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## Imagined interactions as a link to political talk

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IMAGINED INTERACTIONS AS A  
LINK TO POLITICAL TALK

by

Megan Mary Lambertz

Bachelor of Arts  
Delaware State University  
2009

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for

**Masters of Arts in Communication Studies  
Department of Communication Studies  
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## THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

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**Megan Mary Lambertz**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Imagined Interactions as a Link to Political Talk**

by

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According to the imagined interaction theory (IIT), IIs are the cognitive processes where individuals indirectly experience past or future interactions through the process of imagination (Honeycutt, 2003). Retroactive IIs occur after a conversation takes place, whereas proactive IIs occur when individuals imagine a conversation before the interaction (Honeycutt, 2010). The current study examined individuals' imagined interactions (IIs) regarding conversations about politics with family members. Participants completed an online survey where they recorded retroactive and proactive IIs, and completed a set of measures regarding their family and political affiliation. Both proactive and retroactive IIs fell into eleven categories for content. Proactive and retroactive IIs fell into nine categories for form. Results indicate that IIs helped participants relieve tension and anxiety about political conversations. This study suggests that individual's II consists of many diverse emotions, regardless of family type when imagining a political conversation with a family member. Also, individuals in consensual families found relational maintenance, conflict management, rehearsal, self-understanding, and compensation the most useful II functions during IIs of political conversations with a family member.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE LITERATURE REVIEW.....	1
Imagined Interaction Theory.....	2
Functions of IIs .....	5
Characteristics of IIs .....	9
Family Types .....	11
CHAPTER TWO METHODOLOGY .....	19
Measures .....	21
Data Analysis .....	26
CHAPTER THREE RESULTS .....	36
CHAPTER FOUR DISCUSSION.....	42
Limitations .....	49
Future Research .....	54
Practical Applications .....	57
APPENDIX A INFORMED CONSENT FORM .....	60
APPENDIX B SURVEY .....	62
TABLES .....	77
REFERENCES .....	82
VITA.....	89

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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Proactive and Retroactive II Conversation Topics .....	77
Table 2	Proactive II Conversation Form.....	78
Table 3	Retroactive II Conversation Form .....	79
Table 4	Modified SII Scale (Political IIs).....	80
Table 5	General SII Scale .....	81



## CHAPTER ONE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Participating in political talk is essential for a democracy. Citizens must communicate their political preferences in order to influence government policies. Unfortunately, the longstanding taboo of politics has led many people to avoid situations likely to entail this type of social content (Ulbig & Funk, 1999). The taboo nature of politics was partially developed by the increase of media coverage on rancorous floor debates in Congress (Ulbig & Funk) and screaming matches between political ‘talking heads.’ Research has shown that political cynicism has never been higher or voter turnout rates lower (Hart, 2000). Due to this political taboo, there has been a growth in research devoted to how political information is exchanged in a variety of social networks (McGlurg, 2006). Many scholars (e.g. Denton & Kuypers, 2008) claim the dominant source of political socialization is within the family environment. Family members depend on one another for information and guidance which gives rise to persuasion and shared political preferences (Zuckerman, 2005).

Although there has been a growth in political science research on political information in social networks, the topic of politics has received minimal attention in interpersonal communication (c.f., Woelfel, 1977; Tims, 1986). There is a need for interpersonal research to focus on politics because of the influence families have on interpersonal political communication, political interest, and involvement (Tims). A variety of interpersonal communication theories could be used to study conversations about politics with a family member; however, I chose Honeycutt’s Imagined Interaction Theory (IIT) as my theoretical framework.

IIT is a theory of intrapersonal communication, which involves “all of the physiological and psychological processing of messages that happen within individuals as they attempt to understand themselves and their environment” (Honeycutt, 2008, p. 79). Honeycutt and colleagues have researched a variety of topics within IIT ranging from studies of rumination (Honeycutt, 2010), communication apprehension (Honeycutt, Choi, DeBerry, 2009) and social cognition (Edwards, Honeycutt, & Zagacki, 1988). Most IIT research examines relational conflicts involving romantic relationships (Honeycutt & Wiemman, 1999), co-workers (Croghan & Croghan, 2010) and family members (Allen, Edwards, Hayhoe & Leach, 2010). The current study will examine a new topic in IIT by analyzing imagined conversations about politics in the family environment. There first must be a more thorough description of IIT in order to better understand this attempt to expand the application of IIT.

### Imagined Interaction Theory

A significant number of interpersonal communication theories seek to understand how individuals plan, produce, and process interpersonal messages; theories such as these envision communication as an individually-centered, cognitive activity (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). Theories using this perspective “focus on the mental representations that influence how people interpret information and how they behave” (Baxter & Braithwaite, p. 5) and one such theory is IIT. IIT was created to understand how individuals’ organize their thoughts on communication, on the actors involved in specific acts of communication, and on their communicative contexts (Honeycutt, 2008). A core assumption of IIT is that individuals use IIs to organize their thoughts on communication. IIs are the cognitive process where individuals indirectly experience themselves in past or

future communication interactions with others through their imagination (Honeycutt, 2003). The term “imagined interaction” is strategically used instead of “imaginary conversation” or “internal dialogue,” because II is a broader term that takes into account all nonverbal and verbal imagery (Honeycutt, 2008). Although “imaginary conversation” is not used to label this phenomenon, IIs possess many of the same characteristics as a real conversation in that they may be fragmentary, extended, rambling, repetitive, or coherent (Honeycutt, 2008).

IIT’s theoretical assumptions are largely based in the work of cognitive scripts (Honeycutt, 2008). “When people experience IIs they may be experiencing a representation of scripted or partially scripted knowledge, with the information being brought directly into explicit awareness for review” (Honeycutt, p. 78). Through their cognitive script’s individuals use internal dialogues to test out various possible scenarios in advance of an act (Honeycutt). Honeycutt and Cantrill (2001) discussed how scripts are a type of automatic pilot providing guidelines on how to act when one encounters new situations. Individuals use their IIs to store themes or central tendencies that may prove to be helpful in future interactions (Edwards et al., 1988). Scripts might contain specific social behaviors that are seen as acceptable within various family environments. Monitoring social behaviors on an individual level can be accomplished through the use of scripts before and after a conversation takes place.

There are two types of IIs: proactive and retroactive. Proactive IIs occur when individuals imagine a conversation before it takes place (Honeycutt, 2008). These anticipated encounters allow for an increase in message strategy for individuals prior to a conversation (Honeycutt, 2010). IIs may allow individuals to use a recalled conversation

as a means of editing the episode to meet anticipated situational exigencies (Allen & Honeycutt, 1997). For instance, an individual might imagine parts of a conversation and change certain language choices that he or she thinks is better suited for the conversation. This strategy gives individuals the opportunity to take information from past experiences and apply them to future goals and anticipated sequences of action (Allen & Honeycutt). Although proactive IIs are associated with message strategy, previous studies have positively associated proactive IIs with loneliness (Honeycutt, Zagacki, & Edwards, 1989). IIs may be less beneficial for lonely individuals because they fail to act on the basis of their imagined interaction, or they idealize outcomes in their IIs (Honeycutt et al., 1989). Avoidance can also be associated with proactive IIs. Individuals might take longer when imagining a conversation, which could be perceived by others as avoiding the topic.

Retroactive IIs occur after a real interaction has taken place, or to review what happened during an encounter (Honeycutt, 2010). Retroactive IIs allow individuals the opportunity to visualize communicating with someone who is not physically present. A negative outcome of retroactive IIs occurs when individuals repeatedly review and rehearse negative messages, which reflects rumination (Honeycutt). Honeycutt found that rumination results in heightened feelings of depression, hopelessness, and sadness; however, both II types have the potential to constructively influence the way individuals talk with others about important issues (e.g. politics). Most II research has looked at both II types from a post-positivist lens (Honeycutt, 2008). Not much is known about the content of IIs and in particular IIs of how family members talk about politics. By looking at the form and topic of conversation involved in both IIs might provide insightful

information on how individuals imagine political conversations with a family member.

Therefore, I ask the following research question: **RQ1: What are the content characteristics of proactive and retroactive IIs?**

#### Functions of IIs

According to IIT, proactive and retroactive IIs fulfill six functions. The first function IIs serve is sustaining relationships. Allen (1994) revealed that geographically separated couples use IIs as a means of maintaining their relationships (Honeycutt). IIs can help individuals continue their relationships when circumstances prevent actual interaction (Honeycutt). Research has revealed that relational happiness is associated with having pleasant IIs (Honeycutt & Wiemann, 1999). People often imagine talking about meaningful topics with others that are important in their lives (Honeycutt, 2008). One of these issues might involve conversations about politics. Honeycutt et al. (1989) indicates that individuals report having IIs that involve a variety of relational partners including romantic partners, friends, family members, and co-workers; most II research has focused primarily on romantic relationships (Honeycutt, 2008). Although a majority of II scholarship has specifically focused on relational maintenance with romantic partners, IIs can also be used to maintain familial relationships. Familial relationships can be maintained by keeping in mind others thoughts and viewpoints on sensitive topics (e.g. politics). Perhaps IIs serve as a helpful tool with relational maintenance when discussing political issues with a family member. Imagining conversations about political issues with a family member might affect the relationship by keeping in mind the family members' ideologies while constructing a thoughtful response. Once a thoughtful

response is imagined, individuals can reflect on how the conversation will play out, by gauging their family members' reaction.

The second function IIs serve is managing conflict. Relational partners might prolong conflicts by reliving old arguments and imagining the next conversation so that certain goals might be accomplished (Honeycutt, 1995). Using IIs to learn from past conflicts can be a major tool for future interactions. Conversely, the conflict management function of IIs can also reflect the role of rumination in which people have recurring thoughts about conflict and arguing that make it difficult to focus on other things (Honeycutt, 2008). Research has revealed that the most common case of reported IIs involved conflict about topics such as dating, school, work, family and money (Zagacki, Edwards, & Honeycutt, 1992). The topic of politics might prove to be associated with some form of conflict within the family environment. There has been a great deal of research devoted to taboo topics such as politics within friendships (Rawlins, 1983) and romantic relationships (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Rawlins' study on friendships indicated hesitancy in discussing topics that would hurt the other's feelings such as topics that were 'touchy' for the other party, past experiences that one would prefer not re-living, and topics that would jeopardize the other party's opinion of one. Baxter and Wilmot found that in romantic relationships, the state of the relationship itself was a popular taboo topic. IIs that concern conversations about politics between family members may serve to manage conflicts because they allow individuals to prepare for and reflect on the 'touchy' or 'taboo' topics of politics in the family. As stated earlier, political discussion is essential for a democracy; IIs could serve as a way of engaging in more political dialogue. IIs regarding political topics could help individuals construct a response that

helps formulate a well thought out argument or stance on an issue while keeping in mind the other parties' feelings toward the topic.

IIs can also compensate for a lack of interaction (Honeycutt, 2010). Sigman (1991) claims people exercise various means to continue the mental element of their relationship in the face of absence or lack of interaction. Ford (2010) notes that couples living apart use IIs as a substitution for the lack of real interaction with the absence of a spouse and as a means of perpetuating the relationship during times of separation. Similar to the functions already mentioned, research involving IIs associated with compensation (e.g., Ford) mainly focus on romantic relationships. This function of IIs might also be useful to individuals who are unable to communicate important issues to a family member. Opinionated topics such as politics may prove difficult for individuals to talk about if their family does not value open communication. Individuals who come from this type of family might use IIs to compensate for the absence of interaction with their family members.

The fourth function of IIs is self- understanding (Honeycutt, 2008). IIs can help reveal an individual's values, beliefs and attitudes. By reflecting on one's ideologies, a better understanding of their role in political conversations might be revealed. Zagacki et al. (1992) indicated that IIs served this function, which involved verbal imagery of the self as dominant. This result reiterates the importance IIs serve for individuals to better understand themselves, which could in turn help them visualize their strengths and weaknesses when engaging in interpersonal communication. Through the repeated use of IIs, individuals might detect certain patterns during political conversations where they

either take a more dominant or passive role. This recognition of self-understanding might affect future interactions regarding political conversations.

The last two functions of IIs are arguably the most relevant for this study: catharsis and rehearsal. IIs help individuals identify and clarify emotional responses to situations (Zagacki et al., 1992), which is a form of catharsis. IIs can serve as a way to ‘get things off one’s chest’ when individuals know that certain behaviors or the expression of emotions are inappropriate during ‘real’ interactions (Honeycutt, 2003). Passionate topics, such as politics, might evoke an emotional response for some individual’s. This emotional response may depend on how a family values communicating about political issues which could affect what emotions are appropriate during political engagement. Emotions have been considered a cognitively oriented experience where feelings play a critical role in how individuals view politics (Redlawsk, 2006). Richards (2004) found a strong connection between emotions and politics due to the increase of popular culture in our society. “Popular culture is largely about the expression and management of emotion (Richards, 1994; Elias & Dunning, 1986), the incursion into political experience of the values of popular culture means that we now seek certain kinds of emotionalized experience from politics that we have not done in the past” (Richards, p. 340). Unfortunately, there has been a negative connotation associated with politics as citizens continuously see negative stories and advertisements about political figures. The distrust of the government is fueled by the media, which emphasizes that organizational units ranging from governments to corporations are fundamentally flawed (Woodward, 2007). Citizens incorporate the emotions generated by negative press as they build their understanding of campaigns and candidates (Redlawsk). Individuals might associate



various emotions with different IIs. These emotions might differ in terms of who is involved in the conversation. IIs might not only afford the chance for individuals to consider the characteristics of others, they may simultaneously strengthen emotions associated with relational partners or situations (Zagacki et al., 1992). Previous scholarship on IIs and emotions shows the ability of IIs to relieve tension and reduce uncertainty about another's actions (Edwards et al., 1988).

