS News	Nov 2	50%	33%
New York Times/ CBS News	Oct 20	54%	32%
New York Times/ CBS News	Oct 13	53%	35%
New York Times/ CBS News	Sept 4	50%	35%
New York Times/ CBS News	Aug 18	49%	37%
New York Times/ CBS News	Aug 5	75%	17%
New York Times/ CBS News	June 23	54%	34%

Source: Polling the Nations

[52] E.g. "Clinton maintains big lead; fight for congress is tight", Los Angeles Times, October 29, 1996, p. 1.
[53] E.g. "Good feelings carry Clinton to a solid lead", Los Angeles Times, September 12, 1996, p.1; also CNN Early Edition, October 15, 1996.
[54] E.g. CBS Evening News, October 9, 1996.
[55] ABC World News Tonight with Peter Jennings, October 7, 1996.
[56] CNN Early Prime, November 1, 1996.
[57] "Clinton maintains big lead; fight for congress is tight", October 29, 1996, p. 1.
[58] "Buoyed by polls, Clinton tunes out Dole", Boston Globe, October 29, 1996, p. A22.
[59] CBS This Morning, August 8, 1996.
[60] CBS This Morning, November 4, 1996; "In an era when the polls are kings", New York Times, November 2, 1996, p.8.
[61] "Dole campaign runs on empty: Own words echo sense he's fighting a hopeless battle", Daily News (New York), October 30, 1996.
[62] CNN Inside Politics November 4, 1996.

with a perception that Clinton would not win. Trust in the media, on the other hand, is expected to correlate with a perception that Clinton would win the elections by a wide margin.

Dependent variable. The perceived climate of opinion was measured using two NES questions. First, respondents were asked who they thought would win the presidential election. Response categories were Clinton, Dole, Perot, or "some other candidate". They were then asked if they thought the presidential race would be close or whether their predicted winner would win by quite a bit. These two items were combined into a single variable coded "5" for Clinton winning by quite a bit (the "media" answer), "4" for Clinton winning in a close race, "3" for don't know, "2" for either of the other candidates (Dole, Perot, or "someone else") winning by a close margin, and "1" for either of the other candidates winning by quite a bit.

Results.

To test for H1.2, an OLS regression model was run, with the perceived climate of opinion as the dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 7.1. According to this model, the perceived climate of opinion is not a function of demographic factors. Neither age, sex, education nor race was significantly associated with thinking that Clinton would win the elections. Also unrelated to the perception of Clinton as winning were political discussion and the political interest scale.

As the positive sign of the significant coefficient for the party-ideology index shows, all other things being equal, the more liberal a respondent was, the closer he or she was to the perception that Clinton was winning "by quite a bit". This finding is in line with a

long tradition of research about "projection", which shows that the perception of societal opinion is a function of one's own opinion (Fields & Schuman, 1976; Kennamer, 1990; Mutz, 1997). People tend to think that other people think like they do, which is why conservatives scored lower on the climate of opinion scale (and thus tended to think that either Dole or Perot would win), whereas liberals scored higher (and thus tended to think that Clinton would be the winner). The negative and significant coefficient for extremity shows, however, that in general, moderates were more likely to perceive that Clinton would win.

The perceived climate of opinion was also significantly related to political knowledge and to news media exposure, controlling for all other factors. The more people followed the media and the more they learned from the media about politics, the closer they were to the media in their perception of the climate of opinion. This is in line with theories stressing the important role of the media in the perception of collective opinion (e.g. Mutz, 1998). However, there was no significant association between the perceived climate of opinion and the campaign interest scale.

The perceived climate of opinion was also not significantly associated with the amount of political discussion. Those who talked politics more often were not more likely to think Clinton would win, nor were they more likely to think Dole or Perot would win. The 1996 NES survey did not contain measures about the contents of the conversations or at least about the amount of agreement or disagreement in these political discussions. A measure tapping the amount of conversation, as well as the direction of impressions received in the conversation, might have produced an effect. As the spiral of silence theory tells us, the perceived climate of opinion is influenced not only by media reports,

but also by direct environmental observation. The fact that the current measure of conversation does not reflect the role of political conversation is probably due to the limitations of the data.

Hypothesis H1.2 predicted that media skepticism would be associated with climate of opinion perceptions. Those who trust the media are expected to accept the climate of opinion reported by the media. On the other hand, media skeptics are expected to reject the media's climate of opinion. This is exactly what the significant and negative coefficient for media skepticism shows. The lower one's skepticism (higher trust in the media), the closer he or she was to perceiving, like the media, that Clinton was winning by a large margin. On the other hand, higher skepticism was associated with a perception that Clinton would not win. This association holds even when controlling for political ideology and extremity, knowledge, campaign interest, political discussion, media exposure and demographics. Thus, the fact that media skeptics were less likely to think that Clinton would win is not merely a product of the fact that they tended to be conservatives, or of their higher political involvement. Those who trusted the media accepted the media's prophecies regarding the winner of the election and their portrayal of the collective opinion. Those who did not trust the media, whom I call media skeptics, rejected these prophecies and thought that Dole was more likely to win.

One might argue that the use of OLS in the model reported in Table 7.1 is at least somewhat problematic since the dependent variable is ordinal and is far from being normally distributed. For this reason, I tested a similar model on the same date, but this time using logistic regression. The dependent variable was coded "1" for perceiving that Clinton would win, and "0" for perceiving that Dole, Perot or some other candidate

would win. The model replicated the findings reported in table 7.1 in terms of the signs of the coefficients and results of hypothesis testing. Most important, media skepticism was again negatively and significantly associated with climate of opinion perceptions (b=-.44; se=.11; p<.001; e^b=.64). Each one unit *increase* on the skepticism scale was associated with a 36 percent *decrease* in the odds of perceiving Clinton as the would-be winner. To get a sense of the strength of the effect of media skepticism I calculated a few predicted probabilities. The probability of perceiving that Clinton would be the winner for a moderate white male with average values on age, education and the political covariates was .76 if the man had a score of "1" on the skepticism scale (trust the media "just about always"). A similar person demographically and ideologically, but this time with a score of "5" on the skepticism scale (trust the media "none of the time") had a predicted probability of .36. The predicted probability was .57 for another person with the same values on all covariates but a skepticism score of "3". Thus, the effect of media skepticism on the likelihood of agreeing with the media about the perceived winner is not a minor one. It could substantially alter the perception of the climate of opinion.

Study 2: The electronic dialogue data.

In the months prior to the 2000 presidential elections, the media climate of opinion was much less clear than it was in 1996. Throughout the campaign, the gap between Al Gore and George W. Bush was much smaller than the gap between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole in the prior presidential contest. In fact, this gap was sometimes within the margin of error, implying a statistical tie. In addition to the closer margin, the 2000 race was also much less stable than in 1996, with Gore leading over Bush some of the time and Bush

leading on other occasions. One more factor that contributed to the relative vagueness of the media climate of opinion was the fact that, at least at some points in time, different media outlets reported different poll results that were inconsistent in their projected winner.

The electronic dialogue project measured the perceived climate of opinion at two points in time: in the pre-discussion 4 survey, administered in late July and early October[63], and in the pre-discussion 6 survey completed in late September[64]. Luckily or not, the media answer to the would-be winner question was different at each of these points in time.

In late July and early August, when the pre-discussion 4 survey was in the field, Bush had a lead of 2 to 12 percent. Some outlets and media commentators reported that Bush had "surged" in the polls[65]. For example, Fox News emphasized that all polls were showing that Bush was ahead, "some of them outside of the margin of error, some of them even topping over 50 percent"[66]. USA Today reported that Bush "heads to the Republican National Convention next week with a comfortable lead and a clear advantage over his opponent"[67]. The Baltimore Sun reported that "if polls are accurate, (Bush) is running well ahead of his Democratic opponent, Vice President Al Gore"[68].

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[63] The survey was in the field July 28 through August 6, 2000.
[64] The survey was in the field September 22 through October 2.
[65] CNN Today, July 28, 2000.
[66] The O'reilly Factor, July 31, 2000.
[67] Page, Susan, "Good news, bad news for the Texas governor: Bush going to GOP convention with a comfortable lead," USA Today, July 28, 2000, p. 12A.
[68] Jack W. Germond, "Bush hopes speech tonight will erase doubt, avoid gaffe", The Baltimore Sun, August 3, 2000, p. 17A.

Others reported that Bush was in "close race with Gore"[69] or that the race was "neck and neck"[70]. The Miami Herald reported that Bush "has strengthened his position with moderate and independent voters but still has not persuaded Americans torn between him and Democratic opponent Al Gore"[71]. These reports all emphasize the closeness and fragility of Bush's lead. Still others, like ABC's George Watson, reported that:

> While reading tealeaves might do just as well, I've been consulting all the opinion polls to determine who's on first in the presidential contest. And the winner is too close to call. It's true that George Bush enjoys an edge ranging from two percent in the Gallup Poll to three percent in the ABC News polls to six percent in the New York Times survey of voters. But Bush's lead is statistically insignificant, within the margin of error that pollsters calculate for their arcane sampling techniques[72].

In sum, at the time the pre-discussion 4 survey was in the field, Bush had a small lead in the polls that varied in its statistical significance and journalistic interpretation, depending on time, media outlet, and the caution taken by reporters and commentators. All polls, however, showed that Bush had some edge, and most commentary referred to him as having the lead.

The situation in late September, when respondents completed the September wave, was reversed. By then, according to some journalists, Bush's "lead in the polls had vanished"[73]. This time the media reported that "Gore has a slim electoral edge"[74]. Most

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[69] NPR, Weekend Edition, Saturday, July 29, 2000.
[70] ABC World News Now, July 25, 2000.
[71] Ronald Brownstein, "Bush performance propels campaign", The Miami Herald, August 5, 2000, p. 1.
[72] World News Now, July 27, 2000.
[73] E.g., James Dao, "Bush is pointing to the cloud in the silver lining", The New York Times, September 27, 2000, p. A19.
[74] Paul West, "Contest volatile as debates approach" The Baltimore Sun, October 1, 2000.

media in late September reported that Gore was leading Bush by two to eight points[75]. In addition, most state-by-state analyses found, at that point, that Gore was winning the Electoral College. For example, Fox News reported that "Vice President Gore is leading Governor Bush in the electoral votes" and that "right now we see Gore leading in states with 213 electoral votes"[76]. Bush was portrayed, at least by some journalists, as being "behind in polls"[77]. CNN reported that Gore made gains in polls, and "widened his lead over George W. Bush"[78].

Other journalists, however, pointed out that although Gore had a lead in the polls, Bush had managed to reduce the boost Gore got from the Democratic convention in August[79]. Some polls, increasingly in late September and in early October, actually showed Bush leading by a small margin.[80] Much commentary talked about methodological difficulties and complications that caused the inconsistencies among pollsters[81] and doubted whether it was at all possible to get any valid prediction in such a close race[82]. Reporters often used phrases like "a statistical dead heat"[83], "Very close, very close. Absolutely tied"[84], a "very tight race"[85], "too close to call"[86], and so on, in their interpretations of the campaign.

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[75] E.g., a poll reported in CNN's Early Edition in September gave Gore a 49-41 lead.
[76] Fox News Network, The O'reilly Factor, September 20, 2000.
[77] CNN Ahead Of The Curve, September 18, 2000.
[78] CNN Morning News, September 22, 2000.
[79] E.g., Jeanne Cummings, "Bush enjoys a small bounce in polls while Gore hews to health-care issues", Wall Street Journal, September 26, 2000, p. A28.
[80] NBC Today Show, September 28, 2000.
[81] Dick Polman, "Up, down and tied: The often conflicting polls", The Philadelphia Inquirer, September 27, 2000, p. 1.
[82] Janet Elder, "The polls: Despite ups and downs, surveys show race is tied", The New York Times, September 28, 2000, p. A22.
[83] E.g., NBC News Today Show, September 29, 2000.
[84] Editor-in-chief of the Gallup Organization, Frank Newport. Fox, The Edge With Paula Zahn. September 28, 2000.
[85] ABC World News Now, September 28, 2000.

In sum, in late August Bush had a small lead over Gore, while in late September the situation was reversed, with Gore leading over Bush. Figure 7.1 presents graphs summarizing tracking polls that reflect this image. Both graphs show a Bush lead in July and a Gore lead in September. So if H1.2 holds, media skepticism should be associated with a decreased likelihood of perceiving in late July that Bush would win, and with a decreased likelihood of perceiving in late September that Gore would win.

Dependent variables. Respondents were asked: "Regardless of who you support, who do you think will end up being elected President in November?" Response categories were Gore, Bush and "someone else". Both variables were coded so that "1" would represent the media answer (Bush for pre-discussion 4 and Gore for pre-discussion 6), and "0" the other two answers. While 66.9 percent gave the media answer in the pre-discussion 4 survey (i.e., said Bush would win), only 55.1 percent gave the media answer in the pre-discussion 6 survey (i.e., reported thinking Gore would win).

Results.

Table 7.2 tests hypothesis H1.2 on the EDialogue data. The table presents two logistic regression models predicting the perceived climate of opinion. The dependent variable in Model 1 is the pre-discussion 4 climate of opinion, and in Model 2, the pre-discussion 6 climate of opinion. Both variables were set up so that the media climate of opinion (Bush in July and Gore in September) was coded "1" and all other answers were coded "0".

As in the NES data, the perceived climate of opinion was generally not a function of demographics. In both Model 1 and Model 2 there was no significant effect of sex, race

[86] E.g., CBS, The Early Show, September 27, 2000; William Schneider, CNN Senior Political Analyst, CNN Inside Politics, September 27, 2000.

or age on the perceived climate of opinion. Unlike in Study 1, however, education had a borderline significant effect. In both models, a higher educational level was associated with a perception that Bush would win the elections.

As in the NES data, projection played a major role in climate of opinion perceptions. All other things being equal, political ideology was negatively associated with climate of opinion in pre-discussion 4, and positively associated with it in pre-discussion 6. Since the coding of the dependent variable is flipped (because the media climate of opinion changed between the pre-4 and pre-6 surveys), the signs of the coefficients for ideology in Models 1 and 2 are also reversed. The negative and highly significant coefficient in Model 1 means that as one became more conservative, his or her odds of projecting that Bush would win went up. The positive coefficient in Model 2 means that as one became more liberal, the odds increased that he or she would predict that Gore would win. In sum, people's prediction of the winner was heavily influenced by their own political leanings, both in late July and in late September. Political extremity, however, was unrelated to climate of opinion perceptions in both models.

Unlike in the NES data, the Electronic Dialogue surveys did not show significant effects of any of the involvement variables, after controlling for demographic factors, political ideology and media skepticism. There is no evidence that either political knowledge, political interest, political discussion or news exposure was associated with the perceived climate of opinion. In some cases (especially the effect of news exposure in Model 1), the coefficients approached statistical significance. The direction of the signs of the coefficients for knowledge and news exposure were in the expected direction: more knowledge and news exposure were associated with giving the media answer to the

"who would win" question. Political discussion tended to be negatively related to the perception that Bush was leading in July and that Gore was leading in September. Interest in politics tended to be associated with a perception that Gore would win. Again, none of these associations was significant.

Hypothesis H1.2 predicted that media skepticism would be associated with individual perceptions of the winner. Those who trust the media are expected, according to H1.2, to be more likely than media skeptics to give the media answer to the would-be winner question. Contrary to H1.2, skepticism was not associated with the perceived climate of opinion in Model 1. Moreover, the positive sign of the insignificant coefficient was not the one expected by H1.2 (the positive sign implying that media skeptics tended to think, like the media, that Bush would win). In other words, the July survey does not support H1.2.

However, H1.2 did get support from the late-September pre-discussion 6 survey. The negative and significant coefficient for media skepticism in Model 2 means that as media skepticism became lower (i.e., as trust in the media increased), people were more likely to predict, like the media, that Gore would win. As skepticism increased, people were more likely to report that Bush would win. Each one-unit increase in the media skepticism scale was associated with a 71% ($100*(1-.e^{b})$) decrease in the odds of saying that Gore would win.

If media skepticism influences people to reject the media climate of opinion, then it should also influence the way the perceived climate of opinion *changes* as a result of changes in media reports. Spiral of silence theory, and other theories stressing the importance of news in personal assessments of collective opinion, imply that when the

media changes their reports and alter their assessments of the election winner, audiences will follow. Thus, if the media said in July that Bush was leading, but later polls changed and started to report that Gore was winning, audiences would be likely to follow the media and alter their perceptions of the winner from Bush to Gore. However, H1.2 predicts that only trustful audiences would be influenced by the media. Media skeptics are expected to remain more stable in their perceptions and be less swayed by the media over time.

Table 7.3 presents a logistic regression model that predicts consistent "media answers" to the questions about the winner of the elections. In other words, those who, like the media, said in late July that Bush would win, and then changed their perception to report in late September that Gore would win, were given a value of "1". These people comprised 25 percent of all respondents who completed both surveys. All other respondents, mostly people who consistently said that either Bush or Gore was winning, were coded "0" (only 4 percent of respondents who completed both surveys said that Gore would win in July and Bush would win in September). This is the dependent variable in Table 7.3.

As the negative and significant coefficient for the media skepticism scale shows, skeptical respondents had lower odds of consistently giving the media answer (i.e., saying in July that Bush would win and in September that Gore would win). Controlling for ideology, political knowledge, involvement, discussion and demographics, a one-unit increase on the skepticism scale was associated with a 74 percent decrease in the odds of consistently giving the media answer to the would-be winner question. In order to assess the strength of this effect, I again calculated the predicted probabilities for a 42-year-old

moderate white male with average values on the knowledge, interest and exposure scale. The predicted probability of such a person with a maximum value on the skepticism scale (1) was .17. The predicted probability of such a person with the minimum value on the skepticism scale (0) was .45. The predicted value for such a person with an average value on media skepticism was .28. Thus, the effect of media skepticism on climate of opinion perceptions is again not a minor one. In fact, skepticism, moderateness and sex were the only significant predictors of consistently answering the media answer to the perceived climate of opinion question. The rest of the variables, including political ideology and all the involvement variables, did not significantly predict the dependent variable in Table 7.3.

Discussion.

The models reported in this chapter show the major role of projection in climate of opinion perceptions. When people were asked to name which candidate they thought would win the election, they tended to be influenced by their own preferences. Liberals tended to think that Clinton would win in 1996 and that Gore would win in 2000, and conservatives tended to think that Dole would win in 1996 and that Bush would win in 2000. People tend to perceive that other people share their opinions, sometimes more than they really do.

Involvement variables (such as knowledge and media exposure) were associated with a perception that Clinton was winning in 1996, but they were not associated with the perception of the climate of opinion in 2000. The reason for this difference might be the smaller sample size in the Electronic Dialogue project, and the relatively high

involvement levels of its dedicated participants in this data set. According to theory, we expect people who watch the media and follow politics to be citing the media answer to the would-be-winner question more often. In this respect, the statistical models I presented in this chapter do not offer full support to the spiral-of-silence claim that the media influence audience perceptions of the climate of opinion. Nonetheless, at three different points in time respondents at large, regardless of their level of knowledge and media exposure, tended to give the media answer when asked about their own perception of the winner. A majority of respondents in 1996 said that Clinton would win, a majority in July 2000 said that Bush would win, and a majority in September 2000 said that Gore would win.

Noelle-Neumann might interpret this as evidence to her theory of powerful media. But over and above the effects of ideology and projection, and over and above any inconsistent effect of exposure and knowledge, media skepticism was negatively and significantly associated with the perceived climate of opinion in two of the three models. When people did not trust the media, they tended to reject the mediated climate of opinion, even after controlling for their own opinions. On the other hand, when people had faith in the media, they tended to accept their election predictions and assessments as truthful.

I believe the best evidence for my hypothesis came when I tried to predict who consistently thinks like the media. The media said in July that Bush was leading and in September that Gore was leading. 25 percent of respondents accepted these media projections and reported the same patterns in the July and September surveys. Most other respondents consistently thought that either Gore or Bush would win. Media skepticism

was negatively and significantly associated with consistent acceptance of the media's projections. This was the case even though the mediated climate of opinion was not clear and the gap between the candidates was minor at best. Despite all this, media skepticism was the only significant predictor, except sex, of assessing in July that Bush would win and in September that Gore would win.

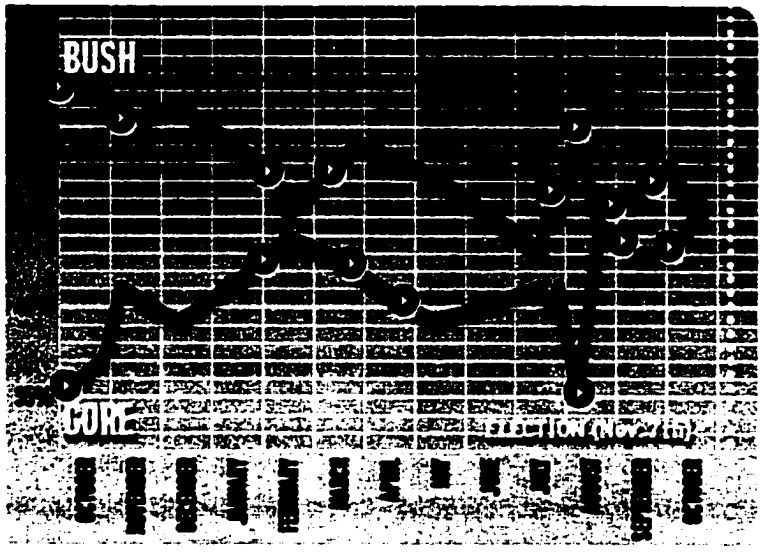
To sum up, I believe this chapter presents at least some evidence supporting my hypothesis that media skepticism moderate the perception of the climate of opinion. Still, one finding – the positive and insignificant coefficient for the effect of skepticism on projected winner in July 2000 – is inconsistent with the other findings in the chapter. The reason for this inconsistency is unclear. One possibility is that the hypothesized association only works when the Democratic candidate is leading in the mediated opinion climate. That is, that the ideology of the projected winner (and not only of audience members) is intervening in the process. Due to well-developed notions and stereotypes of "liberal media biases", audience skepticism might only be operating when media texts are potentially liberally slanted. In other words, skeptics might not have rejected the mediate opinion climate in July because, in this case, it favored the Republicans. "If the media are actually saying a Republican candidate has the lead", a skeptic might have thought, "then they are actually doing a fair job in this instance". On the other hand, suspicion and skepticism may have played a role in September, because this time the media's projection favored the Democrats.

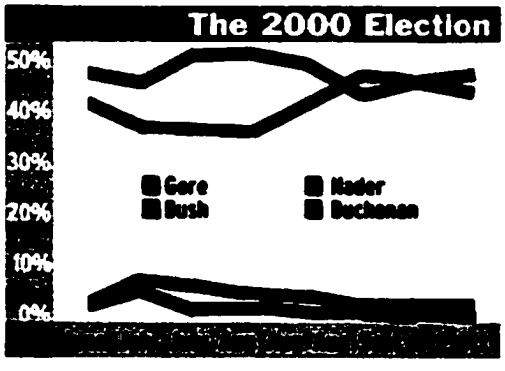
This is only one possibility to account for the inconsistency of the results. Other explanations, more plausible in my opinion, include the fact that the media presentation was vague and unclear, changed from one media outlet to another, and perhaps even

changed while the survey was in the field. In addition, one could argue that the ideological controls were not strong enough. The tendency of skeptical audiences in July to think that Bush would win might only be an artifact of their political views (that is, skeptics thought that Bush was winning due to projection of their conservative biases). The control for ideology should have eliminated or reduced this problem. However, if this control does not capture ideology accurately, then the estimate of the effect of skepticism on personal predictions of the winner could be biased due to measurement error. All of these issues offer potential explanations. I found none of them comforting, since all point out potential study artifacts. This chapter only reported three effects, at different points in time, of skepticism on the projected estimation of the winner. More research would have to report estimates for this association from other studies gathered in other contexts. Meta-analysis would have to be used in order to learn about the average effect of skepticism on personal projection of the winner.

We should not be too bothered with the inconsistent pre-discussion 4 finding simply because it is a null finding. The possibility that the coefficient is actually negative (as it should be according to H1.2) cannot be rejected. The confidence interval for the coefficient of the effect of skepticism on pre-discussion 4 personal prediction of the winner was -.70 to 1.50. Hence, statistically, the estimate could also be negative. The null finding, though clearly not supporting my hypotheses, simply says that we cannot tell if skepticism affected opinion climate perception in late July-early August 2000, or in what ways it may have done so.

Figure 7.1: CBS and ABC tracking poll results





Source: ABC News Web page.

Table 7.1: OLS model predicting the perceived climate of opinion (5=Clinton will win by quite a bit; 1=Dole or Perot will win by quite a bit); NES 1996 Data.

	B (s.e.)	β
Media skepticism	-.08*	-.06
	(.03)	
Sex (male=1)	.07	.04
	(.05)	
Race (white=1)	.03	.01
	(.07)	
Years of education	.01	.04
	(.01)	
Age	.00	.00
	.00	
Party-ideology index	.08***	.25
(-5=extreme conservative/strong	(.00)	
Republican; +5=extreme liberal/strong		
Democrat)		
Political extremity	-.04**	-.07
	(.01)	
Political interest	-.02	-.04
(0=low – 5=high)	(.02)	
Political knowledge	.13***	.14
(0=low – 4=high)	(.02)	
Political discussion	-.06	-.01
(days in the past week)	(.01)	
News exposure	.02*	.07
(mean days in past week)	(.01)	
R^2	.10***	
N	1,465	

Notes: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 7.2: Logistic regression models predicting the perceived climate of opinion in July and September 2000 (1=media climate of opinion); ED2K Data.

	Model 1: Pre-discussion 4 data (1=Bush would win; 0=Gore or someone else would)		Model 2: Pre-discussion 6 data (1=Gore would win; 0=Bush or someone else would)	
	B (s.e.)	e^b	B (s.e.)	e^b
Media skepticism	.40	1.49	-1.22*	.29
	(.56)		(.57)	
Sex (male=1)	-.05	.94	-.27	.76
	(.20)		(.21)	
Race (white=1)	.31	1.36	.47	1.60
	(.28)		(.32)	
Years of education	.10#	1.11	-.09	.90
	(.05)		(.06)	
Age	-.01	.98	-.00	.99
	(.00)		(.00)	
Political ideology (5= extreme liberal; -5=extreme conservative)	-.37***	.68	.31***	1.37
	(.03)		(.03)	
Political extremity	.05	1.05	-.10	.90
	(.06)		(.07)	
Political interest (1=low – 4=high)	-.16	.85	.12	1.12
	(.13)		(.14)	
Political knowledge (0=low – 1=high)	.49	1.64	.33	1.40
	(.46)		(.48)	
Political discussion (days in the past week)	-.05	.96	-.06	.93
	(.10)		(.10)	
News exposure (mean days in past week)	.11	1.13	.01	1.01
	(.07)		(.08)	
Intercept	-.91		2.05	
R^2	.32		.30	
N	623		509	

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 7.3: Logistic regression models predicting consistent adoption of the media climate of opinion (1=thinking in July that Bush would win and in August that Gore would win); ED2K Data.

	B (s.e.)	e^b
Media skepticism	-1.34*	.26
	(.58)	
Sex (male=1)	-.42#	.65
	(.21)	
Race (white=1)	-.00	.99
	(.33)	
Years of education	.01	1.01
	(.06)	
Age	-.00	.99
	(.00)	
Political ideology	-.00	.99
(5= extreme liberal;	(.03)	
-5 =extreme conservative)		
Political extremity	-.17*	.84
	(.06)	
Political interest	-.03	.96
(1=low – 4=high)	(.14)	
Political knowledge	.65	1.92
(0=low – 1=high)	(.71)	
Political discussion	-.11	1.04
(days in the past week)	(.11)	
News exposure	.04	.88
(mean days in past week)	(.08)	
Intercept	.16	
R^2	.06	
N	501	

Notes: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Chapter 8: Media skepticism and cultivation effects.

Cultivation theory was introduced by George Gerbner (Gerbner, 1973; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1977) more than two decades ago. Since then, it has become one of the most influential theories about the effects of mass media on society. Briefly, it states that television has the ability to influence viewers' perceptions of social reality. Television is seen as a powerful and centralized agent of socialization that tells "most of the stories to most of the people most of the time" (see Gerbner et al., 1980). It is perceived to have a univocal, recurrent, stable and unambiguous system of messages. A quantitative large-scale television content analysis, designed to trace this system of messages, shows that the world of television is very different than the real world. The cultivation hypothesis states that television viewers, who spend many hours a day (most of their time) with TV's distorted, highly stylized, stereotyped, and repetitive messages, will tend to adopt its dominant depictions of "the world outside". In Gerbner's words (1990, p. 249), "cultivation means the specific independent (though not isolated) contribution that a particularly consistent and compelling symbolic stream makes to the process of socialization and enculturation".

But what happens if people do not trust television? What happens when people are skeptical of television's skewed presentation of reality? Cultivation scholars, who depict audiences as the passive and helpless victims of televised reality, may be ignoring the active part played by audiences in the communication process. Do people have the ability to resist the mediated reality? Does cultivation work differently on those who trust the

media, compared to those who do not? In other words, does media skepticism moderate cultivation effects? This is yet another aspect of my "media skepticism as an intervening factor in media effects" hypothesis.

"In its simplest form, cultivation analysis tries to ascertain if those who spend more time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and repetitive messages and lessons of the television world, compared with people who watch less television" (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990, p. 17). This strategy has yielded results indicating that perceptions of heavy-viewers are closer to televised reality than those of light-viewers. This was the case with regard to assessments of real-world statistics and facts ("first order cultivation") as well as to the transformation and extrapolation of these assessments into broader values, beliefs and ideologies ("second order cultivation" see Hawkings & Pingree, 1990). For example, heavy-viewers did not exaggerate only the number of cops or crimes; they also tended to perceive the world as a mean and frightening place. Cultivation research found alienation fear, anomie and interpersonal mistrust among heavy TV viewers. The researchers concluded that heavy exposure to TV influences not only viewers' knowledge of real-world statistics, but also the way in which they think about the world they live in, their apprehensions, and their faith and trust in others.

Thus, cultivation theory's most famous finding is that "the hegemonic message of the media is the call for law and order in a dangerous world" (Katz, 1987, p. S32) and that atomized heavy-viewers adopt this message and "lock themselves in for fear of going out" (p. S32). But other second order extrapolations from televised content patterns by heavy-viewers also emerge from the research. According to cultivation scholars, since

women are grossly underrepresented and stereotyped in the televised world, heavy-viewers tend to adopt more stereotypical gender roles than light-viewers (Morgan, 1982). Also, since "television seeks large and heterogeneous audiences...[and hence to] steer a middle course along the supposedly nonideological mainstream...heavy-viewers are significantly and substantially more likely to label themselves as being 'moderate' rather than either 'liberal' or 'conservative'" (Gerbner et al., 1994, p. 29). Cultivation effects were also found in other domains (e.g. attitudes towards the elderly, perceptions of racial tensions), in other countries and cultural contexts, and also in experimental designs (for a more detailed review see Morgan and Shanahan, 1997; Rubin et al., 1988). Morgan and Shanahan (1997) recently performed a meta-analysis of 82 published cultivation studies that contained a total of 5,633 different findings. Though their analysis yielded only a relatively modest cultivation effect (average effect size .09), they claim that this effect, though not large in magnitude, should not be treated as trivial.

Very relevant to the present research is the fact that cultivation effects were found in the context of news watching, not just for television watching in general. Many of the discrepancies Gerbner and his colleagues found between the real world and the televised world could be found when comparing the world of news to the real world. The reason for this is, of course, that news highlights dramatic and deviant events at the expense of more boring but nonetheless prevalent stories. Violence, for example, is a major theme in TV news as well as fiction (Lichter & Lichter, 1997).

As Jamieson and Slovic (1997) point out, the realism of the news genre, as compared to drama, facilitates cultivation; news is therefore expected to have a greater cultivation effect than fiction:

> It is reasonable to believe that whatever the effects of prime time drama, they are inhibited at least somewhat by our awareness of their fictional nature. It is plausible as well that whatever the effects of crime reports, they are magnified by our awareness that palpable individuals with personal identities are the victims and alleged perpetrators. (p.4)

And indeed, Jamieson and Slovic present data from three sources that support the news cultivation of crime risk perceptions hypothesis. In each source they find associations between perceptions of risk of crime and news watching (national, and especially local news). They show that fear of crime is associated with news watching even when controlling for neighborhood or metropolitan area crime statistics. That is, news reports of crime affect fear of crime independently of actual crime rates (for similar evidence see Fishman, 1980; Liska & Baccaglini, 1990; Mutz, 1998). Jamieson and Slovic interpret their findings about news watching as "particularly consistent with cultivation theory" (p. 36).

The evidence for news cultivation has recently received some indirect support from research arguing that cultivation is, in fact, an artifact of "source confusion" (Mares, 1996). People are cultivated by fiction, according to Mares' findings, because they confuse it with news. If this is indeed the case, then it is clear that news has the ability to influence audiences' perceptions of social realities.

In sum, some research finds that news, and not only televised fiction, has the ability to cultivate perceptions of the world in its audiences. This research suggests that the more you watch news, the more you believe the violent world of news prevails in the real world. In this chapter I wish to find whether people accept the picture of the world presented by news, even when they do not trust the news media.

Criticisms of cultivation. The criticisms of cultivation theory are many. Due to space limitations, I will mention only the main ones (see Weimann, 2000 for a detailed review). It has been argued that many of the findings regarding the outcome measures can be explained by other variables not included in the analysis (Hughes, 1980); that there is a possibility that reverse causation (some underlying personality disposition) causes the heavy viewing (see Wober, 1986); that audience selectivity (Rubin & Perse, 1987) could account for cultivation findings; and that the effects might be genre-specific (Gunther, 1994). Many concerns have been raised about measurement issues (e.g. claims about response bias; see Rubin et al., 1988). The theory has also been attacked for treating the diverse spectrum of televised texts as a single monopolistic mainstream, and for neglecting the possibility that audiences might have divergent interpretations of televised texts (Newcomb, 1978). The most problematic early concerns had to do with the fact that after controlling for a few demographics, some of the effects became very small in size[87].

In response to these early criticisms, cultivation researchers have made some elaborations and corrections to their theory (Gerbner et al., 1980), most notably by introducing the concepts of "mainstreaming" and "resonance". Mainstreaming is the way in which television viewing interacts with other, usually demographic, variables in its impact on the outcome measures. "Mainstreaming means that television viewing may absorb or override differences in perspectives or behaviors that stem from other social, cultural, and demographic influence" (Gerbner et al., 1994, p. 31). Resonance is another

[87] An additional early concern was that cultivation's finding were not replicated in Great Britain (in a study by Wober). But it later became clear that Wober's study strengthened cultivation findings, since British audiences watched much less violence than their American counterparts and hence were much less prone to cultivation effects.

form of interaction between TV viewing and demographic variables, "which implies that special circumstances of life can make TV's message highly salient for certain groups. In these cases, there is a congruence between people's everyday realities and TV messages, which results in booming and amplifying TV's impact" (Gerbner et al., 1980, p.10). Thus, contemporary conceptualization of the cultivation hypothesis involves a complex and dynamic process, rather than a straightforward one. Despite the usefulness of mainstreaming and resonance to their theory, Gerbner and his colleagues insist that some "across-the-board" effects still exist, and that these offer the most compelling evidence of television's contribution to conceptions of social reality (see Gerbner et al., 1997).

There is some literature that suggests that hypothesizing about the moderating role of media skepticism in cultivation makes sense. For example, it was found that correlations between amount of viewing and social reality beliefs occurred for those who believed television to be an accurate representation of real life, but not for those skeptical towards television's presentations (Potter, 1986). Research findings regarding the role of audiences' "believability" or "perceived realism" (Chen, 1991; Perse, 1986; Rubin et al., 1988; Slater & Elliott, 1982) provide similar results: the cultivation hypothesis works when people trust what they see on TV to be real, but does not work when audiences have doubts about the realism of television contents. It is thus worth examining whether media skepticism intervenes in news cultivation processes.

The possible strategies to examine the different cultivation hypotheses are diverse. First, cultivation could occur "across the board". This means that television exposure should be associated with the outcome measure in the general population. As Gerbner noted, if such effects are found, they present the most compelling evidence for

cultivation. The cultivation hypothesis predicts that those who watch heavy doses of television will view the world as dangerous and mean place, compared to those who watch only limited amounts of television. If we expect media skepticism to moderate the "across-the-board" cultivation process, we could formulate the following hypothesis:

> **H1.3a**: Media skepticism will interact with television exposure in its effect on "social mistrust" perceptions. The effect of TV viewing on "social mistrust" perceptions will be weaker for those skeptical toward television than for non-skeptics.

As discussed above, according to cultivation theory, television exposure is expected to be associated not only with perceptions of the world as mean and dangerous, but also with other outcome measures. The data at hand contain two such possible outcomes of television watching: political beliefs and gender-related beliefs. As noted earlier, according to cultivation theory, since females are symbolically annihilated and grossly stereotyped in television, "most heavy-viewers absorb the implicit assumptions that women have more limited abilities and interests than males" (Gerbner et al., 1994, p. 28). Moreover, since (due to the economy of the entertainment industry) television supposedly presents a politically "balanced," middle-of-the-road point of view, cultivation theory expects heavy television viewing to cultivate less ideologically-committed political positions. But, since attitudes toward the press are hypothesized to moderate the process, media skepticism is expected to interact with television viewing in the following ways:

> **H1.3b**: The effect of TV viewing on perceptions of women as having more limited capacities than men will be weaker for those skeptical toward television than for those not skeptical toward television.

H1.3c: The effect of TV viewing on political "moderateness" will be weaker for those skeptical toward television than for those not skeptical toward television.

As noted in the cultivation literature, "across-the-board" effects are often hard to find. An alternative strategy has been to look for effects within specific groups. According to the mainstreaming and resonance hypotheses, television viewing is expected to interact with other demographic variables in their effect on the outcome measures. Since I believe that media skepticism will interfere with the cultivation process, I expect a three-way interaction (TV-viewing * demographic variable * media skepticism). Among non-skeptical respondents, heavy-viewers from diverse social backgrounds should be either closer to (mainstreaming) or more remote from (resonance) light-viewers in the outcome measure. However, if media skepticism indeed moderates such processes, there should be no such complex relationship among skeptical respondents. Hence,

H1.3d: There will be a three-way interaction between television-viewing, media skepticism and demographic factors in their effect on the outcome measure. Whereas non-skeptical viewers are expected to be "mainstreamed", skeptical and heavy television viewers are expected to remain unaffected by TV's mainstream.

This hypothesis will be operationalized using education, race and gender as the interacting demographic variables. Mainstreaming predicts that both educated and uneducated, and white and non-white, heavy-viewers will be closer in their perceptions of the world as mean, in their gender positions, and in their level of political moderateness than their light- viewing counterparts. Since skepticism toward television should moderate this process, I expect those who trust the media to be mainstreamed compared to media-skeptics, who should remain unaffected by the media's mainstreaming

messages. Hypotheses h1.3d.A, h1.3d.B, h1.3d.C, h1.3d.D, h1.3d.E and h1.3d.F are variations of this hypothesis using the three outcome measures and the two interacting demographic variables.

Independent variables: News exposure vs. general TV exposure. Cultivation research deals mainly with exposure to televised fiction. My dissertation deals with attitudes toward news and news producers. Thus, when testing hypotheses H1.3a through H1.3d I plan to utilize not only measures of TV exposure in general, but also measures of exposure to TV news. As I mentioned earlier, TV news, as well as fiction, conveys the message of a scary and violent world. The same discrepancies that Gerbner and his colleges found between the real world and the televised world can be found when comparing the world of news and the world of reality. Thus high doses of news also cultivate social mistrust. However, if media skepticism moderates the cultivation process, this association should exist for trustful audiences, but not for skeptical ones. Thus, the cultivation hypotheses will be examined with two kinds of measures of exposure to the media. Study 1 uses GSS data, which measures general exposure, and the other studies use other data sets, with measures of exposure to news in particular.

Study 1: GSS data: General television exposure.

In this section, I test the hypotheses using exposure to TV in general as the main independent variable. The NORC General Social Survey Data contain such a general exposure measure, as well as measures of confidence in television and a few cultivation outcome variables. GSS data were the basis for much research in cultivation. (e.g., Signorielli, 1990). A cumulative file containing all respondents who answered the

exposure, confidence in television and outcome measures items in the years 1972-1996 was created[88]. The total N for the file was 35,285. However, since not all the questions were asked in all years, the actual Ns were considerably lower and depended on the specific variables under investigation in the specific models.

Measures.

Outcome Measures.

Social mistrust (Gerbner's Mean World Index). GSS respondents were asked if they thought "most people would try to take advantage of them or would try to be fair", if they would say that "most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people" (TRUST), and if they would say that "most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves" (HELP). This mistrust scale was labeled by Gerbner and his colleagues the "Mean World Index" (MWI), and has been validated and checked for reliability many times in the past (see Rubin et al., 1994, pp. 154-5). For the cumulative GSS file, Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .66. The three items were coded so that the mistrustful option would have a value of "2", the reversed option a value of "0", and "not sure" a value of "1". These were then summed, creating an index varying between 0 and 6, with a mean of 2.86 and a standard deviation of 2.24.

Gender positions. Respondents were also asked whether they agreed or disagreed that "most men are more emotionally suited for politics than most women", that "women

[88] The rationale for the use of the cumulative, thus huge, GSS file is simple. Cultivation is expected to be a very small effect, according to meta-analysis (Morgan & Shanahan, 1997). To detect such a small effect one needs considerable statistical power. Hence, the larger the sample, the better.

should take care of running their home and leave running the country to men", whether they thought a woman should or should not work "if she has a husband capable of supporting her", and whether they would vote for a female candidate for president[89]. All items were coded so that a negative attitude toward females ("the television answer", according to cultivation scholars; e.g., Morgan, 1982) would have a value of "2", a positive attitude would have a value of "0", and a neutral/uncertain attitude, a value of "1". Reliability for the scale was .66. The scale was the mean of the four items multiplied by 4. It ranged between 0 and 8, with a mean of 2.0 and a standard deviation of 2.37. The distribution of this variable was highly skewed toward higher values (more egalitarian positions, right skew; skewness=.99; se=.01), with about 50 percent of cases having a value of "0" (endorsing the most egalitarian position toward women).

Political "moderateness". The GSS surveys contained an item asking respondents to rank themselves on a "liberal-conservative" scale. To create a measure for "moderateness" from the GSS data, "extreme" liberals and conservatives were assigned a value of "1", regular liberals and conservatives a value of "2", those ranking themselves as "slightly" liberal or conservative a value of "3", and "moderates" a value of "4" (as mentioned earlier, according to cultivation scholars, "moderation" is the TV answer). The mean score for this variable was 3.02, with a standard deviation of .92.

Independent variables.

[89] The GSS data contain a few more gender items. Some of them were rejected since using them would substantially reduce the N (all the women-in-military items). Other items were not included due to vague wording (e.g. OPSEX).

Media skepticism. GSS respondents were asked how much confidence they had in television. Answer categories were "a great deal" (coded "1"), "only some" (coded "2"), or "hardly any" (coded "3"). About 15 percent of respondents chose the first category, 56 percent chose the second, and about 29 percent chose the third.

Television watching. The GSS survey included an item measuring the number of hours respondents watched television on an ordinary day. Clear outliers – respondents who gave an answer of more than 15 hours of daily watching – were not included in the analysis[90]. The new variable (without the outliers) had a mean of 2.92, with a standard deviation of 2.05.

Results.

"Across the board". To test Hypotheses H1.3a through H1.3c, three multiple regression models were run. The first stage of each model was designed to check for the original cultivation hypothesis. Accordingly, the dependent variables were the different outcome measures (social mistrust, gender positions, political moderateness), and the main independent variable was television exposure. For statistical control purposes, demographic variables of education, race, sex, social class and age were inserted as covariates. Also used in the models was the skepticism measure. My first hypothesis predicted that media cynicism would interact with television exposure in its effect on the outcome measures. The effect of TV viewing on the outcome measures is expected to be weaker for those skeptical toward television than for non-skeptics. Hence, the second step

[90] 15 hours was chosen as the cut-off point since this was the 99th percentile. People reporting 10 or 12 hours a day with the TV on could still be giving an accurate account (e.g. the guards in the Annenberg school). But 15 hours starts to sound like a measurement error, given our need to sleep.

of each model tests for the hypothesized TV-watching*media-skepticism interaction. Centering was used in the reported models to minimize multicolinearity.

Models 1 and 2 in Table 8.1 test Hypothesis H1.3a. Model 1 shows that the cumulative GSS data are consistent with Gerbner's cultivation hypothesis. Television viewing is indeed associated with mean-world perceptions, and in the right direction: the more viewing a respondent reported, the more he or she tended to perceive the world as mean (all demographic factors being equal). However, the interaction term in Model 2, testing for the interaction between TV viewing and mistrust in TV, did not significantly add to the variance explained by Model 1. In other words, there are no significant differences in the effects of TV viewing on the outcome measure between TV skeptics and non-skeptics. Hypothesis H1.3a does not gain support from the data.

Similarly, Models 5 and 6 test Hypothesis H1.3c. In accordance with the cultivation hypothesis, Model 5 shows that even after controlling for demographics, those who watch more television tend to be more politically moderate than those watching less television. But again, Model 6 shows that the interaction between television viewing and television skepticism is not statistically significant. The effect of TV viewing on moderateness is not associated with the level of confidence in TV. Thus, Hypothesis H1.3c? is also not supported by the data.

Model 3 tests the relationship between respondents' gender attitudes and television viewing. Although there is a significant effect of TV viewing on gender positions, it is not in the direction predicted by cultivation theory. Controlling for race, education, sex and class, heavy TV viewing is significantly associated with more *egalitarian* attitudes toward women, not the other way around (note that the coding of the "gender positions"

variables is 8= non-egalitarian positions, and 0=egalitarian positions). This could reflect a shift in TV reality toward a more feminist direction since Morgan tested the gender-related cultivation hypothesis in the early 1980s. One could argue that contemporary heavy-viewers encounter more females as lawyers, judges or business managers than past heavy-viewers did. Women might even be *overrepresented* in executive and professional roles on TV today, compared to "real life" statistics and to their past "symbolic annihilation" on TV, documented by cultivation scholars. Such a shift in televised content, if it has indeed occurred (and one would need to run a large-scale content analysis to investigate this possibility), might explain the interesting cultivation pattern that emerges out of Model 3. However, the GSS data (an additional unreported model) did not find evidence for a year * TV viewing interaction. In other words, the effect of TV viewing on gender positions did not change over the years. There is no evidence in the GSS data for the "content change" explanation for the negative direction of the TV viewing coefficient in Model 3[91].

All of this makes it difficult to explain the results of Model 4. As the table shows, TV viewing interacts with confidence in television in its effect on attitudes towards females. To interpret this interaction, the different levels of TV viewing and confidence in television were put into the equation, and the mean values were used for all control variables. The results are presented in Figure 1. As the figure shows, the effect of TV viewing on chauvinistic gender positions (the more TV viewing, the more egalitarian the position) is *negative* for those having "hardly any" confidence in TV and *positive* for

[91] A more plausible explanation for this negative coefficient will be offered in the next section.

those with "a great deal" of such confidence, with those having "some confidence" in the middle. This pattern is similar, but not identical, to what H1.3b predicted. The slope for skeptics (indicating a positive effect of television on gender position) was expected by H1.3b, but this hypothesis expected skeptics to be *unaffected*, not *negatively* affected as Figure 3 shows. It seems as though television "cultivates" chauvinism for non-skeptics and feminist positions for skeptics. Perhaps this is due to differing interpretations of televised texts; perhaps it is a boomerang effect for those having the least confidence in TV.

To sum up, we have so far seen little evidence that media skepticism moderates "across-the-board" cultivation effects. In all models, television-viewing was associated with the outcome measure. But in two of the three cases there was no interaction effect of TV-viewing and confidence in television in their effect on the outcome measure. In the third case the interaction between television-viewing and confidence in TV was not exactly the one predicted by the hypotheses. Overall, then, there is little support for Hypothesis 1.3 in the data.

Mainstreaming. Media skepticism does not seem to moderate the so called "across the board" cultivation effects in the GSS data, at least when social mistrust and political moderateness were the outcome variables. But what about mainstreaming? According to cultivation theorists, heavy television viewing brings people of diverse demographic backgrounds closer in their perceptions of the world. An example of such an effect is presented in Figure 2a: heavy-viewing educated and uneducated television viewers are closer in their social mistrust than their light-viewing counterparts. Is this process affected by people's attitudes toward television? Hypothesis H1.3d predicts that the

mainstreaming effect will occur only for audiences who have faith in television. Those who do not trust television are expected to remain unaffected by its presentation of the world. Hence, educated and uneducated heavy-viewing and skeptical audiences' perceptions of reality are expected to remain far apart (see Figure 2B). This is in fact a three-way interaction between television-viewing, confidence in TV and another demographic measure in their joint effect on an outcome measure.

