“It’s All Political”: The Role of Political Identity in the Identification and Selection of Politically Relevant Entertainment Media

by

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For Velma Alice Maxine Coles
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Abstract

Thanks to technological advances over the past two decades, media consumers now have an unprecedented number of content options. Along with an increase in news options has come an even greater expansion in the number of entertainment options available to media consumers. This is especially true when it comes to fictional entertainment television programming available via cable and services such as Netflix and Hulu. Much attention has been paid to how individuals' political identities affect their selection of news. Although there is evidence that exposure to entertainment media is fractured along political lines, there remains an assumption that most viewers select entertainment media without any political considerations. The average individual consumes much more entertainment media than they consume news media. What if people's political identities actually do influence what fictional entertainment media they choose? I contend that 1) individual-level differences such as political identity strength affect whether people evaluate media content as politically relevant, and 2) these evaluations affect whether people selectively expose themselves to fictional entertainment media.

Rather than rely on researchers' designations of media as politically relevant or not, I call for a viewer-centric approach to identifying politically relevant media. Any given media text may be of greater or lesser political relevance to any given media consumer. Unfortunately, asking viewers to identify what television shows are politically relevant isn't a straightforward process due to the way people often use terms such as "political" and "politics." To overcome limitations with existing approaches, this dissertation develops a new scale that I use to evaluate individuals' perceptions of media as politically relevant. I propose a model predicting how the

strength of a viewer's political identities, together with a television show's content, will affect the viewer's evaluation of the show as politically relevant. In turn, the evaluation of the show as politically relevant will affect politically motivated selective exposure to that show. In Chapter 2, I develop the Politically Relevant Media (PRM) scale across two studies. In Chapter 3, I examine how attributes of media content and political identities affect evaluations of television programs as politically relevant, as indicated by PRM scale scores. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate the predictive and mediating abilities of the PRM scale. I find that political identity strength has a positive effect on evaluations of television programming as politically relevant, and such evaluations are associated with greater politically motivated selective exposure to fictional entertainment shows. This has implications for the study of politically motivated selective exposure more broadly, but particularly in the context of fictional entertainment media.

Chapter 1: A Viewer-Centric Approach to Identifying Politically Relevant Media

Over the past two decades, technological advances have brought with them an explosion in the amount of media available to consumers, whether via cable and satellite television or via the Internet. Media consumers now have an unprecedented number of options to choose from for both news and entertainment. Particularly when it comes to entertainment television, the proliferation of both cable television and subscription services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime Video leaves viewers with a seemingly endless number of fictional entertainment television options. Political communication scholars have paid much attention to how news selection is affected by individuals' political identities, defined in this project as partisanship, ideological identity, and issue public membership. Yet there is evidence that exposure to entertainment media is also fractured along political lines. Much has been made about the potential for news media to lead to "echo chambers" in which people only expose themselves to news that conforms to their existing political viewpoints; however, the average person consumes much more entertainment media than they consume news media (TiVo, 2019). Is it possible that people's political identities affect their selection of fictional entertainment media? Perhaps the real "echo chambers" we should concern ourselves with are not with news media, but with fictional media.

Studies of television viewing patterns have identified that conservatives and liberals watch different types of television entertainment content (Blakley et al., 2019). Although theories of moral foundations have been applied to the selection of entertainment media (Long & Eveland, 2018; Tamborini et al., 2013) and scholars have developed typologies of political

entertainment media (Eilders & Nitsch, 2015; Haas, Christensen, & Haas, 2015; Holbert, 2005), very little work (e.g., Settle, 2018; Vraga, Bode, Smithson, & Troller-Renfree, 2016) has explored the degree to which individuals perceive media content to be politically relevant, especially television entertainment programming. Likewise, there exists ambiguity around what counts as "political entertainment" and what media is politically relevant (Delli Carpini, 2014). I define the political relevance of media as the degree to which individuals think about media content as being related to politics and the political. These matters are complicated by the fact that media genres are defined by audiences, researchers, industry actors, and cultural practices alike, making classification difficult. Meanwhile, scholars still seem to delineate between explicitly political media and media whose political content is more implicit.

Scholars of media effects and narrative effects and engagement have demonstrated that entertainment media can affect social reality judgments and political opinions. For example, exposure to entertainment media has been found to affect attitudes regarding crime (Donovan & Klahm, 2015; Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2004; Holbrook & Hill, 2006; Mutz & Nir, 2010; Slater, Rouner, & Long, 2006), women's and reproductive rights (Brown & Cody, 1991; Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2003; Swigger, 2017), egalitarianism and racial policy attitudes (Ball-Rokeach, Grube, & Rokeach, 1981; Brigham & Giesbrecht, 1976; Gierzynski, 2018), and other sociopolitical attitudes (Gierzynski, 2018; Volgy & Schwarz, 1980). However, there remains an assumption that most viewers choose their entertainment media absent of political considerations. I contend that 1) individual-level differences such as political identity strength affect whether people evaluate media content as politically relevant, and 2) these individual-level differences will affect whether people selectively expose themselves to media that may be perceived as politically relevant. What objects (e.g., social issues, government agencies/agents, and

politicians/parties/polls) individuals perceive as political is shaped by individual forces; thus, we must take a viewer-centric approach to determining individuals' evaluation of media as politically relevant and thus whether politically motivated selective exposure of entertainment media is occurring.

I offer two general hypotheses in this dissertation. First, my *evaluation hypothesis* posits that evaluations of media as politically relevant are a function of the strength of viewers' political identities, as moderated by the objects depicted in that media. That is, an individuals' political identity strength will affect how politically relevant they evaluate media to be, but the influence of political identity strength on such evaluations will vary depending on media content. Second, my *selection hypothesis* predicts that individuals are more likely to engage in selective exposure for media they perceive to be more politically relevant, but less so when they evaluate media as less politically relevant. I further hypothesize that evaluations of media as politically relevant will act as a mediator between political identity strength and selective exposure. That is, stronger political identities will lead to evaluations of media as being more politically relevant, and these evaluations will lead to greater levels of selective exposure. Although these concepts apply to all media, in this study I choose to focus on television content, fictional entertainment shows in particular.

Asking viewers to evaluate what television shows are politically relevant is no small task. Political science literature investigating how individuals talk about politics and identify objects as political reveals the pitfalls of relying on directly asking individuals what objects are political (Fitzgerald, 2013; Guess, Munger, Nagler, & Tucker, 2019; Settle, 2018; Walsh, 2004). To overcome limitations with existing approaches, this dissertation develops a new scale that I use to evaluate individuals' perception of media as politically relevant. Studies 1 and 2 of this

dissertation are used to develop and refine the new Politically Relevant Media (PRM) scale. Following them, Study 3 tests my evaluation hypothesis, and Study 4 tests my selection hypothesis.

In the following section I offer a definition of the political that will be useful throughout this project, as well as define and discuss the significance of three classes of political objects: social issues, government agencies/agents, and politicians/parties/polls. Next I explicate the new PRM concept, then detail three conceptualizations of political identity relevant to this project: partisanship, ideological identification, and issue public membership. I conclude this chapter by laying out the design and plan for the four studies that comprise this dissertation.

Defining the Political

A primary task of this dissertation is to identify a clear definition of what the political comprises, along with a way to identify objects that might be relevant to politics. In this section, I first offer a definition for politics and the political that is specific yet flexible enough to cover a broad range of potentially political objects. I then offer a way to classify political objects into three categories: social issues, government agencies and agents, and politicians/parties/polls. Third, I discuss the relevance of perceptions of controversy and of persuasive intent to politics and to politically relevant media. Finally, I discuss why a scale assessing the political relevance of media is necessary rather than relying on simply asking people if a media text is political.

Defining Politics: Collective Concerns, Decisions, and Consequences

I adopt Hay's (2007) definitions of politics and politicization. He defined politics as the response to the need for "collective and ultimately binding decision making" (p. 2). Hay (2007) identified four features of politics, each one encompassing the previous feature: choice, capacity for agency, deliberation, and social context. In order to define an object as political, individuals

must have choices regarding the object available to them. Likewise, individuals must be able to practice agency to make those choices, and those choices must actually have a material outcome. In other words, political objects involve the potential for human control. There is also the potential, at least hypothetically, for deliberation amongst people regarding those choices—political objects are things people could talk about, if given the opportunity. Finally, the choices made regarding political objects must have the potential to be made collectively, or the effects of those choices must have collective consequences.

Relatedly, Hay (2007) defined politicization as a process leading to the collective ownership-taking of social issues. He envisioned politicization as a continuum between which matters were left to fate (matters beyond human control, for which people could not make choices and had no agency), all the way to which matters were assigned to collective decision making through the organizing processes of government. The first step along this continuum was the elevation of issues from matters of fate to matters of personal freedom/responsibility: those issues that individuals could control for themselves. The second step was the further elevation of issues to matters of public concern: those issues that could be addressed collectively. Mirroring his four features of politics, this second step is the level of politicization at which the potential for collective decision making and collective consequences arises. Thus, an object becomes political once it becomes a matter of public concern and there is the potential for collective decision making and/or collective consequences.

Classification of Political Objects

With a suitable definition of politics and the political identified, I now turn to how one might classify politically relevant objects. Scholars have identified three classes of objects that comprise the political: 1) what social issues are of concern to the broader public as opposed to

the private matters of individuals, 2) how government agencies and agents function to address those concerns, and 3) who (politicians and parties) we elect (polls) to run the government. These classes exist along a continuum that Hay (2007) refers to as a process of politicization and depoliticization. He describes the first step of the politicization process as the recognition and ability of people to exert control over certain circumstances, rather than resigning their conditions to chance or to supernatural causes. Once this occurs, issues become a matter of individuals to address on their own; the first class of political objects proceeds from elevating issues beyond this point.

It's important to note the varying levels of consensus among people regarding what counts as political within each of these classes of political objects. As I note below, there is considerable variability among individuals regarding what matters are of public concern rather than private matters; however, people are closer to unanimity in considering matters related to politicians, political parties, and elections to be political. These varying degrees of consensus among the different classes of political objects are indicative of the consensus-as-political we might expect out of television programming depicting the objects found within these classes of political objects.

Social issues: Public concerns (vs. private matters). The first class of political objects is social issues, where individuals collectively define what issues are of public concern, rather than private matters (personal freedoms and personal responsibilities; Eliasoph, 1997; 1998; Fitzgerald, 2013; Hay, 2013). Eliasoph (1998) noted that there is power in deciding what is political, what is allowed as part of "public-spirited" conversation. She asserted that through talking is how we both define what is political and also how we wield political power: "The public sphere is something that exists *only between* people, and comes into being when people

speak public-spiritedly. Speaking public-spiritedly creates the public sphere" (p. 16). Similarly, Hay (2013) stated that politicization is about taking ownership of social processes. Rather than matters being left to fate, and therefore social inequalities as personal problems for people to overcome by themselves, politicization for this class of objects is marked by the act of people acknowledging that something can be done collectively to address an issue. This politicization process is also similar to the power that Eliasoph (1998) described when she stated that to be able to define what is political is a form of power. Hay (2013) speaks of this as seizing power, or seizing the matter from being left up to fate alone: "Politicization is about reclaiming social processes and the always uneven outcomes they create from fate; it is about taking responsibility for our collective choices" (p. 109).

Like Eliasoph (1997; 1998), Fitzgerald (2013) identified that what topics people consider "political" vary widely, with some people seeing many things as political and other seeing very few things as such. Referring to this mechanism as "personal salience," she found that identity-laden attributes (e.g., age, gender, political ideology and partisanship) affect how people construct the political.

Given the intense variability in what issues people consider to be of public concern and whether government should address those issues, this class of political objects is characterized by a low level of consensus in terms of what the political means. Accordingly, whether a television show that depicts social issues or topics divorced from any notion of government involvement will be considered more or less political is likely to be most influenced by an individual's political identities. The introduction of government involvement further politicizes an issue; this brings us to the second class of political objects.

Government agencies & agents. The second class of political objects concerns the activities of government agents and agencies. Hay (2007) identified government actions as a step in the politicization process, after the designation of issues as being of public concern. Fitzgerald (2013) also identified governmental functions as a way her participants conceptualized politics. Like individualized notions of what issues were of public concern, ideas of how government agents and agencies should act also varied widely; however, one common theme was that things were political if they were related to the government somehow: what it did and what it should do.

Wyatt, Katz, and Kim (2000) identified two particular institutions that seemed to oscillate between personal and public consideration. They found that respondents divided topics of discussion between those that were within what they defined as the personal sphere and the political sphere; however, topics such as education and crime aligned with the personal in some social contexts and with the political in others—what they referred to as a "bridge facet" between political and personal facets of public deliberation. This context-dependent shifting of these topics between personal (private matter) and political (public matter/governmental) spheres echoes the differential treatment Eliasoph's (1997; 1998) subjects gave to various topics depending on whether they were speaking privately versus publicly. It's worth noting that the topics within this bridge facet are deeply rooted in governmental institutions: the criminal legal system and the education system. As Wyatt et al. (2000) and Soss and Weaver (2017) note, the criminal legal and education systems are deeply embedded into the everyday lives of citizens. Thus, the criminal legal and education systems lie at both, or between, the personal and political facets of public deliberation. These systems and related issues are indeed political, but only insofar as how we consider them at any given time. Thus, just how "political" we consider any specific governmental function to be may depend on individual perceptions and contexts

(Hansford, Intawan, & Nicholson, 2018). Additionally, Hansford et al. (2018) found that individuals think of different governmental institutions (e.g., the Supreme Court, NASA, traffic court) as being politicized to varying degrees.

The fact that individuals differentially perceive various governmental institutions to be political depending on context and other factors, in addition to the fact that individuals hold different ideas of what government agencies do and should do, still evidences a lack of total consensus regarding what counts as political within this class of objects. Although there is clearly more consensus around what is political regarding government agents and agencies than there is consensus for social issues, the third class of political objects—concerning those who lead the government, the processes and institutions through which they're chosen, and how they carry out their duties—possesses a much greater level of consensus, which is why I've chosen to separate it from government institutions overall.

Politicians, parties, & polls. The third class of political objects is the contestation over what politicians and parties will run the government and the process through which that power is seized and wielded. As Hay (2007) detailed, one way to envision politics that goes back centuries is that of preservation of the "state": "By this we mean the art of stabilizing, insulating, and crystallizing the political power and authority of a person or group…through the strategic deployment of access to, and control over, public institutions" (p. 8). In other words, the political is about politicians and parties seeking to control the government. In the U.S. and many other nations this happens primarily through elections, but also through procedural strategies within the branches of government. Walsh (2004) observed that her participants often defined the political as elections, debates between parties (Democrats and Republican) and the conduct of elected officials. Eliasoph (1998) noted that frustrations regarding elections, politicians, and

ballot measures were some of the political topics her subjects fumed about privately but avoided discussing publicly. Hansford et al. (2018) identified Congress, along with the president and lobbyists, as being a highly politicized governmental institution. All three of those entities are related to the execution of political power. Particularly for lobbyists, even though they are not elected, they are involved in the drafting and passage of new legislation. Fitzgerald (2013) also noted conflict among politicians as a description that respondents provided regarding what "political" means to them, especially in the context of controversy.

This final class of political objects, concerning politicians and their means of seizing wielding power, is marked by a great deal of consensus regarding what the political comprises. It seems that few people would disagree that politicians, political parties, elections, and legislative bodies and activities are political objects. With that in mind, television shows depicting these political objects have a much greater likelihood of being evaluated as politically relevant by a broader swath of the population.

In the above section, I identified the three classes of political objects: 1) what issues are of concern to the broader public as opposed to the private matters of individuals, 2) how government agencies and agents function to address those concerns, and 3) who (politicians and parties) we elect (polls) to run the government. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative studies, I noted the different ways individuals conceive of the political within each of these classes, particularly noting varying degrees of consensus regarding these definitions: the first class, concerning social issues, bearing a relatively low level of consensus between individuals; the second class, concerning government agencies and agents, carrying a greater level of consensus but still leaving room for individual variation; and the third and final class, concerning politicians, parties, and polls, being a place of near-unanimity among individuals. These classes,

given the objects they each comprise and the level of consensus around those objects as expressed in the literature, inform a new media typology. Rather than a new typology of how to classify media as politically relevant, this new typology allows us to make predictions about when viewers' political identities will matter more or less in *viewers' evaluations* of what media are politically relevant.

Given the varying levels of consensus regarding the conceptualization of the political for each of the classes of political objects, I expect two things. First, political identities will matter most in determining what television shows people evaluate as politically relevant when those shows depict objects around which there is less consensus as political (i.e., social issues) than when those shows depict objects around which there is greater consensus as political (i.e., politicians/parties/polls). Second, television shows depicting objects around which there is more consensus as political (i.e., politicians/parties/polls) will be rated as more politically relevant than shows depicting content around which there is less consensus as political (i.e., social issues). I do not offer this typology as a set of hard-and-fast rules for classifying television content, but as a starting point from which to begin to understand how viewers may think of television content as politically relevant.

We must also acknowledge two key attributes of all classes of political objects: persuasion and conflict. The final class of political objects, comprising politicians, parties, and elections, is where notions of persuasion and controversy are ubiquitous; however, as I explain in the next section, persuasion and conflict are attributes of all classes of political objects. These two qualities are central to how individuals should approach media that they consider more politically relevant differently from media that they consider less politically relevant.

Controversy and Persuasive Intent

Although politicians, political parties, and elections are near synonymous with persuasion and conflict (Fitzgerald, 2013; Hay, 2007), persuasion and conflict are relevant to all classes of political objects. Individuals are divided on what issues are of public (rather than private) concern, and if so, how government agents and agencies should operate to address those issues (Eliasoph, 1998; Fitzgerald, 2013; Wyatt et al., 2000). This disagreement necessitates deliberation and persuasion in order to come to a consensus. People seem to have a dislike of things that are "political," which Hay (2007) blamed on a dislike of the concepts associated with politicians and elections: intractable conflict between opposing political camps, deception, and self-interest—all things we attribute to elite political actors. Hay (2007) described this definition of politics as "a dirty word, a term that has come to acquire a whole array or almost entirely negative associations and connotations in contemporary discourse. Politics is synonymous with sleaze, corruptions and duplicity, greed, self-interest and self-importance, interference, inefficiency and intransigence" (p. 153). Recent public opinion polls show that members of Congress rank low in respondents' evaluations of their honesty and ethical standards, with state and local officeholders faring better but far from revered (Brenan, 2017). Walsh (2004) also found that people conceive of politics as chiefly about controversy and conflict: "Specifically, talking about politics is 'opinionated' talk; unless a person holds controversial opinions (opinions that diverge from their own), the conversation is not political" (p. 38). Politics in the minds of many people has become a matter of politicians and their parties in conflict with one another to attempt to win elections at all costs, no matter how dishonest or unethical the methods. This conceptualization is a far cry from the more idealized one of citizens taking control of social issues to realize some greater good for society. This is also why there is less consensus that a

topic is political if it doesn't overtly include mention or representation of politicians, parties, and the voting process.

Regardless, envisioning an object to be political should evoke a sense that persuasion is afoot—in an environment in which others are not to be trusted. This is especially true when it comes to the third class of political objects, but also true for the first and second classes, around which individuals may be debating what issues are worthy of public attention and how the government should act accordingly. In fact, recent work by Simons and Green (2018) has demonstrated that perceiving a topic as controversial leads to a sense of threat. Importantly, they find that people don't even need to perceive that they hold the minority position on the topic in order to feel threatened. With this in mind, the mere presentation of a divisive topic, which is inherent in the understanding of an object as political, should lead to a threat response. Importantly, this effect is likely to heighten viewers' cognitive guards even in instances in which perceived persuasive intent is lower. For example, viewers might be more likely to perceive persuasive intent when watching an interview with a political candidate than when watching horse-race election news coverage about recent polling numbers. Although they may not feel that horse-race coverage is attempting to persuade them, the context of the news coverage—an election between two politicians—is still likely to evoke feelings of controversy.

Rationale for a Scale

Objects depicted within the media text are a fundamental cue regarding whether the media text is relevant to politics. Previous typologies of political media (Eilders & Nitsch, 2015; Haas et al., 2015; Holbert, 2005) have provided media communication researchers' understanding of what media content is politically relevant. Still, as political science researchers have determined through qualitative and quantitative means, individuals' understanding of what

counts as political varies widely. Fitzgerald (2013) offered one of the first quantitative examinations of what objects within the world are considered political. More recently, political communication scholars researching social media users' behaviors online have identified the need to consider what social media content users deem to be political (Guess et al., 2019). Taking a cue from Fitzgerald (2013), Settle (2018) presented study participants with mock social media posts and asked them if they thought the posts were about politics. In doing so, unfortunately, Settle (2018) did not address the methodological shortcoming that this project attempts to tackle: how the vastly different ways in which people employ the words "politics" and "political" make it difficult to interpret responses to questionnaire items that use those words.

So far, scholars have attempted to determine what issues (Fitzgerald, 2013), activities (Coffé & Campbell, 2019), and media (Settle, 2018; Vraga et al., 2016) are political by directly asking participants if they think the issue or media is political. Fitzgerald (2013) asked her participants to imagine they were editors of a political magazine and to choose what kinds of stories should appear in their publication: "In other words, choose the [topics] that are 'political.' This should be your only consideration." In studying what activities respondents considered to be political, Coffé and Campbell (2019) asked "To what extent, if at all, do you consider each of the following activities to be political," followed by a list of activities ranging from "tweeting about news stories" to "standing for election at national level." In her study of whether Facebook users perceived posts to be political, Settle (2018) asked respondents "In your opinion, is this post about politics?" Vraga et al. (2018) asked respondents whether the purpose of various Facebook posts was for political information or opinion, among other options (nonpolitical news and current affairs, personal stories and updates, or other).

In each of the above, the word "political" or "politics" is within the question wording, leaving it up to respondents to draw on their own definition of the political. The problem with this approach is how broadly or narrowly any one person's definition of "politics" or "political" is. For example, Walsh (2004) noted that people mainly defined the political in two ways: as anything related to politicians, political parties, and elections; or as any "opinionated" talk in which others took controversial positions opposite of one's own. If we examine Settle's (2018) wording as an example, one way that people could narrowly define whether a Facebook post is "about politics" is whether the post addresses politicians, parties, or elections; anything falling outside of this narrow definition would then be considered not to be about politics. Given the high level of consensus regarding the political relevance of politicians/parties/polls, media depicting these objects are more likely to be identified as politically relevant than other media. If researchers are only interested in such media, as were Vraga et al. (2016), then a single-item "political" measure may be perfectly fine; however, if a researcher is interested in examining a broader range of media such as fictional entertainment, then content that doesn't depict these objects may remain unidentified. For another person, a Facebook post might be evaluated as about politics if the post expressed some viewpoint that was considered controversial and opposite of their own opinion, regardless of whether any politicians were mentioned or not. If a research participant relies on a controversy frame in evaluating media as politically relevant, they may evaluate media that convey positions congenial to their own as less "political" than media conveying positions uncongenial to their own.

Fitzgerald (2013) further highlighted the problem with explicitly asking if objects were "political," reporting that people sometimes didn't label topics as political because they felt the government *shouldn't* be involved in those issues. In these cases, individuals understood that the

issue was one that could be collectively addressed (and was likely controversial); however, framing the issue as apolitical was an expression of their desire to limit government involvement in the issue. This conforms to two of the components of the political she identified: what the government does (what she describes as government-institutional) and what the government *should* do (what she describes as government-normative). If people don't think the government should do something, they may be inclined to identify that issue as not political even though they're fully aware of the potential for government involvement and the desire of others to make that involvement a reality (see Fitzgerald, 2013, p. 461).

For example, Fitzgerald (2013) found that conservatives don't seem to think of energy and the environment as political issues, which she chalked up to a government-normative desire to keep the government out of such issues. This could also appear on other topics in which "personal freedom/responsibility" is prized: abortion, vaccination, etc. This is why we must gauge people's understanding of the political without asking "is this object political?" As previously stated, this makes the political about what issues people think the government *should* be involved in and also about issues on which there is disagreement regarding whether the government should be involved, regardless of which side of that disagreement people fall on. Not only would such a definition account for individuals such as the conservatives described by Fitzgerald (2013), but it would also address individuals with other rather narrow understandings of politics (e.g., politics as solely about partisan infighting, politics as only stances with which they disagree; Walsh, 2004).

In addition to determining which objects in media could be evaluated as politically relevant, a scale used to evaluate the political relevance of media must also tackle the other two aspects germane to perceiving media as politically relevant: perceptions of controversy, and

especially, perceptions of persuasive intent. Because media texts are created by individuals, the intent of the text's creator(s), as perceived by the recipient, is relevant in terms of whether the reader believes the purpose of the text is meant to persuade them in some form. Not only does perception of persuasive intent hold implications for message processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979) and disagreement surrounding political objects necessarily require persuasion in order for collective decisions to be made, but media texts might be perceived as particularly imbued with persuasive intent. This applies equally to Facebook posts (Settle, 2018) as it does to television programming. Thus, a scale used to evaluate the political relevance of media texts must capture all three of these concepts: Whether the objects depicted in the media text are relevant to politics, whether those objects are associated with controversy, and whether the media text itself was created with the intent to persuade.

The Politically Relevant Media Scale

The new Politically Relevant Media (PRM) scale comprises three dimensions that address viewer perceptions of how relevant to politics the objects presented within a media text are, whether those objects are associated with controversy, and whether the media text was created and disseminated with the intent to persuade. The first two dimensions are frequently identified in the existing literature regarding the definition of the political and of political media, whereas the last dimension, critical to the "media" aspect of politically relevant media, has received less explicit attention.

Collective Concerns, Decisions, and Consequences

The first dimension of the PRM scale is founded in Hay's (2007) definition of politics, as detailed in the previous section: the degree to which the show depicts an object for which there is shared concern, for which collective decision-making could take place, and for which there could

be collective consequences. This definition of the political applies equally well to objects that Settle (2018) and others refer to as explicitly and implicitly political content. It is quite easy to see how an object widely understood to be political, for example, tax cuts (Fitzgerald, 2013), meets these criteria. Still, for other objects that many people would say are *not* political, for example, women in sports (Fitzgerald, 2013), these criteria also apply. Increasing the number of women in sports and the sports available for women to compete in is an issue that one might say is of public concern, for which we have choices that can be made, the capacity to make those choices, the ability to deliberate about those choices, and doing so can be done collectively and will have an effect on half of the population. Thus, it's not that this dimension might simply pick up on how meaningful or relevant the depicted objects are to the viewer; rather, it assesses the degree to which the depicted objects are relevant to the domain of politics. Particularly, assessing the degree to which collective decisions could be made and collective consequences could be incurred is directly relevant to how governments function. Government is the organ through which collective decision-making could be achieved, and the execution of policy and enforcement of laws are how those decisions come to have collective consequences throughout a society.

Using Hay's (2007) definition of politics also allows us to distinguish between the possible interpretations of an example that Settle (2018) provided: a social media post regarding a Chick-fil-A sandwich, considering that organization's public, financial support for anti-LGBTQ groups. If a Facebook user sees a post by someone talking about going to Chick-fil-A for lunch, that user may not draw the connections between purchasing a chicken sandwich and supporting anti-LGBTQ groups. On the other hand, another Facebook user seeing the same post may recognize the issues surrounding Chick-fil-A, interpreting the post as related to an issue

meeting Hay's (2007) definition. Most importantly, this is equally the case for someone who may say that the Chick-fil-A issue isn't political because what private organizations do with their money—and also who people form romantic or sexual relationships with—are private matters. Such individuals should still recognize these issues as ones with far reaching effects, on which we can deliberate and make collective decisions that affect a multitude of people—regardless of the individual's personally held beliefs on the matter.

Controversy

Almost everything written about politics includes talk of controversy as an important component. There are two potential sources of a viewer's perception of controversy: 1) the way the objects are presented on-screen (e.g., are people literally arguing about something or is information being presented that indicates that the issue is controversial?), and 2) the viewer's own knowledge of controversy surrounding the object (even if the object isn't being presented as controversial on screen, the viewer already perceives controversy surrounding the object). The former is especially likely to be true when information is presented indicating that opinions are divided on an issue (Simons & Green, 2018). The latter is especially likely to be true for "easy" political issues such as abortion, immigration, and gun control (Carmines & Stimson, 1980). Indeed, my pre-test study found that the way differing positions (i.e., Democrat/liberal or Republican/conservative) were presented in the show affected perceptions of controversy in the show content. Likewise, shows depicting abortion, immigration, and gun control were perceived as more controversial than shows depicting health care and marijuana legalization, even controlling for how positions on the issues were presented within the show. When interviewing social media users about what they thought of political posts on Facebook, Vraga, Thorson, Kliger-Vilenchik, and Gee (2015) found that controversy was a common element of the

description. Often, interviewees described political posts as "rants" and associated them with being obnoxious and "[pissing] people off." This is another example of the negative valence that accompanies attitudes regarding the political. Still, Vraga et al. (2015) reported that interviewees were less bothered by seeing civics-relevant posts such as reminding people to vote and supporting social causes.

Perception of Persuasive Intent

Persuasive intent is mentioned in the literature regarding the definition of politics less than the other two dimensions, and in a couple different ways. One way is as perception of persuasive intent, the other is as perception of bias (among politicians and among people behaving "politically"). The second way is specifically in the context of media (Haas et al., 2015). Because media texts are created by other people, figuring out *why* something is being communicated is important. Settle (2018) gave the example of the person making the post referencing Chick-fil-A: Is this person just posting about their lunch, or are they trying to make a statement about their support for a franchise engaging in certain political actions?

The difference between perception of persuasive intent and perception of bias deserves careful consideration in terms of what's actually being measured. Vraga et al. (2015) described respondents not liking Facebook posts that seem biased. Both perceptions may lead to the same effects in terms of processing (e.g., counter-arguing, reactance, etc.), but the difference may matter in terms of the intent of the sender/actor/producer of the media text. Bias is an attribute of a person or group (i.e., media content creators), whereas persuasive intent is an attribute of an action (i.e., *why* those individuals/groups created the media content). For one, individuals may be perceived as biased absent any perception of persuasive intent (e.g., in scenarios in which disagreement is already high). Likewise, individuals may be perceived as attempting to persuade

absent any perception of bias (e.g., in scenarios in which the message source stands no personal gain). For example, few people would accuse a doctor trying to persuade them to quit smoking to be biased against cancer or in favor of lung health. This is the case even if one agrees with the doctor. Additionally, a distinction must be made between bias/persuasive intent and controversy. The former addresses whether a source of information is conveying information that only supports one position on an issue or wants the receiver to think a certain way, whereas the latter addresses the degree to which people are strongly divided in their opinions on an issue.

Perceptions of persuasive intent may also be affected by *who* creates and disseminates media content, known as a source cue (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Because this study attempts to address cues from within the media text itself, I control for source cues using stimulus sampling.

Distinction from other scales.

It's important to establish how the PRM scale differs from other scales that attempt to evaluate politically relevant media in some way. Notably, previous research has found that individuals' moral foundations affect their appeal for and selection of media entertainment (Long & Eveland, 2018; Tamborini, 2011; Tamborini et al., 2013). This line of research finds that individuals select media and find it more appealing if they perceive the content to conform to their moral sentiments; however, perceiving a media text to be politically relevant and perceiving media content to align with one's moral sentiments are two separate matters. Although moral foundations may factor into whether a media text is perceived as being politically congenial, the PRM scale isn't a measure of the political congeniality of media texts. Rather, it is a measure of whether a media text is relevant to the domain of politics, based on the dimensions outlined above.

This is not to say that moral foundations are completely irrelevant to the current inquiry. Moral foundations may be one of several factors relevant to political identities, given the differences between how liberals and conservatives rely on different moral intuitions (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009) and particularly how ideology informs the salience of moral domains (Ciuk, 2018; Hatemi, Crabtree, & Smith, 2019). If anything, to the extent that a viewer's political identities influence their moral sentiments, the effect of political identity on PRM evaluations may run through moral foundations. In this way, the salience of moral domains would serve as a proxy for ideology a political identity, with moral domain salience mediating the effect of ideological strength on PRM evaluations. This is a testable hypothesis that lies outside of the scope of the current inquiry.

Additionally, the PRM scale is agnostic to whether a media text is congenial to one's political views. This is a fundamental rationale for developing a scale to measure the political relevance of media texts rather than relying on a single questionnaire item asking if a media text is political, as it circumvents the tendency that Fitzgerald (2013) identified, in which participants with certain political viewpoints seem to have labeled particular issues as not political because of a government-normative view on what makes an issue political. For this reason, I do not expect responses on the PRM scale to be influenced by either an individual's moral sentiments or their political ideology or party membership, but rather by the *strength* of their political identities. Thus, neither liberals nor conservatives, Democrats nor Republicans, those with individualizing nor binding moral foundations (Long & Eveland, 2018), should be more likely to identify media texts as politically relevant. Instead, more extreme liberals *and* conservatives, people more strongly identified with their parties, individuals more strongly identified with an issue public, and individuals who hold stronger individualizing *and* binding moral foundations may be more

likely to identify media texts as politically relevant. Again, the relationship between the *salience* of moral foundations and the identification of media texts as politically relevant is a testable hypothesis to be considered at some other time.

Next, I will detail three conceptualizations of political identity and explicate how it should work to influence the rating of shows as politically relevant and how it will matter the most when there is the least amount of consensus around the show's content.

Defining Political Identities

Our identities, lived experiences, and social factors shape the perspectives through which we approach our understanding of the political (Fitzgerald, 2013; Walsh, 2004), and political communication scholars have acknowledged that individual lived experiences and social factors may influence what types of messages individuals perceive as political (Holbert & Young, 2013). For the purpose of this inquiry, I will focus on political identities, which I define in three distinct ways: partisanship, political ideology, and membership in an issue public. These political identities, along with political interest, are likely to influence whether an individual identifies any particular work of media as more or less political by making more salient the various components of what people understand as being political. In this section, I define these three conceptualizations of political identity, then explain how they work to influence viewers' evaluation of television programming as politically relevant and their selective exposure to that programming. Before doing so, I first define what I mean by political identity and why I focus on partisanship, ideology, and issue public membership as the three distinct conceptualizations of political identity relevant to this project.

Although others (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002; Levendusky, 2009; Mason, 2013; 2018) count political identities (by which they mean the three conceptualizations I identify here)

as social identities, there are distinct differences between the three dimensions I identify and other types of social identities, e.g., race, gender, religion, age, disability, etc. As Green et al. (2002) noted, these other types of social identity are difficult *not* to notice in our everyday lives, whereas one could easily walk through everyday life without knowing others' political identities nor acknowledging our own. Although political identities are often developed and maintained as a result of other social identities (Mason, 2013), it's also the case that, with few exceptions (e.g., Black Americans' ties to the Democratic party), other social identities aren't necessarily strong predictors of partisan identity or political ideology. (Another exception might be issue public membership, where issue publics may be constructed around social identities, such as disability.) Although other types of social identity are likely to influence political media identification and selection independently as well as through political identities, we must establish some boundaries for the current inquiry.

My reasoning for isolating these conceptualizations of political identity are twofold. First, these conceptualizations are directly relevant to how people interact with the political process. Partisan membership affects whether you can vote in certain elections, and that membership or identification is directly tied to the candidates for which one can vote. Likewise, political elites frame their positions in terms of ideology: conservative versus liberal. As such, whether one identifies as a conservative or liberal is directly tied to how various issues are discussed. Issue public membership is important because politicians run on issue platforms, vote on legislation that addresses social issues, and execute policy that affects particular issues. Thus, one's membership in an issue public also has an analogue within the political process. Second, to varying degrees, political identities can be more malleable than other social identities. People can hypothetically change partisan identification and membership. They may grow more or less

conservative as they age. They can opt in and out of issue publics if their own priorities change. This is not to say that other social identities are set in stone. Rather, because different identities are developed, enforced, and reinforced differently within the self and within society (for example, race is inherited through phenotypic indicators, yet neither gender nor partisanship are), political identities are uniquely suited for adaptation.

