

A Causal Analysis of the Political Socialization of High School Seniors in Arkansas

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Responding to the latest calls for political socialization studies as an approach to understanding why do women not participate as much as men in the higher levels of political activities (Elder 2004, 45; Verba, Burns, Lehman Schlozman 1997, 1070), this research reports political socialization data obtained from high school seniors attending seven central Arkansas schools. It finds: (1) these female and male high school seniors differ very little on a range of political orientations, including present and future political activities, and (2) although in the direction predicted, the type of family (nuclear or maternal), education of mother or father, and family SES have little independent or aggregate capacity to predict the students' political orientations or political activities. However, student grade point average and matriculation plans do predict increased political participation. (3) Political efficacy displays significant impact on the political interest and participation rates of both females and males.

Introduction

The reduction in differences between adult women's and men's rates of political participation has been a positive development (Carroll CAWP 2005; Niemi and Junn 1998, 133-139; Verba et al. 1995, 251, 317).² Yet gender differences persist in some

¹ The authors' names appear in alphabetical order.

² From the high of nearly 80% in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Americans' trust in their national government has dropped to less than 30%; this low rate is expressed by all types of Americans (Nye et al. eds 1997, 81). Political party identification--important not only for its influence on voting decisions but also for its role in engaging us in the political system (Verba and Nie 1972, 46)--also has decreased, from about 75% overall to 65% (Flanigan and Zindale 1998, 62). Nearly half of Americans have expressed the belief that our democracy would be better served if there were no party labels on the ballot (Gitelson et al, 1984, 317). Political participation in presidential elections is at an all-time low (Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin 1994, Table 2-1). The possible effect of this negativism on the democratic order has become a growing concern (Dionne Jr 1991, 9-28, 356-373; Nye et al. eds 1997, 1-18, 252-281). Following the terrorist attack of 9/11 there was a temporary spike in American's trust for the national government, shooting up to 64%. However, by 2007, Katrina and the second war in Iraq had taken their toll on American's trust in their national government; it had dropped back to pre-9/11 levels for the national government, while having remained about the same for state and local governments during that time(gallup.net/poll/2007).

attitudes and political behaviors that could influence women's empowerment (Cammissa and Reingold 2004; Conway, Steuernagel, and Ahern 1997, 21). After several decades of increases in women's office-holding, there has been a leveling off of women in elective office (see CAWP 2005). Since the peak of 28.5% of women state office-holders in 2000, that percentage in 2004 was 25.4% (Carroll CAWP 2005,3). Even at the zenith of women running for office in the 2002 election, only 15% of the major party candidates' for the U.S. Senate and House, as well as gubernatorial offices were women (Elder 2004, 28). Important to women's lower political participation is their lower interest in politics, which in turn may be impacted negatively by their lower internal efficacy (Bennett and Bennett 1989; Elder 2004, 45). Internal efficacy (the belief that politics and government are understandable or not) is a strong predictor of political activities (Verba et al. 1995, 346).

Political socialization is thought to be the preliminary source of our political orientations, as well as our sense of political efficacy (Easton and Dennis 1969). Political socialization—"Who learns what, from whom, with what results"³—is the process that creates the basic attitudes and values through which we (at least) initially interpret our political world (Sears and Valentino 1997, 45-64). This process may be different for females than it is for males, with important consequences for women's interest in politics and their internal efficacy, and ultimately their political participation (Conway, Steuernagel, and Ahern 1997,21).

Verba, Burns, and Lehman Schlozman (1997, 1070) declare that the study of the political socialization of females and males has become necessary. Elder (2004, 45) anticipates that the significant differences she finds between females and males in political interest, ambition, and confidence⁴ demonstrate the need for political socialization studies. Indeed, it has been more than a generation since research on the socialization of female and male high school seniors was conducted using nationwide random samples (Jennings and Niemi 1974). High school seniors provide data on pre-adult political socialization (Niemi and Hepburn 1995,4-5). And while pre-adult political socialization is not the all-determining requisite of adult political behavior that early researchers such as Hess and Torney (1967, 220) claimed, nevertheless it provides a foundation of attitudes that structure the initial basis for adult evaluations of the political system's performance (Sears and Valentino 1997, 45-64).

Our sample of seniors from seven Arkansas high schools is an ideal age-cohort to study not only because they provide data on the results of pre-adult political socialization before being subjected extensively to the influence of life's events, but also because Arkansas is one of the traditional southern states wherein political

³ This is Fred Greenstein's (1965, 12) paraphrasing of Harold Lasswell's famous definition of politics.

⁴ Elder's measurement of "Confidence" is not the same as the Internal Efficacy measure but is quite similar in meaning (see her Appendix A).

socialization might continue to transmit traditional political gender roles (Elazar 1965; Savage and Blair 1984; Scott 1970).⁵

Research Focus. This research is concerned with differences, if any, between female and male high school seniors' political socialization as reflected in their political orientations. The orientations were selected to cover the range of theoretically important political orientations ranging from the most general attitudes toward the American political system to the most concrete. At the most general end of such a continuum are attitudes toward the American system of government and trust in the national government; at middle range are interest in political things and internal efficacy; at the most concrete level are political party identification and political participation.

We assume that differences, if any, flow from the political socialization experiences that the high school seniors have had as they were reared in different family backgrounds filtered by these young people through their personal characteristics.

