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A DOWNWARD SPIRAL: YOUNG PEOPLE,
THE MEDIA, AND POLITICAL
DISENGAGEMENT

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Hamilton College
1984

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree
Hank Greenspun Department of Communication Studies
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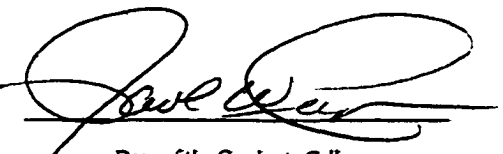
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ABSTRACT

A Downward Spiral: Young People, the Media, and Political Disengagement

by

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This study examines whether political disengagement is related to the amount and/or type of television that young people watch. The study was conducted through survey research at University of Nevada, Las Vegas, with over one hundred undergraduate participants. It demonstrates that there is no relationship between the *amount* of television which students watch and their political engagement. However, it also demonstrates that there *is* a relationship between the *types* of television programs which students watch and their attitudes toward politics and politicians. Frequent viewers of local news feel less trusting toward the government in Washington, whereas frequent viewers of late-night talk shows feel greater trust toward politics and politicians. Further, there is a relationship between the types of programs which students watch and their level of political *involvement*. Frequent viewers of local news, network news, and political talk shows are more involved with politics than less frequent viewers.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, young people between the ages of 18 to 24 have the lowest voting participation rate of any age group in the voting-age population (Hall & Jones, 1998). Have young adults simply become more alienated from the political process than their elders? Is this an understandable reaction to growing up in an era of major political scandals, including Watergate, the Iran-Contra affair, and Whitewater? This chapter will examine several theories as to why young adults seem disengaged from the electoral process, including the effects of the mass media. The following chapters will describe a survey research project through which young people's political attitudes will be measured. In this survey project, an adaptation of Gerbner's cultivation theory will be used to look at relationships between indicators of political disengagement and mass media use, specifically television viewing. This study suggests that political attitudes and activity are tied to media use, which creates a downward spiral of interest in politics for the younger generation. Thus, as young people rely more on television for political cues, they become more and more disenchanted with politicians, campaigns, and government in general.

Describing cultivation theory, Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli (1982) write that “the assumptions, beliefs, and values of heavy viewers differ systematically from those of light viewers in the same demographic groups” (p. 104). This study will explore the possibility that college-aged heavy television viewers feel more negatively toward government than their counterparts who are light viewers. When studying perceptions of violence, Gerbner (1972) found that heavy viewers believe that much more violence exists in the world than do light viewers. According to Jeffres (1997), Gerbner “concluded that television viewing cultivated this distorted view of a ‘mean and scary world’” (p. 87). Instead of violence, this study focuses on perceptions of government, politics, and politicians, and hypothesizes that heavy viewers who are young adults cultivate the view of a negative and untrustworthy government—the Government Is Bad (and Boring) hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, if heavy viewers believe that government is bad, they will also be less inclined to pay attention to elections, feel as though they can make a difference (internal efficacy), or become politically involved. The hypothesis is based on the ideas that 1) news coverage of politicians and campaigns encourage a negative view of politics, 2) entertainment shows, such as late night talk shows, tend to treat politicians derisively, and 3) young viewers find little political information on television that is directed specifically toward them, either in content or style.

Some of the hypotheses in this study will also be based on Putnam’s (1994, 1995) theory on the erosion of social capital. According to this theory, people spend more time watching television and less time involved in social and community interaction. This, he argues, has caused a decline in civic and political engagement.

My interest in this topic stems from teaching an introductory speech course to students in this age group in 1999. Practically everyone in the class expressed a dislike of politics. While the author's "thirty-something" peers followed President Clinton's "intern-gate" troubles with avid interest, these students did not pay attention even to this salacious scandal. Although some communication scholars might consider this a sensible response to the overheated reporting of the Lewinsky story, students seem equally uninterested in local issues, such as the conduct code at University of Las Vegas, water conservation in the desert, and the governor's plan to give college scholarships to high school students who graduate with a B average or higher. The author's concerns grew when a colleague, a philosophy teacher, told about a class in which students insisted the word "politician" was always a pejorative term or dysphemism.

It seems that these students may represent a national trend. Strama (1998) writes, "Seven out of ten young people between the ages of 18 and 24 did not vote in the 1996 presidential elections. A 1997 UCLA survey of college freshmen nationwide finds their interest in politics at a thirty-year low" (p. 71). This generation will soon lead the United States. Should there be concern at their lack of civic participation and their seeming disinterest in politics overall? If young people think that the very idea of being a politician is suspect, what will that mean for the future of American democracy?

In order to answer these questions, this chapter will review several quantitative studies and qualitative papers that focus on youth and political disengagement. Some of these studies deal specifically with members of "Generation X." This generational label became popular because of Douglas Coupland's novel of the same name, written in 1991, and usually applies to those born between 1961 and 1981. Other researchers compare the

political attitudes of Generation X to the generation that came directly before them—the Baby Boomers. Writers generally use the term Baby Boomers to describe those people born in the 15 to 20 years after World War II. Still other research looks at the characteristics of today's youngest possible voters, the Millennials, born from 1982 through 2005.

First, the chapter will cover whether or not young adults have always exhibited less interest in politics than older adults. Next, it will show how the American public on the whole feels more disengaged from politics, and will note theories as to why the cynicism exists. Then, the paper will focus on characteristics of Generation X and Millennials, including several scholars' theories as to why these young people exhibit even less interest in politics than the rest of Americans. In the next section, the chapter will review studies on how marketing forces and the media target political messages to young Americans, and how young Americans respond to these messages. In the final section, the chapter will focus on media effects, and how media effects and political attitudes will be analyzed in the next four chapters.

Political Participation of Young Adults Over Time

Have young Americans always been much more disengaged from politics than their elders? If we answer “yes,” then we should not feel any particular alarm now. Indeed, while older adults may worry about why college-age students do not vote, college-age students were only given the opportunity in recent decades. It wasn't until 1972 that the federal law lowered the voting age people from 21 to 18—the age at which American men could be drafted (Bennett & Craig, 1997).

In the introduction to After the Boom: The Politics of Generation X, Bennett and Craig (1997) describe some of the challenges for those who study generations. For example, when looking at political participation of youth over time, researchers must consider “*aging or life cycle*” effects (Bennett & Craig, 1997). Life cycle effects account for the fact that people face similar struggles at similar points in life. For example, young people might always tend to show less interest in politics because at that point in their lives, they spend their time establishing a career and finding a mate. Bennett and Craig (1997) go on to explain why researchers need to consider life cycle effects when looking at generational demographic data:

Although . . . long-term research focus is rare . . . those who study political generations must nonetheless consider the possibility that whatever age-based differences they observe in their (usually) cross-sectional data are due to life-cycle factors rather than generational change. If, for example, we look at a public opinion survey in 1996 and learn that young adults are less likely to identify with a political party than are older citizens, should we assume that this is because the former constitute a less partisan generation, that is, they have been shaped by events in such a way that they will probably remain less supportive of parties for the rest of their lives? Or is it because the political identities of young people have not yet fully developed, and thus they tend in any historical era to be less partisan than their elders (p. 7)?

Bennett and Craig (1997) suggest that researchers can best study life-cycle effects by following a group of individuals throughout their lives, measuring attitudes and behaviors at regular intervals. The researchers would need to compare the patterns of the group

studied to the patterns found in the population overall. This is difficult but necessary work.

In his study of political apathy, Bennett (1986) developed a “Political Apathy Index,” by using surveys to measure both campaign interest and attention to public affairs. Bennett, using data collected from 1960 to 1984, found that:

young Americans have consistently paid less attention to public affairs than either the middle-aged or (in most cases) the elderly, despite having the advantage of more years of formal schooling (a factor that is strongly and inversely related to apathy). (p. 26)

Bennett and Rademacher’s (1997) statistical study of the forces responsible for political apathy compared the political involvement of Early Boomers, Late Boomers, and Gen-Xers when each group was between 18 and 26 years old. These authors define Early Boomers as those born between 1946 and 1954, Late Boomers as those born between 1955 and 1964, and Gen-Xers as those born between 1965 and 1978. These researchers performed regression analyses on 1972 data for Early Boomers, 1980 data for Late Boomers, and 1992 data for Gen-Xers. The authors used “race, gender, marital status, education, occupation, income, strength of partisan identification, and concern about which party would win the election” as variables (p. 28). First, the researchers found that education serves as the factor most strongly correlated to interest in politics. Second, they found real differences between the generations. For example, gender usually correlates with political interest, but it was not a factor in 1972, when the Women’s Movement was at its height. Third, for Gen-Xers, identifying with other young people predicted a lack of interest in politics. This last point is particularly intriguing

since, as Bennett and Rademacher (1997) note, any group identification usually predicts a *greater* interest in politics.

Mass Cynicism and American Politics Today

Many writers who cover politics and communication argue that the American population on the whole shows more cynicism about the political process than previous generations (Dionne, 1991; Hart, 1999). In their book, The Spiral of Cynicism, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) note findings of the National Opinion Research Center Survey, which show that in 1970, 75 percent of respondents said that they felt either a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in the government as a problem solver. By 1993, only 42 percent gave the same answer to this survey question. Why? Some researchers seek to explain this general alienation as an effect of political news coverage. Bennett (1997), for example, writes about her content analysis of print and broadcast “ad watches” during the 1996 presidential elections. In ad watches, news analysts review political advertisements for false information. Bennett contends that the election coverage focuses on the strategies that campaigners use, rather than on the issues campaigners address. The ad watches editorialize about dishonest politics, and the public concludes that politicians are self-serving liars.