Six OLS regression models were run to test for Hypothesis H1.3d. The first stage of each model was designed to test whether mainstreaming occurs (a two-way interaction between TV-viewing and a demographic variable). Two demographic variables (education and race) and three different outcome measures (MWI, gender positions and political moderateness) were used. Education and television viewing were coded as dichotomous variables to facilitate interpretation. For the sake of parsimony, only significance levels are presented. In five of the six models these interaction effects emerged as significant ones. The models were interpreted using the mean values of all control variables. Figures 8.3 through 8.7 present the interpretations of Models 7 through 11 respectively.

Figure 3 shows that although educated respondents tend to see the world as less mean and evil than less-educated respondents, uneducated and educated heavy television viewers are closer in their perceptions of the world than their light-viewing counterparts. Hence, this model supports mainstreaming theory. Similar mainstreaming effects are found in Figures 8.4, 8.6 and 8.7. In each, educated and uneducated, as well as white and non-white, heavy-viewers are closer in their perceptions of the world than their light-viewing counterparts. However, the significant interaction reported in Model 9 is not in

the direction expected by the mainstreaming hypothesis. Only heavy-viewing highly-educated respondents seem to be affected by the televised message, while the uneducated are virtually not affected. The distance in political moderateness is greater between educated and uneducated heavy-viewers than between educated and uneducated light-viewers (no mainstreaming). In sum, the mainstreaming hypothesis works in four of the six models.

The second stage of each of the models was designed to test for the effect of confidence in television on these two-way-interactions. The results show that the three-way interaction advanced by Hypothesis H1.3d is not found in any of the six models. The interaction between television viewing and education or race is not affected by the level of confidence in television. In other words, the mainstreaming process is not moderated by audiences' skepticism toward the media. In Models 7, 8, 10 and 11 all respondents are "mainstreamed" regardless of their attitudes toward the media, but Hypothesis H1.3d does not gain any support from the data.

Conclusion.

Overall, this study did not provide much evidence in favor of a moderating effect of media skepticism in cultivation processes. Skepticism did not reduce "across-the-board" cultivation effects in the case of the social mistrust index or political moderateness. When mainstreaming took place (in four out of six models in Table 8.2), it was not related to audiences' level of confidence in TV. In sum, as cultivation predicts, TV viewing is indeed associated with social mistrust and with political moderateness. To the extent that these associations are indeed evidence of cultivation effects (and not, for instance, of

audience selectivity), these effects are not influenced by audiences' skepticism toward the media. As far as the analysis of the cumulative GSS file can tell, skeptical audiences are as likely as any others to be cultivated or mainstreamed by heavy exposure to television. The audience, as active, cynical and critical as it might be, does not have the ability to resist TV's repetitive and distorted messages. The extremely large data set seems to corroborate Morgan and Shanahan's meta-analysis finding of a "small but significant" cultivation effect.

Yet this study tested the moderating role of news media skepticism in the association between general media exposure and cultivation outcome measures. One could argue that the general exposure measure used here does not correspond with the specific nature of the interacting item (mistrust in the *news* media). If media skepticism moderates cultivation, than it probably affects *news* cultivation, not some general television cultivation. Thus, hypotheses H1.3a through H1.3d.e should be tested using measures of news exposure, in addition to general media exposure. This is exactly what I do in the rest of the chapter.

Study 2: NES 1996 data: News exposure.

The 1996 National Election Study provides data to assess whether news cultivation effects are affected by media skepticism. Respondents were asked how much of the time they thought they could trust the media to report the news fairly. Response categories were "just about always" (coded "1"), "most of the time" (coded "2"), " only some of the time" (coded "3"), "almost never" (coded "4"), and "none of the time" (coded "5"). This

item, averaging 2.69, with a standard deviation of .75, serves as my measure of media skepticism.

Independent variable: News media exposure. NES respondents were asked for the number of days in the past week they watched national and local news on TV and the number of days they read a daily newspaper. Most of the tables reported in this section used the mean of the local and national news items as a measure of news exposure (reliability for this measure was .69). This is because cultivation deals specifically with television, and because the newspaper item substantially lowered the reliability of the news media exposure scale. However, I did run models using a measure of exposure that included both the newspaper item and a scale with the mean of the three items (local news, national news, and daily newspaper) in addition to the models I report here. These models provided similar results to those reported in the tables.

Social mistrust (Gerbner's Mean World Index). NES also contains the TRUST and HELP items of the social mistrust index. Reliability for these two items was .62. The items were coded so that the mistrustful option would have a value of "1" and the reversed option a value of "0". They were then averaged, creating an index varying between 0 and 1, with a mean of .50 and a standard deviation of .41.

Gender positions. Respondents were asked to place themselves on a gender role scale in which "1" represented "women and men should have equal roles" and "7" meant "a woman's place is in the home". The mean for this item was 2.24, with a standard deviation of 1.65.

Political "moderateness". As in Study 1, a measure for "moderateness" was created by assigning "extreme" liberals and conservatives a value of "1", regular liberals and

conservatives a value of "2", those ranking themselves as "slightly" liberal or conservative a value of "3", and "moderates" a value of "4". The mean score for this variable was 2.88, with a standard deviation of .92.

Results.

Across the board. Table 8.4 tests the hypotheses about "across-the-board" cultivation effects. Models 1 through 3 test Hypothesis H1.3a. As cultivation predicts, TV news watching is associated with perceptions of a mean world, after controlling for race, age, sex and education (Model 2; the bivariate association, reported in Model 1, was zero). The more news respondents watched, the higher they scored on the social mistrust index. However, as Model 3 shows, there was no significant interaction between exposure and media skepticism. In other words, there is no evidence for differential cultivation effects for skeptics and non-skeptics.

Models 4 through 6 test H1.3b. Here, television news exposure was associated with chauvinistic positions only in the bivariate case (Model 4), and the association disappeared after controlling for demographics. There was also no significant interaction between exposure and media skepticism. This interaction was also tested without the demographic controls, again with null results.

Models 7 through 9 test H1.3c. With or without controls, news exposure is associated with political moderateness. The more one reports watching TV news, the more moderate she or he is. However, the hypothesized interaction was again not significant. We cannot reject the null hypothesis that the effect of news watching on political moderateness is the same regardless of one's skepticism toward the media.

In sum, the 1996 NES data show some associations that may be interpreted as news cultivation, but these associations do not interact with media skepticism, as Hypothesis 1.3 predicts. To increase confidence in the findings, the hypotheses were also tested using alternative measures of news media exposure. Each of the tests provided evidence for news cultivation[92], but none yielded a significant exposure*media skepticism interaction.

Local news and crime risk perceptions. According to prior research, local news cultivates the perception of a mean world much more than national news does, because of its greater emphasis on crime issues. This is why I tested Hypothesis H1.3a with specific attention to local news. The findings are presented in Table 8.4. In addition to social mistrust (Gerbner's Mean World Index), I used "fear of crime" as another outcome measure potentially affected by cultivation. Like Jamieson and Slovic (who also tested their news cultivation hypothesis on NES data), I found that both measures are correlated with local news watching. The more people watched local news, the more they were afraid that they or one of their family members "might be the victim of an assault during the coming year". This association was only borderline significant (p=.05 for MWI; p=.09 for fear of crime) after controlling for demographics. However, the interaction with media skepticism was again not statistically significant. In other words, to the extent that local news cultivates crime risk and social mistrust, these processes are not affected by media skepticism.

Mainstreaming. Table 8.5 provides nine tests for mainstreaming, corresponding with the interactions between exposure and education, race and sex in their effect on the

[92] For example, I tried using a measure that contains newspaper as well as TV news exposure. This measure was positively associated with gender positions and political moderateness, and negatively associated with MWI. However the exposure*media skepticism interaction was not significant.

three outcome measures. This interaction was not significant in seven of the nine cases. However, two models do provide support for mainstreaming. Model 1 shows a significant interaction between education and exposure in their effect on the mistrust index. Figure 8.8 provides an interpretation of this significant interaction. As mainstreaming predicts, TV exposure does bring people of diverse backgrounds closer in their social mistrust. While educated and uneducated light news watchers are far apart in their perceptions of the world as mean (uneducated score much higher on the MWI in this group), heavy news watchers' perceptions of the world as mean are much closer. The effect of news exposure on MWI is negative for the relatively uneducated, while it is positive for the highly educated. Similarly, Model 6 shows a significant interaction between race and exposure in their effect on political moderation. Figure 8.9 provides the interpretation for this interaction. Again, in accordance with mainstreaming, white and non-white heavy viewers are closer in their political moderateness than their light-viewing counterparts. While light-viewing whites tend to be much more moderate than light viewing non-whites, the moderateness scores of heavy news watchers almost converge.

However, those two mainstreaming effects are not affected by media skepticism. As Models 1 and 6 show, the three-way interactions exposure*education*skepticism and exposure*race*skepticism are non-significant in both cases. When mainstreaming effects do take place, they are not influenced by people's attitudes toward the media. In cases where heavy news exposure brings people of diverse backgrounds together in their perceptions of the world, it does so regardless of their media skepticism.

Summary. The overall finding, using the 1996 NES data, is that media skepticism does not seem to moderate news cultivation and mainstreaming effects. Television news

exposure was associated with social mistrust and political moderateness (and, without controls, also with chauvinistic gender positions). One could interpret these associations as evidence for TV news cultivation effects. However, they did not interact with media skepticism as my hypotheses predicted they should. I also tested (following Jamieson & Slovic) for local news cultivation effects on risk of crime and social mistrust. Again, I found main effects, that were not affected by media skepticism.

The NES 1996 data do not provide much evidence of news mainstreaming effects. Only two of the nine models testing for mainstreaming found evidence for mainstreaming. However, there were no significant three-way interactions with media skepticism. In other words, even when there are mainstreaming effects, they are not affected by audience skepticism.

Study 3: The APPC 2000 data.

Another data source that enables us to test cultivation hypotheses is the Annenberg Public Policy Center 2000 election study. A random fourth of the rolling cross-section respondents were asked what grade they would give the news media for the way they were reporting on the presidential campaign. The answer categories were "A – excellent" (coded "0"), "B – very good" (coded "1"), "C – average" (coded "2"), "D – poor" (coded "3"). and "F – very poor"(coded "4"). As mentioned earlier, this item correlates highly with other media skepticism items and can serve as a measure of media skepticism. Unfortunately, the APPC data had no measures of social mistrust, nor any measures of gender positions. Therefore, the following analysis is restricted to news cultivation effects on political moderateness.

Independent measure.

News exposure. The news exposure measure in this study is the average of three items, each measuring the number of days in the previous week in which subjects watched "the national network news on TV", "cable news, such as CNN or MSNBC", or "the local TV news – for example, 'Eyewitness News' or 'Action News'". Reliability for this measure was .61. Again, I focus on the TV items because of cultivation's focus on TV, and because the newspaper and radio exposure items did not load with the TV items and thus lowered the reliability. The mean for this scale is 3.48, with a standard deviation of 2.01.

Dependent measure.

Political "moderateness". I use here a similar measure of "moderateness" to the one I used in the previous studies ("very" liberal or conservative=1, regular liberals and conservatives=2, and "moderates"=3). The mean for this measure is 2.31, with a standard deviation of .65.

Results. Table 8.6 presents models testing the hypotheses on the APPC primary season data. Models 1 and 2 are designed to test the association between TV news exposure and political moderateness. As these models show, news watching was associated with political moderateness: The more one watched TV news, the more he or she reported being politically moderate. This was also the case after controlling for race, age, sex and education. As in the previous studies, in the next stage I entered an exposure*skepticism interaction to the OLS regression model to test for H1.3c. In this

case, Model 3 produced a significant interaction. However, the interpretation of the interaction, presented in Figure 8.10, does not correspond with H1.3c. According to this hypothesis, non-skeptics should be cultivated, while skeptics are expected to remain unaffected by their exposure to television. This is (almost) the opposite of what Figure 8.10 shows. According to Model 6, television cultivates moderateness for *skeptics*, whereas the effect of television news on moderateness is negative for non-skeptics. This pattern is not in line with what H1c predicted. What the findings suggest is that skeptics are *cultivated the most* in terms of political moderateness, compared to all other groups. This is the opposite of what I hypothesized, namely, that skeptics should be cultivated the least.

Mainstreaming. In order to test for the moderating role of media skepticism, the same procedure that was applied in the previous studies was applied to the APPC data. That is, the test for mainstreaming is the interaction between television and a demographic variable on their joint effect on the outcome measure. The test for the moderating role of media skepticism in mainstreaming is the three-way interaction between exposure, the demographic variable and media skepticism. The results are presented in Table 8.7. Model 1 shows no significant interaction between education and news exposure on their effect on moderateness. In other words, there is no difference in the effect of television for educated and uneducated audiences. Similarly, Model 2 shows no interaction between race and exposure. In other words, the significant association between exposure and political moderateness is not affected by respondents' race.

However, unlike Models 1 and 2, Model 3 produced a significant sex*exposure interaction. The interpretation of this interaction is presented in Figure 8.11. The findings

cannot be interpreted as mainstreaming; rather, the interpretation of the interaction is that the moderateness cultivation effect is stronger for females than it is for males. Contrary to the mainstreaming hypothesis, television news amplifies the distance between males' and females' political moderateness scores rather than reducing it. Light TV news-viewing females are slightly more moderate than light male viewers. But this difference gets bigger rather than smaller as people watch more TV news.

For each of the three interacting variables, the three-way exposure*skepticism* demographic variable interaction is not significant. Again, there is no support for H1.3d. However, in this case it would be more accurate to say that the "media skepticism as a moderator in mainstreaming" hypotheses could not be tested since there was no mainstreaming effect in the data.

Summary. Study 3 tested the hypotheses on the APPC 2000 data, and found a significant association between news watching and political moderateness that is in line with cultivation research, but no evidence for mainstreaming. To the extent that we can interpret the positive effect of TV news exposure on moderateness as a cultivation effect, this effect does not depend on audiences' media skepticism.

Study 4: The PTR data.

Respondents in the PTR study answered the social mistrust and political moderateness items, which enabled us to test the same set of hypotheses on the PTR data set. The measure of media skepticism used in this data set is different than those used in the previous studies. Respondents were asked if they thought that the media "help society to solve its problems" (coded "0") or "get in the way of society solving its problems"

(coded "1"). Since talk radio listeners were over-sampled, weighting is used throughout the analysis. Also, the panel nature of the PTR data allowed for testing the hypotheses at two different points in time (Wave 1 and Wave 4), though not on the very same cases (since people were added to the panel to compensate for mortality). Since these two sets of data provided almost identical results when analyzed separately, I collapsed the two sources so that the new variables contain data from cases that were added to the study in Wave 4 as well as from the original Wave 1 data.

Social mistrust (Gerbner's Mean World Index). Like NES and GSS, the PTR study also contained the TRUST and HELP items of the social mistrust index. However, this time respondents were also asked to provide an indication of the strength of their social mistrust. The items were coded so that feeling "strongly" that "most people can be trusted" or that people "try to be helpful was coded "1", while feeling "not too strongly" about these perceptions was coded "2". Feeling "strongly" that you "can't be too careful with people" or that people are "looking out for themselves" was coded "4", while feeling not so strongly about it was coded "3". The two recoded items were then averaged, creating an index varying between 1 and 4, with a mean of 2.29 and a standard deviation of 1.31. Reliability for this scale was .70.

Political "moderateness". The measure of "moderateness" I use in this study is the same one I used in Study 3 ("very" liberal or conservative=1, regular liberals and conservatives=2, and "moderates"=3). The mean for this measure was 2.31, with a standard deviation of.65.

TV news exposure. TV news exposure was measured on an ordinal scale with four categories. Respondents were asked how often they watched "national TV evening news

programs on ABC, CNN, NBC or CBS". Response categories were "regularly" (coded "4"), "sometimes" (coded "3"), "hardly ever" (coded "2"), and "never" (coded "0"). The mean for this item was 3.45, with a standard deviation of .82.

Results. The models in Table 8.8 test for cultivation effects and for their interaction with media skepticism. Models 1 through 3 have social mistrust as the dependent variable. Unlike the other data sets, the sign for the coefficient for news exposure is negative. However, this negative association becomes statistically insignificant when controlling for the demographic variables. In other words, unlike in the other data sets, which showed that TV news exposure is related to low interpersonal trust, in the PTR data news consumption is related to increased trust. This association disappears in the presence of controls. Also, Model 3 shows that exposure does not interact with media skepticism (i.e., there is no support for H1.3a in this model). In sum, although the direction of the TV exposure effect is different than what I found in previous studies, the test for H1.3a consistently gives the same result. To the extent that television exposure is associated with social mistrust (or with opposite perceptions, for that matter), this association is not moderated by media skepticism.

Models 4 through 6 test for cultivation effects on political moderateness. As in the previous studies, TV news exposure was positively and significantly associated with moderateness, even when controlling for demographics. However, as in the previous study, Model 6 shows that the exposure*skepticism interaction is again not significant. Thus, there is no evidence supporting H1.3c in the PTR data. The effect of exposure to TV news on moderateness is the same for skeptics and non-skeptics.

Mainstreaming. Mainstreaming and its interaction with skepticism were tested using the same procedure that was applied in the previous studies. As Table 8.9 shows, the two-way exposure*demographic variable was only significant in two out of six models. In Model 5, exposure significantly interacted with race in their joint effect on the Mean World Index. However, the interpretation of the model, presented in Figure 8.12, shows that the interaction is not mainstreaming. The distance between the perceptions of whites and non-whites *increases*, instead of decreasing as mainstreaming predicts. The pattern presented in Figure 8.12 is in fact the one suggested by the resonance hypothesis: television supposedly amplifies the differences between whites and non-whites because the televised world may echo the mean world realities of non-whites. Nonetheless, as in most previous cases, there was no three-way interaction between news exposure, media skepticism and race. This means that however we choose to interpret the two-way interaction presented in Figure 8.12, this interaction is not related to media skepticism.

The other two-way interaction in Table 8.9 was found in Model 4, which tested for the mainstreaming effect of TV news on political moderateness, using race as the interacting variable. In this case, the interaction could indeed be an example of a mainstreaming process. According to this model (interpreted in Figure 8.13), television brings whites and non-whites closer in terms of their political moderation. While light-watching whites were more moderate than non-whites, this difference gets smaller as TV news watching increases, until there are no such differences between whites and non-whites in the heaviest viewing category. These results replicate the same mainstreaming pattern that was revealed in the NES data.

The second stage of Model 4 added to the equation all the rest of the two-way interaction terms accompanied by the three-way exposure*skepticism*race interaction. Unlike most other similar models reported in this chapter, the three-way interaction was borderline significant this time (p=.071). An interpretation of this interaction is presented in Figure 8.14. As predicted by H1.3d, non-skeptics show the same mainstreaming pattern that was revealed in the two-way interaction model. However, skeptical audiences were not unaffected by TV as H1.3d predicted, but showed a reverse pattern: while non-white skeptics were unaffected, white skeptics became more moderate as their exposure to TV news increased. This is not very strong evidence for H1.3d, given the .07 p-value and the peculiar interaction pattern.

In addition to the two-way interactions in Table 8.9, some attention should be given to Model 2. In this case, although there was no education*exposure interaction (needed as evidence for mainstreaming), there was a significant three-way education*exposure* skepticism interaction. Figure 8.15 examines the patterns revealed by this interaction. Again, there is no evidence for the moderating role of media skepticism in mainstreaming. Rather, it appears that the effect of TV news watching was positive for non-skeptics and negative for skeptics, with a stronger effect for educated respondents in the two groups. Neither skeptics nor non-skeptics showed a clear mainstreaming pattern. If anything, it is the skeptics' pattern that was closer to mainstreaming (educated and uneducated heavy-viewers were more alike in their political moderation than their light-viewing counterparts).

In sum, there is nothing in Table 8.9 that suggests that media skepticism moderates mainstreaming effects. The six models did not find strong evidence of mainstreaming, but

even when they did find an exposure*demographic interaction, it was not affected by skepticism in the way predicted by H1.3d. The pattern that appears from the borderline significant three-way interaction in Model 3 is not far away H1.3d. Here, non-skeptics were cultivated while skeptics were not. However, skeptics were not unaffected by TV, as H1.3d predicts, but rather demonstrated a different pattern, one that might be interpreted as being closer to resonance.

Summary. As in the other data sets, the PTR data demonstrate the effect of television news exposure on political moderateness. Unlike the other data sets, it does not contain evidence for a news cultivation effect on social mistrust. In fact, the sign of the insignificant coefficient for this effect was negative, whereas it was positive in Studies 1 and 2. In any case, there was no evidence for the moderating role of skepticism in cultivation. The association between exposure and moderateness was not influenced by audiences' skepticism toward the media.

Although two of the models found the three-way interactions by H1.3d, there was not much support for skepticism's moderating role in mainstreaming either. In one case, Model 6 of Table 8.9 (Figure 8.14), non-skeptics were cultivated, while skeptics were affected differently. This is the closest I got in this chapter to getting support for my skepticism as moderating the mainstreaming hypothesis. But it does not offer strong evidence for the hypothesis, because skeptics were affected (albeit differently from non-skeptics) by television exposure. The direction of the pattern revealed in Figure 8.14 is not what H1.3d predicts.

Study 5: The EDialogue Data.

Another potential test for the hypotheses comes from the Electronic Dialogue data, using the social mistrust index and political moderation as dependent variables. This time media skepticism is measured using not a single item but, rather, a scale containing four items from Gaziano and McGrath's News Credibility Scale, as well as items measuring general trust in the fairness and accuracy of the news media, an item measuring whether respondents thought the news media help society or get in the way of society solving its problem, and a general evaluation of the work the media did in their coverage of the 2000 campaign (see Chapter 2 for a detailed description of this scale). Reliability for this media skepticism scale, varying between 0 and 1, was .89. The mean was .56, with a standard deviation of .18. While the use of the scale is superior to the use of single items as measures of skepticism, the disadvantage of this data set for the study of cultivation effects is the relatively small sample size, which stems from design limitations (i.e., the media skepticism battery was administered only to EDialogue discussion participants and controls). As we shall see, this relatively low N (around 640 in most of the models) is not large enough to detect significant cultivation effects, which are very small and so require relatively large-sample data sets to become evident.

Social mistrust (Gerbner's Mean World Index). The EDialogue baseline survey included the three MWI items. The items were treated exactly the same way as they were in Study 1 (GSS data). Reliability for the social mistrust scale was .73. The scale had a mean of .45, with a standard deviation of .39.

Political moderateness. As a measure of political moderateness, I used the absolute value of a measure of a party-ideology extremism index (coded "5" for very-liberal-

strong-Democrat and "-5" for very-conservative-strong-Republican, with "0" for moderate-independent in between). The absolute values of this index provide a measure of extremism, so they were flipped to create a measure of moderateness varying between "0" (for extreme partisans) and "5" (for independents-moderates). The mean value for this measure was 2.25, with a standard deviation of 1.64.

TV news exposure. As in Study 2 (NES data), TV news exposure was operationalized as the mean number of days in the past week in which subjects watched national and local news. Reliability for these two items was .70 (mean = 3.86; SD=2.16).

Results. Table 8.10 presents OLS models testing for hypotheses H1.3a and H1.3c. As in the previous studies, the exposure measure was entered by itself in the first step of the regressions, the demographic controls were entered in the second step, and the media skepticism scale and interaction terms were entered in the third step. In this case, probably due to the small N, there were no significant cultivation effects. Nevertheless, the coefficients were generally in the direction predicted by cultivation: more news exposure was associated with higher "social mistrust" scores (this time only after inserting controls) and with more moderate political opinions[93]. However, there was once again no significant interaction between skepticism and exposure in either the "social mistrust" or moderateness models (Models 3 and 6, respectively). Once again, Hypotheses H1.3a and H13.c do not receive confirmation.

Mainstreaming. Six unreported "mainstreaming models" paralleling those reported in Table 8.9 were run to test for mainstreaming (exposure*education, exposure*race, and

[93] To compare the magnitude of the associations in this and other studies, it is recommended to use the beta coefficients (reported in the middle row of each table entry throughout this chapter). For example, the standardized coefficient for the effect of TV exposure on moderateness was .06 in EDialogue, the same effect size as in NES. The corresponding beta in the APPC and PTR data was .04.

exposure*sex for each of the two outcome measures). Three-way interactions testing for the moderating role of skepticism in mainstreaming were entered in the second step. However, neither of the two-way or three-way interactions was statistically significant – i.e., there was no evidence for mainstreaming in any of the models. There was also no suppression of mainstreaming by the three-way interactions as predicted by Hypothesis H13.d. In sum, the EDialogue data do not offer evidence for mainstreaming, nor do they offer support for H1.3d, which predicted skepticism would moderate mainstreaming.

Conclusion.

Taken together, the studies reported above offer at least some evidence consistent with cultivation and news cultivation. Study 1 demonstrated that general television watching was associated with the social mistrust index and with political moderateness. The same associations were found in the NES data presented in Study 2, but this time using a news watching rather than a general TV exposure measure. An association between news exposure and political moderateness was also found in Study 3, this time using the APPC data, and in Study 4, using the PTR data. The long and short of it is that the more people watch national and local TV news (and not just TV in general), the higher their MWI scores, and the more politically moderate they are. As to the association between exposure and gender positions, I found a negative association between general TV watching and chauvinistic positions. But the same association was positive for news watching (and without statistical controls) in Study 2.

Altogether, this chapter presented 13 separate tests for cultivation (three for general TV watching cultivation and the rest for news cultivation). In eleven of these models there was a significant association between television exposure and the cultivation outcome measure, and in nine of these eleven, the sign of the coefficient was in the direction expected by Gerbner and his colleagues. Also, nine of the cultivation effects remained significant even after controlling for demographics. The two insignificant effects came from a relatively small data set (EDialogue), and in this case, the coefficients were in the direction predicted by cultivation.

In sum, the findings are generally in line with cultivation research. However, cultivation is only one possible interpretation of the data. Another possible interpretation could be selective exposure. For example, television watching (news watching included) could be the *result,* rather than the *cause,* of lack of interpersonal trust. When people do not trust other people, they might prefer to spend more time alone with their TV sets, compared to their more trusting counterparts. Similarly, political extremists might spend less time watching national or local mainstream news than their moderate counterparts, because they would rather receive political information from more partisan sources. Besides the possibilities of reverse causation and selectivity, cultivation has also been attacked on other methodological bases, including the possibility of response bias, the assumption that TV contents are uniform, not distinguishing among different audiences, and so on. The associations presented above could easily be attacked on many of these grounds. In short, the findings presented above do not offer conclusive evidence for cultivation, though they do demonstrate that a few of the associations reported by cultivation researchers hold even when the independent variable is TV news watching,

and despite the relatively tight demographic controls. Fortunately, testing the hypotheses forwarded in this chapter does not necessitate resolving all the methodological conflicts surrounding cultivation theory.

My hypotheses in this chapter are not concerned with cultivation per se, but with the way media skepticism interacts with cultivation. Of the 13 models testing for hypotheses H1.3a through H1.3c, only two found significant exposure*skepticism interactions. In other words, television exposure affected not only the non-skeptics, as I predicted, but all respondents regardless of level of skepticism. Even in the two cases in which I did find significant exposure*skepticism interactions (Model 4 in Table 8.1 and Model 6 in Table 8.6), the patterns of interaction were not exactly those predicted by my hypotheses. In fact, the interaction pattern presented in Model 6, Table 8.6 was the opposite of what I predicted: cultivation, in this case, was stronger for skeptics than for non-skeptics.

Only one model provided some evidence that could be interpreted as a moderating effect of skepticism in cultivation: Model 4 in Table 8.1, interpreted in Figure 8.1. In this case, television exposure "cultivated" chauvinistic positions for non-skeptics (as H1.3c predicted). While H1.3c predicted a weaker or zero effect of TV exposure on gender positions for skeptics, the association was actually negative. Does this mean that TV "cultivates" feminism for skeptics? Perhaps this association reflects divergent interpretations of televised texts by skeptics and non-skeptics respectively[94].

In sum, in this chapter I tested for the moderating role of media skepticism in cultivation processes using three different cultivation outcome measures and five separate

[94] In any case, this model is not inconsistent with the other studies. Study 1, unlike the other studies, deals with cultivation in general, not with news cultivation per se. For this reason, the results obtained in Study 1 are not really comparable to the other studies.

data sources, each utilizing different sampling strategies and different measures of media skepticism. Based on these observations, we may conclude that to the extent that the associations between exposure and outcome measures are evidence for cultivation (and, as I've pointed out, that is not necessarily the case), these associations are probably not affected by audiences' skepticism toward the media. In most cases, the effect of media exposure did not interact with media skepticism. That is, when I found associations between outcome measures and TV exposure, the supposed cultivation effects occurred for skeptics and non-skeptics alike. My hypotheses H1.3a, H1.3b and H1.3c did not gain any support from the models.

As for mainstreaming, the interactions that emerged in four of six models testing for general television mainstreaming in Study 1 (but only in four of 24 models testing for news mainstreaming) showed the interaction patterns expected by mainstreaming theory. It appears that, as with general television programming, news watching has the potential to bring people from diverse backgrounds closer in their perceptions of the world. However, these news mainstreaming effects were rarer than general exposure effects. Thus, the evidence for news mainstreaming is far from overwhelming.

But even when we did find evidence for mainstreaming effects (either in the news or in the general exposure models), these effects were not moderated by media skepticism. Hypothesis H1.3d predicted that while non-skeptics would be "mainstreamed" (i.e., heavy-viewers from diverse backgrounds would be closer in the outcome measure than their light-viewing counterparts), the distance in their perceptions of the world, caused by demographics, would not be affected by TV exposure for non-skeptics. Not even one of the 24 models showed this pattern, however. Although we did get two significant three-

way interactions, these could be attributed to mere chance, due to the large number of models). The closest we got to this pattern was in Model 4, Table 8.9 (Figure 8.14), in which non-white skeptics remained unaffected by exposure to TV news but their white counterparts were affected by such exposure. This is the only model that could be interpreted as skeptics being "non-mainstreamed" while skeptics are "mainstreamed" (as predicted in H1.3d), but the non-mainstreaming pattern that emerges from this model was not the one I expected.

In terms of contribution to theory, this chapter offers the following modest insights: **First**, it offers additional empirical evidence for news cultivation. The only study I have encountered so far that actually tested news cultivation hypotheses was Jamieson and Slovic's paper. This chapter replicates their findings in four different data sets, and shows that the effects reported by Jamieson and Slovic could be found even when the independent variable was national, rather than local, news exposure (or with a scale combining national and local news exposure items). Moreover, in this chapter I tested news cultivation effects on three different outcome measures relating to three different issues. As far as I know, this is the first evidence for news cultivation in these domains. **Second**, this chapter tested, for the first time, for mainstreaming effects in the context of news. The findings show that, unlike in the context of general TV exposure, these news mainstreaming effects are relatively rare. **Third**, and most important for my thesis, this chapter tested, for the first time, whether or not news cultivation effects are moderated by people's attitudes toward the media. The null findings are surprising from the theoretical standpoint. If we accept the main effects presented above as media effects, then people are affected by the news media despite their lack of trust in same.

Null findings are, in many ways, harder to interpret. Why didn't the hypotheses work? Many explanations could be offered. A natural instinct is to blame some study artifact, resulting, perhaps, from measurement error. However, the fact that the same results were replicated in five separate data sets using different survey designs and separate measures of skepticism helps to alleviate the concern that the null results are an artifact of measurement error. In addition, the fact that skepticism did moderate media effects other than cultivation, as we saw in Chapters 6 and 7, shows that it is not the measurement of media skepticism that is causing the null finding.

On another level, one could argue that the associations between television exposure and the cultivation outcome measures are not really a media effect but something else, hence skepticism does not moderate them. Skepticism toward the media is only expected to moderate media *effects*. If the main effects presented in this chapter are not media *effects*, one could argue that skepticism toward the news media is irrelevant in this case, hence the null TV exposure*skepticism interaction. Indeed, given the amount of criticism of cultivation in the literature, one should be cautious about the findings. The intention of this chapter was not to resolve the methodological difficulties in cultivation research, but rather to examine the moderating role of skepticism in cultivation, to the extent that we interpret the association between exposure to cultivation outcome measures as media effects. If one does not accept these associations as evidence for a media effect, then the test for an interaction with media skepticism is indeed irrelevant.

One way to resolve this issue would be through the use of experimental designs. For example, repeated exposure of experimental subjects to televised news violence (e.g., crime stories) should produce stronger cultivation effects for non-skeptics than for

skeptics. Such a design could resolve the debate over whether a media effect is moderated by skepticism – or not moderated, should the results we found in this chapter be replicated in such a study. Experimental manipulation and random assignment to treatments would enable us to test for the hypothesized moderation with somewhat less concern over whether the association between exposure and the cultivation outcome measures represents a media effect or something else.

Null findings can always be viewed as representing some study artifact. However, there is still the possibility that the null findings indicate that there was no association in the data. In our case, it could simply be that media skepticism does not moderate the association between television news exposure and social mistrust, political moderateness, and gender positions. These associations are only a few possible cultivation effects, and of a specific type. They are all referred to in the literature as "second order" effects. The more basic social realities cultivated by television – the "first order" cultivation effects – were not examined at all in this chapter due to lack of adequate data.

It could be that skepticism moderates first order but not second order, cultivation. In other words, it could be that the more basic, fact-related perceptions stemming from exposure to news are indeed moderated by skepticism and suspicion toward the news media. Cultivation implies, first and foremost, that televised "statistics" influence viewers. First order cultivation refers to, for example, assessments about the rate of males employed in law enforcement, the rate of all crimes that are violent, and the rate of occurrence of fatal violence between strangers or acquaintances. It could be that skeptics are less likely to accept the television answer to these questions than non-skeptics because of their lower trust in the news media. Second order cultivation, which is viewed

by cultivation scholars as extrapolations of the first order information into broader perceptions and values (like fear and mistrust), was not affected by skepticism, as we have seen, but it is still worth examining whether first order cultivation would be.

In sum, more evidence is needed using other first and second order cultivation outcome measures, and probably also other research designs, before we can clearly determine whether the null findings mean that media skepticism does not intervene in cultivation. In other words, the research presented in this chapter needs to be replicated in order to advance our knowledge of the intervening role of media skepticism in cultivation. First order outcome measures and other second order outcome measures (e.g. attitudes toward the elderly, minorities, sexual minorities, various professions, and other typical cultivation outcomes) should be used.

If we repeat this analysis using additional designs and outcome measures and still get the same null results, we could probably conclude that news media skepticism does not moderate cultivation. In that case we could probably argue that cultivation is so powerful, so insinuating, so manipulative, so robust, that it affects even those least trusting of television. The possibility of tracking such a powerful media effect not in terms of its magnitude, but rather in terms of its reach (all heavy-viewing audiences, regardless of their skepticism), should probably motivate scholars desperately seeking for such media effects to pursue this line of research.

Table 8.1: Multiple regression models predicting cultivation outcome measures, using television exposure, confidence in television and demographic variables (GSS 1972-1996)

B β (S.E)	Dependent variable: Social mistrust (MWI)		Dependent variable: Gender positions		Dependent variable: Political moderateness	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
TV hours	.07*** .06 (.01)		-.02* -.01 (.01)		.01* .02 (.00)	
TV hours – $\overline{\text{TV hours}}$		.07*** .06 (.01)		-.02* -.02 (.01)		.01* .02 (.00)
Education	-.16*** -.23 (.00)	-.16*** -.23 (.00)	-.23*** -.30 (.00)	-.23*** -.30 (.00)	-.02*** -.06 (.00)	-.02*** -.06 (.00)
Sex (Male=1)	.20*** .04 (.03)	.20*** .04 (.03)	.15*** .03 (.03)	.15*** .03 (.03)	-.11*** -.06 (.01)	-.11*** -.06 (.01)
Race (White=1)	-1.20*** -.19 (.05)	-1.20*** -.19 (.05)	-.07 -.01 (.05)	-.07 -.01 (.05)	.17*** .06 (.02)	.17*** .06 (.02)
Age	-.02*** -.17 (.00)	-.02*** -.17 (.00)	.03*** .22 (.00)	.03*** .22 (.00)	.00 -.01 (.00)	.00 -.01 (.00)
Class	-.27*** -.08 (.03)	-.27*** -.08 (.03)	.05 .01 (.03)	.05 .01 (.03)	-.06*** -.04 (.01)	-.06*** -.04 (.01)
Confidence in TV	.10** .03 (.03)		-.09** -.02 (.03)		-.05*** -.04 (.01)	
CONTV – $\overline{\text{CONTV}}$		.10** .03 (.03)		-.09** -.02 (.03)		-.05*** -.04 (.01)
(TV hours – $\overline{\text{TV hours}}$)* (CONTV – $\overline{\text{CONTV}}$)		.00 .00 (.01)		-.05*** -.02 (.01)		.01 .01 (.00)
Constant	7.09*** (.14)	7.51*** (.12)	3.63*** (.14)	3.37*** (.12)	3.44*** (.05)	3.54*** (.04)
R^2	.15***	.15***	.18***	.18***	.01***	.01***
N	11,347	11,347	12,697	12,697	14,013	14,013

Notes: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001; The minimal tolerance is .77.

Table 8.2: Testing for the moderating role of confidence in television on mainstreaming effects (GSS 1972-1996).

	Dependent variable = Social mistrust (MWI)	Dependent variable = Gender positions	Dependent variable = Moderateness
Demographic variable = education	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Education * exposure	P<.001	p<.001	p<.01
Education * exposure * confidence in TV	*n.s.*	*n.s.*	*n.s.*
R^2	.13	.15	.01
N	11,365	12,726	14,038
Demographic variable = race	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Race* exposure	P<.05	p<.001	n.s.
Race * exposure * confidence in TV	*n.s.*	*n.s.*	*n.s.*
R^2	.15	.18	.18
N	11,346	12,696	1,900

Notes: All models control for education, race, sex and social class.

Table 8.3: Multiple regression models predicting cultivation outcome measures, using television news exposure, media skepticism and demographic variables (NES 1996).

B β (S.E)	Dependent variable: Social mistrust (MWI)			Dependent variable: Gender positions			Dependent variable: Political moderateness		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
News media exposure	.00 .02 (.00)	.01* .05 (.00)	.01* .05 (.00)	.07*** .10 (.01)	.02 .03 (.02)	.02 .03 (.02)	.02* .06 (.01)	.02* .06 (.01)	.02# .06 (.01)
Race (White=1)		- .19*** -.16 (.02)	- .20*** -.16 (.02)		-.09 -.01 (.12)	-.10 -.02 (.12)		.09 .03 (.08)	.10 .03 (.08)
Age		- .00*** -.15 (.00)	- .00*** -.15 (.00)		.01*** .17 (.00)	.01*** .17 (.00)		-.01 -.03 (.00)	-.01 -.03 (.00)
Sex (Male=1)		-.01 -.02 (.02)	-.01 -.02 (.02)		.08 .02 (.08)	.08 .02 (.08)		-.10 -.05 (.05)	-.10* -.05 (.05)
Education		- .05*** -.30 (.00)	- .05*** -.30 (.00)		- .08*** -.13 (.01)	- .08*** -.13 (.01)		-.10* -.13 (.01)	-.05* -.13 (.01)
Media skepticism			.06*** .12 (.00)			.20*** .09 (.05)			- .13*** -.11 (.06)
Exposure*media skepticism			.00 .07 (.00)			-.03 -.03 (.02)			.01 .02 (.01)
Constant	.49	1.48	1.49	2.25	2.63	2.64	2.88	3.59	3.60
R^2	.00	.13	.15	.01	.06	.07	.00	.02	.03
N	1515	1515	1515	1463	1463	1463	1244	1244	1244

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.
The lowest tolerance was .80. Centering was used in all models (the coefficients for news media exposure, media skepticism and the interaction are the coefficients for the centered terms). Alternative measures of news media exposure (using newspaper exposure, and a combined measure of TV news exposure and newspaper exposure) were tried separately. In all cases the exposure*skepticism interaction was not significant.

Table 8.4: Multiple regression models predicting fear of crime and MWI, using local television news exposure, media skepticism, and demographic variables (NES 1996).

B β (S.E)	Dependent variable: Social mistrust (MWI)			Dependent variable: Fear of crime		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Local news exposure	.01 .03 (.00)	.01# .05 (.00)	.01# .05 (.00)	.02* .05 (.00)	.02# .05 (.01)	.02# .05 (.01)
Race (White=1)		-.19*** -.16 (.02)	-.20*** -.16 (.02)		-.32*** -.11 (.01)	-.33*** -.12 (.01)
Age		-.00*** -.14 (.00)	-.00*** -.14 (.00)		-.00 -.03 (.00)	-.00 -.03 (.00)
Sex (Male=1)		-.01 -.02 (.02)	-.01 -.02 (.02)		-.29*** -.15 (.04)	-.29*** -.15 (.04)
Education		-.05*** -.29 (.00)	-.05*** -.30 (.00)		-.02* -.05 (.01)	-.02* -.05 (.01)
Media skepticism			.06*** .11 (.01)			.06* .05 (.03)
Exposure*media skepticism			.00 .01 (.00)			-.00 -.00 (.01)
Constant	.49	1.46	1.47	2.26	2.63	2.64
R^2	.00	.13	.15	.00	.04	.05
N	1514	1514	1514	1517	1517	1517

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.
The lowest tolerance was .80. Centering was used in all models (the coefficients for news media exposure, media skepticism and the interaction are the coefficients for the centered terms).

Table 8.5: Testing for the moderating role of confidence in television on mainstreaming effects (NES 1996).

	Dependent variable = Social mistrust (MWI)	Dependent variable = Gender positions	Dependent variable = Moderateness
Demographic variable = education	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Education * exposure	p<.05	n.s.	n.s.
Education * exposure * media skepticism	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
R^2	.13	.15	.04
N	1,515	1,463	1,245
Demographic variable = race	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Race * exposure	n.s	n.s.	p<.10
Race * exposure * media skepticism	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
R^2	.15	.08	.04
N	1,515	1,463	1,245
Demographic variable = gender	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Gender * exposure	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Gender * exposure media skepticism	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
R^2	.13	.15	.04
N	1,515	1,463	1,245

Notes: All models control for education, race, sex and age. Centering was used in all models.

Table 8.6: Multiple regression models predicting cultivation outcome measures, using television news exposure, media skepticism and demographic variables (APPC 2000).

B β (S.E)	Dependent variable: Political moderateness		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	.01*	.01*	.01*
News media exposure	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)
		.03	.03
Race (White=1)		.01 (.05)	.01 (.05)
		-.04	-.04
Age		-.01 (.00)	-.00 (.00)
		-.02	-.00
Sex (Male=1)		-.01 (.02)	-.00 (.02)
		.00	.00
Education		.01 (.00)	.02 (.00)
			-.06***
Media skepticism			-.09 (.01)
			.01*
Exposure*media skepticism			.04 (.00)
Constant	2.31	2.26	2.21
R^2	.00	.00	.01
N	2,403	2,403	2,403

Notes: $^{\#}$ p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.
The lowest tolerance was .87. Centering was used in all models (the coefficients for news media exposure, media skepticism and the interaction are the coefficients for the centered terms). Alternative measures of news media exposure (using newspaper exposure, and a combined measure of TV news exposure and newspaper exposure) were tried separately. In all cases the exposure*skepticism interaction was not significant.

Table 8.7: Testing for the moderating role of media skepticism on mainstreaming effects (APPC 2000).

	Dependent variable = Moderateness
Demographic variable = education	Model 1
Education * exposure	n.s.
Education * exposure * media skepticism	n.s.
R^2	.01
N	2,403
Demographic variable = race	Model 2
Race * exposure	n.s.
Race * exposure * media skepticism	n.s.
R^2	.01
N	2,403
Demographic variable = gender	Model 3
Gender * exposure	p<.001
Gender * exposure * media skepticism	n.s.
R^2	.02
N	2,403

Notes: All models control for education, race, sex and age. Centering was used in all models.

Table 8.8: WLS models predicting cultivation outcome measures, using television news exposure, media skepticism and demographic variables (PTR 1996).

B β (S.E)	Dependent variable: Social mistrust (MWI)			Dependent variable: Political moderateness		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	-.08***	-.01	-.01	.04*	.03*	.03*
News media exposure	-.06	-.00	-.00	.05	.04	.04
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
		-.42***	-.42***		.07#	.06
Race (White=1)		-.13	-.13		.03	.03
		(.06)	(.06)		(.04)	(.04)
		-.01***	-.01***		.00*	.00*
Age		-.18	-.18		.04	.04
		(.00)	(.00)		(.00)	(.00)
		-.11*	-.11*		-.02	-.02
Sex (Male=1)		-.05	-.05		-.01	-.01
		(.04)	(.04)		(.03)	(.03)
		-.13***	-.13***		.00	.00
Education		-.29	-.29		.00	.00
		(.01)	(.01)		(.00)	(.00)
			.11*			-.07
Media skepticism			.04			.05
			(.04)			(.03)
			-.01			.02
Exposure * media skepticism			-.00			.01
			(.05)			(.03)
Constant	2.45	5.17	5.16			
R^2	.00	.13	.14	.00	.01	.01
N	2,068	2,068	2,068	2,031	2,031	2,031

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.
The lowest tolerance was .83. Centering was used in all models (the coefficients for news media exposure, media skepticism and the interaction are the coefficients for the centered terms).

Table 8.9: Testing for the moderating role of confidence in television on mainstreaming effects (PTR 1996).

	Dependent variable = Social mistrust (MWI)	Dependent variable = Moderateness
Demographic variable = Education	Model 1	Model 2
Education * exposure	n.s.	n.s.
Education * exposure * media skepticism	n.s.	P<.01
R^2	.14	.01
N	2,068	2,031
Demographic variable = race	Model 3	Model 4
Race * exposure	P<.01	P<.05
Race * exposure * media skepticism	n.s.	P<.10
R^2	.14	.01
N	2,068	2,031
Demographic variable = gender	Model 5	Model 6
Gender * exposure	n.s.	n.s.
Gender * exposure * media skepticism	n.s.	n.s.
R^2	.14	.01
N	2,068	2,031

Notes: All models control for education, race, sex and age. Centering was used in all models.

Table 8.10: OLS models predicting cultivation outcome measures, using television news exposure, media skepticism and demographic variables (EDialogue 2000).

B β (S.E)	Dependent variable: Social mistrust (MWI)			Dependent variable: Political moderateness		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	-.00	.01	.01	.03	.04	.04
News media exposure	-.05	.02	.03	.04	.06	.06
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
		-.08*	-.09*		-.07	-.04
Race (White=1)		-.07	-.08		-.01	-.01
		(.04)	(.04)		(.18)	(.18)
		-.05***	-.05***		-.01#	-.01#
Age		-.23	-.23		-.07	-.08
		(.00)	(.00)		(.00)	(.00)
		-.04	-.04		-.25*	-.26*
Sex (Male=1)		-.05	-.05		-.07	-.08
		(.03)	(.03)		(.12)	(.12)
		-.03***	-.03***		-.19***	-.18***
Education		-.15	-.15		-.21	-.21
		(.00)	(.00)		(.03)	(.03)
			.11			-.92***
Media skepticism			.05			-.10
			(.08)			(.33)
			.02			-.10
Exposure * media skepticism			.02			-.02
			(.03)			(.15)
Constant	.41	1.25	1.26	2.16	5.28	5.24
R^2	.00	.10	.10	.00	.06	.07
N	638	638	638	640	640	640

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.
The lowest tolerance was .82. Centering was used in all models (the coefficients for news media exposure, media skepticism and the interaction are the coefficients for the centered terms).