The rehearsal function of IIs allows for individuals to imagine a conversation before the interaction takes place. IIs allow individuals to construct and test predictions against what they already believe to be a particular state of affairs (Edwards et al., 1988). If individuals imagine having a conversation with a family member about politics, they may shape their responses around the political views of their family member. For instance, if a young college student who tends to vote Democratic has a conversation with her father who is a staunch Republican about the upcoming Nevada Senate elections, the college student might not imagine convincing him to vote for Senator Harry Reid. She might instead imagine a more thoughtful response that takes into account both her and her father's political preferences. Not much is known of these six functions and their role in a conversation about politics with a family member. Therefore, I ask the following research question: **RQ2: What are the most helpful II functions for conversations about politics with a family member?**

#### Characteristics of IIs

Honeycutt (2010) identifies eight characteristics of IIs, which include frequency, proactivity, retroactivity, variety, valence, discrepancy, self-dominance, and specificity. "Frequency refers to the regularity at which IIs occur for an individual" (Honeycutt, p. 2).

Daly, Vangelisti, and Daughton (1987) revealed that frequency is positively correlated with the ability to detect irony or sarcasm in what others say and to paraphrase what others have said. The next two characteristics are similar to the two types of IIs: proactive and retroactive. Proactivity refers to IIs that precede anticipated encounters (Honeycutt, 2008). Proactivity is the only II characteristic directly associated with one of the functions, rehearsal, as individuals plan messages in what they will say in relation to images or scripts of what others might say (Honeycutt, 2010). Retroactivity refers to IIs that follow an encounter (Honeycutt, 2008). Retroactivity is the antithesis of proactivity, but both characteristics reflect the timing of the II in relation to the actual conversation (Honeycutt, 2010). The fourth characteristic of IIs is variety. IIs might contain a variety of diverse topics with different partners. Individuals whose IIs have high levels of this characteristic are skilled at wording the same thought in a number of ways (Honeycutt). In close relation to variety is valence. Valence is the amount and diversity of emotions that are experienced while envisioning a conversation (Honeycutt). Another characteristic of IIs is discrepancy. "Discrepancy is the characteristic that provides for the incongruity between IIs and the actual interaction that they address" (Honeycutt, 2010, p. 4). Conversations can be very discrepant from what was imagined. Individuals in families that openly voice their opinions might show a low amount of discrepancy; however, individuals who come from families that do not value open communication might report a high amount of discrepancy. The seventh characteristic of IIs is self-dominance (Honeycutt). Individuals might imagine themselves doing most of the talking during their II. Often individuals see themselves in the more dominant role while the other person involved plays more of a listening role (Edwards et al., 1988). The final characteristic of

IIs is specificity. Specificity refers to the detail and distinction of images contained within the IIs (Honeycutt). Some of these characteristics speak to content related items, while others are more quantitative in nature. In this study, the distinctions between and among these characteristics might be revealed. Therefore I ask the following research question:

**RQ3: What are the characteristics of political IIs with a family member?**

Family Types

Many agree that family remains the dominant source of political socialization (Ulbig & Funk, 1999). Early political communication research introduced general family communication patterns as an important attribute (Chaffee, McLeod, & Wackman, 1973) and more recent scholarship has extended this by examining family discussion of politics as central in the political socialization process (Hively & Eveland, 2009). The direct impact of political influence is mediated through family relationships, which are more immediate sources of casual influence on individual's sense of efficacy, political knowledge, nationalistic sentiment, tolerance of diversity, and other dispositions germane to the political socialization process (Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003). Through family interactions, individuals construct their ideological beliefs and values that in turn influence the way they interact with others regarding political topics. "Most of the forces internal to the family tend to produce a likeness in political attitudes and action from generation to generation" (Davies, 1981, p. 16). Assuming that politics are a part of family life (e.g., discusses politics, vote, participate in campaigns), the context would likely affect how young people view political engagement. Parents may emphasize partisanship or something else as a fundamental clue to understanding the political world (Sapiro, 2004). How families shape individual views on political issues is important to

understanding how individuals imagine political conversations with a family member. Family types might differ on the form and topic of conversation when engaged in political discussion. By looking at the different communication styles of each family type, a better understanding of how individuals imagine political conversations with a family member might be revealed. Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) describe four different family types, which include pluralistic, consensual, protective and laissez-faire families. There are two fundamental dimensions that distinguish these four family types: conformity orientation and conversation orientation (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997).

“Conformity orientation refers to the degree to which families create a climate that stresses homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs” (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997, p. 60). Families high in conformity orientation often teach their children the rules and norms of society and the behavior expected of them, which facilitates their children’s peer relationships (Gudykunst, 2002). Families that are low in conformity have heterogeneous attitudes and beliefs, a greater individuality of family members and focus on the uniqueness of the family members and their independence from their families (Koerner & Fitzpatrick). Conversely, Koerner and Fitzpatrick define conversation orientation as “the degree to which families create a climate where all family members are encouraged to participate freely in interaction about a wide array of topics” (p. 60). Families high in conversation orientation interact freely, frequently and spontaneously without time or topic limitations, whereas families low in this dimension interact less frequently and there are fewer topics that are openly discussed (Koerner & Fitzpatrick). Individuals are classified into four different family types based on whether their responses are low or high to these two dimensions (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Its

might function differently for members of each family type. Research has not addressed how each family type differs on II function. Therefore I ask the following research question: **RQ4: Do family types differ on II functions?**

### Pluralistic Families

Pluralistic families stress the relationship between the child and various concepts or issues (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). These families are high in conversation orientation and low in conformity orientation (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). “Communication in these families is characterized by open, unconstrained discussions that involve all family members, which fosters communication competence and independent ideas in children of such families” (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, p. 60). These families will likely have good listening skills, deal with people directly, favor regular interaction, and view strong feelings as normal. Regular interactions with family members will likely remain consistent when the topic of politics is approached. Roberto, Carlyle, Goodall, and Castle (2009) found that relationships and interactions with parents provide a foundation for most other relationships in an individual’s life, and results underscore the importance of family communication.

Individuals who come from pluralistic families may have higher II valence that constructively uses language to explain political conversations with family members. Individuals in pluralistic families might also imagine positive interactions more frequently than other family types. Since individuals in pluralistic families value open communication, more frequent IIs might be used to help construct respectful responses during all conversations involving politics. The following hypotheses address the positive characteristics associated with pluralistic families.

**H1: II frequency and valence will be positively correlated for individuals in pluralistic families.**

**H2: Compared to other family types, individuals in pluralistic families will report higher valence in their IIs about politics with a family member.**

Pluralistic families in addition may be considered the most constructive family type of the four due to the open nature of discussions (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Their ideology may be grounded in the notion that “politics and communication go hand in hand because they are essentially parts of human communication” (Denton & Kuypers, 2008, p. 4). IIs can be a contributing factor for pluralistic families when discussing political issues. Individuals may use proactive IIs to construct a respectful response to their family members’ views without demeaning or devaluing their ideas. The language choice used by these individuals in pluralistic families may be more thoughtful and considerate of the other individuals’ opinions. Due to the open nature of discussion, individuals in pluralistic families might be less discrepant in their IIs. Since a variety of topics and concepts are frequently discussed, II discrepancy would seem to be lower for individuals in pluralistic families. Therefore, I state the following hypothesis:

**H3: Compared to other family types, individuals in pluralistic families will report less discrepancy in their IIs about politics with a family member.**

#### Consensual Families

Consensual families are high in both conformity and conversation orientation (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Communication in this family type is characterized by a tension between pressure to agree and to preserve the existing hierarchy within the family, and an interest in open communication and in exploring new ideas (Koerner &

Fitzpatrick). “Parents in consensual families are interested in their children’s perspective, but as parents, they believe they should be making the decisions for the family and for their children” (Swanson & Cahn, 2009, p. 154). This tension may create IIs that contain uncertain reactions from individuals regarding political topics. Individual’s IIs from this family type may contain a more passive role in the conversation with a family member where the self is less dominant. Swanson and Cahn (2009) state that children in consensual families learn to value family conversation and to adopt their parents’ values and beliefs but have the freedom to escape into fantasy if necessary. Perhaps individuals from consensual families will rehearse conversations that will likely not take place but will take the luxury of imagining the conversation instead. Due to the fact that individuals in consensual families are high on both conversation and conformity orientation might reflect varying results for II functions and characteristics. Specifically, individuals in consensual families may be more discrepant in their IIs as a way of expressing conflicting views from the families’ without vocalizing them.

**H4: Compared to other family types, individuals in consensual families will report more discrepancy in their IIs about politics with a family member.**

#### Protective Families

Protective families are low on conversation orientation but high on conformity orientation (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). There is an emphasis on obedience and there is little concern for discussions of conceptual matters (Koerner & Fitzpatrick). Previous research indicates that these families are characterized by conflict avoidance paired with many incidents of venting negative feelings (Koerner & Fitzpatrick). Protective families

may have characteristics involving brutally honest responses, showing emotions strongly even if it hurts someone, and the idea that people who do not engage are weak.

A characteristic of protective families might be verbal aggression. Verbal aggression is a broad category of communication that involves attacks on an individual's self-concept that are intended to cause psychological pain and can include teasing, ridicule, swearing, and criticism of the individual's appearance or personality, and is often delivered with feelings of contempt or anger (Infante & Wigley, 1986). Some families may be considerably passionate about their particular political beliefs and do not allow for any competing ideas to be verbalized. This may create a continuous one-sided conversation about political issues where most members in the family do not participate. Individuals who come from protective families might have IIs that include verbal aggression from family members and even a type of vengefulness that could otherwise not be verbally uttered. Koerner and Fitzpatrick (1997) found that individuals in protective families "develop hostility and negative feelings toward family members, which are expressed in short, but often inconsequential, emotional outbursts" (p. 72). Negative feelings such as these may be seen in individuals proactive and retroactive IIs.

By examining the types of verbal aggression individuals imagine might show a unique distinction between the other three family types described by Koerner and Fitzpatrick (1997). Even those who are verbally aggressive might not fully admit it either to save face or because they might not be cognitively aware of it (Roberto et al., 2009). Those who are verbally aggressive might imagine themselves as the dominant figure by limiting responses from the other person involved in the conversation. Individuals who come from protective families may imagine the conversation from a more dominant role



while picturing the conversational partner in more of a listening role (Edwards et al., 1988). Verbal aggression might be associated more with protective families due to the vengeful feelings individuals typically have towards family members.

**H5: Compared to other family types, individuals in protective families will reflect the most verbal aggression in their IIs about politics with a family member.**

#### Laissez Faire Families

Laissez faire families are low in both conformity and conversation orientation (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). External social groups such as teachers or peers likely influence individuals from this family type more than the other family types (Koerner & Fitzpatrick). Swanson and Cahn (2009) claim that individuals from laissez faire families learn that there is little value in family conversation because interactions are emotionally unrewarding. Previous research indicates that individuals from laissez faire families tend to avoid rather than engage in conflict (Koerner & Fitzpatrick). Laissez faire family members may adopt the “agree to disagree” strategy, simply choosing not to talk about political issues to avoid rising tension. Some individuals report that taboo topics are used to avoid disagreements (Roloff & Ifert, 2001; Baxter & Wilmot, 1987). This may be useful for a short term solution. However, avoiding topics of discussion that individuals are passionate about will likely surface in the future. Individuals whose families avoided political issues may, unnecessarily ruminate on past or future conversations about politics. The role of rumination in IIs occurs when people have recurring thoughts about conflict and arguing that make it difficult to focus on other things (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). Rumination is associated with negative thinking and poor problem solving because individuals continuously build tension by constantly thinking

about the problem (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Avoidance might be misunderstood in some cases involving IIs. Individuals might be labeled as avoidant if they take the time to imagine a conversation before it takes place in order to ensure a more thoughtful response. Laissez faire families are low on the conversation dimension; therefore, individuals in these families might view politics as one of many topics that are not discussed with family members. Honeycutt (2010) claims the more ruminators dwell on their problems, the less motivation they have to solve the problems. Individuals who ruminate believe they lack the strength or resources to effectively solve their problems (Honeycutt, 2010). Nolen-Hoeksema (2008) echoes these findings indicating that even if a ruminator generates a worthwhile solution to a problem, rumination may impede him or her from implementing it. Due to the connection between research in laissez faire families and rumination, individuals in this family type may have IIs that involve negative thoughts. As stated earlier, valence refers to the amount and diversity of emotions that are experienced while envisioning a conversation (Honeycutt, 2010). The following hypotheses address how IIs characteristics might be associated within laissez faire families.

