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**You Can't Choose Your Family:  
A Review of the Literature on Family Political Socialization (1959-2018)**

**I. Introduction**

As a concept, political socialization has several definitions and usages that, in part, depend on context. Greenstein (1970) argues that there are four distinct definitions of political socialization that have applications for precise circumstances. Firstly, political socialization can refer to “the study of pre-adult orientations to the adult political process” (Greenstein 1970, 971). In other words, political socialization can specifically encapsulate children’s political orientations. Secondly, political socialization can denote “the study of the acquisition of prevailing norms” (Greenstein 1970, 971). Greenstein notes that this definition can often be described as the process of “politicization”—of introducing “new members” to the relevant norms of society (Greenstein 1970, 971). Thirdly, political socialization can refer to “the study of any political behavior whatsoever, whether of conformity or deviance, and at any stage of the life cycle” (Greenstein 1968; Greenstein 1970, 972). This definition, of course, is the broadest, lending itself to multiple applications. And finally, political socialization can denote “the actual observations of socialization processes, in any of the above senses, taking into account both the socialized and the agents of socialization” (Greenstein 1970; 972). The last definition encompasses a literal reading of what “socialization” means, emphasizing the role of both the influencer and the influenced.

In my paper, I will, at various times, apply all four of these definitions when discussing political socialization. All four have a distinct purpose and cover separate aspects of political socialization. Indeed, political socialization is a topic that demands multiple definitions, as it is so

vast and includes a wide range of potential actors, mechanisms, and impacts. Although my paper will focus upon the concept of *family* political socialization, I will briefly reference other facets of the literature on political socialization, such as social norms, in order to provide a fuller view of political socialization's various applications.

Political scientists have long considered the family unit to be the most influential agent in one's political socialization (Dolan 1995; Hess and Torney 1967; Hyman 1959; Jennings et al. 2009; Mutz 2006; Sinclair 2012). Because family networks tend to be more intimate than other types of networks, they allow for a more meaningful and constructive diffusion of ideas and behaviors (Foos and Rooj 2016; Morey, Eveland, and Hutchens 2012). The literature seems divided on what, exactly, the mechanism behind this diffusion of ideas and behaviors is. While some political scientists argue that the mechanism is *overt discussion* (Campbell et al. 1960; Greenlee et al. 2018; Jennings et al. 2009; McClurg 2003; Rolfe 2012), others claim that *sheer observation* of behaviors is enough to influence family members' political attitudes (Dalton 1980; Jennings and Niemi 1968; Plutzer 2002; Verba et al. 2005). Though these two camps are not mutually exclusive—and, indeed, many political scientists posit that both discussion and observation affect political socialization—it is empirically unclear which of the two has the most profound effect on one's political socialization.

My paper thus continues in the following manner. Firstly, I will discuss the various types of families and how they influence political socialization, starting with “traditional” households, then moving on to “non-traditional” households. Secondly, I will explain the two mechanisms by which political socialization occurs, starting with direct and ending with indirect. Finally, I will conclude by offering my opinions on what should be further studied in this field, as well as the implications that this research has on political science, in general.

## **II. Type of Family**

### **a. “Traditional” Households**

The literature defines “traditional” households as those with two parents, both of whom the children are related to by blood (Carlson and Meyer 2014; Kalil et al. 2014; Tach 2015). There was, of course, a time when two-parent households were the norm, but as the family unit has become increasingly diversified, this method of defining a family has become inadequate and, quite frankly, outdated. Families no longer constitute only those by whom one is blood-related, or with whom one is living. Regardless, the literature presents interesting views on how being raised in a “traditional” household influences children’s political socialization.

#### **i. Theory**

To start, children who reside in two-parent households generally receive more attention and affection than children in one-parent households, which has a profound impact on the children’s political socialization (Kalil et al. 2014). Instead of relying on one caregiver, children in two-parent households have the implicit benefit of being loved by more than one adult. This, of course, has ripple effects for the children’s political development. Indeed, Langton (1969) found that children from two-parent households in Jamaica exhibited higher levels of political efficacy and trust than children from one-parent households. Hess and Torney (1967) claim that “people learn about relationships in the family and then transfer that experience to the work, social, and political worlds” (Dolan 1995; Hess and Torney 1967). Hence, “someone who has seen a parental authority leave the home might be more suspicious of the stability or legitimacy of political authorities” (Dolan 1995, 261). For these reasons, it appears that two-parent households are more stable, allowing children to develop their political attitudes in a less harried environment. As children from two-parent households tend to trust their parents at higher levels than children from

one-parent households, these views translate to the political realm, granting children from two-parent households higher levels of political trust and efficacy as they mature into adulthood (Hess and Torney 1967).