Figure 8.1: The effect of TV exposure (hours of daily watching) on gender equality positions (0=egalitarian positions, 8=non-egalitarian positions), by confidence in TV

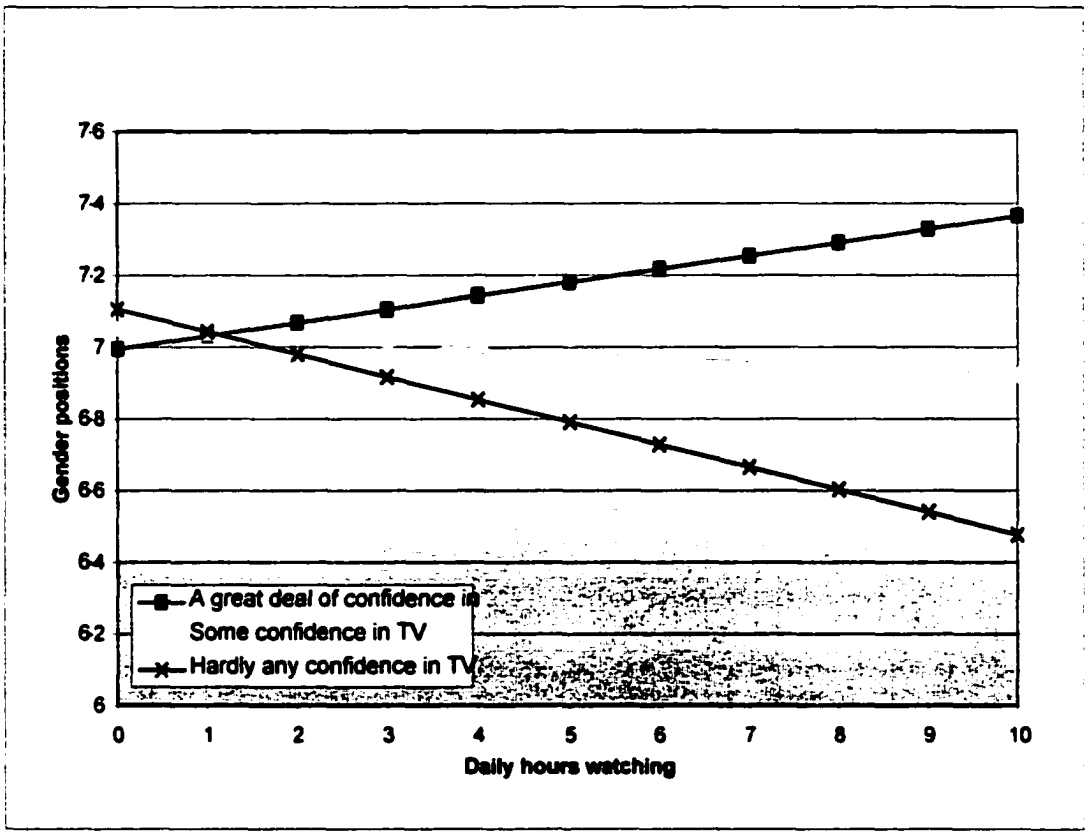
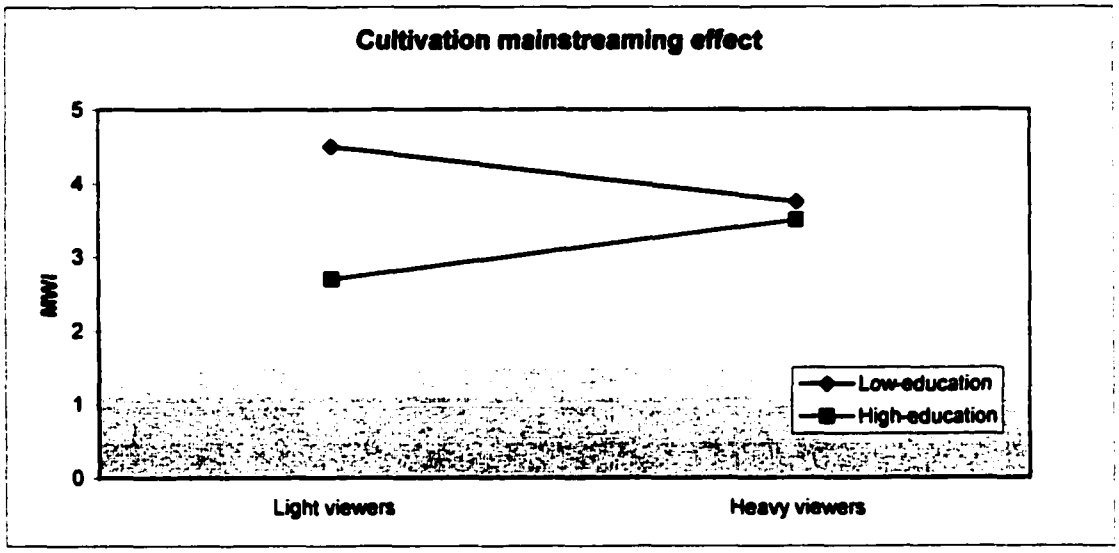


Figure 8.2: An example of a mainstreaming effect and of the hypothesized moderating role of audience skepticism in mainstreaming.



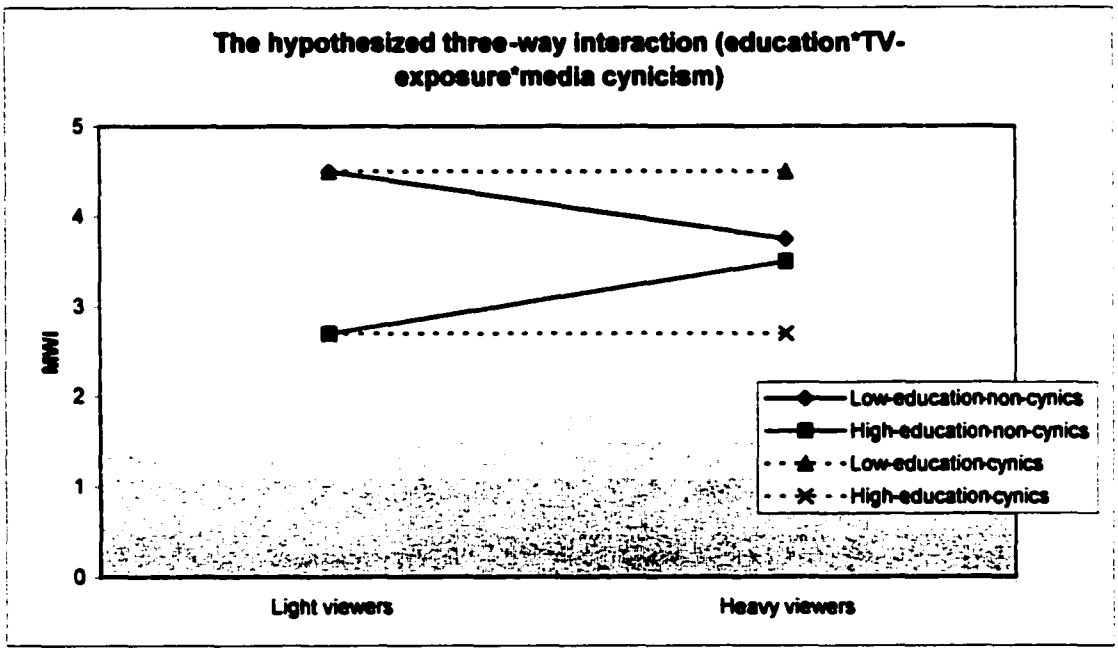


Figure 8.3: Interpretation of Model 7

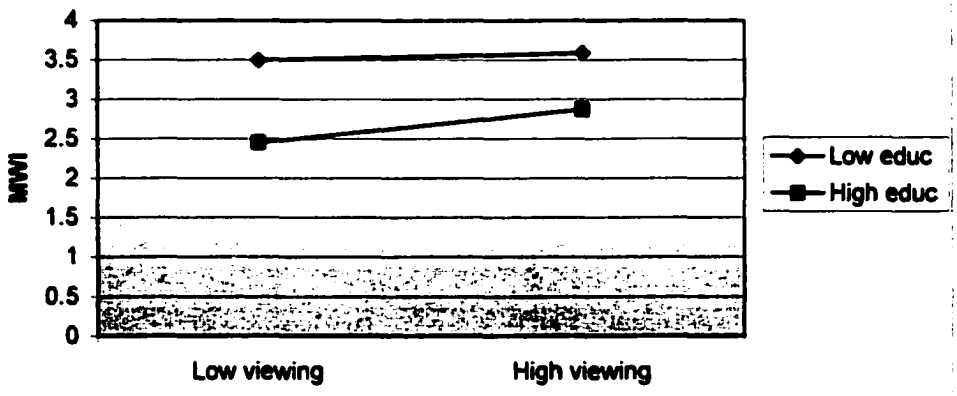


Figure 8.4: Interpretation of Model 8

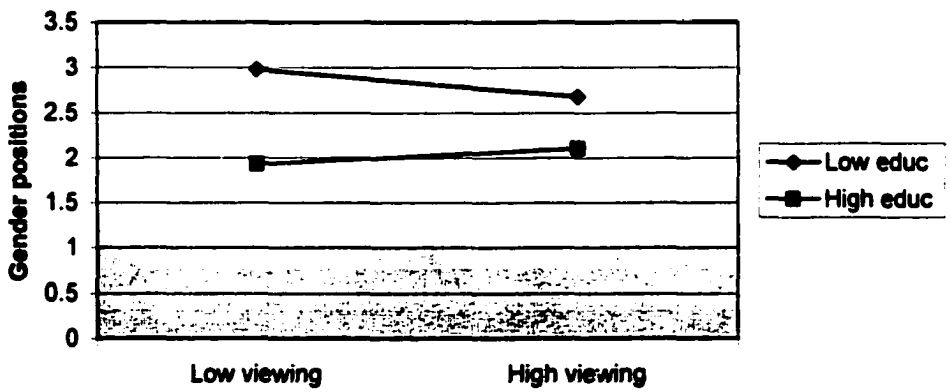


Figure 8.5: Interpretation of model 9

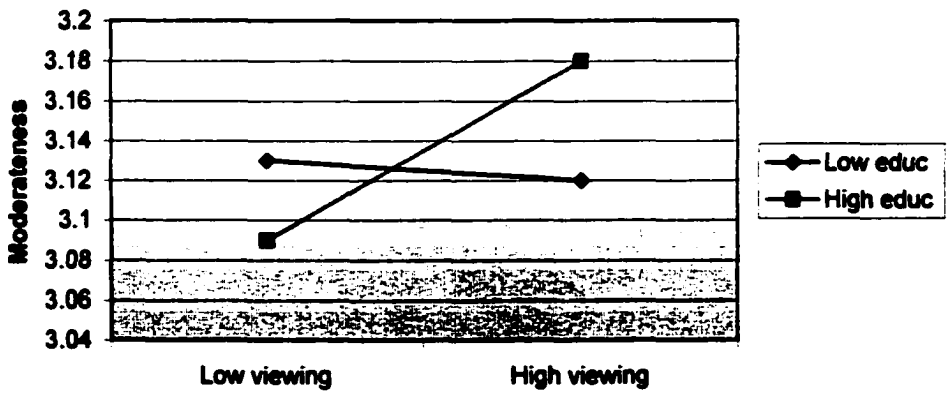


Figure 8.6: Interpretation of Model 10

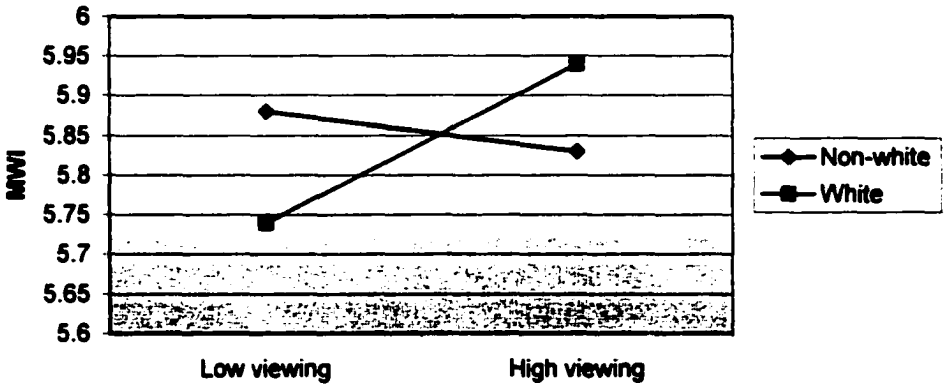


Figure 8.7: Interpretation of Model 11

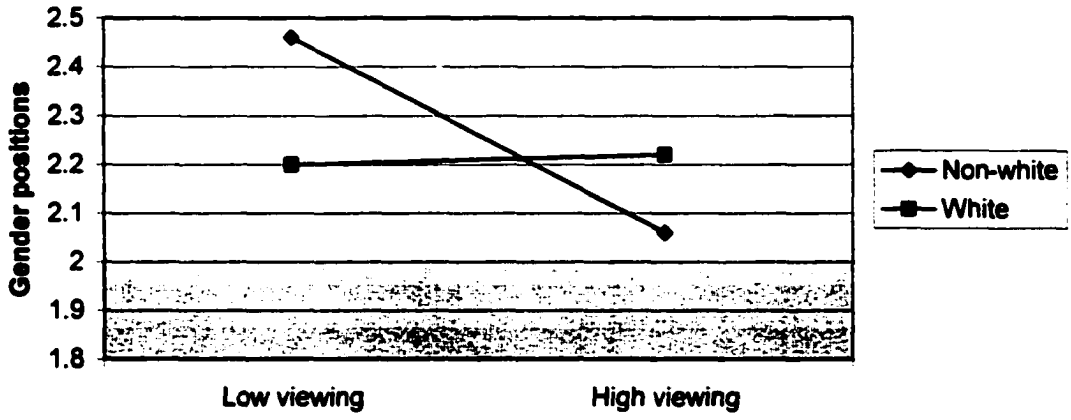


Figure 8.8: Interpretation of Model 1 (Table 8.5)

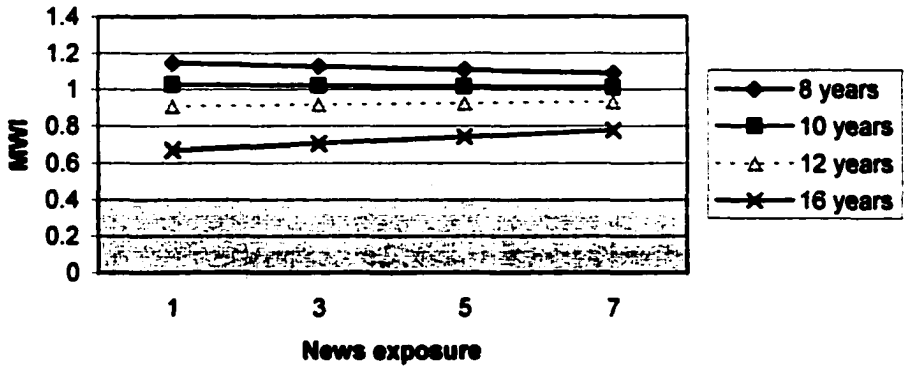


Figure 8.9: Interpretation of Model 6 (Table 8.5)

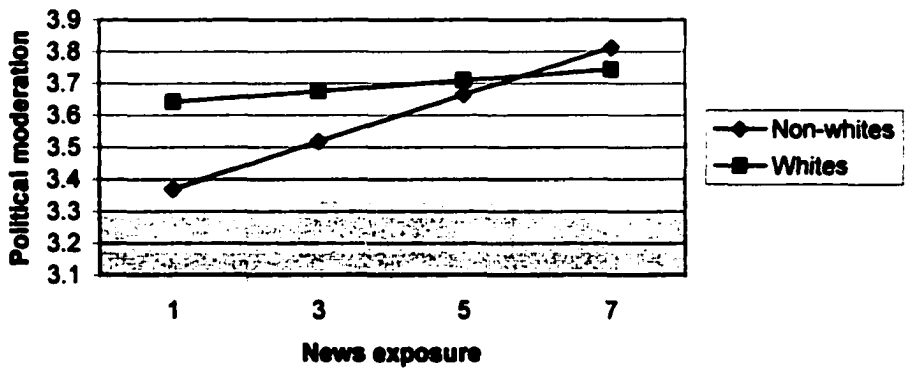


Figure 8.10: Interpretation of Model 3 (Table 8.6)

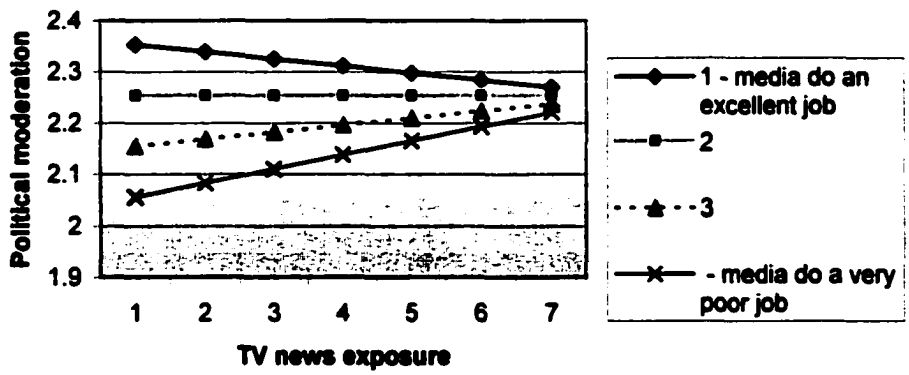


Figure 8.11: Interpretation of Model 3 (Table 8.7)

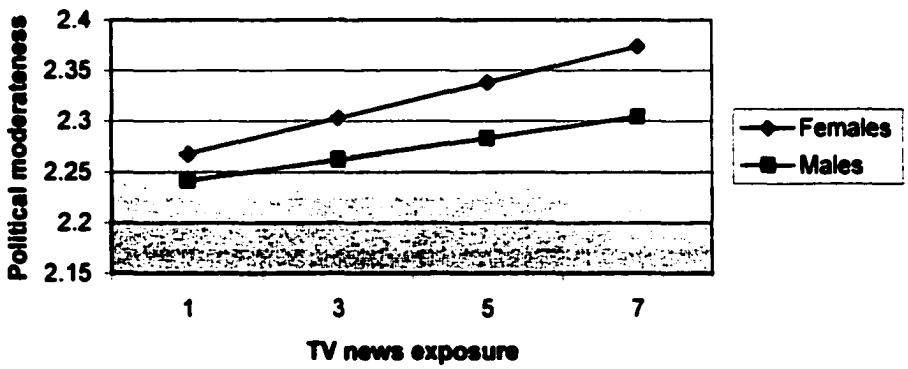


Figure 8.12: Interpretation of Model 3 (Table 8.9)

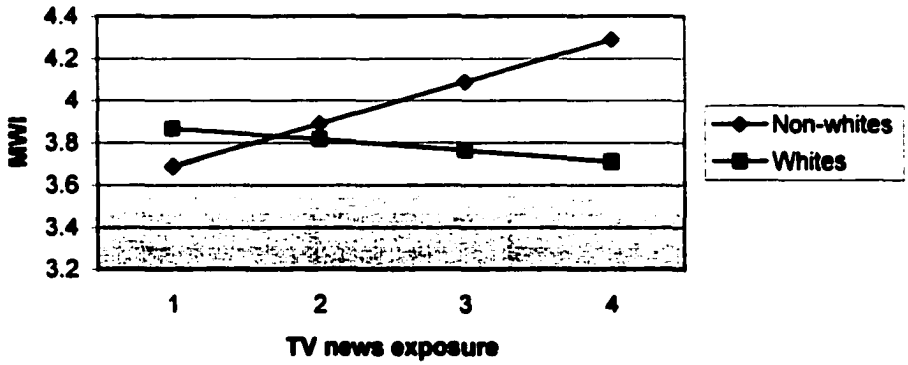


Figure 8.13: Interpretation of Model 4 (Table 8.9)

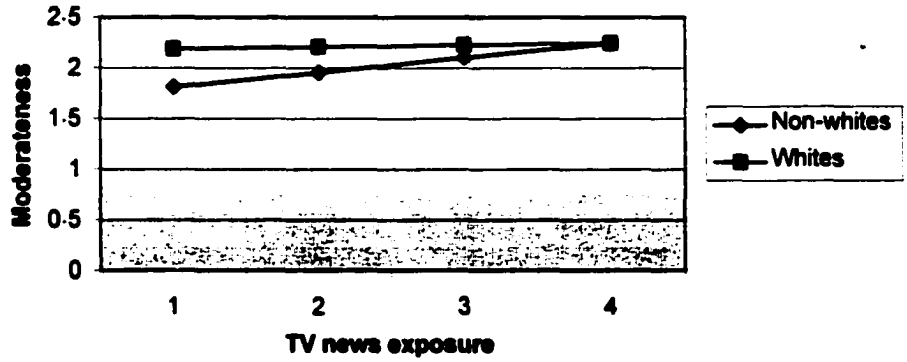


Figure 8.14: Interpretation of the Model 4, Table 8.9, three-way interaction (PTR 1996 data).

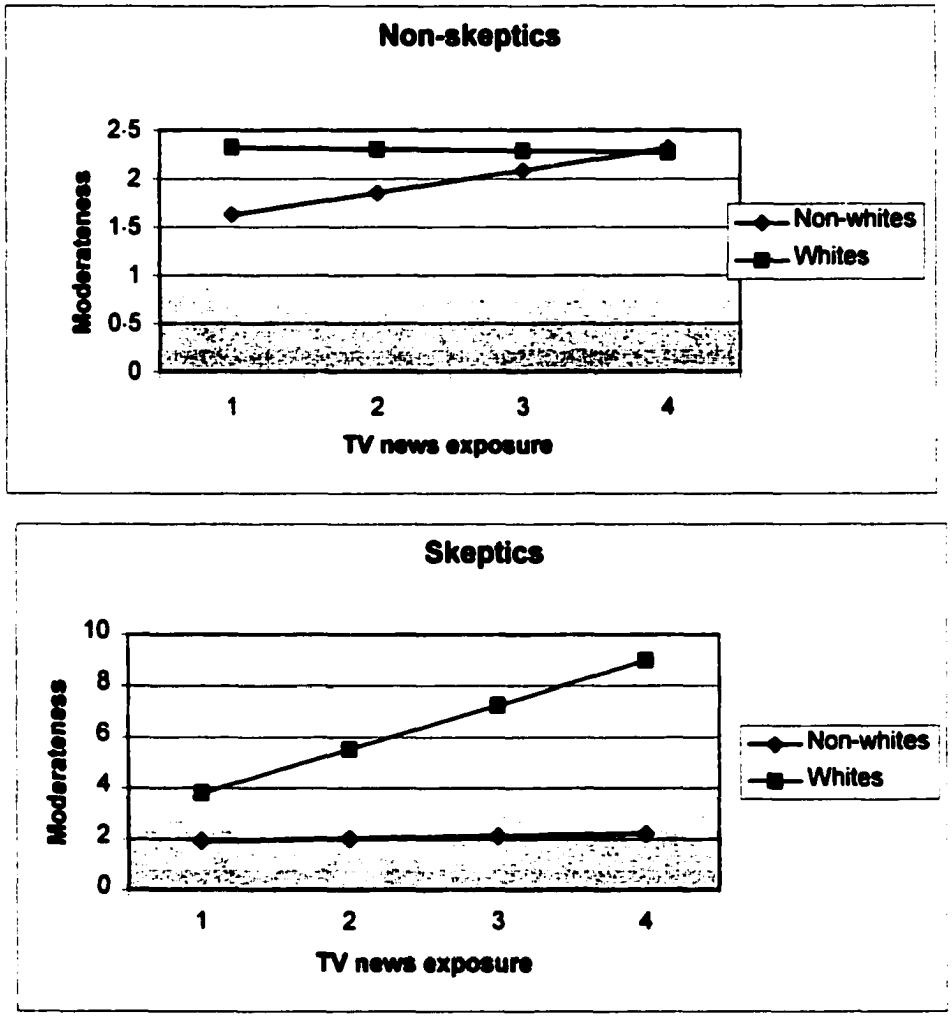
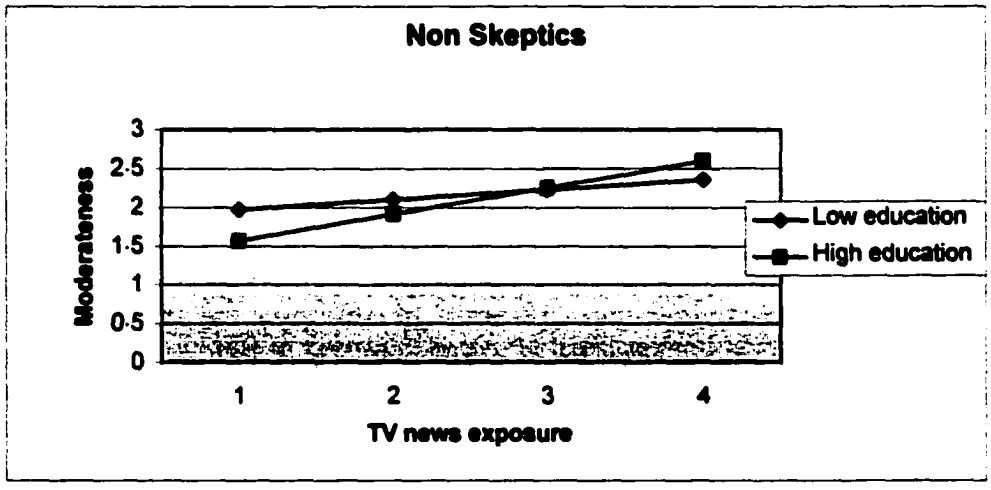
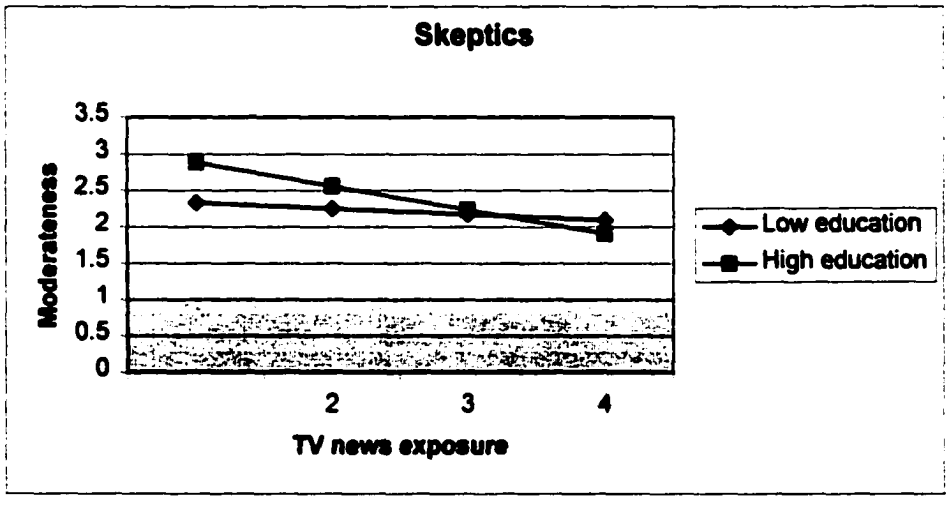


Figure 8.15: Interpretation of the Model 2, Table 8.9, three-way interaction (PTR 1996 data).





Chapter 9: Media skepticism and priming.

Virtually all reviews of priming mention that the concept originated in cognitive psychology. The starting point is almost always the "accessibility" or "availability" heuristic. Psychologists found that "people solve problems with what comes to mind". When a construct is accessible in people's memories, it is presumed to influence their judgments more than when it is not accessible. "Priming" refers to the enhancement of a construct's impact on judgments by making it more cognitively available. In media studies, "priming effects" refer to the ability of the news media to make certain constructs or considerations more influential in decision making. Priming effects imply that while the media are not so powerful in telling us *what* to think, they are extremely powerful in telling us *with what* to think: *what considerations to use (what constructs will be available in our minds)*, and *how much weight to give to the different considerations* when we think.

The concept of media priming has been widely applied in the political communication domain. Providing the first evidence of media priming, Iyengar and Kinder's experimental subjects watched news telecasts that were manipulated to contain stories dealing with defense (e.g., their Experiment 1), while their control group watched the same newscast without the defense items (an unemployment item was shown instead). For both groups, Iyengar and Kinder (1987:65-9) calculated the effect of presidential-defense-performance-rating on overall presidential performance (i.e., the regression coefficient for the effect of problem-specific evaluations on general

presidential evaluations). The priming effect is the significant difference between the coefficients of the experimental and the control groups (i.e., an issue-exposure * issue-specific-evaluation interaction was their test for priming). They found this interaction to be significant at the .05 level, not only in this example, but also in an additional eight of their 11 models[95] dealing with various issues including inflation, arms control, unemployment and energy. In some cases, "the importance of the particular problem for the president's overall standing more than doubled thanks only to increase in television news coverage." (p.68). In sum, Iyengar and Kinder's experiments demonstrated that exposure to a newscast containing a particular problem primes that problem, and makes it an important consideration in audiences' presidential approval. "By calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, television news influences the standards by which governments, presidents, policies and candidates for public office are judged" (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987:63).

Other scholars have demonstrated priming effects using public opinion surveys rather than an experimental methodology. For example, Krosnick and Kinder (1990) found that the intrusion of the Iran-Contra scandal into the media agenda[96] shifted the considerations that people used to evaluate the president, with more emphasis placed on foreign affairs. Again, the priming effect was operationalized as a difference in coefficients in regression models predicting presidential evaluation, this time, difference between the coefficients for people interviewed before and after the scandal appeared on

[95] In two other models the p-values for the interactions were at the .25 level. The direction of these insignificant effects was consistent with their priming hypotheses.
[96] On November 25, 1986 the Attorney General made a dramatic announcement about the diversion of funds from the secret sale of weapons to Iran to the Contras in Nicaragua.

the top of media agenda. In sum, there is both experimental and non-experimental research demonstrating "media priming effects".

The literature on media priming tells us that the media are very influential in telling audiences *with what* to think – in particular, how much weight they should give to the different considerations when they think. But why should people give more weight to the problems and criteria set by the media when they do not trust the media? Why should the media "prime" certain topics in the minds of those who do not trust them? If media skepticism moderates media effects, then the priming effect should be weaker for media skeptics than for non-skeptics.

Experimental evidence suggests that media priming is indeed moderated by audience trust in the media. In a series of experiments, Miller and Krosnick (2000) found an exposure * issue performance * trust * knowledge interaction effect on presidential evaluations, such that knowledgeable audiences who trusted the media were affected by priming, while other audiences were not. This led them to suggest that "further investigation of the role of media trust in regulating agenda setting and priming seems merited" (p. 303).

Given these past findings, and the rationale of my "moderating role of media skepticism in media effects" thesis, we may formulate the following hypothesis:

> H1.4a: The priming effect will be weaker for media skeptics than for non-skeptics (an exposure*issue performance*media skepticism interaction).

Given Miller and Krosnick's finding of a trust*knowledge interaction, we should expect knowledgeable and media-trusting audiences to be more susceptible to priming than other audiences. Hence,

> H14.b: There will be a four-way knowledge*skepticism*exposure*issue-performance interaction such that the priming effect will be stronger for knowledgeable and trusting audiences than for any other group.

Study 1: The PTR data.

The dependent variable in this study is an overall opinion regarding President Bill Clinton. All PTR respondents were asked for their "overall opinions" of the President. Response categories were "very favorable" (coded "5"), "mostly favorable" (coded "4"), "mostly unfavorable" (coded "2"), "very unfavorable" (coded "1"), and "can't rate" (coded "3"). Respondents were also asked to rate the way President Clinton was handling his job on some specific issues (the economy, foreign policy, the deficit, Medicare and welfare reform). Response categories were "approve" (coded "1") and "disapprove" (coded "0"). Since economic issues dominated the media agenda at the time of the study (as the media content analysis in the agenda setting study showed; see Table 6.1), the media presumably "primed" the economy as a consideration in people's judgments about the President. So the influence of the evaluation of Clinton in the economic domain on the general opinion of him should be higher as exposure to the news media increases (exposure and issue performance are expected to interact in their effect on the overall presidential evaluation). H1.4a predicts that this priming effect will be weaker as a function of media skepticism.

Table 9.1 presents cumulative logistic regression models testing H1.4. Cumulative logit is the most highly recommended method for ordered categorical dependent variables (Allison, 1999; McCullagh, 1980). Unlike OLS, it does not require that the dependent variable be continuous or normally distributed. Cumulative logit also does not make any assumption about the distance between the observed categories [97]. As before, weighting was used throughout the analysis because of the overrepresentation of talk radio listeners in this file. Model 1 shows a significant two-way exposure * issue-performance interaction effect on overall Clinton evaluation, controlling for ideology, involvement and political knowledge. As Figure 9.1 shows, approval of Clinton's handling of the economy was stronger for those receiving more media coverage than for those low on media exposure. That is, the weight assigned to economic issues was stronger for those receiving more media coverage. Since economy was at the top of the media agenda at that time, this could be interpreted as evidence for priming. That is, one could read the data as suggesting that the media "primed" economic issues as a consideration for presidential evaluation.

On the other hand, additional models showed no evidence for a statistically significant interaction of media exposure with specific evaluations of Clinton's handling of foreign affairs, the deficit, Medicare and welfare reform. That is, increased media exposure did not lead audiences to assign more weight to these issues when evaluating the president. These null interactions, at least in the cases of the deficit, Medicare and welfare, do not contradict priming theory. Since these issues received only limited media attention at the time of study they were not supposed to be "primed" by the media.

[97] An OLS model (which is less appropriate for ordinal dependent variables) provided the same patterns for the relevant variables in terms of coefficient signs and significance.

Priming theory does not argue that media exposure should increase the importance of *any* issue in political decision-making or evaluation, only issues that receive media attention. The fact that exposure did not interact with evaluation of Clinton's handling of foreign affairs is contrary to what one might expect according to "priming", because foreign affairs did receive ample media attention (the issue ranked second on the media agenda at the time of study).

In sum, the data could be interpreted as containing evidence for media "priming" of the economy, but not of foreign affairs, at the time of the first wave of the PTR study (early 1996). However, the focus here is not on priming by itself, but rather on the role played by media skepticism in priming processes. H1.4a predicts that priming will be weaker as a function of media skepticism. Step 2 of Table 9.1 examines this hypothesis. As the table shows, there was no evidence for a three-way exposure* skepticism* evaluation of Clinton on the economy interaction effect. That is, the association between overall Clinton evaluation, media exposure and specific evaluation of Clinton in the economic domain was the same regardless of media skepticism. The exposure*economic-evaluation interaction took place for skeptics and non-skeptics alike. Thus, there is no evidence for H1.4a in the PTR data.

Hypothesis 1.4b predicted a four-way interaction between media exposure, media skepticism, political knowledge and issue-specific presidential evaluation in their effect on overall presidential approval. Knowledgeable and trusting audiences are expected, following Miller and Krosnick, to be more influenced by priming than other audiences. Step 3 of the model tests this hypothesis. As the table shows, there was no evidence for a four-way exposure* knowledge* skepticism* specific evaluation of Clinton in the

economic domain interaction effect on overall Clinton evaluation. If we divide respondents to four groups based on their levels of political knowledge and media skepticism (low-knowledge-low-skepticism; low-knowledge-high-skepticism; high-knowledge-low-skepticism and high-knowledge-high-skepticism), these groups will not show significantly different patterns of priming. The priming effect is not stronger for knowledgeable non-skeptics than for other respondents. Thus, H1.4b did not receive support from the data.

Study 2: NES 1996 Data.

The dependent variable in this study is overall presidential approval rating. The question wording for this item was, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as president?" Response categories ranged from "approve strongly" (coded "4") to "disapprove strongly" (coded "1"). Respondents were also asked to evaluate the president's performance in specific domains: the economy, "our relations with foreign countries", the environment, and health care. These variables were also coded "4" for "approve strongly" and "1" for "disapprove strongly", with varying categories in between.

The content analysis showed that the news media devoted a lot of attention to foreign affairs and the economy in the weeks preceding the NES 1996 data collection, and much less attention to the environment and health (see Table 6.6). Hence, according to priming theory, news exposure should increase the weight audiences gave to economic and foreign affairs when judging the president's overall performance. That is, media exposure is expected to interact with the evaluation of Clinton's handling of these two specific

domains in their effect on overall presidential evaluation. However, my hypotheses predict that these patterns will be stronger for non-skeptical audience, especially those with high levels of political knowledge.

Table 9.2 presents cumulative logit models testing the hypotheses regarding the media's priming of economic issues. Similarly, Table 9.3 presents models testing the hypotheses regarding media priming of foreign affairs. All models control for demographics, political interest, ideology and knowledge. As the first step of each model shows, both cases provide evidence for the priming hypothesis. In other words, the coefficient for the news-exposure * issue-specific-evaluation interaction effect was statistically significant in both cases.

For an interpretation of Step 1 of Table 9.2, examine Figure 9.2[98]. The figure shows that the effect of the issue-specific evaluation of Clinton in the economic domain was stronger for those who were exposed to the media seven days in the previous week than for those with less media exposure. As media exposure decreased, the association between Clinton's handling of the economy and people's overall presidential evaluation weakened. It may therefore be argued that the media "primed" economic issues in August and September of 1996, and thus influenced the accessibility of these issues for political judgments.

The interpretation of Step 1 of Table 9.3 is presented in Figure 9.3. Again, this figure shows that the association between evaluation of Clinton's handling of a specific issue – this time foreign affairs – and overall presidential approval was stronger for those who

[98] The figure actually presents OLS estimates of the predicted values. Cumulative-logit equations predict the log odds of being in higher versus lower categories, which are much less intuitively interpretable. As I mentioned earlier, the results achieved using the two separate methods were almost identical.

reported higher media exposure. The data can be interpreted as evidence that the media "primed" foreign affairs. By stressing foreign affairs in their coverage, the media (supposedly) increased the weight people assigned to foreign issues when evaluating the president.

In contrast to economic and foreign issues, and in line with "priming theory", there was no exposure*health-care-evaluation or exposure*environment-evaluation interaction (models not presented). In other words, these issues, which did not receive much media attention, were not "primed" by the media. Their weight in overall evaluation of the president was unrelated to their level of media exposure. In sum, the data can be interpreted as providing evidence for media priming of economic and foreign affairs issues during the time of study.

However, my focus in this chapter is not on priming effects per se, but on the way these effects are influenced by audience trust in the media. The hypotheses regarding the moderating effect of media skepticism on news priming are tested in Steps 2 and 3 of Tables 9.2 and 9.3. H1.4a predicts a three-way exposure*skepticism*issue-evaluation interaction, such that the priming effect would be weaker for media skeptics. However, as Step 2 of both models shows, no such interaction was found in the NES 1996 data: there was no evidence that media skeptics significantly differed from their non-skeptical counterparts in the way they were (apparently) influenced by the media. The association between the issue-specific evaluation of Clinton (in the economic and foreign affairs domains) and overall presidential approval was stronger for heavily-exposed individuals, regardless of media skepticism.

H1.4b predicted that the priming effect would be stronger for politically knowledgeable non-skeptics (a four-way interaction between knowledge, exposure skepticism and specific evaluation of Clinton's handling of the economy or foreign affairs). However, as Step 3 of Tables 9.2 and 9.3 shows, there was no evidence in the NES data for the predicted interaction. In other words, knowledge and skepticism do not jointly influence the priming process; the exposure*issue-evaluation interaction pattern is essentially the same, regardless of media skepticism.

Conclusion.

The data at hand provided two examples that could be interpreted as evidence for media priming effects: the priming of economic issues in early 1996, and the priming of economic and foreign affairs issues during the late stages of the 1996 campaign. In both examples, the association between overall presidential approval and evaluations of presidential performance on specific issues that received vast media exposure was stronger for audiences who reported heavy news exposure, controlling for demographic and political factors. However, contrary to what my hypotheses predicted, to the extent that we could interpret these interactions as evidence for media priming effects, these effects were not affected by audience trust in the media. Priming effects took place regardless of media skepticism, as skeptics and non-skeptics were equally likely to be affected by the media. This was the case in two separate data sets using different sampling designs and two different measures of skepticism.

There was also no evidence for stronger priming effects for knowledgeable non-skeptics, compared to other respondents. The four-way interaction hypothesized by

Miller and Krosnick (2000) was not significant in the two data sets used in this study. Thus, to the extent that the two-way interactions are indeed evidence for priming effects, these effects were not jointly affected by audience trust in the media and political knowledge. Again, this was the case in two independent data sets with two separate measures of skepticism.

Thus, the data failed to replicate the earlier experimental findings reported by Miller and Krosnick (2000). A potential explanation for this could be the difference between experimental and survey research designs. The experimental effect is more short-term in terms of the time span between exposure to media contents and measurement of the response to the media messages. Miller and Krosnick's subjects were asked about their trust in the media and about their overall and specific presidential evaluations immediately after their exposure to the experimental manipulation. This time conjuncture might have led to a more conscious response pattern on the part of the experimental subjects, compared to that of the survey respondents. Media contents for the present survey-based studies were monitored for a relatively long time span, and exposure took place in the natural setting of everyday life. Under these conditions, the possibility that survey respondents would respond in accordance with their guesses about the purpose of the study is very small, especially in comparison to an experimental design.

It could also be that the post-manipulation trust-in-the-media measurement in the experimental studies was influenced by the specific contents viewed in the different experimental conditions. For example, some story manipulations may have been perceived as more credible than others, thereby influencing other responses in the post-survey. Another possibility is that the specific content of the different manipulations

created the reported patterns. It is important to note that in both studies presented here, as well as in the Miller and Krosnick experiments, the media skepticism questions were asked after the presidential evaluation questions. However, as I have pointed out, answers to *all* questions could have been influenced by more or less credible specific stories in the experimental manipulation, but no stimulus in the surveys used here could have influenced subjects' answers to the skepticism question. Thus, one set of explanations for the discrepancies in findings between the present studies and those reported by Miller and Krosnick (2000) lies in the differences between laboratory experiments and survey correlation-based designs.

Another possibility is simply that the two-way interactions presented here are not evidence for priming but, rather, that they are a result of coincidence or of another kind of artifact (e.g. some sort of response bias). Indeed, apart from a general news media content analysis there is not much in my survey data that links actual news exposure to news contents. I am assuming that respondents who watched more news were exposed to more prominent media issues, and hence more prone to media priming of these issues. The opposite process also makes some sense, that is, that those who spend more time with the media receive more coverage of less prominent issues, rather than more coverage of the same prominent issue. However, one could dispute this assumption and dismiss my two-way interaction findings as something other than priming. This would explain the discrepancy between this my findings and those of Miller and Krosnick (2000).

It is unlikely that the patterns of priming I found in the survey data were solely due to chance. Also, the fact that priming effects were found on issues that received ample media attention, but not on those that did not receive media attention, negates the

possibility of response bias or other artifacts of this kind. Media exposure was associated with what it is supposed to prime, not with some general tendency of involved audiences to rely more heavily on all issues in their presidential evaluation, regardless of their prominence in the media. So although I cannot say exactly why my hypothesis was not supported by the data, I think they do demonstrate an association between media priming and media skepticism.

One possible explanation for the null findings could simply be that media skepticism does not moderate media priming, i.e., that skeptical and non-skeptical audiences are equally likely to be affected by media priming. Priming tells us that the media supply audiences with considerations to use when making political decisions. They do not tell audiences *what to think*, but *what weight to put on what standards* when they think about politics. One explanation of the null interaction between priming and media skepticism is simply that this influence is not related to audience trust. Audiences may not believe the actual contents of news stories, but they can still use the standards set by the media, especially issue prominence standards, when evaluating politicians.

Some scholars conceptualize priming effects as resulting from media agenda setting. That is, the media set our personal agendas, and we then use these agendas when we make political evaluations. The media tell us what to think *about*, and consequently, we use these issues as important standards and criteria for our political decision-making. If we accept this view of priming as an outcome of agenda setting, we can explain the null result as being due to the fact that the personal agendas of skeptics *were*, in fact, influenced by the news media, at least to some degree (if we accept the findings presented in Chapter 6 as agenda setting). Though substantially less prone to media

agenda influences than non-skeptics, the correlations between general media agenda and public agenda for skeptics were rather high – .58 in the PTR data and .51 in the NES data (see Tables 6.2 and 6.7). Although skeptics were somewhat less likely than non-skeptics to mention the economy and foreign affairs as their most important problems, many *did* learn from the media about the importance of these issues. The differences in agenda setting could have been too small to create differences in its consequence, priming.

Since the null hypotheses could not be rejected, and since this null findings stands in contrast to previously published findings that were obtained using a different methodology, more research is probably needed to gain more knowledge about media skepticism and priming. Meta-analysis will eventually be required that would combine these contradictory findings to reach more valid conclusions.

Figure 9.1: Priming: the effect of issue performance on Clinton approval, by media exposure

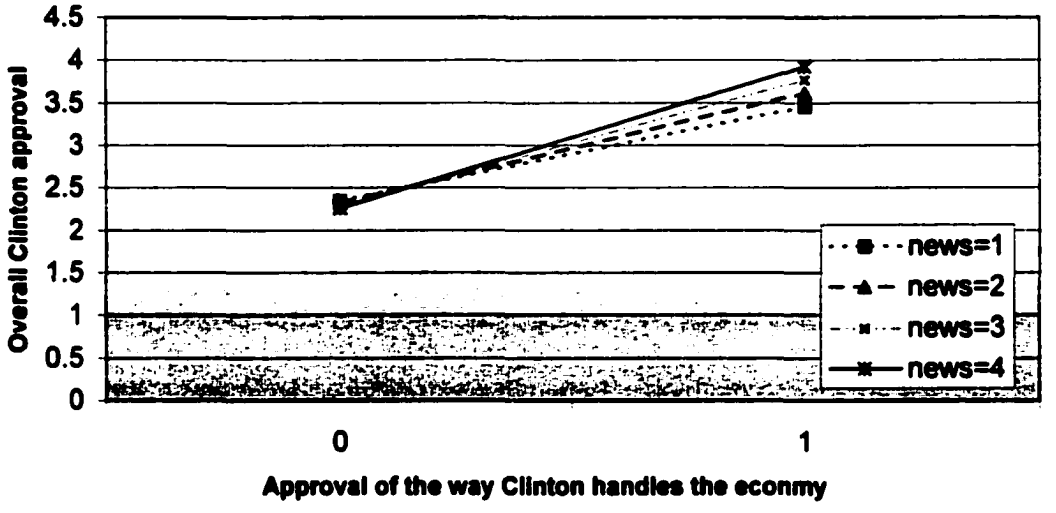


Figure 9.2: The effect of issue evaluation on overall Clinton evaluation (interpretation of Step 1, Table 9.2)

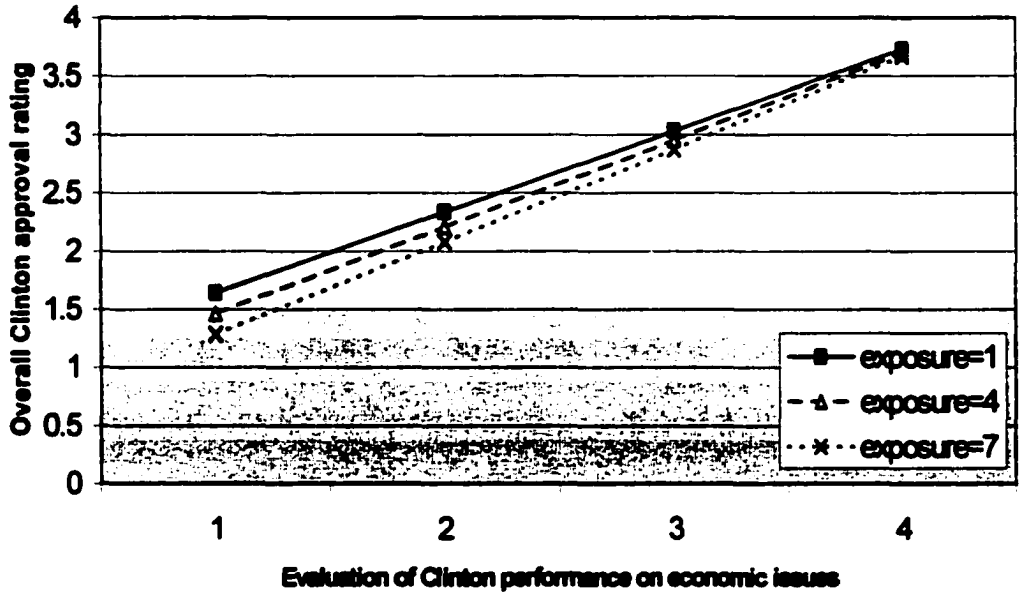


Figure 9.3: The effect of issue evaluation on overall Clinton evaluation (interpretation of Step 1, Table 9.3)

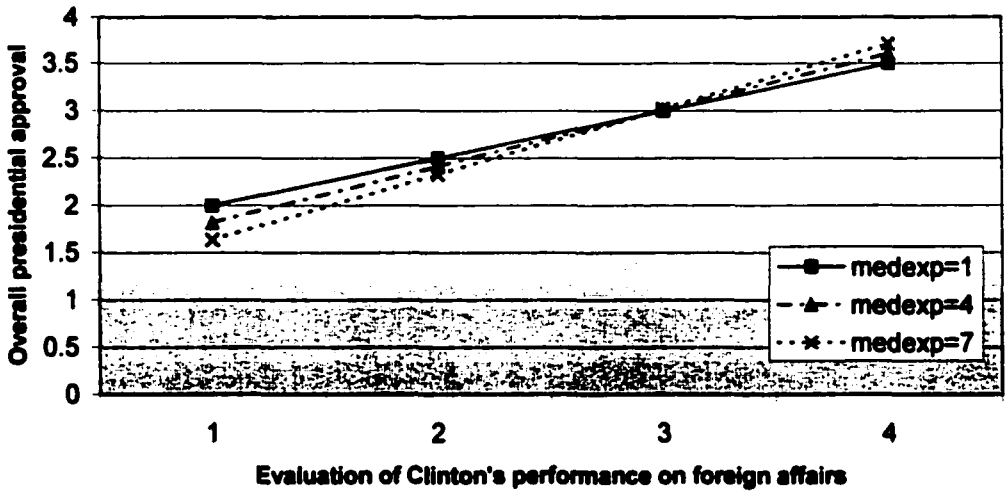


Table 9.1: Priming, media skepticism and political knowledge. Cumulative logit models predicting Clinton overall evaluation using evaluation of Clinton's performance on the economy (PTR 1996).