Still, why do people identify with particular parties, ideologies, and issues? Mason (2013; 2018) is particularly helpful for illuminating this identification. She highlighted how individuals' affective or behavioral polarization (how strongly they identify with their in-party and derogate out-parties) has increased, whereas their issue polarization generally has not. In doing so, and with an eye toward the social identity literature (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), what becomes clear is a need to identify with a group. Surely, people choose parties partly because they feel those parties represent their interests and issue positions (Mason, 2013); however, if that were the sole reason, then a lack of issue polarization would be coupled with a lack of affective/behavioral polarization. The abundance of the latter in the absence of the former instead points to a more basic need to belong to social groups (Green et al., 2002; Mason, 2013; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Because of ideological sorting into political parties (Green et al., 2002; Levendusky, 2009; Mason, 2013) and partisan issue ownership cues (Petrocik, 1996), all three conceptualizations of political identity I specify in this project are likely to be affected by our human desire to belong to social groups and uplift our own, generally at the expense of other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

In much the way that social identity theory predicts that group members will engage in actions to protect the ingroup when faced with external threats (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), Slater's (2007; 2015) reinforcing spirals model predicts that individuals will seek out media that protect

their group identity when that identity is under threat. I seek to offer evidence of this claim even within the realm of fictional entertainment media: That individuals will seek out media content they perceive as congenial and may avoid certain types of media content they perceive as uncongenial in order to maintain equilibrium within their political identities. This selective approach and potential avoidance of media content for the purposes of identity maintenance will also likely be affected by viewers' motivations for media selection (Winter, Metzger, & Flanagin, 2016). Furthermore, their political identities contribute to the initial evaluation of media as politically relevant, as well as whether that media contains congenial or uncongenial messages. From there, viewers can use (or avoid) that media in order to reinforce their political identities. In short, all else flows from political identity: It is responsible for how we evaluate media as politically relevant, and the reason for which we in turn consume media: in furtherance of its own maintenance and reinforcement. With this in mind, I detail the three distinct conceptualizations of political identity below. I then explain specifically how these political identities work across various types of media in the evaluation of media as politically relevant.

Political Partisanship

Mason (2018) detailed how strong of a political identity partisanship is. Partisanship applies to actual party membership as well as those who "lean" toward any particular party (Green et al., 2002). Additionally, the strengthening of partisan identity has been coupled with both real and perceived demographic sorting that also leaves party identification more closely aligned with social identity related demographic factors such as race (Ahler & Sood, 2018; Edsall & Edsall, 1991; Green et al., 2002) and political ideology (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017; Levendusky, 2009). Green et al. (2002) noted that party identification seems to be linked to whether people feel close to particular social groups that one associates with particular parties,

e.g., minorities and Democrats. Taken together, we should consider that social and political identities are not necessarily separable and that one's partisan identity may affect attraction to television shows with different content such as a different racial balance amongst the cast. Likewise, there is reason to believe that partisanship will alter perceptions of media bias (Stroud, Muddiman, & Lee, 2014). Scholars have recognized this in the context of news, but it's also possible that political ideology leads viewers to mark entertainment media as biased as well—especially because most Americans perceive Hollywood to be a liberal institution (Piacenza, 2018). This bias perception may not occur only among Republicans and conservatives, since it's possible that Democrats and liberals also perceive that media is (justly) biased in their favor. Likewise, a number of Democrats and liberals could just as likely perceive that the media is biased against them, as explained by the hostile media phenomenon (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). The perception of media bias is important because it could cue viewers that they should expect a message that is both political and either hostile or sympathetic to their views, depending on their party identification and political ideology.

Political Ideology

Although political ideology and partisanship aren't the same and the majority of people are ideologically incoherent (Kalmoe, 2020), there is much ideological sorting into the parties based on the parties' platforms and priorities (Green et al., 2002; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017; Levendusky, 2009; Mason, 2013). Political ideology also constitutes an identity in its own right, with people identifying in ideological terms in ways that lead to ingroup solidarity and outgroup derogation (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017; Mason, 2018). Additionally, despite the complexities of defining and applying political ideology (Kalmoe, 2020), one might also expect individuals' self-reported ideology to align with their positions on various issues to some degree (Levendusky,

2009). Like partisanship, political ideology may also affect perceptions of media bias (Stroud et al., 2014).

Issue Public Membership

Relevance of and interest in a particular political issue is another component that may affect which media viewers perceive to be political. Considering that individual-level factors influence which issues people consider to be political (Fitzgerald, 2013), individuals invested in certain issues should be more likely to consider shows featuring those issues to be political. *Issue public membership* (Boninger, Krosnick, & Berent, 1995; Iyengar, Hahn, Krosnick, & Walker, 2008; Krosnick, 1990) is similar to partisan and ideological identity in terms of how people identify around a particular issue. Specifically, individuals on oppositional sides of an issue (e.g., reproductive rights supporters vs. anti-abortion supporters) often adopt an identity and the identity reinforcement practices that come along with it in a similar fashion that partisans and ideologues identify with in-party members and people who share their ideological identity. In the same way that Democrats or liberals might consider Republicans or conservatives to be outgroup members, respectively, individuals advocating for one side of an issue, gun control advocates for example, might consider people advocating for an oppositional position, such as gun rights, to be outgroup members. In all three conceptualizations of political identity (partisanship, ideology, and issue public membership), it is less clear how much individuals with stronger political identities (strong partisans, strong ideologues, and issue public members) derogate people with weaker political identities (nonpartisans, moderates, and issue public non-members). Individuals with weaker political identities may not be considered *in*group members by people with stronger political identities, but they are less likely to receive the same scorn as individuals with oppositional identities.

Issue public membership may also override partisan identification when it comes to how important a particular social issue is to an individual, meaning that issue public membership deserves careful consideration and should not be dismissed in lieu of partisanship as a proxy (Levendusky, 2009; Mason, 2013). For example, a strong partisan could be ambivalent about a particular issue on their party's platform, or a non-partisan could have very strong feelings regarding a particular issue. Concurrently, issue ownership may lead individuals to more closely associate an issue with a given party, making them feel as if one party or another is better equipped or more determined to take action on a particular issue (Petrocik, 1996). Issue public membership has been shown to predict selective exposure to information about political campaigns (Iyengar et al., 2008); therefore, it may prove useful in the identification of and selective exposure to politically relevant entertainment media. This is another area where the alignment of social and political identities should be considered. For example, a member of a community more frequently and deeply affected by a certain issue (e.g., Latinxs and immigration policy) may be more likely to find that issue to be political than a member of a community less frequently and deeply affected (Boninger et al., 1995; Krosnick, 1990). Thus, we would be wise to consider these interactions of social and political identity in future examinations of consumers' considerations of political media. Issue public members are also likely to have strong, immovable prior attitudes regarding their respective issue, which should have consequences for potential persuasion upon exposure to counter-attitudinal information (Boninger et al., 1995; Krosnick, 1990).

All three of these conceptualizations of political identity are likely to be associated with an individual's political interest. Individuals with strong partisan and ideological identification or who are deeply invested in an issue are likely to be more politically interested than their

counterparts, which might itself lead them to be more cognizant of potentially political cues within and surrounding media texts. Thus, although political interest may not be a political identity on its own, it's likely a factor related to partisanship, ideology, and membership in issue publics as conceptualizations of political identity. A certain level of political knowledge may also be necessary for politically relevant cues to be salient to a viewer. For example, in order for a viewer to selectively expose themselves to a television program depicting a politician from the political party of which the viewer is also a member, the viewer must know to which party the depicted politician belongs. In an ideal world, I would account for both political interest and knowledge in evaluations of the political relevance of media; however, political interest appears to be a unidimensional construct (Prior, 2019), whereas political knowledge is much more domain specific (e.g., Cohen and Luttig, 2019). Therefore, I account for the effect of political interest throughout the studies that follow, leaving exploration of how political knowledge affects PRM evaluations for future studies that can address very specific domains and political objects.

I should also note how political identities as I define them are different from social identities. Although our social identities may be influencers of our political identities, our political identity are those aspects of identity that are more directly tied to the political structure of our society. Our party identification is reliant on the political parties available to a person to join. Our membership in various issue publics depends on the issues we identify and their relevance to us—which, yes, may be shaped by our social identities. However, one's race is not dependent on which candidates are on the ballot this year. One's gender isn't determined by an issue we feel strongly about organizing around. If anything, political identities are more influenced by social identities than vice versa. It's conceivable that one's class identity might

have some influence on whether we identify as more liberal or more conservative, but our political ideology is much less unlikely to shift our social class. We can use media, though, as a tool to shape and maintain them all.

Political Identities and the Evaluation of Media as Politically Relevant

These conceptualizations of political identity are important to the identification of politically relevant media because they should influence what media content individuals perceive as politically relevant. The mechanism for this identification is the amplification of the salience of political issues and cues surrounding media content. This amplification comes as a result of the strength of a person's political identities, regardless of their particular attitudes toward a given object and whether the media content in question is congenial to their views. For example, an individual who identifies strongly with the Democratic *or* Republican party will likely find political cues more salient than an individual who identifies with neither party on account of how strongly they associate with their political party. Political identities, along with political interest, serve this function for all media, making political identities central to how viewers understand any type of media to be politically relevant, whether it be a news report about Congressional hearings or a sitcom. That being said, due to the varying levels of consensus regarding what counts as political among the three classes of political objects as outlined above, I do expect political identities to be most influential to the evaluation of media as politically relevant when that media depicts social issues, followed by media depicting government agents and agencies, followed by media depicting politicians/parties/polls.

For programming depicting politicians/parties/polls, I expect political identities to play a much smaller role in audience evaluation of such programming as politically relevant. This is because there seems to be little disagreement between people that politicians, political parties,

and the like are political objects. Still, individuals may choose to expose themselves to media depicting politicians or parties that align with their party identification and political ideology, or who have taken what the viewer deems to be favorable action regarding an issue the viewer holds dear (Iyengar et al., 2008). When it comes to fictional television shows depicting politicians/parties/polls, political identities may influence selective exposure depending on how the fictional politicians and political parties are depicted. For example, Democrats may not care for a fictional entertainment show that depicts Democratic politicians in a negative light, whereas conservative viewers may be drawn to programs that depict conservative politicians more positively.

For programming depicting government agencies and agents, individuals' political identities may influence to a greater degree how they evaluate the program as politically relevant, as compared to programming depicting politicians/parties/polls. This may also be influenced by whether the viewer believes the government even should be involved in whatever issue the viewer cares about. For example, a viewer who feels that what school children eat for lunch is none of the government's business might have a strong negative reaction to a news report regarding the Department of Agriculture. Likewise, partisans may be sensitive to depictions of particular government functions regarding issues they see as being owned by their own party or the opposing party, e.g., Democrats and environmentalism or Republicans and national defense (Petrocik, 1996). This carries over into fictional television shows as well. For example, individuals negatively affected by police misconduct may avoid programming that depicts police officers and departments positively.

Programming depicting social issues is where political identities have the most room to affect evaluation and selection of television content. This is particularly the case because people

have very different ideas of what issues are of public concern (Fitzgerald, 2013), which leads them to differential membership in various issue publics. For example, if a sitcom features a storyline on immigration, the political relevance of that sitcom will be greater for an individual belonging to the issue public regarding immigration (Wojcieszak & Garrett, 2018). Such an effect may occur for immigration supporters as well as opponents. Relatedly, a fictional storyline regarding immigration may cause potential viewers to call to mind which political party "owns" immigration as an issue (Petrocik, 1996). That viewer may then use that sitcom or one with a competing narrative on immigration to reinforce their own political identities, which may later reinforce their media selections (Slater, 2007; 2015).

An ever-expanding entertainment media landscape calls for political communication scholars to more fully understand the potential for political identities and entertainment media to collide to produce politically meaningful outcomes. In this project, I explore the possibility that media consumers engage in politically motivated selective exposure to fictional entertainment media, much like what has been shown to occur for news media. By centering viewers' identities and experiences in the classification of media, I acknowledge how their political identities affect how they evaluate a particular television show as more or less politically relevant, meaning that we can examine the political effects of a show that we may have otherwise excluded from the genre of political entertainment. Because of the particular ways that the words "politics" and "political" are often used and how people's identities and experiences affect what they consider to be political, existing methods of evaluating media as being "political" or "about politics" are insufficient for gauging how media consumers evaluate the political relevance of media outside of a narrow range of media focused on politicians, parties, and elections. A study of viewers' evaluations of the political relevance of fictional entertainment media—and media more

broadly—demands a novel way of measuring the political relevance of media. Using the PRM scale, we are able to get a much better sense of what media people think of as politically relevant, how the strength of their political identities affect such evaluations, and how those evaluations lead to politically motivated selective exposure. This work underlines the need to greatly expand the way politically motivated selective exposure is studied in terms of both content and method, and it potentially implicates entertainment media as a driver of political polarization.

Design of Dissertation Studies

In this dissertation, I propose a model predicting how the strength of a viewer's political identities will interact with a television show's content to affect the viewer's evaluation of the show as politically relevant, and in turn how the evaluation of the show as politically relevant will affect selective exposure to that show; see Figure 1.1. I offer the following two general hypotheses.

First, the *evaluation hypothesis* predicts that television show content will moderate the effect of political identity strength on evaluation of the show as politically relevant, such that the effect of political identity strength will be weakest when the show depicts politicians/parties/polls and strongest when the show depicts social issues. Using Holbert and Park's (2019) typology of moderation, I believe the pattern will be convergent-positive and contingent: 1) PRM will be higher for shows depicting politicians/parties/polls than for shows depicting social issues, 2) the effect of political identity strength on PRM will be nonsignificant for shows depicting politicians/parties/polls, and 3) the effect of political identity strength on PRM will be statistically significant for shows depicting social issues.

Secondly, the *selection hypothesis* posits that evaluation of a show as politically relevant will positively predict selective exposure to a show. I further hypothesize that evaluation of a show as politically relevant will act as a mediator between political identity strength and selective exposure: individuals with stronger political identities will evaluate shows as more politically relevant, and in turn, evaluations of shows as more politically relevant will be associated with greater levels of selective exposure. In other words, PRM evaluations will explain how viewers with stronger political identities come to engage in selective exposure to fictional entertainment media.

Four studies comprise the core of the dissertation. In Chapter 2, I develop the Politically Relevant Media scale across two studies. The PRM scale, then, becomes the primary dependent variable and mediator variable in the subsequent chapters and studies. The third study, reported in Chapter 3, tests the evaluation hypothesis, examining what attributes of media content and political identities affect evaluations of television programs as politically relevant, as indicated by PRM scale scores. The fourth study, reported in Chapter 4, tests the selection hypothesis, which demonstrates the predictive and mediating abilities of the PRM scale. I close this dissertation with a chapter detailing the conclusions drawn from these studies, along with their limitations and areas for future research.

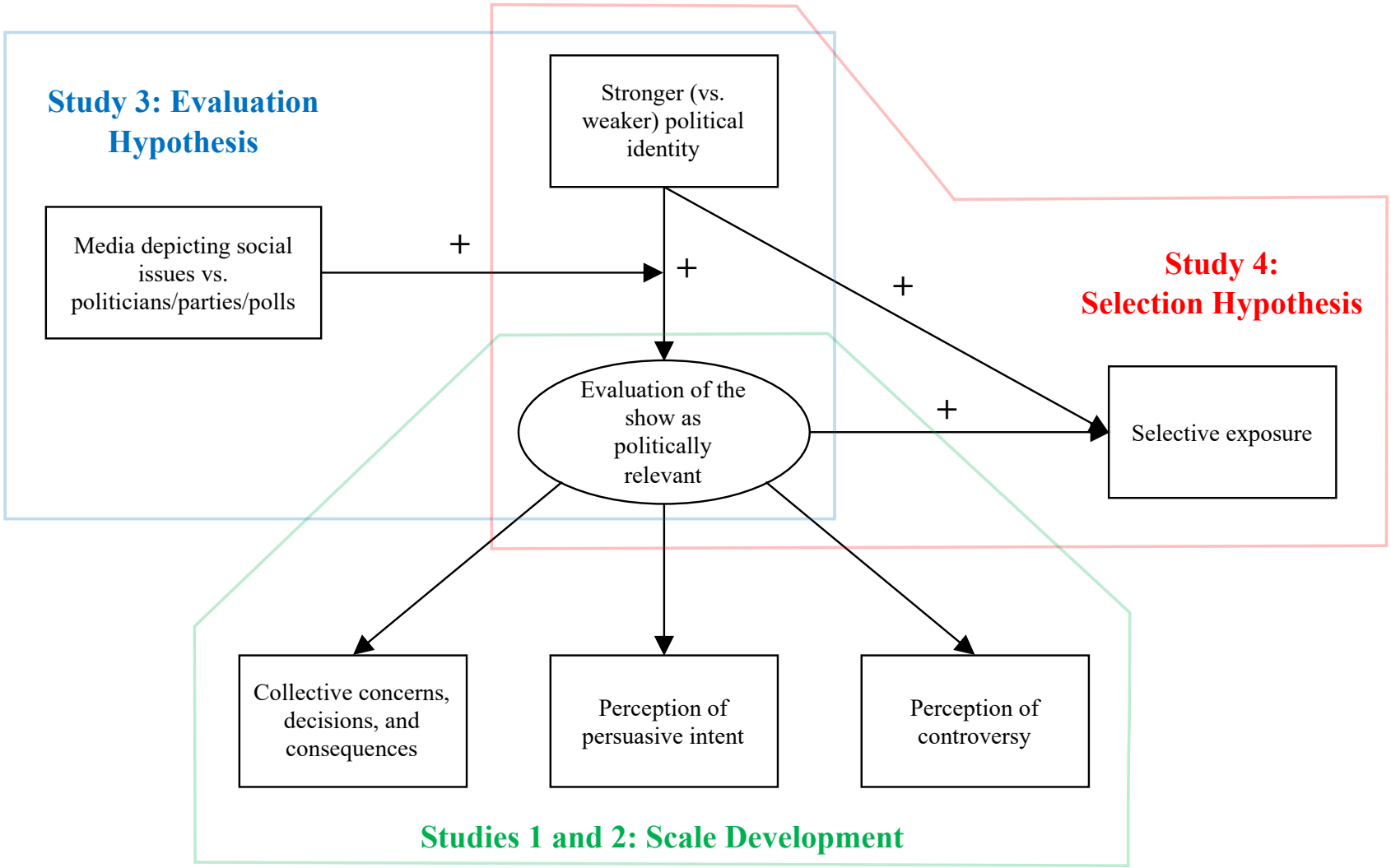

Figure 1.1. Model depicting the relationship between critical variables of interest and plan for studies.

Chapter 2: Developing the PRM Scale

In this chapter, I develop the PRM scale across two studies. In Study 1, I field the initial 26-item PRM scale to a sample drawn from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), then use multilevel exploratory factor analysis techniques to discern the factor structure and reduce the number of items. In Study 2, I field the reduced 11-item scale to another MTurk sample, then use confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the factor structure. I then subject the refined scale to a series of tests for internal consistency and validity. My end state is a validated PRM scale that can be used in studies 3 and 4 to test the identification and selection hypotheses, respectively.

Study 1 Overview

The purpose of Study 1 is to test and refine the initial PRM scale. I conduct scree plot analysis and exploratory factor analysis to aid in determining the number of factors, to reduce the number of items, and to revise items as necessary. Reliability is assessed by computing Cronbach's α for the individual factors and for the scale as a whole. The end state was to have a refined scale with a reduced and refined set of items whose validity can be further tested in Study 2.

In this study, participants were presented with descriptions of four existing television shows depicting either social issues (the cost of healthcare, marijuana as a public safety issue) or politicians/parties/polls (e.g., discussion of elections, legislative voting) and were asked to provide their evaluations of the shows using the PRM scale. Two of the shows were news programming (*ABC World News Tonight* or *CBS Evening News*), and the other half were fictional entertainment programming. I also varied the genre within fictional entertainment

programming between sitcoms (e.g., *Friends*) and dramas (e.g., *Scandal*), such that participants were presented with one of each. Thus, a respondent might have seen a description of a news show depicting healthcare, either a sitcom or drama depicting marijuana, a news show depicting an election, and a sitcom or drama depicting legislative voting. Participants were randomly assigned to see four show descriptions, of which there are a total of 32 possible variations. Table 2.1 provides a breakdown of the potential descriptions.

Table 2.1. *Study 1 factorial design.*

			Objects	
			Social Issues	PPP*
Genre	News		Healthcare	PPP 1
			Marijuana	PPP 2
	Entertainment	Sitcom	Healthcare	PPP 1
			Marijuana	PPP 2
		OR		
		Drama	Healthcare	PPP 1
			Marijuana	PPP 2

Note: *Politicians, Parties, and Polls

Method

Participants

A convenience sample of U.S. adults ($N = 321$) was recruited via MTurk to participate in an online study from Feb. 27–March 3, 2020. Slightly more than half ($n = 188$) of the sample identified as men, 130 identified as women, and two participants identified as agender or non-binary. The mean age was 38.31 ($SD = 11.02$). Most (63.24%) of the sample reported their race as White, non-Hispanic; 10.90% as Black, non-Hispanic; 16.51% as Hispanic/Latino; 6.23% as Asian; and 3.12% as multiracial or some other race. The sample comprised a mix of self-identified Democrats ($n = 138$), Republicans ($n = 97$), and Independents or members of some other political party ($n = 86$). The mean reporting for political conservatism on a 1-to-7 scale was 3.61 ($SD = 1.82$).

Stimuli

Each show description included an overview describing the show, followed by a synopsis of a single episode. I wrote the show descriptions and episode synopses to be similar to what television viewers might find on websites such as *IMDB* or *Wikipedia*. Show descriptions were derived from information on the show's website, *IMDB*, *Wikipedia*, and my own knowledge of the show from prior exposure. All descriptions are detailed in Appendix A. Textual descriptions of television shows and movies have been successfully employed as stimuli in previous research regarding selective exposure and media selection (e.g. Tamborini et al., 2013; Weaver, 2011).

I chose to focus on social issues in comparison to politicians/parties/polls and to omit government agencies/agents because we would expect to find the starkest differences between these two classes of political objects and to achieve the cleanest manipulation. Marijuana and healthcare costs were chosen as the social issues to depict because they are issues commonly asked about in public opinion polls, without being one of the three classic "easy" issues (Carmines & Stimson, 1980) for which people might have very strong prior opinions: abortion, immigration, and gun control. I chose *ABC World News Tonight* and *CBS Evening News* as the news shows because network television news programs are perceived to be more trustworthy than cable news networks such as CNN, MSNBC, or Fox News (Brenan, 2019). I chose the fictional entertainment shows based on the ability to summarize the show while focusing on the presence of the political object in question without referencing other political objects that might cause a confound. I pre-tested all descriptions to ensure the successful manipulation of the genre and objects depicted, as detailed in Appendix B.

Procedure

Participants were told they were participating in a study on television preferences and given instructions that they would be asked to evaluate four television shows. Each show description was randomly presented, followed by the PRM scale and the prior exposure and familiarity items. Finally, participants completed a standard battery of demographic questions.

Measures

PRM scale. The PRM scale was developed based on the dimensions (collective concerns, decisions, and consequences; perception of persuasive intent; and controversy) identified in Chapter 1. The scale, including item response options and scoring for all 26 original items across the three dimensions, is detailed in Appendix C. A single item asking respondents how political they think the television show in question is, is also included. There are no definitive rules on how large an initial pool of scale items should be, with suggestions ranging from 50% larger than the desired final scale (DeVellis, 2017) to several hundred items for multi-factor scales (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003). The main concern for the size of the initial item pool is the size of the final scale, which should comprise no less than three (Carpenter, 2018) or four (Netemeyer et al., 2003) items per factor. Thus, the initial item pool includes at least six items per factor, so that up to half of the items can be eliminated in the item reduction process. I developed or adapted scale items to correspond with each dimension as detailed below.

Collective concerns, decisions, and consequences (CDC). In line with Hay's (2007) definition of politics, I created eight items to assess the degree to which respondents identified matters of collective concern (e.g., "When it comes to the topics presented on [show name], those topics affect: [proportion of the population]") for which decisions can be made collectively (e.g., "Thinking of the topics presented on [show name], how possible do you think it is for our society to do things that affect those topics?") that have collective consequences

(e.g., “Thinking of the topics presented on [show name], when our society makes decisions about those topics, those decisions affect: [proportion of the population]”) within a media text. Thus, each aspect of Hay’s (2007) definition of politics is represented by at least two items. Collective concerns are represented by four items: Two addressing the degree to which the objects depicted affect people collectively (e.g., “When it comes to the topics presented on [show name], the average person is: [degree of being affected]”), and two addressing the degree to which people are concerned with the depicted objects (e.g., “Thinking of the topics presented on [show name], how much do you think people in general care about those topics?”). Again, none of these items assess how meaningful or relevant the objects depicted are to the individual respondent. Rather, they assess the degree to which the objects depicted represent concerns shared by members of a society, who could potentially come together to make decisions regarding those objects that would affect members of that society. Thus, the items tap into how Hay (2007) defined politics.

Controversy (CON). To assess perceptions of controversy, I developed six items assessing the degree to which respondents perceived that the media text depicted objects that people argue about at greater frequency (e.g., “How often do you think people argue about the topics presented on [show name]?”), on which people hold strong opinions (e.g., “Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: People hold strong opinions about the topics presented on [show name].”), on which people seem divided (e.g., “Thinking of the topics presented on [show name], how divided do you think people in general are on those topics?”), and that were explicitly controversial (e.g., “How controversial do you think the topics presented on [show name] are?”).

Perception of persuasive intent (PPI). Scale items for perception of persuasive intent were adapted from three existing measures. Previous work on perception of persuasive intent in

political satire (Holbert, Tchernev, Walther, Esralew, & Benski, 2013) employed the items "The author was serious about advancing his/her views in the message" and "The editorialist was trying to influence my attitude about the [issue]." In consumer and advertising research, perception of persuasive intent has been measured using items such as "The salesperson had a strong interest in changing my attitude toward [the product]" (Reinhard, Messner, & Sporer, 2006). In both of these examples, the items home in on the degree to which the respondent perceives that the message sender is attempting to influence the respondent's attitude about a particular object or attempting to propagate the sender's position more broadly.

Items were also adapted from the four-item message discounting scale (Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, & Byrne, 2007). Message discounting has been conceptualized in the previous literature as the degree to which a message recipient perceives that a message isn't actually meant to be taken seriously with regard to important issues. Unfortunately, most of the message discounting scale items are either written specifically within the context of humor ("The author of the message was just joking," "It would be easy to dismiss this message as simply a joke") or are double-barreled ("The message was intended more to entertain than to persuade"). Therefore, I either split double-barreled items into two separate questions ("The purpose of [show name] is to persuade people", "The purpose of [show name] is to entertain") or put them in an entertainment context that wasn't specifically humorous ("How easy would it be to dismiss [show name] as simply a form of entertainment?"). In particular, this last change means the question is sensible to be asked regarding any type of show, whether it be a comedy show, a drama, or even a political commentary show that some might perceive to be for entertainment purposes, but not necessarily intended as humorous.

I draw on items previously used to measure both perception of persuasive intent and message discounting because it's unclear how distinct a concept the latter is. Both apply to the degree to which a message recipient perceives that a message is meant to get them to think a certain way; however, message discounting also introduces two additional elements that address *why* a message may not be germane to decision making. The first element unique to message discounting is whether the message is meant as entertainment as opposed to an attempt to persuade. The second element is whether the message can be dismissed as a persuasion attempt specifically because it was a joke. As indicated in the previous paragraph, these specificities render the message discounting scale in its current form less than ideal for application to a broad range of media. My modifications to the items make them a better fit for the widest range of media possible. Whether message discounting is itself distinct from perception of persuasive intent remains unaddressed; however, that question is beyond the purview of this project.

Prior exposure and familiarity. To assess familiarity with and prior exposure to a show, respondents were asked, "How familiar would you say that you are with [show name]?" from 1 (*not familiar at all*) to 5 (*extremely familiar*) and "Have you ever watched [show name]?" (yes/no). If a participant indicated that they have ever watched the show, they were also asked, "Have you seen this particular episode of [show name]?" (yes/no) and "How often would you say you watch [show name]?" from 1 (*less than once a month*) to 5 (*most days*).

Analysis Plan

With each participant providing four observations, 321 participants yielded approximately 1,284 observations. Between the 32 possible combinations of the stimuli, this works out to 40 observations per possible combination.

Before conducting exploratory factor analysis, I must first account for the hierarchical nature of my data. Because each participant evaluated four television shows, observations are clustered within individual respondent rather than independent. Repeated-measures designs such as this pose additional considerations for conducting factor analyses, since the factor structure may be different at level one (the show evaluation level) than at level two (the respondent level) (Reise, Ventura, Nuechterlein, & Kim, 2005). I first follow steps to determine whether multilevel exploratory factor analysis is necessary, then proceed to perform whichever type of factor analysis is called for given the factor structure.

The first step in determining whether a multilevel factor analysis is needed is to conduct an exploratory factor analysis as normal to determine the factor structure ignoring the hierarchical nature of the data (Reise et al., 2005). Next, intraclass correlations (ICCs; Shrout & Fleiss, 1979) are estimated for each item on the scale. The ICC is an indicator of how much of an item's total variance is due to variation within groups (in our case, individual respondents) rather than between groups. The ICC is estimated as the item's between-group variance divided by the item's total variance (Reise et al., 2005). An ICC closer to 0 indicates that a greater share of the item's variance is due to within-group factors—in this case, variance due to the different show descriptions the respondents evaluate. An ICC closer to 1 indicates that a greater share of the item's variance is due to differences between groups—in this case, variance due to differences in how respondents evaluate the shows. Thus, the items having ICCs closer to 1 would mean that the PRM scale is capturing some attribute of the respondent rather than the content, meaning that the factor structure may be different at the respondent level than at the show observation/evaluation level. If the scale items have ICCs that are closer to zero, then the observations can be treated as independent and the results of the initial exploratory factor

analysis can stand; if not, additional steps must be taken to account for the confounding nature of the between-groups variance (Reise et al., 2005).

I also assess reliability by computing Cronbach's α for the individual factors and for the scale as a whole. I use the exploratory factor analysis to reduce the number of items. Potential considerations for item reduction are low factor loading (e.g., less than .50; Netemeyer et al., 2003), cross-loading on multiple factors, and items that don't contribute to either greater reliability or content validity.

Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis

I first produced a scree plot to determine the number of factors to extract (DeVellis, 2017); see Figure 2.1. Two components lie above the "elbow" on the scree plot, indicating the presence of two factors underlying the scale rather than the three factors initially hypothesized. I also examined the eigenvalues of the components. The first component had an eigenvalue of 14.72, followed by 3.70 for the second component and 2.93 for the third component. There was

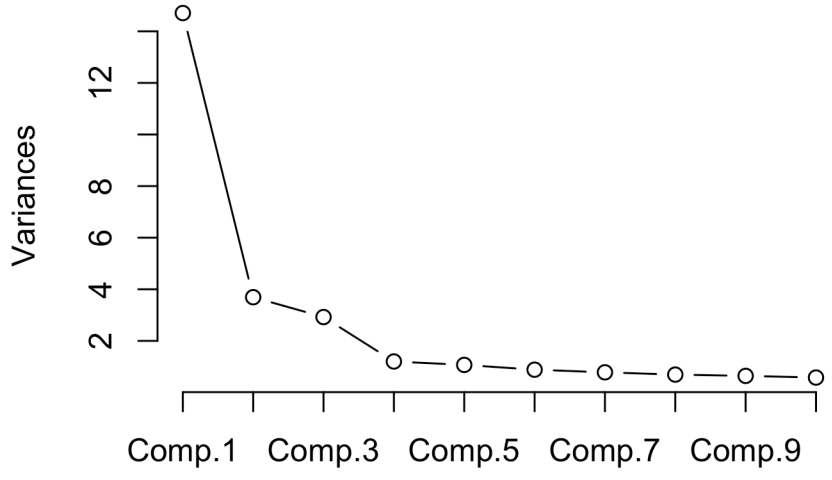

Figure 2.1. Scree plot for original data, not accounting for the hierarchical structure of the data.

only a minor difference of 0.77 between the eigenvalues of the second and third components, indicating that a distinct "leveling off" of the components had indeed occurred after the second component. This finding further solidified my decision to explore a two-factor solution rather than a three-factor solution. Next I ran an exploratory factor analysis extracting two factors using oblimin rotation, which allows the factors to be correlated rather than orthogonal. Table 2.2 displays the factor loadings and eigenvalues for each factor. The CDC items generally load high on factor 1 and the PPI items on factor 2; however, the CON items that do have factor loadings above .50 also load on factor 1.

Table 2.2. *ICCs and factor loadings for PRM scale, not accounting for the hierarchical data.*

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	ICC
pe_propcare	**.75**	.03	.28
pe_topaff	**.87**	-.07	.25
pe_topavg	**.83**	-.01	.21
pe_docare	**.75**	.01	.23
pe_affectnum	**.82**	-.06	.29
pe_affectavg	**.84**	-.04	.26
pe_influence	**.58**	.01	.43
pe_possible	**.64**	.02	.34
pe_persuade	.00	**.81**	.33
pe_entertain	-.30	.07	.00
pe_change	.00	**.83**	.26
pe_dismiss	-.33	.06	.08
pe_serious	.30	**.57**	.17
pe_think	-.05	**.86**	.38
pe_point	-.03	**.84**	.24
pe_message	.13	**.71**	.17
pe_attention	.35	.47	.11
pe_stand	-.01	**.83**	.32
pe_reflect	.35	.35	.18
pe_express	-.07	**.84**	.28
pe_controversy	.29	.41	.41
pe_argue	**.62**	.13	.22
pe_minds	.30	.24	.47
pe_opinions	**.62**	.19	.12
pe_divided	**.55**	.16	.25
pe_agree	.10	.15	.45
Eigenvalue	14.72	3.70	

Note: Items with high factor loadings in bold.

As an additional check on my decision to explore a two-factor solution rather than a three-factor solution, I compared the above results to those for a three-factor solution. Only two items loaded on the third factor: pe_entertain and pe_dismiss. Both of these items, taken from the message discounting scale (Nabi et al., 2007), were intended to measure perception of persuasive intent, but instead loaded on a separate factor. These items are both reverse-coded, with higher scores indicating weaker perception of persuasive intent, and they both refer to entertainment in their question word. Additionally, the third factor only explained a very small proportion of variance in the factor analysis: .07, compared to .26 and .24 for the first two factors. Thus, I concluded that a third factor would be of little added value. These results indicate the presence of two factors, despite my finding three distinct factors across four rounds of pre-testing of the PRM scale (two rounds using student samples and two using MTurk samples, including the previously reported PRM scale pre-test; see Appendix B).

The presence of two factors rather than three could be the result of a combination of a couple issues. For one, the previous PRM scale pre-tests were run using stimuli that included issue positions, whereas the stimuli used in the current study did not include issue positions. I used stimuli with issue positions in the pre-tests because I was interested in how the presence of congenial and uncongenial positions might affect PRM scores; however, that was not the objective of the current study. This difference could have attenuated the variability of the CON subscale items, making the factor less distinct. By the current stimuli not conveying an issue position, respondents could perceive the issues presented as less controversial. (This omission could also potentially lower one's perception of persuasive intent; however, these items still appear to load on a factor.) Additionally, the selection of objects portrayed in the stimuli could affect perceptions of controversy. The previous PRM scale pre-tests have included abortion,

immigration, and gun control (for the student samples) or the environment and LGBTQ/religious discrimination (for the MTurk samples) as issues alongside the cost of healthcare and marijuana; however, the current study instead uses stimuli depicting politicians and legislative voting processes alongside these two recurring issues. Respondents might perceive stimuli describing politicians in the absence of the discussion of some specific issue or policy as less controversial. Nevertheless, although the various subscales could be employed individually, I envisioned the PRM scale being administered as a whole; therefore, the number of factors is less important in the immediate sense. In the next study I explore whether controversy truly constitutes a distinct factor.

My next step was to compute ICCs for each of the items. I used Huang's (2017) `mcfa.input()` function to estimate the ICCs; these are also presented in Table 2.2. These ICC estimates indicate that with few exceptions, a sizable share of the items' variance is due to between-groups variance rather than within-groups variance. For example, an ICC of .47 would indicate that nearly half of the variance in the item's scores is due to differences between individual respondents than due to differences between the show descriptions themselves. As a whole, these ICC estimates point toward a need to conduct multilevel factor analysis (Reise et al., 2005).

Having established a need to conduct multilevel factor analysis, the next step is to partition the correlation matrix typically used in exploratory factor analysis into a matrix accounting for pooled within-groups (observation level) variance and a matrix accounting for between-groups (respondent level) variance (D'Haenens, Van Damme, & Onghena, 2010; Kim, Dedrick, Cao, & Ferron, 2016; Reise et al., 2005; van de Vijver & Poortinga, 2002). Then exploratory factor analysis is conducted on these matrices. An exploratory factor analysis

conducted using the pooled within-groups covariance matrix reveals the factor structure at the observation level, with any between-groups variance partitioned out (Reise et al., 2005). Because I am uninterested at the respondent-level factor structure and my future analyses will use multilevel modeling with random effects to account for between-groups effects, an exploratory factor analysis conducted using the pooled within-groups covariance matrix is sufficient to uncover the factor structure of the PRM scale for my purposes (Reise et al., 2005). I used Huang's (2017) `mcfa.input()` function to generate this matrix, then submitted it to the same exploratory factor analysis steps as the original data.