Furthermore, because political scientists regard the family as the most crucial agent of political socialization (see Hyman 1959; Mutz 2006; Sinclair 2012), children from two-parent households benefit, potentially, from exposure to different political views. The household tends to be the most intimate social network to which we belong; consequently, the household also has the greatest durability, as it is better able to endure disagreement than other social networks (Foos and Rooj 2016; Morey, Eveland, and Hutchens 2012). Children from two-parent households have an increased chance of residing in a politically heterogeneous environment, which could “be beneficial for encouraging political debate and ultimately participation” (Foos and Rooj 2016; 290). Truly, as Mutz (2002) argues, debating politics within a heterogeneous network is indispensable for the democratic process, as it exposes people to different worldviews and fosters greater political tolerance.

## **ii. Large Families**

Though large families may, potentially, be bastions of greater political discussion, they also lend themselves to being highly competitive environments. Boys, especially, are affected by residing in larger families. Because they find themselves competing for their parents’ attention and love, boys experience a decrease in their sense of personal power (Broh 1979, 186). Additionally, parents tend to have more intimate interactions with their daughters than their sons, which, again, contributes to boys’ sentiments that they are not receiving the attention or affection they require (Broh 1979, 186). As the size of the family increases, boys’ sense of political efficacy decreases (Broh 1979, 175). Overall, this life-long battle for attention and love leads children from larger

families to have “lower achievement and more adjustment problems than children from smaller families,” which is, in part, due to the decreased interactions between parents and children (Broh 1979, 185).

As resources are worn thin in large families, parents do not always act as the primary agents of political socialization. Indeed, younger siblings tend to emulate their older siblings, and hence, older siblings may, in fact, be the ones who exert the most direct influence on their younger siblings’ political development (Broh 1979, 185). Since first-born children had the intrinsic advantage of being the only child competing for their parents’ devotion, they tend to have closer relationships with their parents than their younger siblings do (Broh 1979). Recognizing, perhaps, that their parents’ time and energies are more divided amongst several siblings, first-born children are thus equipped to assume that mentoring role and look after their younger siblings (Broh 1979).

### **iii. Fathers and Daughters**

Several theories exist that try to explain the effects that daughters have on their fathers. The Fatherhood “Linked-Fate” Hypothesis states that “having a daughter, regardless of birth order, leads men to see the benefits of public policies that aim to reduce gender inequality for their daughter(s), and thus become more supportive of such policies” (Sharro et al. 2018, 495). In other words, a father absorbs his daughter’s struggles as his own and, accordingly, becomes more cognizant of women’s issues. The Proportion-of-Daughters Hypothesis, on the other hand, argues that men whose lion’s share of children are daughters are more likely to support policies that are intended to reduce gender inequality (Sharro et al. 2018, 495). If a man finds himself in a family where women outnumber men, then he is more likely to be an activist for women’s rights. And finally, the First-Daughterhood Hypothesis purports that “fathering a daughter as a first child is a critical event in men’s political socialization, such that this experience of ‘first-daughterhood’ will

lead to higher levels of support for sex-equity policies in comparison to men who enter into fatherhood with a son” (Sharro et al. 2018, 495).

The literature offers conflicting evidence about the political effects of fathering a daughter. Interestingly, some fathers find it easier to act paternally toward their daughters in the context of sports (Kay 2009; Messner and Bozada-Deas 2009). In support of Title IX, fathers can become political activists, rallying behind their daughters’ athletic successes (Sharro 2016). While some researchers have found that fathering daughters makes men more conservative (Prokos, Baird, and Keene 2010; Conley and Rauscher 2013), others claim that fathering daughters makes men more liberal (Oswald and Powdthavee 2010; Shafer and Malhotra 2011; Sharro 2016), and others still contend that fathering daughters has no significant impact on a man’s political disposition (Perales, Jerallah, and Baxter 2018). Truly, the literature has not yet arrived to a consensus on how fathering daughters may impact a man’s political leanings, and there are most likely other factors at play that may explain these disparate findings, such as a father’s personality, level of political interest, or level of civic engagement.