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Evaluation of Clinton's performance on economic issues (CLINEC)	1.58*** (.45)	1.17# (.73)	n.s.
Media exposure	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
CLINEC * exposure	.32* (.15)	n.s.	.93# (.51)
Media skepticism		n.s.	n.s.
Skepticism * exposure		n.s.	n.s.
Skepticism * CLINEC		n.s.	n.s.
CLINEC * skepticism * exposure		n.s.	n.s.
Knowledge			n.s
Knowledge * CLINEC			n.s.
Knowledge * exposure			n.s.
Knowledge * skepticism			n.s.
Knowledge * CLINEC * exposure			n.s.
Knowledge * CLINEC * skepticism			n.s.
Knowledge * skepticism * exposure			n.s.
Knowledge * skepticism * CLINEC * exposure			n.s.
R2	.44	.45	.45
Unweighted N	1,519	1,415	1,415

Notes: Table entries are weighted cumulative logit regression coefficients. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.
# p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; *** p <.001.
All models control for demographic factors, political interest, political ideology and political knowledge.

Table 9.2: Priming, media skepticism and political knowledge. Cumulative logit models predicting Clinton overall job approval using evaluation of Clinton's performance on the economy (NES 1996).

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Evaluation of Clinton's performance on economic issues (CLINEC)	1.50*** (.07)	1.46*** (.41)	1.46# (.88)
Media exposure	-.19* (.07)	n.s.	n.s.
CLINEC * exposure	.07** (.02)	n.s.	n.s.
Media skepticism		n.s.	n.s.
Skepticism * exposure		n.s.	n.s.
Skepticism * CLINEC		n.s.	n.s.
CLINEC * skepticism * exposure		n.s.	n.s.
Knowledge			n.s
Knowledge * CLINEC			n.s.
Knowledge * exposure			n.s.
Knowledge * skepticism			n.s.
Knowledge * CLINEC * exposure			n.s.
Knowledge * CLINEC * skepticism			n.s.
Knowledge * skepticism * exposure			n.s.
Knowledge * skepticism * CLINEC * exposure			n.s.
R2	.62	.63	.63
N	1,308	1,304	1,304

Notes: Table entries are cumulative logit regression coefficients. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.
# p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; *** p <.001.
All models control for demographic factors, political interest, political ideology and political knowledge.

Table 9.3: Priming, media skepticism and political knowledge. Cumulative logit models predicting Clinton overall job approval using evaluation of Clinton's performance on foreign affairs (NES 1996).

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Evaluation of Clinton's performance on foreign affairs (CLINFOR)	.83*** (.09)	.76* (.35)	n.s.
Media exposure	-.25*** (.06)	n.s.	n.s.
CLINFOR * exposure	.09*** (.02)	n.s.	n.s.
Media skepticism		n.s.	n.s.
Skepticism * exposure		n.s.	n.s.
Skepticism * CLINFOR		n.s.	n.s.
CLINFOR * skepticism * exposure		n.s.	n.s.
Knowledge			n.s
Knowledge * CLINFOR			n.s.
Knowledge * exposure			n.s.
Knowledge * skepticism			n.s.
Knowledge * CLINFOR * exposure			n.s.
Knowledge * CLINFOR * skepticism			n.s.
Knowledge * skepticism * exposure			n.s.
Knowledge * skepticism * CLINFOR * exposure			n.s.
R2	.53	.54	.55
N	1,309	1,305	1,305

Notes: Table entries are cumulative logit regression coefficients. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.
# p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; *** p <.001.
All models control for demographic factors, political interest, political ideology and political knowledge

Chapter 10: Media skepticism as a moderator in media effects.

In the beginning of this section I asked: Does audience trust in the media matter in media effects? The answer, it seems, depends on the type of media effect in question. Trust in the news media seems to moderate the perception of the media's climate of opinion (a component of the spiral-of-silence effect): the higher the skepticism, the higher the rejection of the mediated opinion climate. There is also evidence for a moderating role of audience mistrust in the agenda setting process: trusting audiences tended more than skeptical audiences to converge with the mainstream news media on the most important problems.

On the other hand, trust in the media does not seem to moderate news cultivation effects: media skeptics and non-skeptics did not significantly differ in the way they were (presumably) affected by the media on cultivation outcome measures. Also, trust in the media does not seem to moderate priming effects, as skeptics did not differ from non-skeptics in the way they used the standards set by the media when making political evaluations.

It is important to note that the fact that H1.1 and H1.2 were supported, while H1.3 and H1.4 received no confirmation, is not by itself contradictory. Agenda setting and cultivation, priming and spiral-of-silence are different theories representing different phenomena, perhaps with different cognitive processes operating in the background. We cannot expect the intervening role of media skepticism to be identical across this broad range of theories. However, since in Chapter 5 these separate theories were discussed

under one framework, and since the same explanations were used to justify the separate hypotheses, some consistency could have simplified our interpretations of the findings.

Absent such consistent findings, we must ask ourselves: Why did media skepticism moderate the acceptance of the media's climate of opinion and agenda, while not interfering with news cultivation and priming processes? This question can be answered on various levels. In the following pages I offer two major kinds of explanations: methodological and conceptual.

Methodological explanations.

Model specification. One methodological explanation for the fact that H1.3 and H1.4 were not supported, in contrast to H1.1 and H1.2, might have to do with imperfect specification of the statistical models. For example, it might be that the hypothesized moderation of media effects by media skepticism takes place under certain conditions that occurred in the case of agenda setting and spiral-of-silence, but not in the case of priming and cultivation. From the theoretical standpoint, Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) offers one such condition – that of involvement.

According to ELM, involvement fosters people's motivation to engage in issue-relevant thinking. Under this condition of personal relevance, elaboration likelihood is said to be high. This means that people will attend more carefully to the message, scrutinize it, and consequently make up their minds about it based on its substantial argumentative and informational qualities. On the other hand, when messages are not important or personally relevant to recipients, they will not allocate cognitive resources to evaluating the substantial qualities of the message. Rather, they will use "peripheral

cues...triggering relatively primitive affective states that become associated with the attitude object" (p. 18). Petty and Cacioppo see source credibility as such a peripheral cue. Thus, ELM sees source credibility as a relevant factor in persuasion only when elaboration is low. When the issue at stake is relevant and important to the recipients, they will not use the credibility shortcut; rather, they will base their judgments on the substantial qualities of the message. This is a major modification of the source credibility hypothesis. As mentioned above, my resistance hypothesis is an extension of the classic source credibility hypothesis. Thus, it might be that ELM modifications apply to media skepticism and media effects. Is low involvement a necessary condition for the resistance hypothesis to work?

No evidence in the data suggested that this is the case. In many of the models reported in Chapters 6 through 9, an interaction of skepticism with political involvement was tried. Since it was not statistically significant it was not reported. However, in these interaction models I used political involvement (measured as interest in politics, sometimes combined with measures of news attention) as the operationalization of "involvement". One might argue that this is not exactly what Petty and Cacioppo had in mind. The problem is that the data at hand did not contain better measures tapping factors such as personal relevance or responsibility. In many cases, it is even hard to think about such factors conceptually. What would be considered as "personal relevance" when the outcome measure is overall presidential evaluation? What would be considered "personal involvement" of people with the perceived climate of opinion (other than actually

working on a campaign)? For these reasons, I do not find ELM's ideas applicable in the contexts of priming, cultivation and spiral-of-silence[99].

Study artifacts. Another way to explain the fact that skepticism moderated agenda setting and the perception of opinion climate but not cultivation and priming is to look for some plausible artifacts. This could be done in two general ways: attacking the validity of the null findings in the cases of cultivation and priming, or attacking the validity of the confirmation of the hypotheses in the cases of agenda setting and spiral-of-silence. For example, the fact that we got evidence that *could* be interpreted as consistent with priming or cultivation does not assure us that what we observed is indeed a priming or a cultivation effect – and if they are not effects, the null findings about the intervening role of skepticism are meaningless. On the other hand, how can we be sure that the agenda setting and spiral-of-silence effects are indeed media effects and not something else? What about possible reverse causality (namely that people adopt alternative agendas because they hate the media)? Another possibility is that moderating role of skepticism in priming or cultivation might be too small to be detected by the interaction tests, possibly due to lack of statistical power. That is, an argument can perhaps be made for small effects in cultivation and priming and large, robust effects in agenda setting and spiral-of-silence. In other words, one solution to the inconsistency may lie in some study artifact that leads us to false conclusions either in the cases of cultivation and priming or in the

[99] Still, it could be that some factor other than involvement is intervening in the moderating role of media skepticism in media effects, in particular priming and cultivation, given the null findings in this area. To the best of my knowledge, none of the relevant existing theories suggest such factors. Another possibility is that some non-linearity other than interaction conceals the moderating effect of skepticism. Much exploratory analysis in each of the chapters was devoted to examining this possibility (mainly using quadratic models, but also by running separate models by level of skepticism). There was no evidence here for such non-linearities either. In sum, potential non-linear and interactive forms were tested to the extent possible by the data and negated. The possibility of other untestable factors intervening in the process deserves of further research.

cases of agenda setting and climate-of-opinion perceptions. One advantage of statistical methods is the fact that you never have to say you are certain: there are always reasons for doubt.

True, we are never immune from reaching erroneous conclusions. However, the replication of findings across data and the use of statistical controls provide some protection from study artifacts. An additional important tool that we have at our disposal is theory to direct us. In all cases we expected that effects would take place, and we found them. This is a very good justification to move on and study the ways in which these effects are affected by trust in the media. Guided by these theories and the body of research they represent, we gain confidence that what we got is what we think we got. This is the reason that, while being cautious about some of the findings (as we always should be), I prefer substantial theoretical explanations to blaming invisible study artifacts for the inconsistencies in the findings. We have theoretical reasons to suspect that the main effects in all chapters were media effects. Assuming they are indeed media effects, let us move forward and try to learn something substantial about trust in the media and the effects of the media, rather than speculating about artifacts, which can always affect our studies.

Conceptual explanations.

Automatic versus deliberate effects. Another possible explanation has to do with the automatic process of cultivation and priming compared with the other two hypothesized effects. This means that the reason the hypotheses worked for agenda setting and opinion climate perception but not for cultivation and priming is simply because the former are more straightforward, deliberate and conscious effects, while the

latter are more unconscious and irresistible, even for the most skeptical audiences. People cannot resist processes they are totally unaware of. Hence, they cannot resist priming and cultivation despite their media skepticism.

It could be that cultivation effects are so manipulative, so unconscious from the audience's perspective, so demanding for heavy-viewers in terms of repeated exposure, that even those who are most skeptical about the media are influenced by them. This is exactly the way Gerbner and his colleagues thought about cultivation. For cultivation scholars, the univocal, repetitive, stable and unambiguous televised presentations of reality are so compelling that they are in fact automatic, and as such, irresistible. The realism of the presentation may be an issue when the content is televised fiction (Potter, 1986). However, it becomes irrelevant for cultivation scholars, when the content creating the effect is news (Jamieson & Slovic, 1999). Cultivation is perceived to be an unconscious effect. If you spend much time with television, you accept its mediated realities without thinking or knowing that you do so. What you think about the news media becomes irrelevant under such conditions.

Priming, like cultivation, is also an unconscious effect. People do not know that they are affected by media content when they put more weight on certain criteria in their evaluation of the president or other political figures. If they are consciously seeking for ways to express their mistrust in the news media, they would have to change their answers to questions about issue-specific and general presidential evaluations, and assign less weight to issues that receive ample media attention in order to convey their media skepticism through their survey responses. This is not a very easy cognitive task.

In contrast to priming and cultivation, agenda setting effects and media effects on the perception of the climate of opinion are quicker and more direct, on the one hand, and at least somewhat more conscious and deliberate, on the other. When audience members answer questions like "Who will win the presidential race?" or "What is the most important problem facing the country?" they are more aware of the "media answer" than when they answer questions about gender positions or their social mistrust. It could be that when answering such questions, skeptical audiences are deliberately trying to express their mistrust of the media. By contrast, news cultivation and priming effects could be so subtle that they are in fact irresistible, even for the most skeptical audiences.

This possibility – that respondents' answers to agenda setting and opinion climate questions involve some conscious resistance to the media – is in fact testable. If the answers to survey questions are due to deliberate resistance, one might expect that people resisting the media would spend more time thinking about the answer to those questions than those not resisting the media. Their thoughts when asked who would win the election in November might be a bit more elaborate. For example: "The media say that Clinton is going to win. But I don't trust these liberal media. I think it's going to be Dole". Conscious resistance requires deliberation and we could try to capture this deliberation by measuring response time or by asking respondents to list the thoughts that went through their minds when they answered the agenda setting and opinion climate questions.

Alternate sources of information. Yet another possible explanation for the inconsistency between the confirmation of H1.1 and H1.2 and the null findings for H1.3 and H1.4 has to do with the fact that, as we shall see in Section 3, the information diet of

skeptics is different from that of non-skeptics. Media skeptics actually get less mainstream media and more talk radio and political information over the Internet (which I shall consider as non-mainstream media) than non-skeptics. Some of these sources, especially the Rush Limbaugh PTR show, are similar to mainstream news in their overall presentation of reality and the overall standards they use to evaluate politicians. However, when it comes to pre-election opinion climate, they offer a real alternative – for example, in 1996 Limbaugh repeatedly asserted that Dole would win despite 'the liberal media". The political agendas of some of these channels differ at least somewhat from those of the mainstream media[100]. It may well be that the outcome measures of skeptics actually represent media effects of exposure to more non-mainstream news. In this case, the inconsistent results we got for the different theories would actually be a result of differences between mainstream and non-mainstream channels in some aspects of the content, and similarities in other aspects.

In order to explain the results using this "alternate-sources" explanation, one must start with a content analysis of these non-mainstream sources and compare them with mainstream sources. If this explanation of the inconsistent findings is correct, then the "social indicators" presented by non-mainstream and mainstream media should be roughly the same, at least in relation to the outcome variables utilized in Chapter 8 (gender attitudes, social mistrust, political moderation). We should also find differing

[100] The PTR research team actually analyzed the agenda content of the Limbaugh show for the same period discussed in Study 1 of Chapter 6. The rank order correlation between the Limbaugh agenda and the general mainstream media agenda (presented in Table 6.1) was .42 ($p<.10$). Taxes, ranked 11.5 on the media agenda, were ranked first on Limbaugh's agenda. Foreign policy, ranked second on the mainstream agenda, was ranked eighth on Limbaugh's agenda. However, almost all the last places on the mainstream media agenda also occupied the last places on Limbaugh's agenda. Some of the issues that received much attention on the media agenda also received much attention in the Limbaugh show (e.g. dissatisfaction with politicians, economy, morality).

agenda and climate of opinion contents between the two, at least for the time periods corresponding to the data collection in the different data sets. From our knowledge of some non-mainstream content (especially PTR), it is likely that the content would indeed differ in terms of climate of opinion and issue priority. However, from what we know about the content of the Limbaugh show, there is little reason to expect the "social indicators" of mediated realities to be the same as in the mainstream media (there was relatively little discussion of crime on the show; also, political "moderation" hardly applies to the show's presentation of reality). Thus, while there is reason to suspect that alternate sources might be influencing the results presented in this section, there is little in what we know about the content of these non-mainstream alternatives that supports the claim that Limbaugh (for example) uses the same criteria to evaluate politicians, and presents the same picture of the world, as the mainstream media do.

Discussion.

In the last pages we asked: "Why did skepticism moderate agenda setting and spiral-of-silence but not cultivation and priming?" A few potential explanations for this inconsistency were offered. First, the results could be an outcome of an artifact or artifacts in one or a few of the studies. The second possibility was that the results might reflect the different media diets of skeptics and non-skeptics. The third explanation suggested that the findings could simply reflect the more conscious and straightforward nature of agenda setting and climate-of-opinion effects, in contrast with the automatic and unconscious nature priming and cultivation. More research would be needed to determine which of the processes are in fact taking place.

In a way, the findings offer a crucial validation for the media skepticism measures used in this study. The fact that the survey questions I used influenced some media effects demonstrates that these items indeed measure audience mistrust in the media. The findings also give extra validation to the agenda setting literature and to the media effects component of the spiral-of-silence theory. That is, if a hypothesized media effect is affected by audience trust in the media, we can interpret this pattern as strengthening the case for a "media effect", rather than for some statistical artifact.

So audience trust in the media seems to matter in media effects, at least some of the time. This is not a surprising finding, yet it is an important one. In many ways it echoes the claims by reception theorists about audiences' ability to "resist" some of the persuasive powers of media texts (e.g., Morley, 1980; Livingstone, 1997). Audiences emerge stronger from the findings presented in this section: they are critical and active, and do not accept the media's agenda and climate of opinion at face value. In this respect, the findings tell us that mistrust in the media is liberating.

However, some caution is warranted when we interpret the data. First, the fact that audiences can resist the media could also be interpreted as rigidity – as refusal to give in to the realities reported by the media. This is exemplified by the fact that media skeptics refused in 1996 to accept the media's prediction that Clinton would win the election. Rather than resistance or liberation, this could simply be interpreted as shutting one's ears and eyes to reality. Second, we should remind ourselves that there was no evidence for a moderating role of media skepticism in the more insinuating news cultivation and priming effects. This suggests that if media skeptics are inoculated, it is only against *some* media effects. Third, the effects of the media were weaker for media skeptics, but

they still existed. Thus, mistrustful audiences are not totally immune, but only less susceptible to, *some* influences of the media. Ironically, skeptics were as prone to media cultivation and priming as were non-skeptical audiences. This finding highlights the fact that we cannot talk about a far-reaching resistive ability, only of a limited one.

In sum, the effects of audience mistrust in the media, even when present, were not huge. There are clearly other factors in addition to trust in the media that influence the outcome variables in agenda setting and opinion-climate perceptions. The general literature on trust suggests that mistrust should lead to lower influence. And indeed, this is what we found in the cases of agenda setting and opinion climate. However, we did not find mistrust in the media to be associated with *no* influence of the mainstream media. In addition, it seems that only rarely, if at all, did skepticism result in a total *boomerang* effect[101]. Skeptics were not trying to say that the *exact opposite* of what media say is true. While mistrust implies suspicion and disbelief, it does not necessarily imply automatic and unconditional rejection, certainly not an automatic and unconditional acceptance of the very opposite of what the media say. The realities portrayed by non-skeptics often conflict with those presented by the media, but the fact that non-skeptics do not give answers that are the *direct opposite* of the "media answers" suggests that their resistance is not childish.

The reception literature offers some examples of audiences reading media texts upside-down ("the thieves are the good guys / the detectives are the bad guys" kind of oppositional readings; e.g. Fiske, 1986). While these critical interpretations might take place when audiences encounter fiction (and this is not necessarily the case; see Condit,

[101] For example, even in the most skeptical category respondents thought Clinton would win in 1996 (68.4 percent, compared to 93.8 percent in the least skeptical category).

1989), there was no evidence of similar response patterns of skeptics when it came to news effects. For example, not many skeptics said that issues related to the elderly or women's issues were the most important problems just because the media hardly ever reported on these issues. Skeptical and resistant as they may have been, audiences did not go this far in their reaction to media texts. This response pattern suggests that mistrustful audiences are suspicious and more resistant, but do not go all the way to blatant cynicism. What they *say* about the media might sound cynical at times, but what they *do* with it is, for the most part, skeptical.

The main implication of this section, I maintain, is that we should probably pay more attention to audience skepticism toward the news media when we build theories about media effects. The hypothesis that media skepticism moderates media effects should also be tested on other kinds of effects such as news framing, and theories dealing with knowledge gains. In short, as always, much is left for further research.

SECTION 3: MEDIA SKEPTICISM AND NEWS EXPOSURE

Chapter 11: News exposure and mistrust in the media.

In the previous section we saw that, at least some of the time, mistrust in the media affects the media's influence on audiences: when people do not trust the news media, they resist some of its effects. This short chapter sets the stage for the following section, which deals with another consequence of mistrust in the media. In the following chapters, I ask, What are the effects of media skepticism on audience news exposure patterns?

Trust was defined in Chapter 1 as an expectation by the trustors that gains rather than losses would result from their interaction with the trustees. Research in various fields shows that trust leads to cooperation and participation, and mistrust decreases them. If trust facilitates interaction, then in the present context trust should facilitate audience exposure to the news media. If mistrust inhibits interaction, then mistrust in the news media should inhibit the exposure of mistrusting audiences to sources they mistrust.

What is the information environment of media skeptics? What kinds of news media do they consume? Do they watch TV news despite the fact that they do not trust them? Do they expose themselves to mainstream press and radio even while holding negative attitudes toward their producers? Or do they seek other sources of information outside the mainstream media to satisfy their need for political information? The second main research question I investigate in this section of my dissertation is thus:

RQ2: Do media skeptics differ in their media exposure patterns from non-skeptical audiences?

As far as I know, not much research has been devoted to this question. There is some evidence that media exposure patterns are associated with attitudes toward the media (Cohen, 1981). But this evidence comes from a totally different culture and a media environment without new media technologies or Political Talk Radio (the study investigated media exposure patterns after a 1978 media strike in Israel). Some have reported that PTR exposure is related to attitudes toward the media (Pfau et al., 1998). The association between media skepticism and media exposure patterns certainly deserves another look.

Assumptions about the audience.

To develop hypotheses about media skepticism and media exposure, we can borrow a few postulates from the rational choice literature.

1. ***Rational audiences.*** Rational choice scholars often assume that "all human behavior is directed to the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain" (Lupia & McCubbins, 1991, p. 23). Rationality does not only imply pursuit of pleasure, however; it also implies utility maximization. Human energy and cognitive resources are limited. People are not computer processors. They cannot process infinite amounts of information over short time spans. They therefore rely on simple shortcuts to reach otherwise complex decisions. This is perfectly consistent with the assumption that people are rational (Carmines & Kuklinski, 1991; Sniderman, Brody & Tetlock, 1991).

2. ***People want to hold accurate knowledge about the non-immediate world.*** This assumption was discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. To reach reasoned decisions, rational people have to hold some knowledge of the world. As discussed in Chapter 5, this does not mean that people hold *full and accurate* information, but rather that when they do spend resources on acquiring information, political or otherwise, they want this information to be as correct as possible. Knowledge helps us reach decisions, because it helps us predict the consequences of our choices. When we make decisions we want to rely upon correct facts, and we strive to get these correct facts when we spend energy on collecting information.
3. ***People have an incentive to ignore many stimuli*** (Lupia & McCubbins, 1991:29). We cannot consume and process information from the environment all the time. In fact, the normal response to a given stimulus is simply to ignore it. It follows, according to Lupia and McCubbins, that "if a person can attend to only one stimulus, then he or she will attend to the stimulus for which the expected benefits are extremely high relative to the expected costs" (1991, p. 29).

It follows from these assumptions and from the definition of trust that people will choose to expose themselves to news information they trust. Trust is an expectation by the trustor that the trustee can be relied upon and that the interaction with the trustee will increase the probability of gains, rather than losses, to the trustor. Assumption 3 suggests that rational audiences need not attend to all news sources to collect information about the world. We need not, and indeed cannot, expose ourselves to all news sources all the time. Assumption 3 states that we have an incentive to ignore many stimuli. Indeed, we

regularly ignore political stimuli – or rather choose not to attend to them. No one watches CNN or CSPAN all the time, though these stations are always on the air. Ditto for online political information. More news exposure to more news sources might increase the data we have about the world, but not necessarily the knowledge useful for political decision-making. Thus, it is perfectly rational to obtain political information selectively rather than trying to attend to all political information. Indeed, we must select, because we are not physically capable of attending to all political information all the time.

Assumption 3 implies that if people must select, if they can attend to only one stimulus or set of stimuli, then they will attend to the stimuli for which the expected benefits are high relative to the costs. This means, by definition of trust, that they will try to attend to sources they trust rather than to sources they mistrust. In the words of Lupia and McCubbins, "information is valuable only when it improves the accuracy of predictions about the consequences of choices" (1991:20). If the information is incorrect it is not of much value to rational audiences. Rational audiences should attend to sources that will assist them in gaining correct knowledge about the world, sources that will benefit their political decision-making. That is why they should prefer sources they perceive to be accurate and trustworthy.

Assumptions about the sources.

For simplicity's sake, let us assume that media news sources are of only two types, mainstream and non-mainstream, generally overlapping the distinction between traditional and non-traditional news media. Non-mainstream channels are distinguished

from mainstream channels by the fact that they present themselves as alternatives to the mainstream media institutions. This difference is expressed in genre and format differences. For example, non-mainstream channels are, in some cases at least, seemingly more easily accessible to the average person (e.g. talk radio offers the opportunity to call in, and so forth). But the difference between mainstream and non-mainstream media is also manifested in the content of those channels. Non-mainstream sources attempt to present alternative information and a different point of view from the mainstream media. They are also very cynical about mainstream media.

Further, let us assume that mainstream sources consist of national and local TV and radio news, (e.g. general network news, all-news cable networks like CNN and MSNBC, public television and National Public Radio) and daily newspapers, and that non-mainstream news consists of Political Talk Radio and political information over the Internet. This assumption may seem far-fetched, but it should be read and interpreted probabilistically. Some of the content in what I define as "mainstream" media probably fits into the definition of non-mainstream sources. Clearly, some space in network TV news is dedicated to counter-media materials (especially in the coverage of "media scandals"). Much space in some partisan newspapers is dedicated to arguing and counter-arguing with mainstream news. Some mainstream channels do allow participation of ordinary citizens (e.g. CNN's *Talkback Live*). However, most of these features of "non-mainstream" news are much more prevalent on PTR and over the political Internet.

On the other hand, by saying that the Internet and PTR may be considered as "non-mainstream" media, I am not suggesting that most of their *content* is non-mainstream. In fact, the Internet is flooded with sites presenting the very same information originating

from the same mainstream sources. However, the features of non-mainstream news are much more prevalent online and in talk radio than in the mainstream press and TV news, as we saw in Chapter 4. Over the Internet, even mainstream channels such as CNN.com are much closer to being non-mainstream than their televised counterparts. For example, they provide space for audience reaction and interaction, and audience responses to the news sometimes contain a good deal of anti-media or counter-media argumentation.

Given that (as we saw in Chapter 4) much of the content of PTR and the Internet falls into the definition of non-mainstream news, it seems reasonable to assume that the probability of encountering these materials over these channels is higher than the probability of encountering anti- and counter-mainstream news content while watching Jennings, Rather or Brokaw. People who seek non-mainstream news would probably find it not in *USA Today*, but rather on the Limbaugh Show. The assumption that the Internet and PTR can be considered non-mainstream has little to do with technology per se. Rather, it has to do with the ways in which technologies are implemented in a given context. In the current news environment, it is plausible to assume that it is easier to find "non-mainstream" content over the Internet or on PTR than on national and local TV news and newspapers. Further, some current research finds that attitudes toward the mainstream media are negatively associated with PTR listening (e.g., Pfau et al., 1998). In the context of Internet research, some have talked about the "displacement" of television by online media (Kayany & Yelsma, 2000). Skepticism toward TV news may be operating in this process.

Hypotheses.

In sum, we assume that sources can be divided to mainstream and non-mainstream sources. If trust in sources predicts exposure, as it was suggested above, then it should be hypothesized that

H2.1. Media skepticism will be associated with lower levels of exposure to the mainstream news media. Trust in the media will be associated with higher levels of exposure to the mainstream media.

H2.2. Media skepticism will be associated with higher levels of exposure to non-mainstream news media. Trust in the media will be associated with lower levels of exposure to the non-mainstream news media.

Structure of the section.

In the previous section each chapter dealt with a different media effect, focusing on separate processes and different outcome measures. This section will be different since all of the following chapters share the same dependent measures. In all cases, the explained phenomenon is news media exposure and the dependent variables are measures of exposure to various media outlets. In contrast to the previous section, each chapter in this section will build on the findings discussed in prior chapters.

In Chapter 12 I will draw hypotheses from the theory of selective exposure. According to this theory, people choose to attend to sources congruent with their prior beliefs, attitudes and preferences. Based on selective exposure theory, I will hypothesize that skepticism toward the mainstream media will result in reduced exposure to the mainstream media and increased exposure to alternative channels. These hypotheses will be tested on four separate data sets. Structural equation models testing for the cross-

lagged effect of skepticism on exposure will be used to address the issue of causal direction.

In Chapter 13 I will add a motivational factor to the equations predicting exposure. I will argue that motivational factors, highlighted and advanced by Uses & Gratifications theory, interact with attitudes toward the media when people make their exposure decisions. This chapter focuses on one such motivational factor, the need for cognition. Cognitive needs, it will be argued, increase media exposure. But does the effect of media skepticism on media exposure depend on these cognitive needs? Does skepticism toward the media matter less when cognitive needs are present? These questions will be explored in Chapter 13.

In Chapter 14 I test the same hypotheses forwarded in Chapters 12 and 13, this time on variables capturing overall media diets, rather than exposure to specific news outlets. The questions investigated in this chapter deal with the overall composition of news exposure. Do skeptics consume non-mainstream sources instead of - or rather in addition to - mainstream news? Multinomial models with media diets as dependent variables will be used to answer this question.

Chapter 12: Media skepticism and selective exposure.

Selective exposure is said to be "one of the most widely accepted principles in sociology and social psychology", and "a basic fact in the thinking of many social scientists about communication effects" (Sears & Freedman, 1967:194). The principal of selectivity has guided research in communication for decades. For political scientists and communication scholars, selectivity has been the primary explanation – apart from reinforcement – for the failure of research to document campaign effects. For social psychologists, selective exposure has played a central role as a prime mechanism for dissonance reduction (Festinger, 1957). Some have even argued that selectivity may explain why experimental and survey methodologies often lead to quite different conclusions (Hovland, 1959). It would not be exaggerating, then, to say that the notion of selective exposure has had an immense influence on the social sciences.

When searching electronic databases, however, one might get the impression that selective exposure has been abandoned over the past decade. A keyword search for the term "selective exposure" in 20 political science, sociology and communication journals resulted in 22 hits for the years 1980-89, but only 9 hits for 1990-99[102]. However, this reduced scholarly attention may simply reflect a tendency to accept selectivity as self-evident. Rather than rejecting selective exposure, we may simply be less excited by it. We grew up with selective exposure. It is old news. It is a non-finding.

In his summary of communication research, Klapper (1960:19) described selective exposure as the fact that "by and large, people tend to expose themselves to those mass

[102] The database used for the search was JSTOR.

communications which are in accord with their existing attitudes and interests. Consciously or unconsciously, they avoid communication of opposite hue". Berelson & Steiner (1964) added that "people tend to see and hear communications that are favorable or congenial to their predispositions; they are more likely to hear congenial communications than neutral or hostile ones". This viewpoint is shared by many scholars, including Lazarsfeld et al. (1948), Hyman and Sheatsley (1947), Lipset et al. (1954), and Childs (1965).

The main explanation for the fact that people attend to sources that are congruent with their own opinions is the human need for consistency. People strive to be consistent and to avoid dissonance, hence they carefully choose to encounter only reaffirming and congenial communications. They simply shun information that runs counter to their attitudes and stay away from communications that could lead to discordant feelings.

Though the term "selective exposure" is most often applied to audience preferences for *contents* that support their political beliefs and attitudes, it should be noted that selectivity also refers to the message *source*. For example, Wheeless (1974) argues that perceptions of the sources as well as of the messages account for selectivity. Most relevant for this chapter, he found that when offered a list of public figures, people chose to be exposed to information from sources they trusted, and rejected sources they mistrusted (his subjects were asked to indicate the information items "they definitely did not want provided to them").

Wheeless argues that attitudes toward the source predict selectivity better than attitudes toward concepts discussed by the source. This makes sense in light of consistency theory. If I strive to be consistent, I won't expose myself to sources that I

mistrust (a simple consistency triangle). I will also try to stay away from content that includes dissonance-invoking opinions, though doing so may sometimes be harder than avoiding "untrustworthy" sources, because I cannot tell in advance what the attitudes expressed by any sources, on any matter, will be. In fact, my attitudes toward the source are often the only a priori cue I have that might come into play in my exposure decision (e.g., when I cannot guess in advance what the opinions expressed on a specific subject matter will be).

In this chapter, I apply this line of research to people's mistrust of the media. If selectivity takes place, then people should try to avoid sources they mistrust. Those who despise journalists and perceive mainstream news to be inaccurate, sensational and self-motivated should look for alternatives to these mainstream channels if they seek correct political information and strive for consistency. The question I ask in this chapter, then, is: Does media skepticism lead to selectivity in exposure?

Selective exposure leads to the hypothesis that skepticism will be associated with lower levels of exposure to the mainstream news media. Trust in the media should be associated with higher levels of exposure to the mainstream media (H2.1). On the other hand, selective exposure also implies that media skepticism will be associated with higher levels of exposure to non-mainstream news media. Trust in the media should be associated with lower levels of exposure to non-mainstream news media (H2.2).

Selectivity, however, implies more than an association between media skepticism and media exposure. One of the major criticisms of selective exposure theory is the lack of evidence regarding causality. This is why Sears and Freedman (1967) distinguish between selective exposure, which represents "preference for supportive, rather than

nonsupportive, information" (p. 196), and what they call "de facto selectivity", which refers to audiences' tendency to share the viewpoints of communicators. The latter, they argue, is merely a descriptive statement that is "noncommittal to the cause of this bias" (p. 196). In other words, the fact that people share the viewpoints of their information sources is not enough to support the general hypothesis that people have a motivated tendency to seek out supportive information and/or to avoid nonsupportive information (Kleinhesselink & Edwards, 1975).

The question of causal direction is most relevant to the issue of news media exposure and media skepticism. Even if the two are correlated, one must keep in mind the possibility of reverse causation and the potential influence of intervening factors. A negative correlation between mainstream media exposure and media skepticism may indeed reflect the tendency of mistrustful audiences to avoid or reject the mainstream media. However, it might also reflect a tendency of those who consume higher doses of mainstream news to end up as trusting audiences. Conversely, higher exposure of media skeptics to non-mainstream sources may be due to their tendency to prefer non-mainstream information. However, it could also be that exposure to non-mainstream channels – in particular, to expressions of resentment and mistrust of the mainstream media on these channels – *causes* negative attitudes toward the media in audiences' minds.

A second source of concern is related to intervening variables. As Sears and Freedman (1969:202) note, existing attitudes "often represent only one of several variables that correlate highly with exposure, and their selection as the best predictor might be unnecessarily arbitrary". Other factors could be the causes of both exposure and

the supposed pre-existing attitudes. For example, demographic factors are often said to be the source of political attitudes through socialization, but these factors are also said to have a strong influence on audience media exposure patterns.

To sum up: I have mentioned two methodological issues that need to be resolved in order to infer selectivity: reverse causation and intervening factors. The former problem will be addressed by cross-lagged analysis (presented towards the end of this chapter) that aims at addressing the issue of causal direction. The second will be addressed by employing various controls for potential intervening factors, some of which are discussed in the next few paragraphs.

Constraints on media selectivity: Possible intervening variables in models predicting exposure.

Early media research stressed that people's freedom to select media content that fits their prior opinions and likes is a major factor in exposure decisions. But the activity of the audience is not unlimited, as later scholars argued in response to these claims. Audiences are constrained by many factors in their exposure choices. First, technology and individuals' ability to absorb it affect their exposure decisions. For example, if one cannot afford cable, he or she will probably not rely on CNN or MSNBC as a major source of news. Second, there are constraints caused by schedules, personal as well as institutional (Cohen, 2000). For example, if I get home from work after 7:00 PM every day, the likelihood that I watch the evening news is very low, since the networks broadcast the evening news at 6:30 Eastern Standard Time (or 5:30 Central time). This decision, along with many others, has an effect on the choices individuals make. People

are free to give up their job and look for one that will allow them to get home in time to watch Peter Jennings at 6:30. Alternatively, they could buy a VCR and tape the show in order to watch it later. But these alternatives require an effort that not many people are likely to make, even for the noble cause of becoming an informed citizen.

Thus, people are free to select the media environment they want, but they are also constrained, due mainly to their other obligations, but also to media menus. Reagan (1996) uses the concept of the media's "information repertoire": individuals do select media materials, but they are limited by what the media have to offer. Brosius et al. (1992) use the metaphor of "media diets" to describe how audiences come up with their exposure patterns. And indeed, media exposure decisions are similar to nutrition decisions. First, in neither case can people consume everything. There is a biological limit on the amount of food the human body can absorb; likewise, people cannot get all of the news from all of the sources all of the time. Cognitive limits prevent us from attending to multiple media sources at the same time, and biological limits hinder our ability to attend to the media all the time (e.g. we must sleep). For these reasons, the models presented in this chapter control for employment, student status and, in some cases, schedule flexibility and having children at home.

Second, our media choices and nutritional diets are limited by resources such as money to subscribe to cable services or time to cook. Computer literacy is another kind of resource that determines whether or not people can attend to online political communication. Time is a crucial resource as well, since busy people have less time to consume any form of communication. Third, preferences and tastes shape the composition of both types of diet. People watch, listen to and read what they like in the

same way that they eat what they like. This is why the models in this chapter control for factors such as political involvement (usually operationalized as close following of politics) and political knowledge. Fourth, nutrition, like media exposure, is embedded in one's context and culture. In both cases, we consume what we have been socialized to consume. Differences between sexes, races and educational backgrounds determine, at least to some extent, our media habits. This is why such factors are controlled for in the analysis that follows.

Data analysis.

The aim of the rest this chapter is to describe the associations between media skepticism and exposure to various news media outlets. Following selective exposure research, skepticism should be associated with higher exposure to alternative sources of political information and lower exposure to mainstream news. In this section of the chapter, I describe these associations. In the next section, I try to take an extra step and explore the causal mechanism underlying these associations. In the following chapters I explore the intervening role of need for cognition in this process, and explore how media skepticism is associated with people's overall media diets.

Given that, as described above, exposure decisions are a function of media skepticism as well as of resources, motivations and demographic factors, I use various intervening factors as controls. Motivational controls include political interest, knowledge and extremity. Those more interested in politics (and media skeptics are generally more interested in politics than other audiences) tend to watch more news. This is why the models control for such involvement variables. Resource covariates include

being employed, being a student, and (when present) other indicators regarding audience schedules. Those with less available time are expected to watch, read and listen to less news simply because they do not have the time to attend, given their tighter schedules. Demographic background controls are also utilized, since demographic factors account for much variance in exposure given the diverging tastes, possibilities and economic resources of people of diverse backgrounds. Much has been said about differences in accessibility to new information technologies ("the digital divide") resulting from purely demographic factors. Demographic factors are also related to cultural and economic factors that may come into play when audiences make exposure decisions. Hence, the statistical models control for motivational and resource factors.

Study 1: The Electronic Dialogue data.

Given their repeated measurement of media exposure and media skepticism, the EDialogue data offer us more than one possibility to examine the association of media skepticism and news media exposure. In fact, one can try a variety of lags between skepticism and exposure, thereby testing for the sensitivity of the analysis for measurement lag.

The question wordings for the exposure items were "Please tell me how many days *in the past week* you did each of the following (a) Watch national network news on TV (Peter Jennings/ABC, Dan Rather/CBS, Tom Brokaw/NBC, Fox or UPN); (b) Watch cable news, such as CNN or MSNBC; (c) Watch local TV news ("Eyewitness" or "Action News"); (d) Read a daily newspaper; and (e) Hear radio shows where listeners

call in to discuss politics and public affairs". Question order was randomized to minimize bias. These are the dependent variables in Tables 12.1 and 12.2.

Table 12.1 presents the results of OLS Models with the individual Wave 4 exposure questions as the dependent variables. The skepticism measure used in these models was a Wave 4 measure. Thus, the tables test for the cross-sectional effect of skepticism on exposure. As the results show, the best predictors of exposure to all mainstream outlets are age and political interest. The older the respondent, the higher his or her reported mainstream news exposure, and the lower his or her score on the non-mainstream news measures. All other things being equal, those reporting higher political interest also reported higher exposure to national and local TV news, as well as to a daily newspaper and to the non-mainstream and mainstream media in general. Non-whites reported significantly more local TV news exposure (a fact that may be related to the overrepresentation of Asians and Native Americans in the EDialogue sample). Females reported more local TV news and general mainstream news exposure, while males reported significantly more exposure to PTR. Employment was associated with lower exposure to national and local TV news, as well as with significantly lower scores on the general news media scale. Knowledge had a significant effect on PTR and general non-mainstream exposure, and on cable news watching. This data set does not, for the most part, replicate the expected association between knowledge and news exposure. In fact, there was a borderline significant negative effect of knowledge on exposure to local TV news.

H2.1. and H2.2 deal with the association between mainstream media skepticism and exposure to mainstream and non-mainstream news. Skepticism was negatively associated

with exposure to national, local and cable TV news, with daily newspaper reading, and with a combined measure of mainstream media exposure. However, the coefficients for local and cable TV news were not statistically significant. In contrast to the negative association between skepticism and exposure to mainstream news outlets, the coefficient for PTR and for general non-mainstream news exposure was positive and significant. In other words, controlling for political and demographic variables, the higher the skepticism expressed by respondents, the more they attended to PTR and to a combined index composed of exposure to PTR and the Web. Skeptical audiences listened to more political talk radio than their non-skeptical counterparts. The statistical models in Table 12.1 account for 13-35 percent of the variance in the dependent variables. The models predicting exposure to national TV news, newspapers and mainstream media in general had relatively high R-squares of between .25 and .35.

As discussed above, the Wave 4 skepticism to Wave 4 exposure is only one way to formulate the models. Alternative models, using data collected at different points in time, are presented in Table 12.2. The table presents only the coefficients for the skepticism → exposure associations. Though all control variables used in Table 12.1 were also used in all models in Table 12.2, the effects of these covariates (which were generally similar in size and significance to those reported in Table 12.1) are unreported in order to save space.

The first set of models presents the coefficients for the effects of Wave 4 skepticism on Wave 6 exposure measures. The signs for the effects of skepticism on exposure to mainstream news sources (national and local newspapers and the general mainstream media exposure scale) are negative, but these effects are not significantly different from

zero. The effect of skepticism on PTR exposure was, as in Table 12.1, positive and significant. The second set of models reports the effects of Wave 4 skepticism on Wave 7 exposure. In this case, the effect of skepticism on TV exposure and on mainstream news media exposure is negative and significant. The significant effect of skepticism on exposure to PTR disappears, given the longer time lag between skepticism and exposure. The third set of models presents the effects of Time 4 skepticism on measures of exposure that are composed of the averages of the Wave 6 and Wave 7 measures. In this case, the effects of skepticism on national TV news exposure and on general mainstream media exposure were significant. In addition, the effect of Wave 4 skepticism on daily newspaper reading was also significant in this case.

In sum, the Electronic Dialogue data show some evidence for associations between media skepticism and news media exposure. Of the four models reported in Tables 12.1 and 12.2, the effect of skepticism on general mainstream media exposure and on network TV news exposure was significant in three cases. The effect of skepticism on PTR exposure was positive twice, and on daily newspaper exposure only once. Thus, there appears to be some indication that media skepticism is associated with enhanced exposure to PTR and with decreased exposure to the mainstream media, especially to TV news.

H2.2 deals with consumption of political information from the Internet (as a partly non-mainstream source) and media skepticism. This issue is examined in Tables 12.3 and 12.4. The dependent variables in Table 12.3 are general Internet use and exposure to political information over the Internet. These variables were significantly associated with younger age and higher political interest, but also (in the case of online political

information) with schedule flexibility and political knowledge. The coefficient for the effect of skepticism on exposure was positive in both cases, but not statistically significant. As in the previous models, the associations were examined using measures collected at different points in time, with varying time lags between skepticism and exposure. In all of the cases, the effect of skepticism and exposure was positive but statistically insignificant.

Table 12.4 presents two logistic regression models predicting participation in online chats and visiting a Web site to find information on current affairs (both coded "1" for online exposure and "0" for no exposure). While the latter was significantly related to political knowledge, the former was associated with lack of political knowledge. In both cases the coefficient for media skepticism (positive for participating in online chats and negative for visiting a Web site to find current affairs information) were insignificant. Other models tested for the effects of Wave 4 skepticism on Wave 7 exposure. In both cases the coefficients were positive (skepticism was associated with somewhat higher odds of exposure to online political information). However, neither of these coefficients was significantly different from zero.

In sum, the EDialogue data do not contain significant evidence for an association of media skepticism with exposure to online political information. However, three out of four models (reported in Tables 12.1 and 12.2) did contain significant effects of skepticism on exposure to national TV news, and to the general mainstream news media measure. Two models contained positive and significant associations between skepticism and exposure to political talk radio.

Study 2: The APPC 2000 data.

The primary-season APPC data (11/12/1999 through 1/31/2000) contained the same exposure measures as the Electronic Dialogue data. The sample size of the RCS study for this period was 12,666, of whom 2,500 (a random fourth, approximately) answered the media evaluation item. Table 12.5 presents OLS models predicting exposure to various news media outlets. As in the EDialogue models, political interest and age were among the best predictors of media exposure, with young respondents reportomg more PTR and Web exposure[103] and older respondents reporting higher exposure to all forms of mainstream news. All other things being equal, political knowledge was associated with exposure to TV news, daily newspaper, PTR, and with the general mainstream media scale. Employed respondents reported less exposure to all sorts of TV news, but more exposure to PTR. Education was associated with exposure to daily newspapers and to political information on the Web. Males watched more cable news than females, and females watched more national and local TV news than males. Whites reported more exposure to daily newspapers, while non-whites reported significantly higher national and local TV news exposure and lower exposure to PTR. Conservatives reported higher exposure to PTR, general non-mainstream news and local news, while liberals reported higher exposure to cable news and daily newspapers. Political extremity was associated with more exposure to cable news and PTR, and less exposure to national TV news.

Hypotheses 2.1 and 2.2 focus on the association between media skepticism and news media exposure. As predicted by H2.1, media skepticism was negatively associated with exposure to national TV news, local TV news, cable TV news, and with the general

[103] Note that this finding is inconsistent with results obtained by other models in this chapter.

mainstream media exposure scale. All of these associations were statistically significant at the .001 level. In other words, those skeptical of the mainstream media tended to consume less mainstream news. As predicted by H2.2, mistrust in the media was positively associated with PTR exposure and with general non-mainstream media exposure. Those trusting the media tended to consume more mainstream news and less non-mainstream news. However, the positive effect of skepticism on exposure to online political information and the negative effect of skepticism on exposure to daily newspapers were not statistically significant.

The APPC data allow us to examine the association between skepticism and talk radio exposure in somewhat more detail. Survey respondents who indicated talk radio exposure were also asked to name the talk show hosts they listened to in the previous week. Models predicting exposure to the four most mentioned answers are presented in Table 12.6. The dependent variables are coded "1" for mentioning the host, and "0" for no exposure in the previous week. Logistic regression coefficients and standard errors are presented. Exposure to the Limbaugh show is explained by interest in politics, political knowledge, employment and gender (males had higher odds of mentioning Limbaugh than females). The more conservative one's scores were on the party-ideology index (lower scores), the higher the odds that one listened to the Limbaugh show. Surprisingly, Limbaugh listeners tended to be somewhat less educated than those reporting not listening to the show.

The prediction equations for the other shows (Liddy, Dr. Laura and the Stern show – the latter two not strictly political talk radio) were much less successful in terms of variance explained, compared to the R-squared for the Limbaugh show. Age and political

extremity were the only significant predictors of listening to the Stern show. The party-ideology index was the only significant predictor of listening to Dr. Laura. None of the covariates was significantly associated with listening to Liddy.