Generation and analysis of a scree plot (see Figure 2.2) reveal two components lying above the "elbow," once again indicating the presence of two factors. I ran an exploratory factor analysis extracting two factors using oblimin rotation; see Table 2.3 for the factor loadings and eigenvalues for each factor. Examination of the components' eigenvalues once again indicated a distinct leveling off between the second component (eigenvalue of 2.48) and third component (eigenvalue of 1.50), with a difference in eigenvalues of .98. Thus, I concluded that a two-factor solution was appropriate. A comparison of the factor loadings in tables 2.2 and 2.3 reveals much

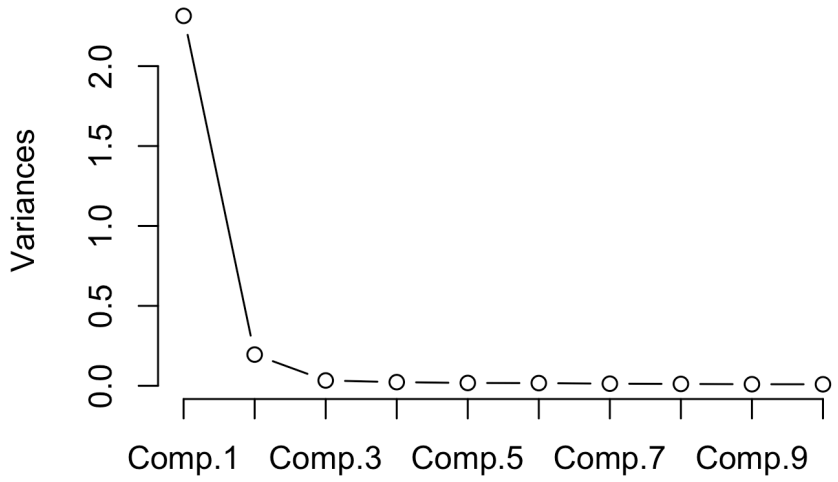

Figure 2.2. Scree plot based on the pooled within-groups covariance matrix.

Table 2.3. *Factor loadings for PRM scale, based on the pooled within-groups covariance matrix.*

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
pe_propcare	**.68**	-.02
pe_topaff	**.82**	-.05
pe_topavg	**.80**	-.03
pe_docare	**.73**	-.01
pe_affectnum	**.72**	-.03
pe_affectavg	**.78**	-.05
pe_influence	.48	-.05
pe_possible	**.52**	.03
pe_persuade	.09	**.71**
pe_entertain	**-.65**	-.01
pe_change	.09	**.73**
pe_dismiss	**-.60**	-.04
pe_serious	.40	.47
pe_think	-.01	**.78**
pe_point	-.03	**.80**
pe_message	.20	**.66**
pe_attention	.41	.45
pe_stand	-.07	**.80**
pe_reflect	.41	.34
pe_express	-.15	**.82**
pe_controversy	.22	.38
pe_argue	**.64**	.07
pe_minds	.24	.16
pe_opinions	**.65**	.17
pe_divided	**.53**	.12
pe_agree	-.03	-.07
Eigenvalue	11.15	2.48

Note: Items with high factor loadings in bold.

commonality, with only a few differences. First, the factor loadings for pe_influence and pe_serious are lower based on the pooled within-groups covariance matrix, loading at .48 and .47, respectively. These items already exhibited the weakest loadings out of the other items for their respective dimensions. Second, pe_entertain and pe_dismiss, two reverse-scored items for the PPI dimension that didn't load on any factor in the original analysis now load negatively at -.65 and -.60, respectively. Examining the results of a three-factor solution, I once again find that pe_entertain and pe_dismiss are the only items that load on a third dimension, rather than on the

first factor if only two factors are extracted. As before, the third factor explains a relatively small proportion of variance, .09, rendering it of little value.

Item Reduction

The next phase of scale development is to reduce the number of items. I use the results of the exploratory factor analysis, analyses of internal consistency (assessed using Cronbach's α), and the congruence analyses from the PRM scale pre-test (see Appendix B) to accomplish this. I first turn to factor 2, since the only items that loaded high were items intended to assess the PPI dimension. None of the seven items that loaded high on this factor exhibited congruence or incongruence effects during the pre-test. Cronbach's α for all seven items, across all show evaluations, was .93.[1] By eliminating items based on which had the lowest factor loadings and which would maintain the highest Cronbach's α among the surviving items, I settled on four items for the PPI subscale: pe_change, pe_think, pe_stand, and pe_express (M = 3.22, SD = 1.06, α = .90). The subscale exhibits negative skewness (-0.32, SE = .07, p < .001). Using the PRM scale pre-test data, a PPI subscale composite item created by averaging these four items does not exhibit any congruence or incongruence effects.

Next I attend to the items that loaded high on the first factor, including the two items intended to measure perception of persuasive intent that loaded negatively (< -.5) on this factor. These two items, pe_entertain and pe_dismiss, are reverse-coded items for which higher scores indicate the perceptions that the show's purpose is to entertain and can be dismissed as simply a form of entertainment. The other items on the factor tap into the CDC and CON dimensions; thus, high negative loadings for pe_entertain and pe_dismiss indicate that the more individuals

[1] Because of the repeated-measured design of this study, I also examined Cronbach's α for just the first show respondents evaluated, just the second show, and so on. All analyses of internal consistency were similar, so I opted to present the results for all observations.

perceive that the show depicts controversial matters for which there are collective concern, decisions, and consequences, the less they perceive the show as simply a form of entertainment. One course of action might be to reverse-code and retain these items; however, these two items also capture an attribute of the show rather than an attribute of the topics presented on the show or of how people in general think and feel about those topics. Also considering that reverse-coded items often lower the internal consistency of scales as captured by Cronbach's α, I decided to eliminate these two items.

Next I examined the remaining 10 items together, as well as separating them out into their intended dimensions (pe_argue, pe_opinions, and pe_divided for CON, the others for CDC). I do this for two reasons. One, it may be the case that perception of controversy is inherently higher for issues that are seen as collective concerns, with the potential for collective decisions and collective consequences. In other words, CON and CDC may be two distinct dimensions that are so highly correlated as to load on one factor. Secondly, Cronbach's α will typically be higher the more items are analyzed together for internal consistency; thus, including all 10 items together may artificially inflate the α if the two subscales are combined, making it more difficult to identify items for elimination.

I first turn to the three items intended to measure controversy. None of these items exhibited congruence or incongruence effects on the PRM scale pre-test. The three items together also demonstrate good internal consistency (α = .78). Thus, I averaged pe_argue, pe_opinions, and pe_divided to create a composite item for CON (M = 3.40, SD = 0.88). The composite item exhibits negative skewness (-0.38, SE = .07, $p < .001$), and a composite item constructed using the pre-test data showed no evidence of a congruence or incongruence effect.

Three of the seven items measuring collective concerns/decisions/consequences did evidence congruence effects on the pre-test: pe_affectnum, pe_topaff, and pe_topavg. This alone is not grounds for elimination. The seven items together demonstrate excellent internal consistency (α = .92). By eliminating items based on content validity (that is, capturing perceptions of concerns, decisions, and consequences), which had the lowest factor loadings, which would maintain the highest Cronbach's α among the surviving items, and whether the resultant subscale would exhibit congruence effects, I settled on four items for the CDC subscale: pe_propcare, pe_topavg, pe_affectavg, and pe_possible (M = 3.24, SD = 0.88, α = .85). The composite item exhibits negative skewness (-0.30, SE = . 07, p < .001), and a composite item constructed using the pre-test data showed no evidence of a congruence or incongruence effect. The seven items of the CDC and CON subscales combined demonstrate excellent internal consistency (α = .89; M = 3.31, SD = 0.83), although the resultant composite item does exhibit negative skewness (-.40, SE = .07, p < .001). Still, the composite item constructed using the pre-test data showed no congruence or incongruence effects.

Most importantly, the CDC dimension still retains items addressing all three aspects of the political: collective concerns (pe_propcare, pe_topavg), decisions (pe_possible), and consequences (pe_affectavg). Thus, this dimension of the PRM scale assesses the degree to which viewers identify the objects depicted in media as being of concern to people within a society, potentially subject to collective decision-making that could address those concerns, with those decisions having ramifications for individuals within a society. In short, the CDC dimension taps into how relevant to the political realm and government the viewer evaluates the objects depicted in media to be.

The PRM Scale

I averaged the 11 items of the PPI, CON, and CDC subscales to create a single PRM scale item (M = 3.27, SD = 0.81, α = .91). The single item constructed using the pre-test data showed no congruence or incongruence effects, but the item does exhibit negative skewness (-.40, SE = .07, $p < .001$). This indicates that, at least for the stimuli used in the current study, respondents tended to give higher PRM scores rather than lower ones. The three subscale items are moderately to strongly correlated with each other (CDC and PPI r = .52, CDC and CON r = .75, PPI and CON r = .57; ps < .001) and are very strongly correlated with the single PRM scale item (rs = .85-.87, ps < .001); see Table 2.4. Table 2.5 displays descriptive statistics for the individual items, subscale composite items, and PRM scale composite item.

Table 2.4. *Correlation matrix for the PRM scale and subscale items.*

	CDC	PPI	CON
PPI	.52***		
CON	.75***	.57***	
PRM	.87***	.85***	.86***

Note: ***$p < .001$.

Table 2.5. *Descriptive statistics for the PRM scale.*

	M	*SD*	Skew	Skew *SE*	α
CDC	3.24	0.88	-0.30***	.07	.85
pe_propcare	3.30	0.93	-0.14*	.07	-
pe_topavg	3.07	1.14	-0.08	.07	-
pe_affectavg	3.21	1.13	-0.15*	.07	-
pe_possible	3.39	1.04	-0.31***	.07	-
PPI	3.22	1.06	-0.32***	.07	.90
pe_change	3.39	1.20	-0.54***	.07	-
pe_think	3.10	1.24	-0.13	.07	-
pe_stand	3.11	1.22	-0.12	.07	-
pe_express	3.28	1.18	-0.27***	.07	-
CON	3.40	0.88	-0.38***	.07	.78
pe_argue	3.26	1.01	-0.10	.07	-
pe_opinions	3.79	1.09	-0.89***	.07	-
pe_divided	3.15	1.07	-0.03	.07	-
PRM	3.27	0.81	-.40***	.07	.91

Note: *$p < .05$, ***$p < .001$.

Having now completed exploratory factor analysis and item reduction, I turn to the validation of the PRM scale, including confirmatory factor analysis and tests of discriminant, nomological, and convergent validity.

Study 2 Overview

The purpose of Study 2 is to validate the refined PRM scale using a different sample (Churchill, 1979; DeVellis, 2017; Netemeyer et al., 2003). There are a number of considerations regarding internal consistency, reliability, and validity that I address in this study. Having conducted exploratory factor analysis and item reduction in Study 1, using a unique data set I conduct a confirmatory factor analysis of the scale items to check for internal consistency, and I assess reliability again by computing Cronbach's α for the individual factors and for the scale as a whole. I also conduct tests of nomological, convergent, and discriminant validity. As such, I demonstrate that the PRM scale is correlated with theoretically related constructs and with existing measures of identification of media texts as politically relevant, whereas it is not correlated with distinct constructs that capture different phenomena.

Specifically regarding nomological validity, the PRM scale should be positively correlated with the strength of political identities and with political interest (Settle, 2018). Because the PRM scale is a novel measure, convergent validity will be difficult to determine. To date, the only way researchers have quantitatively assessed media consumers' perception that a media text is political is to ask respondents directly if the text in question is about politics (Settle, 2018) or to gauge agreement regarding the purpose of the post between researchers and respondents (Vraga et al., 2016). Consistent with the pre-test of the PRM scale, I will ask respondents how political they think the television show in question is using a Likert-type item measured from 1 (*Not at all political*) to 5 (*Extremely political*). In terms of discriminant

validity, the scale should not be correlated with moral progressivism (Long & Eveland, 2018). We would also not expect political ideology (e.g., liberalism/conservatism) or partisanship to be correlated with the scale, in that liberals and Democrats shouldn't find media to be more politically relevant than conservatives and Republicans or vice versa.

The end state was to have a validated scale that can be used to test the relationships proposed in studies 3 and 4.

Method

Participants

A convenience sample of U.S. adults was recruited via MTurk to participate in an online study on March 9, 2020, with quotas for partisanship set to evenly split the sample between Democrats, Republicans, and Independents/Others. Two participants were eliminated because of a technical issue, bringing the final sample size to $N = 328$. Slightly more than half ($n = 173$) of the sample identified as men, 154 identified as women, and one participant identified as non-binary. The mean age was 41.36 ($SD = 12.86$). Most (76.22%) of the sample reported their race as White, non-Hispanic; 7.93% as Black, non-Hispanic; 6.71% as Hispanic/Latino; 3.96% as Asian; and 5.18% as multiracial or some other race. The sample comprised a mix of self-identified Democrats ($n = 110$), Republicans ($n = 107$), and Independents or members of some other political party ($n = 111$). The mean reporting for political conservatism on a 1-to-7 scale was 3.82 ($SD = 1.76$).

Stimuli

Participants were presented with the same textual descriptions of real television shows used in Study 1.

Procedure

Participants first answered questions regarding political interest, political identity strength, and demographics. Then participants completed the moral foundations scale, which also served as a distractor task to prevent the measurement of pre-exposure variables, in particular issue public membership, from priming individuals regarding the show descriptions or the study purpose. Next, participants were told they were participating in a study on television preferences and given instructions that they would be asked to evaluate four television shows. Each show description was randomly presented, followed by the PRM scale and the prior exposure and familiarity items.

Measures

See Table 2.6 for descriptive statistics.

PRM scale. The reduced and refined 11-item PRM scale was used.

Moral progressivism. I administered 20-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ; Graham et al., 2011) and used it to generate a measure of moral progressivism (Long & Eveland, 2018). I do this because the MFQ measures the salience of five different moral domains and is thus not suitable to be employed as a single scale. Moral progressivism draws on previous research (e.g., Graham et al., 2009) that finds differences for the salience of moral domains between conservatives and liberals. Typically, the individualizing (harm/care and fairness) domains are more salient for liberals, and the binding (authority, ingroup loyalty, and purity) domains are more salient for conservatives. Moral progressivism is a measure of how salient the individualizing domains are for an individual over and above how salient the binding domains are for that individual. I first generated scores for salience of the individualizing and binding domains (Graham et al., 2009; 2011). I then subtracted the binding score from the individualizing score to create a single-item measure of moral progressivism (Long & Eveland,

Table 2.6. *Zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics for Study 2 variables.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. PRM Scale	-								
2. Moral Progressivism	-.04	-							
3. Partisanship (Republican)	.09**	-.50***	-						
4. Ideology (Conservatism)	.09**	-.59***	.79***	-					
5. Partisan Strength	.07**	-.18***	-.02	.01	-				
6. Ideological Strength	.06*	.08**	-.06*	-.10***	.50***	-			
7. Issue Public Membership	.19***	.14***	-.12**	-.16***	.11**	.18***	-		
8. Political Interest	.10***	.06*	.02	.02	.25***	.29***	.26***	-	
9. Single-Item "Political"	.50***	-.09**	.12***	.13***	.02	.03	.04	.04	-
M	3.15	1.19	0.47	0.47	1.88	1.44	1.75	3.63	3.11
SD	0.80	1.27	0.35	0.29	0.99	1.03	0.77	1.01	1.25
Skew	-.30***	.29***	0.13	0.11	-.44***	-.06	-.28**	-.46***	-.03
Skew *SE*	.07	.07	.07	.07	.07	.07	.10	.07	.07
α	.91	-	-	-	-	-	.85	-	-

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. For partisanship, 0 = Strong Democrat, and 1 = Strong Republican. For ideology, 0 = extremely liberal, and 1 = extremely conservative.

2018), with higher (>0) scores indicating greater salience of the individualizing domains and lower (<0) scores indicating greater salience of the binding domains. I can then demonstrate that the PRM scale is not correlated with moral progressivism.

Political identity. Political identity was assessed in three ways: partisanship and strength thereof, political ideology and strength thereof, and membership in the relevant issue publics and strength thereof.

Partisanship. Partisan identification was measured using three items from the ANES asking if participants consider themselves Democrats, Republicans, Independents, or something else. Self-identified Democrats and Republicans were then asked if they are strongly or not very strongly identified with their party, whereas Independents and Others were asked if they think of themselves as being closer to the Republican or Democratic party (referred to as leaners). Partisanship strength was computed as follows: Independent/Other non-leaners (0), Independents/Others who lean toward the Democrat or Republican party (1), not strongly self-identified Republicans/Democrats (2), and strongly self-identified Republicans/Democrats (3).

Political ideology. Ideology was measured using a single item taken from the ANES asking respondents to identify their ideology on a 1 (*extremely liberal*) to 7 (*extremely conservative*) scale. Ideological strength was computed as follows: Moderate (0), slightly liberal/conservative (1), liberal/conservative (2), extremely liberal/conservative (3).***Issue Public Membership.*** Issue public membership was assessed using five items. I asked respondents the following for each of eight political issues (see Appendix D): how important the issue is to them on a scale of 0 (*not at all important*) to 3 (*extremely important*); how strongly held their views are on the issue from 0 (*not at all strongly*) to 3 (*extremely strongly*); how frequently they seek information on the issue from 0 (*never*) to 3 (*daily*); and how frequently

they discuss the issue with others from 0 (*never*) to 3 (*daily*). A semantic differential item assessed how strongly respondents believe one of two divergent positions on the issue on a -3 (strongly believe position A) to 3 (strongly believe position B) scale, with a 0 meaning that they believe or disbelieve in both positions to the same degree. The absolute value of this item was to be averaged with the previous four items for a score of strength of issue public membership; however, doing so lowered the internal consistency of the issue public membership measure. Therefore, this item was discarded and issue public membership was measured as the average of the first four items.

Political interest. Political interest was measured using a single item from the ANES asking respondents to report how often they pay attention to what's going on in government and politics from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Previous research has found that a single item is sufficient for measuring political interest (Prior, 2019).

Analysis Plan

I conduct confirmatory factor analysis of the scale items to check for internal consistency (Carpenter, 2018; DeVellis, 2017; Netemeyer et al., 2003). I assess reliability by computing Cronbach's α for the individual factors and for the scale as a whole. I also conduct tests of nomological, convergent, and discriminant validity (Netemeyer et al., 2003). These validity tests will consist of assessing the correlation between the PRM scale and each of several measures: political identity strength, political interest, the single-item measure of how political participants think the shows are, moral progressivism, political ideology, and partisanship.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The steps for performing multilevel confirmatory factor analysis are similar to those I used in the previous study for performing multilevel exploratory factor analysis (Dyer, Hanges, & Hall, 2005). First, I conduct confirmatory factor analysis on the original data set, ignoring the hierarchical structure of the data; then I estimate ICCs for my scale items. Next, if the ICCs indicate substantial between-groups variance, I conduct confirmatory factor analysis using the pooled within-groups covariance matrix, which partials out the between-groups variance.

I specified the model with the individual items retained from Study 1 estimating the three latent variables for their respective factors, as well as correlations between the three latent variables. I used the `cfa()` function in the lavaan package in R to fit the model and the `semPaths()` function in the semPlot package to visualize it; see Figure 2.3. Acceptable model fit was achieved, $\chi^2(41) = 281.77$, $p < .001$; CFI = .974; RMSEA = .067; SRMR = .035; providing support for a three-factor structure with each item loading strongly on its expected factor; see Table 2.7 and Figure 2.3. The covariances between the latent variables were all statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.

Next I used Huang's (2017) `mcfa.input()` function to generate the ICC estimates, which are also reported in Table 2.7. These ICCs still indicate substantial between-groups variance; thus, my next step was to use the between-groups covariance matrix also generated by Huang's function to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis with the between-groups variance partialed out. Once again, acceptable model fit was achieved, $\chi^2(41) = 267.10$, $p < .001$; CFI = .973; RMSEA = .065; SRMR = .037; providing support for the same three-factor structure with each item loading strongly on its expected factor and statistically significant covariances between the latent variables at the $p < .001$ level; see Figure 2.4. Therefore, the factor structure of the 11-item PRM scale is confirmed.

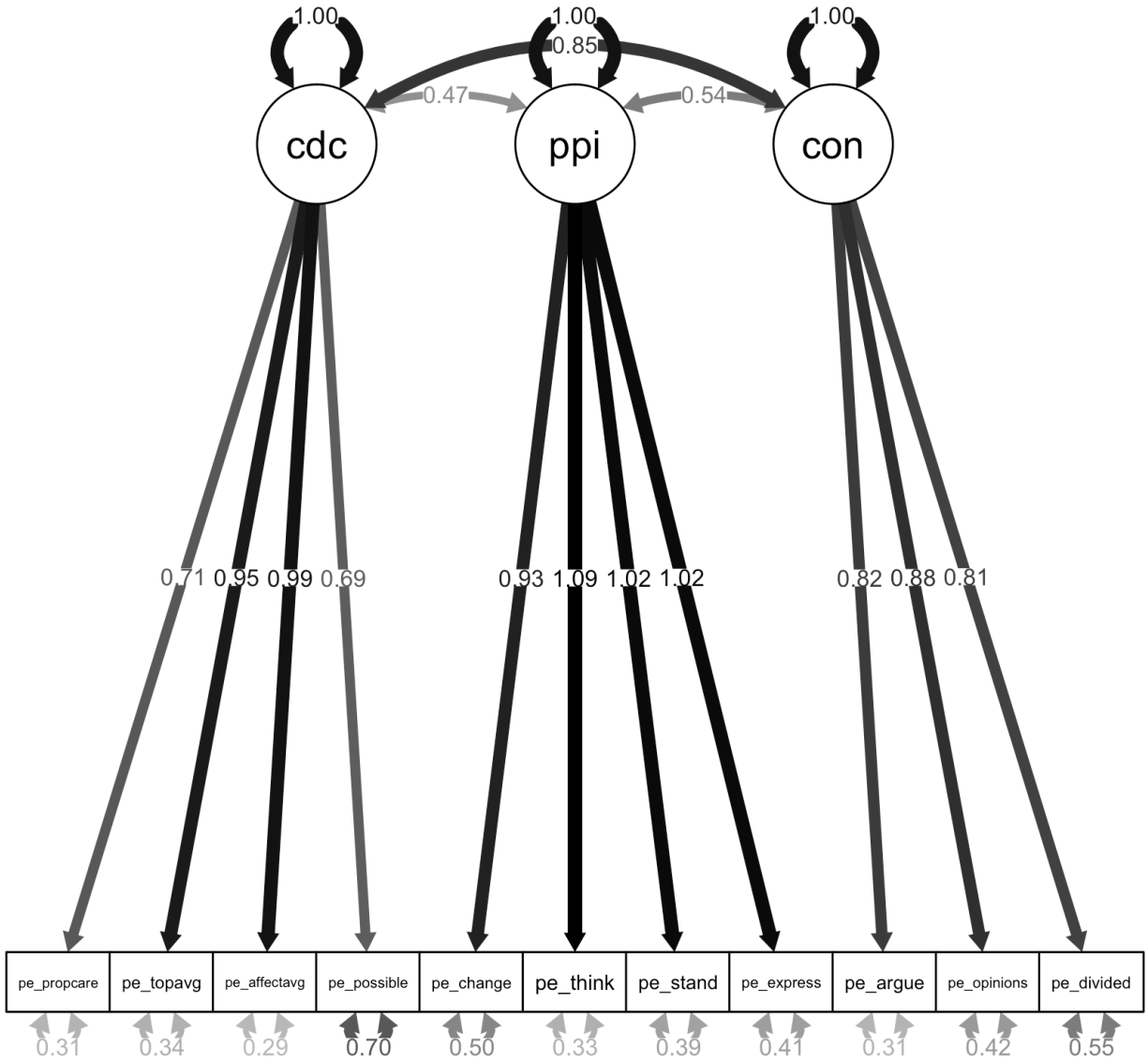

Figure 2.3. Confirmatory factor analysis for original data, not accounting for the hierarchical structure of the data.

One might wonder why a confirmatory factor analysis indicates a three-factor structure whereas the exploratory factor analysis indicated a two-factor structure. There are three points of explanation that address this issue. First, the CDC and CON factors are very strongly correlated in both Study 1 ($r = .75$, $p < .001$) and in Study 2 ($r = .85$, $p < .001$ for the two latent variables in the confirmatory factor analysis; $r = .75$, $p < .001$ for the two subscale items). Therefore, it's unsurprising that their items might load on a single factor in an exploratory factor analysis. As

Table 2.7. *ICCs and factor loadings for PRM scale, not accounting for the hierarchical data.*

	CDC	PPI	CON	ICC
CDC				
pe_propcare	0.71			.09
pe_topavg	0.95			.07
pe_affectavg	0.99			.10
pe_possible	0.69			.18
PPI				
pe_change		0.93		.25
pe_think		1.09		.29
pe_stand		1.02		.24
pe_express		1.02		.27
CON				
pe_argue			0.82	.10
pe_opinions			0.88	.14
pe_divided			0.81	.09

stated in Study 1, my reason for keeping these two dimensions distinct is because they are conceptually different, even if they are strongly correlated. By opting for separate factors, we will be able to detect when the two subscales move independently of one another. Second, a confirmatory factor analysis conducted with a two-factor model specified achieves tolerable fit, $\chi^2(43) = 517.83$, $p < .001$; CFI = .944; RMSEA = .092; SRMR = .042. Still, some of the fit indices fall just outside of established cutoff criteria, namely CFI (≥ .95) and RMSEA (< .08) (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006). Not only were the fit indices better, but the factor loadings were generally the same or higher for a three-factor model. Thus, a three-factor model fits the observed data better than a two-factor model.

Finally, one should attend to the differences between exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses as analytical tools. The former is, as its name suggests, an exploratory tool. One can approach it with no expectations of the underlying factor structure or which items will load on which factor. The latter, on the other hand, is a theory-centric analytical technique to determine how well a particular model specification fits the data. As such, the factor structure suggested by an exploratory factor analysis may not match what theory would indicate, nor may a model

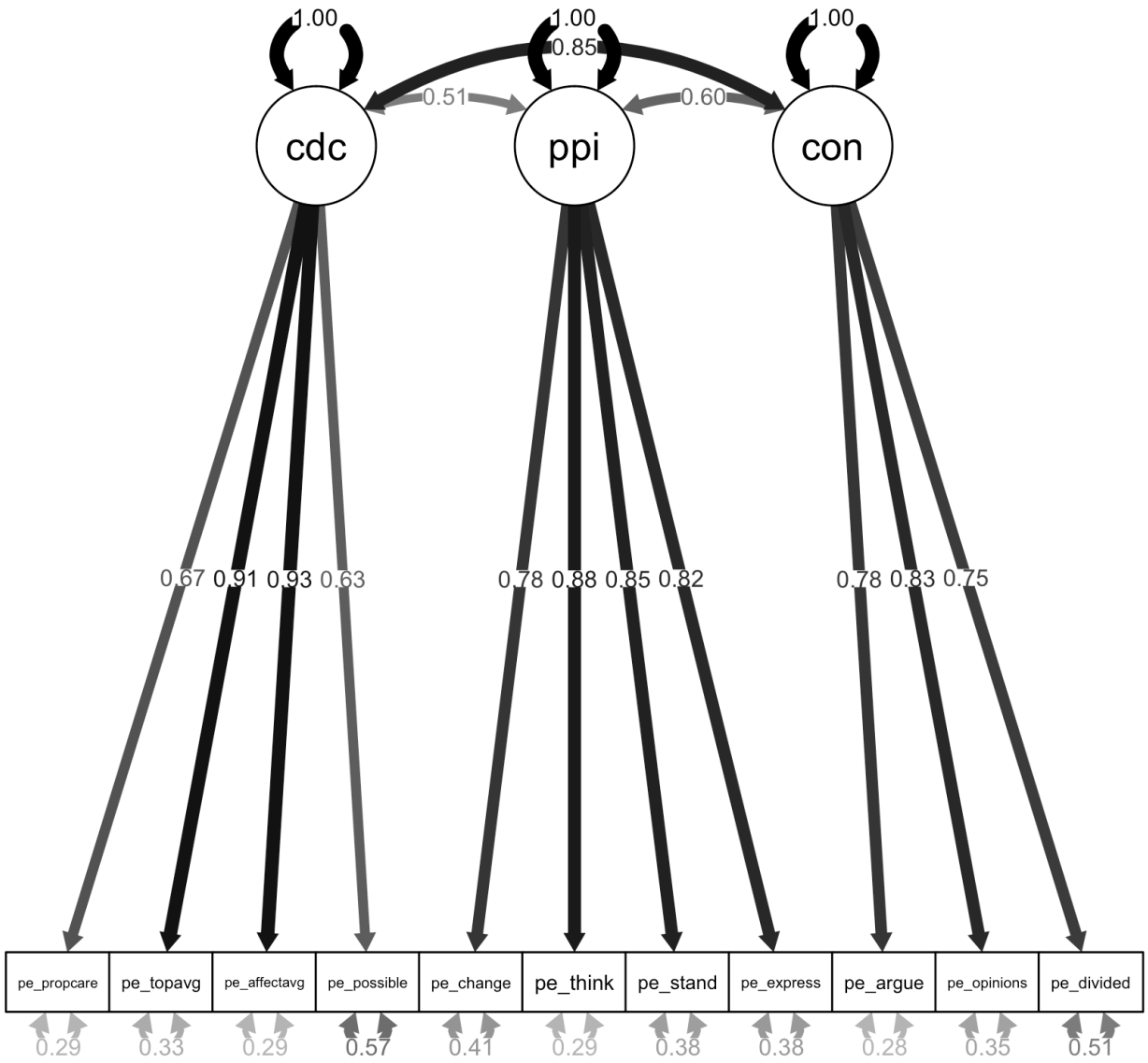

Figure 2.4. Confirmatory factor analysis based on the within-groups covariance matrix.

specified by that factor structure be the best fit for the data. This is exactly what we observe in this case: despite an exploratory factor analysis suggesting two factors, theory indicates the existence of three factors, and a three-factor model fits the data better than a two-factor model does. Altogether, we must keep in mind that scale development is an iterative, theory-driven process that requires decision-making on the part of the researcher, not a formulaic procedure in which the research takes a back seat to the numbers.

Testing Internal Consistency

Cronbach's α for the full scale is .91; see Table 2.6 The high α indicates excellent internal consistency among the 11 items. The subscales also exhibit internal consistency ranging from very good to excellent (CDC: α = .86, PPI: α = .91, CON: α = .83).

Validity Checks

Nomological validity. Per Settle (2018), we would expect the PRM scale to be correlated with political identity strength and with political interest. Indeed, I find that PRM scale scores are statistically significantly correlated, albeit weakly, with ideological strength ($r = .06$, $p = .041$), partisanship strength ($r = .07$, $p = .009$), issue public membership ($r = .19$, $p < .001$), and political interest ($r = .10$, $p < .001$); see Table 2.6. Further, we should find that PPI subscale scores in particular are not *lower* for individuals with stronger political identities; in other words, PPI should not be negatively correlated with ideological strength, partisan strength, and issue public membership. Such a finding would be concerning because individuals with stronger political identities should be more, not less, attuned to perceiving persuasive intent from media content than individuals with weaker political identities. I find that PPI is positively correlated ($r = .08$, $p = .004$) with partisanship strength, not correlated ($r = .04$, $p = .174$) with ideological strength, and positively correlated ($r = .11$, $p = .004$) with issue public membership. In general, individuals with stronger political identities perceive greater persuasive intent from television shows than do individuals with weaker political identities.

Discriminant validity. I tested the discriminant validity of the PRM scale by examining whether the scores correlated with respondents' moral progressivism and with political ideology and partisanship.

Moral progressivism. Previous research (e.g., Long & Eveland, 2018; Tamborini et al., 2013) has applied Tamborini's (Tamborini, 2011; 2013) model of intuitive morality and

exemplars (MIME) to predict attraction to media based on people's reliance on different moral domains. For example, Tamborini et al. (2013) investigated whether salience of the five individual moral domains (harm/care, fairness, ingroup loyalty, authority, and purity) would predict appeal for media in which a character violated the relevant moral domain. I borrow the approach of Long and Eveland (2018), who explored whether moral progressivism, the salience of individualizing moral foundations over binding moral foundations, would predict preferences for music with morally progressive lyrics. It's important to note that the MFQ and the salience of moral domains are themselves not measures of media appeal or of perception of a media text as political. Moral progressivism, or the salience of the various moral domains, is independent of what media a person may be exposed to. Thus, the way that moral foundations theory has been applied to the study of media appeal is to determine whether individuals find media to be more appealing when that media is aligned with, rather than violates, the moral domain(s) that are more salient to them.

Still, I aim to demonstrate that the PRM scale is not merely tapping into the salience of one moral domain over the other. Therefore, I examine the correlation between the PRM scale and moral progressivism to demonstrate that PRM scale scores are *not* higher for individuals who rely on certain moral domains over others. I find no correlation between PRM scale scores and moral progressivism, $r = -.04$, $p = .201$; see Table 2.6. In other words, the PRM scale isn't related to the salience of particular moral domains over others.

Political ideology and partisanship. Just as I determined that the salience of different moral domains isn't related to PRM scale scores, I want to ensure that political ideology and partisanship aren't predictive of PRM scale scores. I measured political ideology on a 1 (*Extremely liberal*) to 7 (*Extremely conservative*) scale, with "moderate/middle of the road" as

the center point. I then transformed this measure to a 0-to-1 scale of conservatism, with the same anchors. I find a weak but statistically significant correlation between PRM scores and conservatism ($r = .09$, $p = .001$), evidencing that more conservative individuals tend to report higher scores on the PRM scale. In terms of partisanship, an ANOVA test indicated no difference in PRM scores between Democrats ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.76$), Republicans ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.83$), and Independents/Others ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.80$), $F(1, 1308) = 0.50$, $p = .479$. However, a *t*-test comparing PRM scores among just Democrats to those among just Republicans revealed that PRM scores among Republicans were statistically significantly higher than among Democrats, $t(852.42) = -2.44$, $p = .015$. Using partisanship as a scale with strongly self-identified Democrats at one end (0), strongly self-identified Republicans at the other end (1), and Independent/Other non-leaners at the mid-point (0.5), I also find a weak albeit statistically significant correlation between partisanship and the PRM scale, $r = .09$, $p = .001$.

Convergent validity. To test the convergent validity of the PRM scale, we asked respondents how political they thought each show was from 1 (*Not at all political*) to 5 (*Extremely political*); see descriptive statistics in Table 2.6. This single-item measure is moderately correlated with the PRM scale, $r = .50$, $p < .001$; see Table 2.6. Thus, there is a moderate level of agreement between the single-item measure and the PRM scale measure.

Comparing the PRM Scale to a Single-Item Measure

The development of a new scale must serve a purpose: To measure some phenomenon more fully and accurately than is currently possible. Current measures of the degree to which people perceive media texts as relevant to politics use single-item measures (Settle, 2018; Vraga et al., 2016). Why ask 11 questions when one might suffice? My reasoning behind the construction of the PRM scale is that simply asking someone whether a media text, be it a

Facebook post or a television show, is "political" is bound to be flawed due to how people employ the word "political" (Eliasoph, 1998; Fitzgerald, 2013; Walsh, 2004). I argue that my novel measure is a better indicator of whether someone thinks of a media text as political. I demonstrate this by submitting the single-item measure to the same validity checks I have performed on the PRM scale thus far.

Nomological validity. In terms of nomological validity, we would expect a measure of the political relevance of media to be correlated with political interest and political identity strength (Settle, 2018). However, although the PRM scale is correlated with both political identity strength and political interest, the single-item measure isn't correlated with any of these partisan strength: $r = .02$, $p = .566$; ideological strength: $r = .03$, $p = .293$; issue public membership: $r = .04$, $p = .335$; political interest: $r = .04$, $p = .160$); see Table 2.6.

Discriminant validity. As with the PRM scale, I tested the discriminant validity of the single-item measure by examining whether the scores correlated with respondents' reliance on various moral domains and with political ideology and partisanship.

Moral progressivism. The single-item measure is negatively correlated with moral progressivism ($r = -.09$, $p = .002$), meaning that *less* morally progressive individuals (those for whom the binding domains of authority, ingroup loyalty, and purity are more salient) indicate that television shows are more "political"; see Table 2.6. In contrast, the PRM scale is not correlated with moral progressivism.

Political ideology and partisanship. Finally, I examine the relationship between the single-item measure and both political ideology and partisanship. Like with the PRM scale, I find a weak yet statistically significant correlation between the single item and political ideology ($r = .13$, $p < .001$), with conservatives reporting higher levels of a show being "political." There is no

statistically significant difference between the correlations between political ideology and the PRM score and the single-item measure, $Z = 1.04$, $p = .298$. For partisanship employed as a 0-to-1 scale, there is a weak yet statistically significant correlation with the single-item measure, $r = .12$, $p < .001$. There is no statistically significant difference between the correlations between partisanship and the PRM score and the single-item measure, $Z = -0.78$, $p = .435$.