**H6: II frequency and valence will be negatively correlated for individuals in laissez faire families.**

**H7: Compared to other family types, individuals in laissez faire families will report lower valence in their IIs about politics with a family member.**

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODS

#### Participants

Two hundred and thirty-eight undergraduates at a large southwestern university participated in this study. Participant age ranged from 17 to 48 ( $M = 21.98$ ;  $SD = 5.03$ ). The study included 133 women (56%), 100 men (42%), and five participants (2%) did not report their sex. Ethnicities included: Caucasians ( $n = 106$ , 44.1%), Asians ( $n = 45$ , 20.5%), Hispanics ( $n = 40$ , 19.3%), African Americans ( $n = 18$ , 8.1%), Pacific Islanders ( $n = 9$ , 3.1%), other ( $n = 13$ , 4.9%) and four did not respond. The data included participants from pluralistic families ( $n = 73$ , 30.6%), protective families ( $n = 71$ , 29.8%), laissez-faire families ( $n = 54$ , 22.6%), and consensual families ( $n = 40$ , 16.8%). Participants reported party affiliation, which included Democrats ( $n = 94$ , 39.5%), Republicans ( $n = 67$ , 28.2%), Independents ( $n = 50$ , 21%), Libertarians ( $n = 5$ , 2%), other ( $n = 17$ , 7.2%) and five did not respond. One hundred and seventy-two participants indicated that they were registered voters, whereas 59 were not, four did not know and three did not respond. Participants completed on average two and a half years of college ( $M = 2.43$ ;  $SD = 1.45$ ).

#### Procedures

Participant recruitment was conducted in two ways. During the fall semester, the researcher visited undergraduate communication classes offering the study as an extra credit opportunity. During the spring semester, students had to participate for course and extra credit through the SONA web site. SONA is a human subject pool website used to coordinate participation in research studies with the Communication Studies department.

Specifically, the web-site provides researchers the central location for awarding research credit and students the ability to track their participation record.

During the fall semester in-class announcements, the researcher provided a brief description of the study including potential risks and benefits and the time expected to complete the survey. The researcher assured students that participation was voluntary and would be given the option to either complete the study or an alternate class assignment. The researcher gave interested students her contact information and asked participants to email her providing their name and section number in order to obtain the extra credit. After interested students emailed the researcher, an email including a link to the online survey was sent. Individuals' not interested in the survey, but wanted the extra credit emailed the researcher indicating that they wished to complete the alternative assignment. After collecting participant names to identify extra credit, participants' contact information was deleted to ensure confidentiality.

The SONA instruction followed a similar process, except the survey was part of some course's requirements and offered as extra credit in others. Course instructors made students aware of the research process through the SONA website. Instructors gave students navigational instructions for the web site along with instructions on how to complete the study. After interested students indicated through the SONA website that they wanted to participate, an email including a link to the online survey was sent. Students not interested in the study had the option to complete the alternative assignment. The alternative assignment instructed students to read an article related to IIs and submit a two-page summary to the researcher.

Once a student was given access to the survey, she or he went to the site provided by the researcher. Through a survey-based web site called Survey Tools, each participant created a username and password. After logging into the site, participants read the informed consent form (see Appendix A). If a student decided to participate in the study, he or she checked the box indicating that s/he had read the terms, and agreed to participate. Those who decided not to participate checked the box indicating they did not agree to the above terms and were thanked for their time. Participants who agreed to participate were then taken to the survey. The survey took approximately 40-45 minutes to complete.

### Measures

The survey included two sets of directions for II scripts, three instruments, and a set of demographic questions (See Appendix B). The first section included two sets of directions for II scripts. One set of directions instructed participants to imagine a conversation about politics with a family member that had not taken place (i.e., a proactive II). The directions instructed participants to transcribe the conversation in the form of a movie script indicating who said what and any nonverbal they imagined during the conversation. The second set of directions asked participants to imagine a conversation about politics with a family member that had taken place (i.e., a retroactive II). The same instructions from the first set of directions followed. After participants structured their II scripts, they completed a series of questions that asked them to specify which immediate family member they imagined having the political conversation with and if they shared the same political beliefs as that person. Participants also indicated where and when the imagined and previous conversation took place. The order of

directions for each II script was switched after the fall semester. During the fall semester the proactive II script was given first then the retroactive II script followed. The opposite occurred during the spring semester.

In the second section, participants completed the 61-item Survey of Imagined Interactions (SII) scale (Honeycutt, 2010). Participants answered questions from the SII using a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The SII included measures of the six functions, relational maintenance (e.g. "I use imagined interactions to think about someone whom I have a close bond"), conflict management (e.g. "My imagined interactions usually involve conflicts or arguments"), self-understanding (e.g. "Imagined interactions often help me to actually talk about feelings or problems with an interaction partner"), compensation (e.g. "Imagining talking to someone substitutes for the absence of real communication"), catharsis (e.g. "Imagined interactions help me relieve tension and stress"), and rehearsal (e.g. "Imagined interaction helps me plan what I am going to say for an anticipated encounter"). The SII also included measures of the eight characteristics: frequency (e.g. "I have imagined interactions many times throughout the week"), proactivity (e.g. "I often have imagined interactions before interacting with someone of importance"), retroactivity (e.g. "I often have imagined interactions after interacting with someone of importance"), variety (e.g. "Many of my imagined interactions are with different people"), discrepancy (e.g. "In my real conversations, I am very different than in my imagined ones"), valence (e.g. "I enjoy most of my imagined interactions"), specificity (e.g. "When I have imagined interactions, they tend to be detailed and well-developed"), and self-dominance (e.g. "I talk a lot in my imagined interactions"). The reliability for the SII ranges from .76-.83 (Honeycutt, Choi,

& DeBerry, 2009). In this study the reliabilities for the SII subscales ranged in acceptability ( $\alpha = .34-.83$ ). Reliability for SII scale subscales are as follows: conflict management ( $\alpha = .48$ ), relational maintenance ( $\alpha = .72$ ), self-understanding ( $\alpha = .68$ ), compensation ( $\alpha = .53$ ), catharsis ( $\alpha = .44$ ), rehearsal ( $\alpha = .72$ ), frequency ( $\alpha = .83$ ), proactivity ( $\alpha = .71$ ), retroactivity ( $\alpha = .74$ ), variety ( $\alpha = .34$ ), discrepancy ( $\alpha = .70$ ), valence ( $\alpha = .63$ ), specificity ( $\alpha = .48$ ), and self-dominance ( $\alpha = .74$ ).

In the third section participants completed the 26-item Family Communication Pattern (FCP) instrument (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Ritchie and Fitzpatrick referenced the family communication pattern (FCP) instrument to measure the dimensions of conformity and conversation orientation. The FCP has been widely used by communication researchers to measure family communication norms and has predicted a variety of outcomes and behaviors (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Studies using FCP have shown that both children and adults conceptual orientation is positively associated with interest in politics, knowledge and discussion of politics, and political campaign activities (McLeod, Fitzpatrick, Glynn, & Fallis, 1982). The FCP instrument was used to measure the two dimensions of conformity and conversation oriented families. Different levels associated with these two dimensions indicated which of the four family types each participant belonged to. Sample items measured conversation and conformity orientation (e.g. “In our family we often talk about topics like politics and religion where some persons disagree with others” and “My parents often say something like ‘My ideas are right and you should not question them’”). The reliability for the FCP is .84 for conversation orientation and .76 for conformity orientation (Ritchie &

Fitzpatrick). Reliability for the FCP subscales are as follows: conversation orientation ( $\alpha = .91$ ) and conformity orientation ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

In the fourth section participants completed a modified version of the SII scale developed for this study. Honeycutt (2010) states that the items of the SII scale may be measured in terms of overall usage as well as in specific contexts and the modified version is specific to political conversations with a family member. Sample items measuring the six functions of IIs included conflict management (e.g. “My imagined interactions about politics usually involve conflicts”), relational maintenance (e.g. “Imagined interactions about politics help me maintain a close bond with my family member”), catharsis (e.g. “Imagined interactions about politics help me relieve tension and stress), and rehearsal (e.g. “Imagined interactions about politics helps me plan what I am going to say for an anticipated encounter with a family member”). Sample items measuring the eight characteristics of IIs included frequency (e.g. “I have imagined interactions about politics many times throughout the week”), proactivity (e.g. “I often have imagined interactions about politics before interacting with a family member”), retroactivity (e.g. “I often have imagined interactions about politics after interacting with a family member”), variety (e.g. “Many of my imagined interactions about politics are with different family members”), discrepancy (e.g. “In my real conversations about politics, I am very different than in my imagined ones”), valence (e.g. “I enjoy most of my imagined interactions about politics”), specificity (e.g. “When I have imagined interactions about politics, they tend to be detailed and well-developed”), and self-dominance (e.g. “I talk a lot in my imagined interactions about politics”). Reliability for the modified SII scale subscales are as follows: conflict management ( $\alpha = .62$ ), relational



maintenance ( $\alpha = .79$ ), self-understanding ( $\alpha = .81$ ), compensation ( $\alpha = .55$ ), catharsis ( $\alpha = .16$ ), rehearsal ( $\alpha = .81$ ), frequency ( $\alpha = .80$ ), proactivity ( $\alpha = .71$ ), retroactivity ( $\alpha = .74$ ), variety ( $\alpha = .43$ ), discrepancy ( $\alpha = .52$ ), valence ( $\alpha = .65$ ), specificity ( $\alpha = .31$ ), and self-dominance ( $\alpha = .42$ ).

In the fifth section participants answered ten likert type items from the Interpersonal Communication Competency Scale (ICCS) using a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The ICCS included measures for empathy (e.g. "I can put myself in others' shoes"), assertiveness (e.g. "I stand up for my beliefs"), altercentrism (e.g. "My mind wanders during conversations"), interaction management (e.g. "I take charge of my conversations I'm in by negotiating what topics we talk about"), supportiveness (e.g. "My communication is usually descriptive, not evaluative"), and environmental control (e.g. "I can persuade others to my position") (Rubin & Martin, 1994). Reliabilities for the ICCS subscales are as follows: empathy ( $\alpha = .49$ ), assertiveness ( $\alpha = .72$ ), altercentrism ( $\alpha = .49$ ), interaction management ( $\alpha = .41$ ), supportiveness ( $\alpha = .43$ ) and environmental control ( $\alpha = .60$ ) (Rubin & Martin). In this study the reliability for the ICCS was consistent with previous studies ( $\alpha = .60$ ).

In the sixth section participants completed a modified version of the ICC scale, which was specific to political conversations with a family member. Sample items measuring competency included self disclosure (e.g. "I allow my family to see who I really am during conversations about politics") empathy (e.g. "I can put myself in my family members' shoes"), assertiveness (e.g. "I stand up for my beliefs when engaged in a political discussion with a family member"), altercentrism (e.g. "My conversations about politics are pretty one-sided"), interaction management (e.g. "I take charge of my

political conversations I'm in by negotiating what topics my family members and I talk about"), supportiveness (e.g. "My communication is usually descriptive, not evaluative when engaged in political discussion with a family member"), and environmental control (e.g. "I can persuade my family members' to my political position"). In this study the reliability for the modified ICCS was ( $\alpha = .71$ ).

In the final section participants completed a set of demographic questions including the participant age, sex, ethnicity and political affiliation. Participants reported their voting status (i.e., registered, not registered, did not know).

#### Data Analysis

Once surveys were collected, quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Qualitative data were coded for conversation form and topic. A constant comparison method was used to develop themes for the proactive and retroactive II scripts. Both researchers went through a series of constant comparisons until a consensus was reached regarding II form and topic.

The data were analyzed in the following ways:

#### **RQ1: What are the content characteristics of proactive and retroactive IIs?**

The first research question focused on the content characteristics of the proactive and retroactive IIs. This research question was analyzed by coding each narrative for conversation topics. The II scripts were examined using inductive processing. Initially a set of II scripts from both retroactive and proactive IIs were used to identify themes and develop coding schemes. II scripts were examined for conversation form (e.g., conflict, exchange of ideas, gossip/complaining, recapping/forecasting, joking around, small talk, persuasion, and decision making) and content (e.g., politicians, domestic issues, or

international issues). The content provided by participants ranged on a variety of topics. Participants provided conversations regarding a variety of politicians. Some participants provided the name of the politician while others gave a general response. Conversations regarding politicians were coded as politicians, except when participants reported having a conversation about President Obama. Participants also reported conversations about a variety of domestic issues (e.g., gay marriage, dream act, immigration reform, tea party). Although only a few students discussed international issues (e.g., Egypt revolution, war in Iraq, Korean conflict), a code was developed to categorize these conversational topics.

An adapted coding scheme from Baxter and Goldsmith (1996) was used to code conversation form. Qualitative data must initially begin with reading the entire data set (Baxter & Babbie, 2003) in order to experience a total immersion in them. A series of constant comparisons occurred to get to the final coding scheme. Researchers looked for a general homogeneity for the units placed within a given category. The comparison process consisted of redrafting codes from Baxter and Goldsmith to better explain the type of political conversations participants reported having. The redrafting of codes took several trials to come to a consensus on the most accurate approach to each II script. The coding scheme for conversation form consisted of nine adapted codes for both proactive and retroactive II scripts. The proactive II scripts included a code for decision-making conversations, which was not seen within the retroactive II scripts. The retroactive II scripts included a code for small talk, which was not seen within the proactive II scripts. There were some scripts that could have been coded in more than one category. For these scripts, researchers examined what was the main topic or form of conversation.

Specifically if a script included more than one topic, the code was based on which topic was discussed more in-depth. This method was also used for conversation form.

The first category was *gossip/complaining* conversations, this included conversations where there was an exchange of negative opinions or information about a person or topic. An example of a gossip/complaining II was when a male participant talked with his mother about President Obama.