Literature

Political socialization provides the basis for initial adult evaluations of the political system's performance (Sears and Valentino 1997, 45-64). The learning of political attitudes and values is strongly influenced by structural (e.g., socioeconomic variables), situational (life circumstances), and personal characteristics (e.g., intelligence). These influences are, however, interactive and difficult to separate operationally. Structural factors, such as education, income, and occupation, are important determiners of one's situation in life. Verba, Lehman Schlozman, and Brady (1995) provide compelling evidence that the structural factor of parents' socioeconomic (especially parents' education) provides their children with situational conditions that explain a significant amount of the political participation in America; namely, that parents' education bestows upon their offspring educational and occupational opportunities, as well as exposure to political stimulation, which not only initially generate interest and efficacy among their offspring but also combine over time to furnish them with a set of political resources (e.g., money, communication skills, time, institutional positions, and various attitudinal and self-interested motives) that are vital to political participation (pp. 458-459).

Yet while there is strong evidence that higher SES enhances political internal efficacy, political interest and participation (Dye 1999, 154; Verba et al. 1995, 343-

⁵ Although Elazar (1965) classifies Arkansas as overall a traditional state, Savage and Blair (1984) find attitudinal variations between and within regions of Arkansas (pp. 59-85).

45, ch.15), women's efficacy and interest are somewhat lower than men's at the various socioeconomic levels (Conway et al. 1997, 47; Jennings and Niemi 1974, 125; Verba et al.1995,349). Moreover, Bennett and Bennett (1989) find that structural factors (e.g., job, income) do not affect women's political interest, except for the mild impact of education (pp. 114-115), nor do situational factors (e.g., marriage, age) explain women's lower political interest; rather it is personal political factors (e.g., internal efficacy) that are important in explaining women's lower political interest (pp. 114-115).

Internal efficacy is among the most important of these personal political factors explaining women's lower political interest: If we believe that government and politics are too complex for us, we are less likely to be interested or to participate (Bennett and Bennett 1989, 116-117; Verba et al. 1995, 346). It is women's lower internal efficacy that Bennett and Bennett believe is the variable that explains why women are not as interested in politics, and women's lower interest in politics reduces their level of political participation (outside of voting) (1989, 114-115).

The Family As Political Socializer. The family is the basic setting for early political socialization (Conway et al. 1997, 22), but family structure has changed dramatically since the high water mark of political socialization studies in the late 1950s and mid-1960s (Niemi and Hepburn 1995, 4-5). At that time, only a small percentage (about 12%) of children studied were reared in single-parent families (Hess and Torney 1967, 114)⁶; today 37% are, and over half of American children will live in a single-parent household at some time before their 18th birthday (Stokes and Chevan 1996, 246-248).⁷ Stepparent and grandparent type of families have also increased dramatically. Nationwide, 16% of families with children under 18 years of age are the stepparent type, and in 90% of these the mother has custody of her natural children. And while the typical stepparent-family structure consists of birth-mother and stepfather, multiple divorces and remarriages are creating different combinations (Stokes and Chevan 1996,246; Thio 1998, 353). Grandparent-headed households have increased from 3.2% in 1970 to 5.5% in 1997 (Casper and Bryson 1998, 2).

The early research found that elementary-age children from maternal and from nuclear families had similar political orientations (Hess and Torney 1967, 114). More recent research also finds that family structure does not influence the level of political information of American high school seniors (Niemi and Junn 1998, ch 6). However, the political values of Canadian youth from two-parent families differ more from their parents than youth reared in single-headed families, and mothers in

⁶ Seventy-six percent of Jennings and Niemi's 1973 national sample were from nuclear families.

⁷ The percentages of children under 18 living with mother only are: whites=20%, African Americans=49%, Latinos=30% (Appelbaum and Chambliss 1997, 394).

single-parent Canadian families have more influence on their offspring's political values than mothers in two-parent families (Dalhouse and Frideres 1996, 244-245).

With the rapid change in family structure, new calls for research on the impact of family structure on political attitudes (e.g., Dalhouse and Frideres 1996, 227-248; Endersby 2008; Niemi and Hepburn 1995) have been added to Hirsch's call of three decades ago (1971, 57).

Interaction of Family SES and Family Structure. While the studies of family structure influence on offspring's political orientations are inconclusive, research on the influence of parent's education and family socioeconomic status (presented earlier) suggests that non-nuclear families have potentially negative influence on offspring's political socialization.⁸ This potential results from the higher occurrence of poverty and lower levels of parental education in non-nuclear families. In single-parent families, nearly half (47%) of children in single-headed families are in poverty (Carlson and Danziger Feb 1998, 3,9). An American national study of high school seniors finds that the educational level of their parents has a small but significant impact on the political knowledge of both females and males, especially males (Niemi and Junn 1998, 134). Another American national survey (Verba et al. 1995) finds that parents' socioeconomic status (especially their education) is the major factor socializing their children's potential political participation (pp.326, 522-24).

Single-headed families are overwhelmingly (>98%) female-headed, and most of these mothers are poorly educated (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994, 237-239). Moreover, mothers with less education have a negative impact on their offspring's political interest and efficacy (Langton 1969, 51), and mothers exert considerable influence over offspring's—daughters in particular—political attitudes (Jennings and Niemi 1974, 162; Hirsch 1971, 39; Langton 1969, 60); in father-absent families mothers' influence on the political orientations of their children is accentuated (Hirsch 1971, 64-65). At the same time however, the potential maternal influence in single-headed families may be mitigated by the fact that in general lower status

⁸ The expectation of dysfunctional political consequences of single-headed families follows also from the dysfunctional social and economic consequences of single-headed families (i.e., children from single-headed households compared with children from two-parent families have much higher rates of crime, school dropout, illegitimacy, and illegal drug use)(McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Thomas, Farrell, Barnes 1996, 884-885). Other reasons suggested for the differing impact of single-headed households are: (1) compared to two-parent families, single parents are less consistent, have less time available to spend with offspring, and have less control of their offspring outside the family setting (Fields and Smith 1998, 5); (2) single parents are more likely to experience stress that influences their ability to parent effectively (Miller and Davis 1997, 997); and (3) lower socioeconomic families characteristically have parenting styles that do not encourage children to explore new ideas, expose them to controversial material, or encourage children to reach and express their own conclusions (Chaffee et al. 1973, 351, 355).

families have less influence over children's political orientations than higher status families (Hess and Torney 1967, 114-116).