An ANOVA test indicated no difference in scores for the single-item measure between Democrats ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.16$), Republicans ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.25$), and Independents/Others ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.30$), $F(1, 1310) = 1.87$, $p = .172$. A *t*-test comparing single-item scores for Democrats to those for Republicans revealed that the single-item scores among Republicans were statistically significantly higher than among Democrats, $t(857.09) = -3.52$, $p < .001$. To test whether the PRM scale or the single-item measure performed better in this regard, I generated the mean differences between the Democrat and Republican scores for both the PRM scale and the single-item measure for 5,000 bootstrapped samples of the data set to determine if the partisan gap in scores is larger for the PRM scale or the single-item measure. Across these bootstrapped samples, the mean partisan gap for PRM scale scores ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.05$) is smaller than the mean partisan gap for single-item measure scores ($M = 0.29$, $SD = 0.08$), $t(8622.9) = 113.33$, $p < .001$. Thus, although both the PRM scale and the single-item measure exhibit a partisan gap in which Republicans report higher scores than Democrats, the gap is more than half the size for the PRM scale.

A Validated Scale of the Political Relevance of Media

In this chapter I have presented two studies in which I test, refine, and validate a measure of the political relevance of media. In Study 1, I used multilevel exploratory factor analysis to uncover the factor structure of the PRM scale and reduce the number of items from 26 to 11. In

Study 2, I employed confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the factor structure and the internal consistency of the scale and its three subscales, then I submitted the scale to several tests of validity. I demonstrated that, as expected, the PRM scale is correlated with political identity strength, measured as partisanship strength, ideological strength, and issue public membership strength. I further demonstrated that overall, PRM scale scores are not correlated with the salience of certain moral domains over others. I also demonstrated that the PRM scale is moderately correlated with existing single-item measures of the political nature of media, yet it is more robust to validity checks than is a single-item measure. Although both the PRM scale and the single-item measure were correlated with political ideology and partisanship, with conservatives and Republicans reporting higher scores, the partisan score gap was smaller for the PRM scale than for the single-item measure. Overall, evidence indicates that the PRM scale is a superior measure of how people think of media texts as being politically relevant.

My reason for creating the PRM scale goes beyond merely finding a better way to measure how politically relevant people think certain media texts are. The PRM scale is also useful for the generation of new theories. As I demonstrate in the next two chapters, identifying media as politically relevant is a function of media content and political identity strength, and such evaluations also influence politically motivated selective exposure to fictional entertainment media. This carries implications regarding related theories regarding media selection and narrative persuasion. Furthermore, as I demonstrate regarding the similarities and differences between the PRM scale and single-item "political" measures, the PRM scale may help build other theories related to individuals' evaluations of media as politically relevant as opposed to "political." I discuss the broader implications for the creation of the PRM scale in the Conclusion chapter.

The PRM scale is not without its flaws, however. Specifically, although I sought to create a scale that would perform uniformly across partisan and ideological lines, the PRM scale is still correlated with political ideology, and Republicans still reported higher scores than Democrats. Interpreting this finding is difficult. One explanation would be that conservatives and Republicans are more politically interested than liberals and Democrats, leading to higher PRM scores; however, *t*-tests and correlation tests between political interest and partisanship and ideology, respectively, do not bear this out. Another explanation could be that conservatives and Republicans are more primed to think about politics and political relevance in the media than are liberals and Democrats. The majority of Americans believe that Hollywood is a liberal-leaning institution (Piacenza, 2018); that perception alone could prompt Republicans and conservatives to think of media in general as politically relevant more so than their Democratic and liberal counterparts. In fact, attention to the subscales reveals that the partisan and ideological gap in PRM scores is driven solely by Republicans and conservatives reporting higher perception of persuasive intent than Democrats and liberals. PPI scores are correlated with conservatism, $r = .20$, $p < .001$, and Republicans report higher ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.04$) PPI scores than do Democrats ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.99$), $t(860.99) = -6.46$, $p < .001$. Using partisanship as a scale from strongly self-identified Democrats to strongly self-identified Republicans, there is also a correlation between partisanship and PPI score, $r = .20$, $p < .001$. There were no partisan or ideological effects for the collective concerns/decisions/consequences or for the controversy dimensions. These findings indicate that conservatives and Republicans think of media, at least television shows, as being created for the purpose of changing people's minds more so than liberals and Democrats.

Although I attempted to design a scale that would work uniformly across political identities, perhaps there is no way of assessing perceptions of media's political relevance that doesn't somehow suffer from a partisan and ideological effect—especially since certain people are predisposed to think of media as being a tool of persuasion. More importantly, the above finding further demonstrates the power and necessity of the PRM scale and its multidimensional nature. A single item asking "how political do you think [media text] is?" simply cannot capture the complexity of the concept it's trying to measure. Through careful construction of a multidimensional scale, we are able to see that differences in responses along fissures of political identity are due to one particular dimension (perception of persuasive intent) but not others. The ability of the dimensions to vary freely from one another should be noted for future study. If attributes of the viewer can affect some scale dimensions and not others, then certainly attributes of the media texts themselves may be able to do the same. In the next chapter, I conduct an experiment, following the same format as the previous two studies, in which I examine how viewer attributes, in the form of political identity strength, and television show attributes, in the form of genre and the objects depicted on the show, interact to influence how politically relevant people consider television shows to be.

Chapter 3: Testing the Evaluation Hypothesis

The current study tests the evaluation hypothesis, examining the relationship between the types of objects depicted on the television shows, along with its interaction with respondents' political identity strength, on evaluation of those media texts as politically relevant. This study aims to accomplish two theoretically important goals. First, it will demonstrate that people's political identity strength affects how politically relevant they evaluate television shows to be. Such a finding would question the utility of typologies of political entertainment media relying on researchers' definitions and instead confirm the need for a viewer-centric approach to determining which media individual viewers think of as politically relevant. Second, it will demonstrate that how strong an effect political identity strength has on PRM evaluations is itself a function of the objects depicted in media. In other words, the strength of a person's political identities will exert a stronger or weaker effect on how that person evaluates a television program as politically relevant, depending on what objects are depicted in the show. Thus, not only must we consider how attributes of an individual viewer affect their evaluation of media as politically relevant, but we must also take into account how attributes of media content are involved in this process. The end state is confirmation of the relationship between media content, respondent political identity strength, and the evaluation of media texts as politically relevant. The ability of media content, interacted with political identity strength, to predict scores on the PRM scale also serves as evidence supporting the concurrent validity of the scale. Additionally, I use Study 3 to pre-test a measure of motivations for consuming various genres of television content and to explore the relationships between PRM and tolerance for ambiguity.

Tolerance for ambiguity (TA) is a dimension of a broader psychological predisposition known as need for closure (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). Specifically, TA is the degree to which individuals are comfortable with uncertainty, novelty, and ambiguity. Ambiguity intolerant people prefer clearly delineated boundaries and definitions, as well as certainty regarding the meaning of events and the actions and intentions of others (Young, 2019). TA has been associated with support for transgender rights, with those less tolerant of ambiguity being less supportive of transgender rights (Jones, Brewer, Young, Lambe, & Hoffman, 2018), as well as with conservatism and artistic preferences (Young, 2019). These latter two associations are of particular interest, given our earlier finding that evaluations of television programs as politically relevant and "political" are also associated with conservatism. Thus, I will investigate if TA has an additional effect on these outcome variables once conservatism is controlled for. Additionally, TA may be important in the evaluation of television shows across genres. Ambiguity intolerant individuals are likely to experience discomfort with hybrid forms of media, such as political satire as compared to news (Young, 2019). If the prototypical "political" television show is a news program, how might an individual who is intolerant of ambiguity process an entertainment show in which they identify politically relevant objects? To assess this, I will also explore the interaction of TA and show genre on evaluations of television shows as politically relevant and as "political."

Specific hypotheses and research questions are as follows:

RQ_1: Do participants evaluate news programs as more politically relevant than entertainment programs?

H_1: Participants will evaluate shows depicting politicians/parties/polls as more politically relevant than shows depicting social issues.

H_2: There will be greater consensus in the evaluation-as-politically-relevant of shows depicting politicians/parties/polls than there will be in the evaluation-as-politically-relevant of shows depicting social issues.

H_3: Respondents with stronger political identities will evaluate shows as more politically relevant than respondents with weaker political identities.

H_4: The effect of respondents' political identity strength on evaluating a show as politically relevant will be stronger when the show depicts social issues than when the show depicts politicians/parties/polls.

RQ_2: Will the relationship between political identity strength and evaluation of shows as politically relevant be different for news shows than for entertainment shows?

Study 3 Method

As with the previous study, participants were presented with descriptions of television shows and were asked to provide their evaluations of the shows.

Participants

A convenience sample of U.S. adults was recruited via Qualtrics to participate in an online study from March 24-28, 2020, with quotas for partisanship set to evenly split the sample between Democrats, Republicans, and Independents/Others. Five participants were eliminated because of a technical issue, bringing the final sample size to $N = 667$. Additional quotas were set to ensure the sample was reflective of the U.S. population along gender, age, and income lines. About half ($n = 330$) of the sample identified as men, 336 identified as women, and one participant reported their gender as "human." The mean age was 45.88 ($SD = 16.86$). Most (74.66%) of the sample reported their race as White, non-Hispanic; 7.50% as Black, non-Hispanic; 8.40% as Hispanic/Latino; 6.00% as Asian; and 3.45% as multiracial or some other

race. The sample comprised a mix of self-identified Democrats (n = 222), Republicans (n = 223), and Independents or members of some other political party (n = 222). The mean reporting for political conservatism on a 1-to-7 scale was 4.11 (SD = 1.72).

Stimuli

Participants were presented with the same textual descriptions of real television shows used in studies 1 and 2.

Procedure

Participants were told they were participating in a study on television preferences and given instructions that they would be asked to evaluate four television shows. Participants first answered questions regarding political interest, political identity strength, and demographics. Then participants completed a short tolerance for ambiguity questionnaire and questions regarding motivations for watching various television genres. Besides acting as a pre-test of these measures for Study 4, these items served as a distractor task to prevent the measurement of pre-exposure variables, in particular issue public membership, from priming individuals regarding the show descriptions or the study purpose. Next, each show description was randomly presented, followed by the PRM scale and the prior exposure and familiarity items.

Measures

The validated PRM scale was used, along with political identity, political interest, and show familiarity and exposure measures carried over from Study 2. See Table 3.1 for descriptive statistics.

Tolerance for ambiguity (TA). I first pre-tested TA in the PRM scale pre-test (see Appendix B) and in another round of data collection by administering all nine items from the TA subscale of the need for closure scale (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). Across both samples, the

Table 3.1. *Zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics for Study 3 variables.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. PRM Scale	-								
2. Tolerance for Ambiguity	.18***	-							
3. Partisanship (Republican)	.04*	.07***	-						
4. Ideology (Conservatism)	.06**	.07***	.67***	-					
5. Partisan Strength	.15***	.04*	-.01	.06**	-				
6. Ideological Strength	.19***	.06**	.06**	.06**	.51***	-			
7. Issue Public Membership	.31***	.14***	-.13***	-.16***	.15***	.17***	-		
8. Political Interest	.16***	.05*	-.08***	-.08***	.20***	.25***	.30***	-	
9. Single-Item "Political"	.56***	.10***	.14***	.16***	.09***	.16***	.13***	.09***	-
M	3.15	3.73	0.5	0.52	1.98	1.3	1.64	3.71	3.09
SD	0.81	0.79	0.38	0.29	1.09	1.13	0.86	1.11	1.22
Skew	-0.17***	-0.65***	-0.01	-0.05	-0.59***	0.19***	-0.21**	-0.52***	-0.08
Skew SE	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.07	0.05	0.05
α	.91	.73	-	-	-	-	.86	-	-

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. For partisanship, 0 = Strong Democrat, and 1 = Strong Republican. For ideology, 0 = extremely liberal, and 1 = extremely conservative.

highest internal consistency (α = .82-.83) was found for a three-item measure comprising the following: "I don't like when situations are uncertain," "I dislike it when a person's statement could mean many different things," and "I feel uncomfortable when someone's meaning or intention is unclear to me." Thus, I measure TA in this study using these three items measured from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores reflecting greater *intolerance* for ambiguity. Three- or four-item measures for TA have been used in previous research (e.g., Jones et al., 2018; Young, 2019; Young, Bagozzi, Goldring, Poulsen, & Drouin, 2019).

Motivations for television use. Participants were first asked if they watched each of the following genres of television shows: news shows, fictional sitcoms, fictional dramas, sports (including commentary and reporting), and reality TV shows. If they responded affirmatively, after each genre participants were further asked how important on a 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*extremely important*) scale the following reasons for watching that particular genre were: "to learn or stay informed," "for escape, entertainment, or relaxation," "so I can talk about it with others," and "because it shares my values."

Analysis Plan

Because respondents will evaluate four shows, I employ linear mixed models using random effects to account for multiple observations for each respondent (with the exception of H_2, which uses an *F*-test). Show order, conservatism, and political interest will be used as additional control variables. When the presence/absence of politicians is used as a variable, I use a recoded version of the object variable, such that shows depicting politicians/parties/polls (*n* = 1,334) are in the affirmative category and shows depicting healthcare and marijuana (*n* = 667 each, for a total *n* of 1,334) are in the negative category. As in Study 2, I continue to report

predictions for the single-item "political" measure as a comparison to the PRM scale to detect when and in which ways the two measures differ.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Familiarity. I used the prior exposure and familiarity items to determine if participants' previous experiences and knowledge of the programs affected the outcome variables. Participants who reported having watched the programs reported being much more familiar (M = 3.27, SD = 1.11) with the shows than people who reported not having watched the programs (M = 1.62, SD = 0.98), $t(2647.5) = 40.70$, $p < .001$. Show watchers evaluated the shows as more politically relevant (M = 3.36, SD = 0.74) and "political" (M = 3.19, SD = 1.24) than non-watchers (M = 2.89, SD = 0.81, and M = 2.97, SD = 1.17, respectively), $t(2461.2) = 15.31$, $p < .001$, and $t(2604.5) = 4.73$, $p < .001$, respectively. Self-reported familiarity with the programs is moderately correlated (r = .42, $p < .001$) with PRM scores and weakly yet statistically significantly correlated (r = .15, $p < .001$) with "political" scores. At this point, one might consider including familiarity as a control variable in further analyses; however, the fact that familiarity was measured post-treatment presents some analytical challenges (Montgomery, Nyhan, & Torres, 2018). Nevertheless, I conducted all analyses with and without familiarity included as a covariate. The inclusion of familiarity as a control variable doesn't substantively change the interpretation of most of the analyses below nor the conclusions I would draw from the current study. Therefore, I do not include familiarity as a control in the analyses I report below, but I do note where and how analyses differ if familiarity is included as a control.

Tolerance for ambiguity. As found in previous literature (e.g., Young, 2019; Young et al., 2019), TA is correlated with political ideology, in that conservatives are less tolerant of

ambiguity than are liberals; see Table 3.1. TA is also correlated with PRM, in that individuals who are less tolerant of ambiguity evaluate television programs as more politically relevant than do individuals who are more tolerant of ambiguity. I ran linear mixed models to predict PRM and its subscale (collective choices/decisions/consequences, or CDC; perception of persuasive intent, or PPI; and controversy, or CON) scores, along with scores for the single-item "political" measure, based on TA, controlling for conservatism, political interest, genre, object, and show order. I find a statistically significant relationship between TA and the PRM scale, its subscales, and the single-item "political" measure, accounting for conservatism and the other control variables; see Table 3.2.

It's also conceivable that TA would have a different effect on the outcome variables depending on the genre (Young, 2019). Table 3.3 displays the previous models with an additional interaction term for TA x genre. This interaction term is statistically significant for predictions of CON, in that the effect of TA on CON scores is weaker for entertainment shows than for news shows; see Figure 3.1. I also further probed the interactions for all models by plotting them to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in outcome scores between news and entertainment shows at some level of TA but not for other levels (Brambor, Clark, & Golder, 2006), as indicated by overlapping confidence intervals. Although the confidence intervals for TA predictions for news and entertainment programs did overlap for some models, they only did so at the very lowest levels of TA (typically scores less than 1.50 on a 1-to-5 scale). Considering the very small number of participants with TA scores that low (a dozen at best), it's safe to say that notwithstanding the previously mentioned interaction for the CON subscale, the effect of TA on the outcome variables was generally not conditional on genre.

Table 3.2. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM, its subscales, and "Political" based on TA.*

	PRM	**CDC**	**PPI**	**CON**	**"Political"**
Fixed Effects *b* (*SE*)					
Genre: Entertainment	-0.42*** (.02)	-0.52*** (.02)	-0.24*** (.03)	-0.54*** (.02)	-0.53*** (.04)
Object: Healthcare	0.13*** (.03)	0.27*** (.03)	0.10** (.03)	-0.02 (.03)	-0.51*** (.04)
Object: Marijuana	0.04 (.03)	0.01 (.03)	0.08* (.03)	0.02 (.03)	-0.45*** (.04)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.17*** (.03)	0.16*** (.03)	0.17*** (.04)	0.19*** (.03)	0.13** (.04)
Conservatism	0.18* (.08)	-0.14 (.09)	0.57*** (.10)	0.08 (.08)	0.71*** (.11)
Political Interest	0.11*** (.02)	0.14*** (.02)	0.09*** (.03)	0.12*** (.02)	0.10*** (.03)
Order	-0.01 (.01)	0.004 (.01)	-0.02 (.01)	-0.02 (.01)	-0.02 (.02)
Constant	2.17*** (.14)	2.18*** (.15)	2.03*** (.17)	2.37*** (.14)	2.43*** (.19)
Random Effects var (*SD*)					
Respondent	0.28 (0.53)	0.32 (0.57)	0.41 (0.64)	0.25 (0.5)	0.39 (0.62)
Residual	0.29 (0.54)	0.37 (0.61)	0.52 (0.72)	0.40 (0.63)	0.90 (0.95)
Log likelihood	-2668.28	-2987.32	-3406.87	-3004.1	-3994.44
AIC	5356.56	5994.64	6833.75	6028.19	8008.88
BIC	5415.45	6053.53	6892.64	6087.09	8067.77

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. $N_{respondents} = 667$ and $N_{observations} = 2{,}668$ for all models. The reference group for genre is news, and the reference group for object is politicians/parties/polls.

Table 3.3. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM, its subscales, and "Political" based on the TA x genre interaction.*

	PRM	**CDC**	**PPI**	**CON**	**"Political"**
Fixed Effects *b* (*SE*)					
Genre: Entertainment	-0.32** (.10)	-0.39*** (.11)	-0.31* (.13)	-0.24* (.12)	-0.39* (.18)
Object: Healthcare	0.13*** (.03)	0.27*** (.03)	0.10** (.03)	-0.02 (.03)	-0.51*** (.04)
Object: Marijuana	0.04 (.03)	0.01 (.03)	0.08* (.03)	0.02 (.03)	-0.45*** (.05)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.19*** (.03)	0.18*** (.03)	0.16*** (.04)	0.23*** (.03)	0.14** (.04)
TA x Entertainment	-0.03 (.03)	-0.03 (.03)	0.02 (.04)	-0.08** (.03)	-0.04 (.05)
Conservatism	0.18* (.08)	-0.14 (.09)	0.57*** (.10)	0.08 (.08)	0.71*** (.11)
Political Interest	0.11*** (.02)	0.14*** (.02)	0.09*** (.03)	0.12*** (.02)	0.10*** (.03)
Order	-0.01 (.01)	0.003 (.01)	-0.02 (.01)	-0.02 (.01)	-0.02 (.02)
Constant	2.12*** (.15)	2.11*** (.16)	2.06*** (.19)	2.22*** (.15)	2.36*** (.21)
Random Effects var (*SD*)					
Respondent	0.28 (0.53)	0.32 (0.57)	0.41 (0.64)	0.25 (0.5)	0.39 (0.62)
Residual	0.29 (0.54)	0.37 (0.61)	0.52 (0.72)	0.40 (0.63)	0.90 (0.95)
Log likelihood	-2670.45	-2989.23	-3409.14	-3003.2	-3996.26
AIC	5362.9	6000.45	6840.27	6028.41	8014.52
BIC	5427.68	6065.23	6905.05	6093.19	8079.3

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. $N_{respondents} = 667$ and $N_{observations} = 2{,}668$ for all models. The reference group for genre is news, and the reference group for object is politicians/parties/polls.

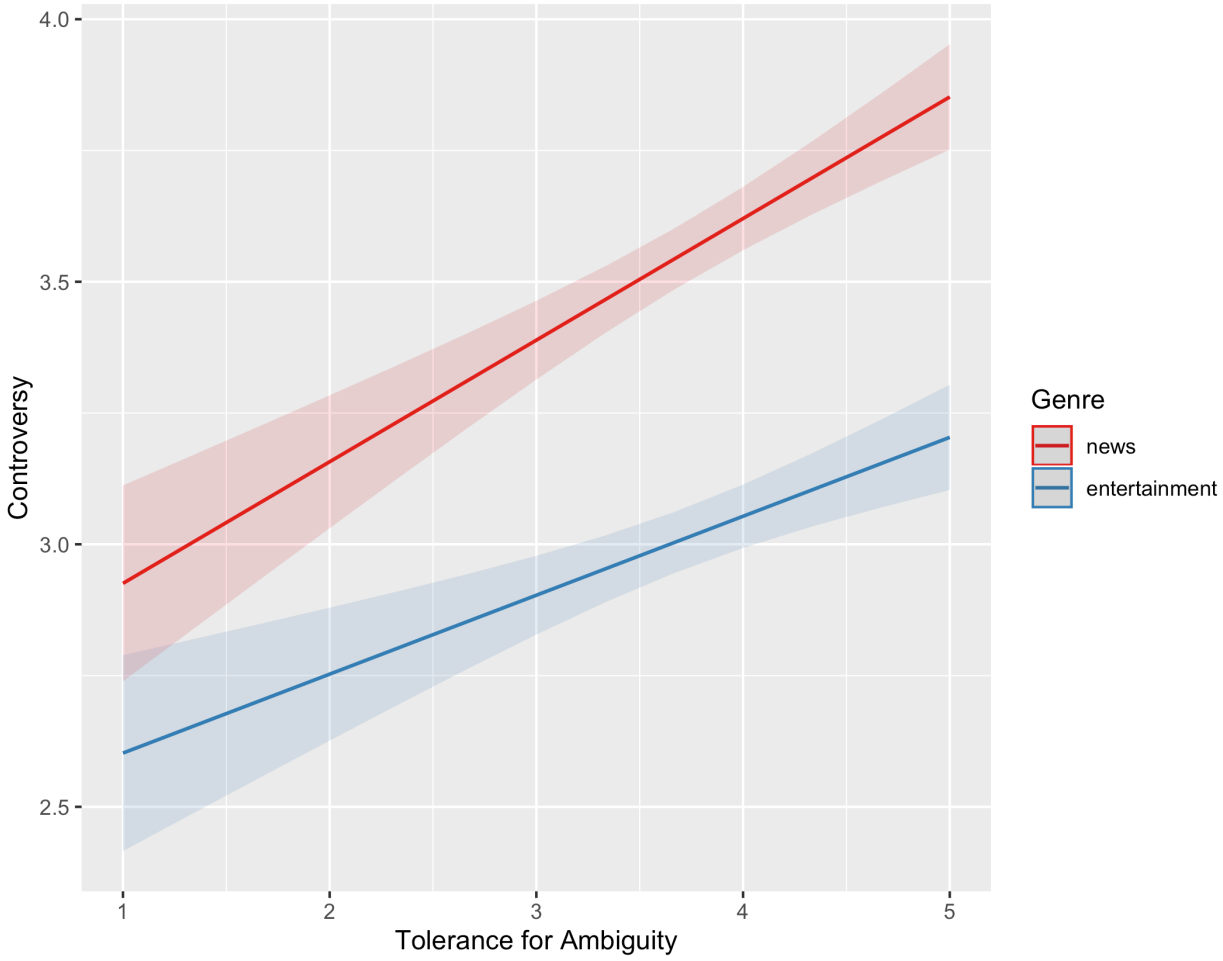

Figure 3.1. Interaction of tolerance for ambiguity and genre on controversy scores.

Because of the effect that TA exhibits on PRM and the other outcome variables independent of controls, I include TA as an additional control variable in all analyses going forward.

Main Analyses

RQ_1. My first research question asked whether participants would evaluate news programs as more politically relevant than entertainment programs. Table 3.2 displays models predicting PRM and the single-item "political" measure predicted by genre (first and last columns), and Table 3.4 displays models predicting PRM and the single-item "political" measure predicted by the presence of politicians/parties/polls. Regardless of the model, genre has a

statistically significant effect on PRM and "political" scores, with entertainment shows being evaluated as less politically relevant and less "political," respectively, than news shows.

Table 3.4. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM and "Political" based on presence of politicians.*

	PRM	**"Political"**
Fixed Effects *b* (SE)		
Genre: Entertainment	-0.42*** (.02)	-0.53*** (.04)
Politicians: Yes	-0.08*** (.02)	0.48*** (.04)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.17*** (.03)	0.13** (.04)
Conservatism	0.18* (.08)	0.71*** (.11)
Political Interest	0.11*** (.02)	0.10*** (.03)
Order	-0.01 (.01)	-0.02 (.02)
Constant	2.25*** (.14)	1.95*** (.19)
Random Effects var (SD)		
Respondent	0.28 (0.53)	0.39 (0.62)
Residual	0.29 (0.54)	0.90 (0.95)
Log likelihood	-2,670.36	-3,993.19
AIC	5,358.72	8,004.39
BIC	5,411.72	8,057.39

Note: $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$. $N_{\text{respondents}} = 667$ and $N_{\text{observations}} = 2{,}668$ for all models. The reference group for genre is news, and the reference group for object is politicians/parties/polls.

H_1. My first hypothesis posits that participants will evaluate shows depicting politicians/parties/polls as more politically relevant than shows depicting social issues. Although shows depicting politicians were evaluated as more "political" than shows depicting social issues, such shows were evaluated as *less* politically relevant than the shows depicting social issues; see Table 3.4.[2] H_1 was unsupported.

H_2. My second hypothesis predicts that there will be less variance in the PRM scores for shows depicting politicians/parties/polls than there will be for shows depicting social issues. A one-tailed *F*-test comparing the variances of PRM scores for shows depicting social issues (0.59)

[2] When familiarity is included as a control, there is no difference in PRM scores for shows depicting social issues and shows depicting politicians.

to the variance of PRM scores for shows depicting politicians (0.71) indicated that the variance of the former is not greater than the variance of the latter, $F(1333) = 0.84$, $p = .99$. Rather, the variance of the latter was greater than the former, $p = .001$. H_2 was unsupported. A similar analysis conducted on the single-item "political" scores showed the opposite: The variance of "political" scores for shows depicting social issues (1.51) was greater than the variance of "political" scores for shows depicting politicians (1.33); $F(1333) = 1.14$, $p = .009$. Thus, the pattern hypothesized by H_2 is found for the single-item "political" measure, whereas the opposite pattern was found for PRM.

Two things are clear based on the analyses conducted to this point. First, PRM and the single-item "political" measure, although moderately correlated (see Table 3.1), are measuring something different. This is an expected—and welcoming—development that I will return to at the end of this chapter and in the conclusion chapter. Second, although shows depicting the cost of healthcare and marijuana as a public safety issue are both evaluated as less "political" than shows depicting politicians, it's shows depicting the cost of healthcare that stand out as more politically relevant than the other shows; see tables 3.2 and 3.5. This could be because the cost of healthcare is a much more politically salient social issue than marijuana as a public safety issue, even if politicians/parties/polls or associated policies are not mentioned. Even though the cost of healthcare hasn't played a major part in the discourse surrounding the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, these current events (including the loss of health insurance due to job loss) may be doing even more to highlight the cost of healthcare as a social issue. Whether because of situational factors driven by current events or because of varying levels of political salience, perhaps the distinction between "social issues" and "politicians/parties/polls" is meaningful

when it comes to evaluations of what is "political" but is too vague a distinction when it comes to *political relevance*. This could have consequences for H_3.

Table 3.5. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM and "Political" based on whether marijuana or politicians are depicted.*

	PRM	**"Political"**
Fixed Effects *b* (SE)		
Genre: Entertainment	-0.42*** (.02)	-0.53*** (.04)
Object: Marijuana	-0.09** (.03)	0.07 (.05)
Object: Politicians	-0.13*** (.03)	0.51*** (.04)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.17*** (.03)	0.13** (.04)
Conservatism	0.18* (.08)	0.71*** (.11)
Political Interest	0.11*** (.02)	0.10*** (.03)
Order	-0.01 (.01)	-0.02 (.02)
Constant	2.30*** (.14)	1.91*** (.19)
Random Effects var (SD)		
Respondent	0.28 (0.53)	0.39 (0.62)
Residual	0.29 (0.54)	0.90 (0.95)
Log likelihood	-2668.28	-3994.44
AIC	5356.56	8008.88
BIC	5415.45	8067.77

Note: $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$. $N_{\text{respondents}} = 667$ and $N_{\text{observations}} = 2{,}668$ for all models. The reference group for genre is news, and the reference group for object is healthcare.

Therefore, when I proceed to my fourth hypothesis examining the interaction of the objects depicted and participants' political identity strength, I will examine all objects (healthcare vs. marijuana vs. politicians/parties/polls) separately in addition to collapsing across social issues (healthcare/marijuana vs. politicians/parties/polls). Likewise, because of the drastic effect of genre (news vs. entertainment) on PRM and single-item "political" scores, I examine the objects x political identity strength interaction for news and entertainment shows separately—essentially a three-way interaction between objects x political identity strength x genre. For analyses involving all objects, I present tables displaying two sets of models: one set with politicians/parties/polls as the reference category for objects, and one set with healthcare as the reference category for objects. I do this to convey whether there are statistically significant

differences between any pair of the three objects. Before I explore this interaction between the objects depicted and participants' political identity strength, I first assess the independent effect of political identity strength on PRM evaluations.

H_3. My third hypothesis predicts that participants with stronger political identities will evaluate shows as more politically relevant than participants with weaker political identities. When issue public membership is the political identity, the objects are limited to healthcare and marijuana, since issue public membership is irrelevant for shows depicting politicians. Table 3.6 displays models predicting the outcome variables based on the three measures of political identity strength. In all models, political identity strength has a statistically significant positive effect on both PRM scores and the single-item "political" measure. H_3 is confirmed.

H_4. My fourth hypothesis predicts that the effect of respondents' political identity strength on evaluating a show as politically relevant will be stronger when the show depicts social issues than when the show depicts politicians/parties/polls. As stated above, I examine this two-way interaction among news and entertainment shows separately. Because issue public membership is irrelevant in the politicians/parties/polls object condition, I only use partisanship and ideological strength as measures of political identity strength. I report these results using ideological strength and partisanship strength as separate measures of political identity strength. I find no statistically significant interactions of whether politicians are depicted and either ideological strength (Table 3.7) or partisan strength (Table 3.8) for either news or entertainment programs.

Further probing revealed an interaction between partisan strength and the presence of politicians on evaluations of entertainment shows as "political"; see Figure 3.2.[3] A simple slopes

[3] This interaction doesn't occur when familiarity is included as a control.

Table 3.6. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM and "Political" based on political identity strength.*

	Ideological Strength		**Partisan Strength**		**Issue Public Membership**	
	PRM	"Political"	PRM	"Political"	PRM	"Political"
Fixed Effects *b* (*SE*)						
Ideological Strength	0.10*** (.02)	0.14*** (.03)				
Partisan Strength			0.08*** (.02)	0.07* (.03)		
Issue Public Membership					0.21*** (.02)	0.19*** (.04)
Genre: Entertainment	-0.42*** (.02)	-0.53*** (.04)	-0.42*** (.02)	-0.53*** (.04)	-0.29*** (.03)	-0.83*** (.05)
Object: Healthcare	0.13*** (.03)	-0.51*** (.04)	0.13*** (.03)	-0.51*** (.04)		
Object: Marijuana	0.04 (.03)	-0.45*** (.04)	0.04 (.03)	-0.45*** (.04)		
Object: Marijuana					0.17*** (.03)	0.12** (.04)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.17*** (.03)	0.12** (.04)	0.17*** (.03)	0.12** (.04)	0.16*** (.03)	0.11** (.04)
Conservatism	0.15 (.08)	0.66*** (.11)	0.16* (.08)	0.69*** (.11)	0.24** (.08)	0.74*** (.12)
Political Interest	0.09*** (.02)	0.07* (.03)	0.10*** (.02)	0.09** (.03)	0.06** (.02)	0.05 (.03)
Order	-0.01 (.01)	-0.02 (.02)	-0.01 (.01)	-0.02 (.02)	-0.02 (.01)	-0.02 (.03)
Constant	2.18*** (.14)	2.43*** (.19)	2.10*** (.14)	2.36*** (.19)	2.09*** (.14)	1.95*** (.22)
Random Effects var (*SD*)						
Respondent	0.27 (0.52)	0.37 (0.61)	0.27 (0.52)	0.39 (0.62)	0.20 (0.45)	0.28 (0.53)
Residual	0.29 (0.54)	0.90 (0.95)	0.29 (0.54)	0.90 (0.95)	0.29 (0.54)	0.97 (0.98)
$N_{observations}$	2,668	2,668	2,668	2,668	1,334	1,334
Log likelihood	-2659.48	-3984.88	-2664.34	-3994.33	-1375.6	-2039.96
AIC	5340.96	7991.76	5350.69	8010.67	2771.2	4099.92
BIC	5405.74	8056.54	5415.47	8075.45	2823.16	4151.87

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. $N_{respondents} = 667$ for all models. The reference group for genre is news. The reference group for object is politicians/parties/polls for ideological and partisan strength models and healthcare for issue public membership models.

Table 3.7. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM and "Political" based on ideological strength and the depiction of politicians.*

	PRM		**"Political"**	
	News	Entertainment	News	Entertainment
Fixed Effects *b* (SE)				
Politicians: Yes	0.00 (.03)	-0.26*** (.05)	0.16** (.06)	0.78*** (.08)
Ideological Strength	0.08*** (.02)	0.09** (.03)	0.17*** (.04)	0.10** (.04)
Ideo. Str. x Politicians	0.03 (.02)	0.03 (.03)	0.00 (.04)	0.00 (.05)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.18*** (.03)	0.16*** (.03)	0.13** (.05)	0.10* (.04)
Conservatism	0.30*** (.08)	0.02 (.09)	0.95*** (.14)	0.40*** (.12)
Political Interest	0.09*** (.02)	0.09*** (.03)	0.01 (.04)	0.13*** (.03)
Order	0.04** (.01)	-0.07*** (.02)	0.04 (.02)	-0.08** (.02)
Constant	2.00*** (.14)	2.20*** (.17)	1.94*** (.24)	1.43*** (.21)
Random Effects var (SD)				
Respondent	0.28 (0.53)	0.32 (0.56)	0.72 (0.85)	0.28 (0.53)
Residual	0.17 (0.41)	0.33 (0.58)	0.56 (0.75)	0.90 (0.95)
Log likelihood	-1204.57	-1529.85	-1942.64	-1998.62
AIC	2429.14	3079.71	3905.29	4017.25
BIC	2481.1	3131.67	3957.25	4069.21

Note: $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$. $N_{respondents}$ = 667 and $N_{observations}$ = 1,334 for all models.

Table 3.8. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM and "Political" based on partisan strength and the depiction of politicians.*

	PRM		**"Political"**	
	News	Entertainment	News	Entertainment
Fixed Effects *b* (SE)				
Politicians: Yes	0.00 (.05)	-0.25*** (.07)	0.08 (.08)	0.93*** (.11)
Partisan Strength	0.03 (.02)	0.10*** (.03)	0.04 (.04)	0.11** (.04)
Part. Str. x Politicians	0.02 (.02)	0.02 (.03)	0.04 (.04)	-0.07 (.05)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.18*** (.03)	0.16*** (.03)	0.14** (.05)	0.10* (.04)
Conservatism	0.31*** (.08)	0.02 (.09)	0.98*** (.14)	0.41*** (.12)
Political Interest	0.10*** (.02)	0.09*** (.02)	0.04 (.04)	0.14*** (.03)
Order	0.04** (.01)	-0.07*** (.02)	0.04 (.02)	-0.08** (.02)
Constant	1.96*** (.15)	2.09*** (.17)	1.92*** (.25)	1.29*** (.22)
Random Effects var (SD)				
Respondent	0.29 (0.54)	0.31 (0.56)	0.75 (0.87)	0.29 (0.54)
Residual	0.17 (0.41)	0.33 (0.58)	0.55 (0.74)	0.90 (0.95)
Log likelihood	-1213.02	-1529.52	-1951.8	-2000.43
AIC	2446.05	3079.05	3923.61	4020.85
BIC	2498	3131.01	3975.57	4072.81

Note: $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$. $N_{respondents}$ = 667 and $N_{observations}$ = 1,334 for all models.