While the literature remains divided on the question of how daughters in general influence their father, the literature is consistent on the effects that a *first* daughter wields on a father’s policy preferences. A father’s experience is wholly different from a mother’s, as mothers have already been living in a world where women’s issues are a salient concern for them. The first daughter, then, introduces the father to this world of policy debates, making women’s issues a pertinent concern for them, as well (Greenlee et al. 2018; Sharro et al. 2018). Furthermore, Greenlee et al. (2018) found that fathers whose first child was a daughter were more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton in 2016 and support the idea of a theoretical woman running for Congress than men whose first child was a son. Throughout her campaign, Clinton invoked rhetoric about how fathers could

tell their daughters that one day, they, too, could be president. By doing so, Clinton aimed to exploit fathers' devotion for their daughters, reminding them of the unique challenges that women face in the world—and especially the world of politics (Greenlee et al. 2018). Having close, intimate relationships with their daughters exposes men to the realities of sexism, and subsequently, they find their political orientations shifting in favor of policies that more directly assist their daughters (Glynn and Sen 2015; Greenlee et al. 2018; Sharrow et al. 2018). Indeed, both Sharrow et al.'s (2018) and Greenlee et al.'s (2018) work support the First-Daughterhood Hypothesis.

#### **iv. Siblings**

Though the literature is more limited on the question of siblings' effects on each other, Healy and Malhotra (2013) conducted a natural experiment that aimed to understand how having all sisters affects men's political views. They found that men who are raised in families that abide by more "traditional" gender roles (i.e. females cook and clean while males work and make money) are more likely to identify as Republicans (Healy and Malhotra 2013, 1025). In turn, this traditionalist view of male and female spheres will impact men's views on gender roles, encouraging them to adopt more conservative viewpoints with respect to which domains belong to the man and which belong to the woman (Healy and Malhotra 2013, 1025). Typically, men who grow up with all sisters are not expected to partake in the same sorts of chores and tasks that their sisters are, which greatly affects men later in their lives, as men who have all sisters do not complete their fair share of household chores as adults (Healy and Malhotra 2013, 1024). Most crucially, Healy and Malhotra (2013) found that men who have all sisters are more politically conservative both in terms of their attitudes about gender roles and their partisanship (pg. 1034). Hence, siblings—and siblings' genders—also have a prominent impact on one's political socialization. Yet, this area of research is empirically understudied in political science, and I would

be interested in learning more about the effects that siblings can have on each other's political socialization.

#### **v. Parents and Children**

Early literature on family political socialization suggested that the father is the primary agent of political socialization in the family (McClosky and Dahlgreen 1959; Lane 1959). Hess and Torney (1967) found that children who grow up in families without an active, involved father figure do not develop their political orientation as quickly as children who grow up with an active, involved father figure. This was attributed to the fact that, in the mid-twentieth century, the father was widely regarded as "the head of the household," and thus, he was considered the dominant member on the chain of family political socialization (Hess and Torney 1967). For many decades, a family's social class was exclusively determined by that of the father (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Goldthorpe 1983). However, in later years, researchers have come to view the mother as the primary agent of political socialization in the household, as mothers tend to have more intimate relationships with their children (Jennings and Langton 1969). And, as women have become increasingly involved in the workforce, the age-old assumption that the man is "the head of the household" and the sole determiner of the family's social class is slowly waning, and family structures are no longer so patriarchally driven (Erikson 1984; Jennings and Langton 1969).

Regardless of which parent is the more influential agent of political socialization, parents, inarguably, have a significant impact on their children's political identification (Campbell et al. 1960; Jennings et al. 2009). One of the key aspects of family political socialization is "the ability of families to pass on to their children particular political attitudes, values, and identities" (Jennings and Niemi 1968; Langton 1969; Jennings and Langton 1969). Children whose parents are politically engaged are more likely to assume their parents' political identification as their own

(Jennings et al. 2009, 782). Moreover, children who acquire their political identification at an early age hold more stable political dispositions throughout their adult lives, while children with weak political socialization hold more unstable political dispositions throughout their adult lives (Jennings et al. 2009, 796). Growing up in a household where political discussion is normalized and actually encouraged foments a child's political socialization, molding him or her into a more politically engaged citizen.