The other non-nuclear family types (i.e., stepparent and grandparent) have features in common with single-headed families that may negatively influence political socialization. For example, divorce (a principal circumstance generating stepparent family formation) appears to have an impact on children's social behaviors to some extent in ways similar to that of lower socioeconomic status single-headed families: when compared with children from nuclear families the children of divorced parents have more school problems, as well as higher school dropout rates, drug use, illegitimacy, crime, etc (Appelbaum and Chambliss 1997, 403).⁹ In brief, family structure and situations related to it, such as family income and parental education, provide a context within which political socialization occurs: "...exposure to politically relevant stimuli in the family early in life, having politically involved parents, or being exposed to political discussions at home[are important] for the propensity to become active in politics as an adult" (Verba et al, 1995, 419).

Students' Personal Characteristics. Pre-adult political socialization provides attitudes that are influenced by family socioeconomic background, yet young adults are not automatons (Sears and Valentino 1997, 45-64). The personal characteristics of young persons, such as their aspirations for their future, are potentially important in their evaluations of the political system.¹⁰ Experiences are filtered through the individual mind; intelligence and anticipated future circumstances (especially expected future socioeconomic status) act as perceptual filters of experiences that affect political orientations: "High intelligence accelerates the acquisition of political attitudes" (Hess and Torney 1967, 148); political activity is higher among children who have higher intelligence (p.186), and political knowledge is higher among the more intelligent high school seniors (Jennings and Niemi 1974, 96).

⁹ The evidence on the impact of divorce on children is not conclusive; see the summary and citations provided by Appelbaum and Chambliss (1997, 403). Grandparent-headed families in particular do not appear to bode well for the grandchildren's positive political socialization, given the circumstances that force child-rearing responsibilities upon grandparents; namely, circumstances such as parents who are not married, use drugs, are divorced, have mental illnesses an/or physical illnesses such as AIDS, abuse or neglect their children, or are incarcerated (Casper and Bryson 1998 ,3). Moreover, grandparent-headed families produce high levels poverty (27%) for the grandchildren reared in them (p.18) and of course grandparents are older and usually less energetic and/or physically able to care for grandchildren.

¹⁰ Important works among the literature on social mobility-opportunity structure in America are Blau and Duncan (1967) and Featherman and Hauser (1978).

Expectations

We expect that the high school seniors in this study will register some small (but not significant) differences between females' and males' political orientations. And while both females and males from maternal-headed families will have lower family SES than those from nuclear families, any differences in political orientations will be accounted for by socioeconomic status (SES), not gender or family structure type. Thus, we expect that regardless of gender and/or type of family, lower family SES will produce less involvement in high school activities, less family discussion of politics, less interest in government and politics, less political efficacy, less trust in the political system, less identification with political parties, and less expectation of future political activities. We expect, then, family SES is the factor that generates any differences between high school seniors' political orientations, if there are any differences; however, individual intelligence (indicated by GPA) and expectations of future socioeconomic status (indicated by plans to attend a four-year college) should display some independently positive impacts on their political orientations.

Given that internal efficacy is thought to provide a mental filter affecting political interest and participation, we expect that internal efficacy may be an intervening variable affecting present and future political participation, particularly for young women (see Literature section, last paragraph prior to *The Family as Political Socializer*).

Methodology and Data

The students' family SES backgrounds are operationalized using their mothers' educational attainment, fathers' educational attainment, and family income. Students' intelligence and socioeconomic aspirations are operationalized using their high school GPA and their plans to attend a four-year college, respectively.

The attitudinal dependent variables against which our hypothetical expectations are tested are (1) strength of identification with either political party, (2) perception of the government of the United States as a model that other countries should follow, (3) belief that government and politics are too complex to understand (internal efficacy), (4) belief that the government of the United States is dominated by a few big interests at the expense of the many (external efficacy), and (5) trust in the U.S. government. The participatory (dependent) variables against which the hypotheses are tested include (6) occurrence of family political discussions, (7) paying attention to politics and government, (8) holding leadership positions in school, and (9) expected level of political activity in the future.

The actual wording of the questions used to measure each of the foregoing variables and the method in which they were coded for use in the analyses reported below are detailed in the Appendix.

We begin the testing of our expectations/hypotheses by analyzing the mean distributions of the attitudinal and behavioral variables for male and female children raised in nuclear and maternal family settings, respectively. Mean distributions of the other independent variables (parental educational attainment, family SES, and respondents' academic records and socioeconomic ascription) are also presented.

We use logistic regression, a technique that permits regression analysis of dichotomous categorical dependent variables, to test the relative influence of family type (nuclear or maternal), family income and educational attainment, and the respondents' intellects and aspirations upon the respondents' attitudinal and behavioral orientations. The dichotomization of each of the dependent variables tested in the logistic regression equations is detailed, along with the original wording and response categories for each question-item, in the Appendix.