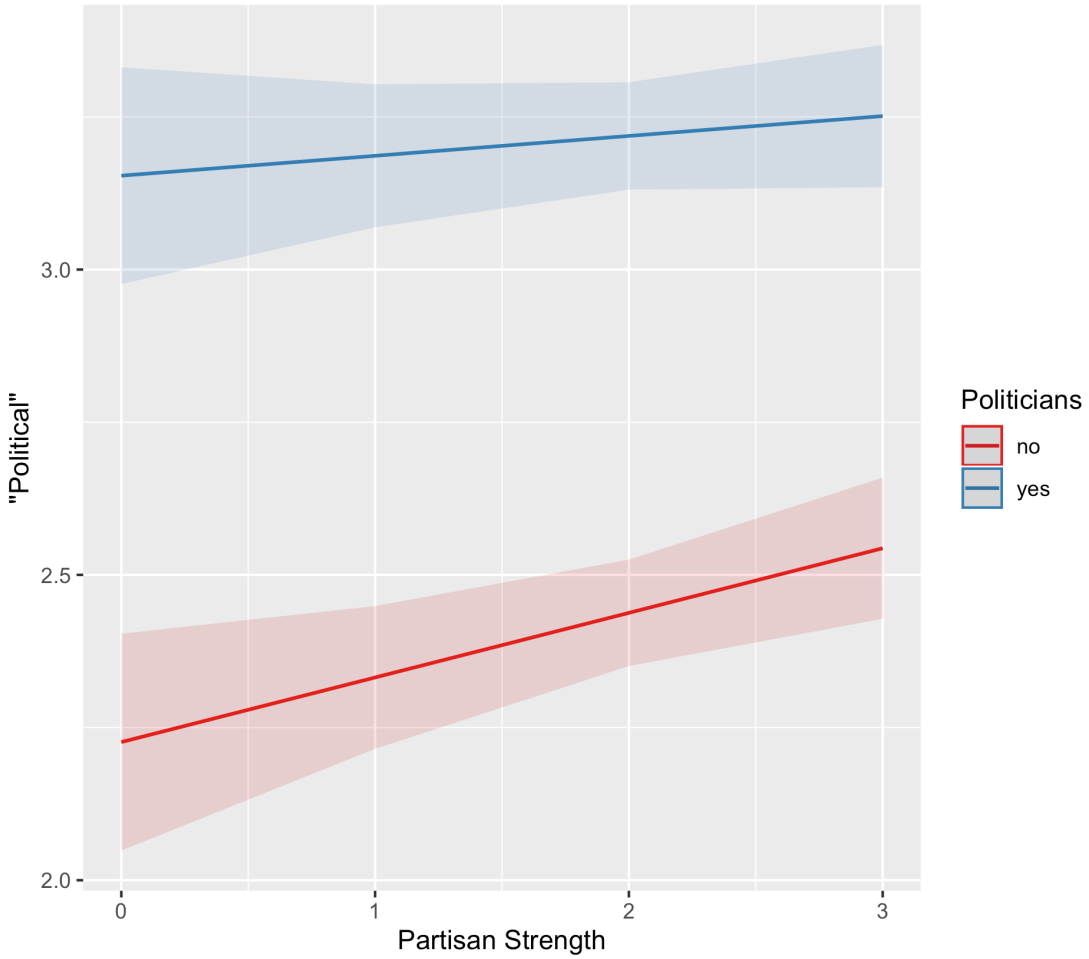

Figure 3.2. Interaction of partisan strength and the presence of politicians/parties/polls on "political" scores.

analysis showed that the effect of partisan strength on "political" evaluations for entertainment shows depicting politicians was nonsignificant, $b = 0.03$, $SE = .04$, $p = .203$; however, the effect of partisan strength on "political" evaluations for entertainment shows depicting social issues was statistically significant, $b = 0.11$, $SE = .04$, $p = .004$. This moderation effect is convergent-positive and contingent (Holbert & Park, 2019): 1) shows depicting politicians/parties/polls are evaluated as more "political" than shows depicting social issues, 2) there is no effect of partisan strength for shows depicting politicians/parties/polls, but 3) there is a positive effect of partisan strength for shows depicting social issues. H_4 was unsupported; however, the hypothesized

interaction occurred for "political" evaluations rather than PRM, and for partisan strength but not for other measures of political identity strength. What is evident, though, is that the presence of politicians on entertainment shows has a strong, positive effect on whether those shows are evaluated as "political"; however, the presence of politicians has a weaker, negative effect on evaluations of entertainment shows as politically relevant.

Now I turn to the same analysis, using the objects depicted (healthcare vs. marijuana vs. politicians/parties/polls) rather than the presence/absence of politicians (social issues vs. politicians/parties/polls). For ideological strength as the measure of political identity strength (tables 3.9 and 3.10 and Figure 3.3), I find statistically significant interactions with marijuana, for news shows: The effect of ideological strength on PRM scores is weaker for news shows depicting marijuana than it is for news shows depicting politicians and for news shows depicting

Table 3.9. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM and "Political" based on ideological strength.*

	PRM		**"Political"**	
	News	Entertainment	News	Entertainment
Fixed Effects *b* (SE)				
Object: Healthcare	0.05 (.05)	0.34*** (.06)	-0.15 (.09)	-0.91*** (.10)
Object: Marijuana	-0.06 (.04)	0.17* (.07)	-0.17* (.08)	-0.64*** (.10)
Ideological Strength	0.11*** (.02)	0.12*** (.03)	0.17*** (.04)	0.10** (.04)
Ideo. Str. x Healthcare	0.01 (.03)	-0.06 (.04)	0.04 (.05)	0.05 (.06)
Ideo. Str. x Marijuana	-0.06* (.03)	0.00 (.04)	-0.04 (.05)	-0.06 (.06)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.18*** (.03)	0.16*** (.03)	0.13** (.05)	0.10* (.04)
Conservatism	0.29*** (.08)	0.02 (.09)	0.95*** (.14)	0.40*** (.12)
Political Interest	0.09*** (.02)	0.09*** (.03)	0.01 (.04)	0.13*** (.03)
Order	0.03** (.01)	-0.08*** (.02)	0.04 (.02)	-0.08** (.02)
Constant	2.00*** (.14)	1.95*** (.17)	2.11*** (.24)	2.20*** (.21)
Random Effects var (SD)				
Respondent	0.29 (0.54)	0.32 (0.56)	0.73 (0.86)	0.28 (0.53)
Residual	0.16 (0.40)	0.33 (0.58)	0.55 (0.74)	0.90 (0.95)
Log likelihood	-1,193.22	-1,531.74	-1,943.97	-1,999.52
AIC	2,410.44	3,087.47	3,911.94	4,023.04
BIC	2,472.79	3,149.83	3,974.29	4,085.39

Note: $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$. $N_{respondents} = 667$ and $N_{observations} = 1{,}334$ for all models. The reference group for object is politicians/parties/polls.

Table 3.10. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM and "Political" based on ideological strength.*

	PRM		**"Political"**	
	News	Entertainment	News	Entertainment
Fixed Effects *b* (SE)				
Object: Marijuana	-0.11 (.06)	-0.17* (.08)	-0.03 (.11)	0.27* (.13)
Object: Politicians	-0.05 (.05)	-0.34*** (.06)	0.15 (.09)	0.91*** (.10)
Ideological Strength	0.13*** (.03)	0.06 (.04)	0.21*** (.05)	0.15** (.05)
Ideo. Str. x Marijuana	-0.08* (.04)	0.07 (.05)	-0.08 (.06)	-0.11 (.07)
Ideo. Str. x Politicians	-0.01 (.03)	0.06 (.04)	-0.04 (.05)	-0.05 (.06)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.18*** (.03)	0.16*** (.03)	0.13** (.05)	0.10* (.04)
Conservatism	0.29*** (.08)	0.02 (.09)	0.95*** (.14)	0.40*** (.12)
Political Interest	0.09*** (.02)	0.09*** (.03)	0.01 (.04)	0.13*** (.03)
Order	0.03** (.01)	-0.08*** (.02)	0.04 (.02)	-0.08** (.02)
Constant	2.06*** (.15)	2.29*** (.17)	1.96*** (.25)	1.29*** (.22)
Random Effects var (SD)				
Respondent	0.29 (0.54)	0.32 (0.56)	0.73 (0.86)	0.28 (0.53)
Residual	0.16 (0.40)	0.33 (0.58)	0.55 (0.74)	0.90 (0.95)
Log likelihood	-1,193.22	-1,531.74	-1,943.97	-1,999.52
AIC	2,410.44	3,087.47	3,911.94	4,023.04
BIC	2,472.79	3,149.83	3,974.29	4,085.39

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. $N_{respondents} = 667$ and $N_{observations} = 1{,}334$ for all models. The reference group for object is healthcare.

healthcare. No significant interactions were found for the single-item "political" measure. For partisan strength as the measure of political identity strength (Figure 3.4 and tables 3.11 and 3.12), no significant interactions were found for PRM scores; however, two were found for the single-item "political" measure. First, the effect of partisan strength on "political" scores is weaker for news shows depicting marijuana than for news shows depicting politicians. Second, the effect of partisan strength on "political" scores is stronger for entertainment shows depicting healthcare than for entertainment shows depicting politicians.

Interpreting such interactions is difficult, considering that the moderator is a nominal variable—that is, it's hard to understand what it means that one interaction term or another is statistically significant or not. To gain some understanding of when political identity strength has an effect on the outcome variables depending on the objects depicted, I further probed all

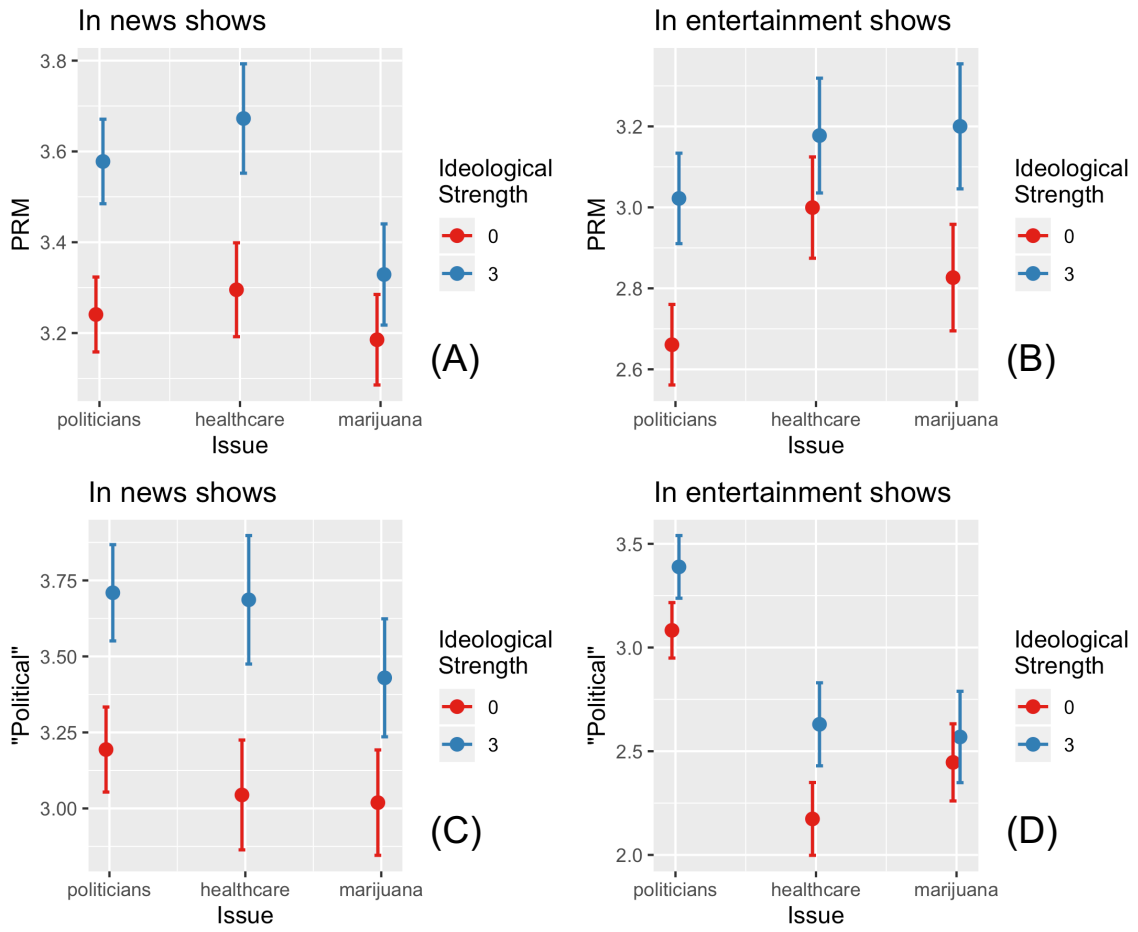

Figure 3.3. Interaction of objects, ideological strength, and genre.

interactions by examining their interaction plots; see Figure 3.3 for plots for ideological strength and Figure 3.4 for plots for partisan strength. At a glance, it's evident that the effect of the political identity strength measures is not uniform across the objects depicted, indicating that PRM and "political" evaluations are a function of both media content and political identity strength. Still, some patterns emerge. For example, although ideological strength has an effect on both PRM and "political" scores for news shows across almost all objects (see Figure 3.3, panels A and C), partisan strength has little effect on either outcome variable for news shows regardless of the object depicted (see Figure 3.4, panels A and C).

The patterns for both ideological and partisan strength are similar for entertainment shows as well. For both measures of political identity strength, evaluation of entertainment

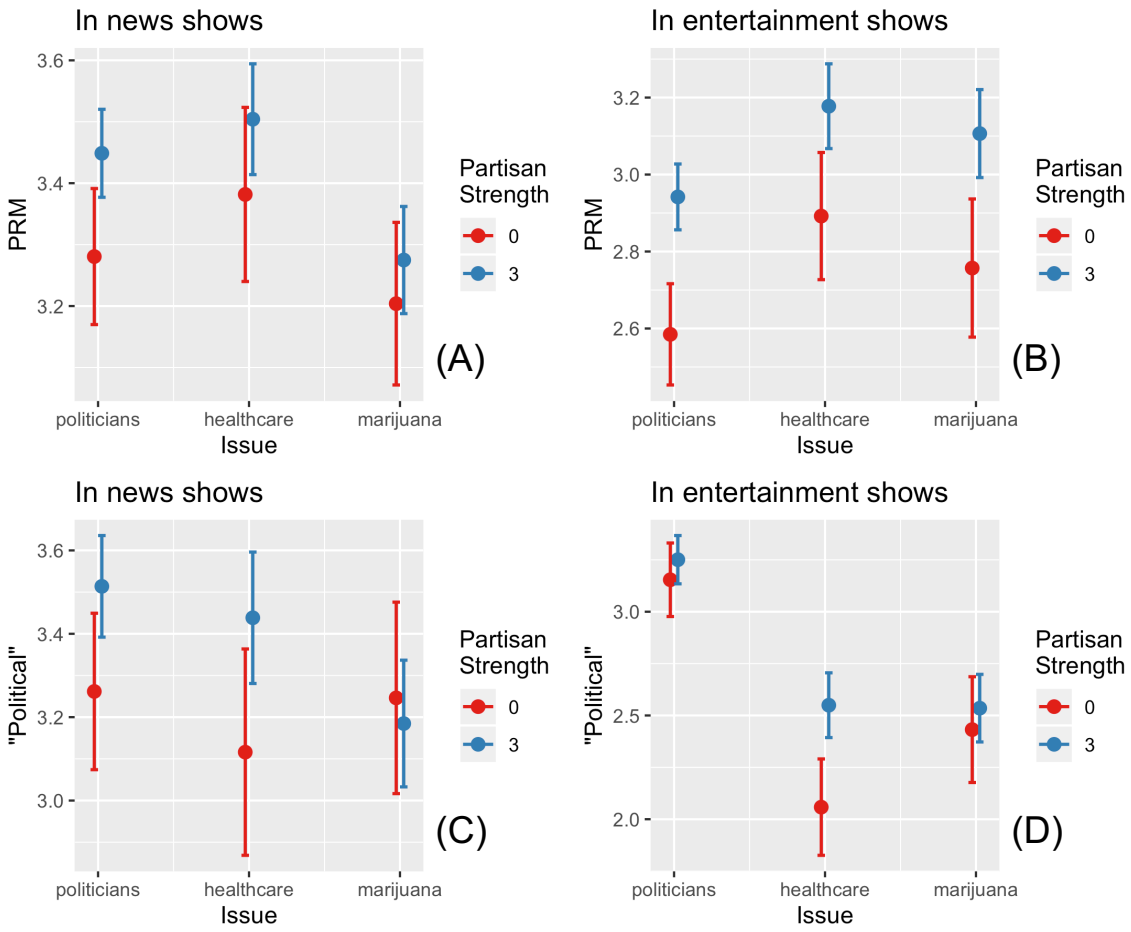

Figure 3.4. Interaction of objects, partisan strength, and genre.

shows as "political" seems mostly driven by the presence/absence of politicians. Programs depicting politicians/parties/polls were evaluated as more "political" than shows depicting healthcare or marijuana, regardless of participants' political identity strength. On the other hand, PRM scores for entertainment programs seem to be much more influenced by both measures of political identity strength in addition to the objects depicted, with no object standing out as more politically relevant than other objects across the range of political identity strength. This is another indicator that when it comes to entertainment programs, political identity strength is more related to evaluations of a show as politically relevant, whereas the presence/absence of politicians is more related to evaluations of a show as "political." In sum, PRM and the single-

item "political" measure are telling us something different, and the former is more related to the political identities of viewers, while the latter is more related to what objects appear on screen.

Table 3.11. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM and "Political" based on partisan strength.*

	PRM		**"Political"**	
	News	Entertainment	News	Entertainment
Fixed Effects *b* (SE)				
Object: Healthcare	0.10 (.06)	0.31*** (.08)	-0.15 (.12)	-1.10*** (.13)
Object: Marijuana	-0.08 (.06)	0.17 (.09)	-0.02 (.11)	-0.72*** (.14)
Partisan Strength	0.06* (.02)	0.12*** (.03)	0.08* (.04)	0.03 (.04)
Part. Str. x Healthcare	-0.02 (.03)	-0.02 (.04)	0.02 (.05)	0.13* (.06)
Part. Str. x Marijuana	-0.03 (.03)	0.00 (.04)	-0.10* (.05)	0.00 (.06)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.18*** (.03)	0.16*** (.03)	0.14** (.05)	0.11* (.04)
Conservatism	0.31*** (.08)	0.02 (.09)	0.98*** (.14)	0.41*** (.12)
Political Interest	0.10*** (.02)	0.09*** (.02)	0.04 (.04)	0.14*** (.03)
Order	0.04** (.01)	-0.07*** (.02)	0.04 (.02)	-0.08** (.02)
Constant	1.95*** (.15)	1.84*** (.17)	2.00*** (.25)	2.22*** (.22)
Random Effects var (SD)				
Respondent	0.30 (0.55)	0.31 (0.56)	0.76 (0.87)	0.29 (0.54)
Residual	0.16 (0.40)	0.33 (0.58)	0.55 (0.74)	0.90 (0.95)
Log likelihood	-1203.96	-1532.05	-1952.02	-2001.17
AIC	2431.91	3088.10	3928.04	4026.34
BIC	2494.26	3150.45	3990.39	4088.69

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. $N_{respondents}$ = 667 and $N_{observations}$ = 1,334 for all models. The reference group for object is politicians/parties/polls.

RQ_2. My second research question asks if the effect of political identity strength on PRM scores will be different between news and entertainment programming. Table 3.13 displays models to which the interaction between political identity strength and genre were added. Only one interaction term was statistically significant: The effect of partisan strength on PRM scores is stronger for entertainment shows than for news shows.[4] Specifically, although partisan strength has a significant effect on PRM for news shows ($b = 0.05$, $SE = .02$, $p = .017$), its effect on PRM for entertainment shows is stronger ($b = 0.11$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$); see Figure 3.5. Further

[4] When familiarity is included as a control, there is no statistically significant effect of partisan strength on PRM for news shows.

Table 3.12. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM and "Political" based on partisan strength.*

	PRM		**"Political"**	
	News	Entertainment	News	Entertainment
Fixed Effects *b* (SE)				
Object: Marijuana	-0.18* (.08)	-0.14 (.11)	0.13 (.15)	0.37* (.17)
Object: Politicians	-0.10 (.06)	-0.31*** (.08)	0.15 (.12)	1.10*** (.13)
Partisan Strength	0.04 (.03)	0.10* (.04)	0.11* (.05)	0.16** (.05)
Part. Str. x Marijuana	-0.02 (.04)	0.02 (.05)	-0.13 (.07)	-0.13 (.08)
Part. Str. x Politicians	0.02 (.03)	0.02 (.04)	-0.02 (.05)	-0.13* (.06)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.18*** (.03)	0.16*** (.03)	0.14** (.05)	0.11* (.04)
Conservatism	0.31*** (.08)	0.02 (.09)	0.98*** (.14)	0.41*** (.12)
Political Interest	0.10*** (.02)	0.09*** (.02)	0.04 (.04)	0.14*** (.03)
Order	0.04** (.01)	-0.07*** (.02)	0.04 (.02)	-0.08** (.02)
Constant	2.05*** (.15)	2.15*** (.18)	1.86*** (.26)	1.12*** (.23)
Random Effects var (SD)				
Respondent	0.30 (0.55)	0.31 (0.56)	0.76 (0.87)	0.29 (0.54)
Residual	0.16 (0.40)	0.33 (0.58)	0.55 (0.74)	0.90 (0.95)
Log likelihood	-1203.96	-1532.05	-1952.02	-2001.17
AIC	2431.91	3088.10	3928.04	4026.34
BIC	2494.26	3150.45	3990.39	4088.69

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. $N_{\text{respondents}} = 667$ and $N_{\text{observations}} = 1{,}334$ for all models. The reference group for object is healthcare.

probing of all interactions by plotting them and conducting simple slopes analysis to see if there is some effect of political identity strength for one genre but not the other did not reveal any additional interactions.

Still, there are fascinating findings regarding the effect of ideological strength and issue public membership across genres. Although I find that participants in general evaluate news shows as being more politically relevant and more "political" than entertainment shows, these evaluations are very much dependent on individuals' ideological strength and issue public membership. In some cases, I find that individuals with stronger political identities evaluate entertainment programming as just as politically relevant or "political," if not more politically relevant, than individuals with weaker political identities evaluate news shows. Notably, strong ideologues (extreme liberals and conservatives, who score a 3 on a 0-to-3 scale of ideological

Table 3.13. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM and "Political" based on the political identity strength x genre interaction.*

	Ideological Strength		**Partisan Strength**		**Issue Public Membership**	
	PRM	"Political"	PRM	"Political"	PRM	"Political"
Fixed Effects *b* (*SE*)						
Ideological Strength	0.10*** (.02)	0.16*** (.03)				
Partisan Strength			0.05* (.02)	0.06 (.03)		
Issue Public Membership					0.18*** (.03)	0.22*** (.05)
Genre: Entertainment	-0.43*** (.03)	-0.46*** (.06)	-0.54*** (.04)	-0.56*** (.08)	-0.37*** (.07)	-0.73*** (.12)
Entertainment x Ideo. Str.	0.00 (.02)	-0.05 (.03)				
Entertainment x Part. Str.			0.06** (.02)	0.02 (.03)		
Entertainment x IPM					0.05 (.04)	-0.06 (.07)
Object: Healthcare	0.13*** (.03)	-0.51*** (.04)	0.13*** (.03)	-0.51*** (.04)		
Object: Marijuana	0.04 (.03)	-0.45*** (.04)	0.04 (.03)	-0.45*** (.05)		
Object: Marijuana					0.03 (.03)	0.15** (.06)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.17*** (.03)	0.12** (.04)	0.17*** (.03)	0.12** (.04)	0.16*** (.03)	0.11** (.04)
Conservatism	0.15 (.08)	0.66*** (.11)	0.16* (.08)	0.69*** (.11)	0.23** (.08)	0.75*** (.12)
Political Interest	0.09*** (.02)	0.07* (.03)	0.10*** (.02)	0.09** (.03)	0.06** (.02)	0.05 (.03)
Order	-0.01 (.01)	-0.02 (.02)	-0.01 (.01)	-0.02 (.02)	-0.02 (.01)	-0.03 (.03)
Constant	2.18*** (.14)	2.40*** (.19)	2.16*** (.14)	2.38*** (.19)	2.13*** (.15)	1.90*** (.23)
Random Effects var (*SD*)						
Respondent	0.27 (0.52)	0.37 (0.61)	0.27 (0.52)	0.39 (0.62)	0.21 (0.45)	0.28 (0.53)
Residual	0.29 (0.54)	0.90 (0.95)	0.29 (0.53)	0.90 (0.95)	0.29 (0.54)	0.97 (0.99)
$N_{observations}$	2,668	2,668	2,668	2,668	1,334	1,334
Log likelihood	-2662.54	-3986.27	-2662.37	-3996.67	-1376.97	-2041.37
AIC	5349.09	7996.54	5348.75	8017.34	2775.95	4104.75
BIC	5419.76	8067.21	5419.42	8088.01	2833.11	4161.9

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. $N_{respondents} = 667$ for all models. The reference group for genre is news. The reference group for object is politicians/parties/polls for ideological and partisan strength models and healthcare for issue public membership models.

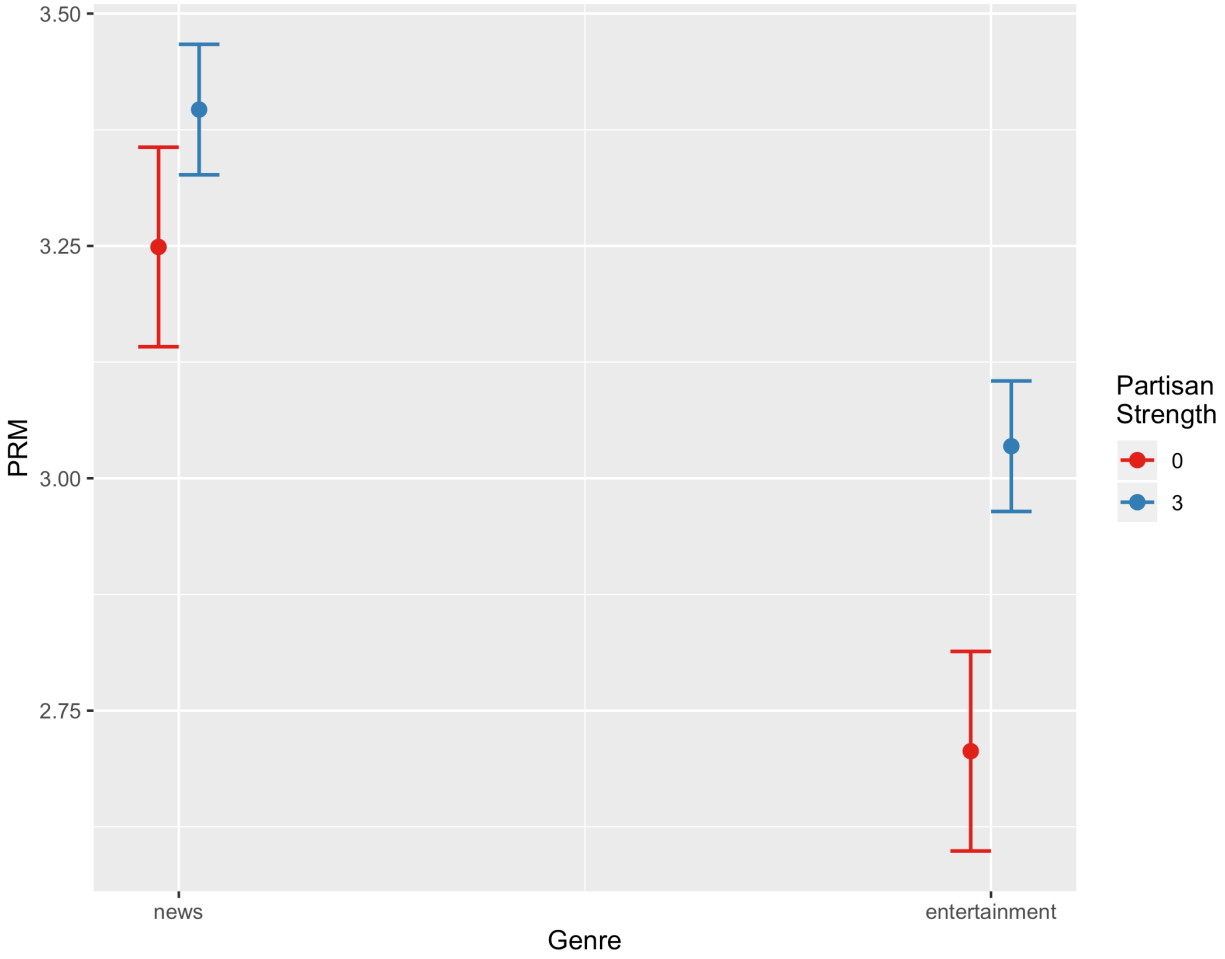

Figure 3.5. Interaction of partisan strength and genre on PRM scores.

strength) evaluate entertainment programs as just as politically relevant as weak ideologues (moderates, who score a 0 on a 0-to-3 scale of ideological strength) evaluate news programs; see Table 3.14 and Figure 3.6. This same non-difference was also found for evaluations of shows as "political": strong ideologues evaluate entertainment programs as just as "political" as weak ideologues evaluate news programs; see Figure 3.7.

Likewise, strong issue public members (those who score a 3 on a 0-to-3 scale of issue public membership) evaluate entertainment programs as just as "political" as issue public non-members (those who score a 0 on a 0-to-3 scale of issue public membership) evaluate news programs; see Figure 3.8. Even more importantly, strong issue public members evaluate

Table 3.14. *Predictions and means comparisons by genre and political identity strength.*

	Weak Ideologues for News Shows			Strong Ideologues for Entertainment Shows					
	M	*SE*	95% CI	*M*	*SE*	95% CI	*t*	df	*p*
PRM	3.21	.04	[3.13, 3.29]	3.09	.05	[3.00, 3.18]	1.87	5334	.061
"Political"	3.40	.06	[3.29, 3.52]	3.27	.07	[3.15, 3.40]	1.41	5334	.159
	Issue Public Non-Members for News Shows			Strong Issue Public Members for Entertainment Shows					
	M	*SE*	95% CI	*M*	*SE*	95% CI	*t*	df	*p*
PRM	3.04	.07	[2.91, 3.17]	3.37	.05	[3.28, 3.47]	2.73	2666	.006
"Political"	2.85	.11	[2.63, 3.06]	2.61	.08	[2.45, 2.77]	1.76	2666	.078

Note: N for ideological strength comparisons is 2,668, and N for issue public membership comparisons is 1,334.

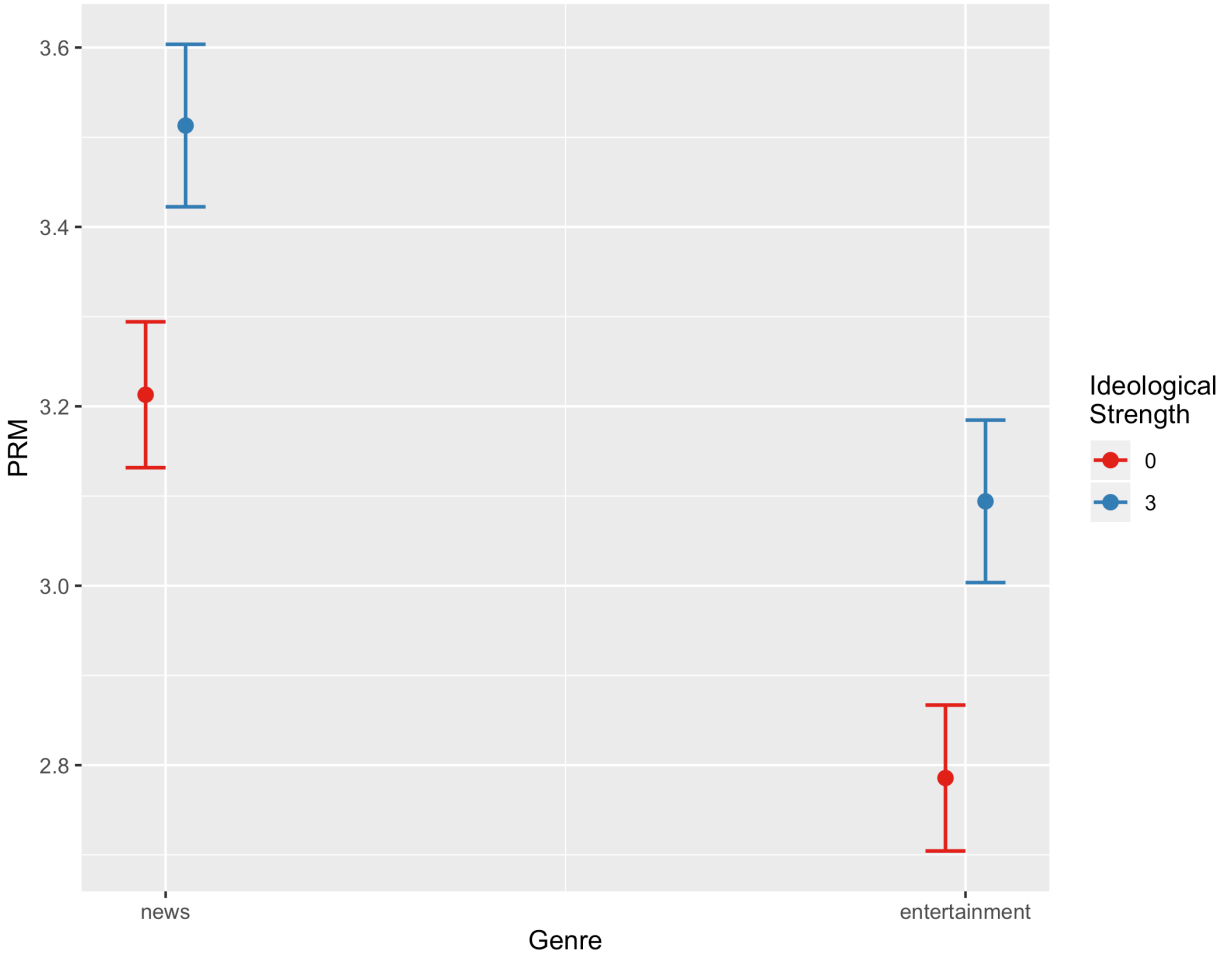

Figure 3.6. Interaction of ideological strength and genre on PRM scores.

entertainment programs as being *more* politically relevant than issue public non-members evaluate news programs; see Figure 3.9. In other words, depending on one's political identity strength and despite the fact that news shows are evaluated as more politically relevant and more "political" than entertainment programming overall, a person may evaluate entertainment programming as just as "political" and politically relevant, *if not more* politically relevant, as another person evaluates news programming. This finding further underscores the limitations of an arbitrary boundary between news and entertainment programming in terms of political relevance, as well as the need to take viewers' identities into account in determining what particular programs any given viewer might evaluate as politically relevant.