In Seducing America: How Television Charms the Modern Voter, Hart (1999) argues that television, especially with shows such as Politically Incorrect, encourages cynicism and the belief that “having an attitude” counts for more than having knowledge. Hart also believes that television, with its focus on political personalities instead of issues, encourages its audience to feel infatuated with candidates who speak well and

show their emotions. The audience becomes terribly disillusioned when the candidates, with whom they feel intimate, let them down in some way. The public then, according to Hart, becomes cynical. Further, Hart suggests that because Americans watch politicians and political analysts on television, they feel the illusion of taking part in the political process without needing to vote.

Another explanation for the mass cynicism about the political process is that it results from “culture wars” in political discourse that caused a kind of national identity crisis. Belief in the political process seems to require a concern about groups beyond one’s own. These culture wars, perhaps, made each group’s members feel less sympathetic to members of other groups. Irving Kristol defined culture wars as “profound division over what kind of country we are, what kind of people we are, and what we mean by ‘The American Way of Life’” (Strauss & Howe, 1997, p. 203). Individuals may now feel more concerned about their own groups, and less concerned about the members of other groups because, as Strauss and Howe (1997) contend:

The Culture Wars had as many combatants as America had niches, from the Nation of Islam to the Internet. As each group exalted its own authenticity, it defined its adversary’s values as indecent, stupid, obscene, or (a suddenly popular word) evil. (p. 203)

In Todd Gitlin’s (1995) book on the culture wars, called The Twilight of Common Dreams, the author asserts that the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s saw itself as questioning and attacking the traditional values of American society. The New Left defined these traditional values as the interests of straight white men. Even if their dreams were not as radical as those involved believed, by separating themselves, the

members of the New Left allowed the Right to claim the ideas of a “common America” (p. 73).

On the other hand, in his address at the American Political Science Association, Bennett (1998) argues that instability in the job market caused a breakdown in the traditional institutions in American society. As American companies let go of their workers, these workers and their children grew more distrustful of institutions in general. These American workers, Bennett believes, do not trust that traditional government will provide solutions to these uncertain economic conditions.

In The Fourth Turning, Strauss and Howe (1997) examine cycles of history to find generational shifts and patterns of social experience. These writers refer to the late 1990s as a time of “unraveling.” They say that the country is in a dark mood because the end of the Cold War has produced a New World Order that feels unstable. Americans in the 90s have seen the failure of health care reform, and have stopped believing that institutions could solve their problems for them. The O. J. Simpson trial and the Million Man March showed a new kind of “racialism” in the culture (Strauss & Howe, 1997, p. 206). Certainly, this author would add the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal—including how the government and the media handled the presidential crisis—to the issues that might make Americans in general more likely to distrust institutions.

Like these other writers, Jonathan Cowan (1997) sees Americans in general as losing interest in the political system. In his essay on today’s youth, Cowan speaks as the founder of the youth movement “Lead or Leave,” an organization dedicated to solving the United States’ deficit problem. Cowan states that “differences among generations when measuring citizen disengagement and frustration with politics are really in degree

but not in kind. We're all fed up with politics as usual" (p. 196). Nonetheless, even if any or all of these theories about American cynicism prove true, they fail to explain why young people especially disengage themselves from the electoral process.

Specific Characteristics of Today's Young Adults

What factors make today's 18- to 24-year-olds particularly inclined toward cynicism? Certainly, media scholars have written much about the special issues for those in Generation X. Researchers generally define Generation X as being those born between 1961 and 1981 (Strauss and Howe, 1991). This definition expands Gen X beyond "20-somethings" to include those who are in their mid-thirties, and allows the use of the wealth of demographic materials published about this Post Baby-Boom group. In their book, Generations, Strauss and Howe (1991) use the label "Thirteeners" to describe this thirteenth generation of Americans, and note the following:

Far more than other generations, 13ers feel that the real world is gearing up to punish them down the road. Annual polls of high school seniors show that those born just after 1960 came of age much more fearful of national catastrophe than those born just before. These early 1960s babies. . . grew up as the kids whose low test rates and high rates of crime, suicide, and substance abuse marked a postwar extreme for American youth. (p. 317)

Strauss and Howe (1991) explain this negative picture by describing the way these 13ers were brought up. While those born in the early 1960s had to compete with the Baby Boomers, parents mainly left those born in the 1970s on their own. Indeed, during the 1970s, the number of "latchkey" children doubled. The 13ers are the children

of broken families who grew up in a time of diminishing economic expectations. Their parents were busy “self-actualizing” through their careers and personal lives, without making the sacrifices for their children that their parents had made for them.

In her unpublished Masters’ thesis, Paula Gottula Miles (1997) reviews much of the communication literature about Generation X. She notes that 40 percent of the members of this generation grew up in a family where their parents divorced, compared to just 11 percent of Boomers. Miles suggests that guilt-ridden mothers who went off to work tried to make up for the lost time with their children by buying them toys. Media gained a new importance for this generation--while the children were at home alone, television became their constant companion. According to the 1995 Statistical Abstracts, by the time an average child reaches the age of five, he or she has watched over 5000 hours of television, including 1000 hours of commercials targeting products to them (Miles, 1997). The media and guilt-ridden parents, according to this theory, helped to create a generation of materialistic young adults who want to have it all, and are bitter when they don’t get it. In order to afford material goods, more members of this generation continue to live with their parents beyond the age of 18.

Miles (1997) also contends that both because television content changed and because parents were not home to guide television use, these young people, during childhood, watched television with more adult themes than Baby Boomers before them. Young adult books of the ‘70s, ‘80s, and ‘90s also dealt with fearful subject matter, such as divorce, teen-age sex, and drug use, for the first time. These media-saturated children largely had to figure out for themselves how best to make sense of these scary issues, which perhaps left them feeling cynical and distrustful toward older adults.

Miles (1997) adds that members of Generation X do not commit to institutions or people easily. In their lifetimes, they have seen that loyalty to a corporation does not guarantee continued employment. Even with college education, members of this generation have a harder time finding good jobs, with so many Baby Boomers ahead of them. Also, after being brought up by career-occupied parents, Gen-Xers seem reluctant to give work the same priority in their own lives. Finally, Miles notes that having witnessed their parents' divorces, many Gen-Xers wait longer to get married themselves (Miles, 1997).

The Millennials, on the other hand, are being brought up by more carefully nurturing Late Boomer parents. According to Strauss and Howe (1991), the first members of this generation were born in 1982. These generational scholars note that at around the same time, a large number of books were published calling on parents to think carefully about the effects on children of education with no instruction in values, latchkey households, and divorce. These children also benefited from a new child-friendly trend in Hollywood. The state governments, too, took a more protective stance toward this generation, enacting safety measures such as the infant restraint laws for automobiles and bicycle helmet laws. Quality education has become a greater political priority for parents of these children than it was for the parents of Gen-Xers. However, these young people still have had to deal with the effects of divorce and the fact that even if both parents stay together, they most likely both have jobs (Strauss & Howe, 1991). In the election of 2000, the first of these Millennials will have the opportunity to vote. Whether or not they will begin to reverse the trend toward apathy, given the fact that the government gave them more attention and protection, will be a focus of future study.

Political Participation and Today's Young Adults

Are young people really so uniquely disengaged? Bennett (1998) states that although young people find “lifestyle politics” more compelling than traditional organized political group activity, they do actively engage with these more personal political concerns. The young writer Michele Mitchell (1998) takes issue with the idea of her generation’s apathy, writing *A New Kind of Party Animal* to draw attention to her peers’ involvement in social issues. Mitchell wrote the book partly as a response to the media’s charges of apathy against her generation.

Strauss and Howe (1991) note that in a report, “Democracy’s Next Generation,” by pollster Peter Hart, only 12 percent of “13ers” described voting as a characteristic of good citizenship. However, 48 percent believed that generosity was an important attribute of citizenship. Strauss and Howe describe 13ers attitudes this way:

When you vote, maybe you’ll waste your time—or, worse, later feel tricked. But when you do something real, like bringing food to the homeless, you do something that matters, if only on a small scale. The president of MIT has likened the 13ers civic attitude to that of the Lone Ranger: Do a good deed, leave a silver bullet, and move on. (p. 333)

On the other hand, the former acting head of Rock the Vote, Mark Strama (1998), contends in an essay on youth participation that while young people in the 1990s volunteer in record numbers, this volunteerism does not translate into belief in the power of social movements for change. Strama writes, “They seemed to view the political side of these issues as inaccessible and intractable, focusing instead on the satisfaction of

serving an immediate need in their community,” (1998, p. 72). Others, such as UNLV Professor Ronald Wilburn, theorize more cynically that young people volunteer because they have to in order to get into the better colleges (personal interviews, 1999).

As a founder of an advocacy group for young people, Jonathan Cowan (1997) writes in his essay about young people and politics that traditional political cannot be replaced. Cowan believes that though volunteerism can help build community, it cannot substitute for political activity such as voting. Vermont Democratic Representative Matt Dunne (1997) quotes the results of a student poll in his essay on youth and political leadership. The poll findings show that while young people do want to make a difference in the world, they simply believe that “meaningful social change *cannot* be achieved through traditional American politics” (p. 253).

Other writers have looked at lack of party identification as an important piece of the apathy puzzle. Dennis and Owen’s (1997) study examined data from the 1994 American National Election Study to measure party identification and loyalty. These researchers point out that members of Generation X do not identify with political parties as strongly as previous generations did. This generation, according to Dennis and Owen, get their political cues directly from television, and do not have (or take) the opportunity to participate in political discussions with family members or peers. This leaves them less entrenched in the political world, with fewer cues on how to vote. Their study showed that Xers “are the cohort least likely to reject strongly the proposition that ‘we probably don’t need political parties in America anymore’ and the one least inclined to support continuation of the two-party system in its present form” (p. 59).