*Mom: I don't like president obama...*

*Me: why not?...well I can kind of see why he's been a disappointment so far.*

*Mom: I know! when he was first elected I kept thinking, great! maybe we will have change...but look at everything that's happened.*

*Me: I know he wasn't going to perform. and he first proved that when he failed to act in Louisiana after the tragic oil spill. that was just irresponsible.*

*Mom: oh I know! how long did it take him...? I don't know something like over 50 days!*

*Me: I know that in itself was so astounding to me...the fact that he was busy on shows like the view but had no time to deal with the real serious problems going on in the country he's supposed to be running...what a joke! I hope the people that voted for him are happy now!*

*Mom: Well...he's popularity is definitely declining and that's without question. We also have to consider that he is also influenced by the people around him...I mean they advise him everyday.*

*Me: Yeah well I just wish he would get it together! Because our economic crisis is going no where fast, and we need a true leader right now.*

*Mom: I know...but what can we do. He's in office because people voted him in.*

*Me: Yeah well I sure wasn't one of them.*

The second code was labeled as *joking around*. This code focuses on a playful kind of talk to have fun or release tension. An example of this was when a female participant and her father talked about an upcoming election.

*Me: I plan on voting for Susie in this upcoming election.*

*Dad: Oh really, that's good.*

*Me: Who are you going to vote for?*

*Dad: I don't vote (laughing), I am in the middle.*

*(When me and my dad talk about politics it is usually light hearted, and he really does not take it very seriously because it has been ten years since he last voted.)*

The third code was labeled as *recapping the days' events/forecasting*. These conversations involved an individual asking about another's day or an individual forecasting a voting behavior. An example of this conversation form was when a female participant asked her father who he was voting for in the upcoming election.

*Me: Who did you vote for in the Nevada elections.*

*Dad: I voted for Harry Reid.*

*Me: Why did you vote for Reid instead of Sharon Angle, was it her viewpoints or her political party affiliation?*

*Dad: (ponders question) I think both reasons were why I voted against her.*

The fourth code was labeled as *conflict*, or when two people disagreed. These conversations included defensive/argumentative language, accusations, and/or sarcasm. An example of this conversation form was when a male participant and his uncle were arguing about governmental policy.

*Me: I just don't understand why poor people keep voting republican! it makes no sense to me AT ALL.*

*Uncle: I just don't want or need the government involved in everything in my life. This country is heading toward socialism!*

*Me: Oh no, here we go again with one of your one-dimensional and unreliable talking points.*

*Uncle: Let's just agree to disagree.*

*Me: Agreed!*

The fifth code was labeled as the *exchange of ideas*; which was a two-way, in-depth discussion or exchange of feelings, opinions, or ideas. An example of this conversation form was when a male participant was discussing the Nevada elections with his brother.

*Me: How do you feel about Harry Reid being re-elected?*

*Brother: 'm exstastic! I'm glad we still have a Democrat in office.*

*Me: Why he has been in office for years, our state is in worse shape that it has ever been.*

*He has done nothing ro help unemployment, our housing issues?*

*Brother: It always about money with you! (loudly) You know that I'm gay and*

*Republicans are trying to keep us (gay and lesbian community) from having equal rights as far as marriage, etc.!*

*Me: I can understand that, however what good are those rights if everyone is struggling, losing their houses, losing their jobs? More gov't control is not the answer to these problems. I believe that both political sides need to reach across the isle and work together. I'm all for equal rights, but I also believe in free-enterprise and small gov't.*

The sixth code was labeled as *information seeking*. This code involved a two-way conversation where one person sought information from the other. An example of this conversation form was when a male participant asked his stepmother about the North Korean conflict.

*Me: So do you guys think the Koreans will go to war?*

*Stepmom: Yeah, very likely.*

*Me: And will the U.S. support the South?*

*Stepmom: I don't think so, U.S. OWES CHINA TOO MUCH MONEY!*

*Me: That makes sense, because China would probably support North Korea.*

*Stepmom: Soon enough China will cease to be a communist country, and that will change things too.*

*Me: Is that likely?*

*Stepmom: Sure, the younger generation will soon change society. Even a person my age doesn't agree with communist beliefs.*

The seventh code was labeled as *persuading conversation*, where one person trying to convince the other person to do something. An example of this conversation form was when a female participant talked about voting with her grandmother.

*Me: I'm not into politics and I don't plan on voting.*

*Grandma: (yelling) You better vote.*

*Me: Why? I don't follow along with politics, I don't even know who's running for what and I don't know who to vote for.*

*Grandma: Do you know black people fought for the right to vote. Voting is a privillage that you should take advantage of. I've been voting every since I could.*

*Me: (frustrated) Yea I know. I'll vote.*

The eighth code was labeled as *decision-making conversations* where people had the goal of making a decision about some task. An example of this conversation form was when a female participant talked to her mother and tried to decide who to vote for in the upcoming election.

*Me: I am trying to decide who to vote for this election.*

*Mom: The so and so candidate said he is not going to raise taxes.*

*Me: I'm not worried about the taxes I just want a good candidate.*

*Mom: yes, I agree.*

The ninth code was labeled as *small talk*. This code focused on a kind of talk to pass time or avoid being rude. An example of this conversation form was when a female student was talking with her father.

*Me: I'm not sure that I'm on the right track or not.*

*Dad: What's wrong? Are you having a bad day today?*

*Me: Oh, well. I guess.*

*Dad: Oh's ok*

The final code was labeled *other* including all data that was not in the form of a script.

A second researcher coded a subset of the data ( $n = 59$ , 25%). The supervisor of the study served as the second coder. The coders achieved acceptable levels of intercoder reliability for both category schemes (Proactive IIs 91.7% agreement, Cohen's Kappa = 0.89; Retroactive IIs 92% agreement, Cohen's Kappa = 0.89).



**RQ2: What are the most helpful II functions for conversations about politics with a family member?**

The second research question focused on the helpful functions used during political conversations with a family member. This research question was answered by calculating the mean and standard deviation for each II function, and then determining the order of functions from highest to lowest.

**RQ3: What are the characteristics of political IIs with a family member?**

The third research question focused on the characteristics of the political IIs with a family member. The research question was analyzed by running descriptive statistics for each II characteristic. Specifically, each characteristic was measured by determining the mean and standard deviation.

**RQ4: Do family types differ on II functions?**

The fourth research question focused on the differences in II functions across family type. Researchers analyzed this research question by conducting an ANOVA for II functions by family type.

**H1: II frequency and valence will be positively correlated for individuals in pluralistic families.**

The first hypothesis focused on the positive correlation between II frequency and valence for individuals in pluralistic families. The hypothesis was tested by calculating the correlation between II frequency and valence.

**H2: Compared to other family types, individuals in pluralistic families will report higher valence in their IIs about politics with a family member.**

The second hypothesis compared the valence characteristic of IIs in pluralistic families to the other three family types. Researchers tested this hypothesis by conducting an ANOVA to find the highest mean for valence by family type to identify which of the three family types reported the highest II valence. The results for research question 5 will show whether this hypothesis is supported.

**H3: Compared to other family types, individuals in pluralistic families will report less discrepancy in their IIs about politics with a family member.**

The third hypothesis compared II discrepancy in pluralistic families to the other three family types. Researchers tested this hypothesis by conducting an ANOVA for discrepancy by family type to identify which of the three family types reported the lowest discrepancy in their IIs.

**H4: Compared to other family types, individuals in consensual families will report more discrepancy in their IIs about politics with a family member.**

The fourth hypothesis compared II discrepancy in consensual families to the other three family types. Similar to hypothesis 3, researchers tested this hypothesis by conducting an ANOVA for discrepancy by family type to identify which of the three family types reported the most discrepancy in their IIs.

**H5: Compared to other family types, individuals in protective families will reflect the most verbal aggression in their IIs about politics with a family member.**

The fifth hypothesis compared verbal aggression in protective families to the other three family types. The hypothesis was tested by examining who was dominant within each set of IIs. Dominance was measured by counting the number of words

spoken by each individual, as reported by the participant. The individual with the most words recorded in the II scripts was considered the most dominant during the interaction.

**H6: II frequency and valence will be negatively correlated for individuals in laissez faire families.**

The sixth hypothesis focused on the negative correlation between II frequency and valence for individuals in laissez-faire families. Similar to hypothesis 1, this hypothesis was tested by calculating the correlation between II frequency and valence.

**H7: Compared to other family types, individuals in laissez faire families will report lower valence in their IIs about politics with a family member.**

The seventh hypothesis compared II valence in laissez-faire families to the other three family types. Similar to hypothesis 2, researchers tested this hypothesis by conducting an ANOVA for valence by family type to identify which of the three family types reported the lowest valence in their IIs.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESULTS

**RQ1.** The first research question focused on the content characteristics of proactive and retroactive IIs. Participants reported who the conversation took place with in both proactive and retroactive IIs. Most participants reported talking with their Father ( $n = 100, 42.4\%$ ), others reported talking with their Mother ( $n = 72, 30.5\%$ ), and the rest of the data included extended family ( $n = 66, 27.1\%$ ). Participants also reported whether or not they shared the same political beliefs with the family member they imagined the interaction with. Results did not differ greatly for those who shared the same political beliefs as their family member ( $n = 98, 41.4\%$ ) than those who did not share the same political beliefs ( $n = 92, 38.8\%$ ). Others indicated that they did not know whether or not they shared the same political beliefs as their family member ( $n = 47, 19.7\%$ ).

This research question was also analyzed by coding each narrative for conversation topics. Topics for proactive II scripts included a political candidate ( $n = 57, 24\%$ ), domestic issues ( $n = 52, 22\%$ ), President Obama ( $n = 50, 21\%$ ), party affiliation ( $n = 25, 11\%$ ), voting significance and/or behavior ( $n = 22, 9\%$ ), both international issues and other topics ( $n = 11, 4.5\%$ ), and some did not include a topic ( $n = 10, 4\%$ ). Topics for retroactive II scripts included domestic issues ( $n = 54, 23\%$ ), President Obama ( $n = 53, 22\%$ ), political candidate ( $n = 46, 19\%$ ), voting significance and/or behavior ( $n = 38, 16\%$ ), party affiliation ( $n = 16, 7\%$ ), other topics ( $n = 6, 5\%$ ), international issues ( $n = 10, 4\%$ ), and some were not clearly identifiable ( $n = 9, 4\%$ ).

The proactive and retroactive II scripts were also examined for conversation form. Conversation form for proactive II scripts were coded as exchange of ideas ( $n = 70,$

30%), gossip/complaining conversations ( $n = 55$ , 24%), information seeking ( $n = 24$ , 10%), recapping the days' events or forecasting a voting behavior ( $n = 21$ , 9%), persuasion ( $n = 17$ , 7%), conflict ( $n = 17$ , 6%), decision-making ( $n = 3$ , 1%), joking around ( $n = 2$ , .9%), and other ( $n = 24$ , 10%). Conversation form for retroactive II scripts were coded as exchange of ideas ( $n = 82$ , 35%), gossip/complaining conversations ( $n = 48$ , 21%), recapping the days' events or forecasting a voting behavior ( $n = 30$ , 13%), information seeking ( $n = 26$ , 11%), other ( $n = 18$ , 8%), persuasion ( $n = 16$ , 7%), conflict ( $n = 8$ , 3%), small talk ( $n = 4$ , 2%), and joking around ( $n = 2$ , .9%).

The II characteristic of dominance was coded for in both the proactive and retroactive II scripts by counting the number of words the participant reported each person uttering in the conversation. The person who had the most words uttered within a conversation was coded as dominant. For the proactive II scripts, the participant accounted for 52.9% ( $n = 126$ ) of the data as the dominant person in the conversation, while the family member accounted for 31.9% ( $n = 76$ ). Some of the data did not have a script ( $n = 33$ , 13.9%) and other responses included an equal amount of words uttered by both the student and the family member ( $n = 3$ , 1.3%). The participant dominated in 53.8% ( $n = 128$ ) while family members dominated 35.7% ( $n = 85$ ) of the retroactive II scripts. Some participants did not provide a script ( $n = 21$ , 8.8%) and others reported an equal amount of words uttered by both the participant and their family members ( $n = 4$ , 1.8%).

**RQ2.** The second research question asked what were the most helpful functions for conversations about politics with family members. The participants' conversations about politics functioned most through catharsis ( $M = 3.04$ ;  $SD = .55$ ), self-understanding

( $M = 3.02$ ;  $SD = .797$ ) and rehearsal ( $M = 3.01$ ;  $SD = .86$ ). For conversations generally rehearsal ( $M = 3.99$ ;  $SD = .64$ ), self-understanding ( $M = 3.63$ ;  $SD = .62$ ) and conflict management ( $M = 3.50$ ;  $SD = .59$ ) were the highest rated functions.

**RQ3.** The third research question asked what are the II characteristics of political conversations with a family member. In these data, the top three II characteristics were valence ( $M = 3.05$ ;  $SD = .66$ ), specificity ( $M = 3.01$ ;  $SD = .58$ ) and dominance ( $M = 2.94$ ;  $SD = .60$ ). The II characteristic with the highest mean during general conversations was proactivity ( $M = 3.93$ ;  $SD = .73$ ). Retroactivity ( $M = 3.79$ ;  $SD = .67$ ) and frequency ( $M = 3.63$ ;  $SD = 0.83$ ) were the next two II characteristics with the highest means.