### **b. “Non-Traditional” Households**

The literature defines “non-traditional” households as those with only one-parent, or blended families (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Bumpass, Raley, and Sweet 1995; Tach 2015). Indeed, divorce has become a more common occurrence for families, which has implications for children's political socialization. At the end of the twentieth century and into the beginning of the twenty-first century, nearly forty percent of all children had spent considerable time in “cohabiting households,” and over thirty percent had spent time with stepfamilies (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Bumpass, Raley, and Sweet 1995; Tach 2015). Moreover, out of marriage births have increased pointedly, from only five percent of all births in 1950 to over forty percent of all births in 2009 (Martin et al. 2011; Ventura and Bachrach 2000; Ventura 2009). Clearly, a sizable number of children no longer reside in “traditional” households, and in the last few decades, these statistics have only become more relevant. Consequently, while understanding how “traditional” family structures affect children's political socialization is important, it is equally crucial to recognize how “non-traditional” households can influence children's political socialization.

### **i. Theory**

While it seems logical to assume that the increase in unmarried parents would, naturally, coincide with an increase in single parents, this assertion is not entirely accurate, as many single

parents quickly establish new relationships (Tach 2015, 86). A phenomenon called “serial partnering” has led to blended families and complex family relationships that surveys have not adequately adapted to studying (Tach 2015, 89). As the American family has become an increasingly unstable unit of political socialization, children have found themselves absorbing political cues from other sources, as well, such as schools, peers, and the media (Jennings and Niemi 1974; Serbert, Jennings, and Niemi 1974; Tach 2015; Tedin 1980; Verba et al. 1995). Hence, the political science literature is not yet able to investigate thoroughly the effects that blended families may have on children’s political socialization, as survey mechanisms have not caught up with the realities of the American family. Recent years have also seen a rise in the number of same-sex unions (Manning 2014; Miller and Price 2013), but, again, the research is, unfortunately, not developed enough to draw any meaningful conclusions about the effects that same-sex parents may have on children’s political socialization.

## **ii. Cohabitation & Stepfamilies**

Cohabitation is a facet of “non-traditional” family structures that can expressively impact children’s political socialization. Alarming, “cohabiting fathers provide less instrumental and social support to mothers and exhibit weaker parenting control than married fathers” (Tach 2015; Thomson, McLanahan, and Braun-Curtin 1992; Thomson, Hanson, and McLanahan 1994). This, in turn, negatively impacts children, who do not receive the same amount of time or attention from their cohabiting father as they would from a father who was married to their mother. Although “stepparents may contribute financial resources and act as socialization agents by virtue of living in the same households with stepchildren” (Tach 2015, 89), the rules for stepparents are not as institutionalized as those for biological parents, and as such, stepparents tend to devote less time, energy, and resources to stepchildren than biological children (Case, Lin, and McLanahan 1999;

Cherlin 1978; Daly and Wilson 1996; Evenhouse and Reilly 2004; Tach 2015). In stepfamilies, all children may find themselves starving for attention, as resources are scarcer and stepparents may not be as willing to spend time with children who are not related to them by blood (Tach 2015, 90).

Not all the research surrounding blended families, however, is tinged with negativity. For example, Tach (2015) purports that “children in blended families potentially have access to different economic and cultural resources than their half and stepsiblings even though they live in the same household, because they have different biological, step, and non-resident parents” (pg. 90). Tach (2015) sees this as beneficial, as it exposes children to ideas and cultures with which they may not otherwise have come into contact. Mutz (2002) would agree that children profit from this early life introduction to different viewpoints, as it prepares them to deal with conflict in the “real world” and adopt more tolerant stances in the company of those with whom they disagree. Additionally, stepparents have the potential to be more influential agents of political socialization than non-resident parents, as they reside in the same household as the children and thus, in theory, have more opportunities to interact with the children and shape their political attitudes (Tach 2015, 87). Hence, blended families are not utterly inhibitors of children’s political socialization. Their success depends, in part, on the personalities of the actors involved, as well as the resources that these families pass on to their children.