Marketing Forces and the Media

With young people relying more and more on television for their political cues, how is television responding to their need? The evidence suggests that 18 to 24 year olds do not participate in the political process. Perhaps it is because mainstream political culture has decided to ignore the young.

In his essay on public intellectuals, Giroux (1997) suggests that marketing researchers “represent one of the few groups that appear attentive to how youth think, feel, behave, and desire” (p. 193). Giroux contends the entertainment media have consistently portrayed these American youths in negative terms, especially young black males. The media’s interests, Giroux believes, lie mainly in raising consumers, not active citizens. Portrayed alternately as shallow hedonists or as “violent sociopaths” (p. 192), Giroux suggests that media exploit youth, while public issues such as education and health care disappear from public discourse, especially in media directed toward young people. No wonder, then, that young people remain uninformed.

Miles (1997), however, asserts that because marketers do not understand this generation’s attitudes and rhetoric, “politicians and advertisers cannot succeed in appealing to or manipulating this vast and diverse group” (p. 5). She believes that young people today grew particularly media savvy because of the amount of time they spent watching television as children. They feel skeptical about advertising and marketing messages because they learned at an early age that they might well be disappointed in the products advertised. In other words, they learned that advertisers misrepresent their products.

On the other hand, in an article discussing the uneasy “marriage” of popular culture and politics, van Zoonen (1998) writes that popular political communication *does* somewhat successfully direct some programming toward young people. Van Zoonen gives the example of MTV and the “Rock the Vote” campaign. This campaign made it impossible for a traditional politician like George Bush to ignore the medium of the young. While it did not “get out the vote” in impressive numbers, “Rock the Vote” did help young people form opinions about the candidates, and in some cases, gave the candidates the opportunity to forge a connection with them (van Zoonen, 1998). Van Zoonen concludes that popular culture and politics will grow ever closer.

Owen (1997) conducted a generational study using data gathered in 1992 and 1994 by the American National Election Surveys, as well as findings from the 1996 Youth Voice Survey, which surveyed 1200 Americans between age 18 and 24. Owen (1997) concludes that “most Xers do not identify with any current leader, not even Bill Clinton, despite his efforts to reach out to them during his 1992 campaign” (p. 97). She also finds a significant gap in the level of patriotism between younger and older generations, despite efforts on the part of political parties to inspire such patriotism.

Finally, in their introduction to After the Boom, a book about politics and Generation X, Bennett and Rademacher (1997) contend that because Gen Xers do not use media to learn about public affairs, they remain ignorant of political events. Further, they write, “Thomas Jefferson once noted that there never has been, nor ever will be, a people who are at once both politically ignorant and free” (p. 39).

Media Effects and Directions for Research

According to my thesis, young people rely more heavily on the media for political information and attitudes while at the same time they are less apt to be engaged in discussion about politics with family and friends. A previous study (Maloy, 1999), found a moderately strong correlation ($r = .517, p < .001$) between the amount of time spent discussing politics with friends and concern about who will win the next presidential election. Similarly, a moderately strong correlation ($r = .448, p < .001$) was found between discussion of political issues with family and concern about who will win the next presidential election. The students who have discussions are most concerned about who will become president. However, many other students do not often take part in these discussions. In this same study, 44% of those surveyed responded that they “rarely” discuss political issues with friends and family, and another 16% responded that they discussed political issues less than “once or twice a month.”

With discussion less frequent, the media’s impact may be growing. After conducting four focus groups to determine voter response to campaign messages during the 1996 presidential election, Kern (1997) found that political advertisements and news coverage reinforce the public’s mistrust of politicians. McChesney (1999) argues that media enforce the status quo because it is in their interests for an uninterested majority to let corporate powers govern.

According to MacManus (1996), one quarter of Americans between the ages of 18 to 29 watch late night TV talk shows regularly. One third of these viewers acknowledge that they hear news about candidates and campaigns on these shows that

they have not heard elsewhere. As the comedians on these shows make politicians seem absurd, perhaps young Americans get reinforcement for their disinclination toward political activity. Through survey research, this study will explore the connection between young people's television use and political apathy.

The second chapter will include reviews of literature covering theories of how political socialization occurs and how political identifications are formed. The chapter will then review literature that deals specifically with television media effects, focusing particular attention on Putnam's theory on the erosion of social capital and Gerbner's cultivation theory (1972). As Jeffres (1997) notes on cultivation, "This theory sees media images molding society by the long-term presentation of relatively uniform versions of social reality" (p. 86).

The literature review will include a recent study by Norris (1996) which shows that heavy television viewing is associated with lower political participation rates. This same study, according to Bennett (1998), shows that viewing television news and public affairs is associated with *higher* rates of political participation, a finding that is especially interesting given that young people are not the targeted demographic group for those shows. The literature review will also include a study conducted by Moy, Pfau, and Kahlor (1999) which examines media use and public confidence in democratic institutions, along with Pfau, Moy, Radler and Bridgeman's (1998) study of how individual communication media influence public confidence in democratic institutions.

The third chapter will outline the methodology for the survey study. This study involves a convenience sample of over one hundred University of Nevada, Las Vegas undergraduate students. The survey includes questions about the role of government in

society, how involved and engaged students are (or plan to be) in the current political campaign, attitudes toward government institutions, the news media, and politics in general, and how much interest they have in politics. The survey also includes questions about the number of hours students spend watching television. It is designed to test the specific hypotheses about the effects of heavy use of television on (1) feelings of political efficacy, (2) interest in politics, (3) political involvement, (4) assessments of politics and politicians, and (5) trust in government institutions.

The predictor variables of the study are the average amounts of daily television exposure, as well as the types of programs watched most frequently. These will be taken from responses to survey questions.

The criterion variables are political self-identification, feelings about the role of government in society, political involvement, feelings of internal efficacy, and attitudes toward government, including confidence and trust levels. The survey takes less than 30 minutes for students to complete.

The fourth chapter will analyze and discuss the results of the survey. Finally, the fifth chapter will propose directions for future research, based on the results of this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to establish the importance of television as a factor in forming political attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, this chapter will first review articles and books that address theories of political socialization. The chapter will then cover literature that deals with the relationship between television viewing and political engagement. Though two different theories will be explored, both have in common the idea that those who are heavy television viewers have a lower level of political engagement than lighter viewers. The chapter will also set forth the five hypotheses and two research questions that this study seeks to address.

Political Socialization

Political socialization, also sometimes referred to as politicization, is the means by which people gain their political knowledge and ideas as well as the motivation to act on this knowledge and these ideas. One might look at the factors that are generally considered to be involved in political socialization to find out whether these have changed for members of Generation X. This might help to explain their lack of engagement with politics and government.

According to Dennis and Owen (1997), theorists such as Hyman (1959) and Greenstein (1960) wrote that in the United States, "the foundations of political learning

and political identity are thought to be established during the childhood years" (p. 49). Sigel (1989) writes that Hyman believed such socialization would essentially be finished by the high school years. Political scientists such as Easton and Dennis (1969) asserted that in childhood, young people look up to political figures as trustworthy and deserving of affection. According to this theory, these positive attitudes make it possible for the adult to maintain a reservoir of goodwill toward government and politicians, even after the childlike sentiments have been tempered by skepticism (Sigel, 1989). These political science theorists viewed the family, as well as school and peer groups, to be of primary importance in helping to inculcate political attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Dennis and Owen (1997) argue that this kind of socialization model, which stresses the importance of family and early learning, is not as useful for those studying Generation X as it is for studying other, earlier age cohorts. This is because of the changing structure of the American family during the time that members of Generation X were children. As discussed in Chapter 1, many of these children grew up in single-parent households. Divorce rates increased at a rapid pace. At the same time, many women went to work. According to Dennis and Owen (1997), "Parents were left with less time and perhaps less inclination to teach their progeny about politics. As a result, Gen-Xers often received fewer, less direct, and less homogenous political cues from family members over the course of their preadult political development" (p. 49).

Dennis and Owen (1997) believe that because of these changes in the family, Gen-Xers are not as fully formed in their political identities when they reach voting age. They further argue that the mass media play an enormous role in giving political cues to these young people. For example, they cite a Wisconsin study conducted in 1980-81 which

found that only 16 percent of preadult Gen-Xers got most of their political information from their parents, while 30 percent of those surveyed got most of their political information from television. The importance of mass media has not diminished for adult Gen-Xers, according to Global Strategy Group 1996 data, which showed that 54 percent of adult Gen-Xers studied receive most of their political information from television (Dennis & Owen, 1997).

Graber (1984) contends that most of the political information that children receive comes from the mass media. If this is true, then perhaps it has been more difficult for children in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to form the kind of idealization of political figures that Easton and Dennis (1969) argued was desirable in political socialization. When members of Generation X were growing up, the mass media showed presidents involved in scandal—Nixon in Watergate, Reagan and Bush in the Iran-Contra episode, and, most recently, Clinton in Whitewater and the Lewinsky affair.

Further, Graber (1984) argues that when adults are resocialized—that is, when they acquire new attitudes and ideas about politics in adulthood, it happens as a result of information they get from mass media. She cites the shifts in attitudes toward race and sex since the 1940s and 1950s as examples of such resocialization. Sigel (1989) agrees with the perspective that socialization does not end at high school, and that a variety of agents can continue to play a role in adult political socialization. For Generation X and the Millennials, television has played an especially important role in socialization throughout childhood, and may continue to be important throughout the adult years, as resocialization takes place. The literature review that follows will address two theories of

how mass media use is related to the political attitudes, involvement, interest levels, and feelings of efficacy.