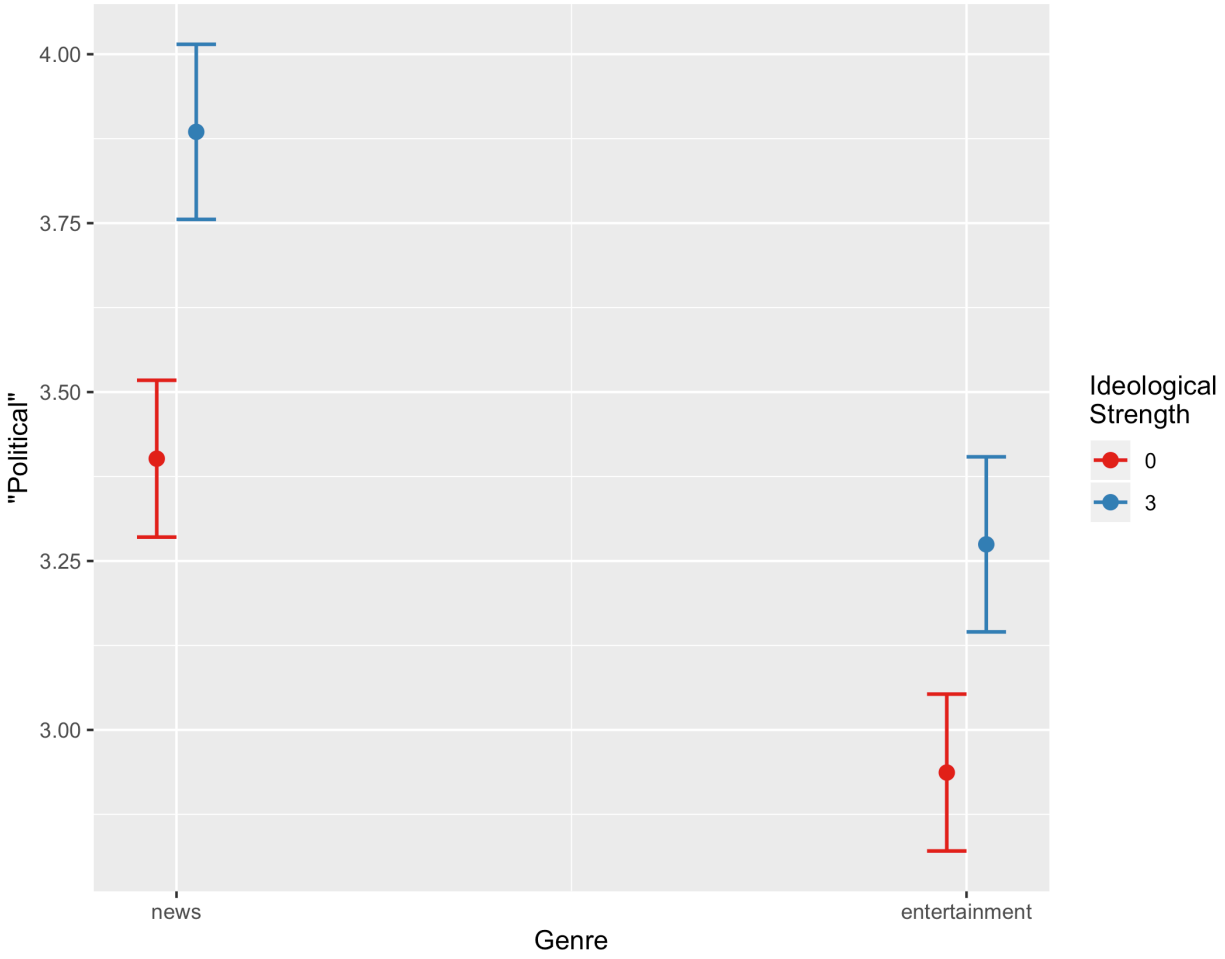

Figure 3.7. Interaction of ideological strength and genre on "political" scores.

Discussion

The primary objective of the current study was to provide evidence of the evaluation hypothesis: That evaluations of media as politically relevant are co-determined by media content acting as a moderator for the strength of media consumers' political identities. Specifically, I predicted that the effect of political identity strength will be weakest when the show depicts politicians/parties/polls and strongest when the show depicts social issues. I find no support for this prediction. Instead, I find that the effect of political identity strength on PRM and "political" scores varies between genres, different measures of political identity strength, and types of objects depicted in a way that cannot be as easily delineated as politicians vs. social issues.

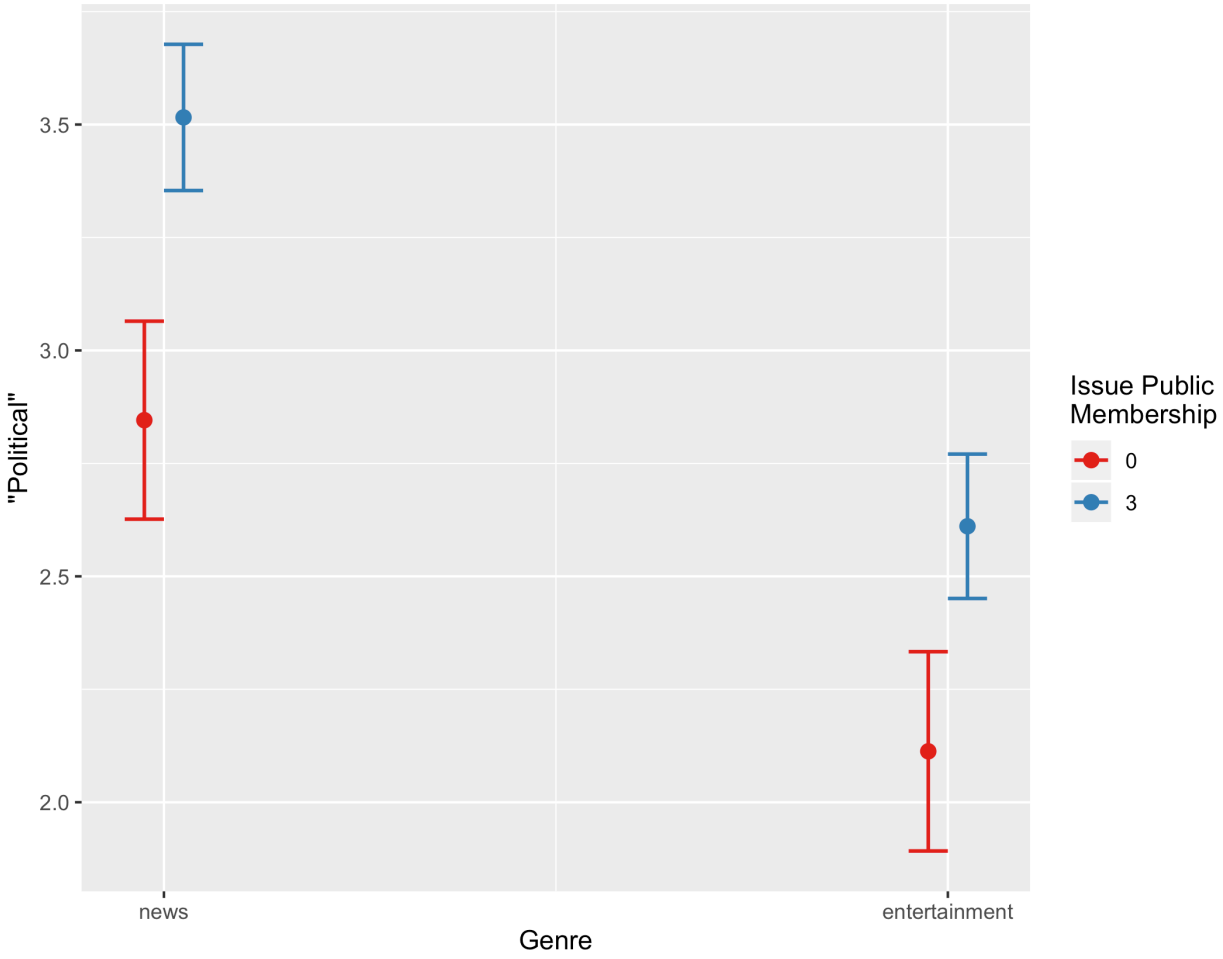

Figure 3.8. Interaction of issue public membership and genre on "political" scores.

Although these results do not support the ability to easily determine under which circumstances (i.e., based on what *class* of objects is depicted) political identity strength will have a greater or weaker effect on evaluations of television shows as politically relevant, they do support the notion that the object depicted will determine the effect of political identity strength.

The difficulty in classifying the objects depicted as politicians/parties/polls as opposed to social issues could stem from a number of issues. First, in order to achieve the cleanest manipulation of the objects depicted, I chose stimuli that depicted politicians/parties/polls absent any reference to any sort of policy or social issue. It could be the case that a show depicting politicians/parties/polls absent any particular issue is evaluated differently than a show depicting

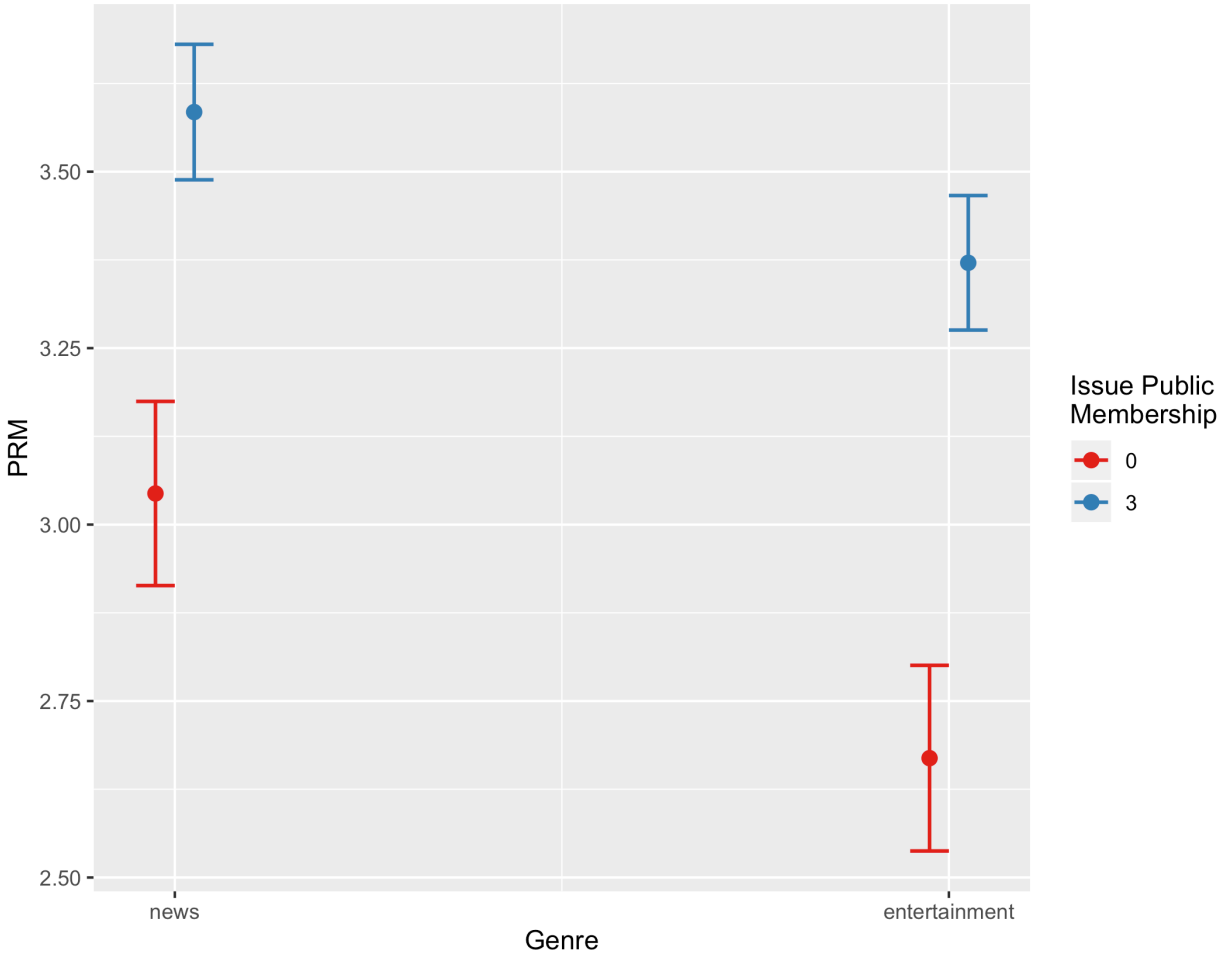

Figure 3.9. Interaction of issue public membership and genre on PRM scores.

politicians debating some policy related to a social issue. Likewise, I sometimes find that the effects of political identities on the outcome variables is stronger for shows depicting healthcare than for shows depicting marijuana, indicating that there is variability in how different social issues might moderate the effect of political identity strength. In the next study, I add two additional social issues to the list of objects that respondents will be exposed to in the show description stimuli. This will provide the opportunity to test the selection hypothesis across a greater range of social issues.

In terms of my second hypothesis regarding consensus around evaluations of political relevance for shows depicting politicians/parties/polls as compared to social issues, I do not find

support for this prediction for PRM scores. In fact, there was greater variance in PRM scores for shows depicting politicians than there was for shows depicting social issues. In other words, participants were less in agreement that the shows depicting politicians were politically relevant than they were in agreement that the shows depicting social issues were politically relevant. As I noted above regarding the circumstances under which politicians were depicted in my stimuli, this finding could be because participants find depictions of politicians absent the discussion of any sort of social issue or policy to be less politically relevant—not very "close to home," as Eliasoph's (1997) subjects would say. That seems to be the clearest distinction between the PRM scale and the single-item "political" measure: the former captures sentiments of objects one might call "close to home" but not "political," whereas the latter captures sentiments of objects that are distant and perhaps less meaningful to viewers. The inner workings of Congress and political campaigns may seem too far an abstraction absent some clear connection to the everyday lives of citizens. On the other hand, "political" scores did follow the expected consensus pattern, with lesser variance in "political" scores for shows depicting politicians than for shows depicting social issues. My respondents were in greater agreement that show depicting politicians are "political" than they were in agreement that shows depicting social issues are "political."

Likewise, I found no support for my prediction that respondents would evaluate shows depicting politicians as more politically relevant than shows depicting social issues; in fact, shows depicting politicians were evaluated as *less* politically relevant than shows depicting social issues. This, despite the fact that respondents evaluated shows depicting politicians as more "political" than shows depicting social issues. In retrospect, it makes sense that shows depicting politicians would be evaluated as more "political" and for there to be greater consensus

around such evaluations, even if the same was not found for evaluations of such shows as politically relevant. This is also where we begin to get the sense that PRM and "political" are measuring something different. As we also see in the results to H_3 for the evaluation of entertainment shows as "political," the presence of politicians seems to be a strong predictor of whether a show will be rated as "political." The entire point of the PRM scale was to develop a measure of political relevance that would not fall victim to this narrow definition of the political. There is clear evidence that I have succeeded on that front.

Furthermore, it appears as if entertainment shows are especially susceptible to being evaluated as more "political" due to the presence of politicians. Considering that my primary interest is in the perceived political relevance of entertainment programming, this is clear evidence for the need for the PRM scale as opposed to simply asking viewers if an entertainment show is "political." Based on the results of the current study, asking if an entertainment show is "political" isn't much different from asking if the entertainment show depicted politicians. In contrast, both the objects depicted and the viewer's political identity strength are determining factors in PRM scores for entertainment shows. On that front, my results also demonstrate a positive relationship between political identity strength and evaluations of shows as politically relevant and as "political." Thus, it's not that political identity strength has no bearing on evaluations of shows as "political"; instead, my findings overall indicate that despite this effect, the presence/absence of politicians is the primary determining factor.

I also find that news programs are evaluated as more politically relevant and as more "political" than entertainment programs. This is unsurprising, considering how news programs are presented by the media industry and how they've been treated by media scholars. Still, this study points to the need to consider the effect of political identity strength across genres. I find

that partisan strength has a stronger effect on the evaluations of entertainment programs as politically relevant than it does on such evaluations for news programs. This is further evidence of the need to attend to political identity strength as a determinant of evaluations of entertainment programming in particular. Additionally, my findings regarding the differences between how strong vs. weak ideologues and strong issue public members vs. issue public non-members evaluate news vs. entertainment programs illuminate just how important it is to consider how political identity strength influences the evaluations of entertainment programming. I found that strong ideologues evaluated entertainment programming as just as politically relevant and "political" as weak ideologues evaluated news shows, and strong issue public members evaluated entertainment shows as just as "political" as issue public non-members evaluated news shows. Most importantly, strong issue public members evaluated entertainment shows as *more* politically relevant than issue public non-members evaluated news shows.

This, more than any other finding, evidences why we need to take a viewer-centric approach to the identification of politically relevant media. Although viewers in general seem to consider news shows to be more politically relevant and "political" than entertainment shows, careful attention to the strength of individual viewers' political identities may reveal when they think of entertainment shows as just as politically relevant and "political," and possibly more politically relevant, than news shows. My findings here show that there's no clear way to delineate between media that is more or less politically relevant based on attributes of the media alone, be it genre or content. The viewer is the final arbiter of how politically relevant any particular media text is, and media attributes are merely co-determinants in that evaluation.

Why does it matter how politically relevant viewers think any particular television show is? I contend that such evaluations affect politically motivated selective exposure to entertainment media. Having now demonstrated 1) the ability of political identity strength and the objects depicted in media to determine PRM scores, 2) the strengths of the PRM scale over single-item measures of how "political" media content is, and 3) the need to consider political identity strength and PRM evaluations specifically in the context of entertainment media, I proceed to the final study in this project. In the next chapter, I test whether PRM scores mediate the effect of political identity strength on the selective exposure of entertainment media.

Chapter 4: Testing the Selection Hypothesis

Having validated the PRM scale and evidenced the relationship between show content, political identity strength, and evaluating a show as politically relevant, Study 4 examines politically motivated selective exposure of fictional entertainment television programming depicting social issues.

It is necessary to start with an overview of what selective exposure is from a conceptual and methodological standpoint. Selective exposure is defined as any bias in exposure to media content, such that the media one consumes diverges in composition from the available media content (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). Although this divergence could be toward any attribute of media content and based on any bias of the media consumer (e.g., sports fans who primarily choose to watch sports programming), here and in the political communication literature the term is used to indicate the selection of media congruent with political attitudes or identities. Thus, politically motivated selective exposure comprises two features: selection of some media content over other media content, under the condition that the selected content is politically congenial to one's views.

Selection can take the form of discrete media choices (e.g., selecting to watch a given television show over another show at a particular point in time) or of media preferences, typically identified as the abstraction of choice tendencies in the aggregate (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). In other words, an individual who frequently chooses some media content over others could be said to have a preference for the frequently chosen media content. The operative words here are "over others"—selection takes place in an environment in which the

media consumer has various options for media consumption and can make a decision to consume some media content out of a pool of potential choices. I will return to this below in the discussion of methodology and measuring selective exposure.

Closely related to selection, either in terms of choice or preference, is avoidance. The selection of some media content over others could be a result of a desire to consume the chosen media or a desire to avoid unchosen media (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). In other words, media selection may either be due to a genuine desire to consume particular media content, or it could be due to a desire to consume media that is *not* the other available options (rather than consume no media at all). The reverse of this is also true: not choosing some particular media content and choosing some other media content could be the result of avoidance of the unchosen content or merely of a stronger desire to consume the chosen content. In short, selective avoidance can only be inferred from selection behaviors; it cannot be measured directly through experimental methods, which are the most common and most desirable ways of examining selective exposure (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). One would have to explicitly ask people whether they were avoiding exposure to particular media content, which would require a level of awareness over one's media choices that is greater than what is assumed under the selective exposure paradigm (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015).

This has implications for what conclusions can be drawn from any study of selective exposure/avoidance. Of note, this is not a question of whether selective approach or avoidance are two equally strong tendencies (e.g., Garrett & Stroud, 2014), but rather what insight can be drawn from observing individuals select some media content and not select other media content. Whereas selection definitely indicates a desire for some content over others, it's not necessarily the case that non-selection indicates avoidance of certain content; it could also simply mean less

desire for the unchosen content. Methodologically, we can infer that avoidance (and its inverse, approach) has occurred based on attributes that differentiate chosen vs. unchosen content over the course of multiple selections. In the case of politically motivated selective exposure, selective exposure is often measured as the degree to which pro-attitudinal content is selected, and selective avoidance is measured as the degree to which counter-attitudinal content is not selected (e.g., Garrett & Stroud, 2014), accounting for other attributes of the media selection choices.

This brings us to a methodological discussion of how to measure selective exposure. My descriptions above discuss selective exposure measurement in the context of the observation of choices between media content. Although other measures (e.g., self-reported introspection of past media use, rating of interest in or desire for individual media choices separately) have been employed, the observational approach employed in experimental designs is the preferred method (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). Ideally selective exposure is measured by giving survey or experiment participants the opportunity to choose between media stimuli and observing which choices they make. There is another methodological consideration: whether participants' media choices are recorded unobtrusively or not. Unobtrusive observation is the preferred method since it mimics real-world selection behaviors best and is less prone to participant reactivity (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). Of course, unobtrusive observation is difficult if there are no actual media for respondents to consume. Unlike in other studies such as those done using articles on mock news websites (e.g., Garrett & Stroud, 2014), my participants won't be able to actually watch the mock television shows for which they see descriptions. As such, I cannot give them the opportunity to watch a show or shows and then observe which ones they choose to watch. Instead, I ask participants to rank shows in terms of which they'd most like to watch (Coppini et al., 2017). Thus, participants must still choose only one show to be ranked first,

second, and so forth. I go into further detail of how I recorded program selection in the Method section below.

The purpose of Study 4 is to test the selection hypothesis: that evaluating media texts as politically relevant will be positively related to selective exposure. The end state is the confirmation of the relationship between identification of the show as politically relevant and selective exposure to the show. The ability of the PRM scale to predict selective exposure would also serve as additional evidence supporting the concurrent validity of the scale. The fundamental prediction of the selection hypothesis is that:

H_1: Participants will engage in selective exposure to a greater degree when they evaluate shows as more politically relevant than when they evaluate shows as less politically relevant.

Additionally, because evaluation of the political relevance of media is a function of political identity strength, I predict that PRM will mediate the relationship between political identity strength and selective exposure, such that the way that viewers with stronger (as opposed to weaker) political identities come to engage in selective exposure is through the degree to which they evaluate media as politically relevant. In this mediation relationship, I would expect stronger political identities to lead to higher PRM scores, which should lead to greater selective exposure. Thus, I hypothesize that:

H_2: PRM will mediate the relationship between political identity strength and selective exposure.

Study 4 Method

Participants

A convenience sample of U.S. adults was recruited via Qualtrics to participate in an online study from April 20-21, 2020, with quotas for partisanship set to evenly split the sample

between Democrats, Republicans, and Independents/Others. Six participants were eliminated because of a technical issue, bringing the final sample size to $N = 666$. Additional quotas were set to ensure the sample was reflective of the U.S. population in terms of gender, age, and income. About half ($n = 330$) of the sample identified as men, 334 identified as women, and two participants reported their gender as something else. The mean age was 44.91 ($SD = 16.63$). Most (68.77%) of the sample reported their race as White, non-Hispanic; 8.41% as Black, non-Hispanic; 11.56% as Hispanic/Latino; 6.16% as Asian; and 5.11% as multiracial or some other race. The sample comprised a mix of self-identified Democrats ($n = 225$), Republicans ($n = 223$), and Independents or members of some other political party ($n = 218$). The mean reporting for political conservatism on a 1-to-7 scale was 4.00 ($SD = 1.72$).

The study employed a 2 (show position: Republican/conservative vs. Democratic/liberal) x 2 (genre: sitcom vs. drama) x 4 (issue: healthcare, marijuana, the environment, or LGBTQ discrimination) design, with participants evaluating the descriptions of four shows; see Table 4.1. Half the show descriptions conveyed support for a position that aligns with Republican and ideologically conservative (RC) views, and the other half conveyed support for a position that aligns with Democrat and ideologically liberal (DL) views. Of these two RC position shows and two DL position shows, one was described as a sitcom and the other as a drama. Finally, both to ensure the expected effects are robust across issues and so participants aren't presented shows with the same issues, each show description featured one of the four randomly assigned issues.

Table 4.1. *Study 4 Factorial Design*

	Republican/Conservative (RC) Position	Democratic/Liberal (DL) Position
Sitcom	RC Position, Issue A	DL Position, Issue B
Drama	RC Position, Issue C	DL Position, Issue D

Stimuli

Stimuli for Study 4 match the structure of the stimuli for the first three studies; however, I created descriptions of mock television shows rather than use existing shows. I chose to use mock shows rather than real shows for this study for two reasons. First, using mock shows allows me to maximize control over the manipulation of social issues and issue positions. Second, it eliminates the possibility that familiarity or prior attitudes toward the show will interfere with selection by leading people to select shows with which they're more familiar. Since all of the show descriptions were created specifically for this project, there is no possibility that any participants had any familiarity with or prior attitudes about the shows that would affect their selection choices in any way. Although all descriptions were of mock fictional entertainment sitcom or drama programs rather than a wider selection of television programming as in the first three studies, the issue position factor (RC or DL) was added. I generated an RC and a DL stem for each television show description; see Appendix A. One of the stems was randomly added to the end of the show description, such that half of the show (one sitcom and one drama) descriptions had DL stems and half of the show (the other sitcom and the other drama) descriptions had RC stems. For example, in the case of the *Hawkins Point* episode regarding health care, half of respondents viewed a show description ending with a character questioning why anyone should have to go into massive debt to receive health care (the DL position), and the other half viewed a show description ending with a character advocating for people taking personal responsibility for saving more for health costs rather than relying on others (the RC position).

Four show overviews were created, such that participants read descriptions for four ostensibly separate shows. The overviews varied so that two of the shows were described as sitcoms and two were described as dramas. Episode synopses depicting the four social issues

were written for each show, such that each of the four shows depicted a randomly selected social issue. Finally, I created the DL and RC stems for each issue for each show. I pre-tested the show descriptions to ensure that the Democratic/liberal and Republican/conservative stems as well as the issues were interpreted as intended; see Appendix B. In addition to the textual descriptions of the shows, I created various versions of title graphics for each show based on the style of title graphics typically seen for real sitcom and drama shows. These graphics were presented along with the show descriptions and during the ranking task as a way to further indicate the genre of the show.

Procedure

Participants were told they were participating in a study on television preferences and given instructions that they would be asked to evaluate four television shows in development. Participants first answered questions regarding political interest, political identity strength, and demographics. Then participants completed a short tolerance for ambiguity questionnaire and questions regarding motivations for watching various television genres. These items additionally served as a distractor task to prevent the measurement of pre-exposure variables, in particular issue public membership, from priming individuals regarding the show descriptions or the study purpose. Next, each show description was randomly presented, followed by the PRM scale and single-item "political" measure. After all shows were evaluated, participants were told to rank the shows based on which they'd most like to watch. Participants had the opportunity to review the show descriptions during this selection task.

Measures

The PRM scale, TA scale, motivations for television use, political partisanship, ideology, and interest measures were carried over from Study 3. See Table 4.2 for descriptive statistics.

Table 4.2. *Zero-order Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Study 4 Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. PRM Scale	-										
2. Tolerance for Ambiguity	.12***	-									
3. Partisanship (Republican)	-.01	-.03	-								
4. Ideology (Conservatism)	-.03	.01	.50***	-							
5. Partisan Strength	.13***	-.01	.00	-.02	-						
6. Ideological Strength	.12***	.08***	.08***	.01	.42***	-					
7. Issue Public Membership	.29***	.06**	-.09***	-.22***	.13***	.12***	-				
8. Political Interest	.15***	.01	.03	-.04	.18***	.17***	.27***	-			
9. Single-Item "Political"	.59***	.04*	.05**	.07***	.05*	.10***	.14***	.13***	-		
10. Congeniality	.04*	.00	.00	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	.02	-	
11. Selective Exposure	.06**	.01	-.01	-.01	.00	.00	.01	-.02	.02	.03	-
M	3.30	3.80	0.50	0.50	1.97	1.33	1.58	3.60	2.95	3.95	0.16
SD	0.76	0.79	0.37	0.29	1.08	1.10	0.86	1.10	1.11	2.39	10.17
Skew	-0.29***	-0.66***	0.01	0.02	-0.58***	0.12*	-0.15***	-0.38***	0.00	0.03	0.05
Skew *SE*	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	.05
α	.91	.73	-	-	-	-	.86	-	-	-	-

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. For partisanship, 0 = Strong Democrat, and 1 = Strong Republican. For ideology, 0 = extremely liberal, and 1 = extremely conservative.

A common way to measure selective exposure is the degree to which the congeniality of media content affects whether a participant chooses that content over other content. In this fashion, selective exposure is measured as the effect of media congeniality as a predictor on selection as an outcome variable. Although this method allows the researcher to assess the degree to which pro-attitudinal content is selected, it is not the only way to assess selective exposure. Because I am interested in the effect of PRM on selective exposure, using this method would essentially make PRM a moderator in the congeniality-selection relationship: if selective exposure is operationalized as the *effect* of congeniality on selection, then predicting that higher PRM scores lead to greater selective exposure would mean predicting that the effect of congeniality on selection would be stronger when PRM scores are higher than when PRM scores are lower. This poses analytical issues regarding the use of post-treatment variables as moderators in experimental designs (Montgomery et al., 2018). Therefore, I cannot test my hypotheses by examining PRM as a moderator of the effect of congeniality on selection. I overcome this challenge by computing a measure of selective exposure derived from how congenial each show was to the respondent's issue beliefs and the respondent's preference for the show. As such, I am able to examine the effect of PRM on this selective exposure measure.

I computed a measure of selective exposure based on how congenial each show was to the respondent's beliefs and the ranking the respondent gave the show. Congeniality was measured as how well the show's issue position matched the participant's self-reported agreement with the issue positions based on the pre-exposure questionnaire items, which ranged from 1 (strongly believe the DL position) to 7 (strongly believe the RC position). If a participant was exposed to the DL position for an issue and had reported they strongly believed that position, their congeniality score for that show was 7. If they were exposed to the DL position

and had reported they moderately believed the RC position, their congeniality score for that show was a 2. Thus, congeniality was coded from 1 (*least congenial*) to 7 (*most congenial*). For show ranking, participants were asked to rank the four shows they were presented with in terms of which ones they'd most like to watch, with a rank of 1 for the show they'd most like to watch, followed by 2, 3, then a rank of 4 for the show they'd least like to watch. Thus, show ranking is a measure of how much a respondent preferred one program over another.

My next step was to multiply the congeniality score by the show ranking to generate a single-item measure reflecting preference for congenial content. (I use "preference" here in the general sense, not in the sense of the abstraction of choice tendencies in the aggregate, as described at the beginning of this chapter.) Before doing so, I recoded the show ranking scores as 3, 1, -1, -3, respectively, so a higher number indicated greater preference for the show and a lower number indicated lesser preference for the show. I executed this recode for two reasons. First, so that the selective exposure measure would have a true mid-point: a positive score indicates that the show was ranked as one of the top two shows, and a negative score indicates that the show was ranked as one of the bottom two shows. Second, so that the scores above and below the mid-point would be at the same interval from the mid-point, since the recoded ranking item values maintain the same interval. Finally, I multiplied the show congeniality variable and the recoded ranking variable to generate a measure of selective exposure, ranging from -21 (*least selective exposure*) to 21 (*most selective exposure*). Greatest preference (3) for a most-congenial (7) show would be maximum (21) selective exposure; least preference (1) for a most-congenial (7) show would be minimum (-21) selective exposure. See Table 4.3 for a tabular depiction of the selective exposure scoring values. Thus, for each show evaluated and ranked by each participant, I have a measure of how much selective exposure they engaged in. I will now be able

to determine how PRM evaluations for each show observation affects selective exposure to that show.

Table 4.3. *Tabular depiction of selective exposure scoring values*.

		Congeniality						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Preference for content	3	3	6	9	12	15	18	21
	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	-1	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7
	-3	-3	-6	-9	-12	-15	-18	-21

I should note that because the show ranking and greater/lesser preference for a show doesn't necessarily indicate a desire to *avoid* such programming, one cannot measure selective avoidance through these means. Likewise, selective exposure scores for less congenial shows end up toward the middle of the scale (e.g., a show with a congeniality score of 1 would receive a selective exposure score between 3 and -3). This is fitting, since selective exposure is defined as the act of choosing *congenial* content, irrelevant of whether one would choose uncongenial content. As such, my measure of selective exposure can detect when respondents have a greater or lesser preference for congenial television shows. Furthermore, I found the same pattern of the effect of PRM on selective exposure that I report below across alternate ways of calculating a selective exposure measure (i.e., multiplying the congeniality variable by a reverse-coded ranking variable with 4 representing greatest preference and 1 representing least preference).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Congeniality. I've developed the PRM scale items in an attempt to eliminate the potential influence of message congeniality. As I discussed earlier regarding evaluations of perception of bias, I would *not* like respondents to indicate that they perceive greater persuasive intent from shows containing messages that are uncongenial to their views than from shows with

congenial messages. Ideally, respondents would indicate the same level of persuasive intent from a show conveying either congenial or uncongenial messages. Most importantly, we should also not find that message congeniality affects the PRM scale, in that shows with uncongenial messages are rated as more politically relevant than shows with congenial messages. The objective of the PRM scale is to capture the perception of collective concerns/decisions/consequences, controversy, and—most relevant here—persuasive intent, not perception of bias. I do find a weak yet statistically significant correlation between congeniality scores and PRM scores, $r = .04$, $p = .030$; however, further testing of this relationship using congeniality to predict PRM, its subscales, and the single-item "political" measure, controlling for other factors, revealed only a very small effect on the CON subscale ($b = 0.01$, $SE = .01$, $p = .041$) and no statistically significant effects on the other subscales or the PRM scale as a whole; see Table 4.4.

Main Analyses

I answer my first and second hypotheses using a mediation analysis; see Figure 4.1. Such an analysis allows me to address H_1, which predicts that PRM will be positively related to selective exposure, and H_2, which predicts that PRM will mediate the relationship between political identity strength. The additional benefit of using the mediation analysis to answer H_1 is that I can determine if the effect of PRM on selective exposure is robust to controlling for political identity strength, since both the effects of PRM (the *b* path) and political identity strength (the *c′* path) are included in the model predicting selective exposure. To be clear, although Figure 4.1 depicts a *c′* path between political identity strength and selective exposure indicating a direct relationship between the two, I am not interested in whether such a

Table 4.4. *Linear mixed models predicting PRM, its subscales, and "Political" based on congeniality.*

	PRM	**CDC**	**PPI**	**CON**	**"Political"**
Fixed Effects *b* (*SE*)					
Congeniality	0.01 (.00)	0.01 (.01)	0.00 (.01)	0.01* (.01)	0.00 (.01)
Genre: Drama	0.01 (.02)	0.01 (.02)	0.03 (.02)	-0.01 (.02)	0.01 (.03)
Object: Healthcare	0.21*** (.02)	0.31*** (.03)	0.12*** (.03)	0.21*** (.03)	0.19*** (.04)
Object: LGBTQ	0.21*** (.02)	0.11*** (.03)	0.24*** (.03)	0.32*** (.03)	0.34*** (.04)
Object: Marijuana	0.05* (.02)	0.04 (.03)	0.02 (.03)	0.12*** (.03)	0.02 (.04)
Position: RC	-0.07*** (.02)	-0.06* (.02)	-0.12*** (.02)	0.00 (.02)	-0.07* (.03)
Tolerance for Ambiguity	0.11*** (.03)	0.13*** (.03)	0.08* (.04)	0.13*** (.03)	0.06 (.04)
Conservatism	-0.08 (.09)	-0.24** (.09)	0.13 (.10)	-0.12 (.09)	0.27* (.12)
Political Interest	0.10*** (.02)	0.09*** (.02)	0.12*** (.03)	0.08** (.02)	0.14*** (.03)
Order	0.04*** (.01)	0.04*** (.01)	0.05*** (.01)	0.02 (.01)	0.03* (.01)
Constant	2.34*** (.15)	2.19*** (.17)	2.45*** (.18)	2.41*** (.16)	1.93*** (.21)
Random Effects var (*SD*)					
Respondent	0.35 (0.59)	0.38 (0.62)	0.48 (0.69)	0.37 (0.60)	0.61 (0.78)
Residual	0.19 (0.44)	0.30 (0.55)	0.32 (0.56)	0.30 (0.55)	0.57 (0.76)
Log likelihood	-2327.68	-2816.82	-2931.91	-2805.07	-3613.54
AIC	4681.36	5659.65	5889.82	5636.14	7253.08
BIC	4757.90	5736.19	5966.36	5712.68	7329.62

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. $N_{respondents} = 666$ and $N_{observations} = 2{,}664$ for all models. The reference group for genre is comedy, the reference group for object is the environment, and the reference group for position is DL.