### **iii. Divorce & Separation**

The empirical studies that exist on divorced families offer opposing evidence. Some studies have found that children with divorced parents do not differ significantly in a variety of political measures from children with married parents (Dolan 1995). Dolan (1995) concluded that “no form of family change had a significant impact on an index of all voting related activities” (Sandell and

Plutzer 2005, 138). Sances (2013) solidifies this assertion, claiming that there was “no evidence that growing up in an absent-parent household affects white voter turnout” (pg. 199). Decreased voter turnout was only applicable to blacks (Sances 2013, 199). Interestingly, Sances (2013) hypothesizes that divorce may be a proxy for what he deems “a latent taste for politics”—that is, that “the type of parents who willingly separate would not have invested in their children’s political engagement had they stayed together” and that these parents “were not engaged with politics to begin with” (pg. 202). Thus, children from these families are not losing a political role model when their parents separate, as neither parent was politically engaged, in the first place. To Sances (2013), divorce is merely an indicator for a multitude of unobservable characteristics, including social class, personality, and predisposition toward politics (pg. 212). Taken together, these characteristics determine to what extent a divorced parent politically socializes his or her children.

Other studies, however, have determined that children with divorced parents score lower on measures of academic preparedness, psychological development, long-term health, social competence, and self-concept (Sandell and Plutzer 2005, 134). Furthermore, Sandell and Plutzer (2005) found that, among white families, divorce decreased voter turnout by ten percent (pg. 133). They did not, however, find this same effect for black or Hispanic families, which they attributed to the fact that marriage is less common in black families than white ones, and black families are “more adaptive to the economic and social consequences of single-parenthood due to the support given by extended family networks” (Sandell and Plutzer 2005, 137). Previously, Monaghan and Liebermann (1986) posited that blacks have fewer difficulties adapting to divorce than whites, and Sandell and Plutzer (2005) took this argument a step further, claiming that blacks actually gain *greater* familial stability through divorce (Monaghan and Liebermann 1986; pg. 150).

Divorce has a destabilizing effect on children. Divorce diminishes family current events

discussion by eight percent, decreases the family's income by nearly \$10,000, and increases the family's chances of moving from sixteen percent to thirty-three percent (Sandell and Plutzer 2005, 145). This increased mobility reduces the parents' likelihood of voting, which, in turn, negatively impacts the children. Sandell and Plutzer (2005) posit that "divorce acts through two pathways: social learning through decreased parental voter turnout and current events discussion; and stress and dislocation through increased mobility" (pg. 147). Divorced parents do not vote as frequently as married parents (Wolfinger and Wolfinger 2008), and adults who have recently relocated have turnout rates sixteen percent lower than adults who have resided in the same area for over six years (Squire et al. 1987). When parents cease voting, their children adopt the same predisposition, with the likelihood of young people voting in their first election decreasing by twenty-one percent (Plutzer 2002, 149). These findings cast doubt upon Miller's and Shanks's (1996) assertion that divorce is "non-political," as divorce seems to carry ramifications for children's (and parents') civic engagement. Indeed, young adults whose parents are divorced or separated are less likely to be politically engaged than young adults whose parents still live together (Voorpostel and Coffé 2015, 295). Furthermore, young adults with separated or divorced parents vote less frequently and are less likely to volunteer than those whose parents are still together (Voorpostel and Coffé 2015, 313). Voorpostel and Coffé (2015) explain this phenomenon by noting that parental separation limits young adults' access to resources that would allow them to be more politically engaged, such as the ability to "plant roots" and develop a strong enough emotional attachment to a locale to want to become a more active citizen (pg. 296).

While these studies present, at times, contradictory claims concerning the effects of divorce and separation on children's political socialization, this should not be regarded as problematic. Instead, these studies demonstrate that divorce's effects on children's political socialization are

more complex than formerly believed, and further research is needed to parse these inconsistent results. Several of these studies draw upon the Social Learning Theory, which hypothesizes that parents teach their children about the world and how they should act within it (Dalton 1980; Jennings and Niemi 1968; Jennings et al. 2009; Plutzer 2002; Verba et al. 2005; Voorpostel and Coffé 2015). Parents' behaviors have a massive impact on their children; if divorced parents are less likely to vote than married parents, then this has dire consequences for children's future voter turnout, as they have lost their role model and no longer perceive voting as "normal" (Voorpostel and Coffé 2015, 313).