Definitions of Terms

Just what is political engagement and how does it relate to other measures of attitude and involvement, such as apathy, interest, cynicism, involvement, engagement, confidence, and efficacy? Before reviewing relevant studies and relating them to this study's hypotheses, it is first necessary to define precisely how the terms *political engagement*, *cynicism*, and *interest* are being used in this study.

Political engagement. In Broken Contract, researchers Horn and Conway (1996) write:

By 'political engagement' we mean interest in and attention to politics. Indicators of engagement might include having a general interest in governmental and political affairs, following political campaigns, discussing political issues and candidates with friends or family, and consuming the mass media's political content regardless of the format through which that content is conveyed." (p. 110)

Horn and Conway (1996) measure engagement by using the same ANES survey questions that measure interest in and attentiveness to politics. Political disengagement, it would follow, is a lack of interest in and attention to politics. In this study, disengagement is used as the umbrella term for many negative feelings toward politics, and thus will be used in a broader fashion. One who is disengaged could be described as being distrustful and unsure of his or her own efficacy, as well as being disinterested and inattentive to politics.

Cynicism and trust. Erber and Lau (1990) equate political *cynicism* with distrust, which is essentially how this study uses the term. Along with answering items adapted from the American National Election Study (ANES) surveys (Craig, 1996) that were specially designed to measure trust in government, students have also been asked to identify their own level of cynicism. Students are left to use their own understanding of the term, as the survey provides no further definition.

Apathy and interest. Political scientist Stephen Earl Bennett (1986), in creating his Political Apathy Index, attempted to rid the term “apathy” from such possible meanings as absence of participation, psychopathological dispositions, and even trust, cynicism, and alienation. Instead, Bennett uses the following, limited definition of the term: “The concept of political apathy refers to the varying degrees to which people are or are not interested in and attentive to politics and public affairs” (p. 37). Throughout this study, Bennett’s definition will apply.

Efficacy. In After the Boom, Owen (1997) defines feelings of political efficacy as follows: “. . . the belief that one has the ability to effectively influence the political process through voting and other forms of active involvement” (p. 87). She goes on to explain that efficacy is related more closely to participation than is the concept of trust. Owen’s definition will apply throughout this study.

The Erosion of Social Capital

Putnam’s Theory

In recent years, Putnam (1994, 1995) has described the importance of social capital in the United States. According to Norris (1996), “‘Social capital’ is understood

as the dense networks of norms and social trust which enable participants to cooperate in the pursuit of shared objectives” (p. 474). In The Great Disruption, Fukuyama (1999) explains why social capital is so important to the functioning of a democratic society. He claims that it is social capital that impressed Alexis de Toqueville so much during his travels in the United States. Fukuyama writes that de Toqueville believed the following:

American democracy and its system of limited government worked only because Americans were so adept at forming associations for both civil and political purposes. This ability to, in effect, self-organize not only meant that the government did not have to impose order in a hierarchical, top-down manner; civil association was also a “school of self-government” that taught people cooperative habits they would carry over with them to public life. (p. 20)

Putnam (1994, 1995) argues that for social capital and trust to exist, individuals need to interact with one another in the community. Looking at the decline of group membership in general, Putnam (1994, 1995) asserts that social capital has eroded over the past several decades as, he believes, people spend less time interacting with each other. One of the reasons that people spend less time interacting and therefore have less social capital, according to his argument, is that people in the past few decades spend so much of their time watching television. Fukuyama (1999) notes that the average American watches television for more than four hours a day. This certainly would seem to limit the time that they spend in face-to-face interaction.

Trust, as well as group membership, is an important indicator of social capital. Pfau, Moy, Radler and Bridgeman (1998) cite research that shows declining levels of trust in the Presidency, Congress, the news media, and government at the state level. Putnam

(1994, 1995) argues that the decline in trust is correlated with the increasing amount of time that Americans have spent watching television and is most pronounced in the post-war generation (Norris, 1996). If the Baby Boom generation has lost social capital and feelings of trust because their leisure and social group activities were displaced by television, this author would argue that the same holds true for members of Generation X. Putnam's theory on the decline in social capital might therefore be important in explaining young adults' rising levels of political disengagement.

Putnam (1994, 1995) reviewed the decline of many different types of group membership (from bowling leagues to Parent-Teacher Associations to political parties) in his research. This study, however, will focus on how this erosion of social capital affects political engagement. In a study that used items measuring attention to television, political participation, political interest, and efficacy, Norris (1996) found the following: "people who watch a great deal of television know less about politics, feel less able to affect government, and are less interested in politics" (p. 478). Given Norris's findings, the following predictions were made:

H1: Heavy use of television by students is negatively related to feelings of political efficacy.

H2: Heavy use of television by students is negatively related to interest in politics and government.

Putnam (1995) found in his analysis of survey research that heavy television viewing was associated with lower voting turnout and less social trust. In light of Putnam's findings, the following prediction was made:

H3: Heavy use of television by students is negatively related to political involvement.

The next section of the paper will look at Gerbner's cultivation theory and how the largely negative portrayal of politics and government on television might affect heavy viewers of television.

The Cultivation Process

The cultivation theory, proposed by George Gerbner, focuses on how television presents the world, and on how long term exposure to this television world affects people's attitudes, beliefs, and values (Gerbner et al., 1984). According to Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli (1986), "Television cultivates from infancy the very predispositions and preferences that used to be acquired from other primary sources" (p. 18). These researchers believe that social scientists need to look at the total picture of how television is used, and not simply at how specific types of programs affect viewers. Indeed, these writers observe that, "What matters most for the study of television is not so much what this or that viewer may prefer as what virtually no viewer can escape" (Gerbner et al., 1986, p. 20).

Cultivation theory differs from earlier media effects research because it does not emphasize the effects of a particular campaign or a specific type of marketing effort, but rather how television use in general affects the viewer (Gerbner et al., 1986). According to Gerbner et al. (1984) the effects of television might be very difficult to measure because television is everywhere and its message is fairly homogenous. This means that even non-viewers and light viewers may be indirectly influenced by television through

their discussions with heavier viewers. If differences are found between light and heavy viewers, it may be crucial in understanding how television makes an impact.

The theory was first proposed and tested in studies that focused on how television exposure affected perceptions of violence in the world (e.g., Gerbner, 1972, Gerbner & Gross, 1976, Gerbner, Gross, Eeley, Jackson-Breeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1977). Through this series of studies, researchers found differences between light and heavy viewers. Heavy viewers of television were more likely to have a distorted view of social reality than light viewers were. The heavy viewers perceived that violence was much more prevalent than it actually was.

Gerbner's work on cultivation is part of a larger program of research called Cultural Indicators, which is conducted at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania (Jeffres, 1997). Cultural Indicators also focuses research on how policies are made that affect the creation and flow of media content. Additionally, there is a specific branch of research directed at "message system analysis" (Gerbner et al., 1984). For message system analysis, a week's worth of network television drama are recorded annually and analyzed to determine the world that is being presented on television.

In light of research findings that network television shows violence to occur at least ten times as frequently as it does in the real world, it is understandable that heavy viewers of television might believe that violence occurs more frequently (Gerbner et al., 1984). Gerbner and his colleagues have noted other intriguing discrepancies between the television world and the real world. For example, television dramas do not include nearly as many elderly people as exist in the real world. In cultivation analysis, Gerbner, Gross,

Morgan, and Signorielli (1980) found that heavy viewers are more likely to believe that there are fewer elderly than there used to be and that they don't live as long.

Other message analysis research conducted during the 1980s found that there are three men for every woman on television network dramas. Women on television tend to be younger than their male counterparts. In cultivation analysis, researchers found that most groups of heavy viewers hold more sexist attitudes and beliefs than light viewers (Gerbner et al., 1984).

Young people depend on television for information about politics and government. As Chaffee and Frank (1996) note, "Television is the principal channel by which young people in America and other Western democracies first encounter politics" (p. 56). If cultivation theory is correct, important differences between light and heavy viewers of television might be found for a variety of issues, beliefs, and attitudes. As this study deals specifically with politics and government, it will focus on the way that television portrays politics and government.

Negative Election Coverage on Television

Much communication research has focused on political coverage on network television during presidential campaigns. Lichter, Noyes, and Kaid (1999) looked at the candidates' "sound bites"—the amount of time that candidates' images were shown on screen accompanied by their words. In 1968, the average "sound bite" was 42 seconds (Patterson, 1993). In 1996, the candidates' "sound bites" averaged only about 8.2 seconds. Journalists covering the campaign had about six times as much airtime as the candidates themselves, which they spent in discussing and analyzing the campaign. The

tone of the discussions and analysis was negative, for the most part, especially the coverage of Bob Dole (Lichter, Noyes, & Kaid, 1999).

Patterson (1993) argued that journalist's coverage of politics is organized by a specific schema—the idea that “politics is a strategic game” (p. 57). Within this schema, candidates' actions and words are evaluated in terms of their strategic importance to getting elected. This type of coverage has become much more prevalent in the past thirty years (Patterson, 1993). As a result, Americans who rely on the media for information on politics find out much more about candidate strategies than they do about their substantive stands on various issues. These strategies are often portrayed in cynical terms. Graber (1984) found that when news stories focused on issues, people were more likely to want to take action. On the other hand, when news stories focused on the game, people felt less involved and felt more resigned to candidates' behavior.