Independent variables may influence some dependent variable directly as well as through their interaction with other independent variables. Path analysis provides a method to statistically sort out the impact of variable(s) directly and indirectly on a dependent variable (Welch and Comer 1988, ch 10). We employ path analysis to observe the possible intervening influence of internal efficacy on the dependent variables (political orientations).¹¹

The data are from a sample of 703 high school seniors from seven schools in central Arkansas. These schools provide a set of high schools which, while not random, are the total senior classes in each school and provide a general reflection of the type of schools in Arkansas: four of the schools are public and three are parochial (Catholic); three of the schools have significant minority enrollments (at 15% or greater); two of the schools are located in an urban setting of 170,000 inhabitants, two are located in an urban setting of 40,000 inhabitants, one is located in a small city of 7,000 inhabitants, and two are located in small towns of 1-2,000 inhabitants. Although the authors' plans also included administration of the questionnaire at an urban (Little Rock) public high school, implementation had to be canceled.¹²

¹¹ Path coefficients are standardized regression coefficients that reflect the average change in standard deviation of an effect (endogenous variable) associated with change of one standard deviation in a cause (exogenous variable or preceding endogenous or preceding endogenous variable), when all other causes of that effect are held constant. Path Coefficients also allow a comparison of the related magnitudes of the various coefficients with the same model (see Asher 1983, 45-47). Indirect effects are those parts of a variable's total effect which are transmitted or mediated by variables specified as intervening between the cause and effect relationships of interest in a model indirect effects are determined by multiplying path coefficients along a pathway. Pathways can only be followed in the direction of the proposed causality. The indirect effect of one variable on another is simply that part of the total effect which is not transmitted via intervening variables. The total effect of one variable on another is defined as the sum of its direct and indirect effects (Alwin and Hauser 1975).

¹² The authors had obtained permission to administer the questionnaire at a public high school in Little Rock; however, at the time we were to administer it a dispute (unrelated to our project) developed between the principal of that high school and higher administrators. The principal cancelled permission

Once the cooperation of school authorities was obtained for the project, questionnaires replicating Jennings and Niemi's 1973 questionnaire, with additional questions pertinent to contemporary issues and social and technological changes appended after the original survey protocol, were provided to the high schools in May, 1997. The questionnaires were administered to graduating seniors by teachers at the schools. The responses were gleaned for omission of questions, confused responses such as multiple answers to questions requiring only one answer, response-sets, and other indications of insincere responses.

Females are 49% of the total sample, males 51%. Fifty-two percent of the females (N=169) live in a nuclear family, while 54% of the males do (N=196); 16% (N=51) of females and 15% (N=54) of males live with their mother (maternal family).

Results

Descriptive Results. Parents' Education and SES Backgrounds. The educational background of these students' parents reflects the type of family (see Table 1 below). Mother's and father's education is higher for students from nuclear families than for students from maternal families and, of course, gender does not affect this. Females and males from maternal families differ significantly from females and males from nuclear families on three of the four averages (first four items, last two columns in Table 1: Sig=.035; .031; .165; .005). However, males report slightly higher parental educational averages (except for fathers' education in maternal families where it was nearly identical—females=2.93 and males=2.92). Males also report a significantly higher average for their mothers' education in nuclear families

Moreover, (see Table 1) the family SES (family income) differs by family type; both females and males from maternal families have significantly lower family income compared with those from nuclear families (item three, last two columns in Table 1: Sig=.000; .000). However, once again males report higher family income than do females for nuclear families (males=3.30;females=3.06; Sig=.002). And, while maternal family income is lower than nuclear family income for both sexes, males also report higher family income than females in maternal families and the difference is nearly statistically significant. This consistent difference in the reporting of family income between females and males suggests a perceptual difference between the two sexes that may or may not be of any substantive importance.

for our project. Although we attempted to obtain permission at another public high school in Little Rock, by then it proved to be too late in the school year.

Individual Attributes. Females from nuclear and from maternal families report (Table 1) higher high school grade point averages (GPA) than do males from each type of family, although the GPA's of both females and males is higher among those from nuclear families compared with those from maternal families. Thus this data reflect the situation accurately that females have a consistently higher high school GPA than males.

Moreover in each type of family, female high school seniors are more likely to say that they plan to attend college than do males in that family type. While both females and males from nuclear families are much more likely to plan to attend college than those from maternal families, women in each type of family are more likely to attend college than young men in that type. And this is generally accurate of American high school seniors.

Political Orientations. Typical of American youth, strength of political party identification is weak among both sexes among the respondents, as well as across type of families; and none of the differences is significant (Table 1). These high school seniors uniformly express moderate support for the US government as the best kind for others to have; there is almost no difference between females and males or between family-types. At the same time, their trust in the national government is low and they tend to believe that the US government is run for the benefit of big interests; once again, these beliefs are uniform across gender and family type and the small differences are not statistically significant. Finally, females and males from both types of families agree that government is too complex to understand.

Political Activity Level. Female and male respondents report similarly low levels of interest in paying attention to politics and government (i.e., "only now and then" to "some of the time"), regardless of what family type they live in. However, males from both types of families report somewhat higher interest in politics and government than females. And while there is no significant difference in the frequency with which the students discuss politics with their family ("only a few times a month" to "two or three times per year"), females report a slightly higher level of family political discussions than do males in both family types.