Our main concern here is in the effect of media skepticism on talk radio exposure. Media skepticism was positively associated with listening to the Rush Limbaugh show. Each one-unit increase in the skepticism scale was associated with a 56 percent increase in the odds of listening to Limbaugh ($b=.45$; $e^b=1.56$; $p<.001$). However, there was no significant association between skepticism and listening to the other shows. This implies that the positive and significant coefficient for the effect of media skepticism on general talk radio exposure could be entirely a function of listening to Limbaugh, given the higher exposure to Limbaugh compared to all other talk show hosts in this data set.

In sum, the APPC primary season data shows media skepticism to be negatively associated with mainstream media exposure and positively associated with non-mainstream news exposure, in particular, Limbaugh. Those mistrustful of the media tended to attend to more political talk radio, and to less mainstream national and local TV news. There were no associations between skepticism and newspaper readership and exposure to online political information.

Study 3: The PTR data.

The PTR study utilized somewhat different measures of news media exposure. The question wording for the exposure items was, "Next, I'd like to know how often you use certain types of publications and watch and listen to certain TV and radio programs. As I read each, tell me if you use them regularly, sometimes, hardly ever, or never". The list

of media outlets included "(a) The news or editorial sections of a daily paper, (b) National TV evening news programs on ABC, CNN, NBC, or CBS. This is different from the local news about the area in where you live, (c) News magazines such as Time, US News, or Newsweek, (d) CSPAN, (e) Programs on National Public Radio, such as Morning Edition or All Things Considered, and (f) The News Hour on PBS with Jim Lehrer". Responses were coded so that "1" represented "never" and "4" represented "regularly"[104].

Table 12.7 presents OLS models predicting exposure to the various news sources. Age was positively related to general mainstream news exposure and to exposure to national TV news, to the News Hour on PBS and to daily newspaper reading. Age was negatively related to reading magazines. Whites tended to attend less frequently to almost all news outlets, controlling for all political and demographic covariates. Males scored higher on the general mainstream news scale, and reported higher NPR and newspaper exposure. Education was positively and significantly associated with exposure in five of the seven models reported in Table 12.7. Of the political variables, interest was again a strong and significant predictor of exposure in all cases. Political knowledge predicted news exposure in five out of seven cases. Ideology was associated with exposure to the mainstream media in general, and to NPR, PBS, daily newspapers and newsmagazines in particular. The explained variance in these models varied between 26 percent for general mainstream exposure and 6 percent for the NPR model.

Note that the models presented in Table 12.7 are comparable to those presented in Study 2 (Table 12.5) in terms of the magnitude, direction and significance level of the

[104] Since the PTR data did not contain measures of exposure to political information on the Web, there are no general non-mainstream indices in the following model (there is no way to combine Internet with PTR).

coefficients (betas should be compared because of differences in the coding of some of the variables). However, the coefficients for the effects of media skepticism were much smaller in magnitude and statistical significance, despite the consistency in coefficient signs. Most importantly, the coefficient for media skepticism on national TV news exposure was insignificant, while in Study 2 the comparable coefficient was significant at the .001 level. The only significant result was obtained for the effect of skepticism on PBS news exposure. The effect of media skepticism on general mainstream media exposure was negative and borderline significant (p=.065). The effects of media skepticism on NPR exposure, daily newspaper and magazine readership were negative (as predicted) but not significantly different from zero. There is not enough evidence to suggest that mistrust in the news media is associated with decreased exposure to these formats.

Turning to the effects of media skepticism on PTR, Table 12.8 presents models predicting exposure to the Limbaugh show, liberal talk radio, other conservative talk radio, and all forms of PTR. The dependent variables are hours of listening in a typical week (calculated from separate questions about the number of times a week and another question about the usual listening time). Political interest was positively associated with PTR exposure in all models. Age positively predicted exposure to Limbaugh, liberal and general talk radio exposure. Education was significantly related to exposure to liberal PTR and exposure to PTR in general. Males listened more frequently to Limbaugh and to PTR in general. Conservative ideology was associated with exposure to Limbaugh, other conservative PTR, and PTR exposure in general.

Our main interest is again the effect of media skepticism on exposure. All other things being equal, mistrust in the media was associated with exposure to the Limbaugh show and to PTR in general. Again (similarly to the APPC data), there was no evidence for an association between skepticism and liberal or other conservative PTR. In other words, those mistrusting the media tended to spend more time listening to political talk radio, particularly the Rush Limbaugh Show. Since Limbaugh listening comprised a majority of talk radio listeners (even in this data set, which oversampled talk radio listeners), it is possible that the association between skepticism and PTR exposure reflects the tendency of Limbaugh listeners (vs. listeners to the genre in general) to be skeptical about the media.

To sum up, the PTR data show that skepticism is associated with lower exposure to mainstream news, in particular Lehrer's News Hour, and higher exposure to talk radio, especially Limbaugh.

Study 4: NES data.

NES exposure measures are similar to the EDialogue and APPC measures. Respondents were asked how many days in the past week they watched "national news on TV", "local TV news, such as 'Eyewitness News' or 'Action News'", how many days they "read the daily newspaper", and how many days in they past week they listened to "programs on radio in which people call in to voice their opinions about politics". An additional question asked about the number of days in the past week that respondents listened to the Limbaugh Show in particular. These are the dependent variables in the OLS models presented in Table 12.9.

The models show results similar to those obtained by other data sets. Once again, political interest was consistently a strong predictor of attention to all news media. Age was positively associated with exposure to all mainstream media. Educated people read newspapers and the relatively uneducated attended to local TV news. Males read more papers and listened more frequently to Talk Radio, while females watched more local news. Knowledge was positively related to newspaper exposure. Political extremity was significantly associated with exposure to PTR. Political moderateness was associated with exposure to the mainstream media. Conservatives scored higher on exposure to PTR. The R-squares are, again, comparable to those reported in the previous studies.

Our concern here is with media skepticism. As in virtually all the other data sets, listening to political talk radio (in general, but also to the Limbaugh show in particular) was positively and significantly associated with skepticism toward the mainstream media. However, unlike in some of the other data sets, media skepticism was unrelated to exposure to all mainstream sources. Though the signs of the coefficients were negative (as predicted), there was not enough evidence to reject the null hypotheses in all mainstream models. We cannot conclude from the NES data alone that skepticism is associated with reduced exposure to the mainstream media.

Turning to the association between skepticism and Internet exposure, Table 12.10 presents a logistic regression model predicting exposure to political information over the Web, given Web access. Young, educated and politically interested respondents had significantly higher odds of attending to online political information. The effect of the gender variable was borderline significant, with males having higher odds of exposure.

H2.2 predicted that given Web access, skeptics would report higher consumption of political information from the Internet. This is exactly what Table 12.10 shows. Media skepticism was positively and significantly associated with exposure to political information over the Internet. Each one-unit increase on the skepticism measure was associated with a 48 percent increase in the odds of reporting exposure to political information on the Web.

In sum, the NES 1996 data support the hypotheses regarding an association between media skepticism and PTR exposure, exposure to online political information, and general non-mainstream media exposure. However, there was no evidence supporting the hypothesis relating skepticism to reduced exposure to mainstream news sources.

Reconciling inconsistent findings.

So far in this chapter, I have applied the same statistical strategy in different data contexts, with the aim of answering a relatively straightforward research question. Unfortunately, the different data do not provide a wholly consistent answer. There were inconsistencies both within the EDialogue data and across the different data sets. Skepticism was negatively associated with mainstream news exposure in three out of the four EDialogue models, in the APPC data and in the PTR data, but not in NES. Skepticism was positively associated with exposure to political online information only in the NES 1996 data (this hypothesis was not tested on the PTR data). The most consistent evidence is for the association between skepticism and PTR. In all data sets, skepticism was associated with increased exposure to PTR, and to the Limbaugh show in particular. There was no evidence for an association between skepticism and other talk

radio shows. This finding was consistent across the different data sets. Also, general non-mainstream media exposure (consisting of PTR listening and exposure to online political information) was positively associated with skepticism in three data sets (this hypothesis was not tested on the fourth data set).

In the beginning of this chapter I asked whether media skepticism was related to exposure to mainstream and non-mainstream media. Strictly speaking, in terms of statistical hypothesis testing, the answer was not consistent. The inconsistencies could be due to any inconsistency among the different data sources, including sampling design and sample size, measurement, interview modules, and the specific context of data collection (i.e., the specific media environment in a particular election year). But the different data diverge on each of these possible sources of inconsistency, making it almost impossible to separate out the reasons for the discrepancy.

We could say, for example, that we have some evidence for each of the hypotheses: that under certain circumstances skepticism is indeed associated with reduced exposure to mainstream news and with increased exposure to non-mainstream sources. The problem is stating the exact conditions necessary for the hypotheses to work. Doing quantitative social science is sometimes frustrating. Even simple questions are sometimes hard to answer with confidence.

Another thing that should be said is that in the vast majority of cases, even when the coefficients for the effect of skepticism on exposure were not significantly different from zero they were nevertheless in the direction predicted by the hypothesis (negative for mainstream sources and positive for non-mainstream sources). From a total of 30 insignificant effects obtained from all four data sources, 26 were in the predicted

direction[105]. As we know, one cannot deduce that there is no real association in the face of insignificant effects. All we can say is that there is no *evidence* for an association. Qualitatively, the inconsistencies are less grave, especially in light of the different measures (hence different variances and different measurement errors) used in the different data sets and sampling designs. So one must highlight not only the inconsistencies in statistical tests of significance, but also the fact that the patterns found in the different data sets were generally similar.

There is still much room for speculation about discrepancies in specific findings. The prime suspect could simply be the differences between Summer 1996 and Winter and Summer of 2000. One could argue, for example, that a positive association between mainstream media skepticism and online news exposure existed in 1996 (NES) but subsequently disappeared (no evidence for such an association in the APPC and EDialogue data). One could also argue that skeptics made more of an effort to reach online political information in 1996 – there were certainly fewer online outlets in 1996 – whereas today anyone with access who is interested in politics can get news from the Web. Another explanation might be related to the election year cycle: The only data in which there was no evidence for a skepticism–general-mainstream-exposure association is NES, collected between September and early November of 1996. All other data were collected either in the summer, spring or winter of the election year (the ED data have both pre-election season (July) and post-election season (December) measures of skepticism, the APPC data I'm using were collected from December through February, and the PTR measures of skepticism are also primary-season data). One might argue

[105] These figures exclude Tables 12.8 and 12.6, in which specific types of talk radio listening were explored in detail, diverging from Hypothesis H2.2.

further that in the months immediately prior to an election skepticism is unrelated to mainstream exposure, since skeptics need more political information in this period and so consume the information despite their skepticism. Perhaps during election periods skeptics do expose themselves to mainstream sources simply because such sources are adequate channels for getting information from the candidates and about them.

One could continue to speculate further, and each potential explanation may be a valid explanation. But without the ability to choose one explanation over the others, each one is also as good as a guess. Speculation, though sometimes an elegant and powerful tool for resolving conflicting findings, also represents a slight departure from the strict rules of science.

A totally different, and a much more plausible, approach is a meta-analytical one. Meta-analysis acknowledges that no single study is perfect. "The purpose of meta-analysis is to use the data from multiple studies to generate a more accurate interpretation of findings than is possible by considering the studies one at a time" (Hamilton & Hunter, 1998:2). Meta-analysis generally has the ambitious goal of identifying the sources of study imperfection and correcting for them. Thus, its aim is not only a better interpretation of separate studies that resolves conflicting evidence, but to understand what kinds of artifacts created the discrepancy between the studies. In the context of the present research, however, the goal is much more modest: it is simply to cumulate the results of different studies.

Hunter, Schmidt and Jackson (1982:2) propose five steps in the process of cumulating results across studies:

1) A descriptive statistic is calculated for each study, and averaged across studies;

2) The variance of the statistic is estimated across studies;

3) The variance is corrected by subtracting the amount of variance due to sampling error;

4) The mean and variance are corrected for other study artifacts;

5) The corrected standard deviations are compared to determine if the effect is constant across studies.

The meta-analysis literature then tells how to model for the intervening effects of the confounding factors (study artifacts). This latter stage was not pursued in the current study, given the small number of studies with a large number of potential confounding factors. Hence, a rather simple procedure was applied in order to get an estimate of the average effect size, following the recommendations of Hunter et al. (1982) and Kim and Hunter (1993).

First, each separate correlation was corrected for attenuation. The observed correlation was divided by the product of the square root of its reliabilities to obtain a conservative measure of association that was not due to measurement error. The reliabilities for the different media skepticism items were calculated from the error terms for each item, obtained from the CFA factor loadings reported in Chapter 2[106] (for the EDialogue data, the reliability of the skepticism scale, Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$, was used). In the case of media exposure, a reliability score of .65 was used.

Second, after correcting each correlation for measurement error, the average correlation of the studies was estimated, weighting each individual correlation by its sample size:

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[106] See Figure 2.1.

$$\bar{r} = \Sigma[N_i r_i] / \Sigma N_i$$

where r_i is the individual study correlation and Ni is the N of the individual study[107].

Third, the corresponding variance was calculated:

$$s^2_r = \Sigma[N_i(r_i - \bar{r})^2] / \Sigma N_i$$

This must then be corrected for sampling error. I used the following formula for estimating sampling error:

$$s^2_e = [(1 - \bar{r}^2)^2 K] / \Sigma N_i \text{ where K= the number of studies.}$$

Hunter et al. (1982:44) suggest subtracting the sampling error variance from the observed variance to correct for the sampling errors. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 12.11. All associations between skepticism and mainstream media exposure are negative. The average effect for national and local TV news is around -.14. The average association between skepticism and newspaper exposure is -.07. The average effect of skepticism on overall mainstream exposure is -.18. On the other hand, all associations between skepticism and non-mainstream media exposure are positive. The average association between skepticism and exposure to PTR is .16. The average association between Internet exposure and skepticism is .05. The average effect of skepticism on non-mainstream news media exposure is .12. The average effect sizes vary from small (for Web and newspaper exposure) to moderate (mainstream media exposure). According to these figures, media skepticism explains only a fraction of the variance in mainstream and non-mainstream media exposure. In terms of hypothesis

[107] Hunter et al. do not recommend using the Z transformation if all correlations are bivariate Pearson correlation, such as those used in this chapter.

testing, the average effects of skepticism on general mainstream and non-mainstream exposure are both significant at the .05 level. However, the effects of skepticism on national and local TV exposure, on daily newspaper reading, and on PTR exposure are borderline significant, all at the .10 level. The average effect of skepticism on exposure to political Internet was not significantly different from zero.

In sum, on average across studies, media skepticism is associated with less exposure to mainstream media and more exposure to non-mainstream media. Though the associations are not large in magnitude they are, in most cases, significantly different from zero.

Exposure and skepticism: Cross-lagged analysis.

The previous section provided evidence supporting the hypotheses regarding the association between skepticism and exposure. Though the coefficients were not always comparable in size and magnitude, the overall pattern was that skeptics tended to be exposed more than non-skeptics to PTR (and in some cases, to online political information) and less than non-skeptics to the mainstream news media. In this section I assume that there is indeed a small negative correlation between skepticism and exposure to mainstream sources and a small positive correlation between skepticism and exposure to non-mainstream sources. Here I go one step further and explore the causal mechanism underlying this association. What causes what? Does skepticism influence subsequent exposure patterns? Or does current exposure influence future skepticism? This question will be investigated using structural cross-lagged models.

As discussed above, a rival explanation to selectivity for interpreting associations between media skepticism and mainstream and non-mainstream media exposure could be that increased exposure to mainstream news might result in enhanced trust in mainstream news. Heavy viewers, listeners or readers may be convinced, as a result of their heavier exposure, that journalists are doing a proper job. On the other hand, those who listen to PTR and read anti-media messages over the Internet could be persuaded by the anti-media materials contained in these formats that journalists are far from doing a proper job in covering politics. They might accept some of Limbaugh's arguments and be persuaded that the media are biased and unfair. They might learn from Web sites and chat rooms about inaccuracies and mistakes in the mainstream media. In short, the direction of the association may be from skepticism to exposure (as selective exposure implies), but it could also be the other way around.

The structure of the models I tested is presented in Figure 12.1. The endogenous variables are skepticism (measured in discussion 8) and exposure (measured in discussion 7). The equations test for the effects of past exposure on subsequent skepticism, controlling for previous skepticism, and for the effects of past skepticism on subsequent exposure, controlling for past exposure. Both equations control for a few background variables, including race (measured by a dummy variable, coded "1" for whites), gender, age and years of education. The models also control for the party-ideology index, political knowledge and political involvement. They allow for all possible correlations between the exogenous variables. The measurement part of the model describes skepticism as a latent factor influencing two manifest constructs – the News Credibility Scale (Gaziano & McGrath, 1988) and two mistrust items (general trust in the news

media and specific trust in the press). This conceptualization of skepticism as a latent factor effectively incorporates measurement error into the model. Separate analyses found that, in general, allowing for correlated errors between present and past NCS and mistrust did not significantly improve the fit of the models, and created empirical identification problems in some cases. For this reason, the reported models do not allow for such correlated errors in the measurement part of the models.

Nine structural models were tested, each testing for a different type of exposure. Maximum Likelihood estimation was used in all cases. Since ML estimation of SEMs could be sensitive to starting values (given the possibility of convergence at a local, rather than a global maximum), a few different starting values were tried for each model, other than those selected by the software by default. The results are presented in Table 12.12.

In terms of the chi-square test for the overall fit of the models, all models should be rejected, at least strictly speaking (the p-value should be *larger* than .05). However, it is well known that this chi-square test is very sensitive to sample size. That is, if the sample size is too large, "then the chi-square statistic might be significant even though differences between the observed and model-implied covariances are slight" (Kline, 1998, p. 128). To reduce the sensitivity of the chi-square test to sample size some researchers have suggested dividing it by the degrees of freedom. "Although there is no clear-cut guideline about values of χ^2/df is minimally acceptable, a frequent suggestion is that this ratio be less than 3" (Kline, 1998, p. 128). All nine models in Table 12.12 abide by this rule, and have χ^2/df values around two. Also, other goodness of fit measures that are less sensitive to sample size, like Jöreskog-Sörbom's Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)

and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), as well as the Bentrer-Bonett's Normed Fit Index (NFI), all show close to perfect fit for all reported models. In sum, it seems that the reported models are all satisfactory in terms of their fit, though their chi-square tests provide low p-values.

In all models both constructs demonstrate an impressive stability. The effects of previous on subsequent skepticism were all in the .70 range. As we know by now, media skepticism is rather stable. Those trusting the media in late July and early August tended to trust them in December, and vice versa for those mistrusting the media. Exposure was also rather stable (with betas varying between .41 and .69). In all of the models, subsequent exposure was associated with past exposure.

Unsurprisingly, given the results of the multivariate analysis reported above for the EDialogue data, in most cases both lagged effects were not statistically different from zero. However, the lagged effect of skepticism on national TV news exposure was negative and significant. The lagged effects of skepticism on exposure to all mainstream media sources and all TV news sources were borderline significant. On the other hand, the pattern was reversed for non-mainstream media. In this case, the cross-lagged effect of skepticism on exposure was positive and borderline significant.

The purpose of the analysis is to compare the effect of skepticism on subsequent exposure to the effect of exposure on subsequent skepticism. In this case, the absolute values of the beta coefficients should be compared, since exposure and skepticism have different metrics. Such a comparison shows that, in general, the effects of skepticism on subsequent exposure to mainstream media are stronger (in absolute value) than the effects of exposure to mainstream media on subsequent skepticism (Models 1, 2, 3, 8 and 9, but

not in the daily newspaper case – Model 4). On the other hand, the cross-lagged effects of exposure to non-mainstream sources on subsequent skepticism were stronger than the skepticism → exposure crossed-lagged effects (Models 5, 6 and 7). However, the differences in effect size were rather minor in most of the models. In Models 1 (national TV news), 8 (all mainstream sources) and 9 (all TV sources), the differences are slightly bigger. These models show a negative effect of skepticism on subsequent exposure and a non-significant effect of exposure on skepticism. In Model 7 (non-mainstream), the effect of exposure on skepticism is stronger than the effect of skepticism on exposure. One might deduce that the direction of causality is from skepticism to reduced exposure, in the case of exposure to mainstream news media, and from exposure to enhanced skepticism, in the case of non-mainstream media.

However, some caution is warranted in this case. Although causality is at the heart of social theory, it is very hard for social scientists to present compelling evidence for causal statements, even when longitudinal data are collected and analyzed. As noted by Kessler and Greenberg (1981), the simple comparison of diagonal correlations in cross-lagged analysis may present several methodological problems such as (1) inconsistency of measurement, (2) failure to control for changes in variables across time, and (3) temporal erosion.

The first and second concerns forwarded by Kessler and Greenberg do not, in my opinion, pose a severe threat to the validity of the findings in Table 12.12 or to my interpretation of these findings, described above. The first concern comes from the possibility that the cross-lagged correlations are, in fact, a product of changes in the reliability and/or the validity of the measurement over time. Since the same measurement

tools were used over the different waves (i.e., the same survey questions), and since my models incorporate measurement error of media skepticism, this seems to be only a negligible concern.

Kessler and Greenberg's second concern arises from the possible relationship between current and previous values of the same variables. This concern is built into the structural models. Indeed, previous skepticism predicts consequent skepticism and previous exposure to various outlets predicts later exposure to the same outlets. But the models control for these previous values. Hence, the cross-lagged effects should be interpreted as the effects of exposure on subsequent skepticism and of skepticism on subsequent exposure, over and above the stability of skepticism and exposure. Given controls for background variables, the cross-lagged effects in the models are actually not only on top of previous exposure and skepticism, but also over and above possible common sources of both exposure and skepticism. In sum, given the statistical controls, there is little reason for concern about the effects of past exposure and skepticism.

The third problem mentioned by Kessler and Greenberg, that of temporal erosion, raises reason for concern in the current study. Temporal erosion takes place when the independent and dependent variables are measured at slightly different points in time, and, as a result, the differences between the two cross-lagged correlations might be an artifact of the two different time lags. In the above analysis past skepticism was measured in Wave 4 (late July), while past exposure was measured at the baseline (March). Subsequent skepticism was measured in Wave 8 (December), and subsequent exposure in Wave 7 (October). In other words, the exposure-to-exposure measurement lag is approximately nine months, while the skepticism-to-skepticism lag is only five months.

Admittedly, this is not an ideal design for a cross-lagged analysis: the mere time lags could influence the strength of the cross-lagged effects. However, this is the best that could be done with the data at hand. The same analysis was conducted with Wave 4 measures of exposure as the t1 exposure measures. The resulting models had much lower fit statistics, and in some cases, empirical identification problems. The results of these unreported models pointed to the same conclusions: the association between skepticism and subsequent exposure was larger than the association between exposure and subsequent skepticism for the mainstream media models, with the reverse pattern obtaining in the non-mainstream media models.

Conclusions.

At the beginning of this chapter I outlined the arguments of the somewhat outdated theory of selective exposure and asked whether its principles apply to media skepticism and news media exposure. Selectivity, I argued, refers not only to the ideological valence of news message *contents*, but also to perceptions of the *sources*. In particular, people were found in prior research to prefer trusted sources and to reject mistrusted sources when offered a variety of information sources in experimental contexts. When applying this finding to news exposure, I hypothesized that media skepticism would be associated negatively with exposure to mainstream news and positively with exposure to non-mainstream news.

The results were not wholly consistent across data sets (this was particularly true for hypothesis tests), but when summarized by meta-analytical techniques they generally supported the hypotheses. There was a negative association between skepticism and

national and local TV news exposure and general mainstream news exposure. There was also a positive association between skepticism and PTR listening and non-mainstream news exposure. On the other hand, in the case of skeptics' tendency to report lower newspaper exposure and higher exposure to political information online, the average associations were not significantly different from zero.

However, one must note that these associations do not present trust-based selectivity as a strong force in news exposure diets. First, in terms of slope size, the coefficients were generally small. For example, in the PTR data, the effect of stating that the media "help society" rather than "get in the way of society" was only -.05 – that is, the skeptical answer was associated with a decrease of only .05 in a 1-4 general mainstream media exposure scale (controlling for the other factors). In the most extreme case, the difference between those most skeptical and those least skeptical was merely associated with a decrease of 1.6 days in the past week of attending to national TV news, and 1.3 decrease in general mainstream news media exposure scores (both in the case of the APPC data). Though it may at times be substantial, this is not an extremely strong effect. For the sake of comparison, the differential between the most and least *involved* respondents might correspond to an increase of four, or even five days in the past week of exposure to the media (after controlling for all covariates). This is a much more powerful effect. In other words, media skepticism may play a role in guiding audience news selections, but it is definitely not the only factor that comes into play in the process. The most skeptical, employed, 40-year-old white female who is moderate politically and has 12 years of education with median values on political involvement and knowledge would still have a predicted value of 3 on the 1-7 mainstream media exposure score. This figure was

calculated on the APPC data, which contained a relatively large effect of skepticism on exposure. Thus, even the most skeptical audience members watch the national and local news on TV and read the daily newspaper. Their skepticism might lead them to somewhat less exposure to these channels, on average, but not to a total rejection of the mistrusted media sources.

Second, media skepticism explains only a fraction of the variance in exposure. With an average r equaling -.18 (the largest r in the meta-analysis), the variance explained in exposure by skepticism is 3.25 percent. This figure comes from the average bivariate correlation between skepticism and mainstream media, which corrects the separate effects for attenuation (usually a correction upward). Even if you took the upper point in the confidence interval for this correlation between skepticism and exposure, the variance explained would still be only 12 percent. This estimate is for the upper limit of the strongest average effect, with a correction upward for the measurement error. So, at best, skepticism accounts for little more than one-tenth of the variance. In actuality, the variance explained is usually less than a few percentage points.

So the evidence points to only a modest association between skepticism and exposure. However, in order to demonstrate selectivity we still have to confront the argument of reverse causality. That is, how do we know that skepticism influences exposure and not the other way around? The evidence for selectivity from the cross-lagged models is, again, modest. In the cases of exposure to non-mainstream content, it seems that rather than mistrust influencing exposure, the opposite was happening: that is, that non-mainstream channels were actually cultivating mistrust of the mainstream media in their audience. This makes sense in view of some of the content carried by

these channels. Non-mainstream news media often contain critical reviews of mainstream news information, accompanied by cynical references to the practices and norms of mainstream journalism (several examples from talk radio programs and alternative Web pages were provided in Chapter 4). Exposure to attacks on the media might lead people to think that the media are not trustworthy.

Still, the effect of skepticism on mainstream media exposure was stronger than the effect of exposure to the mainstream media in general on skepticism. This finding is, of course, consistent with selective exposure theory. However, this small and borderline significant effect faces the methodological problem of temporal erosion. Thus, while the data suggest that some selectivity takes place (that is, that the direction of the association between skepticism and exposure is from the former to the latter), more evidence is definitely required to increase our certainty about this finding. The results I presented above merely represent an attempt to do the best I could with data that were not collected for the purpose of testing for these research questions. Another research design would probably provide more accurate results. However, this weak evidence is enough to provoke us to test this research question in more appropriate settings in the future.

Table 12.1: Ordinary Least Squares models predicting exposure to various news outlets (days in the past week; EDialogue 2000 data).

B β (SE)	National TV news	Local TV news	Cable TV news	Daily NP	PTR	Non-mainstream	Mainstream
$MEDSKEP_{d4}$	-1.25*	-.38	-.76	-1.20*	1.22**	1.05*	-.74#
$\rightarrow EXP_{d4}$	-.09	-.03	-.05	-.08	.11	.10	-.06
	(.52)	(.54)	(.57)	(.54)	(.45)	(.42)	(.39)
Political	-.02	-.02	-.04	.02	-	-.06*	-.00
ideology	-.03	-.02	-.05	.03	.13***	-.10	-.00
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	-.20	(.02)	(.02)
					(.03)		
Political	.07	-.01	.04	.05	.07	.10*	.04
extremity	.04	-.00	.03	.03	.05	.09	.03
	(.06)	(.07)	(.06)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
Political	.80***	.62***	.47***	.69***	.27**	.38***	.66***
interest	.30	.24	.17	.24	.12	.19	.31
	(.11)	(.12)	(.13)	(.12)	(.10)	(.09)	(.08)
Political	-.88	-1.27#	1.47*	.76	1.68**	1.38***	-.38
knowledge	-.06	-.09	.10	.05	.15	.13	-.03
	(.65)	(.67)	(.70)	(.67)	(.56)	(.51)	(.49)
Student	.02	-.72	.40	-.02	.42	-.18	-.27
	.00	-.06	.03	-.00	.04	-.02	-.02
	(.51)	(.53)	(.54)	(.52	(.44)	(.40)	(.38)
Employed	-.50*	-.44*	-.08	.21	.23	-.00	-.20*
	-.09	-.08	-.01	.03	.05	-.00	-.10
	(.22)	(.22)	(.24)	(.23	(.19)	(.17)	(.18)
Schedule	-.01	-.06	-.01	-.04	-.01	.02	-.04
flexibility	-.01	-.05	-.01	-.03	-.01	.03	-.04
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Age	.04***	.04***	.02**	.06**	.00	-.01***	.05***
	.29	.26	.14	.37	.05	-.09	.39
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
Education	-.00	-.07	.04	.04	.04	.05	-.00
	-.00	-.05	.03	.03	.04	.05	-.00
	(.05)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)
White	-.40	-.65*	-.37	.13	-.19	-.45	-.33
	-.05	-.09	-.05	.01	-.03	-.08	-.05
	(.28)	(.29)	(.30)	(.30	(.25)	(.43)	(.21)
Male	-.41	-.36#	.16	-.03	.44**	.21	-.30*
	-.08	-.07	.03	-.00	.10	.05	-.07
	(.19)	(.20)	(.21)	(.20	(.17)	(.16)	(.15)
R square	.25	.18	.13	.30	.19	.15	.35
N	547	554	549	556	544	559	562

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001. Table entries are unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 12.2: Testing the skepticism-exposure associations with alternative time lags (EDialogue 2000 Data).

Alternative models with different exposure and skepticism variables (slopes reported only for the skepticism → exposure slopes)						
B β (SE)	National TV news	Local TV news	Cable TV news	Daily NP	PTR	Mainstream
1. $MEDSKEP_{d4}$ → $EXPOSURE_{d6}$	-.57 -.04 (.59)	-.44 -.03 (.63)	10 .00 (.64)	-1.02 -.06 (.62)	1.40** .12 (.49)	-.68 -.06 (.44)
	456	456	456	456	456	456
2. $MEDSKEP_{d4}$→ $EXPOSURE_{d7}$	-1.21* -.09 (.53)	-.43 -.03 (.56)	-.53 -.03 (.63)	-.70 -.04 (.59)	.49 . 03 (.55)	-.76# -.07 (.40)
N	503	501	505	503	499	508
3. $MEDSKEP_{d4}$→ $EXPOSURE_{mean(d6,d7)}$	-1.12* -.09 (.48)	-.54 -.04 (.51)	-.04 -.00 (.56)	-.97# -.06 (.56)	.65 .05 (.47)	-.85* -.08 (.37)
N	547	547	548	547	546	549

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05. Table entries are unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. All models control for the party-ideology index, political extremity, political knowledge and involvement, schedule flexibility, employment, student status, age, sex, years of education and race.

Table 12.3: OLS models predicting exposure to the World Wide Web (EDialogue 2000 Data).

	General Web use (hours in past week)		Political information on the Web (days in past week)	
	B S.E.	β	B S.E.	β
$MEDSKEP_{d4} \rightarrow EXPOSURE_{d5}$	2.30 (1.89)	.06	.65 (.56)	.05
Political ideology	-.03 (.11)	-.01	.01 (.03)	.01
Political extremity	-.03 (.23)	-.01	.05 (.06)	.04
Political interest	.99* (.41)	.13	.37** (.12)	.16
Political knowledge	-1.27 (2.33)	-.03	1.60* (.69)	.13
Student (=1)	2.75 (1.75)	.08	.11 (.52)	.01
Employed (=1)	-.82 (.77)	-.05	.28 (.23)	.06
Schedule flexibility	-.16 (.15)	-.05	.08# (.04)	.08
Age	-.08** (.02)	-.17	-.01* (.00)	-.11
Education	.05 (.02)	.02	.07 (.06)	.06
White (=1)	-.67 (1.13)	-.03	-.51 (.31)	-.07
Male (=1)	.18 (.77)	.01	-.06 (.21)	-.01
R square	.05		.10	
N	463		463	
$MEDSKEP_{d4} \rightarrow EXPOSURE_{d7}$			.45 (.50)	.04
N			462	
$MEDSKEP_{d4} \rightarrow EXPOSURE_{mean(d5,d7)}$			.51 (.44)	.04
N			559	

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01.

Table 12.4: Logistic regression models predicting exposure to political information and political discussion on the World Wide Web (EDialogue 2000 Data).

B (SE)	Went to a chatroom to discuss current affairs (1=yes)	Visited a Web site to find info on current affairs (1=yes)
$MEDSKEP_{d4} \rightarrow$ $EXPOSURE_{d5}$	1.00 (.75)	-.04 (1.00)
Political ideology	.02 (.04)	-.07 (.06)
Political extremity	-.03 (.09)	.03 (.11)
Political interest	.13 (.19)	.11 (.24)
Political knowledge	-1.93# (1.03)	5.57*** (1.35)
Student	.26 (.72)	.26 (.82)
Employed	-.36 (.31)	.61 (.38)
Schedule flexibility	.01 (.06)	-.08 (.07)
Age	-.01 (.06)	.00 (.01)
Education	-.07 (.09)	.06 (.12)
White	-.34 (.41)	-.24 (.50)
Male	.57* (.29)	-.75* (.39)
R square	.09	.26
N	250	251
$MEDSKEP_{d4} \rightarrow$ $EXPOSURE_{d7}$	.23 (.93)	.95 (1.12)
N	180	180

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; *** p<.001.

Table 12.5: Ordinary Least Squares models predicting exposure to various news outlets (days in the past week; APPC 2000 data).

B β (SE)	National TV news	Local TV news	Cable TV news	Daily NP	PTR	Political info on the Web (given Web access)	Non mainstream	Mainstream
Media skepticism	-43***	-.37***	-.25***	-.08	.11*	.01	.07*	-.28***
	-.15	-.13	-.08	-.02	.04	.00	.04	-.14
	(.05)	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)	(.06)	(.03)	(.03)
Political ideology	.00	-.04**	.05***	.04*	-.05**	-.00	-.03*	.00
	.00	-.05	.05	.04	-.07	-.00	-.05	.01
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)
Political extremity	-.05#	-.02	.05#	-.05	.07*	.01	.04#	-.02
	-.03	-.18	.03	-.02	.05	.01	.04	-.01
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.01)	(.02)
Political interest	.45***	.39***	.45***	.53***	.25***	.25***	.20***	.46***
	.16	.14	.16	.18	.10	.10	.12	.25
	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.05)	(.07)	(.03)	(.04)
Political knowledge	.13***	.05	.03	.13***	.09**	.10*	.09***	.08***
	.08	.03	.02	.08	.06	.08	.10	.08
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.04)	(.02)	(.04)
Student	-1.01*	-.39	-.49	-.23	-.30	-.04	-.04	-.55*
	-.05	-.02	-.02	-.01	-.01	-.00	-.00	-.04
	(.39)	(.40)	(.43)	(.43)	(.36)	(.42)	(.24)	(.25)
Employed	-.54***	-.30*	-.55***	.06	.37**	-.05	.27***	-.35***
	-.09	-.05	-.09	.01	.07	-.01	.08	-.08
	(.13)	(.13)	(.14)	(.14)	(.12)	(.17)	(.08)	(.08)
Age	.03***	.02***	.01*	.03***	-.00#	-.01*	-.01***	.02***
	.24	.14	.05	.22	-.04	-.06	-.10	.23
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
Education	-.00	-.03	.04#	.08***	.01	.05*	.05***	.02#
	-.00	-.03	.04	.08	.02	.06	.08	.03
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)
White	-.67**	-.39#	-.36	.54*	-.38*	.04	-.15	-.21
	-.06	-.03	-.03	.04	-.04	.00	-.02	-.03
	(.20)	(.20)	(.22)	(.22)	(.18)	(.26)	(.12)	(.13)
Male	-.36***	-.32**	.39**	.16	.12	.25	.12#	.03
	-.07	-.06	.06	.02	.02	.05	.04	.00
	(.10)	(.10)	(.11)	(.11)	(.09)	(.13)	(.06)	(.06)
R square	.20	.09	.07	.15	.05	.04	.10	.24
N	2,401	2,403	2,405	2,409	2,407	1,456	2,409	2,409

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001. Table entries are unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 12.6: Logistic Regression models predicting exposure to talk radio (1=listened in the past week; 0= did not listen in he past week; APPC 2000 data).

B (SE)	Limbaugh	Liddy	Dr. Laura	Stern
Media skepticism	.45***	.14	.18	.24
	(.08)	(.28)	(.55)	(.23)
Party-ideology	-.28***	-.09	-.21$^{\$}$	.12
index	(.04)	(.11)	(.12)	(.09)
Political extremity	-.02	.00	-.16	-.26$^{\$}$
	(.07)	(.19)	(.18)	(.14)
Political interest	.74***	.24	.21	.17
	(.14)	(.37)	(.32)	(.24)
Political knowledge	.30***	.18	.26	.03
	(.06)	(.21)	(.18)	(.15)
Student	-.09	-5.80	-3.51	-5.21
	(.73)	(23.37)	(14.06)	(14.46)
Employed	.40$^{\$}$	-.37	1.27	.43
	(.24)	(.79)	(.95)	(.74)
Age	-.00	-.03	-.01	-.07***
	(.00)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)
Education	-.05$^{\$}$	-.09	.01	.01
	(.03)	(.12)	(.09)	(.09)
White	.39	-.72	-.43	.21
	(.51)	(.92)	(.96)	(.83)
Male	.32$^{\$}$	1.05	.26	.44
	(.19)	(.71)	(.53)	(.45)
R square	.29	.06	.09	.13
N	2,370	2,370	2,370	2,370

Notes: $^{\$}$ p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.

Table 12.7: Weighted Least Squares models predicting exposure to various news outlets (4="regularly"; 1="never"; PTR 1996 Data).

B β (SE)	All mainstream	National TV news	CSPAN	NPR	PBS	Daily newspaper	Magazines
Media	-.05#	-.02	.04	-.07	-.10*	-.04	-.02
skepticism	-.03	-.01	.02	-.03	-.04	-.02	-.01
	(.03)	(.03)	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)
Party-	.01**	.00	-.00	.01*	.02*	.02*	.01#
ideology	.06	.00	-.02	.05	.05	.05	.04
index	(.00)	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
Political	.01	.00	.03*	.02	-.00	.03*	.01
extremity	.03	.00	.05	.03	-.01	.04	.02
	(.00)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Political	.28***	.28***	.28***	.18***	.32***	.31***	.30***
interest	.38	.30	.24	.17	.25	.28	.25
	(.01)	(.02)	(.03)	(.02)	(.05)	(.02)	(.02)
Political	.15***	.06*	.15***	-.00	.55***	.09*	.07
knowledge	.11	.03	.07	-.01	.23	.04	.03
	(.03)	(.02)	(.04)	(.04)	(.02)	(.04)	(.04)
Age	.00***	.01***	-.00	.00	.00**	.01***	-.00**
	.07	.11	-.02	.01	.07	.09	-.06
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
Education	.03***	.00	.03**	.03***	-.00	.02*	.09***
	.11	.00	.07	.09	-.00	.05	.21
	(.00)	(.00)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
White	-.08*	-.19***	-.20*	-.08	-.04	.02	-.16*
	-.04	-.08	-.07	-.02	-.01	.01	-.06
	(.03)	(.05)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.05)
Male	.05*	-.03	-.01	.19***	.07	.09*	-.03
	.04	-.02	-.00	.09	.03	.04	-.01
	.02	(.03)	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)
R square	.26	.13	.10	.06	.18	.13	.15
Unweighted N	2,027	2,027	1,989	2,020	2,022	2,025	2,022

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001. Table entries are unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 12.8: Weighted Least Squares models predicting exposure to political talk radio (hours in a regular week; PTR 1996 Data).

B β (SE)	Limbaugh	Liberal PTR	Other conservative PTR	All PTR
Media skepticism	.16**	.04	.05	.26*
	.06	.02	.02	.06
	(.07)	(.05)	(.05)	(.11)
Party-ideology index	-.11***	.01	-.04***	-.16***
	-.28	.02	.02	-.21
	(.01)	(.00)	(.03)	(.02)
Political extremity	.03	-.01	.02	.03
	.04	-.02	.02	.02
	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)	(.03)
Political interest	.18***	.06*	.06#	.30***
	.12	.06	.05	.11
	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)	(.09)
Political knowledge	.11#	.03	.07	.15
	.04	.01	.03	.03
	(.07)	(.06)	(.05)	(.12)
Age	.00#	.00*	.00	.01**
	.06	.07	.02	.07
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
Education	.01	.03**	.02	.06**
	.01	.08	.04	.07
	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)	(.00)
White	-.04	.00	-.00	-.04
	-.01	.00	.03	-.00
	(.10)	(.07)	(.07)	(.16)
Male	.15*	.07	.07	.30**
	.05	.03	.03	.07
	(.07)	(.05)	(.05)	(.13)
R square	.12	.02	.04	.10
Unweighted N	1,531	1,531	1,531	1,531

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001. Table entries are unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 12.9: Ordinary Least Squares models predicting exposure to various news outlets (days in the past week; NES Data).

B β (SE)	All mainstream	National TV news	Local TV news	Daily newspaper	All PTR	Limbaugh	All non-mainstream (PTR+ Web)
Media skepticism	-.02 -.01 (.06)	-.01 -.00 (.09)	.04 .01 (.09)	-.12 -.03 (.09)	.09* .06 (.03)	.11*** .10 (.02)	.04* .06 (.01)
Party-ideology index	.00 .00 (.01)	.01 .01 (.02)	-.00 -.00 (.02)	-.01 -.01 (.03)	- .05*** -.14 (.02)	-.06*** -.24 (.08)	-.02*** -.12 (.00)
Political extremity	-.09*** -.07 (.03)	-.12** -.07 (.04)	-.16*** -.09 (.04)	-.00 -.00 (.04)	.05*** .07 (.01)	.06*** .12 (.01)	.03** .07 (.01)
Political interest	.68*** .34 (.04)	1.01*** .37 (.06)	.72*** .28 (.07)	.30*** .10 (.07)	.22*** .20 (.03)	.15*** .20 (.02)	.12*** .22 (.01)
Political knowledge	.10* .05 (.04)	.05 .00 (.06)	-.03 -.01 (.07)	.29*** .11 (.07)	.07 .00 (.03)	.02 .03 (.02)	-.05 .00 (.01)
Age	.04*** .37 (.00)	.04*** .31 (.00)	.02*** .18 (.00)	.04*** .29 (.00)	.00 .00 (.00)	-.00 -.00 (.00)	-.00 -.03 (.00)
Education	.02 .03 (.02)	.01 .01 (.02)	-.07* -.07 (.02)	.12*** .11 (.03)	.01 .03 (.01)	-.00 .00 (.01)	.01* .06 (.00)
White	-.02 -.02 (.13)	-.22 -.02 (.18)	.03 .00 (.19)	.10 .01 (.20)	-.16 -.05 (.08)	-.02 -.00 (.05)	-.07 -.04 (.04)
Male	.03 .01 (.09)	-.14 -.02 (.12)	-.30* -.05 (.12)	.53*** .09 (.14)	.25*** .11 (.06)	.16*** .10 (.03)	.14*** .12 (.02)
R square	.30	.27	.13	.16	.11	.19	.13
N	1,506	1,504	1,504	1,506	1,505	1,506	1,506

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001. Table entries are unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 12.10: Logistic regression model predicting exposure to political information over the World Wide Web.

	Political information on the Web (given web access)	
	B (s.e)	e^B
Media skepticism	.40* (.19)	1.48
Party-ideology index	.04 (.04)	.90
Political extremity	-.04 (.08)	.84
Political interest	.70*** (.15)	2.02
Political knowledge	-.15 (.15)	.86
Age	-.03** (.01)	.96
Education	.21** (.08)	1.24
White	.21 (.48)	1.24
Male	.55# (.26)	1.65
R square	.16	
N	400	

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.

Table 12.11: Meta-analysis summarizing the associations between media skepticism and media exposure

	National TV news	Local TV news	Daily newspaper
Average effect size	-.14	-.13	-.07
Number of studies	4	3	4
ΣN_i	6,722	4,613	6,740
Corrected Std	.08	.08	.04

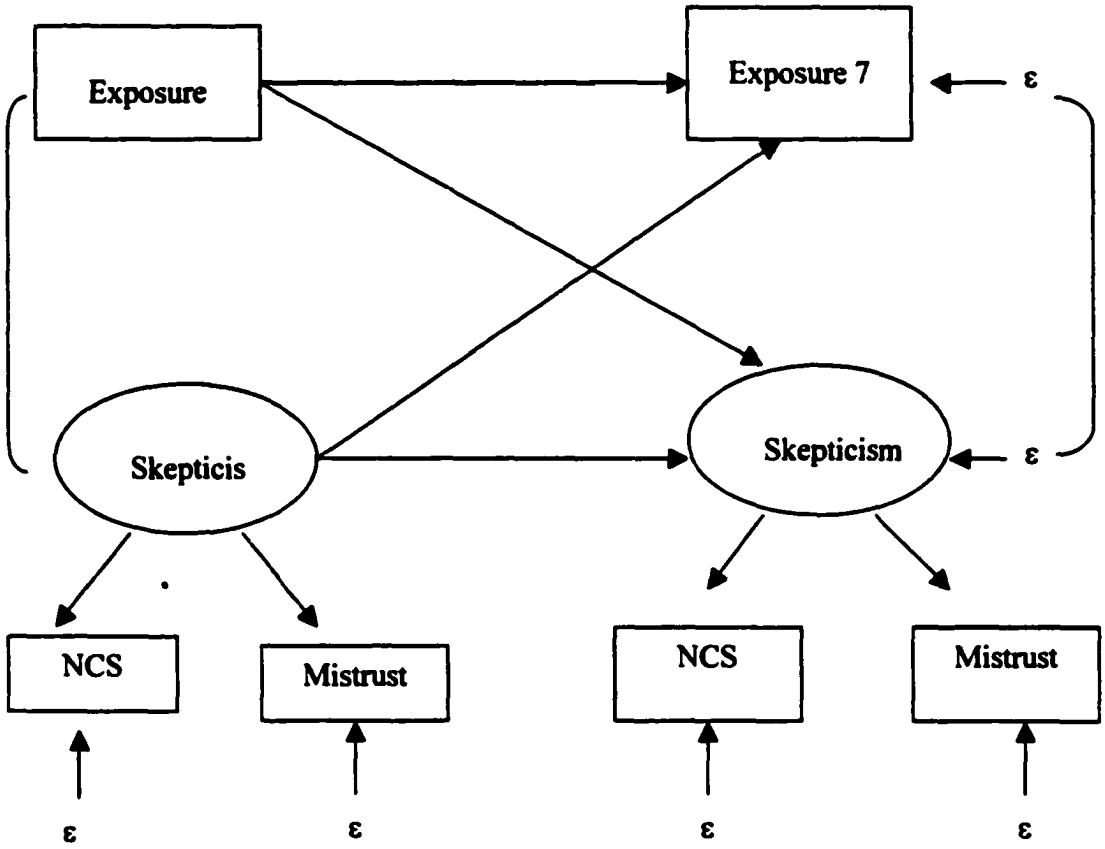
	Mainstream	PTR	Web	Non mainstream
Average effect size	-.18	.16	.05	.12
Number of studies	4	4	3	3
ΣN_i	6,652	6,256	4,516	4,686
Corrected Std	.09	.09	.08	.05

Table 12.12: Structural Equation Models testing the cross-lagged association between skepticism and exposure.