In Out of Order, Patterson (1993) wrote about the increasingly negative tone that journalists take toward politics and the consequences it has for the American electorate. According to Patterson, during the 1992 election,

. . . more than 80 percent of network news stories on the Democratic party were negative; 87 percent of all references to the Republican party were unfavorable.

Congress was portrayed as a human cesspool: 90 percent of news regarding it was bad. The federal government fared even worse: 93 percent negative (p. 18).

Cultivation theory suggests that this overwhelmingly negative depiction of both politicians and government institutions should have an effect over time on television viewers. As negative coverage of politics and politicians has increased markedly over the course of the past thirty years (Patterson, 1993), young viewers might be particularly

affected by it, having never experienced a more positive media depiction of politics.

Therefore, this study will explore the following hypothesis:

H4: Heavy use of television by students is positively related to negative assessments of politics and politicians.

Negative Campaigns

Some scholars argue that like the press, politicians and their campaigns on television have contributed to Americans' lack of confidence in government. In Why Americans Hate Politics, E. J. Dionne (1991) contends that political advertisements have become increasingly negative. Ideally, our form of government should focus on what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. called "the search for remedy" (Dionne, 1991, p. 16), looking toward solutions to real problems in the country. However, Dionne believes that since the 1960s, liberals and conservatives have consistently focused in political advertisements on character attacks and divisive issues that leave Americans feeling frustrated. Dionne (1991) writes:

The decline of a "politics of remedy" creates of vicious cycle. Campaigns have become negative in large part because of a sharp decline in popular faith in government. To appeal to an increasingly alienated electorate, candidates and their political consultants have adopted a cynical stance that, they believe with good reason, plays into popular cynicism about politics and thus wins them votes. But cynical campaigns do not resolve issues. They do not lead to "remedies."

Therefore, problems get worse, the electorate becomes more cynical—and so does

the advertising. At the end of it all, the governing process, which is supposed to be about real things, becomes little more than a war over symbols. (p. 17)

According to this argument, the symbols that have become important in political advertising are not relevant to competence in government. The public realizes that these merely symbolic issues are not important, and become less trusting as a result (Dionne, 1991).

Pfau et al. (1998) assert that Robinson (1975, 1976, 1977) started the line of studies that first focused the relationship between television and lack of trust in institutions. Robinson coined the term “videomalaise” to describe the effect that television had on its viewers. He believed that the increasingly negative tone of news coverage caused viewers to feel cynical. Robinson (1976) wrote the following about the news coverage of American institutions: “It seems reasonable to assume that these anti-institutional themes reach the audience with one essential message: none of our national policies work, none of our institutions respond, none of our political organizations succeed (p. 429, in Pfau et al., 1998, p. 92).

Jamieson, Waldman, and Devett (1998) write that both the campaigners and news coverage of the campaign exacerbated the problem for viewers in 1996. Politicians avoided the press and distorted their opponents’ views. The news media continued to focus on strategy instead of issues. Coverage also over-reported the attacks that candidates made on each other. At the same time, news coverage did not report the inaccuracies that were present in the political advertisements.

As heavy television viewers cannot avoid presidential campaigns and the strategic coverage of government, the following prediction was made:

H5: Heavy use of television by students is negatively related to trust in government institutions.

Modified Cultivation Theory

While Gerbner's cultivation theory suggests that mass media presents users with a relatively homogenous view of the world, other communication scholars, such as Hawkins and Pingree (1981) and Potter (1993) have argued against this view. These researchers assert that "the cultivation of perceptions *should be unique to content genres*" (Pfau et al., 1998, p. 94). Pfau et al. (1998) used a modified form of the cultivation theory in their quantitative study of how mass media use affects public confidence in democratic institutions. The study included a content analysis of television news, print media, and political talk radio. These researchers found that "users of specific communication sources tend to perceive institutions as those sources depict them, sometimes positively, or, as in the case of national television news and political talk radio, negatively" (p. 107).

In this study, Pfau et al. (1998) presented their content analysis findings about which communication sources presented institutions in the most negative light. When looking at coverage of the Office of the Presidency, they found that network television news was more negative than local television news. They found that depictions of the Presidency were even more negative on television entertainment talk shows, such as Late Night with David Letterman and The Tonight Show with Jay Leno. When looking at coverage of Congress, they found that the most negative depiction occurred on the entertainment talk shows, and that network news was again more negative than local news.

In a study that focused on how television viewing is related to civic engagement, Norris (1996) looked at the total amount of time viewers spent watching television. She also looked at which television programs viewers watched, including television news and public affairs programs. Norris found that heavy viewers of television were “less interested in national and local community politics, and less likely to engage in political discussions” (p. 476). However, she also found that viewers of network news and public affairs programs were “more likely to be involved in all types of political activity . . .” (p. 476).

Norris’s study suggests that television use may have a negative effect on political activity, but that the specific content of the types of television programs that viewers watch may override this generally negative effect. Norris, however, looked at two genres that would appeal to those most apt to be interested in politics—network news and public affairs programs. This study will examine how political activity is related to viewing different types of programs, such as late night television talk shows and political talk shows. The study will also examine the relationship between the types of television programs that students watch and their attitudes toward government.

Participants have answered questions about what sorts of programs they watch, so that the following research question may be addressed.

RQ1: What is the relationship between political involvement and the types of television programs that students watch?

RQ2: What is the relationship between attitudes toward government and the types of television programs that students watch?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Design

The principal questions that this study explores concern the relationship between television viewing and political attitudes and political involvement. The study has been developed for a thesis and has been conducted through survey research. The surveys were handed out to students during class time and in their usual classrooms. The surveys were administered in late March, 2000—after many major primaries in the 2000 presidential election had taken place.

Participants

The participants for this study are undergraduate students at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. There were approximately 50 students who filled out the survey in two sections of an interpersonal communication classes and about 40 students who filled out the survey in two sections of a speech communication class. Approximately another 20 students filled out the survey in an introductory course on gender, race, and class. The students were selected non-randomly—as undergraduate students, they were readily available for research. The Office of Sponsored Programs at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas approved the project, after reviewing the protocol.

Measurement

The survey includes forty-eight close-ended questions (see Appendix 1). The questions, except where indicated, were adapted from items used in the American National Election Study (ANES) surveys from 1964 through 1992. These questions appear in Craig (1996, pp. 295-300).

The first section of the survey measures political and ideological self-identification. For the first question, participants indicated whether they identified with any political party by circling (1) Republican; (2) Democrat; (3) Independent; or (4) none of the above. In the next question, participants indicated on a seven-point scale where they would place their political views, with (1) indicating extremely liberal and (7) indicating extremely conservative.

So that the study could measure their level of trust in government, students then marked on two 7-point scales where they would place their own attitude toward politics and politicians. On the first of these scales, 1 = not at all cynical and 7 = extremely cynical. In the next scale, 1 = not at all trusting and 7 = extremely trusting. These two questions were not adapted from previous ANES surveys.

In the next section of the survey, participants answered a series of questions designed to measure their level of political involvement. These questions, again, were adapted from items used in the ANES surveys (Craig, 1996, pp. 295-300).

First, for item 5, participants indicated how often they follow what's going on in government and public affairs, using a scale in which 1 = most of the time and 4 = hardly at all. Next, for item 6, participants indicated how interested they have been in the presidential campaign so far this year, using a scale in which 1 = very much interested and

4 = not at all interested. Then, for item 7, participants indicated how much they personally care about who wins the presidential election this fall, using a scale in which 1 = very much and 4 = not at all.

For items 8-11, students answered questions about how often they paid attention to the campaign through different communication channels. For each of these questions, participants used a scale in which 1 = daily; 2 = 3-5 times a week; 3 = once or twice a week; 4 = once or twice a month; and 5 = rarely. For question 8, participants marked how often they listen to speeches, debates, or discussions about the campaign on the radio. For question 9, participants marked how often they pay attention to information about the campaign on the Internet. For question 10, students marked how often they watch programs about the campaign on television. For question 11, they marked how often they discuss politics with family or friends.

For question 12, students used the above scale to indicate how often they will talk to people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates during the campaign.

Participants indicated their responses by marking (1) yes or (2) no for questions 13 – 17. For question 13, they indicated whether they would wear a campaign button, put a campaign sticker on their car, or place a sign in their window or in the front of their house. For question 14, students marked whether they would go to any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like that in support of a particular candidate. For question 15, participants indicated whether they would do any other work for one of the parties or candidates. For question 16, participants answered whether they listened to radio shows where people call in to voice their opinions. Finally, for question 17,

students indicated whether they watch talk shows on T. V. where people call in to voice their opinions.

All of these items on political involvement (items 5 – 17) were then used to create an index of political involvement. This index has an alpha reliability of .8624. The mean for this index is 37.8131, and the range is 27.00.

In the following section of the survey, participants answered a series of questions designed to measure their feelings of political efficacy. For questions 18 – 22, participants indicated their reaction to each one of a series of statements using a five-point scale in which 1 = agree strongly and 5 = disagree strongly. The statements were as follows: (18) “I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country;” (19) “I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics;” (20) “I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people;” (21) “I think I am better informed about politics and government than most people;” and (22) “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on.” Items 18 – 21 were then used to create an index of political efficacy, which has an alpha reliability of .8340. The mean for this index is 13.1009, and the range is 16.00.

The next section of the survey measures general attitudes about government and politics. For question 23, participants indicated how much of the time they think they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right by marking (1) always; (2) most of the time; or (3) only some of the time. For question 24, students marked whether they think that people in the government waste tax money by circling (1) they waste a lot

of the money; (2) they waste some of the money; or (3) they don't waste very much of the money.