As for current involvement in student government, females from nuclear families have higher rates of holding student leadership positions than males from

Table 1. High School Seniors' Means on Variables by Gender and Family Structure, and Significance of Differences

	Means of Females from Nuclear Family	Means of Males from Nuclear Family	Means of Females from Maternal Family	Means of Males from Maternal Family	Significance of Females v. Males from Nuclear Family	Significance of Females v. Males from Maternal Family	Significance of Females Nuclear Versus Females Maternal	Significance of Males Nuclear Versus Males Maternal
Students' Family SES Background								
Mothers' education	3.06	3.21	2.71	2.88	Sig=.010	Sig=.701	Sig=.035	Sig=.031
Fathers' education	3.17	3.32	2.93	2.92	Sig=.082	Sig=.542	Sig=.165	Sig=.005
Families' Income	3.06	3.30	2.26	2.77	Sig=.002	Sig=.060	Sig=.000	Sig=.000
Students' Personal Attributes								
High school GPA	3.15	3.10	2.90	2.79	Sig=.507	Sig=.802	Sig=.057	Sig=.016
Plans to attend college	83%	72%	59%	50%	Sig=.001	Sig=.006	Sig=.001	Sig=.005
Students' Political Orientations								
Strength of Party Identification	1.37	1.36	1.41	1.45	Sig=.575	Sig=.168	Sig=.671	Sig=.671
US Govt is best kind for others	2.69	2.75	2.67	2.71	Sig=.217	Sig=.758	Sig=.879	Sig=.754
Govt and politics too complex	3.00	2.91	2.98	2.87	Sig=.247	Sig=.782	Sig=.877	Sig=.762
US Govt run for big interests	63%	67%	61%	69%	Sig=.985	Sig=.312	Sig=.617	Sig=.049
Trusts US nat'l govt	1.55	1.69	1.55	1.66	Sig=.102	Sig=.671	Sig=.110	Sig=.883
Family discusses politics	2.92	2.89	2.80	2.56	Sig=.015	Sig=.437	Sig=.428	Sig=.026
Pays attention to govt and politics	2.66	2.76	2.50	2.71	Sig=.546	Sig=.071	Sig=.295	Sig=.747
Students' Political Activities								
Student leadership positions held	1.93	1.81	1.80	2.31	Sig=.104	Sig=.002	Sig=.358	Sig=.000
Intends to be politically active in future	2.20	2.04	2.00	2.24	Sig=.141	Sig=.009	Sig=.168	Sig=.139

N's=nuclear family females 169, males 196; maternal family females 51, males 54. Measurement of variables in this table are described in Appendix A.

that type of family, but females from maternal families show a significantly lower rate of holding student government positions than males from maternal families; indeed, males from maternal families claimed more student leadership positions (perhaps due to inclusion of those in athletics as a form of student “leadership”).

Finally, with regard to respondents’ expectations of future political participation, neither females nor males expect to be highly active (averaging between “somewhat” and “pretty” active). There are some differences by gender and family type: females from nuclear families expect to be more active than males from nuclear families, whereas males from maternal families expect to be more active than do females from maternal families.

Logistic Regression Results

Multivariate analysis using logistic regression techniques appropriate to (dichotomized) categorical dependent variables broadly confirms the above descriptive findings. The results in Table 2 indicate that type of family structure influences only one out of nine dependent political orientations, and even then for males only. Males raised in maternal-headed households are 376% more likely (than those raised in nuclear households) to have held some kind of student leadership position at school (which can include participation in interscholastic athletics).

But then our expectation was that family SES, rather than mere family structure, would condition student political attitudes and behaviors most prominently.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Analysis of High School Seniors’ Political Orientations

Variables	Females		Males	
	b ¹ (se)	Exp b ²	b ¹ (se)	Exp b ²
EQUATION 1				
<i>Dependent Variable:</i> Strength of identification with (either) political party				
<i>Independent Variables</i>				
Type of Family (maternal/nuclear)	.76 (.50)	2.15	.10 (.42)	1.11
Mothers’ Education	-.11 (.23)	.89	.06 (.22)	1.06
Fathers’ Education	.07 (.22)	1.07	.14 (.23)	1.15
Family SES (family income)	.32 (.23)	1.38	.12 (.24)	1.13
Students’ GPA	.27 (.22)	1.31	.13 (.22)	1.14
Plans to Attend 4-Year College	-.66 (.51)	.51	-.08 (.43)	.91
EQUATION 2				
<i>Dependent Variable:</i> American government is best for other countries				

Table 2. Logistic Regression Analysis of High School Seniors' Political Orientations

Variables	Females		Males	
	b ¹ (se)	Exp b ²	b ¹ (se)	Exp b ²
Independent Variables				
Type of Family (maternal/nuclear)	-.42 (.46)	.65	.01 (.43)	1.01
Mothers' Education	-.26 (.23)	.76	.06 (.21)	1.06
Fathers' Education	-.08 (.22)	.91	.08 (.23)	1.09
Family SES (family income)	-.45 (.24)	.63	-.03 (.24)	.96
Students' GPA	-.22 (.23)	.80	-.28 (.23)	.74
Plans to Attend 4-Year College	-1.23* (.54)	.29	.09 (.44)	1.10
EQUATION 3				
<i>Dependent Variable:</i> Government & politics are too complex to understand				
Independent Variables				
Type of Family (maternal/nuclear)	.31 (.52)	1.37	.04 (.45)	1.04
Mothers' Education	-.43 (.26)	.64	.43 (.23)	1.53
Fathers' Education	-.06 (.25)	.94	-.36 (.25)	.69
Family SES (family income)	.47 (.25)	1.60	-.47 (.27)	.62
Students' GPA	-.46 (.27)	.62	.05 (.23)	1.05
Plans to Attend 4-Year College	-.06 (.59)	.93	.23 (.46)	1.26
EQUATION 4				
<i>Dependent Variable:</i> US govt run for benefit of big interests, not for the many				
Independent Variables				
Type of Family (maternal/nuclear)	-.58 (.45)	.55	-.06 (.43)	.93
Mothers' Education	-.28 (.24)	.74	.24 (.21)	1.27
Fathers' Education	-.07 (.23)	.93	-.25 (.24)	.77
Family SES (family income)	-.03 (.23)	.96	-.01 (.24)	.98
Students' GPA	-.24 (.23)	.78	.00 (.23)	1.00
Plans to Attend 4-Year College	-.40 (.55)	.66	.21 (.44)	1.23
EQUATION 5				
<i>Dependent Variable:</i> Trust in U.S. national government				
Independent Variables				
Type of Family (maternal/nuclear)	.72 (.48)	2.07	.14 (.42)	1.15
Mothers' Education	-.07 (.23)	.92	.05 (.22)	1.05
Fathers' Education	-.00 (.22)	.99	.41 (.24)	1.50
Family SES (family income)	.05 (.22)	1.05	-.26 (.25)	.76
Students' GPA	.19 (.22)	1.21	.19 (.22)	1.21
Plans to Attend 4-Year College	-1.32*(.55)	.26	.29 (.43)	1.33
EQUATION 6				