**RQ4.** The fourth research question focused on how the family types differed on II function. For political II functions, individuals in consensual families had the highest II value for self-understanding ( $M = 3.3$ ;  $SD = .85$ ), rehearsal ( $M = 3.3$ ;  $SD = 1.0$ ), conflict management ( $M = 3.1$ ;  $SD = .75$ ), compensation ( $M = 2.71$ ;  $SD = .66$ ), and relational maintenance ( $M = 2.93$ ;  $SD = .94$ ). Individuals in pluralistic families had the highest II value for catharsis ( $M = 3.2$ ;  $SD = .51$ ). For general IIs, individuals in consensual families had the highest II value for self-understanding ( $M = 3.8$ ;  $SD = .57$ ), compensation ( $M = 2.97$ ;  $SD = .83$ ), and relational maintenance ( $M = 3.32$ ;  $SD = .89$ ). Individuals in protective families had the highest II general value for rehearsal ( $M = 4.02$ ;  $SD = .68$ ), and conflict management ( $M = 3.5$ ;  $SD = .63$ ). Individuals in pluralistic families had the highest general II value for catharsis ( $M = 3.27$ ;  $SD = .64$ ).

**RQ5.** This research question focused on the II characteristics of protective families. For political II characteristics, individuals in protective families had the highest II value for discrepancy ( $M = 2.85$ ;  $SD = .50$ ). Individuals in consensual families had the

highest II value for frequency ( $M = 2.6$ ;  $SD = .86$ ), proactivity ( $M = 2.99$ ;  $SD = .84$ ), retroactivity ( $M = 3.16$ ;  $SD = .80$ ), variety ( $M = 2.97$ ;  $SD = .50$ ), valence ( $M = 3.35$ ;  $SD = .61$ ), and specificity ( $M = 3.16$ ;  $SD = .59$ ). Individuals in pluralistic families had the highest II value for dominance ( $M = 3.01$ ;  $SD = .58$ ). For general II characteristics, individuals in protective families had the highest general II value for retroactivity ( $M = 3.86$ ;  $SD = .67$ ), discrepancy ( $M = 3.16$ ;  $SD = .58$ ) and dominance ( $M = 3.60$ ;  $SD = .73$ ). Individuals in laissez-faire families had the highest II value for frequency ( $M = 3.72$ ;  $SD = .89$ ). Individuals in pluralistic families had the highest general II value for proactivity ( $M = 4.02$ ;  $SD = .61$ ), variety ( $M = 3.38$ ;  $SD = .54$ ), valence ( $M = 3.58$ ;  $SD = .54$ ), and specificity ( $M = 3.45$ ;  $SD = .63$ ). See Tables Four and Five for the entire set of results for II functions and characteristics.

**H1.** Hypothesis One was supported. Individuals in pluralistic families did report a positive correlation between general II frequency and valence ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and between political II frequency and valence ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**H2.** Hypothesis Two received partial support. Individuals in pluralistic families reported the highest general valence ( $M = 3.58$ ;  $SD = .54$ ) amongst family types, and general valence did significantly differ by family type ( $F_{(3,237)} = 2.60$ ,  $p < .05$ ); however, pluralistic family members had the second highest valence level ( $M = 3.32$ ;  $SD = .55$ ) for conversations about politics with a family member. Valence did differ across family type ( $F_{(3,237)} = 15.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ) for conversations with a family member about politics; Consensual family members reported the highest valence level ( $M = 3.36$ ;  $SD = .61$ ). Individuals in both pluralistic and consensual families reported higher valence on both general and political IIs than did individuals in protective (General  $M = 3.5$ ;  $SD = .54$ )

(Political  $M = 2.78$ ;  $SD = .69$ ) and laissez-faire families (General  $M = 3.32$ ;  $SD = .62$ ) (Political  $M = 2.81$ ;  $SD = .54$ ).

**H3.** Hypothesis Three was partially supported. Individuals in pluralistic families had the lowest discrepancy score out of all the family types for both general ( $M = 2.94$ ;  $SD = .68$ ) and political IIs ( $M = 2.8$ ,  $SD = .91$ ); however results for discrepancy were not significantly different across family type for both general ( $F_{(3, 237)} = 1.32$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and political IIs ( $n = 237$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $F = 2.10$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Individuals in consensual families had the second lowest discrepancy score for political IIs ( $M = 2.71$ ;  $SD = .55$ ), followed by laissez-faire families ( $M = 2.84$ ;  $SD = .47$ ), and protective families ( $M = 2.85$ ;  $SD = .50$ ). Individuals in laissez faire families had the second lowest discrepancy mean for general IIs ( $M = 3.03$ ;  $SD = .72$ ), followed by consensual families ( $M = 3.04$ ;  $SD = .56$ ), and protective families ( $M = 3.16$ ;  $SD = .57$ ).

**H4.** Hypothesis Four was not supported. Individuals in consensual families did not show the highest discrepancy in their IIs about politics with a family member. Individuals in protective families reported the highest discrepancy for both general IIs ( $M = 3.16$ ;  $SD = .58$ ) and political IIs ( $M = 2.85$ ;  $SD = .50$ ). Individuals in consensual families reported the second highest discrepancy for general IIs ( $M = 3.04$ ;  $SD = .58$ ), but were second to last for political IIs ( $M = 2.71$ ;  $SD = .55$ ).

**H5.** Hypothesis Five was not fully supported. Although family types did not significantly differ for dominance in both proactive IIs ( $X^2_{(6, 205)} = 4.74$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and retroactive IIs ( $X^2_{(6, 205)} = 6.20$ ,  $p > .05$ ), individuals in protective families had the highest percentage of cases falling into the participant as dominant for retroactive II scripts



**H6.** Hypothesis Six was not supported. For individuals in laissez faire families, there was a positive correlation between frequency and valence for political IIs ( $r = .08$ ,  $p > .05$ ), and for general IIs ( $r = .08$ ,  $p > .05$ ); although neither result was statistically significant.

**H7.** Hypothesis Seven received partial support. Although individuals in laissez-faire families did report less valence in their political IIs ( $M = 2.81$ ;  $SD = .50$ ) than individuals in consensual ( $M = 3.35$ ;  $SD = .61$ ) or pluralistic families ( $M = 3.32$ ;  $SD = .54$ ), individuals in protective families reported the lowest valence in their political IIs ( $M = 2.79$ ;  $SD = .69$ ). Family type differed on valence for political IIs ( $F_{(3, 237)} = 15.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For general IIs, individuals in laissez-faire families remained lowest on valence ( $M = 3.30$ ;  $SD = .62$ ) and family types differed on this characteristic ( $F_{(3, 237)} = 2.56$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Individuals in protective families had the second lowest valence level ( $M = 3.47$ , followed by consensual families ( $M = 3.56$ ;  $SD = .46$ ). Pluralistic families had the highest general II valence ( $M = 3.6$ ;  $SD = .54$ ).

**Ad Hoc Analysis.** The ICCS scale was used to measure the effectiveness of both general and political IIs. We examined the differences between family types on communication competence. Family type differed on political II effectiveness ( $F_{(3, 237)} = 9.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and general II effectiveness ( $F_{(3, 237)} = 5.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Individuals in pluralistic families reported the highest communication competence level ( $M = 3.60$ ;  $SD = .41$ ) for political IIs and individuals in consensual families reported the highest communication competence level ( $M = 3.75$ ;  $SD = .42$ ) for general II effectiveness.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION

The findings present some valuable implications for IIT. First, researchers using IIT have not studied imagined conversations about politics; the current study reports findings that connect IIs and political communication. Second, few studies within II research (Bryan, 2010) have asked participants to report the content of their IIs. IIs have primarily been measured through the use of surveys, journals, and even through the use of “talk-out-loud” procedures, where individuals role-play their imaginary dialogues with interaction partners prior to talking with them (Honeycutt, 2003). The content provided by participants in the current study helped researchers understand how political conversations were imagined in a detailed response. Some of the conversation topics included popular news stories during the time period the study was conducted. Many of these news stories reported by participants were covered over an extended period of time by the media. The content revealed various conversation forms indicating how individuals talked about political issues and what participants considered to be political. Conversational dominance was coded for in political IIs. Most of the II scripts indicated participants as the dominant figure. There was also a connection between IIs and different family types. The catharsis II function and family types proved to be helpful for individuals. Also, communication competency skills and traits were measured based on their connection to political conversations with a family member.

This was the first study that examined the role of politics within IIs. Researchers have studied IIs and emotions (Zagacki, Edwards, & Edwards, 1992), planning (Allen & Honeycutt, 1997), rumination (Honeycutt, 2010), and communication apprehension

(Honeycutt, Choi, & DeBerry, 2009). This study provided a new approach to looking at political engagement through the use of IIs. The political content gave insightful information on how individuals imagine conversations about politics. Political engagement is essential for a democratic society and IIs provide a new avenue to understanding how political views are both formed and imagined. Political communication researchers (Gimpel et. al., 2003) argue that the topic of adolescent political socialization is needed because previous research cannot necessarily be trusted to explain the attitudes and behavior of later generations. Research examining the role of politics across generations must continue.

The political content ranged on a variety of topics that highlighted popular news stories in the media. The major events not only attract intense media coverage but also draw more public attention to that coverage, in turn stimulating greater communication in the form of discussion with family and friends (Gimpel et. al., 2003). The content of the proactive and retroactive II scripts reflected a consistency across current events within the media (e.g., gay marriage, immigration reform, taxes, economy). Participants imagined conversations about highly popular news stories, such as the riots in Egypt and the tea party protests. These two stories received an immense amount of media attention during the second semester of data collection, which impacted the topic of conversation discussed with a family member. These findings underscore the importance of the media and the weight attributed to the types of issues participants believed to be political. Many of the participants in the current study solicited family members' interpretations of a news story in order to form their own opinions. Specifically, some of the participants asked their family members what they thought of a particular political issue that had

taken place. By inquiring about a political issue, participants were relying on their family member for information they believed to be political. This finding supports research from Zuckerman (2005) who indicated that family members depend on one another for information and guidance which gives rise to persuasion and shared political preferences. The information acquired from the media was often filtered with political preferences from family members that were mirrored by participants. Specifically, some family members would report to participants what they heard from the news while providing their own opinion on the issue. Some participants agreed with their family members' interpretation of the news story.

There was also a consistency of what participants considered as political conversations. Most of the participants reported political topics dealing with the government, a particular candidate, or domestic issues. The fact that individuals consistently viewed politics in this form is disconcerting given that politics is not limited to governmental policy. Bennett and Entman (2001) argue that politics is built on deep-seated cultural values and beliefs that are imbedded in the seemingly nonpolitical aspects of life such as entertainment media, which often provides factual information, stimulates social and political debate. Politics can occur in a variety of places (e.g., workplace politics, family politics, sports politics, relational politics). None of the participants acknowledged these political areas as topics of discussion with family members. An explanation for this could be the fact that the data collected within the fall semester occurred shortly after mid-term elections. Many of the local Nevada politicians visited campus for political rallies or student held meetings, where they campaigned among the student population. This important time period for local elections could have impacted

the way participants viewed political issues. Further evidence is seen in the IIs scripts involving voting significance or voting behavior as the topic of conversation. Many of the conversation forms for both the proactive and retroactive scripts involved family members asking whether or not the participant was going to cast a vote for a particular candidate. The time period in which the study was taken could have influenced this view of what participants believed to be political however it could have also been due to the stories shared within the media.

The different conversation forms also had important implications for II research. This was the first study within II research that looked at the conversation form of IIs about politics. The results show that most participants engaged in either an exchange of ideas or gossip/complaining when talking about politics with a family member. Over 50% of II scripts were categorized as either an exchange of ideas or gossip/complaining. Many of the participants who engaged in an exchange of ideas presented different ideas about a particular issue without expressing negative feelings towards a certain person or topic. These conversations were civil and nonconflictual in nature. Gossip/complaining occurred when both the student and the family member shared complaints about some common experience where negative feelings were directed toward a topic or a person. Both forms differ in their approach to talking about political issues. One approach consists of an open exchange of ideas while the other involves complaining about an issue or person. Although both differ in terms of productive ways of talking about politics, they were both largely present in this study. IIT researchers should consider the various II forms when looking at the relationship between content and the other person involved. The relationship with the person imagined in the interaction might impact the

conversation form. For example, a parent who typically does not enjoy talking about politics might use gossip or complaining to discuss a political issue, which could influence how the participant believes political issues should be discussed. This is important not only for II research but political socialization research.

Another finding was the role of dominance in participants political IIs. Most of the participants were dominant in their IIs. IIs can serve as a way to talk about politics while getting a point across to a family member. This finding supports past research from Edwards, Honeycutt, and Zagacki (1988) regarding IIs and dominance who reported that individuals typically see themselves talking more while the other person plays more of a listening role. Participants might have reported doing most of the talking as opposed to their family member because of their uncertainty of their family members political viewpoints. It might have been easier to talk about their political opinions or preferences than imagining their family member's.

This study also examined various family types and their connection to political IIs. II research has examined familial relationships and IIs (Allen, Edwards, Hayhoe, & Leach, 2010), but not how individuals imagine political conversations with a family member. IIs provided a new approach to studying different family types from Koerner and Fitzpatrick (1990). Individuals in protective families more were dominant in their political IIs compared to other family types. Although protective families tend to be low in conversation, the opposite seems to be true in political IIs. As stated earlier, research indicates that protective families are characterized by conflict avoidance paired with many incidents of venting negative feelings (Koerner & Fitzpatrick). Individuals in protective families may have been more dominant because they were venting negative

feelings about political conversations that could be considered a taboo topic within their family.

Results indicate that catharsis is the most helpful II function about political conversations with a family member regardless of family type. IIs have been recognized for their ability to relieve tension and reduce uncertainty about another's actions (Honeycutt, 1989). This reduction in anxiety could have been a useful function for participants during conversations about politics. This result supports IIT research that concludes IIs can be a means for "getting things off one's chest" (Honeycutt, Zagacki, & Edwards, 1989, p. 168). As noted earlier, conversations involving politics can be a taboo topic for individuals; however, using IIs can help to relieve tension and reduce uncertainty about topics that are conflictual in nature. As catharsis was the most helpful II function during political conversations, valence had the highest mean for II characteristics during political conversations. Individuals reported higher valence because it provided them the opportunity to test out possible emotional exigencies during conversations about politics with family members. It is arguable that many of the proactive and retroactive political IIs had an emotional attachment to the topic whether it involved a personal experience or passionate opinion on the issue.