Model	B skep→ skep8 β (s.e)	B exp→ exp8 β (s.e)	B exp→ skep8 β (s.e)	B skep→ exp8 β (s.e)	N	χ^2 (d.f.=20) p-value χ^2/d.f.	GFI	AG FI	NFI
1. National TV news	.72*** .69 (.05)	.55*** .52 (.04)	.00 .00 (.04)	-.11* -.09 (.05)	414	38.02 p=.008 χ^2/df=1.90	.98	.94	.97
2. Local TV news	.72*** .69 (.05)	.50*** .50 (.04)	-.03 -.04 (.03)	-.06 -.05 (.05)	416	40.03 p=.004 χ^2/df=2.00	.98	.93	.97
3. Cable TV news	.72*** .69 (.05)	.62*** .61 (.03)	.02 .02 (.04)	-.04 -.03 (.05)	409	40.86 p=.003 χ^2/df=2.04	.98	.95	.97
4. Daily newspaper	.72*** .70 (.05)	.69*** .69 (.03)	-.02 -.02 (.04)	-.00 -.00 (.02)	414	42.23 p=.002 χ^2/df=2.11	.98	.93	.97
5. PTR	.71*** .69 (.05)	.49*** .49 (.04)	.03 .03 (.04)	-.01 -.01 (.05)	407	38.18 p=.008 χ^2/df=1.90	.98	.93	.97
6. Political info on the Web	.77*** .72 (.05)	.41*** .41 (.05)	.05 .05 (.04)	.05 .04 (.06)	335	37.72 p=.009 χ^2/df=1.88	.98	.92	.96
7. Non mainstream (PTR + Web)	.75*** .74 (.05)	.53*** .53 (.05)	.07† .08 (.04)	.01 .01 (.05)	308	35.70 p=.016 χ^2/df=1.78	.98	.92	.96
8. All mainstream	.71*** .68 (.05)	.64*** .64 (.04)	-.02 -.02 (.02)	-.07† -.06 (.04)	395	38.98 p=.006 χ^2/df=1.95	.98	.93	.97
9. Television	.72*** .69 (.05)	.62*** .62 (.04)	-.01 -.01 (.04)	-.09† -.07 (.05)	398	38.06 p=.006 χ^2/df=1.90	.98	.93	.97

Notes: † p<.10; * p<.05; *** p<.001; All models control for demographics, political ideology, political knowledge and political involvement (these covariates all have direct paths to both endogenous variables, and are assumed to be correlated with the exogenous variables). Maximum Likelihood estimates are presented. All models were tested for their sensitivity to different starting values.

Figure 12.1: Structural model testing for the cross-lagged effects of skepticism on exposure and of exposure on skepticism



Chapter 13: The moderating role of need for cognition.

In the previous chapter, I explored the association between media skepticism and exposure to various mainstream and non-mainstream news sources in light of theories of selective exposure to communication. I presented some evidence demonstrating that skeptics are less likely to attend to mainstream channels. Simply put, those who do not trust the mainstream media tune out and look for other sources of information. Hence, they tend to select alternative and non-mainstream media (like political talk radio and political information on the World Wide Web) as their information sources. Those trusting the media have no problems with the mainstream media as their primary source of political information. These non-skeptical audiences tend to attend more frequently to national TV news and daily newspapers and to mainstream news in general, and less to non-mainstream sources, compared to their skeptical counterparts.

However, these findings were not replicated in all four independent data sets. The discrepancy in the results was partly resolved through meta-analysis. However, given the small number of studies, this analysis did not offer a complete account as to why the studies differed in their results. One possibility is simply that the models specified in the previous chapter were not totally accurate. In this chapter I try to improve the accuracy by modeling for the interaction between skepticism and other factors that come into play when audiences select their news sources. In a sense, this could be viewed as a search for the conditions under which skepticism influences exposure. While my limited meta-analytic efforts did not yield an explanation as to why certain associations are significant

in some of the data sets and not in others, the models presented in this chapter might fill the void and contribute to a better understanding of the association between skepticism and news exposure selections.

This chapter adds a motivational factor to the exposure equations. As uses and gratifications research (e.g., Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973) tells us, audience needs serve as primary determinants of their media choices. Tastes and perceptions regarding media credibility also come into play: given plenty of choices and possibilities, people are likely to attend to what they like. In a way, gratification research tells us that these factors interact when people build their media diets. In this chapter the focus is on the interaction between perceptions about the source and people's needs or motivations to attend to the message. People may expose themselves to news content they do not trust, value or appreciate, just in order to gratify cognitive needs. On the other hand, given no such need for cognition, audiences would rely entirely on their attitudes toward the source and not watch what they do not trust.

Uses and gratifications research.

This chapter adds uses and gratifications to the models predicting media exposure. The school of uses and gratifications has provided us with one of the most important theoretical contributions to our understanding of media exposure. In a nutshell, uses and gratifications research tells us that audience exposure patterns are contingent on their social and psychological needs (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973; Katz, Gurevitch & Hass, 1974). People have different exposure patterns because they have different motivations to attend to the media. According to a metaphor often used by gratification

scholars, the media are a toolbox. You use what you want, when you want, according to your needs. Escapist viewers are said to prefer comedies and soaps, while inquisitive viewers are found to prefer news or documentaries. Excited viewers are more likely to choose relaxing content, while bored viewers are more likely to seek arousing content (Zillmann, 1988). In the most parsimonious version of the uses and gratifications approach, viewers are divided into instrumental viewers, who seek specific content for identifiable needs, and ritual viewers, who are less selective and use TV out of habit or because they have nothing better to do (Rubin, 1993). Gratifications research represents the meeting point between those who explain exposure to communication by psychological factors such as personality structure (Finn, 1997), and theories of selective exposure processes in which individuals try to avoid dissonant or otherwise disturbing materials (Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). All of these perspectives highlight the individual freedom and personal choice of active, gratification-seeking audiences. However, gratifications research describes exposure to communication as a means of gratifying a holistic set of human needs, while selective exposure focuses on a more limited set of principles guiding human behavior, such as avoiding dissonance or interacting with likable and trusted objects.

Motivational factors in news exposure.

In the previous chapter I examined the association between media skepticism and news media exposure. Since selective exposure research tell us that people choose to attend to information consistent with their existing attitudes (including attitudes toward sources), it is trivial to claim that when people feel alienated and mistrustful toward mainstream

news, they will watch less mainstream media and seek more non-mainstream information sources as a substitute.

However, this simple hypothesis ignores another basic gratification finding: people have many needs motivating their attention to the media. "One set of media materials is capable of serving a multiplicity of needs and audience functions" (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974:517). The reasons for watching news are diverse (Gantz, 1978; Wenner, 1985). Following Freud, Schramm (1949) claimed that news consumption is guided by either reality motives or pleasure motives (or both). The traces of this reality/play distinction can be found in the writings of later scholars who talked, instead, about information/entertainment (Rubin, 1984) or content/process (Cutler & Danowski, 1980). However, later scholars have offered numerous additional motives. Wenner (1985) offers a map of news gratifications that contains 16 different motivations, including ego-defense, expressive, tension reduction, stimulation, and so on). In the following paragraphs I review only the main families of gratifications mentioned in the literature on news.

Some people attend to the news to fulfill social integrative needs (Levy, 1977). These social gratification seekers are not very interested in the political world, but they do not want to lose touch with other people. They want to belong to the community, to be up-to-date with what is going on, and to be able to use news information as an icebreaker in conversations. In fact, some people watch TV news just because they want to share leisure time with a news-watching spouse. In short, these people use the news media in order to connect with others. It is the social context of exposure, not exposure per se, that gratifies such news watchers.

For others the news may fulfill "surveillance" functions (Wright, 1960). These audience members attend to the news in order to get bits of information necessary for their daily lives, and do not care much about the rest. They watch the news to learn about tomorrow's school strike. They wait for the weather and traffic reports or the news from the stock market, and watch other components of newscasts simply because they are there (see Gantz et al., 1991). Note that issues of media credibility are almost always irrelevant when it comes to these bits of practical information reported by the news. Journalists usually play only a minor role when it comes to reporting about what NASDAQ did or about the weather. Audiences seeking this practical information might find news gratifying regardless of their media skepticism.

Still others expose themselves to news in order to gratify their cognitive needs. They want to better understand the political world, to get to know the arguments and counter-arguments. They get gratification from thinking and deliberating, from encountering problems from different angles, and from trying to "solve" problems even when these are unrelated to them personally, just as others may enjoy cracking riddles and puzzles. For these people, the desire to think and to know (vs. merely some social or practical function) is their motivation for news exposure. Comparing information, learning different angles of the same stories and arguing with texts is a gratifying media experience for people with cognitive needs. Intuitively, audiences high in need for cognition will be those who care most about the validity of media reports and will be the most motivated to learn the "truth" in the news, compared to social-integrative or to practical-functional surveillance-motivated audiences.

However, need for cognition is not all about information. Gratification research distinguishes between orientational gratifications, which are "message uses for information that provide for the reference and reassurance of self in relation to society," and para-orientational gratifications, which are "process uses that ritualistically reorient news content through play activity" (Wenner, 1985:175). In no sense is the goal of this para-orientational activity merely information gain (Stephenson, 1967). Rather, the aim is to "play" with information, to receive gratification from ritualistic exposure to information, from trying to understand complex realities, and from thinking about these realities.

In sum, the motivations for news exposure are diverse. Most of us probably attend to news due to multiple motivations. Many may use news to gratify each of the needs mentioned above, at least to some extent. Yet we also differ in the extent to which we have these motivations and the extent to which we use news to fulfill them. According to uses and gratifications theory, these different needs lead to different exposure patterns. In this chapter, I focus on need for cognition as a predictor of news exposure and as a factor moderating the role of skepticism in exposure to news communication.

Need for cognition.

The main concept I use in the remaining of the chapter derives from a psychological research tradition about "need for cognition" (Cohen et al., 1955; Cohen, 1957; Petty & Cacioppo, 1982; Perse, 1992). Cohen et al., (1955:291) defined the need for cognition (NCOG) as "a need to structure relevant situations in meaningful, integrated ways. It is a need to understand and make reasonable the experimental world". They argued that need for cognition may qualify as a need since it directs behavior toward a goal, and since

tension is caused "when this goal is not attained". Later, Petty and Cacioppo (1982:118) clarified that the term "need" is used in a "statistical (i.e., likelihood or tendency) rather than biological (i.e., tissue deprivation) sense". They defined need for cognition as "a tendency to engage in and enjoy thinking" (p. 116).

Other scholars (reviewed by Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) have characterized people with need for cognition as people who "have fun" thinking, who are motivated by a "quest for reality", who feel frustrated when they are unable to understand. Research has found that need for cognition predicts verbal ability and knowledge (Tidwell et al., 2000), study skills and academic achievement (Guelgoez, 2001) and performance on various problem-solving tasks (Nair et al., 2001).

The need-for-cognition construct has often been applied in persuasion research (Kaufman & Stasson, 1999; Zhang, 1996). Most relevant for this study, and as uses and gratifications research (Katz et al., 1974) predicted using the framework of "cognitive needs", need for cognition was found to be connected with utilitarian local news viewing and attention to government news reports, but not with attention to sports (Perse, 1992). Undergraduates who expressed a liking for heavy metal music ranked lower in need for cognition than non-fans (Hansen & Hansen, 1991). Recently, Tuten & Bosnjak (2001:391) found that need for cognition "was significantly and positively correlated with all Web activities involving cognitive thought". In sum, what psychologists conceptualized and called "need for cognition" was found to be useful in the field of communication, particularly in gratifications research.

Need for cognition as a moderating factor in the effect of skepticism on exposure. Uses and gratifications claims that exposure to communication is guided by social and psychological needs, including a need for cognition. However, motivational factors, important as they might be, are not everything. Even according to gratifications research, human needs interact with other factors when people select media content in order to gratify themselves. First and foremost, the media environment is a crucial interacting factor. "Audience members, naturally enough, can only make choices among options actually available to them" (Backer & Schoenbach, 1989, p. 19). There is ample evidence that the media environment interacts with audience needs in their effect on audience exposure. Typically, these studies show that the presence – or lack – of some sort of media has consequences in terms of audience exposure patterns. For example, Weimann (1996) documented, using a before-after technique, that the introduction of cable TV to Israel resulted in increased exposure to movie and music channels. Others have also found (Schoenbach & Backer, 1989; Webster, 1986) that cable TV allows viewers to specialize their viewing and concentrate on their favorite genres, which are often entertainment genres.

The interaction of media environment with audience motivations is further demonstrated by the finding that for those who have cable television, preference for entertainment is related to decreased exposure for news, while for those who have no cable TV, preference for entertainment is related to *increased* exposure to news (Prior, 2001). Arguably, those who prefer entertainment sometimes have no option but to watch news (people without cable are at times "forced" to watch news genres) and must satisfy their need for entertainment via news watching. (It was also found that local news

audiences tended to be larger when no competing entertainment programming was scheduled; see Webster & Newton, 1988.)

In sum, there is evidence that audience motivations interact with media environments in their joint effect on audience exposure. In this chapter, I argue that motivational factors interact not only with systemic factors such as media environments, but also with individual attitudes and predispositions such as attitudes toward the sources. People with stronger needs might be willing to pay higher costs in order to satisfy their needs – for example, to expose themselves to sources they do not like. Hence, the urge to satisfy certain needs could result in decreased selective exposure to communication.

To hypothesize about the interaction between need for cognition and media skepticism I need to highlight two important points:

1. Selective exposure and uses and gratifications are not the same thing. The former deals with tastes and predispositions, while the latter deals with needs and motivations. However, given the human need to avoid dissonance (which is definitely not the only need motivating human behavior), one can make the argument that "selective exposure" is contained within gratification research.
2. Selective exposure processes and uses and gratifications processes do not work separately, but rather in conjunction. One need may at times "give in" to other needs. The tendency to attend to trusted and likeable sources (stemming from a human need for consistency) might be weakened in the presence of other human needs.

It follows that separate needs interact with each other in the way they influence exposure to communication. Selectivity in exposure to communication is guided by these complex interactions as uses and gratifications tells us. When need for cognition is low, selective exposure is motivated by a desire for consistency (or dissonance avoidance). Thus, people with no cognitive needs will rely more heavily on their attitudes toward the media when they select their news sources. On the other hand, when need for cognition is high, selective exposure is weaker. Thus, people with cognitive needs rely less on their media skepticism when they select their news sources. That is, they are willing to expose themselves to un-trusted sources in order to satisfy their cognitive needs. As in the previous chapter, consistency-motivated selective exposure is conceptualized as the negative effect of media skepticism on mainstream media exposure, and alternatively, the positive main effect of media skepticism on non-mainstream media exposure. Since, as discussed above, need for cognition is expected to interact in the process, I hypothesize that:

> H2.3. Media skepticism will interact with need for cognition in their effect on mainstream media exposure. The effect of media skepticism will be weaker for those with higher levels of need for cognition.

It is important to note that this is only one possible formulation of the general process I am describing. Trust-based selectivity is expected to interact with other needs as well, not only with need for cognition. However, since the data do not contain measures for other individual needs and motivations, my analysis is limited to need for cognition only. In the following paragraph, I discuss the operationalization of need for cognition.

Measuring need for cognition.

The first attempt to create a need for cognition measurement instrument was conducted by Cacioppo and Petty (1982). They created a pool of opinion statements that appeared to be relevant to the need-for-cognition concept. Statements that were judged in preliminary testing to be ambiguous were revised or eliminated. The remaining pool of 45 items was administered to groups "who were known to differ along the dimension of need for cognition" (university faculty members vs. factory assembly line workers). Items that discriminated between the groups were retained. They were found to be internally correlated and loaded on only one factor in a factor analysis, even when applied to different samples from different populations. The scale was tested for discriminant and convergent validity by examining the associations of need for cognition with other constructs (field independence and open-mindedness in the case of convergent validity, test anxiety and social desirability in the case of discriminant validity). Similar examinations of this scale were conducted by different scholars in different contexts (e.g. Forsterlee & Ho, 1999).

The need-for-cognition measure used in the EDialogue study was a shortened version of the need for cognition instrument, consisting of nine statements:

a I would prefer complex to simple problems.
b It's enough for me that something gets the job done; I don't care how or why it works.
c I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally.
d Thinking is not my idea of fun.
e I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems.

f Learning new ways to think doesn't excite me very much.

g I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.

h I only think as hard as I have to.

i I find satisfaction deliberating long and hard for hours.

Respondents were asked to rate how well each of these statements described them. Response categories were "a lot like me" (coded "5"), "somewhat like me" (coded "4"), "uncertain" (coded "3"), "not too much like me" (coded "2"), and "not at all like me" (coded "1"). The variables measuring reactions to statements b, d, f and h were reverse-coded. Reliability for the nine items was .76. To build a scale, the nine items were averaged. The resulting measure had a mean of 3.5, with a standard deviation of .66. The bivariate correlation between the need for cognition measure and media skepticism was .10 ($p<.05$).

Results.

OLS models testing for the interaction between media skepticism and need for cognition are presented in Table 13.1. Basically, these are the same models presented in the previous chapter (Tables 12.1 and 12.2). The dependent variables are again various measures of exposure to various news media sources (number of days in the past week). All models control for the party-ideology index, political extremity, political knowledge and involvement, schedule flexibility, employment, student status, age, sex, years of education and race. But in addition to the effects of these covariates (not reported in the table in order to preserve space), need for cognition was introduced into the models, as well as the need for cognition by media skepticism interaction, predicted by H2.3.

Centering was used in all models, in order to reduce multicollinearity caused by the correlation between the interaction terms and the interacting variables (the coefficients for the centered terms are reported). As in the previous chapter, the analysis was replicated four times to test for the sensitivity of the results to different measurement lags between skepticism and exposure.

The second column on the left (A models) presents the results from models predicting national TV news exposure. While the cross-sectional model (Model A1) did not show a significant skepticism by need for cognition interaction, in all the other models this interaction was significant or borderline significant. In other words, Wave 4 skepticism interacted with need for cognition in their effect on Wave 6 national TV news exposure (Model A2). Wave 4 skepticism interacted with need for cognition in their effect on Wave 7 (Model A3) national news exposure and on the average Wave 6 and Wave 7 combined national TV exposure measure (Model A4).

The interpretation of the significant interactions is presented in Figure 13.1. In all models, media skepticism had a strong and negative effect on national TV news exposure for those with low need for cognition. For those with no cognitive needs, mistrust in the mainstream media reduced exposure to national TV news. These people watched the most national TV news (compared to all other groups) when they trusted the media and the least (again, compared to all other groups) when they mistrusted them. Thus, the effect of media skepticism on exposure to TV news as a mainstream outlet is strongest among people with relatively low cognitive needs. Exposure patterns for those who testify that they do not enjoy thinking and that "they only think as hard as they have to" are heavily influenced by their trust or mistrust in news sources.

In all models, the negative effect of media skepticism on national TV news exposure decreased as their need for cognition increased. The more people enjoyed deliberating and solving puzzles, the lower the influence of mistrust in the media on their choice of national TV news as a source of social information. Still, even for those with moderate (NCOG=3) and relatively high (NCOG=4) need for cognition scores, the effect of skepticism on exposure was negative. That is, despite the fact that they were less influenced by their mistrust in the media than the low-need-for-cognition respondents, people with relatively high need for cognition were still negatively affected by their mistrust when making media choices. The more they trusted mainstream news, the more they watched national TV news, and vice versa for skeptics.

In contrast, for those with the highest scores on the need for cognition scale, the effect of skepticism on exposure was positive rather than negative. For people who are excited by thinking about complex problems even "when they do not affect them personally", skepticism toward the mainstream media is associated with more exposure to national TV news. The more they trust the media, the *less* likely are they are to watch national TV news.

The third column on the left (B models) in Table 13.1 presents models testing for the same interactions, this time with local rather than national news exposure as the dependent variable. In two of the four models (B1, B3), the interaction between skepticism and exposure was not statistically significant. On the other hand, Wave 4 skepticism did interact significantly with need for cognition in their effect on Wave 6 exposure (Model B2). The same significant interaction (between Wave 4 skepticism ano NCOG) was found when the dependent variable was the average of Wave 6 and Wave 7

reports of local news exposure (Model B4). The interpretation of the interaction, presented in Figure 13.2, is similar in both cases to the pattern that was found when national news exposure was the DV. In other words, skepticism was negatively related to exposure to local TV for those with low and moderate levels of need for cognition. For those extremely high on cognitive needs, the association was reversed.

In the fourth column on the left in Table 13.1 (C models), the dependent variable is exposure to cable TV news. Here, in all cases (Models C1, C2, C3, C4), the skepticism by need for cognition interaction was statistically insignificant.

The dependent variable in the fifth column (D Models) is exposure to daily newspapers. In this case, there was evidence for a significant skepticism*NCOG interaction in all four models (D1 through D4). The interpretations of these interactions are presented in Figure 13.3. As in the previous cases, skepticism was negatively associated with newspaper reading for those expressing low cognitive needs. This association weakened as need for cognition increased. However, for those with high need for cognition (NCOG=5), skepticism was positively associated with newspaper exposure. That is, for those who "enjoy tasks that involve coming up with new solutions to problems", mistrust in the media was associated with increased exposure. Those who enjoy deliberation read newspapers even though they do not trust the mainstream media.

The first column on the right (E models) presents models with general exposure to the mainstream media as the dependent variables. As in the D models, in all four cases (Models E1 through E4), the NCOG*skepticism interactions were statistically significant. That is, Wave 4 skepticism interacted with need for cognition in their effect on Wave 4,

Wave 6, Wave 7, and average Wave 6 and 7 general mainstream media exposure measures.

Figure 13.4 presents the interpretation of these significant interactions. As in the previous cases, when need for cognition was low, skepticism negatively affected general mainstream media exposure. In other words, for those who reported that "thinking is not their idea of fun", mainstream media skepticism was associated with lower mainstream media exposure. However, as need for cognition increased, the negative effect of trust in the media decreased. For those with moderate levels of NCOG, skepticism was still negatively associated with mainstream media exposure (but the association was much less steep than for those with low need for cognition). For those with high need for cognition (NCOG=5, and in some cases also when NCOG=4), the effect of skepticism on mainstream media exposure was positive. That is, those who reported high satisfaction from deliberation and problem-solving were exposed to more mainstream news even when their mistrust in the media increased.

Non-mainstream media.

Another set of OLS models, this time predicting exposure to non-mainstream media sources (PTR and the Internet), was run to test for the skepticism by need-for-cognition interaction. The results are presented in Table 13.2. As in Table 13.1, all models control for ideology, political extremity, political knowledge, political involvement, schedule flexibility, employment, student status, age, sex, years of education and race. Again, centering was used to reduce multicollinearity (and the coefficients for the centered terms are reported).

The second column on the left (F Models) presents the results for models predicting exposure to political talk radio. In contrast to all previous models, the coefficients for the effects of skepticism were all positive. Also, need for cognition had a significant and positive main effect on PTR exposure. All other things being equal, as need for cognition increased, PTR exposure increased. PTR exposure is thus related to a desire to think, to solve problems, and to know for the sake of knowledge. In contrast to the "mainstream" models, there was no significant interaction between media skepticism and need for cognition in their effect on exposure to PTR. Regardless of need for cognition, skeptics were more likely to listen to political talk radio than non-skeptics, and regardless of media skepticism, those high on need for cognition were more likely to listen to PTR.

The third column on the left (G Models) presents models predicting use of the World Wide Web for campaign information. As the models show, neither skepticism nor need for cognition are significantly related to exposure for online political information. In other words, the data failed to replicate research findings relating Web usage to need for cognition (Tuten & Bosnjak, 2001). There was also no evidence for significant media skepticism by need for cognition interaction in any of the models. The data included other measures of WWW use for political information. The skepticism by need for cognition interaction was also tested with these other dichotomous measures using logistic regression models. There was no evidence for rejecting the null hypothesis that the skepticism*NCOG interaction is zero.

The first column on the right (I Models) presents models predicting general non-mainstream news consumption (the average of PTR exposure with the campaign information on the Web item). In two cases, the coefficient for need for cognition was

positive and significant. That is, the higher the need for cognition, the higher the exposure to non-mainstream news formats. In one case, the coefficient for the effect of skepticism on exposure was positive and significant. That is, the higher the mistrust in the mainstream media, the higher the exposure to non-mainstream formats. However, the NCOG*skepticism interaction was insignificant in all three models. In other words, when skepticism affected exposure to non-mainstream news, it did so regardless of need for cognition. When need for cognition affected exposure, it did so regardless of audience trust or mistrust in the media.

Political involvement as an interacting factor.

Another possible way to construct the need-for-cognition concept is through variables measuring interest in or close following of politics. Interest in politics is very different from need for cognition. The concept of need for cognition relates to problem-solving in general. It refers to satisfaction from the acquisition of information for the sake of deliberation and not for any practical purpose. It does not relate to politics but to cognitive needs in general. However, measures of interest in politics might tap some of these needs when applied to the political domain. If audience needs can be divided into information-related and entertainment-related needs (as they often are, e.g. by Rubin, 1984), then items measuring close following of politics might be tapping general preference for information, as opposed to entertainment (see Prior, 2001).

The data sets at hand all have variables tapping political involvement and close-following of politics. The typical question wording (e.g. from the EDialogue study) is, "How often would you say you follow what is going on in government and public

affairs?" with "most of the time", "some of the time", "only now and then", and "hardly at all" as answer categories. If this taps preference for news or some other cognitive-informational need, then this involvement factor should also interact with media skepticism in their joint effect on various forms of exposure.

The OLS exposure models were thus run once again, this time testing for the skepticism*political involvement interaction. Two separate data sources were used: the EDialogue data and the NES 1996 data. Altogether, 42 models were tested (38 on the EDialogue data and six on the NES data). There was no evidence for an involvement by skepticism interaction. This null finding seems to be due to lack of construct validity; the involvement factor probably taps something other than need for cognition. Thus, the results of this analysis were substantially different from those presented elsewhere in this chapter. Need for cognition is substantially different than political involvement and close following of politics. It is thus not the tendency to seek political information, but rather the tendency to enjoy deliberation and to seek for solutions for problems, that interacts with media skepticism in their effect on mainstream media exposure.

Summary.

In this chapter I examined the way a motivational factor – need for cognition – intervenes in the association between media skepticism and media exposure. When people select media contents, needs interact with preferences (and trust, as a like-dislike attitude could be conceptualized as a "preference" in this matter). Hence, people may expose themselves to news sources they do not trust just in order to fulfill cognitive needs.

In one of the previous chapters I asked why people should attend to the mainstream news media when they do not trust them. One answer suggested by this chapter is that people may consume mainstream news despite their media skepticism, just because they enjoy listening to diverse points of view, because they like to deliberate about problems, because they get satisfaction from thinking per se. Those who are motivated by a need for cognition, in fact, consume more mainstream news as their skepticism increases. This could be consumption for the sake of media criticism – that is, cognitive skeptics may simply want to argue with the media. Alternatively, the increased consumption of mainstream media materials by cognitively-motivated skeptics could reflect their lack of functional alternatives to the mainstream media. They attend to mainstream news, despite their mistrust, just in order to be exposed to politicians appearing in the media and to their different arguments. One additional possibility is that for those with high need for cognition, the causal direction of the association is reversed. Among this potentially critical group (skeptics with high need for cognition), it could be that media exposure results in media skepticism and not the other way around, as my cross-lagged analysis demonstrated in the previous chapter. At any case, the models presented above show that for those with high cognitive needs, media skepticism is positively associated with media exposure.

However, for people with low or moderate cognitive needs, the association between skepticism and exposure is negative. Mistrusting audience members who were low on NCOG had the lowest exposure to the mainstream news media: these people do not consume mainstream media when they do not trust them. On the other hand, trusting but low-in-cognitive-needs audience members had the highest exposure to the mainstream

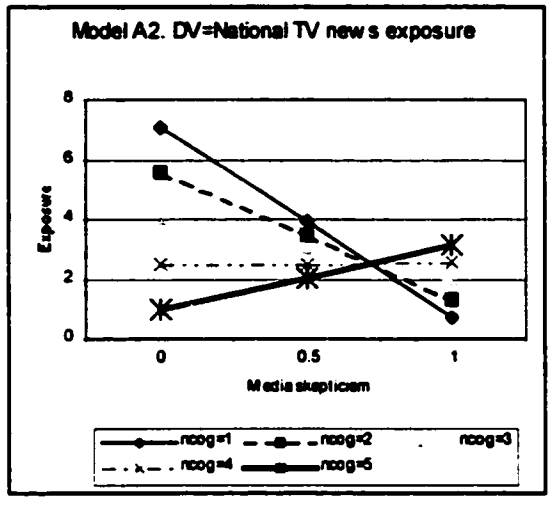
news media. Thus, the negative effect of media skepticism on mainstream news exposure was strongest when need for cognition was at its lowest level. This negative effect decreased as need for cognition increased. This was true for both national TV news exposure and newspaper reading, as well as for mainstream news exposure in general.

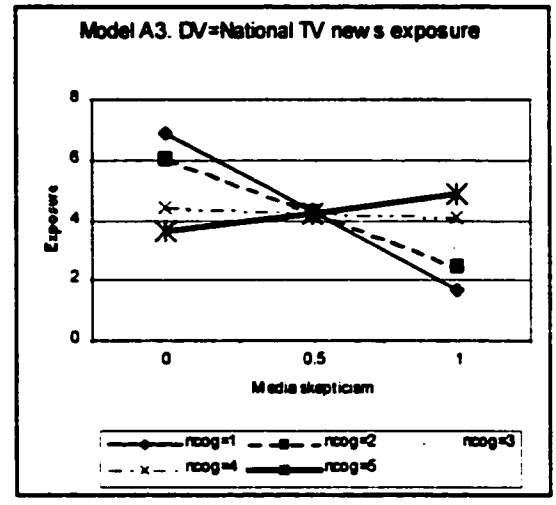
When the dependent variable was exposure to the non-mainstream media, on the other hand, the pattern was different. In the case of exposure to PTR and to the political Internet, there was no evidence of an interaction between skepticism and need for cognition. Skeptics consumed more non-mainstream formats regardless of their cognitive needs. This analysis, together with the models reported in the previous chapter, provides some empirical validation for the distinction between PTR and the Internet, on the one hand, and the mainstream media, on the other. Simply put, the models show that skepticism plays different roles in exposure to these two distinct families of news formats.

The evidence for a skepticism by need-for-cognition interaction may hold the key to explaining the inconsistencies between data sets in the estimated effect of media skepticism on media exposure (as discussed in the previous chapter). Due to the focus and design of a few of the studies, some may contain more people with high cognitive needs (e.g., people who agreed to participate in online political conversations might be high on NCOG to begin with, which may consequently reduce the estimated effect of skepticism on exposure). Unfortunately, only one of the data sets contains the need-for-cognition battery. It would have been interesting to examine whether the incorporation of the skepticism by need for cognition interaction would hold in the different data sets, thus bringing more consistency to the results.

In terms of contribution to communication theory, the findings demonstrate the manner in which different needs interact in the way they influence exposure to the media. The need to avoid dissonance (highlighted by the concept of consistency), in this case, gives in to the need for cognition. In a sense, this is an interaction between the consistency-motivated selective exposure to uses and gratifications research. Other such interactions of selective exposure with other needs (escapism, social integrative, etc.), are possible. More research should be conducted to test for these plausible hypotheses.

Figure 13.1: Models predicting national TV news exposure





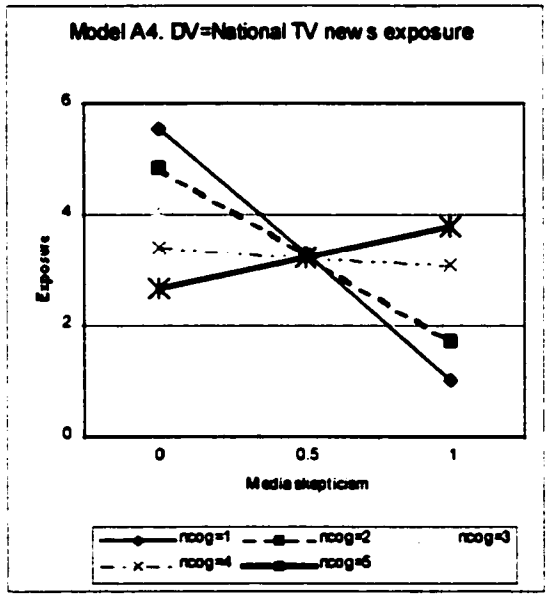


Figure 13.2: Models predicting local and cable news exposure

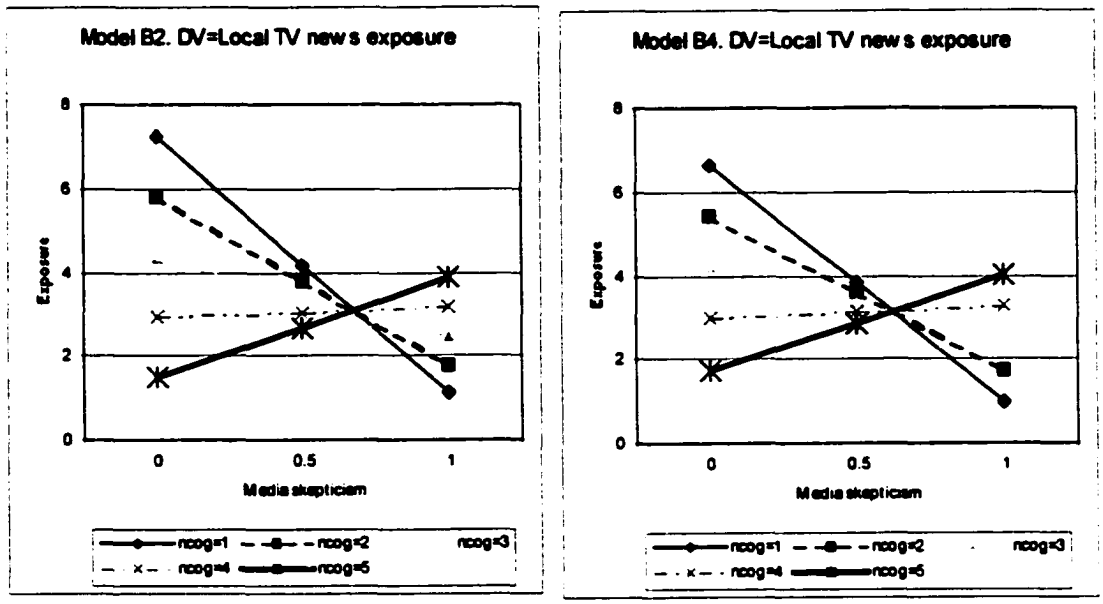


Figure 13.3: Models predicting exposure to daily newspapers

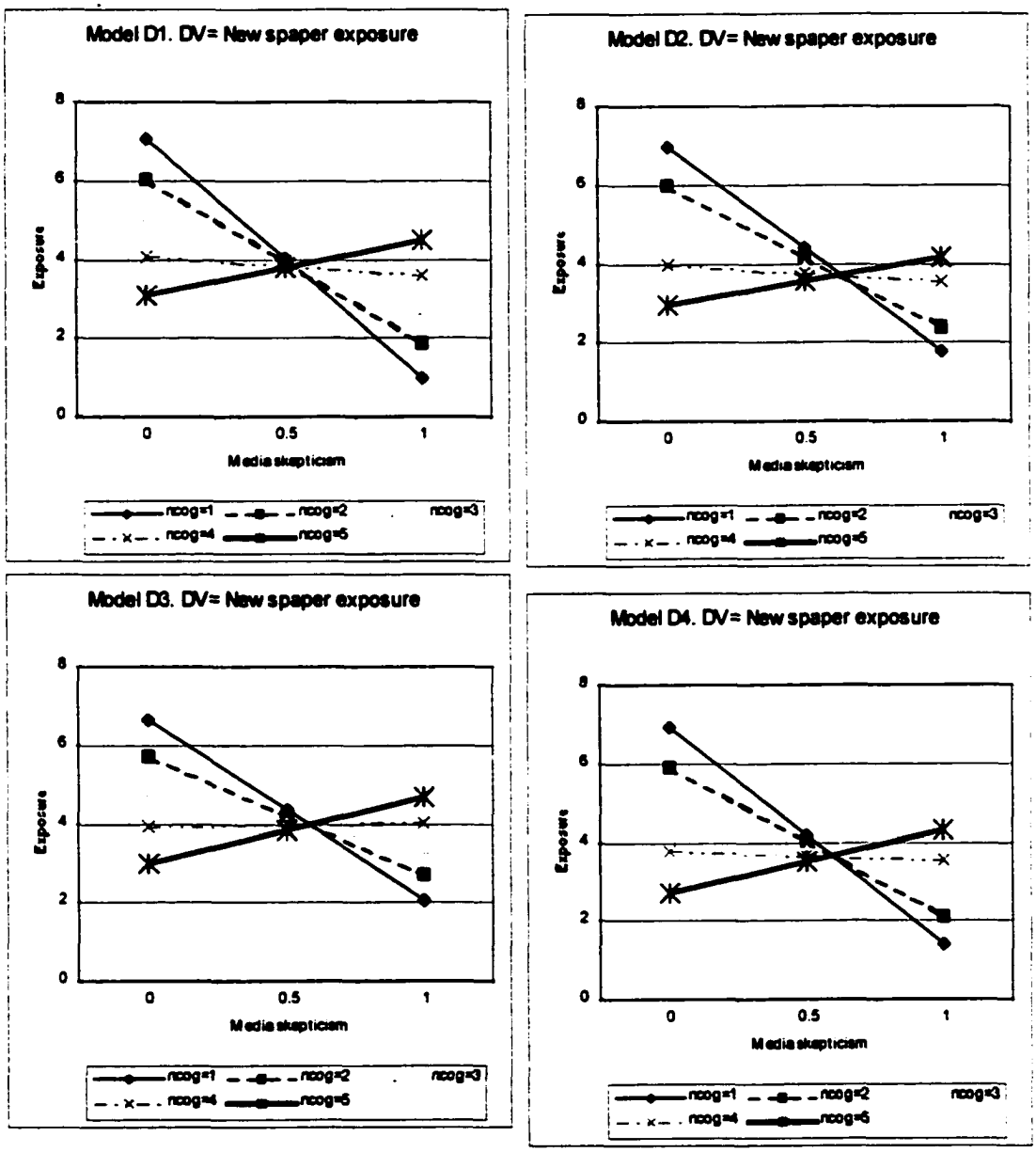


Figure 13.4: Models predicting general mainstream news media exposure

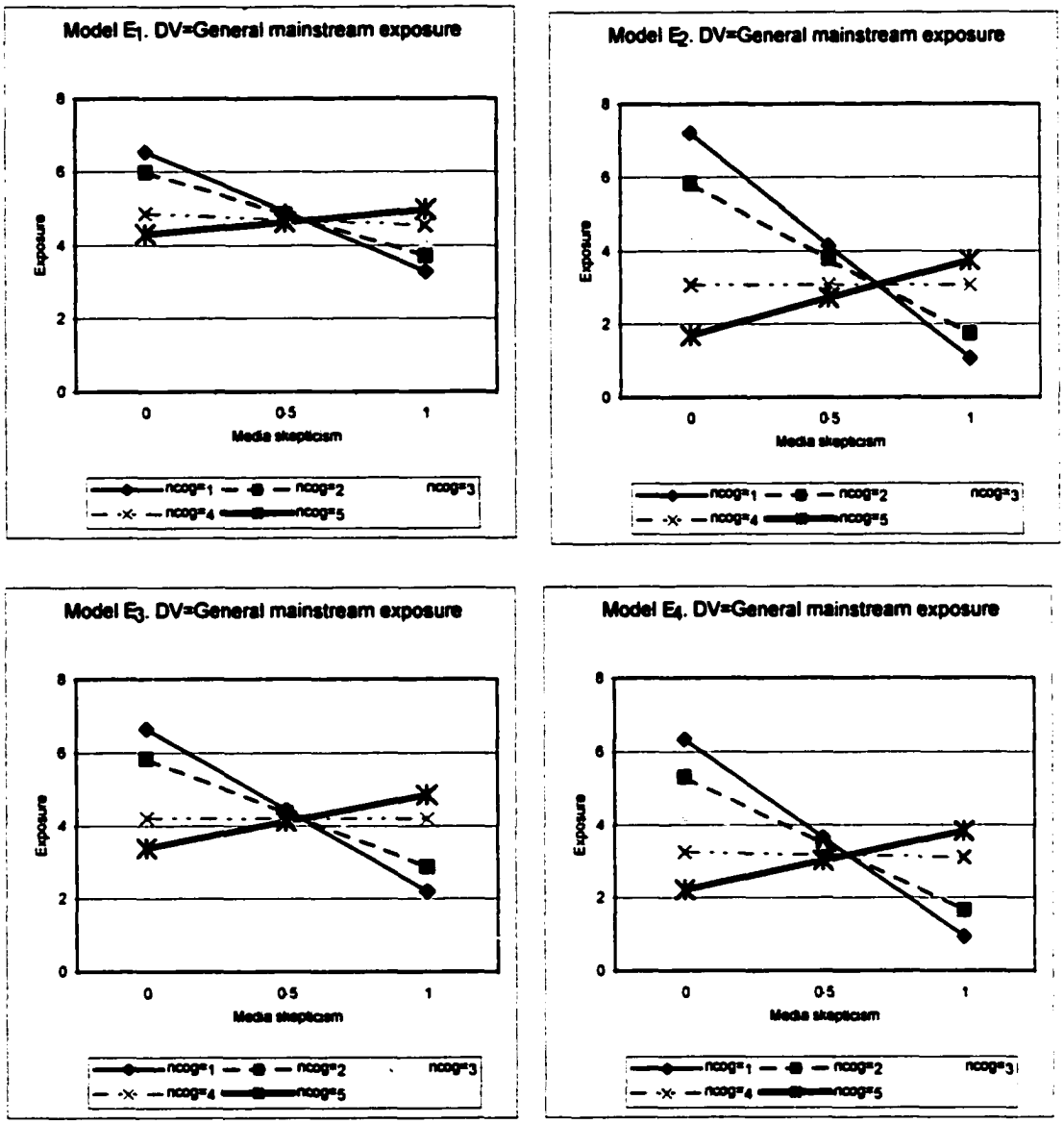


Table 13.1: The role of need for cognition. OLS Models testing for skepticism by need for cognition interaction.

B (SE)	Model A: National TV News	Model B: Local TV News	Model C: Cable TV News	Model D: Daily Newspaper	Model E: Mainstream
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
Need for cognition	-.09 (.15)	-.01 (.15)	-.01 (.17)	.06 (.15)	-.01 (.11)
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
N	546	553	548	555	561
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
Need for cognition	-.34* (.17)	-.25 (.18)	-.26 (.19)	-.11 (.19)	-.23# (.12)
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
N	424	424	424	424	424
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
Need for cognition	.08 (.16)	-.04 (.16)	.13 (.19)	-.03 (.17)	.01 (.12)
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
N	469	468	472	470	508
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
Need for cognition	.01 (.14)	-.12 (.15)	.01 (.17)	-.06 (.16)	-.05 (.10)
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
N	504	504	505	504	506

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. Centering was used in all models to reduce multicollinearity; Table entries are the coefficients for the centered variables, with standard errors in parentheses. All models control for the party-ideology index, political extremity, political knowledge and involvement, schedule flexibility, employment, student status, age, sex, years of education, and race.

Table 13.2: The role of need for cognition. OLS Models testing for skepticism by need for cognition interaction.

B (SE)	Model F PTR	Model G Campaign info on the Web	Model I Non-mainstream
[illegible]			
Need for cognition	.52*** (.12)		
[illegible]			
N	543		
[illegible]			
Need for cognition	.25# (.14)	.03 (.17)	.17 (.12)
[illegible]			
N	424	431	516
[illegible]			
Need for cognition	.37* (.16)	.22 (.15)	.33** (.12)
[illegible]			
N	466	431	496
[illegible]			
Need for cognition	.35* (.13)	.15 (.13)	.24* (.10)
[illegible]			
N	502	518	542

Notes: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. Centering was used in all models to reduce multicollinearity; Table entries are the coefficients for the centered variables, with standard errors in parentheses. All models control for the party-ideology index, political extremity, political knowledge and involvement, schedule flexibility, employment, student status, age, sex, years of education, and race.

Chapter 14: Media skepticism and news diets

In the last chapters we explored possible associations between skepticism and media exposure. We found that skeptics are more likely to attend to non-mainstream sources like political talk radio and the political Internet, sources that contain much counter-mainstream media materials and anti-mainstream media information. We also found that skeptics tend to be somewhat less exposed to the mainstream media. In the previous chapter, it was also shown that this negative association is strongest for people with low need for cognition. For those with high need for cognition, the association between skepticism and mainstream news exposure is actually reversed – they attend more as they become more skeptical. Do skeptics attend to non-mainstream news instead of mainstream news? Or do they rather consume non-mainstream materials in addition to mainstream contents? What is the overall pattern of exposure of skeptics, compared to non-skeptics? At this point these questions remain unanswered.

In the previous chapters, different models predicting exposure to different media were presented side by side. That is, the analysis has so far treated exposure to different news media as separate dependent variables. However, though they do represent distinct behaviors (watching TV and reading the paper are not the same thing), they are not totally independent behaviors. When it comes to news media exposure, exposure to one source may come at the expense of the others. We simply cannot attend to everything all the time. Most of us need to work or to go to school. All of us need to sleep. Some of us

have better things to do with our time than attend to all the news media every day. Indeed, only a negligible minority of survey respondents reports exposure to all news sources. For example, of the 12,666 who completed the APPC survey in November, December 1999 and January 2000, only 15 people (.01 percent) reported maximal exposure (seven days in the previous week) to all news sources (network, cable and local TV news, political talk radio, and political information online). 99.9 percent of respondents could not, or did not want to, attend to all news sources every day.

In Chapter 12, I used the concept of media diets to describe the overall composition of media exposure. I argued that exposure decisions are like nutritional decisions. In both cases, we cannot consume everything. In both cases, individual resources, but also market supply, limit our menus. In both cases, personal tastes and preferences come into play when we decide what to consume. In this chapter I use skepticism to predict not exposure to any particular source or group of sources, as I did in the previous chapter; rather, the overall composition of the media diet, in terms of exposure to mainstream and non-mainstream news, will be the dependent variable throughout this chapter.

In Chapter 12, I assumed that all sources could be divided into two categories: mainstream and non-mainstream. I further assumed (probabilistically) that network news and daily newspapers could be considered as mainstream sources, and that PTR and the political Internet could be considered as non-mainstream news sources. It follows that all audiences should fall into one of the following four categories: low on exposure to both non-mainstream and mainstream news sources; high on both non-mainstream and mainstream exposure; or low on exposure to one of them and high on the other. Hence, one of the dependent variables in this chapter – media diet – is composed as follows. In

the data sets analyzed, an average mainstream exposure variable (average days in the previous week in which respondents watched national and local news and read a daily newspaper), and an average non-mainstream exposure variable (average number of days in the previous week in which they listened to PTR and attended to political information online) were calculated. Those who scored below the median on both variables were coded "low-low". Those who scored above the median on both variables were coded "high-high". Those who scored below the median on non-mainstream and above the median on the mainstream variable were coded "low-non-mainstream-high mainstream", and vice versa for those who scored high on non-mainstream and low on mainstream. Obviously, these four categories do not constitute "ordered categories", hence the methods I use for their analysis are methods for unordered categorical data (chi-square tests of cross-tabulated data for the bivariate level and multinomial models for multivariate analysis).

Another way to conceptualize news media diets is to compare the amount of reported exposure to mainstream and non-mainstream sources *within individuals*. Rather than comparing individuals to some central tendency, this approach looks at what portion of one's diet is mainstream or non-mainstream, regardless of the way one scores on mainstream and non-mainstream in comparison to others. This alternative conceptualization of news diets is the other dependent variable used in this chapter. A simple way to operationalize this conceptualization is to subtract the variable tapping average non-mainstream news exposure from the variable tapping average mainstream news exposure. If both measures are on the same scale, as they are in both data sets used in this chapter, then this difference will reflect the amount of mainstream exposure

relative to the amount of non-mainstream exposure, or in other words, the exposure gap in favor of the mainstream. This variable, which I later call the exposure differential, reflects the composition of individual news diets.

The hypotheses I test do not differ substantially from those tested in Chapters 12 and 13. They are the same hypotheses, applied this time for overall news consumption. Their logic derives from the same theories mentioned in the previous chapters. That is, I begin by testing the "selective exposure"-type hypothesis, then add the motivational factor of need for cognition to the analysis. Unfortunately, the analysis was restricted to two data sets only: the EDialogue and the APPC data. The reason is that the other data did not have full measurement of non-mainstream exposure (NES and the PTR data do not have continuous measures of exposure to online political communication).

Overall reported exposure.

Before testing hypotheses about media skepticism and the amount of non-mainstream news in the audience's diets, it is worth considering the overall amount of news media consumption by skeptics and non-skeptics. After all, an essential parameter of diets is their overall nutritional value. Do skeptics and non-skeptics differ significantly in the time spent with the news media? The problem is, we have no direct measures that would be suitable to accurately answer this question. We could compare their overall "close-following of politics", a variable that significantly and positively correlated with exposure to all news sources, both mainstream and non-mainstream. In both data sets, skeptics did not differ significantly from non-skeptics in their response to the close-following four-item question, after controlling for demographic and political variables

(age, sex, years of education, race, ideology, extremity, and knowledge). On the bivariate level, there was no significant difference on the close-following items in the EDialogue data. On the other hand, in the APPC data, skeptics and non-skeptics did differ significantly, though not tremendously, with skeptics reporting slightly more close-following than non-skeptics ($M_{non\text{-}skeptics}$=2.97, $M_{skeptics}$ =3.07, t=2.62, p<.01, N=2464)[108].