Table 2. Logistic Regression Analysis of High School Seniors' Political Orientations

Variables	Females		Males	
	b ¹ (se)	Exp b ²	b ¹ (se)	Exp b ²
Dependent Variable: Discusses politics with family				
Independent Variables				
Type of Family (maternal/nuclear)	.30 (.91)	1.35	.24 (.65)	1.27
Mothers' Education	.93 (.58)	2.53	.63 (.33)	1.88
Fathers' Education	.83 (.46)	2.30	.08 (.34)	1.08
Family SES (family income)	.54 (.45)	1.72	-.62 (.43)	.53
Students' GPA	.54 (.42)	1.72	.23 (.36)	1.25
Plans to Attend 4-Year College	2.74*(1.18)	15.58	-1.02(.62)	.35
EQUATION 7				
Dependent Variable: Pays attention to govt & politics				
Independent Variables				
Type of Family (maternal/nuclear)	-.46 (.69)	.62	.30 (.64)	1.35
Mothers' Education	.20 (.37)	1.22	-.03 (.32)	.96
Fathers' Education	.42 (.33)	1.53	.28 (.34)	1.33
Family SES (family income)	-.21 (.37)	.81	.23 (.36)	1.27
Students' GPA	-.16 (.35)	.84	.71*(.34)	2.03
Plans to Attend 4-Year College	.32 (.85)	1.38	.29 (.63)	1.34
EQUATION 8				
Dependent Variable: Has held student leadership positions				
Independent Variables				
Type of Family (maternal/nuclear)	.81 (.51)	2.25	1.56*(.55)	4.76
Mothers' Education	.07 (.24)	1.08	-.10 (.23)	.89
Fathers' Education	-.22 (.23)	.79	.33 (.25)	1.39
Family SES (family income)	.20 (.23)	1.22	.02 (.26)	1.02
Students' GPA	.80*(.24)	2.23	.49*(.24)	1.63
Plans to Attend 4-Year College	-.16 (.53)	.84	.58 (.58)	1.80
EQUATION NINE				
Dependent Variable: Intends to be politically active in the future				
Independent Variables				
Type of Family (maternal/nuclear)	-.18 (.52)	.82	.86 (.51)	2.37
Mothers' Education	.10 (.27)	1.11	.01 (.23)	1.01
Fathers' Education	.30 (.25)	1.35	-.02 (.25)	.97
Family SES (family income)	-.18 (.27)	.83	.19 (.26)	1.21
Students' GPA	.11 (.25)	1.12	.19 (.24)	1.21
Plans to Attend 4-Year College	-.47 (.58)	.62	-.35 (.46)	.70

N = females 220; males 250.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Analysis of High School Seniors' Political Orientations

Variables	Females		Males	
	b ¹ (se)	Exp b ²	b ¹ (se)	Exp b ²

The measurement of the dependent variables are in Appendix A, as are the measurement of the independent variables Mothers' Education, Fathers' Education, Family SES (family income), and Students' GPA; the independent variable Type of Family is dummied (maternal=1, nuclear=0) and Plans to Attend a Four-Year College is dummied (yes=1, no=0).
*Significant at <.05

However, as Table 2 indicates, the family SES variables predict student political orientations less well than family structure did. Father's educational attainment, mother's educational attainment, and family income do not occasion even one statistically significant logistic regression coefficient (although mother's educational attainment just misses significance, at .0595, for male respondents reporting participation in family political discussions). The variables most likely to occasion statistically significant coefficients are those most endogenous to the respondents themselves—personal grade point average, and college matriculation plans. Grade point average correlates significantly with assumption of school leadership positions for both male and female high school seniors, and with tendency to pay attention to government and politics for male high school seniors. Male respondents of higher GPA are twice as likely (specifically, 103% more likely) to follow politics and government than their cohorts of lesser academic achievement, and males and females of higher GPA are 63% more likely and 123% more likely, respectively, to hold student leadership positions than cohorts with lower GPAs.

Plans to attend college significantly structure certain political orientations, but only for female high school seniors, never for males. Females planning to attend a four-year college are far more likely than their cohorts to discuss politics with their families. The impressive exponentiated coefficient of 15.58 for equation number six in Table 2 indicates that college-bound females are 1458% more likely than their stay-at-home sisters to have had family political discussions. Interestingly enough, the other two statistically significant coefficients for this variable indicate that college-bound females are less likely to display positive affective orientations toward their government. College-bound females are 74% less likely than their cohorts to trust the U.S. government to do the right thing, and 71% less likely to think that the American system of government is the kind that all countries should have. One might infer from these findings that family political discussions and a critical view of the American government may be closely related.