### **III. Mechanisms of Political Socialization**

Political socialization occurs through several pathways. Traditionally, family political socialization had been understood to have a top-down dispersal—that is, parents influence their children (Jennings and Niemi 1981; Verba et al. 1995). However, in recent years, researchers have started to view family political socialization as a bidirectional process, whereby both parents influence their children *and* children influence their parents (Bloemraad and Trost 2008, 509). The method by which parents and children influence each other can be either direct or indirect.

#### **a. Direct**

By "direct" method of political socialization, I am referring to an *active* understanding of political socialization. Both parties must be engaged in some sort of dialogue or shared activity that allows for the consequential absorption of political cues. Specifically, I will describe two types of direct political socialization: discussion and intimate relationship.

##### **i. Discussion**

A common finding across the literature on family political socialization is the importance of frequent social interactions between parents and children (Bloemraad and Trost 2008; Jones and

Mosher 2013; Tach 2015). The mechanism through which parents transmit their economic, cultural, and social resources to their children requires daily contact and interaction throughout the child's formative years (Beller 2009; Biblarz and Raftery 1993; Coleman 1988; Tach 2015). When parents are politically engaged and regularly discuss politics with their children, their children are much more likely to adopt their parents' political dispositions as their own (Jennings et al. 2009). Ideally, when parents and children regularly discuss politics and have strong, positive interactions with each other, families can become agents of not only political *socialization*, but political *mobilization* (Bloemraad and Trost 2008, 512). Bloemraad and Trost (2008) found that "political discussion and reciprocal interaction served to tighten family bonds, facilitated intergenerational communication, and led to numerous instances of family participation in rallies and marches" (pg. 526). Thus, when the home environment is defined by meaningful political discussions and interactions, children are more likely to want to become engaged citizens. Indeed, parents transmit to their children not only political values and sentiments, but the overall tendency to be a politically active citizen (Beck and Jennings 1975, 1991; Bloemraad and Trost 2008; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Verba et al. 1995). Children who grow up in families that regularly discuss politics and vote are more civically involved than those who did not grow up in this sort of family (Andolina et al. 2003).

Truly, being a member of a close-knit, politically active family has positive effects on children's levels of civic engagement. Citing the Cognitive Development Theory, McIntosh, Hart, and Youniss (2007) argue that "young persons construct meaning and knowledge about the political world through social interaction" (pg. 497). Children who have politically knowledgeable parents have an implicit advantage when it comes to understanding politics, as they have more "immediate access to a supply of civic raw material in the form of parent political knowledge"

(McIntosh, Hart, and Youniss 2007, 498). Indeed, high amounts of youth-parent political discussion translate to higher levels of youth political knowledge (McIntosh, Hart, and Youniss 2007, 497). These children, in turn, are better equipped to become more civically-minded individuals, and they score higher than their peers on a multitude of indicators, including likelihood to vote and volunteer (Gimpel, Lay, and Schuknecht 2003; Verba, Schlozman, and Burns 2005).

## **ii. Intimate Relationship**

Connected to political discussion, an intimate relationship between a parent and his or her child can also help facilitate political socialization—and mobilization. Fathers who have personal, intimate relationships with their daughters educate themselves about women’s issues and struggles and, in the process, become more likely to support policies that seek to improve women’s lives (Glynn and Sen 2015; Greenlee et al. 2018; Sharrow et al. 2018). Therefore, fathers do not take a passive role in supporting women’s issues; they actively seek out avenues through which they can be agents of political change, either by voting or volunteering (Greenlee et al. 2018). Relatedly, Bloemraad and Trost (2008) found that, in immigrant families, children act as the primary agents of political socialization and mobilization, as their superior English skills allow them to navigate social channels and networks that are more difficult for their parents to access (pg. 507). Children of immigrant families often find themselves acting as “the translator” for their parents, and this ability to balance two identities positively affects these children’s rates of political activism (Bloemraad 2006; Kibria 1993; Orellana 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Unsurprisingly, “in cases where parents and children have strong, positive, and frequent interactions, family members can pool sources of political mobilization and socialization” (Bloemraad and Trost 2008, 512). Close-knit families can more effortlessly encourage each other to be civically engaged, as “families act as sites where information, networks, and institutional experiences can be pooled”

(Bloemraad and Trost 2008, 525).