Another valuable implication for IIT can be seen in the differences between II function and family types. Although most of the functions were reported as neutral, consensual families reported the highest mean on relational maintenance, conflict, rehearsal, self-understanding, and compensation. The only function individuals in this family type did not report the highest mean on was catharsis. Consensual families seemed to have benefited more than any other family type by various II functions. Individuals in

protective families reported the rehearsal II function as somewhat helpful during conversations about politics with a family member. A possible explanation for this could be that individuals in protective families do not converse very often but their IIs can serve as a way to rehearse a well planned out response on a political topic. As previous research indicates, individuals in protective families tend to believe that those who do not engage in conversation are weak (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). By rehearsing political IIs, individuals in protective families could better construct their opinions on a subject so that they did not appear weak.

A noteworthy finding was individuals in pluralistic families reported a higher level on proactivity about political IIs. This supports initial claims regarding individuals in pluralistic families constructing respectful responses by imagining conversations before they occur. H1 was supported which indicates that individuals in pluralistic families imagine catharsis as a useful function regarding general IIs. Overall, individuals in pluralistic families proactively use IIs for general and political conversations. Another important finding was the low discrepancy level for individuals in pluralistic families. Individuals from pluralistic families reported the least amount of discrepancy in their IIs however their level was not significantly different from the other family types. The low level of discrepancy indicates that individuals in pluralistic families think they can say what they are imagining without the repercussions of ridicule or conflict. This family type values open communication (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990) where all topics are on the table for discussion, therefore individuals think they can voice what they imagined. This finding supports existing research that knowledge is greatest and discussion is most commonly found among youth living in highly active political environments (Gimpel et.



al., 2003). Through this open communication, adolescents discover multiple viewpoints and soon perceive that information is of some value in the political decision-making process (Gimpel et. al.).

This study also revealed the negative connections between political IIs and laissez faire families. Individuals in laissez-faire families reported lower valence in their IIs about politics with a family member. This result is not surprising given past studies on family communication patterns that report laissez faire families as less aggressive during conversations with family members. Although previous research (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990) deals with actual conversations, a connection between actual and imagined conversations can be made through the reported negative valence. Research suggests that less pleasant IIs often involve conflict-eliciting negative effects (Honeycutt, 2010). Individuals in laissez faire families may have reported lower valence because of the minimal communication within their families. Individuals may have become frustrated with the lack of communication about political issues with their family members by venting negative thoughts through his or her imagination. As stated earlier, existing II research indicated that rumination is associated with negative thinking and poor problem solving because individuals continuously build tension by constantly thinking about the problem (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). The negative emotions associated with these IIs might directly relate to the role of rumination for individuals in laissez-faire families.

#### Limitations

This study did not occur without limitations. The first limitation was the inconsistency across nonverbal cues provided by participants. The II script directions instructed participants to provide any nonverbal and supplied two examples of nonverbal

displays (e.g., “raising his voice” or the emotion “: /” ). Participants used a variety of tactics when indicating nonverbal cues, such as the all capital letters (e.g., Dad: EVERYBODY’S A LITTLE RACIST!), textual smiley faces (e.g., ☺), or descriptions of nonverbal behaviors (e.g., Dad: I voted for Harry Reid. (Smiles proudly)). Coding nonverbal displays such as all caps proved challenging because participants did not indicate whether the all caps meant angry expression or simply louder tone of voice. Some participants did not provide nonverbals for all conversational members, which made those narratives difficult to code for conversation form. An example can be seen in a proactive II script that involved a student and stepmom’s conversation about the North Korean conflict. There was an exchange of ideas throughout the script, until the participant included all caps in a statement from the stepmom (e.g., “Stepmom: I don’t think so, U.S. OWES CHINA TOO MUCH MONEY”). This was the only statement within the conversation that was in all caps, which made it difficult to understand the meaning of the nonverbal. The conversation was ultimately coded as information seeking because the student did not provide any of her opinions; she inquired about her mother’s viewpoints on the conflict. Emoticons, such as smiley faces also posed a limitation. For example, a smiley face did not necessarily indicate that a person was happy. Its use might have meant a person was trying to make the other party feel better about the current situation even if they were uncertain about how the issue would affect them. An example can be seen in a proactive II script that involved a student and mother’s conversation about illegal immigration. There was an exchange of ideas regarding the topic, until the student provided a textual smiley face for the mother (e.g., Mom: I don’t know about that but if one of them is illegal, the other is probably going to try and get them papers ☺).

This conversation was coded as gossip/complaining because both the student and mother were complaining about the new immigration laws being passed. Due to the multiple meanings associated with the nonverbals provided, only a few were useful while coding the II scripts.

The second limitation was the length of the survey, which might have caused participant fatigue. Completing the survey took approximately 40-45 minutes. Although the study was designed to break up the survey into sections with no more than 15 items, the amount of questions over the course of 40 minutes might have been overwhelming. The first two questions took the most time to think about. These questions were positioned first in the survey to make sure participants did not over look these two items. There is a possibility that the amount of questions following the two II scripts were a bit exhaustive for participants. Participants may have found it easy to respond without reading the questions through carefully.

The third limitation in this study was the lack of sample diversity. A majority of participants are Caucasian. The current sample was taken out of convenience. Convenience sampling is generally the weakest form of nonprobability sampling (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). A well-rounded sample would have been better had recruitment been from a variety of classes within the university, not only introductory communication courses. By having a more diverse sample, the results are able to benefit more people with similar cultural backgrounds. For future research, not only the diversity of participants would be more beneficial for generalizable claims, but also individuals who are not college students. The ease and low expense of convenience sampling explains its popularity, but it is risky to generalize the results to a larger population of students or to

people in general (Baxter & Babbie). Although convenience sampling has its limitations, Baxter and Babbie state that the use of convenience sampling in the initial design of a questionnaire might effectively uncover any peculiar defects in the questionnaire. These defects were seen in the low reliabilities for the SII and ICC scales.

The fourth limitation was the low reliability for the SII and ICC scale. An explanation for the low reliability of the scale could have been due to ordering effects. Items were assigned by categorizing one item from each subscale sequentially: no two items from the same subscale followed one another. Randomizing the order of items from the SII subscales may have seemed chaotic and worthless to participants because they had to continually switch their attention from one topic to the next (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). The low reliability for items in both the general and modified SII scale makes it difficult to provide generalized claims regarding some of participants' II functions and characteristics. Claims regarding specific II characteristics and functions should be quite tentative due to the low reliabilities for these subscales. The low reliability might be improved through counter-balancing. Counter-balancing occurs when some questions appear early to half of the respondents and later to the other half (Baxter & Babbie). Results may help determine whether order made a difference for the question. The ICC scale also had a low reliability. Several scales on communication competency were examined however the general conceptualization of the ICC scale seemed appropriate for the current study. The wording and length of the scale items were of particular interest for the design of the current study. An explanation for the low reliability for this scale might have been due to using only certain items from the scale while omitting others. It might have been better to use the entire scale instead of using items that fit within the political

realm. The ICCS's reliability is acceptable ( $\alpha = .71$ ). Future research might want to use the entire scale in order to achieve the original reliability for the ICCS.

The final limitation was a historical validity threat. The II content provided by participants could have been the result of recent events that took place during the conduct of the study (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). The study was taken over the course of two semesters. The first semester involved current events such as the local Nevada elections and the economy, while the second semester involved conversation topics relating to the riots in Egypt and the tea party. These events could have impacted which conversation topics individuals preferred mentioning regarding politics with a family member. Also, some of the participants in the study chose not to provide an answer to the proactive and retroactive II scripts because they believed their family did not discuss politics. In a sense, everything is political. A more concise set of directions might have helped participants understand that politics are not necessarily limited to politicians and elections. Although most of the participants in this study did mention these two areas as topics of political conversations, politics exists in a variety of areas. For instance, if an individual has an argument or conversation with a romantic partner over household chores and claims that it is not her place to be in the kitchen. This argument or conversation has a direct political implication associated with it. It was an interesting finding that elections and politicians were the most common political topics discussed however future research should address that politics encompasses more than political parties.

## Future Research

The first direction for future research should be to continue looking at politics within II research. Although participants reported most II functions as neutral during conversations about politics, research should continue to examine this topic by addressing the limitations of this study. The conversations imagined about political discussions with family members' shows that IIs can be used to construct respectful responses. The taboo nature of politics has made some hesitant to talk about important issues that are highly influential. Future research might want to examine pluralistic family types and their contributions towards effective communication styles during conversations about politics. This may have important implications for political communication between family members by understanding productive ways to approach political issues.

The second area for future research should be to further expand on this new area of II scholarship by asking participants questions specifically regarding the II functions and characteristics of their imagined conversations. In the current study, participants were asked general questions regarding II functions and characteristics that did not directly relate to the II scripts provided. Future research should ask questions about II functions and characteristics that directly relate to the content of the proactive and retroactive II scripts provided by participants. These questions would help increase understanding around the role of IIs in conversations. In the present study, only one of these characteristics was seen within the II scripts, dominance. By asking participants questions specifically about these characteristics, researchers might be able to measure how rewarding these conversations may have been. For instance, valence would be better measured if a question regarding how pleasant or unpleasant the II was for the

participant. It could help to understand whether the II was emotionally fulfilling. In the current study, participants answered a question regarding the effectiveness of the IIs however no questions regarding the emotional reward were asked. Valence was difficult to code in the two sets of II scripts for this particular reason.

The third direction for future research should be to examine how personality relates to political IIs. The combination of different emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral responses could have an impact on the way individuals imagine different interactions. Understanding more about an individual's personality might provide greater insight as to how individual's view political conversations with a family member. Individuals with optimistic personalities might be more inclined to imagine positive interactions whereas individuals who are daunted might be more likely to imagine negative or uncertain interactions. Past II research mentioned personality as a direction for future research involving cognitive styles (Zagacki, Edwards, & Honeycutt, 1992). Although this future direction has yet to be studied within II research, personality might be a distinguishing factor between different family types. Individuals who are more outgoing might be from a pluralistic family due to the open nature of discussion on various topics or concepts. Individuals who are shy and reserved might identify more with consensual or protective families where conformity is high. Future research might examine the role of personality and how it relates to II functions and family type.

The fourth direction for future research should be to conduct a lab experiment regarding II discrepancy. To measure discrepancy accurately, individuals may be asked to first imagine a conversation about politics with a family member in the lab. Once individuals are done reporting their proactive II, they would then have a discussion

regarding their II with a family member. Researchers would be able to measure whether or not the proactive IIs were discrepant from the actual interaction. Researchers may also measure retroactive IIs for discrepancy. Individuals may be asked to have a political discussion with a family member in the lab. Once the participants have completed their discussion, they would then be asked to report their retroactive II on the conversation. By measuring the discrepancy level of each participant, a better understanding of why individuals differ on their imagined and actual interactions may be revealed. Researching discrepancy in light of the current study is important due to the importance of accurately interpreting another person's opinion on a political topic. In the lab setting, instant feedback could be given to participants regarding their interpretation of the actual conversation through the reported IIs. Individuals with lower discrepancy would likely value open communication where individuals who were more discrepant might use IIs as a way to confide information that they would feel uncomfortable verbalizing.

Finally, future research should include recruiting both parents and children and asking them to provide proactive and retroactive II scripts regarding the same political conversation. This might help to better understand the similarities and/or differences of the way parents and children imagine their conversations about politics with one another. A helpful tool might be to show both the parent and the child each of their scripts, to understand how each person interpreted the conversation. This might be especially useful if the two II scripts differed from one another. Opinions have the potential to be misconstrued, especially when talking about passionate subjects such as politics. By understanding how each family member imagines the conversation, a more insightful way to approach a conversation regarding opinionated topics might be revealed. IIs could



assist in bridging this communication gap by helping to understand the other person's view on the conversation. Many of the conversations reported in the current study reported conflict within the conversation because he or she did not understand the rationale behind their political views. This ultimately created an argument amongst participants in the conversation. II research should take on this new direction of scholarship to help better communication about political issues with family members.

### Practical Applications

This study was the first within II research that examined the topic of politics discussed with a family member. Studying politics is an important topic to approach in interpersonal research due to the significance of civic dialogue. As previously stated, participating in political talk is essential for any democracy. Hart (2000) argues that political campaigns and conversations only fail when they forestall genuine engagement. As seen throughout this study, imagining political conversations before a conversation takes place can be used as a way to construct a respectful response that takes into account both parties' viewpoints. Political topics have become taboo for some because of the inability of others to hear opinions that differ from their own. IIs can help increase civic dialogue by imagining how individuals' opinions may affect the other person involved. Retroactive IIs could also help individuals reflect on opinions that differ from their own, perhaps helping to better understand the opposing side of an issue. This can be a difficult task for many, however taking the time to consider a family members' point of view could help to strengthen the relationship. It may do so by showing the other person involved in the conversation that there is an effort being made to understand their opinion.