Analyses of the path analysis models (see Figure 1) demonstrate three basic points: first, the females and males display very similar patterns; second, family structure has little direct or indirect effect (through internal efficacy) on trust, interest, and current or estimated political participation; third, internal efficacy is

important regarding its negative impact on trust in government (females -.21, males -.13), interest in politics (females -.29, males -.31), having run for student government (females -.07, not significant for males), and their estimates of future political participation (females -.22, males -.12).

Overall the models did not, however, explain much of the variance in any model (never higher than 9%), indicating that neither family structure nor internal efficacy is a determining variable on interest in politics and political participation among these young persons.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, these female and male Arkansas high school seniors are quite similar in their political orientations, interest, efficacy, and current and expected activities. It is particularly noteworthy that the young women do not differ significantly from the young men in either attention paid to politics or in their sense of political efficacy. Additionally, the female high school seniors enter adulthood with expectations of educational achievement (four-year college) and future political participation at the same level as the young men, if not somewhat higher.

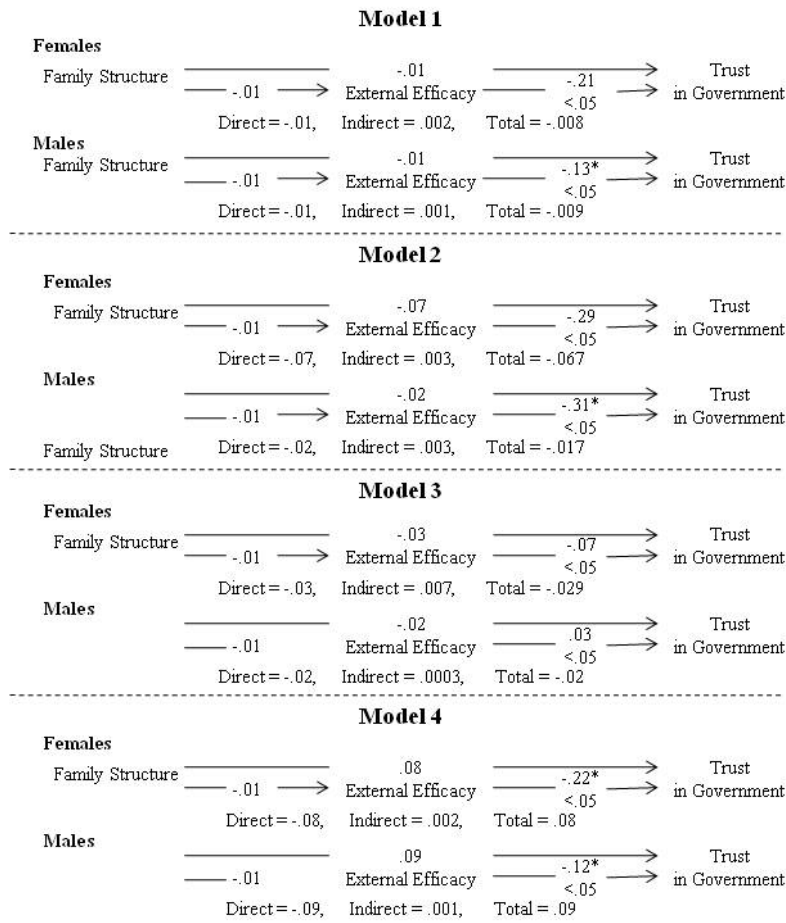
If these young women and men later develop different patterns of political interest and participation, it is not because they initially entered adulthood with differing political socialization experiences: type of family does not systematically (if at all) affect either females' or males' political orientations; nor does the education of either parent nor family income have such an effect. Neither the political attitudes nor the political behaviors of respondents of either gender are affected even once by such variables.

Only the personal intellectual achievement (GPA) and future aspiration (college matriculation) variables produce more than one statistically significant association, and even these interesting findings occur in only three out of eighteen possible cases, respectively.

Thus, the model consisting of family type, mothers' education, fathers' education, family income, students' GPA, and students' plans to attend a four-year college occasionally produces a statistically significant association, but brings to bear very little power to predict high school seniors' affective responses and rates of present or future political participation.

Modern political socialization involves contributions from a variety of agents within the context of the "times," which provide a snapshot of American government and politics that is much the same for most young people. Our experience over the years with several thousand students in U.S. Government classes suggests strongly

Figure 1. Path Analyses of Models



Note: Total effects equal direct plus indirect effects only in cases where direct effects are considered substantive (i.e., $p < .05$). While this is not the case for family structure in any of our models, we include the calculation of its total effects for completeness. See Note 10 for information on path analyses.

that young adults share the current general beliefs of the adult public,¹³ which subscribes to broad democratic participatory ideals and social ideals of “fairness,”

¹³ Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (in Dodd and Oppenheimer eds, 1997, 62-77) provide evidence of widespread support among adult Americans for the American democratic governmental structures,

but perceives that the democratic order is flawed by careerist professional politicians, by political parties responsive to special interests, and by various “unfair” societal conditions (e.g., racism and sexism). Whether reared in a nuclear or maternal family, young people do not hear a great deal concerning politics at home, and what they do hear is largely a reinforcement of the foregoing ideals tempered with cynicism about how the ideals are carried out in practice. Moreover, as young persons they tend to be highly idealistic receivers of a set of normative messages about democracy and the democratic order and correctable flaws. The message concerning government and politics, however, is not important at this stage in their lives; politics and government are largely irrelevant to them, boring to most.