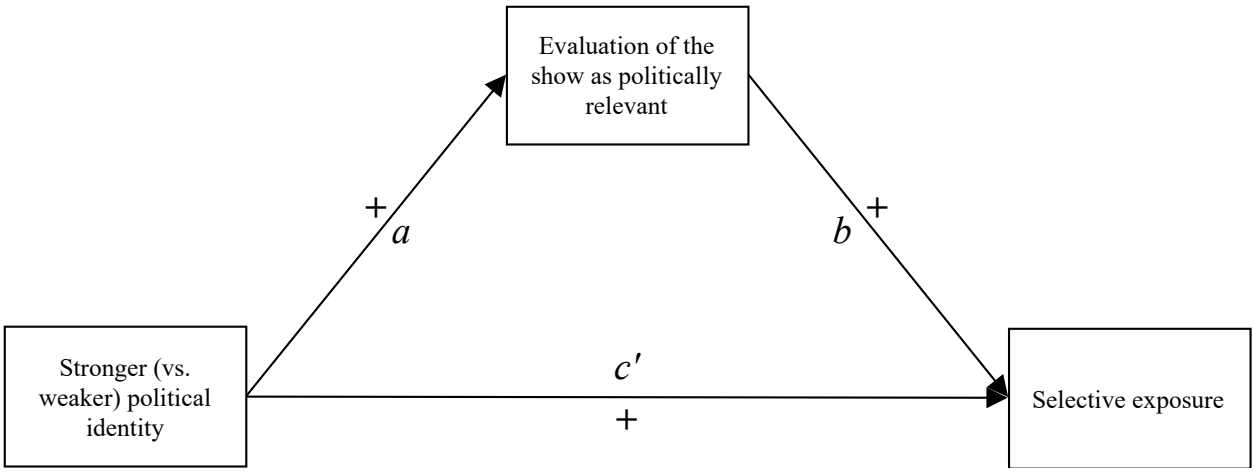

Figure 4.1. Mediation model for H_1 and H_2.

relationship exists. Nor is it necessary to demonstrate a change in the statistical significance between the *c* path (the total effect of the predictor) and the *c′* path (the direct effect of the predictor when the *a* * *b* path is accounted for); the only requirement for evidencing a mediation effect is a statistically significant *a* * *b* path (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010).

I conducted the mediation analyses by running two linear mixed models on 5,000 bootstrapped samples of the original dataset. The first model regresses the mediator (PRM or "political") on political identity strength (ideological strength, partisan strength, and issue public membership), controlling for show genre, issue, issue position, respondents' TA, conservatism, political interest, and show order effects. The estimate for the political identity strength term represents the *a* path. The second model regresses the dependent variable (selective exposure) on the mediator, controlling for show genre, issue, issue position, respondents' political identity strength, TA, conservatism, political interest, and show order effects. The estimate for the mediator represents the *b* path, and the estimate for the political identity strength term represents the *c′* path. The mediated indirect effect of political identity strength on selective exposure is the product of the *a* and *b* paths. The *c* path, representing the total effect of political identity strength on selective exposure, is the sum of the direct (*c′*) and indirect (*a* * *b*) effects. This is

conceptually equivalent to the effect of political identity strength on selective exposure when the mediator is not controlled for. The estimates reported below are the means of the estimates from the 5,000 bootstrapped samples. Finally, I computed 95% confidence intervals (CIs) based on the estimates from the 5,000 bootstrapped samples. I ran these two models a total of six times, corresponding to the combination of the three measures of political identity strength as the predictor and for both PRM and the single-item "political" measure as the mediator.

These calculations are the same as would be done using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2017); however, PROCESS cannot handle linear mixed models used to account for my nested data structure. Likewise, R's mediation package's `mediate()` function (Tingley, Yamamoto, Hirose, Keele, & Imai, 2014), which can handle linear mixed models and will report the mediated indirect effect, doesn't report the individual path estimates and 95% CIs. Thus, I conducted all analyses "by hand" in RStudio, while using the `mediate()` function when possible to double-check the estimates and 95% CIs for the mediated indirect effects. Although `mediate()` uses a different method for simulating samples of the data, the results were very close to those generated through bootstrap sampling and of the same level of statistical significance. Code is available upon request.

H_1. My first hypothesis predicts that PRM will have a positive effect on selective exposure, corresponding to the *b* path in Figure 4.1. Table 4.5 presents the estimates and 95% CIs for the *a*, *b*, *a* * *b, c'*, and *c* paths for all six mediation models. PRM has a statistically significant effect on selective exposure, regardless of which measure of political identity strength I controlled for. The more politically relevant respondents evaluated the shows as being, the more they engaged in selective exposure, as measured by expressing greater interest in watching

Table 4.5. Estimates and 95% confidence intervals for all paths for all mediation models predicting selective exposure.

	Effect Through PRM				Effect Through "Political"			
	Path	Estimate	LLCI	ULCI	Path	Estimate	LLCI	ULCI
Ideological Strength	*a*	0.06	0.03	0.10	*a*	0.08	0.03	0.12
	b	0.88	0.48	1.29	*b*	0.22	-0.06	0.51
	a * *b*	0.06	0.02	0.10	*a* * *b*	0.02	0.00[a]	0.05
	c′	0.01	-0.22	0.22	*c′*	0.04	-0.17	0.26
	c	0.06	-0.16	0.27	*c*	0.06	-0.15	0.27
Partisan Strength	*a*	0.07	0.04	0.11	*a*	0.03	-0.02	0.07
	b	0.88	0.47	1.28	*b*	0.22	-0.06	0.51
	a * *b*	0.06	0.03	0.11	*a* * *b*	0.01	-0.01	0.02
	c′	0.02	-0.19	0.23	*c′*	0.08	-0.13	0.28
	c	0.08	-0.12	0.29	*c*	0.08	-0.12	0.29
Issue Public Membership	*a*	0.10	0.06	0.13	*a*	0.08	0.04	0.13
	b	0.85	0.44	1.26	*b*	0.19	-0.10	0.49
	a * *b*	0.08	0.04	0.14	*a* * *b*	0.02	-0.01	0.05
	c′	0.12	-0.36	0.59	*c′*	0.30	-0.19	0.78
	c	0.20	-0.28	0.68	*c*	0.32	-0.16	0.79

Note: [a]CI rounds to, but crosses, zero. $N_{observations}$ = 2,664 for all models. 95% confidence intervals are based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. All models control for show genre, issue, issue position, respondents' TA, conservatism, political interest, and show order effects. Additionally, the models from which the *b* and *c′* paths are drawn include both the effect of the mediator and the effect of political identity strength, such that the *b* path indicates the effect of the mediator on selective exposure controlling for political identity strength, and the *c′* path indicates the direct effect of political identity strength on selective exposure, controlling for the mediator. The *c* path indicates the total effect of political identity strength on selective exposure.

more-congenial shows. In contrast, the single-item "political" measure did not predict selective exposure. H_1 was supported.

H_2. My second hypothesis predicts that PRM will mediate the relationship between political identity strength and selective exposure, corresponding to the *a* * *b* path in Figure 4.1. As we see in Table 4.5, all three measures of political identity strength have a statistically significant effect on PRM as the mediator, and in each of these models, PRM has a statistically significant effect on selective exposure as the outcome. In short, both the *a* and *b* paths are statistically significant when PRM is the mediator, regardless of the measure of political identity strength. In contrast, although ideological strength and issue public membership have a

statistically significant effect on the single-item "political" measure as the mediator, partisan strength does not. Additionally, none of the *b* paths are statistically significant when "political" is the mediator. The *a* * *b* path representing the mediated effect of political identity strength on selective exposure through the mediator is statistically significant when PRM is the mediator, but not when "political" is the mediator. This indicates that PRM acts as a mediator between all three measures of political identity strength and selective exposure, but the single-item "political" measure does not. The *c′* paths, representing the direct effect of the political identity strength measure on selective exposure once the mediator is controlled for, are not statistically significant for any of the models. The *c* paths, representing the total effect of political identity strength on selective exposure, are also not statistically significant for any of the models. Nonsignificant *c* paths indicate that selective exposure cannot be predicted using political identity strength without accounting for any role of the mediator. More importantly, the lack of a statistically significant direct effect of political identity strength on selective exposure (the *c′* paths) indicates that stronger political identities also did not lead to greater selective exposure once PRM scores were controlled for. Greater selective exposure occurred not directly because of political identity strength, but because of the mediating effect of PRM evaluations: stronger political identities lead to higher PRM scores, which lead to higher levels of selective exposure.

As a robustness check, I also conducted a parallel mediation analysis, with both PRM and "political" in the same model mediating the effect of the political identity strength predictors on selective exposure; see Figure 4.2. This analysis is instructive because it controls for both mediators simultaneously, meaning we can determine the mediating effect of either PRM or "political" when the other is controlled for. In this parallel mediation model, a_1 and b_1 represent the *a* and *b* paths when PRM is the mediator and a_2 and b_2 represent the *a* and *b* paths when

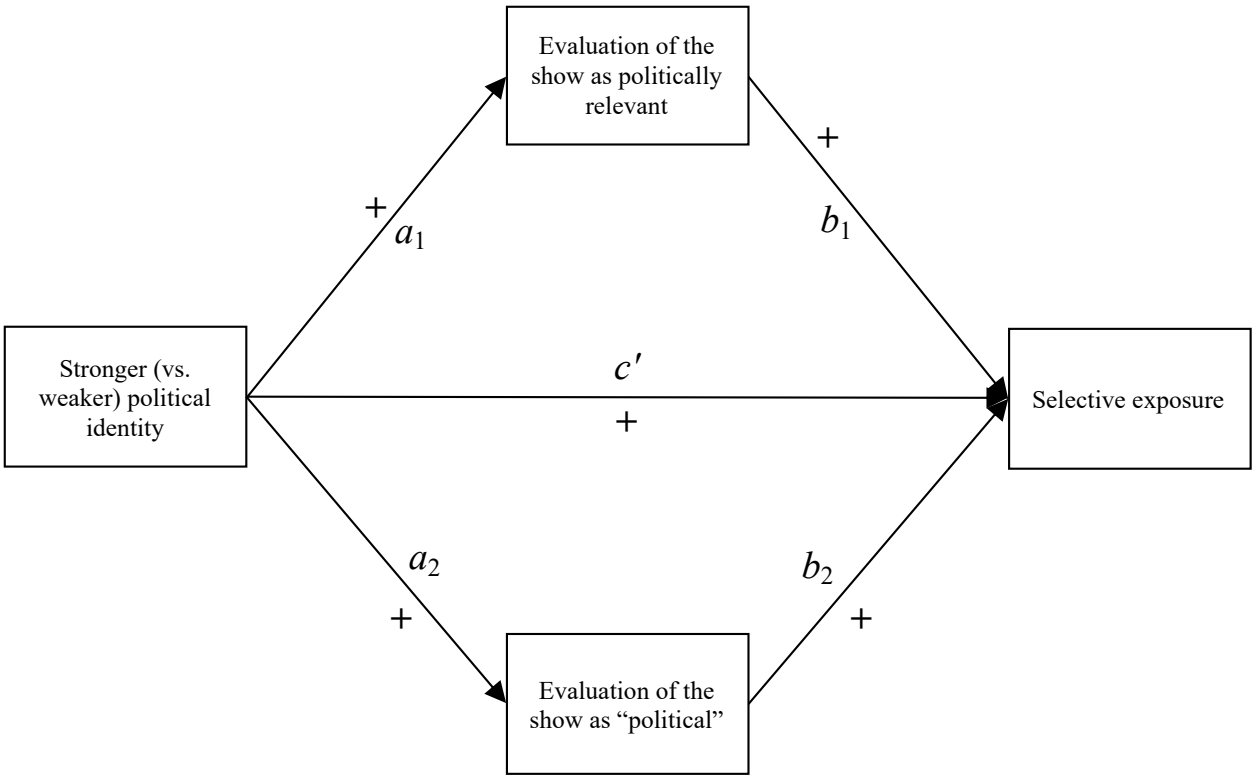

Figure 4.2. Parallel mediation model for H_2.

"political" is the mediator. As before, the indirect effect of the predictor through each mediator is the product of the *a* and *b* paths for that mediator. For example, the indirect effect of the predictor through PRM is $a_1 * b_1$. The total indirect effect (TIE) of the predictor is the sum of the indirect effects through both mediators: $(a_1 * b_1) + (a_2 * b_2)$. The c' path remains the direct effect of the political identity strength predictor on selective exposure once both mediators are controlled for. I also report the *c* path, which is the total effect of the political identity strength predictor on selective exposure. The *c* path equals the sum of the direct effect and the total indirect effect: $c' + (a_1 * b_1) + (a_2 * b_2)$. The total effect is conceptually equal to the effect of the predictor on the dependent variable, not controlling for any mediators.

I used the aforementioned 5,000 bootstrapped samples to compute the estimates and 95% CIs for the parallel mediation analysis; see Table 4.6. There is a statistically significant indirect effect of all three political identity strength predictors on selective exposure through PRM,

Table 4.6. Estimates and 95% confidence intervals for all paths for all parallel mediation models predicting selective exposure.

	Effect Through PRM				Effect Through "Political"				Total, Direct, & Total Indirect Effects			
	Path	Est.	LLCI	ULCI	Path	Est.	LLCI	ULCI	Path	Est.	LLCI	ULCI
Ideological Strength	a_1	0.06	0.03	0.10	a_2	0.08	0.03	0.12	c	0.06	-0.16	0.27
	b_1	1.04	0.50	1.57	b_2	-0.18	-0.56	0.20	c'	0.01	-0.22	0.23
	$a_1 * b_1$	0.07	0.02	0.12	$a_2 * b_2$	-0.01	-0.05	0.02	TIE	0.05	0.01	0.10
Partisan Strength	a_1	0.07	0.04	0.11	a_2	0.03	-0.02	0.07	c	0.08	-0.12	0.29
	b_1	1.03	0.49	1.57	b_2	-0.18	-0.56	0.20	c'	0.01	-0.20	0.23
	$a_1 * b_1$	0.08	0.03	0.13	$a_2 * b_2$	0.00	-0.02	0.01	TIE	0.07	0.03	0.12
Issue Public Membership	a_1	0.10	0.06	0.13	a_2	0.08	0.04	0.13	c	0.20	-0.28	0.68
	b_1	1.03	0.45	1.54	b_2	-0.18	-0.55	0.20	c'	0.11	-0.36	0.59
	$a_1 * b_1$	0.10	0.04	0.16	$a_2 * b_2$	-0.01	-0.05	0.02	TIE	0.08	0.03	0.14

Note: $N_{\text{observations}}$ = 2,664 for all models. 95% confidence intervals are based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. TIE denotes the total indirect effect, which is the sum of the indirect effects through both mediators. All models control for show genre, issue, issue position, respondents' TA, conservatism, political interest, and show order effects. Additionally, the *a*, *b*, and *c′* models predicting selective exposure include both the effect of the mediators and the effect of political identity strength, such that the *b* paths indicate the effect of the respective mediators on selective exposure controlling for political identity strength, and the *c′* path indicates the effect of political identity strength on selective exposure controlling for the mediators. The *c* path, denoting the total effect of political identity strength on selective exposure, does not control for the mediators.

controlling for the mediating effect of the "political" measure and for the direct effect of the political identity strength measure. No such mediation occurred for the "political" mediator. Further, as before, there was no direct effect, *c′*, of any of the political identity strength measures on selective exposure. The total effect, *c*, of the political identity strength measures on selective exposure was also nonsignificant. In other words, political identity strength does not itself predict selective exposure regardless of whether the mediators are controlled for. Only through PRM does political identity strength have any effect on selective exposure, with stronger political identities predicting higher PRM scores, then higher PRM scores predicting greater selective exposure. H_2 is confirmed.

Discussion

The current study set out to explore the relationship between the evaluation of television programs as politically relevant and selective exposure to those programs. I find that individuals engage in greater levels of selective exposure for programs they evaluated as more politically relevant than for programs they evaluated as less politically relevant. In contrast, evaluating a show as "political" had no effect on selective exposure. Even more importantly, I found that PRM served as a mediator between political identity strength and selective exposure: The way that individuals with stronger political identities (stronger ideologues, stronger partisans, and members of issue publics) come to engage in the selective exposure of fictional entertainment media is because they see such programming as politically relevant. In other words, it's not simply that individuals with stronger political identities engage in greater levels of selective exposure to fictional television programs; rather, individuals with stronger political identities engage in greater levels of selective exposure because of how they evaluate programming as politically relevant.

This is where we must draw a finer distinction between what we mean by "selective exposure" in general" and "politically motivated selective exposure" in particular. Most selective exposure research in the political communication literature is conducted on news content, for which the political relevance is taken as a given. Thus, when these studies find that individuals selectively expose themselves to congenial news content, the assumption is that they engaged in politically motivated selective exposure because they understood the political context of the stimuli—and that may very well be true, even though respondents' evaluation of the political relevance of the content was never measured. Yet as Knobloch-Westerwick (2015) indicated, selective exposure is any bias in exposure to media content; therefore, we can only confirm that *politically motivated* selective exposure has occurred if we evidence that selective exposure occurred with the political realm in mind.

This might seem like a distinction without a difference until one considers the findings of the previous chapter, in which I show that media content and viewers' political identity strength work together to influence how political relevant media content is. To recap, political identity strength affected PRM evaluations for news and entertainment shows alike, meaning that participants didn't necessarily evaluate all news programming as equally politically relevant. And even though entertainment shows were evaluated as less politically relevant in general, individuals with stronger political identities sometimes evaluated entertainment shows as just as, if not more, politically relevant than news shows. Thus, when one considers whether people select media content (particularly entertainment content for which political relevance is not assumed) that conforms to their political viewpoints, we may know that selective exposure has occurred, but we can only assume political motivations behind those choices unless we actually measure how politically relevant people think the media in question is.

As I find in the current study, political identity strength alone didn't predict greater selective exposure, regardless of whether PRM and the single-item "political" mediators were controlled for. If we merely examined the effect of political identity strength on selective exposure without accounting for the mediating potential of PRM, we would incorrectly infer that political identity strength is unrelated to selective exposure behavior. Further, the mean selective exposure score was 0.16 (*SD* = 10.17) on a scale whose mid-point was zero. In other words, if we simply examined show preference based on congeniality, there wouldn't appear to be any selective exposure behavior. Based on these two findings, one would erroneously conclude that people show no preference for fictional entertainment shows that are more congenial to their views and that political identity strength has no bearing on selective exposure to entertainment programming. Instead, evaluating fictional shows as politically relevant was the causal mechanism between political identity strength and selective exposure. By considering how political identity strength drives how shows are evaluated as politically relevant and how those evaluations predict selective exposure, we see that individuals with stronger political identities evaluate fictional entertainment shows as more politically relevant, and when they do, they show a stronger preference for shows with congenial content. *That* is politically motivated selective exposure.

The above point bears underscoring. One critique of the PRM concept is that because PRM scores are driven by political identity strength in that people with stronger political identities generally evaluate shows as more politically relevant, the measure is merely a proxy for political identity strength. By this logic, we should be able to dispense with PRM altogether and predict selective exposure with political identity strength alone. The results of the current study indicate that this simply isn't the case. The way political identity strength predicts selective

exposure is through PRM, the $a_1 * b_1$ mediation path in the parallel mediation model. Without PRM as a mediator, political identity strength was not able to predict selective exposure, whether considering its total (c) or direct (c') effect on selective exposure. The effect of PRM on political was also robust to accounting for political identity strength and "political" evaluations as controls. Thus, it's not simply that viewers with stronger political identities engage in greater selective exposure; rather, viewers with stronger political identities engage in greater selective exposure by way of how they evaluate fictional programming as politically relevant.

Evaluating shows as "political," on the other hand, did not predict selective exposure and did not serve as a mediator in a similar fashion in either the individual or the parallel mediation models. Thus, I have evidenced the value of PRM rather than merely assessing how "political" people think a television show might be. I will return to this discussion in the concluding chapter of this dissertation. I should also note that I found no indication that Republicans/conservatives or Democrats/liberals engaged in selective exposure any more than the other, or that the effects were different for programs depending on the show's issue position.

The finding of selective exposure of entertainment television programs due to political identity strength and evaluation of such programs as politically relevant has tremendous implications for viewers' media selection habits, as well as the cultivation of different media ecosystems for those who hold conservative views. Future research should also explore selective *avoidance* of media based on political identity strength and PRM; however, we will need to more carefully consider how avoidance of media is measured, since a preference for some content doesn't necessarily indicate a desire to avoid other content. Thus, although conventional wisdom might dictate that Republicans/conservatives avoid shows they evaluate as too liberal or as "pushing a liberal agenda," what I evidence here is that viewers of either stripe may prefer shows

that are congenial to their views over shows that are uncongenial when they think of such shows as political. I discuss this and the findings of the previous chapters more broadly in the next and final chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

I begin this chapter by briefly summarizing the aims of this dissertation, followed by a review of the objective and findings of each study. Next, I discuss the implications of this research. Finally, I conclude by pointing toward future directions in entertainment media and politically motivated selective exposure research.

In Chapter 1, I define the core problem that this dissertation seeks to address: the dearth of literature regarding how media consumers themselves evaluate media as politically relevant, as opposed to how researchers define which media are politically relevant, especially television entertainment programming. This, despite the fact that viewers are divided in their entertainment watching practices along political lines (e.g., Blakley et al., 2019; Holbert et al., 2003), suggesting that political identities may play a role in entertainment media selection. Although scholars have created typologies of political entertainment media (e.g., Eilders & Nitsch, 2015; Haas et al., 2015; Holbert, 2005), distinctions between news, entertainment, and other genres are arbitrary and don't necessarily reflect how any individual viewer may evaluate media as politically relevant. I argue for a viewer-centric approach to the evaluation of media as politically relevant, with media content and viewers' political identities being the driving force behind such evaluations.

Drawing on political science literature, I divide potentially political objects into three classes: social issues, government agencies/agents, and politicians/parties/polls, and discuss the varying levels of consensus regarding how people evaluate the political nature of objects within

those three classes. I define the political realm as anything regarding collective concerns, for which collective decisions can be made, that have collective consequences. Common across all classes of potentially political objects are two additional attributes of the political: controversy and perception of persuasive intent. These two attributes, along with collective concerns/decisions/consequences, comprise the three dimensions of politically relevant media, or PRM. I then discuss the shortcomings of existing ways to assess how "political" certain forms of media are and why we need a PRM scale, based on these three dimensions, to assess evaluations of politically relevant media.

Next, I define political identity in three ways: as one's partisan identification, one's ideological identification, and one's membership in issue publics; the strength of which will determine how politically relevant a viewer will evaluate television programming to be. The two central assertions of this dissertation lie in my evaluation hypothesis and my selection hypothesis. The evaluation hypothesis predicted that the object depicted in a television show would determine how much of an effect a viewer's political identity strength would have on evaluation of a show as politically relevant. Specifically, I predicted that the effect of political identity strength would be weakest for shows depicting politicians/parties/polls and strongest for shows depicting social issues. The selection hypothesis predicted that viewers would engage in greater levels of selective exposure when they evaluated programs as more politically relevant than when they evaluated programs as less politically relevant. Further, I hypothesized that PRM evaluations would act as a mediator between political identity strength and selective exposure: individuals with stronger political identities engage in selective exposure to fictional entertainment media because they evaluate those media as more politically relevant.

In Chapter 2, I developed the PRM scale across two studies, using both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, respectively. I reduced the initial pool of 26 items down to 11 items representing three subscales that capture the three dimensions of the political: collective concerns/decisions/consequences, perception of persuasive intent, and controversy. I performed several tests of internal consistency and validity. I demonstrated that, as expected, PRM is correlated with political interest and with three different measures of political identity strength: ideological strength, partisan strength, and issue public membership. This indicates that individuals with greater political interest and stronger political identities are more likely to evaluate media as politically relevant than individuals with less political interest and weaker political identities. Additionally, PRM is *not* correlated with the salience of certain moral domains (i.e., binding or individualizing) over others. Thus, it is distinct from the MFQ (Graham et al., 2009; 2011) as a predictor of media selection (e.g., Long & Eveland, 2018; Tamborini, 2011; Tamborini et al., 2013). Rather than predict appeal for particular types of media as moral domain salience, does, PRM predicts when individuals may engage in politically motivated selective exposure, which I will discuss below in my summary of Chapter 4.

I also demonstrated that PRM is moderately correlated with the currently most frequently used measure of evaluation of media as political: explicitly asking participants how "political" a media text is. Still, by subjecting both the PRM scale and a single-item "political" measure to the same validity checks, I showed that the PRM scale is more robust to validity checks than is the single-item measure. And although both measures were somewhat correlated with conservatism and Republican identification, the partisan gap was smaller for PRM scores than for "political" scores. Still, by identifying sub-scales measuring the dimensions of PRM separately, I was able to determine that partisan and ideological differences in PRM were due specifically to

Republicans and conservatives perceiving greater persuasive intent from television shows. I concluded that, given the perception of the media industry as predominantly liberal, Republicans and conservatives may be predisposed to thinking of television programming as a tool of persuasion.

Having developed and validated the PRM scale, I set out to test my evaluation hypothesis in Chapter 3. This hypothesis posits that the effects of political identities on evaluations of television programs as politically relevant will be greater for programs depicting social issues than for programs depicting politicians. Although this specific hypothesis was unsupported, this third study uncovered a number of important findings. First, I do find evidence that the effect of political identity strength on PRM varies depending on the object(s) depicted, just not in a way that can be simplified as politicians in one category and social issues in another. My findings indicate that political identity strength may play a greater or lesser role in PRM evaluations depending on the social issue. Although this means we cannot discount the role of political identity strength when it comes to programs depicting politicians, it also highlights the need for extra attention to how political identity strength factors into PRM evaluations for shows depicting different social issues.

Secondly and relatedly, I found that when it comes to entertainment programming, the presence/absence of politicians in a program was a strong indicator of evaluation of a show as "political." Asking a viewer if an entertainment show is "political" seems not much different from asking them if the show depicted politicians. That seems less than ideal if we're trying to examine how politically relevant viewers think a show is. In contrast, respondents evaluated shows depicting politicians/parties/polls (absent any mention of social issues or policies) as less politically relevant than shows depicting social issues. This indicates that a single question

asking how "political" an entertainment show is measures whether the respondent thinks a politician/party/poll is depicted, whereas the PRM scale measures the degree to which the respondent thinks the show depicts some potentially controversial issue that affects theirs and others' lives and could be solved through government action, as is the goal of the scale. This is another difference that sets the PRM scale apart from the single-item "political" measure: the latter is an indicator of people's identification of what we might call *explicitly* political content in media, whereas the former can actually detect the degree to which people think a broader range of media carries political import.

Third, I found some genre-level differences in evaluations of programs as both "political" and politically relevant, with news shows receiving higher scores than did entertainment shows for both PRM and for the single-item "political" measure, controlling for the types of objects depicted (social issues vs. politicians, and also healthcare vs. marijuana vs. politicians). But what's remarkable is the effect that political identity strength has on these evaluations across genres. Partisan strength has a stronger effect on PRM evaluations for entertainment shows than it does for news shows. Additionally, strong ideologues evaluated entertainment programs to be just as politically relevant and "political" as weak ideologues evaluated news programs. Strong issue public members evaluated entertainment shows to be just as "political" as issue public non-members evaluated news shows, and they evaluated entertainment shows as *more* politically relevant than issue public non-members evaluated news shows.

These findings are important for two reasons. First, they call into question the implicit assumption that people think of news media as more politically relevant than entertainment media. Second, based on the findings of my fourth study, they suggest that individuals with stronger political identities may be just as likely, if not more likely, to engage in selective

exposure to entertainment media as individuals with weaker political identities would to news media. All of this underlines the strong role of political identity strength in the evaluations of entertainment media as both "political" and as politically relevant. It also underlines why it's unhelpful for researchers to attempt to draw distinctions between media in terms of its political relevance, especially when it comes to news vs. entertainment media. To some person, any media, even fictional entertainment media, could be evaluated as politically relevant. In fact, our hypothetical viewer may find an entertainment show to be more politically relevant than a news broadcast. In this way, there's no such thing as media that isn't politically relevant. It's all political.

With that in mind, my final study, reported in Chapter 4, aimed to determine if evaluation of entertainment programs depicting social issues as politically relevant affects selective exposure to those programs. I found that the more politically relevant individuals thought a show was, the more they engaged in selective exposure to that show. This effect was not found for the single-item "political" measure: evaluating a show as "political" did not affect whether one engaged in selective exposure to the show. Moreover, I found that PRM evaluations mediated the link between political identity strength and selective exposure. The stronger an individual's political identities, measured three separate ways, the more politically relevant they thought entertainment shows were, and the more they engaged in selective exposure to those shows. My findings suggest that evaluating media as politically relevant is how political identity strength leads to selective exposure to fictional entertainment television. Although ideological strength and issue public membership predicted evaluation of entertainment shows as "political," such evaluations did not serve as a mediator between any measure of political identity strength and selective exposure.

This is yet another area in which the PRM scale outperforms asking individuals if some piece of media content is "political": the PRM scale explains how people with stronger political identities come to engage in selective exposure to entertainment media, whereas the single-item "political" measure does not. In fact, not only is the "political" measure not a mediator between political identity strength and selective exposure, but the measure does not predict selective exposure to entertainment programs on its own. In the context of the finding from Study 3 that the single-item "political" measure was strongly affected by the presence/absence of politicians in a show, perhaps its weaknesses here are unsurprising. If the "political" measure is so strongly affected by the mere presence/absence of politicians in entertainment shows, then perhaps it's not really as useful for determining the degree to which viewers consider programs depicting social issues to be politically relevant. In this case, the congeniality of the content might be of little concern when it comes to selection, since what the "political" item is telling us is whether the viewer identifies politicians/parties/polls in the show.

In any event, my findings indicate the superiority of the PRM scale, as opposed to a single-item "political" measure, across the scale development studies and the studies testing the identification and selection hypotheses. Although the two are correlated, the PRM scale holds up better to validity checks and is less affected by partisan bias than the "political" measure. The PRM scale is a better indicator of which entertainment programs are evaluated as politically relevant, not just which shows are identified as depicting politicians/parties/polls. PRM can predict selective exposure, whereas the "political" measure cannot. Finally, the PRM scale acts as a mediator between political identity strength and selective exposure; the "political" measure does not. I discuss the implications of the differences between these measures as well as other findings in the next section.

Implications

My findings present numerous implications regarding how political media are defined and how evaluations of the political relevance of media are measured, and how those matters translate into politically motivated selective exposure, particularly to entertainment television media. Likewise, viewers' selective exposure to entertainment programs has downstream implications concerning political fragmentation of the entertainment media ecosystem and the persuasive capabilities (and limitations) of fictional entertainment media.

Defining Political Media and Measuring Viewer Evaluations

Although scholars have developed various typologies of political entertainment media (Eilders & Nitsch, 2015; Haas et al., 2015; Holbert, 2005) and there has been some study into what types of social media posts are evaluated as "political" (e.g., Settle, 2018; Vraga et al., 2016), no quantitative social science research to date has explored viewer perceptions of the political relevance of fictional entertainment television. As I have demonstrated, individual viewers may have very different ideas of what television shows are politically relevant, particularly fictional entertainment programs. These findings demonstrate the futility of drawing an arbitrary distinction between entertainment media and other genres such as news, the political of relevance of which is taken as a given (Delli Carpini, 2014). Instead, whether media are evaluated as politically relevant is determined by both its content and the experiences, identities, and social factors of viewers (Holbert & Young, 2013). Thus, the entire media landscape—news, fictional entertainment, reality shows, documentaries, and so forth—may be evaluated as politically relevant to someone.

One might say that this calls for political communication scholars to pay greater attention to entertainment media not just as media with potentially politically relevant effects, but as

political media itself. But as I have shown, and as others (Delli Carpini, 2014; Holbert & Young, 2013) have suggested, defining any media as political media becomes irrelevant if any media is politically relevant. It's all political—or at least all politically relevant—to someone. What matters in that determination is whose perspectives we choose to value. This is the case for any given type of media (e.g., music, movies, video games, magazines, etc.), but can be no clearer than in another area in which classifications of content as political or not has weighty ramifications: advertising, particularly on social media (McGregor, 2019). As social media platforms work to regulate political advertising, they have the task of defining what ads are political or not. Such decisions may privilege the speech of some individuals and groups over others, depending on the platform's restrictions on political speech. Beyond the decisions of social media companies regarding political advertising, researchers should also take a closer look at what social media content is considered politically relevant by users (Guess et al., 2019; Settle, 2018). Settle (2018) and Vraga et al. (2016) have done groundbreaking work in this area; however, their methods rely on explicitly asking whether content was "political" or for the purposes of "political information or opinion."

As I have demonstrated, asking a respondent how "political" media content is draws on a different evaluation of that content than do the items on the PRM scale. My findings point to a need to adopt the PRM scale or other more sophisticated measures of determining respondents' evaluations of the political relevance of media content—if the goal is capturing more than whether those individuals identify that content as depicting politicians/parties/polls. As Guess et al. (2019) noted, it's difficult for researchers to quantify exposure to or engagement with political content on social media if individual users hold different ideas about what content they are exposed to or they engaged with was about politics or was politically relevant. One of their

recommendations is to provide examples of what the researchers mean by political content—typically, social media content regarding politicians/parties/polls. Again, that's all well and good if that's what the researcher is attempting to assess; however, if the researcher is interested in the amount of media content a respondent comes across or engages with that the respondent evaluates as politically relevant, then using a simple "political" measure may not do.

Still, the PRM scale is designed for the purpose of a single individual evaluating the political relevance of a single specific media text, e.g., a single show description or tweet, etc., not for evaluating the political relevance of a wide swath of content. A new variant of the scale would have to be created for this purpose. Likewise, the number of scale items has implications for questionnaire length. A researcher looking to use the scale would need to make room for 11 items rather than just one. Since survey space is typically at a premium, researchers employing the scale would have to make tough choices regarding which and how many media stimuli are being used. Nevertheless, the superiority of the PRM scale over simply asking respondents how "political" media content is, including its ability to predict selective exposure, might make these other trade-offs worth it.

Politically Motivated Selective Exposure

To my knowledge, this dissertation is the first study to evidence that individuals select fictional entertainment media based on evaluations of media content as politically relevant. In the past, scholars have found associations between political identities and viewing behaviors regarding entertainment television (e.g., Blakley et al., 2019; Holbert et al., 2003); however, there was no indication that individuals thought of such programming as relevant to politics. Selective exposure to news media is already well established, the political relevance of which being taken as a given. I demonstrate here that individuals may think of entertainment media as

politically relevant—and the more they do so, the more they engage in selective exposure. Furthermore, evaluating entertainment media as more politically relevant is how individuals with stronger political identities come to engage in selective exposure.

My findings call for a dramatic reimagining of political communication research regarding politically motivated selective exposure. First, attention must be paid to how people think of news media as politically relevant and how that affects selective exposure to news. This would involve researchers incorporating the PRM scale into surveys and experiments examining selective exposure. Although this would mean collecting PRM evaluations for each stimuli each participant is exposed to, doing so would greatly enhance our understanding of politically motivated selective exposure to news. We might find that selective exposure to news is more likely for news media evaluated as politically relevant, such that individuals *don't* engage in selective exposure as much for news media they evaluate as less politically relevant.

Second, the PRM concept illuminates the need to conduct politically motivated selective exposure research on entertainment media in addition to news media, including what that means for the fragmentation of the entertainment media ecosystem along political lines. In the preceding chapters I show that PRM evaluations affect selective exposure behaviors, and people sometimes evaluate entertainment media as just as, if not more, politically relevant as news media. Thus, political communication researchers need to look at entertainment media as another domain in which to find content that people evaluate as politically relevant and in which politically motivated selective exposure might occur. As I noted at the end of Chapter 4, PRM evaluations are central to whether selective exposure occurred for fictional entertainment shows, since participants in general didn't seem to report greater preference for more-congenial programs than for less-congenial ones. Rather, my participants only seemed to report greater

preference for more-congenial shows when they thought of shows as more politically relevant. I discuss the possibility for future directions in politically motivated selective exposure research later in this chapter, but first we should ponder what this means for the development of different political enclaves within the entertainment media ecosystem.

Political Fragmentation of the Entertainment Media Ecosystem

The practice of politically motivated selective exposure to entertainment television could explain why conservatives and liberals watch different types of television entertainment programs (Blakley et al., 2019). If individuals with stronger political identities evaluate entertainment programs as more politically relevant and then in turn select more congenial shows over less congenial shows, then eventually these individuals will come to mostly watch shows that align with their current political viewpoints. In line with the reinforcing spirals model (Slater, 2007; 2015), this could lead to the reinforcing of political identities and the further selection of media that confirms one's political beliefs. Conservatives and liberals, for example, will each watch programs that confirm their conservative or liberal beliefs, respectively, reinforcing their opinions on those issues and their ideological strength, leading to greater evaluation of future content as politically relevant, in turn leading to greater levels of selective exposure. Individuals with weaker political identities may continue to watch content conveying a broader range of issue positions, while those with stronger political identities are left unchallenged on their views by the entertainment content they consume. Not only could this lead to less commonality in what programs are watched by various groups of people at a time of unprecedented media choice, but it also shows a potential weak spot regarding the possibilities of narrative persuasion that have implications for political polarization and the formation and reinforcement of politically relevant attitudes.