Another possibility would be to create an overall news exposure measure using the different exposure items. In other words, we could take the average days of exposure to the various sources in the previous week, or rather, the maximum days of exposure to any of the sources. In the EDialogue data, skeptics did not significantly differ from non-skeptics on either of these overall exposure indicators, with or without controls (though skeptics scored lower, on average, on both of these measures). In the APPC data, skeptics scored significantly lower on both indicators of overall exposure, both with and without political and demographic controls (in the bivariate case, for the average days of exposure variable $M_{non\text{-}skeptics}$=2.96, $M_{skeptics}$ =2.79, t=3.08, p<.01, N=2469; for the maximum reported days of exposure variable -- $M_{non\text{-}skeptics}$=6.18, $M_{skeptics}$ =5.78, t=3.22, p<.001, N=2469). However, the interpretation of these results has to take into account the fact that the list of sources includes four mainstream sources and only two non-mainstream sources (Internet and PTR). The implication, given that skeptics tend to report more non-mainstream and non-skeptics more mainstream exposure, is that skeptics may rank lower on exposure just because the questions provide more opportunities to report mainstream

[108] Some other analysis, reported in Chapter 4, finds that skeptics and non-skeptics differ on a "political involvement" variable (rather than close-following). Although close-following of politics is a component of the political involvement variable, they do not tap the same things. Close-following probably better reflects our interest here (time spent with the media) than the involvement variable, which also contains measures of attention to politics in general.

exposure. The only way to correct for this artifact would be to create a measure that would give equal weight to the mainstream and non-mainstream sources. Such a measure could be, for example, the mean of the overall mainstream measure and the overall non-mainstream measure. When the exposure variable was calculated this way, the difference between skeptics and non-skeptics was insignificant at the bivariate level, but significant at the multivariate level. In all comparisons, skeptics scored, on average, somewhat lower than non-skeptics.

We do not have sufficient data to accurately compare the time skeptics and non-skeptics spend with the news media. When asked about close-following of politics (a consistent predictor of all forms of exposure, and arguably a surrogate measure for exposure), skeptics scored somewhat higher. When asked about days of exposure to various outlets in the previous week, non-skeptics reported more exposure (a situation that could be affected by the representation of mainstream and non-mainstream sources in the questionnaires). In any case, it is important to note that the differences between skeptics and non-skeptics on either of these measures are only minor. There are no signs in the data to suggest that we have two groups that differ radically on the amount of time they spend on news consumption. It seems much more probable that, on average, the levels of general total exposure are similar for both groups.

In sum, skeptics do not differ radically from non-skeptics in terms of time spent on news consumption. They do not totally shun or boycott the news media. In the next pages, we examine whether the overall composition of the media diets of skeptics and non-skeptics – in terms of exposure to mainstream and non-mainstream materials – differs even though the sum total media-dose appears to be the same.

Study 1: The APPC data.

The bivariate association between media skepticism and media diet is presented in Figure 14.1. According to this figure, skeptics were almost as likely as non-skeptics to attend either to high doses of both mainstream and non-mainstream or low doses of both. 33.8 percent of non-skeptics, compared 34.2 percent of skeptics, scored below median on both mainstream and non-mainstream exposure. 19.8 percent of non-skeptics, compared to 19.2 percent of skeptics, scored high on both mainstream and non-mainstream exposure. However, non-skeptics were more likely than skeptics to score above median on mainstream exposure and below median on non-mainstream exposure (34.4 compared to 27.0 percent). On the other hand, skeptics tended more than non-skeptics to belong to the high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream exposure category. The differences between skeptics and non-skeptics, presented in Figure 14.1, were statistically significant (χ^2=34.40, df=3, p<.001).

To test whether these differences hold over and above statistical controls, a multinomial model was utilized, with the media diet variable as the dependent variable. This model is presented in Table 14.1. The multinomial model is a regression-like procedure for unordered categorical data (Allison, 1999:112). In a four-category dependent variable, the multinomial model consists of three equations, each modeling for the log of the probability of belonging to one category divided by the probability of belonging to another [log (P_{i1}/P_{i4}); log (P_{i2}/P_{i4}); log (P_{i3}/P_{i4})]. The column on the right presents a chi-square test for the null hypothesis that all the coefficients for a given variable are zero (a test for the overall effect of a variable). These tests show that media

skepticism, the party-ideology index, political involvement, political knowledge, employment, age and education all significantly affect media diets.

To understand the pattern of effects, one needs to interpret the coefficients in the three equations. The reference category in this analysis is "low-low". This means that each equation is a contrast between the "low-low" category and the other categories. The interpretation of the coefficients is similar the interpretation in a binary logit model. For example, the odds that a male would be in the high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream exposure category rather than in the low-low category are about 1.24 [exp(.22)] times the odds of females, all other things being equal. Similarly, employed respondents have significantly higher odds than unemployed of being in this category rather than in the low-low category, but unemployed have significantly higher odds than employed of being in the low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream category rather than in the low-low category. The higher the political knowledge and involvement, the higher the odds of being in either the high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream, high-mainstream-low-non-mainstream or high-on-both, rather than in the low-low category. Older people have significantly higher odds of being in either the high-high or the high-mainstream-low-non-mainstream group than of being in the low-low group, compared to younger respondents. Education was significantly associated with higher odds of high exposure to both mainstream and non-mainstream media, rather than low exposure to both. Ideologically conservatives had higher odds of being in the high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream group than of being in the low-low group.

Our interest here is, of course, in the effects of media skepticism on the media diet variable. Skepticism had a significant positive effect on high exposure to non-mainstream

media accompanied by low exposure to mainstream news media, compared to low exposure to both mainstream and non-mainstream news media. Each one-unit increase on the five-category skepticism variable was associated with a 33-percent increase in the odds of exposure to high-non-mainstream with low-mainstream, rather than low exposure to both [exp(.28)=1.33]. Skepticism also had a significant effect, this time negative, on low exposure to non-mainstream media accompanied by high exposure to mainstream media, compared to low exposure to both mainstream and non-mainstream media. Each one-unit increase on the skepticism scale decreased the odds of being in the former rather than the latter group by 22 percent [exp(-.24)=.78]. The effect of skepticism in the third case, which contrasts the low-low and the high-high categories, was again negative. Each one-unit increase on the skepticism scale decreased the odds of being in the high-mainstream-high-non-mainstream {rather than the low-mainstream-low-non-mainstream group) by 19 percent [exp(-.20)=.81].

In sum, the multinomial model provides results very similar to bivariate cross-tabulation of skepticism and media diets. Skeptics have higher odds of high exposure to non-mainstream materials and lower odds of high exposure to mainstream materials. Even when controlling for various intervening factors, skeptics have higher odds of being in the high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream condition than non-skeptics, and lower odds of being in the high-mainstream-low-non-mainstream condition. To contrast the high-low group with the low-high group, we can subtract the coefficient for the former from the coefficient for the latter (Allison, 1999:114). This means that each one-unit increase on the skepticism scale corresponds to a 41 percent decrease in the odds of exposure to high-

non-mainstream-low-mainstream news media rather than to high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream news media [exp(-.24-.28)=.59].

So skeptics are more likely than non-skeptics to be exposed to a diet composed of a high dose of non-mainstream and a low dose of mainstream media. However, the criterion in this comparison is the median respondent. The majority of the respondents in Figure 14.1 fall into either the high-high or in low-low categories. However, most of them probably do not attend to an equal amount of mainstream and non-mainstream content. Someone who is in the "high-high" category might be *relatively* high on both mainstream and non-mainstream exposure. However, this person might still consume higher amounts of non-mainstream than mainstream, or higher amounts of mainstream than non-mainstream media. Alternatively, someone who is in the "low-low" category might score *relatively* low on both mainstream and non-mainstream exposure, but still attend more to the former, or perhaps to the latter. Hence, one can conceptualize "media diets" relative to individuals rather than to the median.

For this reason, an alternate media diet variable was created. The difference between the average mainstream exposure variable and the average non-mainstream exposure variable was calculated. Positive values on this variable indicate higher exposure to mainstream news, while negative values indicate higher exposure to non-mainstream news. A value of zero corresponds to exactly the same score on the mainstream and non-mainstream media exposure variables. The mean value on this difference score was 2.43, the median 2.50, and the mode 3.50, representing a left-skew (a tendency toward positive values). That is, more people reported higher exposure to mainstream media (composed of national and local TV news and daily newspapers) than to non-mainstream (composed

of the Internet and PTR). This variable can be divided into three categories, with one category representing more mainstream exposure than non-mainstream, the second representing more non-mainstream exposure than mainstream, and the third representing roughly equal exposure. (The cut-points between the categories were -.80 and +.80, meaning that people with a difference score below .80 in absolute values were considered to attend to approximately the same amount of mainstream and non-mainstream media)[109].

The cross-tabulation of the skepticism variable with this alternate conceptualization of diet is presented in Figure 14.2. On the whole, most respondents, skeptics and non-skeptics alike, tend to get more mainstream news than non-mainstream news. Only a minority in each group reports more non-mainstream than mainstream news exposure. However, skeptics are more likely to be in the "roughly equal" and the "more non-mainstream" groups than non-skeptics, while non-skeptics are more likely to be in the "more mainstream than non-mainstream" group than skeptics. These differences are statistically significant (χ^2=15.56, df=2, p<.001), and the results hold even after controlling for political and demographic variables, as the multinomial model presented in Table 14.2 shows. Note that the sign of the borderline significant coefficient in the second column on the left is positive. This demonstrates that each increase on the skepticism scale corresponds to an increase in the odds of being in the "more non-mainstream than mainstream exposure" group, rather than in the "roughly equal" group [the odds ratio is exp(.17)=1.18]. On the other hand, the coefficients in the second and

[109] .80 was selected as the cut-point given the range of the scale (+7 to –7). People who scored below .80 did not consume dramatically more of one than the other.

third columns are negative. This means that each increase on the skepticism scale corresponds with a decrease in the odds of being in the "more mainstream" rather than the "roughly equal" exposure group [the odds ratio is exp(-.20)=.81], and that each increase in the skepticism scale corresponds with a decrease in the odds of being in the "more mainstream" rather than the "more non-mainstream" group [the odds ratio in this case is exp(-.20)=.69].

Since the difference between the mainstream and non-mainstream media exposure variables is a continuum (ranging between -7 and +7, the former representing an average of seven days in the previous week of exposure to non-mainstream sources and zero days of average exposure to mainstream sources, and vice versa for the latter), OLS could be used to model for the relative consumption of mainstream and non-mainstream materials. This would not only be more readily interpretable than the categorical multinomial analysis, but also more accurate, in the sense that it involves less loss of information. In other words, one does not need to collapse those who report six more days of mainstream than non-mainstream with those who report .90 more days of mainstream than non-mainstream (as the previous analysis did). We could easily model for the overall difference between mainstream and non-mainstream materials, thus accounting for not only the direction of the difference (more mainstream, more non-mainstream, or roughly the same) but also the magnitude of difference (how much more mainstream than non-mainstream exposure). An OLS regression with this difference score as the dependent variable is reported in Table 14.3.

As the model presented in Table 14.3 shows, liberals tend to report higher exposure to mainstream relative to non-mainstream sources. The higher the score on the party-

ideology index, the higher the reported difference between mainstream and non-mainstream exposure (in favor of the mainstream). This can be easily explained by the well-documented higher exposure by conservatives to PTR (see Cappella, Jamieson & Turow, 1998). In addition, political extremism was negatively associated with the [mainstream – non-mainstream] difference score. This means that the higher the extremism, the lower the exposure difference in favor of mainstream media. In other words, extremists tend to resort more to non-mainstream news. The coefficient for the political involvement variable was positive and significant. This means that, all other things being equal, the higher the political involvement, the higher the difference in exposure in favor of the mainstream media (involved get more mainstream than non-mainstream, on average). Students had a significantly lower exposure differential than non-students. This could be related to higher Internet access among students than among non-students, potentially resulting in more exposure to online political materials for the former. The coefficient for the employment dummy variable was also negative and significant. The employed scored, on average and after controlling for all other factors, -.68 points lower on the [mainstream – non-mainstream] exposure difference score. This could be due to increased workplace computer accessibility, as well as to more time listening to the radio in general (and PTR in particular) because of work-related commutes. Education and gender were both associated with lower exposure differentials (males and educated reported lower differences between mainstream and non-mainstream exposure).

Our main focus here is on the possible effect of media skepticism on this indicator of media diets. As the OLS model presented in Table 14.3 shows, the coefficient for media

skepticism is negative and significant. That is, even when controlling for various political and demographic factors, the higher the skepticism, the lower the [mainstream – non-mainstream] exposure differential. As explained above, lower scores on the differential dependent variables represent higher exposure to non-mainstream than mainstream news. Higher scores represent higher exposure to mainstream, relative to non-mainstream news media. Each one-unit increase on the skepticism measure corresponds, according to the model in Table 14.3, to a decrease of .35 on this difference scale. That is, skeptics tend less to be exposed to more mainstream than non-mainstream, and tend more to be exposed to more non-mainstream than mainstream news. This was one of the best predictors of the dependent variable, as is evident from a comparison of the standardized coefficients (skepticism had a beta of .14, higher than almost all other variables in the model except age).

In sum, the APPC data show that the news diets of media skeptics tend to be composed of more non-mainstream and fewer mainstream sources. This finding holds both when conceptualizing "diets" relative to the median respondent, and when comparing the amount of exposure to mainstream and non-mainstream sources within individuals. Many skeptics ranked high on both mainstream and non-mainstream exposure (making it tempting to say that they get non-mainstream sources *in addition to* mainstream sources). However, they differed from non-skeptics by tending to belong to the high-non-mainstream low-mainstream group (making it tempting to say that they get non-mainstream information *instead of* mainstream information). When I ran the model in Table 14.3 in the four separate "median-based diet" groups, I got a negative coefficient

for media skepticism in each of the four models[110]. So on all levels of overall diet, the reported differential of exposure was lower for skeptics than for non-skeptics. Even in the low-low condition skeptics tended to report more non-mainstream than mainstream news exposure – or at least lower differences in favor of mainstream sources.

In sum, the APPC data show that the news diets of media skeptics contain more non-mainstream news than those of non-skeptics. Many skeptics consume a lot of mainstream in addition to non-mainstream news, although the dominance of the mainstream media in the news diets of media skeptics (measured by the difference score) drops as skepticism increases. Skepticism toward the mainstream news media does not cause people to totally substitute mainstream with non-mainstream sources. However, it does relate to an increase in the consumption of non-mainstream compared to mainstream contents.

Study 2: The Electronic Dialogue data.

The same analysis was replicated in the Electronic Dialogue data. In the previous chapters, each analysis performed on the Electronic Dialogue data was replicated a few times, using data originating in different waves, in order to test for the sensitivity of the analysis to measurement lags. This is also the case in the following analysis. However, in this chapter, for the sake of parsimony, I report only the findings for a particular lag structure. In all EDialogue models reported in this chapter the dependent variables are based on exposure indicators measured in Wave 6. The skepticism variable used throughout this chapter is based on indicators of skepticism measured in Wave 4. In other

[110] The effect of skepticism on the exposure differential was -.04 in the high-high group, -.01 in the low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream, -.08 in the high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream group, and -.16 in the low-low group.

words, the models presented in this chapter all test for the effect of skepticism in Wave 4 on media diets, measured by exposure in Wave 6. Additional models using data originating from different waves had similar patterns to the ones presented here.

As in the previous study, the first stage in the analysis was to cross-tabulate the four-category media diet variable against media skepticism. The result is presented in Figure 14.3. As the in the previous study (compare to Figure 14.1 – the patterns are strikingly similar), the differences in the rate of skeptics and non-skeptics in the high-high and low-low categories were only minor. However, as in the APPC data, non-skeptics were more likely to be in the "low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream" category than skeptics (33.0 versus 21.3 percent). On the other hand (again like the previous study), skeptics were more likely than non-skeptics to be in the "high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream" group (23.6 versus 16.1 percent). The differences between skeptics and non-skeptics, presented in Figure 14.3, were statistically significant (χ^2=11.89, df=3, p<.01).

So, in the bivariate case, skeptics tend more than non-skeptics to be on a "high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream" news diet, and non-skeptics tend more than skeptics to be on a "low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream" news diet. In order to examine whether these differences hold over and above potential intervening variables, a multinomial model was tested, with the four-category media diet variable as the dependent variable. This model is presented in Table 14.4. The first column on the right presents chi-square statistics testing the null hypothesis that all of the coefficients for each of the variables are zero. According to these tests, media skepticism, political ideology, political involvement and knowledge, age, student status and being white all significantly affect

media diets. Note how close these results are to those reported in Table 14.1 (the only differences are that in Table 14.1 education was significant and age insignificant).

The patterns of effects of all covariates are similar to those discussed in Study 1. For example, unemployed respondents had significantly higher odds than employed respondents of being in the low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream category rather than in the low-low category. As in Table 14.1, the higher the political involvement, the higher the odds of being in either the high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream, high-mainstream-low-non-mainstream or high-on-both categories, rather than the low-low category. Older people had significantly higher odds than younger respondents of being either in the high-high or in the high-mainstream-low-non-mainstream groups, rather than in the low-low group. As in the previous study, students had significantly lower odds of being in the lower non-mainstream higher-mainstream group than in the low-low group. In many other cases, the coefficients presented in Table 14.4 resemble the coefficients in Table 14.1 in sign and magnitude, though not in the significance levels. Despite the differences in significance levels, the overall patterns presented by the two models are similar.

Our focus is again on the effect of media skepticism on media diet. The equation on the second column on the left contrasts being low on both mainstream and non-mainstream exposure with being high on non-mainstream and low on mainstream news exposure. As was the case in the APPC data, the coefficient for media skepticism in this equation is positive and significant. The higher the skepticism, the higher the odds of being high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream rather than low on both (the adjusted odds ratio was exp(3.56)=35.16). Unlike in the APPC data, the coefficients for media skepticism in the other two equations were not significantly different from zero.

However, the sign of the skepticism coefficient in the equation contrasting low-low with low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream exposure was negative, as in the APPC data, indicating that the lower the skepticism, the higher the odds of being in the low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream group. Note that in contrast to the APPC data, the coefficient of skepticism in the third equation (reported in the second column on the right) is positive and not significant. In these data, skeptics are actually slightly more likely to be in the high-high than in the low-low category. We could contrast the second and third column on the left by subtracting the coefficients. According to this comparison, skepticism is negatively related to the odds of being in the low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream group rather than the high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream group (the adjusted odds ratio is exp(-.29-3.56)=.02; that is, each one-unit increase on the skepticism scale decreases the odds of being in the latter category, rather than the former, by about 98 percent).

In sum, as in the APPC data, skeptics have higher odds of having a high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream news media diet. As before, the next stage is to compare the composition of diets within persons, which we do by modeling for the difference between the mainstream and non-mainstream variables. Figure 14.4 presents the cross-tabulation of media skepticism and this variable. The coding of the diet composition variable is the same as in the previous study (a change of less than .80 in absolute value constitutes "roughly equal" consumption). As in Study 1, skeptics and non-skeptics alike tended to get more mainstream than mainstream news information (76.8 percent of non-skeptics and 63.5 percent of skeptics reported higher exposure to mainstream than non-mainstream). However, also as in Study 1, higher rates of media skeptics than non-

skeptics reported roughly the same exposure to mainstream and non-mainstream media news (24.6 of skeptics, compared to 17.6 percent of non-skeptics) or more non-mainstream than mainstream news (11.9 percent of the skeptics, compared to 5.6 percent of non-skeptics). As in Study 1, these differences were statistically significant (χ^2=11.32, df=2, p<.01). As in the previous study, in order to examine whether these differences hold over and above statistical controls, a multinomial model was used, with the three-level composition of diet as dependent variable. The model is presented in Table 14.5. Once again, skepticism significantly affected the dependent variable. A one-unit increase on the skepticism scale was associated with a decrease of about 80 percent in the odds of attending to more mainstream than non-mainstream news (vs. approximately the same amount of mainstream and non-mainstream [exp(-1.63)=.19]), and with an 87 percent decrease in the odds of attending to more mainstream than non-mainstream news.

Again, the relationship between media skepticism and this variable could be tested in OLS formulation. This is done in Table 14.6. The dependent variable in this model is the exposure differential, i.e., the difference between mainstream and non-mainstream exposure scores. Maximal gap between mainstream and non-mainstream in favor of mainstream news corresponds to a differential score of 7. Maximal gap between mainstream and non-mainstream in favor of non-mainstream news corresponds to a differential score of -7. A differential score of zero represents exactly the same amount of mainstream and non-mainstream exposure. As before, the distribution was skewed, with more respondents reporting higher mainstream than non-mainstream exposure. The average difference score was 2.26. The median was 2.33. The mode was zero.

This variable is the dependent variable in Table 14.6. The patterns evident from the model and the parallel model from the APPC study (presented in Table 14.3) are strikingly similar. As before, liberal ideology, moderateness, political involvement, unemployment and older age are significantly associated with higher difference score, indicating larger exposure gaps in favor of the mainstream media. The coefficients for the other variables were also similar in sign and magnitude to those presented in Table 14.3, though not always in the level of statistical significance.

Our main interest is, of course, in the coefficient for media skepticism. As in the APPC data, skepticism was significantly and negatively associated with the [mainstream – non-mainstream] difference score. That is, the higher the skepticism, the lower the difference between mainstream and non-mainstream exposure. Since the range of the skepticism scale in the EDialogue data varies between 0 and 1, the coefficient represents the maximal shift in the difference score as a result of skepticism. Those most skeptical would score, on average, 1.79 lower on the difference score than those least skeptical[111], all other things being equal.

In sum, the EDialogue data replicates the findings from the APPC data. In both data, skeptics had higher odds than non-skeptics of having a "high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream" media diet. In both data sets, the dominance of mainstream content in the news diets of media skeptics was lower than for non-skeptics. The next stage is to expand the analysis to include the need for cognition factor. This is done only for the EDialogue data, since the other data sets do not contain a need for cognition measure.

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[111] Again, this is comparable to the magnitude of the effect in Table 3. Since the skepticism variable in the APPC data varies between 1 and 5, one needs to multiply the coefficient in Table 3 by 5: -.35*5=-1.75.

The role of need for cognition.

In Chapter 13, I hypothesized that need for cognition would interact with media skepticism in their effect on media exposure. The rationale was that motivational factors, such as need for cognition, influence our exposure decisions, in addition to general attitudes toward the source, such as trust in the media. People with high cognitive needs might watch mainstream news despite the fact that they do not trust them. The results, presented in Chapter 13, show that people low on cognitive needs had a strong negative association between mistrust in the mainstream media and exposure to the mainstream news media. As need for cognition got higher, the negative effect of media skepticism on media exposure got weaker. In fact, for those with the highest levels of need for cognition, the effect of skepticism on mainstream news exposure was positive, indicating more exposure by skeptics than by non-skeptics at this level of need for cognition.

In this section, I test the same interaction between media skepticism and need for cognition. This time, however, the dependent variable is not exposure to one or another news source, but rather the overall media diet. Earlier, I showed that diets could be conceptualized in a relative way – by comparing respondents to the median observation in mainstream and non-mainstream exposure – or individually, by comparing the amount of mainstream and non-mainstream each individual receives.

A multinomial logit regression model testing for the interaction of media skepticism and need for cognition is presented in Table 14.7. The dependent variable in this case is the "relative diet" variable, so the categories of the variable are "low-low", "high-high", "low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream" and "high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream".

As in all interaction models presented in this dissertation, centering was used to reduce multicollinearity. The first column on the right presents chi-squares testing for the null hypothesis that all the coefficients for a given variable are zero. As these tests show, media skepticism and need for cognition (but also ideology, involvement, employment, age and student status) significantly affected the four-level diet variable. There was also a significant media skepticism by need for cognition interaction effect on the dependent variable.

However, in order to interpret this interaction we need to examine the coefficients for the interaction term in each of the equations comprising the multinomial model. The second column on the left presents the equation contrasting the low-low against the high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream groups. In this case, the need for cognition by media skepticism interaction was not significant. That is, the positive effect of media skepticism, in this case, does not depend on the level of need for cognition. As media skepticism rises, the odds of exposure to a high dose of non-mainstream accompanied by a low dose of mainstream news increase, regardless of need for cognition.

On the other hand, the coefficient for the interaction term was significantly different from zero in the other equations. The interpretation of the interaction pattern for the second equation, contrasting the low-low group with the low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream, is presented in Figure 14.5. The Y-axis in this figure represents the probability of being in the latter category rather than in the former. As the figure shows, for people with low need for cognition, the effect of media skepticism is negative. That is, the higher the skepticism, the lower the probability that they would be in the low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream category. However, this effect gets weaker as need for

cognition increases. In the highest levels of need for cognition, the effect of media skepticism is positive, rather than negative: for people with high need for cognition, the higher the skepticism, the higher the probability of having a low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream media diet than of having a low-low news diet.

A similar pattern is revealed in the third equation, which contrasts the low-low against the high-high groups. The interpretation of the significant need for cognition by media skepticism interaction demonstrated by this equation is presented in Figure 14.6. The effect of skepticism in this case is negative for those with low to moderate need for cognition. The effect of skepticism is positive (and stronger than in Figure 14.5) for those with high need for cognition.

It is also possible to test the skepticism by need for cognition interaction on the individual composition of the media diet variable. As before, this variable consists of the difference between mainstream and non-mainstream exposure variables. It represents the dominance of mainstream sources in respondents' media diets. Higher values represent high dominance of mainstream sources in respondents' diets. Lower values represent lower dominance. Negative values represent higher dominance of mainstream sources in respondents' news diets.

An OLS model with this variable as the dependent variable is presented in Table 14.8. As before, liberal ideology, political moderateness, political involvement, age and unemployment were significant predictors of higher mainstream dominance in respondents' news diets. In addition, there were significant and negative main effects of media skepticism and need for cognition, as well as a significant effect of the need for cognition by media skepticism interaction term. That is, the effect of media skepticism on

the personal diet dependent variable depended on the level of need for cognition. The pattern of interaction is presented in Figure 14.7.

As before, the effect of media skepticism on media diets was negative for those with low need for cognition. As need for cognition increased, the effect of skepticism got weaker. In the highest level of need for cognition, the effect of skepticism on exposure was positive. Note that the predicted values for those with maximal skepticism and low need for cognition are negative (representing more non-mainstream than mainstream news exposure), while the predicted values for those with maximum skepticism and high need for cognition are positive (representing more mainstream than non-mainstream exposure). That is, according to this analysis, it could be said that skeptics with low cognitive needs consume non-mainstream materials *instead of* mainstream materials, while skeptics with high cognitive needs consume non-mainstream news *in addition to* mainstream materials.

Also, note that the spread of the predicted values in the low skepticism condition is higher than the spread of predicted values in the high need for cognition condition. This means that need for cognition is much more consequential in determining exposure diets for non-skeptics than for skeptics. In other words, the [mainstream – non-mainstream] exposure differential of media skeptics varies around zero, depending on the level of need for cognition. However, skeptics with high need for cognition are not far in their predicted value from those with low need for cognition. They have roughly the same exposure to non-mainstream or mainstream news media. On the other hand, non-skeptics vary dramatically in the [mainstream – non-mainstream] exposure differential, depending on need for cognition. Non-skeptics with low need for cognition get much more

mainstream than non-mainstream news, while those with high need for cognition get roughly the same amount of mainstream and non-mainstream news.

In sum, controlling for various political and demographic controls, the amount of non-mainstream relative to mainstream news consumed by individuals is a function of an interaction effect of two factors: media skepticism and need for cognition. For those with low need for cognition, the effect is negative (and the exposure differential is lower for skeptics than for non-skeptics). For those with high need for cognition, the effect is positive but somewhat weaker.

Conclusion.

In the previous chapters we found that media skeptics are less likely to attend to various mainstream news sources (such as network TV news) and more likely to attend to non-mainstream and less traditional media sources (such as political talk radio and online news). We did not examine the possible connection between the former finding and the latter. Although watching national network news and local news and listening to talk radio are different behaviors, they are not independent behaviors. Exposure to one media source or to a set of sources may come at the expense of exposure to other channels. Rather than analyzing the influence of media skepticism on exposure to different news media channels separately, we examined in this chapter the influence of skepticism on the *overall pattern* of news media exposure.

Thus, this chapter was designed to explore whether the hypotheses regarding trust-based selective exposure and the moderating role of need for cognition apply not only when the dependent variable is exposure to a particular source, but also to overall news

diets. Diets were conceptualized in relation to the median audience member as well as for each individual audience member in relation to him- or herself. In both cases, media skepticism was a significant predictor of media diet. Skeptics had a lower likelihood of having a "low-non-mainstream-high-mainstream" news diet and a higher likelihood of having a "high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream" diet than their non-skeptical counterparts, even after employing a series of political, demographic and schedule-related controls. Though most skeptics and non-skeptics alike received "more-mainstream-than-non-mainstream" news, the exposure differential between mainstream and non-mainstream exposure was significantly lower for skeptics. That is, the dose of non-mainstream news on their diets was higher. Skeptics were also more likely than non-skeptics to have "more non-mainstream than mainstream" contents or "approximately the same amount of mainstream and non-mainstream", again, after controlling for an array of potentially intervening factors.

In sum, while in previous chapters we learned that skepticism influences exposure to particular news sources, in this chapter we found that skepticism influences the overall media diet of audiences. Though skeptics and non-skeptics do not differ radically in their sum total of news media exposure, the composition of their diets is significantly different: a higher portion of the news diet of skeptics is composed of non-mainstream news. This could mean that skeptics sometimes substitute non-mainstream for mainstream news. It does not mean, however, that they totally abandon the mainstream media in favor of PTR and the Internet. They do consume mainstream news – just less of it than non-skeptics.

The next chapter summarizes what we have learned in this section about media skepticism and news media exposure. The findings from this chapter and the previous

ones will be discussed and interpreted in light of what we know about trust in general. The limitations and importance of these studies will be outlined.

Table 14.1: Multinomial model predicting overall media diet (reference category is low-mainstream-low-non-mainstream), APPC 2000 primary season data (n=2370).

	Low-low vs. high-non-mainstream low-mainstream	Low-low vs. low-non-mainstream high-mainstream	Low-low vs. high-high	Likelihood ration chi square (df=3)
Media skepticism	.28***	-.24***	-.20**	60.24 (3)***
	(.07)	(.06)	(.07)	
Party-ideology index	-.05*	.00	-.02	8.44 (3)*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	
Political extremity	.05	-.03	-.01	4.50
	(.04)	(.03)	(.04)	
Involvement	.20*	.45***	.79***	104.23 ***
	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	
Political knowledge	.20***	.15***	.20***	31.94 ***
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	
Student	.13	-.96#	-.38	4.65
	(.06)	(.53)	(.52)	
Employment	.68***	-.25#	.14	23.10***
	(.20)	(.14)	(.17)	
Age	-.01	.03***	.01***	82.19***
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	
Education	.04	-.00	.07***	13.98**
	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)	
White	-.03	-.08	-.31	1.92
	(.24)	(.21)	(.23)	
Male	.22#	-.01	.20	5.59
	(.13)	(.11)	(.13)	
R-squared				.26
-2LL				658.33***

Note: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Table 14.2: Multinomial model predicting composition of media diet, APPC 2000 primary season data (n=2370).

	Roughly equal vs. more non-mainstream than mainstream	Roughly equal vs. more mainstream than non-mainstream	More non-mainstream than mainstream vs. more mainstream than non-mainstream	Likelihood ration chi square (df=3)
Media skepticism	.17$^{\#}$ (.09)	-.20** (.06)	-.37*** (.08)	25.76***
Party-ideology index	.01 (.03)	.04* (.02)	.03 (.02)	5.25$^{\#}$
Political extremity	-.01 (.06)	-.10*** (.03)	-.09$^{\#}$ (.05)	8.84*
Involvement	.20$^{\#}$ (.11)	.28*** (.07)	.08 (.10)	15.23***
Political knowledge	.18** (.06)	.02 (.04)	-.16** (.05)	8.53*
Student	-.19 (.69)	-.51 (.45)	-.32 (.61)	1.34
Employment	.06 (.30)	-.50** (.18)	-.56* (.25)	11.39**
Age	-.01 (.00)	.02*** (.00)	.03*** (.00)	45.28***
Education	.01 (.03)	-.04$^{\#}$ (.02)	-.05$^{\#}$ (.03)	5.20$^{\#}$
White	.14 (.34)	.09 (.21)	-.05 (.30)	.25
Male	.16 (.19)	-.26$^{\#}$ (.12)	-.43* (.16)	9.69**
R-squared				.12
-2LL				225.58*** (df=22)

Note: $^{\#}$ p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Table 14.3: OLS model predicting composition of media diet, APPC 2000 primary season data (n=2370).

B β (s.e.)	Roughly equal vs. more non-mainstream than mainstream
Media skepticism	-.35*** -.14 (.05)
Party-ideology index	.03* .04 (.01)
Political extremity	-.07* -.05 (.02)
Involvement	.24*** .10 (.05)
Political knowledge	-.01 -.01 (.03)
Student	-.69 -.04 (.37)
Employment	-.68*** -.13 (.12)
Age	.03*** .23 (.00)
Education	-.04* -.05 (.01)
White	.07 .01 (.17)
Male	-.30** -.06 (.09)
R-squared	.16
N	2,370

Note: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.
The dependent variable is the difference between the mainstream and the non-mainstream exposure score (-7 = high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream; +7 = high-mainstream-low-non-mainstream; 0 = exactly the same score on the non-mainstream and mainstream exposure variable).

Table 14.4: Multinomial model predicting overall media diet (reference category is low-mainstream-low-non-mainstream), EDialogue (n=459).

	Low-low vs. high-non-mainstream low-mainstream	Low-low vs. low-non-mainstream high-mainstream	Low-low vs. high-high	Likelihood ration chi square (df=3)
Media skepticism	3.56***	-.29	1.14	12.16**
	(.89)	(.80)	(.82)	
Party-ideology index	-.05	.04	-.06	6.75#
	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)	
Political extremity	.13	-.07	.10	5.56
	(.10)	(.09)	(.09)	
Involvement	.34#	.56***	1.07***	35.92***
	(.20)	(.17)	(19)	
Political knowledge	2.46*	-.07	.69	6.15#
	(1.09)	(.91)	(1.00)	
Employment	-.52	-.71*	-.23	6.02
	(.37)	(.31)	(.34)	
Schedule flexibility	.01	-.01	.07	2.70
	(.07)	(.06)	(.06)	
Student (=1)	-.13	-2.12#	-2.01#	7.53#
	(.91)	(1.16)	(1.21)	
Age	.00	.06***	.03***	43.56***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	
Education	.14	.02	.13	3.66
	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	
White	-.31	-.17	-1.15*	7.36#
	(.51)	(.47)	(.45)	
Male	.24	-.35	.07	3.73
	(.33)	(.28)	(.30)	
R-squared				.41
-2LL				222.49*** (df=36)

Note: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Table 14.5: Multinomial model predicting composition of media diet, EDialogue (n=424).

	Roughly equal vs. more non-mainstream *than mainstream*	Roughly equal vs. more mainstream than *non-mainstream*	More non-mainstream than mainstream vs. *more mainstream* than non-mainstream	Likelihood ration chi square (df=2)
Media skepticism	.35	-1.63*	-1.98#	7.87*
	(1.11)	(.70)	(1.01)	
Party-ideology index	-.08	.05	.13*	5.57#
	(.07)	(.05)	(.06)	
Political extremity	.01	-.03	-.04	.16
	(.14)	(.08)	(.13)	
Involvement	.38	.18	-.20	2.63
	(.26)	(.14)	(.24)	
Political knowledge	3.19*	-.19	-3.38*	5.81#
	(1.56)	(.83)	(1.47)	
Employment	-.23	-.26	-.03	.81
	(.57)	(.29)	(.46)	
Schedule flexibility	.03	-.02	-.05	.45
	(.09)	(.05)	(.08)	
Student (=1)	.50	-.20	-.70	.48
	(1.08)	(.66)	(1.01)	
Age	-.03	.03***	.06***	16.89***
	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)	
Education	.04	-.11	-.16	3.54
	(.12)	(.07)	(.11)	
White	1.43	.74*	-.69	6.15*
	(.82)	(.35)	(.80)	
Male	.19	-.18	-.37	1.16
	(.45)	(.26)	(.41)	
R-squared				.21
-2LL				83.03***

Note: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Table 14.6: OLS model predicting composition of media diet, EDialogue 2000 data.

	Roughly equal vs. more non-mainstream than mainstream
Media skepticism	-1.79**
	-.14
	(.57)
Party-ideology index	.09*
	.11
	(.03)
Political extremity	-.14*
	.07
	(.06)
Involvement	.24#
	.10
	(.12)
Political knowledge	-1.19#
	-.09
	(.70)
Employment	-.58*
	-.11
	(.23)
Schedule flexibility	-.03
	-.03
	(.04)
Student (=1)	-.55
	-.04
	(.60)
Age	.05***
	.31
	(.00)
Education	-.07
	-.05
	(.06)
White	.17
	.02
	(.32)
Male	-.31
	-.06
	(.21)
R-squared	.23
N	455

Note: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.
The dependent variable is the difference between the mainstream and the non-mainstream exposure score (coded -7 = high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream; +7 = high-mainstream-low-non-mainstream; 0 = exactly the same score on the non-mainstream and mainstream exposure variable).

Table 14.7: The need for cognition interaction: Multinomial model predicting overall media diet (reference category is low-mainstream-low-non-mainstream), EDialogue (n=424).

	Low-low vs. high-non-mainstream low-mainstream	Low-low vs. low-non-mainstream high-mainstream	Low-low vs. high-high	Likelihood ration chi square (df=3)
Media skepticism	2.40*	-.57	.67	9.34*
	(1.00)	(.85)	(.89)	
Party-ideology index	-.05	.03	-.07	6.20#
	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	
Political extremity	.11	-.10	.09	5.30
	(.11)	(.09)	(.10)	
Involvement	.22	.56**	1.13***	35.80***
	(.22)	(.19)	(.21)	
Political knowledge	2.68*	.10	.78	5.42
	(1.23)	(1.02)	(1.11)	
Employment	-.67#	-.87*	-.33	7.82*
	(.40)	(.33)	(.36)	
Schedule flexibility	-.02	-.04	.06	3.36
	(.07)	(.06)	(.06)	
Student (=1)	-1.30	-2.25#	-2.15#	6.91#
	(.95)	(1.21)	(1.24)	
Age	.00	.06***	-.04**	37.78***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	
Education	.13	-.05	.13	2.78
	(.10)	(.09)	(.09)	
White	-.43	-.27	-1.29**	8.28
	(.53)	(.50)	(.47)	
Male	.26	-.42	-.01	4.09
	(.35)	(.30)	(.32)	
Need for cognition	.45	-.30	-.01	6.81#
	(.28)	(.23)	(.24)	
Skepticism * Need for cognition	2.03	3.40**	3.30**	9.45*
	(1.45)	(1.26)	(1.27)	
R-squared				.46
-2LL				236.78*** (df=42)

Note: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.
Centering was used to reduce multicollinearity. Coefficients for the centered terms are presented.

Table 14.8: OLS model predicting composition of media diet, EDialogue 2000 data.

	Roughly equal vs. more non-mainstream than mainstream
Media skepticism	-1.96***
	(.59)
Party-ideology index	.08*
	(.03)
Political extremity	-.14*
	(.07)
Involvement	.26*
	(.13)
Political knowledge	-1.18
	(.76)
Employment	-.62*
	(.24)
Schedule flexibility	-.05
	(.04)
Student (=1)	-.64
	(.63)
Age	.05***
	(.00)
Education	-.05
	(.06)
White	.10
	(.33)
Male	-.32
	(.22)
Need for cognition	-.36*
	(.16)
Skepticism * Need for cognition	1.75*
	(.80)
R-squared	.23
N	455

Note: # p<.10; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.
The dependent variable is the difference between the mainstream and the non-mainstream exposure score (coded –7 = high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream; +7 = high-mainstream-low-non-mainstream; 0 = exactly the same score on the non-mainstream and mainstream exposure variable).
Centering was used to reduce multicollinearity. Coefficients for the centered terms are presented.

Figure 14.1: Exposure to mainstream and non mainstream media, by media skepticism, APPC 2000 Data (percents)

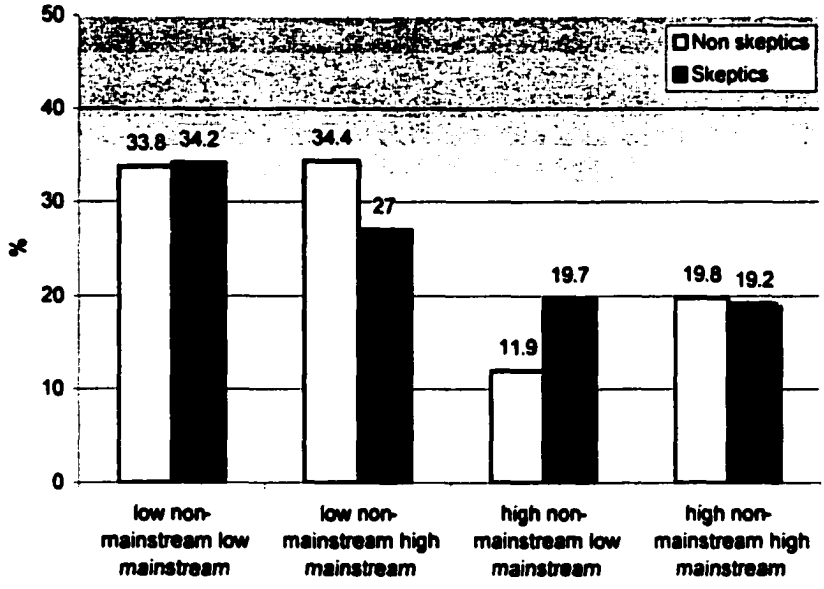


Figure 14.2: Composition of media diets, by media skepticism, APPC 2000 Data (percents, N=2471)

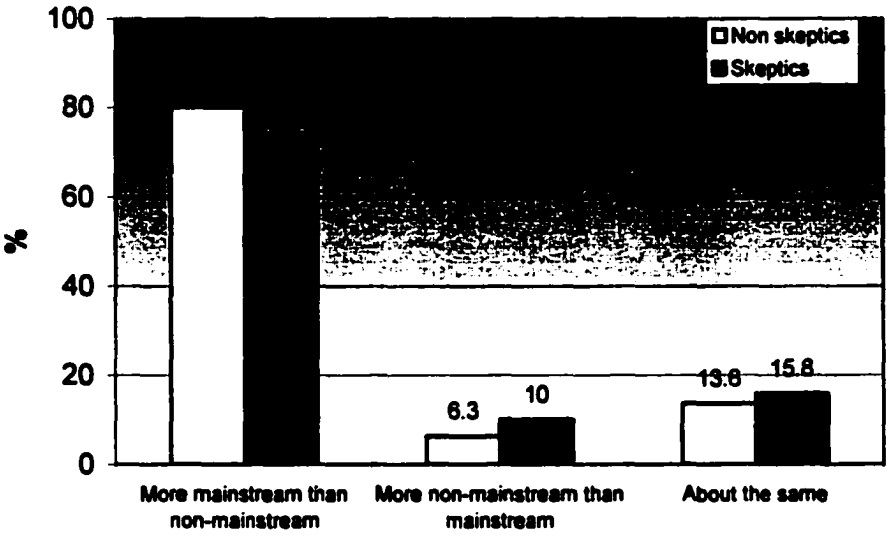


Figure 14.3: Exposure to the mainstream and non mainstream media, by media skepticism; EDialogue 2000 Data (percents)

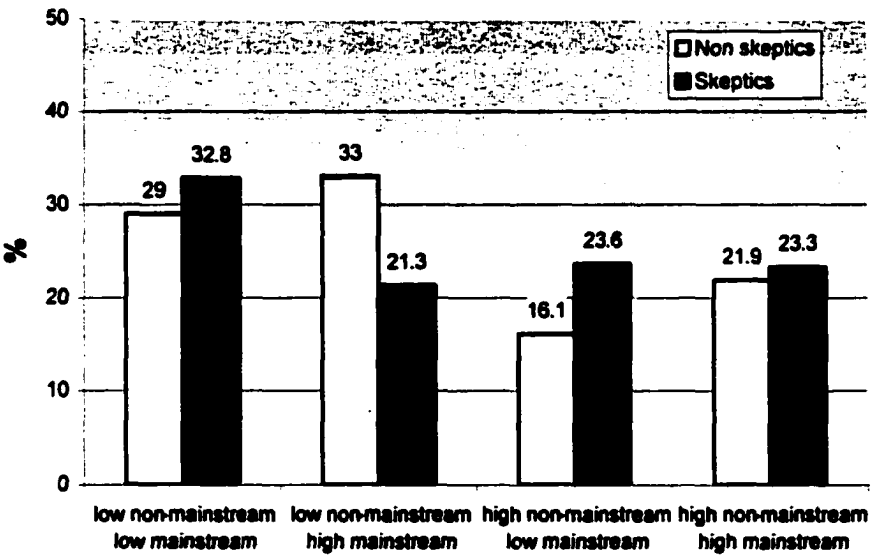


Figure 14.4: Composition of media diets, by media skepticism, EDialogue 2000 Data (percents, N=477)

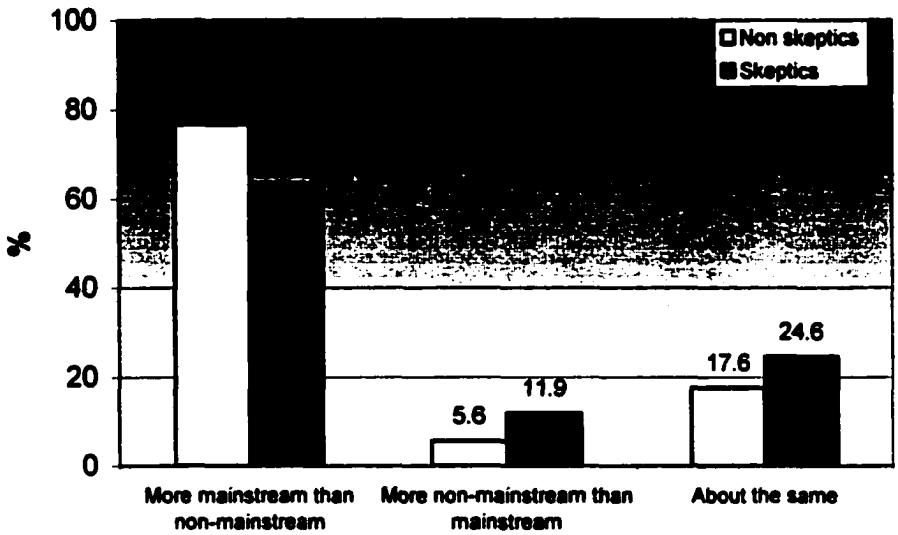


Figure 14.5: Skepticism by need for cognition interaction (probability of low non-mainstream, high mainstream)

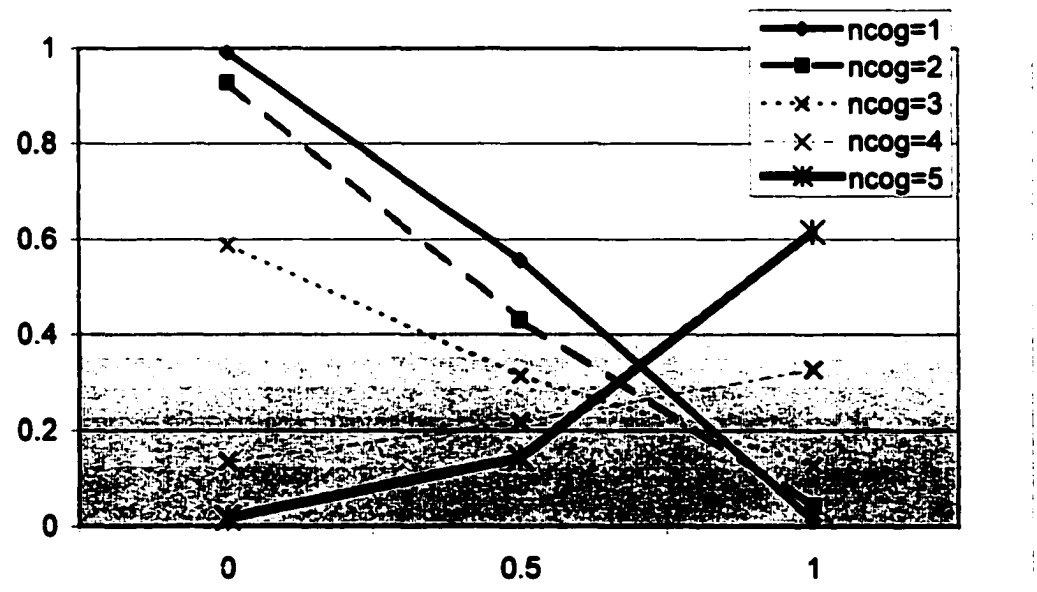


Figure 14.6: Skepticism by need for cognition interaction
(probability of high-high, rather than low-low)

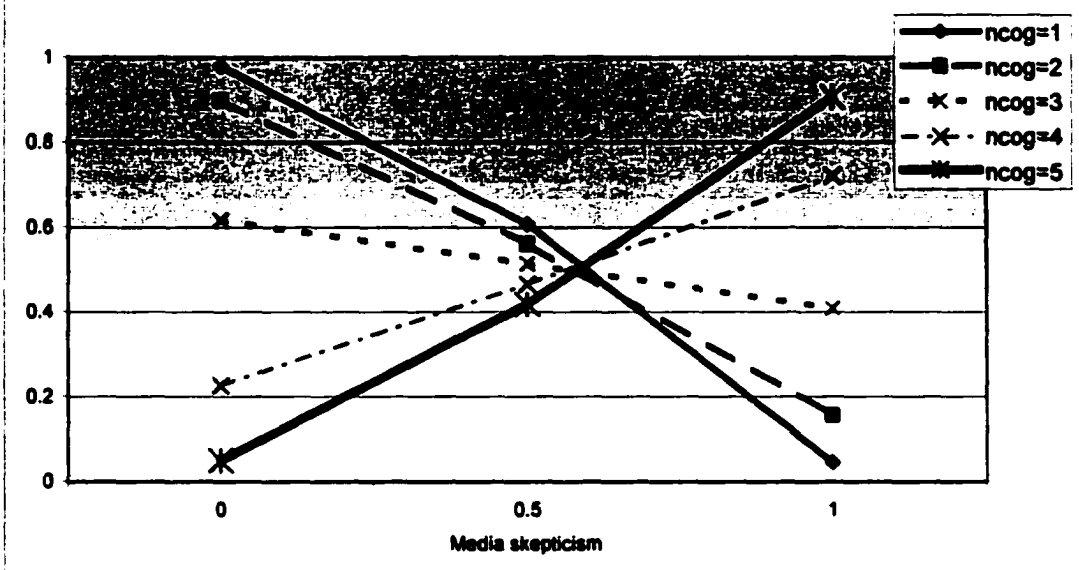
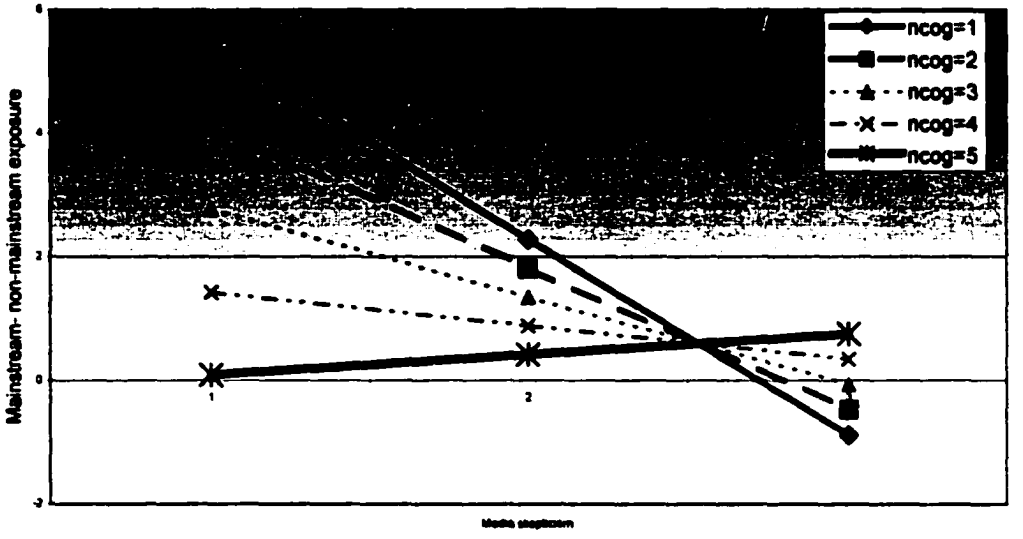


Figure 14.7: Skepticism by need for cognition interaction
(interpretation of Table 8; DV= exposure differential)



Chapter 15: The news environment of media skeptics

This chapter concludes and discusses the findings regarding media skepticism and news media exposure. It follows from the definition of trust, and from what we know about trust in general, that one of the possible consequences of mistrust in the media is reduced exposure to the mainstream news media by media skeptics. Simply put, mistrust leads to lower cooperation and lower engagement, which in the context of audience-media relations could be translated to lower exposure. In the language of communication research, this implies trust-based selective exposure. Following this logic, this section tested hypotheses relating to the association between news media skepticism and news media exposure.