In this research, our basic concern has been with potential gender differences in political orientations, especially political participatory orientations, and—if differences were found—how to explain such differences. However, in our data, few differences exist by gender, and the variables usually thought to be operative in the socialization process do not explain either the female’s or the male’s political orientations. Thus, the political socialization hypothesis—that females are receiving different socialization—is not supported by this data for Arkansas high school youth.¹⁴ Research published since our survey reinforces our findings: A national survey of the value placed on various forms of political participation by American 14-year olds reported that girls mentioned more political actions they intended to engage in than did boys; the girls were more inclined to favor future social participatory actions than boys who favored more confrontational actions (Hooghe and Stolle 2004, 1-24). Similarly, an international (China, Japan, Mexico, and the United States) study of junior high school students concluded that although politics was widely viewed by both sexes as a male sphere, differences between the actual value placed on political interest and political participation by these girls and boys were small and subtle in most areas examined (Mayer and Schmidt 2004, 393-407). Moreover, our findings queue up behind those of Niemi and Junn’s research on American high school seniors’ political knowledge reported after our survey, research worth quoting at length here by way of summing up the gist of our findings:

...[W]hile some explainable differences exist in political knowledge, the larger message is that seventeen-year-old boys and girls have absorbed approximately the same amount of material about government and civics and about the same content. In earlier decades and for previous generations, explanations of gender differences in knowledge might have been attributed to socialization into ‘women’s ways’ or ‘women’s interests.’ The legacy of that kind of socialization still lingers in the existence of male-female differences among older adults. But in the 1980s and 1990s, at least, it would appear that political knowledge has to

tempered with the belief that these are not operated as they should be because professional politicians and political parties respond to big interests while obstructing conversion of majority will into public policies.

¹⁴ In a separate least squares regression analysis (not reported herein) the type of school—public or Catholic—made no difference in predicting female’s or male’s level of future political participation

a large extent been equalized for male and female students leaving high school. Differences may exist among high school dropouts or may develop later, but these differences cannot necessarily be attributed to civic education” (Niemi and Junn 1998, 108-109).

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Appendix A: Questions and Coding

(Source of questions: Jennings, M. Kent and Richard G. Niemi. 1974. *The Political Character of Adolescence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.)

Strength of Political Party Identification

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?

- (1) Independent
- (2) Weak Democrat or Weak Republican
- (3) Strong Democrat or Strong Republican

(For the logistic regression analysis, this variable was dichotomized: 3=1, 2=1, and 1=0.)

Type of Family

Whom do you live with?

- (1) mother and father
- (2) mother

(For the logistic regression analysis, maternal family=1 and nuclear family=0.)

Mother's Education

How far did your mother go in school?

- (1) less than high school diploma
- (2) completed high school (12 yrs) or GED
- (3) some college
- (4) completed college
- (missing data) don't know

Father's Education

How far did your father go in school?

- (1) less than high school diploma
- (2) completed high school (12 yrs) or GED
- (3) some college
- (4) completed college

Family Income

What is your best estimate of the total income of your family (before taxes)?

- (1) less than \$15,000
- (2) \$15,000-\$29,999
- (3) \$30,000-\$75,999
- (4) \$76,000 or more

High School GPA

What is your high school grade average?

- (1) D
- (2) C
- (3) B

- (4) A
- (0) F

Plans to Attend College

What are your plans for next year?

- (Yes=2) I'm going to a four-year college
- (No=1) Not planning to attend college

(For the logistic regression analysis, 2=1 and 1=0.)

USA Best Government

The American system of government is the kind all countries should have.

- (1) strongly disagree
- (2) disagree
- (3) agree
- (4) strongly agree

(For the logistic regression analysis, 4=1, 3=1, 2=0, and 1=0.)

Government Too Complex (internal efficacy)

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

- (1) strongly disagree
- (2) disagree
- (3) agree
- (4) strongly agree

(For the logistic regression analysis, 4=1, 3=1, 2=0, and 1=0.)

Government Run by Big Interests

Would you say 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) run for the benefit of all
- (2) run by a few interests looking out for themselves

(For the logistic regression analysis, 2=1 and 1=0.)

Trusts National Government

How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?

- (1) some of the time
- (2) most of the time
- (3) just about always

(For the logistic regression analysis, 3=1, 2=1, and 1=0.)

Family Discusses Politics

Do you ever talk about current events, public affairs, and politics with members of your family?

- (1) no

- (2) yes, once or twice a year
- (3) yes, a few times a month
- (4) yes, several times a week

(For the logistic regression analysis, 4=1, 3=1, 2=1, and 1=0.)

Interest in Politics

Some people seem to think about what's going on in government all the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. How often do you follow what's going on in government?

- (1) hardly at all
- (2) only now and then
- (3) some of the time
- (4) most of the time

Student Leadership Positions Held

Have you been an officer or committee head of a class, club, or athletic team or other school organization during the last three years?

- (1) no
- (2) yes, once
- (3) yes, more than once

(For the logistic regression analysis, 3=1, 2=1, and 1=0.)

Future Political Activity

Looking ahead to the time when you are on your own, what about actual participation in public affairs and politics? How active do you think you will be in these matters?

- (1) not very active
- (2) somewhat active
- (3) pretty active
- (4) very active

(For the logistic regression analysis this was coded: 4=1, 3=1, 2=1, and 1=0.) For regression analysis this was coded: 4=1, 3=1, 2=1, 1=0)