This study could also help explain the various family types in communication studies courses. For the conflict management course, this study could help to explain how family types differ on controversial, often conflictual topics, such as politics. It creates a new area for class discussion as well as creating more civic dialogue amongst students about important issues that are affecting society. This study could also be used in introductory interpersonal communication courses, specifically for class lectures in listening. Political discussion could be used a teaching tool for instructors while talking about listening. Students may find it difficult to listen to a point of view that conflicts with their own, especially when talking about topics as controversial as politics. Instructors might suggest a student use IIs to help construct a respectful response after listening to another person's political preference on a specific issue. This might help students see the value in thinking about what they will say before verbalizing their thoughts. Communication theory instructors could also benefit from this study. This study could be used as an example to help explain IIT using a combination of both post-positive and interpretive approaches. Since the primary epistemology of IIs can be described as post-positivist (Honeycutt, 2008), this study can be used to explain how the theory can also take on an interpretive approach.

Results from this study can also be applied to family and school counselors. Family counselors may use the II results from each family type to help indicate what functions are most useful for political conversations with a family member. Family counselors might suggest that patients use the rehearsal II function as a way of constructing a respectful response while getting their point across to their family members. This research could be beneficial to school counselors due to the often times

conflictual dialogue between adolescents and parents. IIs might be useful for both the parent and adolescent to help understand how the other is interpreting a conversation. Communication between adolescents and parents can be difficult however through the suggested use of IIs, school counselors may be able to help both parties converse on topics by helping to understand the other parties point of view. School counselors may also ask students to provide IIs regarding topics that are causing them stress or tension. Students may be ruminating on past conflicts with a family member which could affect the relationship with their family member. Counselors could suggest that students use positive II functions to help communicate issues that are important to them.

Interpersonal scholars must look at politics as topics of conversations within various relationships, such as romantic, familial, friendships, or co-workers. Each has the potential to involve political discussion on a daily basis. Politics is an important topic of discussion within any relationship because it helps to maintain civic discourse about important issues. Political issues are not limited to governmental policy and may encompass relationships, sports, school, religion, work, etc. It is surprising that politics has not received more attention within IPC given its significance in everyday discourse. Examining the topic of politics using other interpersonal theories could help to explain how and why politics is considered a taboo topic for some. This research might provide helpful communicative approaches to political conversations that emphasize open discussion. Communicating about political issues on an interpersonal level needs to be studied due to the dependence citizens have on political discourse with significant others for information and guidance.

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM



#### Department of Communication Studies

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**TITLE OF STUDY:** Imagined Interactions as a link to Political Talk

**INVESTIGATOR(S):** Dr. Erin Sahlstein and Megan Lambertz

**CONTACT PHONE NUMBER:** Dr. Sahlstein (702) 895- 3640 Megan Lambertz (702) 524-0704

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#### **Purpose of the Study**

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a study about when you imagine conversations with others. Specifically we are interested in when you imagine having conversations about politics with a family member and how your family's communication patterns might relate to what you imagine.

#### **Participants**

You must be at least 18 years of age and registered for an undergraduate communication course at the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

#### **Procedures**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. We will ask you questions about your background and communication practices between you and a family member when talking about politics. This survey will take no longer than 40-45 minutes of your time.

#### **Benefits of Participation**

There may be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. These benefits include potentially helping to improve your communication about political issues with family members.

#### **Risks of Participation**

This study may include only minimal risks to you. You will be asked to think of a political discussion that you have had with an immediate family member; examples may include but are not limited to your mother, father, brother or sister. Depending on your comfort levels regarding political issues, there is the potential for you to experience slight

embarrassment, awkwardness, shame, or other psychological discomforts in personally reflecting on your experience.

### **Cost /Compensation**

There will not be any financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately 40-45 minutes of your time and is worth 1 research credit in the COM Research Participation System (<http://unlv-comm.sona-systems.com/>). If you are currently enrolled in a COM course that requires research participation for course credit or offers extra credit for participating in research, then you will be compensated for your time with 1 research credit. After you submit your survey a research credit will be applied to the COM course you designate in the COM Research Participation System (<http://unlv-comm.sona-systems.com/>). If you do not want to participate in this study but still wish to earn course or extra credit in your COM course, then you may complete an article summary. Email the researcher if you choose to complete the alternative article summary.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact **Megan Lambertz at**

**(702) 895-0024 or Dr. Erin Sahlstein at (702) 895-3640.** For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the **UNLV Office of Research Integrity-Human Subjects at 702-895-2794.**

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

### **Confidentiality**

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for one year after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be disposed/shredded/deleted from computer hard drives.

### **Participant Consent:**

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study by clicking the button “next” below, which will take me to the survey. I am at least 18 years of age.



APPENDIX B

IMAGINED INTERACTIONS AS A

LINK TO POLITICAL TALK SURVEY

***Part I***

*For the next few minutes imagine having a conversation about politics with an immediate family member that has NOT YET OCCURRED. Take a few minutes to consider what may happen then click the “next” button.*

***NEXT***

*After you are done imagining this conversation, explain in as much detail as possible in the space provided, what you imagined occurring during the conversation. Also, indicate the responses from you and your family member involved in the conversation by writing out the conversation in the form of a movie script specifying who says what. Also, please include, if any, nonverbals during the conversation.*

**EXAMPLE:**

*Me: I plan on voting for Susie in this upcoming senatorial election!*

*Dad: I don't like how she has handled healthcare issues. I'm going to end up paying more money for healthcare (raising his voice).*

*Me: Maybe you're right. I didn't think of it that way. : /*

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*After you are done scripting out your imagined conversation, please answer the following questions about your interaction.*

1) Who in your immediate family did you imagine having this conversation with?

Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_ Brother \_\_\_\_\_ Sister \_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

2) Where did you imagine this conversation taking place?

Home \_\_\_\_\_ Work \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3) What time of day did you imagine this conversation taking place?

Morning \_\_\_\_\_ Afternoon \_\_\_\_\_ Evening \_\_\_\_\_ Did not imagine a time of day  
\_\_\_\_\_

4) Do you have the same political beliefs as the person you imagined having the conversation with?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know \_\_\_\_\_

5.) In your opinion, how effective was your communication during the imagined interaction.

1 = Not at all effective

2 = Somewhat effective

3 = Difficult to judge

4 = Somewhat effective

5 = Very effective



*Recall a conversation about politics with a family member that has ALREADY TAKEN PLACE. Take a few minutes to remember what happened and then click the “next” button.*

*NEXT*

*Explain in as much detail as possible in the space provided, what you recalled from the conversation. Also, indicate the responses from you and your family member involved in the conversation by writing out the conversation in the form of a movie script specifying who said what. Also, please include, if any, nonverbals during the conversation.*

**EXAMPLE**

*Mom: I don't think the president is doing a good job. : (*

*Me: Why? I think he is great.*

*Mom: He has been in office two years now and nothing has changed!*

*Me: I could name a number of things that have changed, such as education, healthcare, etc..*

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*After you are done scripting out your conversation, please answer the following questions about your interaction.*

6) Who in your immediate family did you imagine having this conversation with?

Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_ Brother \_\_\_\_\_ Sister \_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

7) Where did this imagined conversation take place?

Home \_\_\_\_\_ Work \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

8) When did this conversation actually take place?

Morning \_\_\_\_\_ Afternoon \_\_\_\_\_ Evening \_\_\_\_\_ Did not imagine a time of day \_\_\_\_\_

9) Do you have the same political beliefs as the person you imagined having the conversation with?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know \_\_\_\_\_

10) How long ago did this conversation take place?

Days ago \_\_\_\_\_ Weeks ago \_\_\_\_\_ Months ago \_\_\_\_\_ Years ago \_\_\_\_\_

11) In your opinion, how effective was your communication during the imagined interaction.

1 = Not at all effective

2 = Somewhat effective

3 = Difficult to judge

4 = Somewhat effective

5 = Very effective

*The following are a few items asking you about your experiences with imagined interactions with others. Please read each item carefully and try to answer it as honestly as possible using the scale provided. Please answer the following questions by indicating (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).*

## **Part II**

- 12) I have imagined interactions many times throughout the week.
- 13) I frequently have imagined interactions.
- 14) I rarely imagine myself interacting with someone else.
- 15) I often have imagined interactions throughout the day.
- 16) I often have imagined interactions before interacting with someone of importance.
- 17) Before important meetings, I frequently imagine them.
- 18) Before, meeting someone important, I imagine a conversation with them.
- 19) It is rare that I imagine an encounter before an important meeting or conversation.
- 20) I often have imagined interactions after interacting with someone of importance.
- 21) After important meetings, I frequently imagine them.
- 22) After I meet with someone important, I relive my conversation with him or her.
- 23) I often think about prior conversations that I have participated in.
- 24) Many of my imagined interactions are with different people.
- 25) I have recurrent imagined interactions with the same individual over the same topic.
- 26) Many of my imagined interactions are with the same person.
- 27) My imagined interactions often involve a variety of people.
- 28) My imagined interactions tend to be on a lot of different topics.
- 29) In my real conversations, I am very different than in my imagined ones.
- 30) I usually say in real life what I thought I would say.
- 31) When I have a real conversation that I have imagined, the actual conversation is very different from what I imagined.
- 32) In my real conversations, other people are very different than in my imagined ones.
- 33) My imagined interactions are quite similar to the real conversations, which follow them.
- 34) More often than not, what I actually say to a person in a real conversation is different from what I imagined I would say.
- 35) I enjoy most of my imagined interactions.
- 36) My imagined interactions are usually quite unpleasant.
- 37) My imagined interactions are usually enjoyable.
- 38) My imagined interactions usually involve happy or fun activities.
- 39) When I have imagined interactions, they tend to be detailed and well developed.
- 40) It is hard recalling the details of my imagined interactions.
- 41) My imagined interactions are very specific because I envision where the conversation takes place.
- 42) When I have an imagined interaction, I often have only a vague idea of what the other says.
- 43) I talk a lot in my imagined interactions.

- 44) The other person dominates the conversation in my imagined interactions.
- 45) I dominate the conversation in my imagined interactions.
- 46) When I have imagined interactions, the other person talks a lot.
- 47) Imagined interactions often help me to actually talk about feelings or problems later with an interaction partner.
- 48) The imagined interaction helps me understand my partner better in relation to me.
- 49) Imagined interactions help me understand myself better.
- 50) The imagined interaction helps me in clarifying my thoughts and feelings with an interaction partner.
- 51) Imagined interaction helps me plan what I am going to say for an anticipated encounter.
- 52) I have imagined interactions before entering a situation with someone whom I know will be evaluating me.
- 53) Imagined interactions make me feel more confident and relaxed before I actually talk with an interaction partner.
- 54) I have imagined interactions in order to practice what I am actually going to say to the person.
- 55) Imagined interactions help me relieve tension and stress.
- 56) Imagined interactions help me to reduce uncertainty about another's actions and behaviors.
- 57) By thinking about important conversations, it actually increases tension, anxiety, and stress.
- 58) Imagined interactions make me feel tense when thinking about what another says.
- 59) My imagined interactions usually involve conflicts or arguments.
- 60) I rarely recall old arguments in my mind.
- 61) I often cannot get negative imagined interactions "out of my mind" when I'm angry.
- 62) Imagined interactions help me manage conflict.
- 63) It is sometimes hard to forget old arguments.
- 64) Imagining talking to someone substitutes for the absence of real communication.
- 65) Imagined interactions can be used to substitute for real conversations with a person.
- 66) Imagined interactions may be used to compensate for the lack of real, face-to-face communication.
- 67) It is rare for me to imagine talking with someone outside his or her physical presence because I believe in the saying, "out of sight, out of mind."
- 68) I use imagined interactions to think about someone with whom I have a close bond with.
- 69) Imagined interactions help keep relationships alive.
- 70) Imagined interactions are important in thinking about one's relational partner.
- 71) Imagined interactions help me maintain a close bond with my partner.
- 72) My imagined interactions are:
  - \_\_\_ Mostly verbal (e.g., they involve talking with little visual imagery)
  - \_\_\_ Mostly visual (e.g., little talking occurs)
  - \_\_\_ are a mixture of verbal and visual

*The next set of questions asks about communication between you and your immediate family. Using the scale provided, report how much you agree with each statement as it pertains to your family's communication. Please answer the following questions by indicating (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 agree, 5 = strongly agree).*

### **Part III**

- 73) In our family we often talk about topics like politics and religion where some persons disagree with others.
- 74) My parents often say something like "Every member of the family should have some say in family decisions."
- 75) My parents often ask my opinion when the family is talking about something.
- 76) My parents encourage me to challenge their ideas and beliefs.
- 77) My parents often say something like "You should always look at both sides of an issue."
- 78) I usually tell my parents what I am thinking about.
- 79) I can tell my parents almost anything.
- 80) In our family we often talk about our feelings and emotions.
- 81) My parents and I often have long, relaxed conversations about nothing in particular.
- 82) I really enjoy talking with my parents, even if we disagree.
- 83) My parents like to hear my opinions, even when they don't agree with me.
- 84) My parents encourage me to express my feelings.
- 85) My parents tend to be very open about their emotions.
- 86) We often talk as a family about things we have done during the day.
- 87) In our family we often talk about our plans and hopes for the future.
- 88) My parents often say something like "You'll know better when you grow up."
- 89) My parents often say something like "My ideas are right and you should not question them."
- 90) My parents often say something like "A child should not argue with adults."
- 91) My parents often say something like "There are some things that should not be talked about."
- 92) My parents often say something like "You should give in on arguments rather than risk making people mad."
- 93) When anything really important is involved, my parents expect me to obey without question.
- 94) In our home, my parents usually have the last word.
- 95) My parents feel that it is important to be the boss.
- 96) My parents sometimes become irritated with my views if they are different from theirs.
- 97) If my parents don't approve of it, they don't want to know about it.
- 98) When I am at home, I am expected to obey my parents' rules.