For question 25, participants indicated their attitude about how the government is run by circling (1) It's run by a few big interests looking out for themselves; or (2) It's run for the benefit of all the people. For question 26, students marked how many crooked people they think there are running the government by circling (1) quite a few; (2) not very many; or (3) hardly any.

For question 27, participants indicated whether they think that public officials care much what people like them think by circling (1) yes, they care very much, (2) they care some, or (3) no, they don't care much. For both questions 28 and 29, participants chose from the following answers: (1) a good deal; (2) some; or (3) not much. Question 28 addresses how much attention they feel the government pays to what the people think when it makes decisions by circling. Question 29 addresses how much they feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what the people think.

For questions 30 and 31, students indicated their reaction to statements by using a seven-point scale where 1 = limited interest and 7 = a great deal of interest. The statements are as follows: (30) "How much interest would you say you have in the Office of the Presidency?"; and (31) "How much interest would you say you have in Congress?" Interest in government institutions is an important variable in the study.

For questions 32 and 33, students indicated their answers using a five-point scale in which 1 = approve strongly and 5 = disapprove strongly. Question 32 asks how students feel about the way the president is handling his job. Question 33 asks how students feel about the way that members of Congress are handling their jobs. These

questions were included to measure students' assessments of politicians, another important variable for this study.

For question 34, students indicated how often they used different media by using a scale of 1 through 10, where 1 means "rarely" and 10 means "frequently." They marked responses for local TV news, network TV news, late-night TV entertainment talk shows, TV political talk shows, and Internet news sources.

Questions 35 and 36 were not adapted from the ANES surveys. These questions are designed to address the issue of whether the political coverage currently available through media addresses young people. Students indicated their responses using a scale in which 1 = very often; 2 = sometimes; and 3 = rarely. They answered how often they feel that political issues covered on television are relevant for their age group and how often they feel that shows with political content are targeted toward their age group.

In the next section, items 37 and 38 measure amount of media use. Students answered either (1) one hour or less; (2) two or three hours; or (3) four or more hours to questions about how many hours a day they spend watching TV and how many hours a day they spend on the Internet. Amount of television viewing is a critical variable for this study. For the purposes of this study, students watching TV one hour or less are considered light viewers. Those watching TV two or three hours a day are considered moderate viewers. Those watching TV for four or more hours are considered heavy viewers. These labels are based on the work of Gerbner et al. (1984).

The remaining questions are for demographic purposes and for information on voting behavior. For question 39, participants indicated how old they were so that it

would be possible to look at age as a variable. They marked one of the following categories: (1) 18-21; (2) 22-29; (3) 30-39; (4) 40-49; (5) 50-59; (6) 60 or older.

For question 40, participants answered yes (2) or no (1) to show whether they were old enough to vote in the last presidential election. Participants then answered whether or not they voted in the last presidential election. If they answered yes to voting, they then circled who they voted for--(1) Clinton, (2) Perot, (3) Dole, or (4) other. This question was included as one indication of prior political involvement.

For question 43, participants circled (1) no, (2) maybe, or (3) yes to show whether or not they planned to vote in the next presidential election. If they answered yes to planning to vote, they then circled who they planned to vote for—(1) Gore, (2) Bush, or (3) other. This question was included as another indication of political involvement.

For question 45, participants circled whether they were (1) male or (2) female, so that sex could be looked at as a variable. For question 46, participants circled (1) no or (2) yes to show whether or not they had children. This question was included so that it would be possible to look at whether or not specific attitudes toward politics and politicians were correlated with parenthood. For question 47, participants circled (1) no or (2) yes to show whether they were married.

Finally, for question 48, participants indicated their race, by marking one the following six groups: 1) White; 2) African-American; 3) Asian American/Pacific Islander; 4) Latino/Mexican-American; 5) Native American; 6) Other (please specify).

Procedure

The researcher asked participants to fill out the surveys at the beginning of their classes. First, the instructor made a brief announcement, explaining to students what the research was for, assuring them that it was voluntary, and promising to share the results with them. Then, the instructor handed the survey (see Appendix 1) along with a cover letter to students. Students completed the survey in fifteen to twenty minutes.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

An Overview of Responses

The Subjects

There were 109 students surveyed. Of these students, 36% (39) were male and 64% (70) were female. Most of these respondents were fairly young—61.5% (67) were between 18 and 21, 27.5% (30) were between 22 and 29, 6.4% (7) were between 30-39, and just 4.6% (5) were 40-49 years old. Most respondents, about 83% (90), were not married. The vast majority, 88% (96) of respondents, did not have children. The sample was fairly diverse—about 69% (75) of those surveyed identified themselves as white, about 5% (5) as African American, about 14% (14) as Asian American/Pacific Islander, about 6% (7) as Latino or Mexican, and about 2% (2) as Native American.

Political Self-Identification and Election Items

In terms of their partisan identification, about 36% (39) of the participants thought of themselves as Republican, about 32% (34) as Democrats, and about 11% (12) as Independents. About 21% (22) of respondents did not think of themselves as falling into any of these party categories.

About 28% (31) of respondents care very much who wins the presidential election this year and approximately 42% (46) care somewhat. However, this concern may not translate into a great deal of action. In terms of trying to persuade others about who to vote for, 77% (84) indicated that they would rarely talk to other people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates. About 84% (92) of respondents marked that they would *not* wear a campaign button, put a campaign sticker on their car, or place a sign in the window or in front of the house. About 80% (87) marked that they would *not* go to any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners or things like that in support of a candidate. Approximately another 82% (88) indicated that they would not do any other work for one of the parties or candidates.

On the other hand, about 57% (62) of students plan to vote in the next presidential election. About 28% (31) answer “maybe” to voting, while about 15% (16) do not plan to vote. For those who do plan to vote, about 34% (23) plan to vote for Gore and about 49% (33) plan to vote for Bush. About 16% (11) marked “other.” This is striking because of the predominance of women in the survey sample. Perhaps the gender gap, which would predict that women would be more likely to vote for Democrats than Republican candidates, is shifting ground in this race. Of the approximately 28% (31) of students who voted in the last presidential election, about 68% (21) voted for Clinton, while only about 23% (7) voted for Dole.

Media Use and Political Coverage

On an average day, about 16% (17) of respondents watch television for four or more hours, about 46% (50) for 2 or 3 hours, and 38.5% (42) for one hour or less. About

32% (35) of respondents believe that political issues covered on television are *rarely* relevant for their age group, and about 43% (47) believe that shows with political content are rarely targeted toward their age group.

Just 5.5% (6) of students spend four or more hours on the Internet, while about 24% (26) spend 2 or 3 hours, and about 71% (77) spend one hour or less on the Internet.

Statistical Analysis of the Data

The Hypotheses

The hypotheses and research questions explored here have to do with television viewing and political involvement, interest, efficacy, and trust. To test each of the following hypotheses, a bivariate correlation was used.

The first hypothesis predicted that students' heavy use of television would be negatively related to feelings of political efficacy. No significant relationship was found between the number of hours students spent watching television and their feelings of political efficacy, which were measured through an index of items described in Chapter 3 ($r = .152, p = .114$). Interestingly, however, the study did find significant relationships between feelings of political efficacy and types of television programs that students watch. Frequent viewing of local television news was significantly related to feelings of political efficacy ($r = -.231, \text{with } p < .05$). Frequent viewing of network television news was also significantly related to feelings of political efficacy ($r = -.317, p < .05$). Finally, frequent viewing of television political talk shows, such as Larry King, was significantly related to feelings of political efficacy ($r = -.414, p < .01$). Frequent viewers of local

news, network news, and political talk shows have feelings of greater political efficacy than do infrequent viewers.

The second hypothesis predicted that students' heavy use of television would be negatively related to interest in politics and government. No correlation was found between the number of hours spent watching television and any of the three measures of interest in politics. The first item measured students' self-reported interest level in politics ($r = .050$, $p = .608$). The second item measured students' interest in the Office of the Presidency ($r = .057$, $p = .553$). The third item measured students' interest in Congress ($r = .002$, $p = .980$). On the other hand, the study did find significant relationships between the *types* of television programs that students watched for all three measures. Those who frequently watch local news report a higher interest level in politics and politicians than less frequent viewers ($r = -.189$, $p < .05$). Those who frequently watch network news also report a higher interest in politics and politicians than less frequent viewers ($r = -.223$, $p < .05$). Likewise, those who watch political talk shows report a higher interest in politics and politicians ($r = -.327$, $p = .001$).

Students who watch political talk shows are more interested than less frequent viewers in the Office of the Presidency ($r = .220$, $p < .05$) and in Congress ($r = .305$, $p < .01$). Significant relationships were also found between frequent viewing of television network news and interest in the Office of the Presidency ($r = .312$, $p < .01$), as well as interest in Congress ($r = .289$, $p < .05$). Frequent viewers of local news report higher interest in the Office of the Presidency ($r = .234$, $p < .05$). These frequent viewers of local news were also more likely to be interested in Congress ($r = .229$, $p < .05$).

The third hypothesis predicted that students' heavy use of television would be negatively related to political involvement. In order to test this hypothesis, the researcher used an index of involvement, which had an alpha reliability of .8624. No significant relationship was found between the number of hours spent watching television and political involvement ($r = .052$, $p = .593$). Again, however, the study found significant relationships between the *types* of television programs which students watched and their political involvement. See the following section on Research Questions for more information.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that students' heavy use of television would be positively related to negative assessments of politics and politicians. Although no significant relationship was found between television use and assessments of Congress ($r = .111$, $p = .252$), there was a significant relationship between television use and assessments of the President ($r = -.200$, $p < .037$). However, the relationship runs counter to that which was predicted—the more television that participants watch, the more likely they are to give the president a positive job approval rating.