Spouses, too, can affect each other's political socialization (Stoker and Jennings 2005; Zuckerman, Dasovic, and Fitzgerald 2007). Because marital partners find themselves exposed to the same experiences (i.e. living in the same neighborhood, potentially sharing children, and ingesting the same media sources), they, very often, become more emotionally intimate, which, in turn, lends itself to the possibility of the two aligning politically (Stoker and Jennings 2005). Spouses are each other's most frequent political discussion partner (Beck 1991); consequently, spouses become attuned to each other's political views and may, over time, absorb them as their own (Stoker and Jennings 2005). Stoker and Jennings (2005) argue that spouses "tend toward like-mindedness because of the selection processes that bring them together in the first place" (pg. 71). This is evidence of homophily—that is, that people tend to form social relationships with those who are similar to them, be that ideologically, intellectually, or socially (Sinclair 2011, 442). Truly, "people generally feel closer to those who share their values, political and otherwise, and they talk more frequently with those to whom they are close" (Mutz 2002, 123). Through assortative mating, people tend to marry a partner who is similar to them (McDermott, Tingley, and Hatemi 2014), which has consequences for their children's political socialization.

Yet, Bello and Rolfe (2014) call this claim into question by purporting that "respondents are more likely to continue discussing politics with spouses who hold different political views when compared to spouses who hold the same view" (pg. 141). Interestingly, Bello and Rolfe (2014) found that, in unions where the spouses disagreed politically, political discussion did not cease; in fact, it flourished (pg. 145). This supports Morey's, Eveland's, and Hutchens's (2012) assertion that, since the family tends to be our most intimate social network, it is better suited to withstand conflict than other social networks, so long as the conflict does not directly impact

family members' relationships with each other (pg. 292).

### **b. Indirect**

By “indirect” method of political socialization, I am referring to an *inactive* understanding of political socialization. Dissimilarly from its counterpart, indirect political socialization does not require discussion or intimacy. Indirect political socialization can occur consciously or subconsciously, and its effects—though perhaps not as substantive as those of direct political socialization—still have implications for family members. Specifically, I will describe two types of indirect political socialization: observation and circumstances.

#### **i. Observation**

Sometimes, family members do not need to engage in political conversations with each other in order to transmit political ideas or values. The sheer power of observation, remarkably, can often be incentive enough to sway a family member one way or the other. For instance, “observing a household member voting might function as a simple reminder to vote, or it may provide social pressure to comply with a perceived norm of voting” (Foos and Rooj 2016, 301). People are greatly affected by what they perceive to be the social norm, and this is even more relevant in the context of a small, contained social network such as a household. One family member’s decision to vote can “infect” the whole family, and thus, the norm of voting becomes solidified in the household (Campbell 2013, 44). This method of transmitting political ideas and values is not as active as that of regularly discussing politics or establishing intimate relationships within the familial social network; however, it can prove to be effective, as social norms have a strong impact on people’s behaviors—especially their political ones (Campbell 2013).

Additionally, children can interpret political cues from their parents that signal to them how to act in the political world. Over the course of their childhood and adolescence, children are

exposed to a wide assortment of social and political cues from their parents, which encourage the children to model themselves after their parents (Jennings et al. 2009). These cues can take multiple forms, such as seeing which news channel a parent watches, hearing a parent groan when a certain politician starts speaking, and watching a parent place a political sign in the front yard. Indeed, “political experiences, contexts, or messages that occur early in one’s life can have an important impact on political preferences” (Nteta and Greenlee 2013). Whether consciously or not, children digest these parental behaviors, and the behaviors become a part of the children’s political socialization. Acting, again, under the theory of social norms, children do not wish to upset the balance of the family unit by acting in a manner that is contrary to their parents’ actions. Hence, these subtle cues have meaningful consequences for children’s political behaviors. And, predictably, if these social and political cues are consistent throughout the duration of the children’s formative years, they are even more effective (Jennings et al. 2009, 782).