*The following are a few items asking you about your experiences with imagined interactions with family members about a political conversation. Please read each item carefully and try to answer as honestly as possible using the scale provided. Please answer the following questions by indicating (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).*

#### **Part IV**

- 99) I have imagined interactions about politics with a family member many times throughout the week.
- 100) I frequently have imagined interactions about politics with a family member.
- 101) I rarely imagine myself interacting with family members about politics.
- 102) I often have imagined interactions about politics with a family member throughout the day.
- 103) I often have imagined interactions about politics before interacting with a family member.
- 104) Before important gatherings with family members, I frequently imagine them.
- 105) Before, family gatherings, I imagine a conversation with them.
- 106) It is rare that I imagine an encounter before a conversation about politics with a family member.
- 107) I often have imagined interactions about politics after interacting with a family member.
- 108) After family gatherings, I frequently imagine them.
- 109) After I meet with a family member, I relive my conversation about politics with him or her.
- 110) I often think about prior political conversations that I have participated in with a family member.
- 111) Many of my imagined interactions about politics are with different family members.
- 112) I have recurrent imagined interactions about politics with the same family member over the same topic.
- 113) Many of my imagined interactions about politics are with the same family member.
- 114) My imagined interactions about politics often involve a variety of family members.
- 115) My imagined interactions about politics with a family member tend to be on a lot of different topics.
- 116) In my real conversations about politics with a family member, I am very different than in my imagined ones.
- 117) I usually say in real life to a family member what I thought I would say about politics.
- 118) When I have a real conversation about politics with a family member that I have imagined, the actual conversation is very different from what I imagined.
- 119) In my real conversations about politics, my family is very different than in my imagined ones.
- 120) My imagined interactions about politics with a family member are quite similar to the real conversations which follow them.

- 121) More often than not, what I actually say to a family member in a real conversation about politics is different from what I imagined I would say.
- 122) I enjoy most of my imagined interactions about politics with a family member.
- 123) My imagined interactions regarding a conversation about politics with a family member are usually quite unpleasant.
- 124) My imagined interactions regarding a conversation about politics with a family member are usually enjoyable.
- 125) My imagined interactions regarding a conversation about politics with a family member usually involve happy or fun activities.
- 126) When I have imagined interactions about politics with a family member, they tend to be detailed and well developed.
- 127) It is hard recalling the details of imagined interactions regarding politics with a family member.
- 128) My imagined interactions about politics with a family member are very specific because I envision where the conversation takes place.
- 129) When I have an imagined interaction about politics, I often have only a vague idea of what my family member says.
- 130) I talk a lot in my imagined interactions about politics with a family member.
- 131) My family member dominates the conversation in my imagined interactions about politics.
- 132) I dominate the conversation in my imagined interactions about politics with a family member.
- 133) When I have imagined interactions about politics, my family member talks a lot.
- 134) Imagined interactions about politics often help me to actually talk about feelings or problems later with a family member.
- 135) The imagined interaction about politics helps me understand my family member better in relation to me.
- 136) Imagined interaction about politics with a family member helps me understand myself better.
- 137) The imagined interaction about politics helps me in clarifying my thoughts and feelings with a family member.
- 138) Imagined interaction about politics with a family member helps me plan what I am going to say for an anticipated encounter.
- 139) I have imagined interactions about politics before entering a situation with a family member whom I know will be evaluating me.
- 140) Imagined interactions about politics make me feel more confident and relaxed before I actually talk with a family member.
- 141) I have imagined interactions about politics in order to practice what I am actually going to say to my family member.
- 142) Imagined interactions regarding conversations about politics with a family member help me relieve tension and stress.
- 143) Imagined interactions about politics help me to reduce uncertainty about a family member's actions and behaviors.
- 144) By thinking about important political conversations with a family member, it actually increases tension, anxiety, and stress.



- 145) Imagined interactions about politics make me feel tense when thinking about what my family member will say.
- 146) My imagined interactions regarding conversations about politics with a family member usually involve conflicts or arguments.
- 147) I rarely recall old arguments about politics with a family member in my mind.
- 148) I often cannot get negative imagined interactions regarding conversations about politics with a family member “out of my mind” when I’m angry.
- 149) Imagined interactions about politics with a family member help me manage conflict.
- 150) It is sometimes hard to forget old arguments about politics with a family member.
- 151) Imagining talking to a family member about politics substitutes for the absence of real communication.
- 152) Imagined interactions about politics can be used to substitute for real conversations with a family member
- 153) Imagined interactions about politics may be used to compensate for the lack of real, face-to-face communication with a family member.
- 154) It is rare for me to imagine talking with a family member about politics outside his or her physical presence because I believe in the saying, “out of sight, out of mind.”
- 155) I use imagined interactions about politics to think about a family member whom I have a close bond with.
- 156) Imagined interactions about politics help keep familial relationships alive.
- 157) Imagined interactions about politics are important in thinking about one’s family member.
- 158) Imagined interactions about politics help me maintain a close bond with my family member.
- 159) My imagined interactions regarding conversations about politics with a family member are:
- \_\_\_ Mostly verbal (e.g., they involve talking with little visual imagery)
  - \_\_\_ Mostly visual (e.g., little talking occurs)
  - \_\_\_ are a mixture of verbal and visual

*The following are a few items asking you about how you interact with other people. Be honest in your responses and reflect on your communication behavior very carefully.*

*Please answer the following questions by indicating (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).*

- 160) I allow others to see who I really am.
- 161) I can put myself in others' shoes.
- 162) I have trouble standing up for myself.
- 163) I stand up for my beliefs.
- 164) My conversations are pretty one-sided.
- 165) My mind wanders during conversations.
- 166) I take charge of conversations I'm in by negotiating what topics we talk about.
- 167) My communication is usually descriptive, not evaluative.
- 168) I accomplish my communication goals.
- 169) I can persuade others to my position.

*The following are a few items asking you about how you interact with a family member about a conversation involving politics. Be honest in your responses and reflect on your communication behavior very carefully. Please answer the following questions by indicating (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).*

170) I allow my family to see who I really am during conversations about politics.

171) I can put myself in my family members' shoes.

172) I have trouble standing up for myself when engaged in a political discussion with a family member.

173) I stand up for my beliefs when engaged in a political discussion with a family member.

174) My conversations about politics are pretty one-sided.

175) My mind wanders during conversations about politics with a family member.

176) I take charge of political conversations I'm in by negotiating what topics my family members and I talk about.

177) My communication is usually descriptive, not evaluative when engaged in political discussion with a family member.

178) I accomplish my communication goals when engaged in political discussion with a family member.

179) I can persuade my family members' to my political position.

*The next set of questions will ask about your demographics and political beliefs.*

**Part V**

180) How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ Years

181) What is your sex?

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

182) How many years of college have you completed? \_\_\_\_\_ Years

183) What is your ethnicity?

Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_ African American \_\_\_\_\_ Asian \_\_\_\_\_

Middle Eastern \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

184) What is your political affiliation?

Democrat \_\_\_\_\_ Republican \_\_\_\_\_ Independent \_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

185) Are you a registered voter?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know \_\_\_\_\_

**Submit**

*This completes the survey! Thank you for volunteering in this research study. We greatly appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences. Please print this page to keep for your own records.*

Table 1

*Proactive & Retroactive II Conversation Topics*

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Proactive (n, %)</u>	<u>Retroactive (n, %)</u>
Political Candidate	57, 23.9%	46, 19.4%
Domestic Issues	52, 21.8%	54, 22.7%
President Obama	50, 21%	53, 22.3%
Party Affiliation	25, 10.5%	16, 6.7%
Voting Sig/behavior	22, 9.2%	38, 16%
International Issues	11, 4.6%	10, 4.2%
Other	11, 4.6%	12, 5%
No Topic	10, 4.2%	9, 3.8%

Table Two

*Proactive II Conversation Form*

Exchange of ideas: An exchange of ideas including a two-way, in-depth discussion or exchange of feelings, opinions, or ideas ( $n = 70$ , 30.4%).

Gossip/complaining: Conversations where there was an exchange of negative opinions or information about a person or topic ( $n = 55$ , 24%).

Information seeking: A two way conversation where one person is seeking information from the other ( $n = 24$ , 10.4%).

Recapping the day's events/forecasting: Conversations involving either an individual asking about another's day or forecasting a voting behavior ( $n = 21$ , 9.1%).

Persuasion: Conversations when one person had the goal of convincing the other person to do something ( $n = 17$ , 7.4%).

Conflict: Conversations where two people disagreed; these conversations involved defensive/argumentative language, accusations, and/or sarcasm ( $n = 14$ , 6.1%).

Decision-making conversations: Conversations where people had the goal of making a decision about some task ( $n = 3$ , 1.3%).

Joking around: A playful kind of talk to have fun or release tension ( $n = 2$ , .9%).

Other: Conversations that did not have scripts ( $n = 24$ , 10.4%).

Table Three

*Retroactive II Conversation Form*

Exchange of ideas: An exchange of ideas including a two-way, in-depth discussion or exchange of feelings, opinions, or ideas ( $n = 82, 35\%$ ).

Gossip/complaining: Conversations where there was an exchange of negative opinions or information about a person or topic ( $n = 48, 20.5\%$ ).

Recapping the day's events/forecasting: Conversations involving either an individual asking about another's day or forecasting a voting behavior ( $n = 30, 12.8\%$ ).

Information seeking: A two-way conversation where one person is seeking information from the other ( $n = 26, 11.1\%$ ).

Other: All data that was not in the form of a script ( $n = 18, 7.7\%$ ).

Persuasion: Conversations when one person had the goal of convincing the other person to do something ( $n = 16, 6.8\%$ ).

Conflict: Conversations where two people disagreed; these conversations involved defensive/argumentative language, accusations, and/or sarcasm ( $n = 8, 3.4\%$ ).

Small talk: A kind of talk to pass time or avoid being rude ( $n = 4, 1.7\%$ ).

Joking around: A playful kind of talk to have fun or release tension ( $n = 2, .9\%$ ).

Table Four

*Modified SII Scale (Political IIs)*Pluralistic (n = 73) Consensual (n = 40) Protective (n = 71) Laissez-faire (n = 54)

<u>II Function</u>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Relational Maintenance	7.68 (.81)	2.93 (.94)	2.66 (.80)	2.42 (.74)
Self-Understanding:	3.01 (.76)	3.30 (.85)	3.02 (.72)	2.80 (.70)
Rehearsal:	3.00 (.80)	3.30 (1.0)	3.02 (.85)	2.70 (.77)
Catharsis:	3.20 (.51)	3.20 (.46)	2.83 (.55)	3.00 (.56)
Conflict:	2.75 (.69)	3.09 (.75)	3.00 (.67)	2.90 (.56)
Compensation:	2.40 (.59)	2.70 (.65)	2.50 (.82)	2.42 (.68)
<u>II Characteristic</u>				
Frequency:	2.08 (.81)	2.61 (.86)	2.13 (.90)	1.90 (.74)
Proactivity:	2.81 (.91)	2.99 (.83)	2.85 (.85)	2.45 (.79)
Retroactivity:	2.73 (.86)	3.16 (.80)	2.98 (.82)	2.45 (.84)
Variety:	2.82 (.58)	2.97 (.50)	2.78 (.59)	2.46 (.52)
Discrepancy:	2.65 (.65)	2.71 (.54)	2.85 (.50)	2.84 (.47)
Valence:	3.32 (.54)	3.35 (.61)	2.78 (.68)	2.81 (.54)
Specificity:	3.08 (.61)	3.16 (.59)	2.95 (.60)	2.87 (.42)
Dominance:	3.01 (.58)	2.93 (.61)	2.87 (.66)	2.96 (.51)



Table 5

*General SII Scale*Pluralistic (*n* = 73) Consensual (*n* = 40) Protective (*n* = 71) Laissez-faire (*n* = 54)

<u>II Function</u>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Relational Maintenance:	3.25 (.66)	3.32 (.89)	3.27 (.72)	3.03 (.56)
Self-Understanding:	3.64 (.59)	3.80 (.57)	3.63 (.69)	3.48 (.58)
Rehearsal:	4.01 (.57)	3.99 (.57)	3.63 (.69)	3.48 (.58)
Catharsis:	3.27 (.64)	3.15 (.57)	3.19 (.62)	3.25 (.61)
Conflict:	3.48 (.53)	3.45 (.51)	3.58 (.62)	3.45 (.66)
Compensation:	2.64 (.65)	2.97 (.83)	2.64 (.72)	2.57 (.67)
<u>II Characteristic</u>				
Frequency:	3.35 (.80)	3.65 (.83)	3.62 (.80)	3.72 (.89)
Proactivity:	4.02 (.61)	3.89 (.70)	3.96 (.74)	3.79 (.86)
Retroactivity:	3.80 (.67)	3.76 (.63)	3.85 (.67)	3.69 (.73)
Variety:	3.37 (.54)	3.34 (.40)	3.27 (.49)	3.34 (.57)
Discrepancy:	2.94 (.68)	3.03 (.56)	3.16 (.57)	3.03 (.72)
Valence:	3.58 (.54)	3.56 (.46)	3.47 (.61)	3.31 (.62)
Specificity:	3.45 (.63)	3.37 (.53)	3.34 (.61)	3.29 (.60)
Dominance:	3.57 (.64)	3.28 (.72)	3.60 (.72)	3.58 (.67)

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