The fifth hypothesis predicted that heavy use of television would be negatively related to trust in government. The study found no significant relationship between the number of hours spent watching television and any of the six measures of trust. The first item measured attitudes of trust toward politics and politicians ($r = .082$, $p = .369$). The second item measured cynical attitudes toward politics and politicians ($r = .072$, $p = .457$). The third item measured how often the respondent trusted the government in Washington to do what is right ($r = .055$, $p = .396$). The fourth item measured whether the respondent believes government wastes a lot of tax money ($r = .058$, $p = .573$). The

fifth item measured whether the participant believes the government was run by a few big interests or for the benefit of all the people ($r = .016, p = .873$). The sixth item measured the respondent's belief about how many people in the government are crooked ($r = -.089, p = .358$). Although none of these measures were correlated to the *number of hours* that the students spent watching TV, significant relationships were found between the *types* of television programs that students watched and their feelings of trust in government. Read the following section on the Research Questions for more information.

The Research Questions

The two research questions explore how the *types* of television programs which students watch relate to their general levels of political engagement, which includes involvement in politics and positive attitudes toward politics and government. The first question asked about the relationship between the types of television programs which students watch and political involvement. No correlation was found between how frequently viewers watched late night entertainment talk shows and their political involvement ($r = .080, p = .420$). A strong correlation ($r = -.319, p < .01$) was found between how frequently participants viewed local news and their political involvement. Similarly, a strong correlation ($r = -.380, p < .01$) was found between how frequently participants viewed network news and their political involvement. Finally, a strong correlation was found between how frequently respondents view political talk shows and their political involvement ($r = -.435, p < .01$ at .000).

The second research question asked about the relationship between attitudes toward government and the types of television programs that students watch. The study

found some significant relationships. First, local television news viewing was negatively related to trust that the government in Washington will do what is right ($r = .254$, $p < .01$). Those who watch local television news frequently are more apt to believe that you can trust the government in Washington only some of the time.

Second, a significant relationship was found between viewing of late-night entertainment talk shows and attitudes toward politics and politicians. More frequent viewing of late-night entertainment talk shows such as Late Night with David Letterman and The Tonight Show was negatively related to high levels of cynicism toward politics and politicians ($r = -.210$, $p < .05$). Frequent viewing of these late-night entertainment talk shows was positively related to high levels of trust toward politics and politicians ($r = .230$, $p < .05$). That is, those who frequently watch late-night talk shows are *less* apt to be cynical and *more* apt to be trusting toward politics and politicians than less-frequent viewers.

Finally, a moderately strong correlation was found between the president's job approval rating and viewing of political talk shows ($r = -.191$, $p < .05$). Those who watch political talk shows frequently are more apt to give the president a higher job approval rating.

These findings will be highlighted and discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

This study has demonstrated that there seems to be *no* relationship between the *overall amount* of television which students watch and their political involvement, their sense of efficacy, and their interest in politics. The study also has demonstrated that there is some relationship between the *types* of television programs which students watch and their *attitudes* toward politics and politicians. Finally, the study has demonstrated that there is also some relationship between the types of television programs which students watch and their political *involvement*. In this chapter, the findings for each of the hypotheses and research questions will be highlighted and discussed.

Discussion of Hypotheses and Research Questions

Contrary to previous research findings (Norris, 1996), this study found no support for the first hypothesis, which predicted that students' heavy use of television would be negatively related to feelings of political efficacy. The lack of support for this and for the hypotheses that follow may result from limitations within the study itself. One of the limitations of the study is the fact that a convenience sample was used. This sample may not be representative of the average college student. These students may also be

unrepresentative in that many of the students work full time—thus, they have less time to watch television. Indeed, although Fukuyama (1999) writes that the average American watches television for four or more hours a day, only about 16% (17) of the 109 student respondents answered that they watched for that amount of time. Of course, it is possible that students gave what they considered to be the socially desirable response, which might seem to be a lighter amount of television viewing.

The study found no support for the second hypothesis, which predicted that students' heavy use of television would be negatively related to interest in politics and government. This finding is contrary to Norris's (1996) study, in which she found that heavy viewers were less interested in politics and government than light viewers. As stated above, only a very small sample of the survey population admitted to being heavy viewers. On the other hand, quite a large number of students (54% or 59 students) placed themselves toward the uninterested end of the scale measuring interest level in politics. Because this study focuses mainly on young adults, perhaps there were more participants uninterested in politics on the whole, regardless of their television-viewing habits.

The third hypothesis predicted that students' heavy use of television would be negatively related to political involvement. Contrary to Putnam's (1995) research which indicated that heavy viewing was associated with lower voter turnout and less voter trust, no support was found for this hypothesis. This is somewhat surprising, especially given Graber's (1984) findings that when more news stories are presented on the "game" of politics than on issues, as news stories currently do, viewers feel less involved.

No support was found for the fourth hypothesis, which predicted that students' heavy use of television would be positively related to negative assessments of politics and politicians. In fact, the students who spent more time watching television were more likely to give the president a *positive* job approval rating. One might speculate that this is because the current president, with his telegenic communication skills, is able to override the negative coverage generally given to the Office of the Presidency. It will be interesting to see if, as presidents change in the years to come, heavy viewers will continue to be more likely to give the current president a higher approval rating.

The fifth hypothesis predicted that students' heavy use of television would be negatively related to trust in government. In earlier studies, Putnam (1995) did find a relationship between heavy television viewing and decreased voter trust, and Robinson (1975, 1976, 1977) found an association between television news viewing and loss of trust for the government. However, no support was found for the fifth hypothesis in this study.

The study also posed the following research question: What is the relationship between attitudes toward government and the types of television programs that students watch? Interestingly, those students who frequently watch local news were more apt to believe that they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right *only some of the time* (as opposed to always or most of the time). This finding is somewhat surprising given Pfau et al.'s (1998) content analysis, which showed that television local news is less negative toward Congress and the President than network news. It is possible that local news in Nevada provides a particularly negative view of the government in Washington, with its often predominantly negative coverage of the Bureau of Land

Management and the Department of Energy. However, this study did not include any content analysis of Las Vegas local news to back up such speculation.

A more surprising finding is that those students who frequently watch late night entertainment talk shows feel *more* trusting toward politics and politicians than less frequent viewers, given the fact that on these shows, politicians are regularly joked about and generally referred to derisively. In fact, Pfau et al. (1998) found that entertainment talk shows depicted both Congress and the Presidency more negatively than any of the other types of shows they looked at. Yet it is clear that politicians find these shows useful—just this year, both John McCain and George Bush appeared on late-night talk shows during the 2000 presidential primary race. In his race for New York senator, New York City Mayor Rudolph Guiliani has appeared several times on Late Show with David Letterman. Hillary Clinton has also appeared with Letterman, just as her husband famously appeared playing the saxophone on Arsenio Hall's talk show. Perhaps as more politicians use these shows to appeal directly to the viewers, the viewers respond by feeling greater trust toward them. This would support van Zoonen's (1998) thesis that mastery of popular culture has become and will continue to be increasingly important for politicians.

The study also posed the following research question: What is the relationship between political *involvement* and the types of television programs that students watch? The findings were clear: Those who frequently watch local television news, network news, and political talk shows have a higher involvement level in politics than those who watch less often. This runs contrary to predictions based on the work of Putnam, which suggests that television viewing in general will be accompanied by a lessening of civic

participation. However, one of Norris's (1996) findings was similar. In her study, she found that "Those who regularly tuned into the network news were significantly more likely to be involved in all types of political activity . . ." (Norris, 1996, p. 476).

One of the suppositions underlying my hypotheses was that young people are getting their political cues from television (as opposed to their families or political parties). These young people, it has been argued, feel that the media and political marketing forces are ignoring them. Therefore, if they are spending a great deal of time watching television, they are more likely to become disengaged from politics. Indeed, this study found that those who are least involved in politics *are* most likely to feel that television political coverage is not targeted toward their age group and that television political coverage is not relevant for their age group. However, the study also found that those students who do frequently watch television news and political talk shows are more likely to feel that political coverage on television is targeted to and relevant for their age group. In an era where political discussions take place less often and party loyalty is diminishing, perhaps television actually sometimes serves to promote interest in politics.

Suggestions for Future Research

Given the findings of this study, future research might focus more specifically on how viewing television network news and political talk shows are related positively to political involvement and efficacy. Are students who are more interested in politics more inclined to watch television coverage of politics? Since this study found that those who watch these shows tend to be more involved and interested in politics, it would also be

interesting to look more closely at the reasons why some students choose not to watch these shows.

Another interesting finding to pursue is the relationship between frequent viewing of local television news and feelings that the government in Washington can be trusted to do what is right only some of the time. Is this distrust unique to the student population in Nevada, or might it be more generalizable? It would be useful to study this relationship in several different areas of the country, while doing content analyses of the local news in those areas to see how coverage might differ.

Finally, future research might look more closely at the relationship between frequent viewing of late-night entertainment talk shows and greater feelings of trust toward politics and politicians. Which shows specifically seem to encourage these feelings of greater trust? Are they shows where politicians themselves frequently appear? Would this relationship change over time—for example, would this relationship exist during a major political scandal, such as the Clinton/Lewinsky affair? Future research might look at the relationship during off-year elections as well, when not as many prominent politicians would appear on the talk shows. MacManus (1996) wrote that one-quarter of Americans between 18 and 29 watch these shows fairly often and a third of these viewers admit that these shows are sometimes their first source of news about campaigns and candidates. For those young people who are not regularly viewing television news and political talk shows, these talk shows still seem to provide some important cues about politics and politicians.