In Chapter 12, I tested a set of simple skepticism-based selective exposure hypotheses. Though the different data yielded somewhat different findings, the overall pattern (evident from the meta-analysis synthesizing the different findings) suggested a relatively small negative correlation between media skepticism and exposure to the mainstream media. There was a negative association between skepticism and national and local TV news exposure and general mainstream news exposure. There was also a positive association between skepticism and PTR listening and non-mainstream news exposure. In a cross-lagged structural model, the lagged negative effect of skepticism on mainstream exposure was stronger than the lagged effect of exposure on skepticism. None of the available statistical methods allow us to deduce causality from non-

experimental data. However, the cross-lagged analysis shows that a causal argument is consistent with the data. That is, the models could be interpreted as suggesting that the direction of the association is from trust-in-the-media to mainstream media exposure, and not the other way around. On the other hand, since the lagged effect of non-mainstream exposure on skepticism was stronger than that of skepticism on exposure, it appears that in the case of exposure to non-mainstream sources, the direction of the association is from exposure to skepticism.

In the next stage I tested for the intervening role of need for cognition. Trust-based selectivity, I argued, does not operate in a vacuum. Other factors influencing exposure interact with skepticism in their influence on exposure. People may expose themselves to mainstream news media despite their skepticism, just because they enjoy thinking, deliberating and arguing. On the other hand, when they rank low on need for cognition, they rely more heavily on their skepticism in their exposure decisions: when they mistrust the news media, they watch much less mainstream news. Chapter 13 tested this interaction on the Electronic Dialogue data. The findings supported the hypothesized interaction, even when controls for demographic, schedule-related and political factors were employed. However, there was no evidence for a similar interaction when the dependent variables were indicators of exposure to non-mainstream media.

In Chapter 14 I tested the hypotheses presented in the previous chapters, this time with media diets, rather than exposure to a given source, as the dependent variable. The analysis demonstrated that skepticism significantly influenced the news diets of respondents. Skeptics were *more* likely to have a "high-non-mainstream-low-mainstream" news diet than non-skeptics. They were also *less* likely to have a "low-non-

mainstream-high-mainstream" news diet. Their diets contained higher doses of non-mainstream media than the diets of non-skeptics. The insertion of the need for cognition factor showed that the need for cognition by skepticism interaction held when modeling for news diets (expressed either in relation to the median or when comparing the amount of mainstream and non-mainstream within individuals) and not only when modeling for exposure to specific sources.

We now have a more complete picture of the association between skepticism and exposure. We know that skeptics *do not* differ radically from non-skeptics in the amount of their overall news exposure. Though some analyses found *more* news exposure by skeptics and other analyses *less* (depending on how they are asked about close-following of politics, or about the number of days of exposure to various sources in the past week), the differences in absolute terms were not huge. But the *composition* of the news diets, as opposed to the *total amount of exposure*, varied rather noticeably according to skepticism and need for cognition levels. Non-skeptics, especially those with low cognitive needs, relied more heavily on mainstream media sources, while skeptics had higher doses of non-mainstream news in their diets, both relative to non-skeptics and in absolute terms.

Still, many media skeptics reported high exposure to mainstream materials. In fact, most skeptics consume more mainstream than non-mainstream materials, although (as we have seen) the non-mainstream component in their diet was considerably higher than that of their non-skeptical counterparts. Thus, many people are exposed to at least some mainstream media despite the fact they do not trust them. Does this mean that the perceived violation of trust matters less in the case of audience-media relations than in other cases? Why do people who are skeptical about mainstream news still attend to it

despite their mistrust? This is indeed, as Kohut and Toth (1998) have argued, the central conundrum about the relations of the American news media with their audience today.

One answer might be that news gratifies diverse needs regardless of trust. This was evident when we modeled for skepticism by need for cognition interaction. Doing so showed us that skepticism is less important in the presence of cognitive needs. However, when need for cognition was low, it played a more central role in media exposure. As I noted in Chapter 13, need for cognition is just an exemplar of one need. Other needs – integrative and escapist needs, for example – might come into play. Some people watch the news just in order to be able to discuss it with other people. If this is the case, skepticism should interact with integrative needs similarly to the way it interacted with cognitive needs. In other words, when other motivations are present, the effect of mistrust in the media should decrease.

Another way to state this argument is to say that trust in the media does not matter in media exposure when the motivations to attend to the media are irrelevant to the gains and risks that stand at the core of the trust relations. In the interpersonal context, mistrust does not necessarily lead to a boycott. We may hang out with someone we do not trust just because he or she is fun to be with. We would not put our lives in their hands, but we would still interact with them socially. If we have other gains to obtain that are relatively unrelated to the core of trust, we would still be friends with these mistrusted people. In audience-media relations, the core of trust is accuracy, credibility and objectivity. People may perceive that the media fall short of fulfilling these commitments, but still find the exposure to be an exciting pastime or an important means of connecting to society. In other words, we may know that the news is untrustworthy, but we still watch, because it

is fun, because it is interesting, because it helps us stay in touch with other people and with society at large.

Another explanation for the fact that people attend to mainstream news despite mistrusting it has to do with the relative absence of functional alternatives. Skeptics' higher exposure to the political Internet and to PTR might show that they are seeking alternatives to the mainstream. However, in current media environments a real alternative to mainstream news is hard to find. According to this explanation, which does not preclude but rather supplements the previous one, the confines of the menu limit the media diets of skeptical audiences.

To begin with, non-mainstream news media are not as widely accessible as mainstream news. There is no "alternative" channel that offers a national evening television program. The Internet, as widely accessible as it is, is less likely to be reached by some groups than by others. This is evident by the fact that students and employed persons report higher exposure to online news, considered here as non-mainstream. Most probably they attend more to the Web because they have more opportunities to do so, since they likely have a connected PC in their offices or on campus. Although almost everybody has access to Political Talk Radio, listening to talk radio is also partly determined by demographics and lifestyles. Working people are more likely to hear PTR, because they can listen to the radio while commuting to and from work, unlike those who are unemployed. In sum, lifestyle and student status have an important influence on media exposure. For some, these factors might be more influential than skepticism toward the news media. In other words, some skeptics might attend to the mainstream

news despite their mistrust, just because of habits, lifestyles and the increased accessibility and popularity of channels that disseminate mainstream news.

Second, it is not obvious that a real functional alternative to the mainstream media exists. As Bagdikian (1985) argued, the diversification of media channels provides audiences with more of the same instead of a real alternative. Despite the tendency by some talk radio shows and some Internet Web sites to argue with the mainstream media about news facts and about their interpretation, it clear that these sources, dubbed here as "non-mainstream", have their own biases and problems, ideological leanings and imperfections. So although they sometimes present themselves as "alternative" channels, it could be argued that they rarely offer a real, trusted alternative that could compensate skeptics for what the mainstream media deprive them of. Television, a favorite American pastime, still does not offer a real functional substitute to mainstream news. Most attempts to create such a substitute (and CNN was definitely created with the ambition of offering an alternative to network news) have ended up providing more of the same – or redefining the mainstream altogether. The apparatus needed for the production of TV news requires resources that media watchdog organizations (that are very active online) probably cannot recruit. In sum, the televised options that skeptics have are still limited. If they want to watch news on TV, they probably have to attend to the mainstream.

A major limitation of the study has to do with the measurement of exposure. Measures of exposure are always at least somewhat suspect of bias. This is because people can hardly ever report the *exact* amount of time they spend with the media. In the words of Price and Zaller, "accurately assessing levels of exposure to news media in surveys can be very difficult. In trying to estimate their typical rates of media use,

respondents may have trouble recalling the details of what may often be a set of low salience behaviors" (p. 135). According to Price and Zaller, much "guesswork" takes place when people are asked to report their media consumption. This problem is supplemented by a tendency to over-report news exposure. Price and Zaller found that although data collected by the Arbitron Ratings company indicated that about 6 percent of adults listened to NPR at least once a week, 35 percent of NES respondents said they did so (p. 136).

Another problem in measuring news exposure is the use of survey questions referring to broad types of news, which do not distinguish between specific contents within each type. An elaborated measurement scheme, not present in any of the four data sets, could have been much more telling for the current purpose of study. For example, we could have benefited from knowing what exactly people read when they read the daily paper[112]. Some people get the paper every day but only go over the ads and sports, hardly ever reading the news section thoroughly. The current analysis treats these people as if they were "exposed" to news. The measurement of exposure to political information on the Internet is similarly problematic. What do respondents do online? What sites do they visit? Do they go to online outlets of mainstream news sources? Do they get online information by visiting politicians' Web sites? Do they read comments by other users, which may contain anti-media facts and interpretations? Do they visit the Web sites of media watchdog organizations, discussed in Chapter 4? We have learned a lot about the

[112] The question used in most data sets was worded, "Please tell me how many days *in the past week* you did each of the following: read a daily newspaper..."

association between skepticism and exposure, but a more detailed measurement could have led to even more insights.

One assumption discussed earlier received some empirical validation from the analyses presented in this section. In chapter 12 I labeled national network TV news, cable TV news, local TV news and daily newspapers as "mainstream" news media, and Political Talk Radio and Political information over the Internet as "non-mainstream political information". This assumption was based on the presumption that since non-mainstream information is more prevalent online and in PTR, those seeking anti-mainstream and counter-mainstream information would be more likely to find it there. Admittedly, this might seem like a far-fetched assumption. However, the fact is that measures of exposure to PTR and online political information behaved differently than measures of exposure to national and local network news and daily newspapers, in terms of their association with media skepticism. This was evident almost throughout the analysis, replicated in a few data sets as well as in more complicated settings, like the need for cognition interaction and media diet models.

At the very least, the fact that skeptical audiences attend more than their non-skeptical counterparts to the Internet and PTR attests to different kinds of information-seeking by audiences who mistrust the mainstream media. In other words, the findings suggest, at the very least, that media skeptics need diversity. This makes sense in light of the definition of trust. One possible strategy to reduce the uncertainty that stands at the core of trust is simply to gather more information from different sources. The fact that the so-called "non-mainstream" information was a more essential ingredient of skeptics' political information diets despite the fact that the overall level of exposure of skeptics

and non-skeptics was not radically different, points to a possible substitution. Instead of getting all their news from broadcast and cable television and from newspapers, they turn to talk radio and the Internet in addition to mainstream news.

In Chapter 12 I mentioned selective exposure as the cognitive mechanism behind the different exposure pattern of skeptics. In light of the fact that most skeptics do get most of their information from mainstream sources despite their mistrust in mainstream news, it is possible to suggest that the need for cognitive consistency does not lead people to avoid mistrusted news channels completely. Rather, it appears that skeptics select to diversify their information sources. A court might be satisfied with one or two witnesses when they seem credible. But when the testimonies are untrustworthy, conflicting or otherwise suspicious, the court might need more witnesses in order to determine the truth. Likewise, when audiences are skeptical about their news sources, when they perceive their news information to lack credibility, they try to corroborate the information they receive with different news sources.

The different pattern of association between skepticism and exposure to those sources I called "mainstream" and those I called "non-mainstream" suggests that there may be substantial differences in the content or format of each. Hence, the findings could and probably should be related to the fact that much of the content available on PTR and through the Internet is self-promoted as an alternative to mainstream news; that much of it argues and counter-argues with mainstream news, exposes mistakes and contradictions, offers alternative information, and allows more access to non-authoritative "regular" citizens. In other words, one could argue that there is something is substantive that distinguishes PTR and many online news outlets from other outlets, hence the separation

between mainstream and non-mainstream. However, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to pursue this issue further. The hard labor of conceptualizing PTR and online news as "non-mainstream" and refining its place vis-à-vis the mainstream media is a matter for other research endeavors.

Our interest here is in mistrust in the media and its consequences. We have established that mistrust is associated with lower engagement with mainstream news. But we also wondered why this association was weaker than one might expect, given research on trust in other areas.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 16: Audience trust in the media matters.

Synopsis of the dissertation.

In recent decades audience trust in the media has declined. The rate of GSS respondents reporting "hardly any" confidence in the press increased by more than 25 percentage points between 1973 and 1996. While most scholars have thus far concentrated on the *sources* of media skepticism, the main focus of this dissertation was its *consequences*. The main question explored here has been: Does audience trust in the media matter? The answer to this question appears to be generally positive.

One consequence of skepticism toward the media, examined in Section 1, is a reduced susceptibility to mainstream media influence. As we have seen, the higher the skepticism of an audience member, the more likely she or he is to remain unaffected by media agenda setting; the higher the trust in the media, the more likely she or he is to accept the media's agenda. The higher the skepticism, the higher the rejection of the mediated opinion climate; the higher the trust in the media, the higher the acceptance of the mediated opinion climate. There was no evidence, however, for a moderating role of media skepticism in cultivation and priming effects.

The difference in the moderating role of skepticism between spiral-of-silence and agenda setting and priming and cultivation can be explained by the more deliberate nature of the former effects compared to the more automatic and unconscious nature of the latter. When people are asked about gender attitudes or about social mistrust, they are

unaware of the media answer. However, when asked about the likely winner of an election, they *are* aware of media projections. When they are asked to evaluate the president, they might not know that the media set the standards for their answer. However, when asked for the most important problem facing the nation, they know what problems are stressed by the media, and they may or may not accept them. People cannot resist the effects of the media if these effects are unconscious. Thus, there is no evidence that skepticism matters when it comes to unconscious media effects. Still, Section 1 showed that one consequence of media skepticism is the moderation of some media effects.

Another consequence of media skepticism, examined in Section 2, is its effect on audience news exposure patterns. The news diets of media skeptics have a lower component of mainstream news and a higher component of non-mainstream sources, such as PTR and Internet news. This is especially true in the absence of need for cognition. People with low cognitive needs rely more heavily on media skepticism when selecting the sources they attend to. In contrast, those who enjoy listening to diverse points of view, who like to deliberate on social problems, and who get satisfaction from thinking per se, rely less heavily on media skepticism when they compose their media diets.

The causal mechanism in the association between media skepticism and news exposure was explored using cross-lagged analysis. It was found that the lagged effect of skepticism on mainstream media exposure was greater than the lagged effect of mainstream news exposure on media skepticism. Though no currently available statistical method can fully substantiate causality using non-experimental data, the argument that

the direction of the association is from media skepticism to mainstream news exposure, and not vice versa, was consistent with the data. On the other hand, the data suggested that in the case of non-mainstream exposure, the causal mechanism is reversed: exposure to non-mainstream sources may be priming mistrust in the mainstream news media.

In sum, this dissertation presents evidence demonstrating that audience trust in the media matters, at least when it comes to media exposure decisions and to some media effects. For scholars studying trust this could serve as another example that trust is consequential. Trust in spouses is associated with greater marital satisfaction (Holmes & Rempel, 1989), while mistrust is related to psychological distress. Trust in government is associated with civic engagement and taxpaying (Scholz & Lubell, 1998), while mistrust is associated with riot participation (Gamson, 1968). Trust in doctors and nurses has consequences for the effectiveness of medical treatments (Davies & Rundall, 2000). Trust in peers is related to teamwork (Porter & Lilly, 1996). Trust in persuasive sources is related to effective persuasion (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). The analogous consequence of trust in the context of media-audience relations is thus the association between audience mistrust in the media, lower mainstream news exposure, and reduced susceptibility to mainstream media influence.

Audiences emerge stronger from this study. They are active and critical. They are not influenced by sources they do not trust. They do not accept the media's agenda and opinion climate presentation at face value. When they mistrust mainstream news, they seek alternative sources. Reception theorists use concepts like "liberation" and "resistance" when discussing critical audience interpretations of media texts. Such concepts stress the critical ability of those watching television. But in addition to the

critical capabilities of news audiences stressed by reception scholars, this study highlights, at least in some respects, the "rationality" of the audience.

Media skepticism and the rational audience.

Rational choice scholars in political science define rationality as behavior motivated by the pursuit of pleasure and the desire to avoid pain (e.g., Calvert, 1985; Sniderman et al., 1991). Lupia and McCubbins (1998) assumed that in order to behave rationally, people need information about the surrounding world. Assuming that to the extent they scan the environment to collect such information, people want this information to represent the world correctly, and given the definition of trust, the lower exposure of skeptics to the mainstream media is quite rational. As Lupia and McCubbins state, "If a person can attend to only one stimulus, then he or she will attend to the stimulus for which benefits are extremely high relative to the expected costs" (1998, p. 29). Trust is an expectation by the trustor that the interaction with the trustee will lead to gains rather than losses (Coleman, 1990). Hence, if we can attend to only one stimulus or set of stimuli, we attend to sources we trust. Trust is an expectation that the word of the trustee can be relied upon (Rotter, 1967), that is, that it represents the world correctly. If we are indeed motivated to collect correct information, we attend to sources we trust.

Audience rationality can also be used to explain some of the findings about skepticism and media effects. Rationality implies a desire for correct information. Thus, it is only rational that those skeptical of the media would be less willing to accept the media's presentation of the world – their agenda as well as their societal opinion portrayal. Audiences use skepticism as a tool when processing media messages: when

they are skeptical, they are more likely to reject some messages. However, skepticism does not lead to automatic rejection of media portrayals, nor to automatic acceptance of a picture of the world that is the *direct opposite* of that portrayed by the media (examples for such oppositional readings were suggested by Fiske, 1987). Skeptical audiences are simply more cautious, and therefore less likely to accept *certain aspects* of the media's presentation of the world.

On the face of it, the fact that skepticism does not seem to moderate priming and cultivation effects appears to negate the idea of audience rationality described above. How can rational audiences accept the media's presentations of social realities when they mistrust the news media? How can they use the standards set by the media in political decision-making when they are skeptical about the media's fairness? Mistrust is an expectation that the word of the trustee cannot be relied upon. How can rational audiences motivated by a desire for correct information be cultivated or "primed" by the news media despite their mistrust in the media?

One plausible explanation is the unconscious nature of cultivation and priming, in contrast to agenda setting and opinion climate perception. Cultivation and priming are described in the literature as a non-deliberate response to media exposure. Since skeptics are unaware of the influences of the media in the cases of priming and cultivation, they cannot resist them. Since people are affected automatically by priming and cultivation, their mistrust in the media does not come into play in these effects. Thus, the lack of evidence for a moderating role of skepticism in cultivation and priming does not negate audience rationality. Rationality requires deliberate processing. It is bypassed when media effects are unconscious. Audiences are thus rational, but not infallible.

Though skeptics receive, on average, less mainstream news than non-skeptics, they expose themselves to a good deal of mainstream news. This may also seem irrational at first sight. How can rational audiences attend to news they do not trust? One explanation I offered is related to other gratifications obtained by news watching. Rationality is the pursuit of pleasure. Some get pleasure from thinking about different aspects of political issues and listening to diverse points of view. Thus, the effect of skepticism on exposure is lower for people with high need for cognition. Need for cognition is only one example of the needs that interact with skepticism. Skeptics probably attend to mainstream news despite their skepticism, in order to gratify other needs, such as social needs or need for entertainment. This is totally rational, since rationality is the pursuit of pleasure.

Another explanation for the fact that skeptics attend to some mainstream news despite their mistrust might be the relative absence of functional alternatives. Mainstream news is everywhere, while alternatives are, at present, less pervasive. Non-mainstream news is found mostly on the radio and the Internet. Skeptics indeed tend more than non-skeptics to attend to those alternative channels. However, if they want to watch TV news, they have few alternatives. Thus, skeptics may still watch mainstream TV news simply because they have no real choice. From this perspective, their exposure to mainstream news can still be viewed as rational.

The view that audiences use their trust or mistrust in the media rationally, as a tool, when making news media exposure decisions or while processing news messages, does not imply that mistrust in the media is in itself totally rational. Some of the writers about trust state that trust is often a guess (Boyle & Bonacich, 1970) or an intuition, and as such, not based totally on reason.

As has been repeatedly noted, the focus of this dissertation is on the *consequences* of trust and mistrust in the media, not its sources. However, it follows from the social psychological literature about trust that mistrust is either the result of perceived violation of trust in the past, or of some information about the trustee that casts doubt on the trust. We cannot tell what the sources of audience perceptions of past violation of trust are. Some have argued that this information comes from politicians, while others have argued that it comes from meta-communicative sources in the media. It is also possible that media skepticism spreads mimetically in society (as suggested by Cappella, 2001), for example, by interpersonal communication.

There are many examples available to the general public of information about past violations of trust by media institutions. We know about certain rare cases in which journalists overused their imagination and fabricated stories (e.g. the Janet Cook scandal). We know of other instances in which journalists got the facts wrong by mistake[113]. Other journalistic blunders we know of are the results of manipulations of journalists by sources. Journalists have been charged with taking words out of context – or even distorting whole stories – on a daily basis (see quotes in Chapter 4). The public may use these instances as exemplars and develop mistrust in the institutions of the media.

We have seen that trust (including media trust) is often no better than a guess, due to the uncertainty component in the definition of trust. On the other hand, however, audiences have plenty of information about media practices that casts doubt on trust.

[113] For example, a CNN-Time 1998 broadcast "Valley of Death" arguing that a US elite unit used nerve gas in the early 1970s against American defectors in Laos. An investigation of this story revealed that although the broadcast was prepared after exhaustive research and reflected the deeply held beliefs of the CNN journalists who prepared it, their claims could not be supported (Abrams, 1998).

Why some audience members use this information and develop mistrust while others do not remains unexplained by this dissertation.

Implications for liberal democracy.

Some of the consequences of media skepticism examined in this dissertation may be desirable in a liberal democracy. We want our fellow citizens to be informed by a variety of sources. We do not want them to be automatically affected by the news media. Could it be that as adherents of liberal democracy, we need to encourage skepticism toward the news media?

Political Scientists Joseph Nye says that "In the long term, the quality of life in a democracy is hindered by too much trust – and by too little trust. If people believe everything they are told, that isn't healthy. But if they believe nothing, that isn't healthy either." (Cited by Lamberst, 1998). We certainly do not want our fellow citizens to be media cynics. We do not want audiences to reject all the information they encounter in the media. The media do play an important role in democracy, because they provide us with a plethora of facts and interpretations that connect us with other people and make possible the creation of democratic society. However, we do want our fellow citizens to be cautious when reading media texts. We do want audiences to be critical.

In recent years, media scholars have invested efforts in developing media literacy programs designed to improve "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms" (Firestone, 1993; Cited in Hobbs & Frost, 2001:1) Current approaches to media literacy include ideological analysis "designed to help people become more sensitive to the relationship between ideology and culture"

(Silverblatt et al., 1999:3); autobiographical analysis "which investigates media content as a way to promote personal discovery and growth" (p. 66); mythic analysis which helps in "identifying the mythic function of media programming and providing perspective on media content as a retelling of traditional myths" (p. 143); and analysis of production elements that increases audience "awareness of stylistic elements such as editing, composition, point of view, angle, connotation" (p. 196), and so forth.

One implication of this study is that media literacy interventions should probably include news literacy programs. Such programs should enhance healthy skepticism toward news. They should teach the practices of news production, the norms of journalism, and the obstacles facing journalists implementing these norms. When tackling the problem of trust, they should teach caution rather than blatant mistrust, suspicion rather than cynicism. News literacy students should learn how to compare reports from different news media sources, and news reports with information available from non-news sources. Like the media skeptics studied in Section 2, news-literates should be able to seek diverse news information. Arguably, such diversity can increase the quality of audience information.

We found that skeptics were less likely to be affected by news in the more deliberate process of agenda setting and opinion climate perceptions. On the other hand, we found that media skepticism probably does not moderate priming and cultivation because people cannot resist unconscious influences. If we desire citizen deliberation rather than automatic audience responses to media content, we should enhance audiences' ability to resist messages. News literacy programs should thus cover the potential influences of news (Potter, 2001). Audiences should learn that they are cultivated by repetitive and

sometimes distorted messages, highlighting violence and altering audience perceptions of the world. They should also become aware of the fact that their political considerations and priorities are sometimes shaped by news. We do not recommend these measures because we want to eliminate news effects altogether. On the contrary, we want audiences to respond to what is happening in the world, as conveyed to them by the media. But we want this process to be deliberate, not unconscious. Increasing audience awareness of media effects may assist in facilitating citizen deliberation about media facts – a deliberation that lies at the core of the democratic process.

Implications for media scholars.

One contribution of this study to media scholars is the validation of the measures of media skepticism. Convergent validity was manifested by the high correlation between skepticism survey items and open-ended comments about the media in an electronic discussion. Discriminant validity was manifested by the relatively low correlation between skepticism and potentially confounding constructs. Though skepticism is correlated with political ideology, the two are far from being the same. Many liberals are skeptical about the media and many conservatives are non-skeptics. Also, media skepticism is not merely a tendency not to trust. The correlation between the media skepticism measure and interpersonal mistrust was at the -.08 range. Neither is skepticism an artifact of political extremity. The correlation between political extremity and media skepticism was low (in the .13 range). Thus, the media skepticism measures capture what they are supposed to, namely, audience feelings of alienation and mistrust toward the mainstream media.

In addition to validating measures of media skepticism, this dissertation also contributes to our understanding of the concept by examining its stability. Individual skepticism scores measured in August correlated strongly with skepticism scores measured in May. Changes in media skepticism between these two time points were only marginal. Aggregate changes in media skepticism over short time spans are minimal. Changes over decades are only gradual. Thus, media skepticism does not change erratically or capriciously with each encounter of every audience member with media stories. Audience evaluations of the media are not whims.

Now that we have at hand a valid, reliable and stable measure of media skepticism that interacts with media effects and is associated with media exposure, we should use it. I believe the main implication of this study is that communication scholars should pay more attention to audience trust and mistrust in the news media when building media theories. In addition to trying to explain media skepticism, we should also try to understand how this skepticism affects the interactions between news and audiences. The role of media skepticism in other communication theories should thus be examined by future research.

Implications for journalists.

The implication of this study for journalists and editors is simple. Some journalists have dismissed survey findings about diminishing audience trust as representing nothing more than responses people give to pollsters, with no actual consequences (Layton, 1998). Others have pointed to the various methodological problems that could impair such surveys. Should it really matter for journalists if a growing number of citizens doesn't

trust large segments of the press? Ben Bradlee, former editor of *The Washington Post,* is doubtful. "We journalists are not there to be loved. And I don't know that other professions are getting more respect. Not Congress. Not politicians. Not businessmen" (Cited by Lambert, 1998). As Bruce Sanford (1999) argues, journalists resist survey findings about dwindling audience trust by saying they are not in the business of being liked or popular:

> Throughout the communications industry, editors and reporters saw a badge of honor in the statistics. This was the tough-minded "do I look like I want a date?" school that permeates journalism. No one expressed it better than Angus McEachran, who as editor of *The Pittsburgh Press* had driven the...newspaper to a winning streak of Pulitzer Prizes. "If I wanted to be loved," he would say, "I would have been a ski instructor." (p. 17)

In sum, journalists tend to dismiss the evidence about shrinking audience trust as statistical artifacts, or to claim that it does not matter for journalism as a profession. They often reply to sentiments of *mistrust* with the assertion that they are not there to be *liked.* But trust and liking are not the same. Some journalists claim that survey findings about audience mistrust do not matter. But the findings of this dissertation show, to the contrary, that mistrust in the press is not merely a statistic or an artifact of survey methodology. It has practical consequences. Audience skepticism results, at least sometimes, in the mass media's decreased influence on public perceptions and in audiences' decreased exposure to mainstream media. I do not know how journalists should respond, if at all, to the fact that mistrustful audiences are less influenced by them. But at the very least, they should note that the documented audience mistrust probably

represents a real phenomenon with real implications on the societal effect of media institutions.

Appendix 1: Data sets.

Five data sets are used in this dissertation: the National Election Study (NES) 1996, the Electronic Dialogue 2000 data, the political talk radio study data (1996), the Annenberg Public Policy Center election 2000 primary season data, and (in some cases) NORC's General Social Survey data (1973-96). All of the data described in the following pages consist of nationally representative large samples of adult Americans. I have two face-to-face surveys, two telephone surveys and one Internet survey. Three of the data sets use random digit dialing sampling, while the other two use multiple stage area probability sampling designs. Each of the data sets uses a slightly different measure of attitudes toward the media. The data also differ in terms of measurement of the various outcome variables.

In sum, although all five data sets use large samples of adult Americans, they diverge on many methodological qualities. Yet another (sometime even more essential) difference between these separate data is the context in which they were gathered. Though almost all data were gathered in an election year, there were substantial differences between the 2000 and 1996 campaigns, and between the primary season and general election season within these two election years. The outcome variables include news exposure, perception of the climate of opinion, and public agenda. These factors are all influenced by the different campaign dynamics at the time of data collection.

The rationale for the use of multiple data sets is simple. If the same results are replicated under these different conceptualizations, designs and contexts, it will serve as

strong evidence for, or against, the hypotheses. This is because such consistent evidence contributes to our ability to generalize from specific observations to more universal conventions that lie at the basis of social theory. If, on the other hand, the findings are inconsistent across data sets, then more hypothesizing will be necessary to identify the reasons for the inconsistency.

The General Social Survey.

The GSS is an almost annual "omnibus" personal interview survey of U.S. households conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). The first survey took place in 1972, and since then more than 35,000 respondents have answered over 2500 different questions. The project is funded mainly by the National Science Foundation, although other agencies and organizations[114] provide funding necessary for data collection. The design stresses replication, the literal repetition of items and item sequences. "The manifest aim of replication is to facilitate research on social change (and stability). A fortunate consequence of replication has been the accumulation of cases in subgroups" (GSS, 2000). Across the years GSS has used a variety of sampling designs (the changes are detailed by General Social Survey, 2000). Almost all GSS interviews are administered face to face. Response rates reported for the annual surveys vary between 73 percent and 82 percent (see Smith, 1994). Fortunately, GSS replicated a trust-in-institutions battery of survey questions, which includes items measuring respondents' trust in television and in the press. A cumulative file, containing all respondents who

[114] In 1998, for example, GSS received funds from the Lilly Endowment, the Fetzer Institute, Academy Sinica, the Lilly Corporation, the National Institutes of Mental Health, the Office of Naval Research, the American Association of Retired Persons, and the Luce Foundation,

answered the exposure, confidence-in-television and confidence-in-the-press questions, was created. The total N for the file was 35,285.

The National Election Studies – 1996.

NES conducts national surveys of the American electorate in presidential and midterm election years. Since only the 1996 study included a measure of the main concept of this dissertation (trust in the media), the data analysis is limited to NES 1996 data only. The study population for the 1996 pre/post NES includes all US citizens of voting age on or before Election Day 1996. Eligible citizens must have resided in housing units in one of the 48 coterminous states. The sampling design was a "multiple-stage area probability sample design", similar to the one used by GSS (see National Pre-post Election Study, 2000). The field period for the pre-election study was September 3 to November 4, 1996, and for the post- election study, November 6 through December 31, 1996. Interviews were completed with 1714 pre-election respondents; 1534 of the respondents re-contacted after the election were re-interviewed. The overall response rate was 71 percent for the pre-election study; the re-interview rate was 90 percent for the post-election survey. NES reports that response rates varied significantly by geographic region and PSU type. It was also found that the sample overrepresents educated respondents and voters. But these biases in response and non-response are reduced by weighting.

The political talk radio study.

The PTR data consist of a five-wave panel study designed to investigate the effects of political talk radio listening on political attitudes during the 1996 election year. A full description of the sample and design can be found elsewhere (Cappella, Turow & Jamieson, 1997; Yanovitzky & Cappella, 1999). The first wave was conducted between February 21 and March 5, 1996. Of the 5159 numbers dialed by the random-digit-dial system, 2086 calls resulted in contacts, of which 1666 respondents completed the interview. The minimum response rate at Wave 1, calculated using AAPOR guidelines, was 33 percent. The sampling design and administration of the surveys was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates. The study was funded by grants to Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph Cappella by the Carnegie Foundation and the Ford Foundation. Chi-square tests of statistical significance were employed to examine differences in the character of the sample across waves due to respondents being added to or dropping out of the panel. No statistically significant differences across waves were found on demographic attributes (age, gender, education, income and race), thus removing concerns about the comparability of the sample across waves. Since talk radio listeners were oversampled, weighting was used throughout the analysis. In the cultivation analysis (Chapter 8), the Wave 1 cases are supplemented by the oversampled Wave 4 cases, who were asked exactly the same questions in Wave 4.

The APPC-2000 rolling-cross-section data.

The Annenberg Public Policy Center Year 2000 election study is one of the largest and most extensive election data collecting efforts in the history of social studies. The data are gathered using the rolling-cross-section (RCS) method, which offers tight controls for time. The RCS is a cross-sectional survey in which the day of interview is approximately random (in fact, what is randomized is the date of release to the sample, i.e., the date of the first attempt to contact a respondent). This enables highly accurate close following of campaign trends in addition to the more conventional cross-sectional analysis. Approximately 60-300 participants were interviewed on each day of the election year. The data consists of a national sample and a few state samples during primary season and major campaign events. All participants are adults, contacted through a random-digit-dial system. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

The Electronic Dialogue data.

The ED project is a unique Web-based research endeavor that involves a series of Internet surveys and electronic political discussions designed to investigate, among other things, the effects of participation in homogeneous and heterogeneous electronic deliberative forums on various opinions and attitudes. It consisted of 60 experimental groups, each having series of eight online discussions in the course of the 2000 election year. Each event consisted of a 50-minute-long electronic group conversation and short pre- and post-discussion Internet surveys. All participants also completed rather long and extensive baseline Internet surveys, which included measures of various political attitudes and exposure to various forms of communication. All of the surveys were also

administered to a control group. Members of the control group only completed the surveys (baseline and pre/post-event short surveys) and did not participate in any other activity. In fact, they did not even know that electronic discussions were held and that other survey respondents participated in such electronic forums. Another group of participants was a "set-aside" group that completed the baseline survey only. This group was used for recruiting new members to the discussion groups, to replace some of the attrition. Participants in the ED project were part of a random sample of the American population whose households were offered WebTV units in return for weekly completion of Internet surveys. The recruitment and maintenance of this panel were executed by a Web-based consumer research and opinion polling company operating from Menlo Park, CA. Knowledge Networks invited an RDD sample of all US households with telephones to join their panel. Over 50 percent of the households accepted their offer (InterSurvey, 2000). A sub-sample of their panel was invited to join the Electronic Dialogue project. 50.7 percent of the respondents who received the recruitment survey agreed to participate in the project.

Appendix 2: Measures.

This appendix describes the measures used as covariates in the analysis in the various chapters. Note that the coding of some variables in some of the chapters is different from that described below, especially when they are the main dependent variables in the analysis. This is particularly true regarding the use of media exposure scales in Section 3. The media exposure items described below are used as controls in various models. The actual exposure items used as dependent variables in Section 3 are described in this section.

The Electronic Dialogue data.

Political party-ideology index. Participants were asked about their party identification and its strength. They were also asked about their overall ideological leanings, on a continuum from strong liberal to strong conservative. The two components, which were highly correlated, were combined to form an 11-point scale with "strong liberals-strong Democrats" coded as "+5", "strong conservatives-strong Republicans" coded as "-5", and "moderates-independents" coded as "0" (M=-.26; SD=3.18).

Political extremity. Political extremity was simply the absolute value of the party-ideology index. Moderates were coded "0" and extremists, both liberal and conservative,

were coded "5", with varying values in between. This variable had an average of 2.74, with a standard deviation of 1.64.

Political knowledge. Various dimensions of political knowledge were combined to form a single scale measure. Items included ten general political and civics knowledge questions (e.g. who has the final responsibility to decide if a law is constitutional or not), seven questions about the personal backgrounds of the presidential candidates (e.g. which one of the Democratic candidates was a professional basketball player, which one of the GOP candidates was a former POW), and an additional seven questions about issue positions of candidates in the Democratic and Republican presidential primaries (e.g. which of the Democratic candidates supported universal health care, which of the Republican candidates supported vouchers). All 24 items were scored "1" for correct answers and "0" for incorrect. The items were averaged to create a scale (Cronbach alpha=.82; M=.62; SD=.19).

News media exposure. Participants were asked how many days in the previous week they watched national network news, local TV news, and cable news on TV; read a daily newspaper; or listened to talk radio. A scale ranging from 0-7 was created by averaging the five items (Cronbach alpha=.64; M=3.19; SD=1.58).

Political discussion. Respondents reported the number of days in a typical week they discussed politics with two family members or close friends and two other acquaintances. The average of these four items was used as a scale for measuring political conversation (Cronbach alpha=.65; M=1.99; SD=1.12).

Political involvement. Three items – attention to campaign news on TV, attention to newspaper stories about the campaign, and "close following" of the campaign – were

averaged to form a scale measure of involvement (Range: 1-4; Cronbach alpha=.76; M=2.70; SD=1.10).

Schedule flexibility. The number of timeslots selected by respondents when their availability for discussions was canvassed serves as a measure of schedule flexibility. Busy participants who were available for fewer timeslots had lower values, while flexible participants, who said they could make it to relatively many timeslots, had higher values. Since no one was available at all 16 times, the flexibility scale ranged from 0 to 12 (M=2.15; SD=1.92).

Interpersonal trust. Three forced-choice items from the General Social Survey tapped trust in other people (e.g., "Generally speaking, most people can be trusted" versus "You can't be too careful in dealing with people"). Trustful selections were coded "1" and mistrusful selections were coded "0." The scale was the average of the three items (Cronbach alpha=.74; M=.54; SD=.39).

Neighborhood participation. Respondents were asked whether they participated in a variety of neighborhood activities in the past 12 months. The activities included adult education classes, exercise at a workout club, self-help groups, reading/religious groups, organized recreation leagues, church-related activities, neighborhood associations, or youth development programs. A scale was created by scoring each membership as "1" and then averaging (Cronbach alpha=.53; M=.21; SD=.21).

The APPC election 2000 data.

Political party-ideology index. The party-ideology index was created in the same manner as for the Electronic Dialogue data. Participants were asked about their party

identification and its strength. They were also asked about their overall ideological leanings, on a continuum from strong liberal to strong conservative. The two components, which were highly correlated, were combined to form an 11-point scale with "strong liberals-strong Democrats" coded as "+5", "strong conservatives-strong Republicans" coded as "-5", and "moderates-independents" coded as "0". The variable had an average of -.25 and a standard deviation of 3.00.

Political extremity. Political extremity was again operationalized as the absolute value of the party-ideology index. Moderates were coded "0" and extremists, both liberal and conservative, were coded "5", with varying values in between. This variable had an average of 2.53, with a standard deviation of 1.62.

Political knowledge. Political knowledge was operationally defined using six items: correctly recognizing which one of the Democratic candidates supported universal health care (correct answer: both Bradley and Gore), which one was the son of a former senator, which one was a former basketball player, which one of the GOP candidates supported a ban on soft money, which one was currently a state governor, and which one was currently a senator. The rationale for using these questions and not others among all the knowledge items in the survey was that this combination produced the highest reliability (α=0.84). For each respondent, the correct answers were coded "1" and the incorrect "0". The items were then summed up. The average value was 2.59, with a standard deviation of 2.03.

Political discussion. Respondents were asked the number of days in a typical week they discussed politics with two family members or close friends and online or at work.

The political discussion scale was the average of these two items. The variable had a Cronbach alpha of .60 (M=1.52; SD=1.72).

News exposure. This scale is the average of four media exposure items, each measuring the number of days in the past week in which respondents reported watching national network, cable and local TV news, and reading a newspaper. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .60.

Political interest. The question wording for the interest item was: "Some people seem to follow what is going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there is an election or not. Others are not that interested. Would you say you follow what is going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then or hardly at all?" The answers were coded "1" (least interest) through "4" (most interest) (M=3.01; SD=.97).

The PTR 1996 data.

Political party-ideology index. As in the previous two data sets, participants were asked about their party identification and its strength. They were also asked about their overall ideological leanings, on a continuum from strong liberal to strong conservative. The two components were combined to form an 11-point scale with "strong liberals-strong Democrats" coded as "+5", "strong conservatives-strong Republicans" coded as "-5", and "moderates-independents" coded as "0". The variable had an average of -.48 and a standard deviation of 3.18.

Political extremity. Political extremity was again operationalized as the absolute value of the party-ideology index. Moderates were coded "0" and extremists, both liberal

and conservative, were coded "5", with varying values in between. This variable had an average of 2.51, with a standard deviation of 1.64.

Civic knowledge. This scale was composed of two items, one asking how much of the House and Senate vote were needed to override a presidential veto, the other measuring knowledge of which party had the majority in the House of Representatives. Reliability for this measure was .75. The two items were coded "0" for incorrect and "1" for correct and then summed (M=1.38; SD=.74).

Issue knowledge. The issue knowledge scale was composed of four items measuring knowledge of political issues: What part US troops made up of NATO forces in Bosnia, flat tax, the death penalty, and mothers on welfare. The items were coded "0" for incorrect and "1" for correct and then summed (M=1.25; SD=.96).

Political interest. As in the APPC 2000 data, the question wording for the interest item was: "Some people seem to follow what is going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there is an election or not. Others are not that interested. Would you say you follow what is going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then or hardly at all?" The answers were coded "1" (least interest) through "4" (most interest) (M=3.37; SD=.82).

The 1996 NES data.

Media skepticism. The media skepticism measure in the NES 1996 data is an item in which respondents were asked how much of the time they thought they could trust the media to report the news fairly. Response categories varied between "none of the time"

(coded "5") to "just about always" (coded "1"). The mean for this item was 2.69, with a standard deviation of .75.

Political ideology index. Respondents were asked to place themselves on a conservative-liberal scale, and on a party identification scale. The answers to these questions were combined into one variable varying from "+5" ("extremely liberal-strong Democrat") to "-5" ("extreme conservative-strong Republican"). The variable had a mean of .00 and a standard deviation of 2.93.

Political extremity. Political extremity was operationally defined as the absolute value of the party-ideology index. Moderates were coded "0" and extremists, both liberal and conservative, were coded "5". This variable had an average of 2.49, with a standard deviation of 1.54.

Political interest. Respondents were asked about their interest in the campaign, the amount of attention they gave to the campaign in general, and also to its coverage in newspapers, national television and local television. All items were coded so that "5" represented most interest and attention and "0" represented least attention. The scale – the average of the five items – had a reliability of.76, a mean of 2.56 and a standard deviation of 1.12.

Political knowledge. Respondents were asked to identify what job or political office was held by Al Gore, William Rehnquist, Boris Yeltsin and Newt Gingrich. Answering correctly was coded "1" while all other answers were coded "0". The scale was the sum of the four items (M=2.19, SD=2.21).

Political discussion. Political discussion was measured by the number of days respondents discussed politics with friends or family in the past week. The mean for this measure was 1.98, and the standard deviation was 2.21.

News exposure. Respondents were asked about the number of days in the past week they watched national or local news on TV or read a daily newspaper. The answers to these three items were averaged to create a scale (Cronbach's alpha=.55, M=3.67; SD=1.99.).

Descriptive statistics for demographic variables.

In all studies, respondents reported their age, level of education (coded in years throughout the dissertation), race (coded "1" for whites throughout), sex (coded "1" for males throughout), employment, and student status (the latter two variables are coded 1=full-time or part-time; 0=other). Descriptives for these variables are presented in the following table:

	ED	APPC	PTR	NES
Age	42.19	45.49	45.84	47.53
Mean (SD)	(15.17)	(17.00)	(16.90)	(17.41)
Education	13.30	14.39	13.91	13.32
Mean (SD)	(1.33)	(17.80)	(2.45)	(2.66)
Percent male	50.00	46.70	50.40	44.80
Percent white	79.80	89.70	84.20	84.80
Percent student	3.90	1.80	NA	NA
Percent employed	63.82	72.40	NA	NA

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