## **ii. Circumstances**

Though not as extensively mentioned in the literature, circumstances influence family political socialization. Children do not—and cannot—self-select their parents; thus, the fact that children often adopt their parents’ political identification as their own (Campbell et al. 1960) is not something entirely within the children’s control. Previously, the literature discussed the impact that parents’ level of education has on children’s political socialization. Many researchers argued that parents’ level of education and overall political activism were strong predictors for their children’s future political participation (Gimpel, Lay, and Schuknecht 2003; Humphries et al. 2013; Verba, Schlozman, and Burns 2005). However, more recently, the literature has abandoned this line of research, as selection into education status is non-random and is often a proxy for other traits, such as social status or race (Berinsky and Lenz 2011; Sances 2013).

In general, then, one's upbringing affects one's political socialization. Some people naturally have more access to resources that can spur their political socialization, while others do not. As previously mentioned, blended families are at a disadvantage when it comes to resources, as their structure is less institutionalized than "traditional" families, and resources (such as time, money, and affection) are often spread thinner in blended families (Stewart 2005). Hence, not all aspects of political socialization are within one's immediate control, and though direct mechanisms of political socialization are discussed more expansively in the literature, I believe it is important to also mention the indirect mechanisms of political socialization.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Condensing nearly sixty years' worth of literature on family political socialization was a daunting task, but it is a field that will not diminish in relevancy. Though the definition of the family unit has changed drastically over the years, the *mechanisms* of political socialization have not. Indeed, even as children have become exposed to more potential agents of political socialization in their familial social network—through phenomena such as blended families, cohabitation, or "serial partnering"—the ways by which parents or parental figures can politically socialize their children have not significantly altered. Whether directly or indirectly, parents exert substantial influence over their children's political behaviors and values.

Gaps, however, do exist in the literature. For one, the literature has not yet learned how to grapple with the presence of same-sex unions. Much of the literature focuses upon the roles that fathers and mothers play in their children's political socialization, but how do these roles differ when a child has two fathers, or two mothers? Would children with same-sex parents tend to be more liberal than those who have parents of the opposite sex? How does having parents who are still societally discriminated against affect a child's political socialization? These are not inquiries

I am equipped to answer, but they are questions I would be interested in seeing the literature explore more extensively. Now that same-sex couples enjoy the same marital rights as heterosexual couples, same-sex marriages are becoming more commonplace. Consequently, the literature needs to start investigating this thread of family political socialization.

Moreover, I would be interested in uncovering more about siblings' influences on each other. Healy and Malhotra (2013) conducted a natural experiment to parse the effects that having all sisters may have on a brother's political identification, but I would be intrigued to delve deeper into the realm of siblings' impacts on each other's political socialization. Broh (1979) briefly mentioned that older siblings can potentially act as agents of political socialization to their younger siblings, but I have not seen this claim reappear in more recent literature. Thus, I would like to see more research on, for example, how sisters influence each other, or how brothers influence each other. The literature still tends to see family political socialization as occurring mainly through the parents to the children (or the children to the parents), but there are other methods in which political behaviors can be transmitted throughout the familial social network.

Finally, I would be interested in learning more about political socialization in interracial families. Similarly to same-sex couples, interracial couples have been historically discriminated against, and people still hold their prejudices about whether these unions should be allowed to take place. Because of this unfortunate reality, parents of two different races may have to facilitate difficult discussions with their children about the realities of growing up in a world where people will judge them based on the color of their skin. Hence, political socialization in these families may occur at an even earlier age, which, in turn, may have implications for the children's future levels of civic engagement.

Undoubtedly, family political socialization is a dense topic that contains many facets and

possible avenues of research. Even though the field has been in existence for over sixty years, there is still much about family political socialization that we do not fully understand. Yet, it is for this very reason that family political socialization is of crucial importance to political science. As the family still remains the primary agent of political socialization, it is necessary to deconstruct the nuances of the familial social network. “Family” may not mean today what it did sixty years ago, when Hyman (1959) claimed that the family is the most influential agent of political socialization, but regardless, the family unit continues to play a key role in fomenting each other’s political socialization—and, perhaps, mobilization.

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