Conclusions

The findings of this study would indicate that Norris (1996) is correct when she suggests that the relationship between television viewing and engagement “is more complex than sometimes suggested” (p. 479). The study’s findings do not seem to support Putnam’s (1994, 1995) work, which posits that the amount of time people spend watching television is a root cause of civic disengagement.

The study also supports the modified approach to the cultivation theory, which suggests that “the cultivation of perceptions *should be unique to content genres*” (Pfau et al, 1998, p. 94). That is, the sheer amount of time students spend watching television in general seems to be less important than the types of programs they are watching in determining their level of political engagement. However, Pfau et al.’s (1998) study provided support for the notion that “users of specific communication sources tend to perceive institutions as those sources depict them, sometimes positively, or as in the case of national television news and political talk radio, negatively” (p. 107). Their content analyses of specific types of programs showed that late-night talk shows depicted both Congress and the Presidency in a negative light. The current study, on the other hand, found that students who watched television late-night entertainment talk shows feel greater trust toward politics and politicians. It would be useful to figure out the reason for such a discrepancy. One interesting possibility is that, in this age of celebrity-worship, students’ understanding of what counts as a negative depiction might run counter to the expectations of researchers.

Finally, the study suggests that both the amount of television viewing and the types of television programs which students watch do not seem to be related to students' disengagement from politics. Indeed, those who watch television news and political talk shows feel more involved and more effective than less frequent viewers. Rather than being related to disengagement, then, television seems to provide opportunity for greater political engagement. If politicians, the news media, and the government itself could find a way through television to capture the interest of the members of Generation X and their younger brothers and sisters who are not currently watching television news and political talk shows, they might help to further the political engagement of these young viewers.

SURVEY

[The following questions were adapted from the American National Election Study (ANES) surveys from 1964-1992 (in Craig, 1996, p. 295-300)]

Please mark only one answer for each question.

Partisan Self-Identification

1. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a
 1. Republican
 2. Democrat
 3. Independent
 4. none of the above

2. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal (1) to extremely conservative (7). Where would you place **yourself** on this scale?

extremely liberal extremely conservative
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Please place yourself on the following seven-point scales to indicate **your attitude toward politics and politicians.**

not at all cynical extremely cynical
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

not at all trusting extremely trusting
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Please place yourself on this seven-point scale to indicate **your interest level in politics.**

extremely interested extremely uninterested
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Political Involvement

5. Some people seem to **follow what's going on in government and public affairs** most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs
 1. most of the time
 2. some of the time
 3. only now and then
 4. hardly at all

6. Some people don't **pay much attention to political campaigns**. How about you? Would you say that watching the presidential campaign so far this year, you have been
 1. very much interested
 2. somewhat interested
 3. not much interested
 4. not at all interested

7. Would you say that you **personally care** about who wins the presidential election this fall
 1. very much
 2. somewhat
 3. not much
 4. not at all

8. How often do you listen to any speeches, debates, or discussions about the campaign on the **radio**?
 1. daily
 2. 3-5 times a week
 3. once or twice a week
 4. once or twice a month
 5. rarely

9. How often do you pay attention to information about the campaign on the **Internet**?
 1. daily
 2. 3-5 times a week
 3. once or twice a week
 4. once or twice a month
 5. rarely

10. How often do you watch any programs about the campaign on **television**?
 1. daily
 2. 3-5 times a week
 3. once or twice a week
 4. once or twice a month
 5. rarely

11. How often do you **discuss** politics with your **family** or **friends**?
 1. daily
 2. 3-5 times a week
 3. once or twice a week
 4. once or twice a month
 5. rarely

12. During the campaign, how often will you talk to people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates?
 1. daily
 2. 3-5 times a week
 3. once or twice a week
 4. once or twice a month
 5. rarely

13. During the campaign, would you **wear a campaign button, put a campaign sticker on your car, or place a sign** in your window or in the front of your house?
 1. Yes
 2. No

14. During the campaign, would you **go to any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like** that in support of a particular candidate?
 1. Yes
 2. No

15. During the campaign, would you **do any other work** for one of the parties or candidates?
 1. Yes
 2. No

16. Do you listen to **radio shows** where people call in to voice their opinions?
 1. Yes
 2. No

17. Do you watch **talk shows on T. V.** where people call in to voice their opinions?
 1. Yes
 2. No

Effectiveness

Please circle only one answer for each question. Indicate your reaction to the following statements:

18. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.

1. agree strongly
2. agree
3. neutral
4. disagree
5. disagree strongly

19. I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics.

1. agree strongly
2. agree
3. neutral
4. disagree
5. disagree strongly

20. I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.

1. agree strongly
2. agree
3. neutral
4. disagree
5. disagree strongly

21. I think I am better informed about politics and government than most people.

1. agree strongly
2. agree
3. neutral
4. disagree
5. disagree strongly

22. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

1. agree strongly
2. agree
3. neutral
4. disagree
5. disagree strongly

General Attitudes About Government and Politics**Please mark only one answer for each question.**

23. How much of the time do you think you can **trust the government** in Washington to do what is right?
1. always
 2. most of the time
 3. only some of the time
24. When it comes to **taxes**, do you think that people in the government waste a lot of the money, some of the money, or don't waste very much of the money? Choose below.
1. they waste a lot of the money.
 2. they waste some of the money
 3. they don't waste very much of the money
25. Would you say that the **government** is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?
1. It's run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.
 2. It's run for the benefit of all the people.
26. How many people running the government do you think are **crooked**?
1. quite a few
 2. not very many
 3. hardly any of them
27. Do you think that public officials care much what people like you think?
1. yes, they care very much
 2. they care some
 3. no, they don't care much
28. Over the years, how much attention do you feel the government pays to what the people think when it decides what to do?
1. a good deal
 2. some
 3. not much
29. How much do you feel that **having elections** makes the government pay attention to what the people think?
1. a good deal
 2. some
 3. not much

30. How much interest would you say you have in the **Office of the Presidency**?

Limited Interest A Great Deal of Interest
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

31. How much interest would you say you have **in Congress**?

Limited Interest A Great Deal of Interest
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

32. Do you think the president is doing a good job? Mark how you feel about the way the president is handling his job.

1. approve strongly
2. approve
3. neutral
4. disapprove
5. disapprove strongly

33. Do you think that members of Congress are doing a good job? Mark how you feel about the way they are handling their jobs.

1. approve strongly
2. approve
3. neutral
4. disapprove
5. disapprove strongly

34. **On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means "rarely" and 10 means "frequently":**

- how often would you say you watch **local TV news**? _____
- how often would you say you watch **network TV news**? _____
- how often would you say you watch **late-night TV entertainment talk shows**, such as "Late Night with David Letterman" and "The Tonight Show"? _____
- how often would you say you watch **TV political talk shows** such as "Larry King" and "Crossfire"? _____
- how often would you say you visit **Internet news sources**? _____

35. How often do you feel that political issues covered on television are **relevant for your age group**?

1. very often
2. sometimes
3. rarely

36. How often do you feel that shows with political content are **targeted toward your age group**?
1. very often
 2. sometimes
 3. rarely
37. Generally, how many hours a day do you spend **watching T. V.**?
1. one hour or less
 2. two or three hours
 3. four or more hours
38. Generally, how many hours a day do you spend **on the Internet**?
1. one hour or less
 2. two or three hours
 3. four or more hours

The remaining questions are for demographic purposes and for information on voting behavior.

39. How old are you?
1. 18 to 21
 2. 22 to 29
 3. 30 to 39
 4. 40 - 49
 5. 50 - 59
 6. 60 or older
40. Were you old enough to vote in the **last presidential election**?
1. no
 2. yes
41. Did you vote in the **last presidential election**?
1. no
 2. yes
42. If **yes**, **who** did you vote for?
1. Clinton
 2. Perot
 3. Dole
 4. Other _____ (Please specify)

43. Do you plan to vote in the **next presidential election**?

1. no
2. maybe
3. yes

44. If **yes**, **who** do you plan to vote for?

1. Gore
2. Bush
3. Other _____ (Please specify)

45. What is your sex?

1. male
2. female

46. Do you have children?

1. no
2. yes

47. Are you married?

1. no
2. yes

48. What is your race?

1. White (non-Latino)
2. African American
3. Asian American/Pacific Islander
4. Latino/Mexican American
6. Native American
7. Other _____ (Please specify)

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO BE A PART OF THIS SURVEY!

TABLE 1
Pearson Correlations Between Television and Political Engagement Variables

	TV Hrs.	Loc. News	Netwk. News	Ent. Tk.	Pol. Tk.
Efficacy	.152	-.231*	-.317*	.121	-.414**
Int. in Pol.	.050	-.189*	-.223*	-.035	-.327**
Int. in Pres.	.057	.234*	.312**	.041	.220*
Int. in Cong.	.002	.229*	.289**	-.114	.305**
Involmnt.	.052	-.319**	-.380**	.080	-.435**
Assessment of Pres.	-.200	-.088	-.166	-.026	-.191*
Assessment of Cong.	.111	.015	-.090	-.025	.101
Cynicism Re: Pol.	.072	.157	.139	-.210*	.165
Trust Re: Pol.	.082	-.111	.038	.230*	-.033
Trust Gov't in Wash.	.055	.254**	.003	-.052	.018
Are Taxes Wasted	.058	.093	.093	.059	-.030
Who Runs Gov't.	.016	-.079	.091	.073	-.167
Gov't. Crooked	-.089	.017	.181	.140	.094

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

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