Limitations on Narrative Persuasion

There is considerable evidence that fictional narratives can influence politically relevant beliefs and attitudes (e.g., Donovan & Klahm, 2015; Gierzynski, 2018; Holbert et al., 2003); however, one must be exposed to a narrative for it to have an effect. If individuals engage in politically motivated selective exposure to fictional entertainment media, then they may be less likely to encounter information that could persuade them toward an alternative point of view. The only mode of narrative persuasion possible for these individuals would be the reinforcement of existing beliefs, leading to greater polarization. This is where attention to the dimensions comprising PRM is important, particularly controversy and perception of persuasive intent.

Because perception of persuasive intent is a dimension of PRM, evaluation of media as politically relevant could act as a cue of forewarning of persuasive intent. The elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty, Briñol, & Priester, 2009) and reactance theory (J. W. Brehm, 1966; S. S. Brehm & Brehm, 1981) indicate that such perceptions, along with issue relevance, may determine elaboration regarding a particular message and reactance to counter-attitudinal messages. For viewers with stronger political identities, evaluating entertainment shows as politically relevant should serve as a cue forewarning them of persuasive intent, especially regarding personally relevant issues. This forewarning of persuasive intent should in turn motivate viewers to process messages centrally. Conversely, because viewers with weaker political identities should evaluate entertainment shows as less politically relevant, these viewers should be more likely to process the messages therein peripherally, notwithstanding other factors that affect central versus peripheral route processing.

Like forewarning of persuasive intent (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979a), experiencing threat on an affective level leads to greater reactance and counter-arguing (Pfau et al., 2001). Simons and

Green (2018) demonstrated that being introduced to a controversial subject creates in people a sense of affective threat: the more dissensus regarding an issue an individual perceived, the more they felt under threat. This occurred regardless of whether individuals perceived to be in the majority or minority of opinion holders, or whether they perceived disagreement on an interpersonal level. Thus, when presented with divisive topics such as those present within politically relevant media, viewers are likely to experience feelings of threat in such a way that cue them toward psychological reactance, which is the phenomenon through which resistance to persuasion works. Previous work has demonstrated that forewarning of persuasive intent, as well as affective anger responses that could be elicited due to exposure to controversial topics, can lead to diminished effects of persuasion toward alterative viewpoints, especially when issue involvement is high or when the message is counter-attitudinal (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979b; 1979a; Pfau et al., 2001; Quinn & Wood, 2004; Simons & Green, 2018). Because narrative related effects such as transportation and character identification are expected to reduce counter-argumentation (Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004; Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Slater & Rouner, 2002; Slater et al., 2006), the generation of counter-arguing even in the face of such effects is likely to be a harbinger of ineffective persuasion toward alternative points of view.

What does this leave us with? Individuals with stronger political identities should engage in selective exposure to entertainment media, leading to their preexisting attitudes being reinforced and greater polarization. If they are forcibly or inadvertently exposed to uncongenial entertainment media, they are likely to engage in reactance and counter-arguing—which will likely also result in reinforcement of their existing beliefs. It is individuals with weaker political identities, who are also likely to have weaker attitudes toward one position or another anyway, who might experience any sort of narrative persuasion other than reinforcement of pre-existing

strong attitudes. Thus, as promising as narrative persuasion is in terms of achieving attitude change, it may only be successful in this fashion for people whose minds are already open to change. This is one of several areas for future research related to PRM and selective exposure to entertainment media.

Future Directions

Given the implications of my findings, there are several promising directions this research could take in the future. The PRM scale needs to be tested more broadly in terms of both media stimuli and attributes of media consumers. The effects of cues about the media text originating from outside of the text (e.g., a real-life politician's statements about a fictional television show) should also be explored. Additionally, much work could go into assessing the effects of PRM evaluations on selective exposure and fragmentation, as well as on narrative persuasion and what it means for the development of political attitudes.

Addressing Methodological and Analytical Shortcomings

The studies I present are not without their shortcomings that should be addressed in future research. For example, a closer look should be given to why conservatives and Republicans report higher PRM scores than do their Democrat and liberal counterparts. Although it may be a result of existing partisan and ideological attitudes toward the media industry in general and entertainment media specifically, other causes should be explored. And though I controlled for conservatism in all of my analyses and I found no congruence effects when it came to PRM evaluations, we must think carefully about the implications of these partisan and ideological differences in PRM scores. Likewise, the PRM scale should be tested with media depicting an even wider range of social issues. Although the issues I chose appeared in both Democratic and Republican 2016 party platforms, indicating that both parties have some concern

regarding those issues, it could be that one party or another still owns the issue (Petrocik, 1996). Thus, even if both parties seek to advance their positions regarding, say, the environment, this issue may still be seen as an issue owned by Democrats and liberals.

Although I took steps to recruit a balanced proportion of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents/Others in my samples, and the samples used for studies 3 and 4 were reflective of the U.S. population along other demographic factors, this is no substitute for nationally representative samples. This is not to say that all social science research requires nationally representative samples, especially experimental work; however, employing such samples would expand the applicability of my findings. Likewise, future research should address the degree to which the PRM concept applies to international samples and media environments. There is also the matter of how to account for prior exposure and show familiarity. Because I measured show familiarity and prior exposure in Study 3 after the treatments were administered, I could not use them as control variables (Montgomery et al., 2018). Although performing the analyses with and without familiarity as a control produced similar results, future research assessing PRM evaluations of existing media should address this by measuring familiarity and prior exposure in a way that does not limit the utility of these measures as control variables, or even as moderators.

Finally, although textual descriptions of audiovisual media such as television programs have been deployed successfully in previous research and viewers have access to textual descriptions of television media before exposure, viewers might still process a textual description differently than a video preview. Video stimuli are much more difficult to create and control than textual stimuli; however, this is still an expense that should be made in future research.

Examining External Cues

In addition to expanding the stimuli to audiovisual media, future research should consider cues about media content that exist from outside of the content itself. In a way, a textual description of a television show is external to the show itself; however, what I'm referring to here are cues regarding the show from some other source. This could be statements by politicians (e.g., President Trump's statements about the television show Roseanne; see Kelsey, 2018), endorsements from friends, reviews or commentary in other media, etc. All of these things could give clues regarding what objects are depicted in the show and what positions are advocated for regarding social issues. Apart from cues regarding the show content, external cues could inform assessments related to the three dimensions of the political (collective concerns/decisions/consequences, perception of persuasive intent, and controversy). Thus, future research should examine how cues external to the media content itself affect PRM evaluations.

Expanding to Other Media

Although I designed the PRM scale such that it could be used for media beyond television shows, its applicability to other media should be tested. As mentioned in the previous section regarding how political media are defined, this includes social media content, to include advertising. Beyond social media, I see future applicability of the PRM concept and scale to virtually any form of media—books, magazines, video games, music, movies, etc. All of these media may carry politically relevant information, and debates abound regarding their political relevance and the intentions of their creators (Haas et al., 2015).

Expanding to Other Viewer Identities

In this dissertation I examine how political identity strength affects PRM evaluations and, in turn, selective exposure to fictional entertainment television programming. Other social identities may also affect PRM evaluations, in particular identities such as race/ethnicity, gender

identity, sexual orientation, disability, etc. In a way, all of these identities could fall into the category of issue public membership; however, the two may not necessarily be the same thing. For example, it is perhaps the case that women think of gender discrimination as a more important issue than men; however, not only may some men care very deeply about gender equality, but they may be more deeply invested in the issue than some women. Thus, future research should examine whether membership in some arbitrary set group such as gender or race *and/or* being a strong member of those issue publics lead to differential PRM evaluation for shows depicting related issues.

There is the additional question of how political identities are being measured as they pertain to moral foundations (Graham et al., 2009; 2011). Although the MIME (Tamborini, 2011; 2013) and previous research (Long & Eveland, 2018; Tamborini et al., 2013) indicate that the salience of moral domains predicts media selection, previous research finds that moral domain salience may be an *outcome* of ideology as a political identity (Ciuk, 2018; Hatemi et al., 2019). In this case, moral domain salience is merely a proxy for partisan or ideological identity, rather than some separate phenomenon. If so, what the MIME really predicts is selective exposure to entertainment media that conforms to one's ideological identity. Future research should examine if the strength of moral domain salience can predict PRM evaluations and possibly lead to politically motivated selective exposure. In this case, PRM evaluations would serve as a mediator between moral domain salience and selective exposure, with the strength of moral domain salience predicting greater evaluations of media as politically relevant and greater evaluations of media as politically relevant predicting greater selective exposure to media content. The implications of this research could lead to the fusion of the MIME with the PRM concept and evaluation.

Examining News Selective Exposure and Entertainment Media Fragmentation

As I alluded to in the Implications section above, future research should also employ the PRM scale in the study of politically motivated selective exposure to news media. This is important because of the current assumption that news media is politically relevant, therefore selective exposure to news media is politically motivated selective exposure. As Study 3 indicated, political identity strength influences the degree to which people evaluate news media as being politically relevant. There's a possibility that such evaluations affect the degree to which individuals engage in selective exposure to news media. Selective exposure to news media evaluated as more politically relevant would be clear evidence of politically motivated selective exposure rather than simply the assumption of it.

In terms of entertainment media, future research should examine whether PRM evaluations lead to fragmentation of entertainment media audiences along political lines. Although previous research shows that individuals with different political identities watch different entertainment television shows, the role of PRM evaluations in this process must actually be demonstrated. The aim of such research would be to determine if individuals with stronger political identities over time end up primarily selecting entertainment media that aligns with their political beliefs, leading to increasingly politically segregated enclaves in the entertainment media ecosystem. Longitudinal methods might be ideal for addressing this question, with assessments over time regarding the political relevance of available entertainment shows.

Examining Downstream Effects on Narrative Persuasion

As I outline in the Implications section above, politically motivated selective exposure to entertainment media and the dimensions of PRM could pose some limits for the effectiveness of

narrative persuasion. This is an area ripe for exploration. For example, are higher scores on the CON dimension associated with greater feelings of affective threat? Do stronger perceptions of controversy and of persuasive intent translate to more counter-arguing? Is it at all possible for narrative persuasion from entertainment media to work to coax individuals with strong political identities toward an alternative viewpoint? Or is the potential for narrative persuasion only applicable for individuals with weaker political identities who might already be more prone to attitude development or change? If so, then entertainment media may more closely mirror news media in terms of the (in)ability of attitude change to occur due to the strength of individuals' political identities. This, and the findings of this dissertation, is all the more reason why political communication scholars should focus increased attention on how people evaluate entertainment media as politically relevant and what the effects could be on media selection and persuasion.

Conclusion

The list of new ways to access fictional entertainment media seems to grow every day. Rather than kill the television industry, the growth of the Internet and related technologies has led to even more ways for people to access news, information, and especially entertainment content. Considering previously evidenced patterns of political divides in the consumption of entertainment television content and the potential for entertainment media to influence politically relevant attitudes and beliefs, we must wonder to what degree political polarization is occurring by way of entertainment media. Answering this question requires new methods of measuring how politically relevant individuals evaluate entertainment media as being. In this dissertation, I developed the Politically Relevant Media (PRM) scale to that end, then demonstrated that political identity strength affects PRM evaluations of media, which predict politically motivated selective exposure to fictional entertainment media.

Not only is this dissertation the first research venture to evidence politically motivated selective exposure to fictional entertainment media, but it also raises implications for the future study of politically motivated selective exposure to both news and entertainment media. Regardless of genre or medium, I have demonstrated the importance in considering how individuals' political identities and the objects depicted in media texts affect evaluations of how politically relevant that media text is. I also find that we cannot assume that people will consider news media to be more politically relevant than entertainment media. In sum, it's more important to take a viewer-centric approach to determining whether media is politically relevant rather than scholars drawing arbitrary distinctions that may not exist in media consumers' minds. There really is no such thing as media that is political or non-political; rather, any media may be of greater lesser political relevance to any given media consumer.

Because scholars have ignored the possibility of politically motivated selective exposure to entertainment media, this is where I believe this line of research makes the biggest impact. My findings offer an explanation for why there are political fractures in entertainment media audiences. The result of politically motivated selective exposure to entertainment media is the potential for greater political polarization. Individuals with stronger political identities will expose themselves to more politically congenial media over time, likely reinforcing their existing political beliefs. This also places limits on the ability of fictional narratives carrying alternate viewpoints to persuade them. And because of the subdomains of the PRM concept, namely controversy and perception of persuasive intent, such individuals are likely to reject persuasive appeals upon incidental or forced exposure. The individuals most likely to expose themselves to potentially uncongenial narratives are those with weaker political identities in the first place.

The rate at which people consume entertainment media as compared to news media makes the potential for political polarization via entertainment media even more significant. Although people with stronger political identities (and with greater political interest) likely consume more news that individuals with weaker political identities, very few people completely avoid entertainment media. Entertainment programming makes up the bulk of television consumption (TiVo, 2019), meaning that political polarization could be advanced by a much wider range of the media that people consume. As the PRM concept is expanded to other media (e.g., video games, music, magazines, etc.), we might find that politically motivated selective exposure is occurring in even more media contexts—which means that political polarization may also be occurring in those contexts. This dissertation lays the groundwork for such an expansive examination of politically motivated selective exposure, one that dispenses with the definitions and boundaries imposed by researchers and instead centers the viewer's evaluation of media as politically relevant.

Appendix A

Television Show Descriptions

Overviews and Synopses of Real Television Shows for Studies 1-3

News Show, Politicians/Parties/Polls #1:

ABC World News Tonight is a daily evening news program currently anchored by David Muir (on weekdays) and Tom Llamas (on weekends). Airing on ABC, the show provides in-depth reporting on news events from the U.S. and around the world.

In this episode, Mary Bruce reports on U.S. President Donald Trump and former Vice President and current Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden both campaigning in Iowa. Muir and Bruce discuss recent poll numbers of a match-up between the two candidates, with Biden beating Trump at 53 percent versus 40 percent. Muir states that the same poll shows Biden ahead of other Democratic candidates, including senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren.

News Show, Politicians/Parties/Polls #2:

CBS Evening News is a daily evening news program currently anchored by Norah O'Donnell (on weekdays), Reena Ninan (on Saturdays), and Elaine Quijano (on Sundays). Airing on CBS, the show provides in-depth news coverage on events in the U.S. and across the world.

In this episode, former anchor Jeff Glor and chief congressional correspondent Nancy Cordes discuss U.S. Representative Nancy Pelosi being elected the new Speaker of the House of Representatives. Pelosi became House Speaker after Democrats gained control of a majority of House seats from the Republicans. Democrats in the House then voted for Pelosi to become Speaker. As one of her first duties, Pelosi swore in newly elected members of the House.

News Show, Social Issues (Health care costs):

ABC World News Tonight is a daily evening news program currently anchored by David Muir (on weekdays) and Tom Llamas (on weekends). Airing on ABC, the show provides in-depth reporting on news events from the U.S. and around the world.

In this episode, Adrienne Bankert reports on direct primary care, a new option that patients are using to avoid costly health care premiums. Instead of paying a higher insurance premium, patients pay a lower monthly membership fee for direct primary care. Bankert interviews a mother whose family was paying $900 a month in insurance premiums: "Our health insurance is almost as much as our house payment, really." With direct primary care plus a catastrophic coverage plan, the family now pays about half that amount.

News Show, Social Issues (Marijuana/Drugs):

CBS Evening News is a daily evening news program currently anchored by Norah O'Donnell (on weekdays), Reena Ninan (on Saturdays), and Elaine Quijano (on Sundays). Airing on CBS, the show provides in-depth news coverage on events in the U.S. and across the world.

In this episode, former anchor Jeff Glor and chief medical correspondent Dr. John LaPook report on and discuss an increase in the number of people treated in Colorado emergency rooms due to marijuana. LaPook states that cannabis-related ER visits more than quadrupled in a five-year period. This was partly because people may not know how to use the drug safely. Glor notes that there is a particular concern that young children could accidentally eat marijuana edibles, causing undesired effects.

Entertainment Show (Sitcom), Politicians/Parties/Polls #1:

Veep is a fictional comedy series that follows U.S. Vice President Selina Meyer. The show focuses on her career as vice president, along with the inner workings of her staff, family, allies, and rivals. Selina tries to balance the demands of being a vice president while connecting with her daughter, Catherine. Selina maintains a complicated relationship with her ex-husband, Andrew.

In this episode, Selina goes to Iowa to meet with potential voters while she decides who will run her presidential campaign. She learns that a highly sought-after campaign manager is in her area attending the funeral of a congressman. Selina decides to crash the funeral for a chance to meet the campaign manager and offer him the job.

Entertainment Show (Sitcom), Politicians/Parties/Polls #2:

1600 Penn is a fictional comedy series that follows U.S. President Dale Gilchrist, his wife Emily, and their family. The show focuses on his career as president, along with the inner workings of his family, staff, allies, and rivals. Dale tries to advance his agenda while avoiding scandals caused by his goofball son Skip.

In this episode, Dale and Emily fail to gain support from Senator Thoroughgood, a powerful rival, for a bill being voted on in Congress. At a ball held in Thoroughgood's honor on the night of the vote, Skip causes a scene while trying to impress his date. When the senators are called to Capitol Hill for the vote, Emily gets Skip to cause a diversion to prevent Thoroughgood from leaving and voting against the bill.

Entertainment Show (Sitcom), Social Issues (Health care costs):

Friends is a fictional comedy series that follows six friends in their twenties – Chandler and roommate Joey, Rachel and roommate Monica, Monica's brother Ross, and Phoebe. Throughout the show, the friends deal with their friendships, careers, and romantic lives while living in Manhattan, New York City.

In this episode, Rachel has to go to the hospital after she falls and hurts her ankle. As Monica helps her fill out paperwork, Rachel reveals that she doesn't have health insurance.

Monica tells Rachel that the x-rays alone might cost several hundred dollars. Rachel, who works as a waitress, is unsure how she'll be able to afford to pay for the hospital visit.

Entertainment Show (Sitcom), Social Issues (Marijuana/Drugs):

Workaholics is a fictional comedy series that follows three friends – Blake, Adam, and Anders – who are roommates in southern California. Blake and Adam were college roommates and Anders was their resident assistant before they all dropped out of school. The three work together at a telemarketing company, where they often bicker with their boss and coworkers due to their lack of work ethic and refusal to take anything seriously.

In this episode, Blake and Adam, who smoke marijuana regularly, play a prank on Anders. Anders gets so upset that he also smokes marijuana. The next day they find out that they'll be drug tested at work. If they fail the drug test, they'll lose their jobs as telemarketers. The three try to find a way to pass the drug test.

Entertainment Show (Drama), Politicians/Parties/Polls #1:

Scandal is a fictional drama series that follows crisis management expert Olivia Pope. The show focuses on her career as head of a firm handling crises related to multiple U.S. presidents, congresspeople, and other powerful figures in Washington, D.C. Throughout the show, Olivia and her team deal with national and international crises. Meanwhile, she maintains a fragile relationship with her father, a well-connected yet shadowy figure with lots of secrets.

In this episode, Olivia works to prepare a client who's running for president for an upcoming debate. A friend of Olivia tries to recruit her to work for a different candidate, but she stands by her client. Meanwhile, Olivia learns that her father has been secretly funding the campaign of a rival presidential candidate.

Entertainment Show (Drama), Politicians/Parties/Polls #2:

Madam Secretary is a fictional drama series that follows U.S. Secretary of State Elizabeth McCord. The show focuses on her career as secretary of state and later as president, her family, her staff, and other powerful figures in Washington, D.C. The U.S. President, Conrad Dalton, is a long-time mentor of Elizabeth's. Her eldest daughter, Stevie, is an intern for Dalton's chief of staff.

In this episode, Elizabeth must deal with a rival in the Senate who opposes the president's agenda and is running against her for president. Meanwhile, she finds out that her youngest daughter, Alison, has started dating the son of another one of her rivals. Elizabeth warns her family that their personal lives will be scrutinized during the presidential election.

Entertainment Show (Drama), Social Issues (Health care costs):

Grey's Anatomy is a fictional drama series that follows medical doctor Meredith Grey. She and a team of interns, residents, and attending doctors work at a Seattle hospital. Meredith and her coworkers struggle to balance caring for their patients while maintaining their personal lives. Throughout the series they become more experienced doctors while dealing with the demands of the medical field.

In this episode, Teddy, one of Meredith's colleagues, runs into a patient who's being discharged from the hospital even though he needs further care. The patient has a serious health issue but doesn't have enough health insurance to pay for the critical care he needs. Teddy tries to see if she can find a way to get the patient's treatments paid for.

Entertainment Show (Drama), Social Issues (Marijuana/Drugs):

Parenthood is a fictional drama series that follows the four siblings of the Braverman family – Sarah, Adam, Julia, and Crosby – as they each try to raise their children in Berkeley, California. Sarah and Adam both have teenage daughters, while Julia and Crosby both have younger children. Amber, who is Sarah's daughter, is an intern at her aunt Julia's law firm.

In this episode, Amber deals with the disappointment of not getting into college. She and her boyfriend, who also works at the law firm, smoke marijuana in the office after work. Julia confronts her niece about being high at work the next day. Amber quits her internship and storms out of the office, embarrassing Julia in front of her coworkers.

Overviews and Synopses of Mock Television Shows for Study 4

Hawkins Point

Hawkins Point is a new fictional [comedy/drama] series that follows the Hawkins family – father Bob, mother Judy, son Jake, and daughter Katie – in a small Midwestern town. Bob manages a local restaurant, and Judy is a nurse. High school junior Katie is excited about the prospect of going off to college, while Jake and friends contemplate the transition from middle school to high school. Tom, Judy's father, is a retired firefighter who also lives in the neighborhood. Neighbors Larry and Linda, while a bit annoying, are a stable presence in the Hawkins's lives.

Health care costs:

In this episode, Judy deals with an obnoxious patient at the hospital. Bob learns that Eric, one of his close friends, has taken on massive debt after his wife's unexpected health crisis leaves them with a huge medical bill. Katie tries to lay low after Linda spies her sneaking out one night to go to a party.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Tom tells Bob that no one should ever have to go into debt just to receive health care and that health care should be provided to everyone for free.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Tom tells Bob that he thinks people should take responsibility for their own health care costs, rather than making other people pay for it.

Marijuana/Drugs:

In this episode, Judy deals with an obnoxious patient at the hospital. Bob learns that Eric, one of his close friends, might lose his job after his boss finds out he uses marijuana. Katie tries to lay low after Linda spies her sneaking out one night to go to a party.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Tom tells Bob that anti-marijuana rules hurt people without protecting the community and that adults should be allowed to use it responsibly.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Tom tells Bob that he thinks marijuana is a very dangerous drug that poses a safety threat for their community.

Environment:

In this episode, Judy deals with an obnoxious patient at the hospital. Bob learns that Eric, one of his close friends, must find a new, environmentally friendly vendor for his business, but it ends up costing him more money. Katie tries to lay low after Linda spies her sneaking out one night to go to a party.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Tom tells Bob that a clean environment is a human right and that businesses need to do their part to fight against increasing pollution.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Tom tells Bob that environmental extremists forcing rules on everyone is bad for business and that Eric should do whatever is best for him.

Religion/LGBT:

In this episode, Judy deals with an obnoxious patient at the hospital. Bob learns from Eric, one of his close friends, that a bakery in town refused to make a wedding cake for him and his fiancé, Adam. Katie tries to lay low after Linda spies her sneaking out one night to go to a party.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Tom tells Bob that everyone is entitled to equal rights and it's not fair for the bakery to discriminate against Eric and Adam.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Tom tells Bob that marriage is between a man and a woman and the bakery owners shouldn't be forced to violate their religious beliefs.

The Beat

The Beat is a new fictional [comedy/drama] series that follows four friends – Derek, Sarah, Amy, and Chris – trying to make it in the music industry in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Derek, who sings and plays guitar, drummer Sarah, and bassist Chris are in a band together, and Amy is Sarah's roommate who's learning the ropes as a music promoter. Sarah's uncle, Will, owns a local venue where the band sometimes plays. The band chases their dreams of a big break while balancing their personal lives and the excitement of living in Steel City.

Health care costs:

In this episode, Amy works to get the band a spot in an upcoming local music festival. Derek learns that Cameron, one of his close friends, has taken on massive debt after his wife's unexpected health crisis leaves them with a huge medical bill. Sarah and Chris start working together on a new song but keep it a secret from Derek.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Will tells Derek that no one should ever have to go into debt just to receive health care and that health care should be provided to everyone for free.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Will tells Derek that he thinks people should take responsibility for their own health care costs, rather than making other people pay for it.

Marijuana/Drugs:

In this episode, Amy works to get the band a spot in an upcoming local music festival. Derek learns that Cameron, one of his close friends, might lose his job after his boss finds out he uses marijuana. Sarah and Chris start working together on a new song but keep it a secret from Derek.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Will tells Derek that anti-marijuana rules hurt people without protecting the community and that adults should be allowed to use it responsibly.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Will tells Derek that he thinks marijuana is a very dangerous drug that poses a safety threat for their community.

Environment:

In this episode, Amy works to get the band a spot in an upcoming local music festival. Derek learns that Cameron, one of his close friends, must find a new, environmentally friendly vendor for his business, but it ends up costing him more money. Sarah and Chris start working together on a new song but keep it a secret from Derek.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Will tells Derek that a clean environment is a human right and that businesses need to do their part to fight against increasing pollution.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Will tells Derek that environmental extremists forcing rules on everyone is bad for business and that Cameron should do whatever is best for him.

Religion/LGBT:

In this episode, Amy works to get the band a spot in an upcoming local music festival. Derek learns from Cameron, one of his close friends, that a bakery in town refused to make a wedding cake for him and his fiancé, Adam. Sarah and Chris start working together on a new song but keep it a secret from Derek.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Will tells Derek that everyone is entitled to equal rights and it's not fair for the bakery to discriminate against Cameron and Adam.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Will tells Derek that marriage is between a man and a woman and the bakery owners shouldn't be forced to violate their religious beliefs.

Savannah

Savannah is a new fictional [comedy/drama] series that follows the Miller family – father Jason, mother Aileen, son Dan, and daughter Lizzie – living in Savannah, Georgia. Jason co-owns a small but growing advertising agency that his father started, and Aileen teaches math at the local high school. Dan pursues his passion for soccer on his high school varsity team, while nine-year-old Lizzie dreams of following in his footsteps. Doug, Jason's business partner, is a close friend of the family who started the agency with Jason's father.

Health care costs:

In this episode, Aileen prepares her high school team for an upcoming math competition. Jason learns that Ian, one of his close friends, has taken on massive debt after his wife's unexpected health crisis leaves them with a huge medical bill. Dan's failing grades put him in danger of being kicked off of the soccer team, but he hides it from his parents.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Doug tells Jason that no one should ever have to go into debt just to receive health care and that health care should be provided to everyone for free.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Doug tells Jason that he thinks people should take responsibility for their own health care costs, rather than making other people pay for it.

Marijuana/Drugs:

In this episode, Aileen prepares her high school team for an upcoming math competition. Jason learns that Ian, one of his close friends, might lose his job after his boss finds out he uses marijuana. Dan's failing grades put him in danger of being kicked off of the soccer team, but he hides it from his parents.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Doug tells Jason that anti-marijuana rules hurt people without protecting the community and that adults should be allowed to use it responsibly.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Doug tells Jason that he thinks marijuana is a very dangerous drug that poses a safety threat for their community.

Environment:

In this episode, Aileen prepares her high school team for an upcoming math competition. Jason learns that Ian, one of his close friends, must find a new, environmentally friendly vendor for his business, but it ends up costing him more money. Dan's failing grades put him in danger of being kicked off of the soccer team, but he hides it from his parents.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Doug tells Jason that a clean environment is a human right and that businesses need to do their part to fight against increasing pollution.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Doug tells Jason that environmental extremists forcing rules on everyone is bad for business and that Ian should do whatever is best for him.

Religion/LGBT:

In this episode, Aileen prepares her high school team for an upcoming math competition. Jason learns from Ian, one of his close friends, that a bakery in town refused to make a wedding cake for him and his fiancé, Kyle. Dan's failing grades put him in danger of being kicked off of the soccer team, but he hides it from his parents.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Doug tells Jason that everyone is entitled to equal rights and it's not fair for the bakery to discriminate against Ian and Kyle.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Doug tells Jason that marriage is between a man and a woman and the bakery owners shouldn't be forced to violate their religious beliefs.

The Turnaround

The Turnaround is a new fictional [comedy/drama] series that follows Michael Emery, a recent law school graduate who moves back to his small hometown to be closer to his family. He finds that not much has changed, yet everything seems different. Michael's best friend Shaun, who he's known all his life, runs a gym in town. Michael's high school girlfriend, Kimmy, works at the same grocery store as Michael's younger sister, Stacy. Nick, Michael's father, a retired mechanic, and his piano teacher mother, Janice, also live in the neighborhood.

Health care costs:

In this episode, Shaun thinks of ways to grow the membership base of the gym. Michael learns that Zach, one of his close friends, has taken on massive debt after his wife's unexpected health crisis leaves them with a huge medical bill. Stacy finds out that she got a promotion that she and Kimmy were both in the running for.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Nick tells Michael that no one should ever have to go into debt just to receive health care and that health care should be provided to everyone for free.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Nick tells Michael that he thinks people should take responsibility for their own health care costs, rather than making other people pay for it.

Marijuana/Drugs:

In this episode, Shaun thinks of ways to grow the membership base of the gym. Michael learns that Zach, one of his close friends, might lose his job after his boss finds out he uses marijuana. Stacy finds out that she got a promotion that she and Kimmy were both in the running for.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Nick tells Michael that anti-marijuana rules hurt people without protecting the community and that adults should be allowed to use it responsibly.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Nick tells Michael that he thinks marijuana is a very dangerous drug that poses a safety threat for their community.

Environment:

In this episode, Shaun thinks of ways to grow the membership base of the gym. Michael learns that Zach, one of his close friends, must find a new, environmentally friendly vendor for his business, but it ends up costing him more money. Stacy finds out that she got a promotion that she and Kimmy were both in the running for.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Nick tells Michael that a clean environment is a human right and that businesses need to do their part to fight against increasing pollution.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Nick tells Michael that environmental extremists forcing rules on everyone is bad for business and that Zach should do whatever is best for him.

Religion/LGBT:

In this episode, Shaun thinks of ways to grow the membership base of the gym. Michael learns from Zach, one of his close friends, that a bakery in town refused to make a wedding cake for him and his fiancé, Scott. Stacy finds out that she got a promotion that she and Kimmy were both in the running for.

[Democratic/Liberal stem]: Nick tells Michael that everyone is entitled to equal rights and it’s not fair for the bakery to discriminate against Zach and Scott.

[Republican/Conservative stem]: Nick tells Michael that marriage is between a man and a woman and the bakery owners shouldn’t be forced to violate their religious beliefs.

Appendix B

Pre-Tests

Stimuli Pre-Tests

I recruited a total of 155 participants from MTurk from Jan. 10-16, 2020, to pre-test the stimuli for studies 1 through 3. In an initial round of pre-testing, 75 participants were randomly assigned six of the 12 show descriptions and were asked which genre (i.e., news, sitcom, drama, cooking, game show, reality, sports, travel) they thought best described the show. They were also asked what objects (i.e., politicians, the cost of health care, marijuana, terrorism, climate change, football, country music, fashion, or none of these) were mentioned in the show. I used a one-sample *t*-test to determine if the percentage of participants who picked the intended genre or object statistically significantly differed from the percentage who picked the next most frequently guessed genre or object. Ten of the stimuli passed the first round of pre-testing. I revised and re-tested the other two stimuli in two additional rounds (n = 40 each) of pre-testing until they passed; see tables B.1 and B.2.

I recruited a total of 321 MTurk participants for the Study 4 pre-test from Feb. 6-11, 2020. Because not all of the manipulations were successful in the first round (n = 161), I modified the stimuli and ran a second round of pre-testing (n = 160), the results of which are reported here. Participants were randomly assigned four shows using a 2 (congeniality: congenial vs. uncongenial) x 2 (genre: sitcom vs. drama) x 4 (one of four social issues) design, with congeniality operationalized as the show expressing a Democratic/liberal issue position or a Republican/conservative issue position. The partisan/ideological positions were derived from the

Table B.1. *Percentage of pre-testers who guessed the objects depicted in stimuli for studies 1-3.*

Show	Object	*N*	*t*	PPP	Health	Marijuana	Football	Country	Fashion	Terrorism	None
ABC World News Tonight	Health	35	13.16	2.86	91.43	2.86	-	-	-	-	2.86
CBS Evening News	Marijuana	39	10.25	2.86	5.13	87.18	2.56	-	-	-	2.86
ABC World News Tonight	PPP	35	16.73	97.14	-	-	2.86	-	-	-	-
CBS Evening News	PPP	38	13.10	89.47	2.63	-	2.63	2.63	-	-	2.63
Friends	Health	31	6.25	-	80.65	3.23	-	-	3.23	3.23	9.68
Workaholics	Marijuana	43	20.72	-	-	97.67	-	-	-	-	2.33
Veep	PPP	40	10.56	87.50	-	-	-	2.50	2.50	2.50	5.00
1600 Penn	PPP	40	12.09	92.50	-	-	2.50	-	-	-	5.00
Grey's Anatomy	Health	36	10.75	-	91.67	-	2.78	-	-	-	5.56
Parenthood	Marijuana	31	6.66	3.23	-	83.87	3.23	-	-	-	9.68
Scandal	PPP	38	14.39	92.10	-	-	2.63	2.63	-	-	2.63
Madam Secretary	PPP	40	9.62	90.0	-	2.50	-	7.50	-	-	-

Note: PPP = Politicians/Parties/Polls. No pre-testers guessed that climate change was depicted. The *p*s for all *t*-tests were < .001.

Table B.2. *Percentage of pre-testers who guessed the genres depicted in stimuli for studies 1-3.*

Show	Genre	*N*	*t*	*p*	News	Sitcom	Drama	Cooking	Game	Reality	Sports
ABC World News Tonight	News	34	-	< .001	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
CBS Evening News	News	39	10.25	< .001	87.18	-	5.13	2.56	-	2.56	2.56
ABC World News Tonight	News	35	9.68	< .001	88.57	-	2.86	-	-	5.71	2.86
CBS Evening News	News	38	9.95	< .001	86.84	2.63	2.63	2.63	-	5.26	-
Friends	Sitcom	31	5.15	< .001	-	77.42	12.90	-	3.23	3.23	3.23
Workaholics	Sitcom	43	6.00	< .001	2.33	79.07	13.95	-	-	4.65	-
Veep	Sitcom	40	2.11	.041	2.50	60.00	30.00	-	-	5.00	2.50
1600 Penn	Sitcom	40	3.02	.004	2.50	70.00	27.50	-	-	-	-
Grey's Anatomy	Drama	36	17.23	< .001	-	-	97.22	-	-	-	2.78
Parenthood	Drama	31	6.66	< .001	-	9.68	83.87	-	-	3.23	3.23
Scandal	Drama	37	13.99	< .001	-	-	91.89	2.70	2.70	2.70	-
Madam Secretary	Drama	40	9.92	< .001	5.00	5.00	85.00	-	-	5.00	-

Note: No pre-testers guessed that the genre was travel.

2016 party platforms (Committee on Arrangements for the 2016 Republican National Convention, 2016; Democratic Platform Committee, 2016). Each participant evaluated two sitcoms and two dramas, with each genre conveying one Republican/conservative message and one Democrat/liberal message, across all four social issues (the cost of health care, marijuana as a public safety concern, environmental regulations, and anti-LGBTQ discrimination). As in the pre-test for studies 1 through 3, participants were asked to identify which genre they thought each show was, using the same response categories. They were also asked what objects were mentioned in the show, with "The environment," "LGBTQ issues," and "Technology" replacing politicians and country music as response categories. As with the previous pre-test, I used a one-sample *t*-test to determine if the percentage of participants who picked the intended genre or object statistically significantly differed from the percentage who picked the next most frequently guessed genre or object. All of the stimuli passed the pre-test for genre and object; see tables B.3 and B.4.

To check the manipulations of the issue positions, I asked participants how well they though the views presented in the show aligned with the views of four groups: liberals, conservatives, the Democratic party, and the Republican party, randomized. Response options were on a 1 to 5 scale: "Not at all well," "A little well," "Moderately well," "Very well," and "Extremely well." Overall, the scores for alignment with the Democratic Party and with liberals were higher than the scores for alignment with the GOP and with conservatives; see tables B.5 and B.6. Table B.7 reports the *M* and *SD* for the group alignment items for shows delivering a Democratic/liberal message and shows delivering a Republican/conservative message, for each issue. I also ran linear mixed models to predict each alignment measure based on the show's

Table B.3. *Percentage of pre-testers who guessed the objects depicted in stimuli for Study 4.*

Show	***N***	***t***	**Health**	**Mari.**	**Envir.**	**LGBTQ**	**Fash.**	**F-Ball**	**Tech.**	**Terr.**	**None**
All Health	160	17.22	78.75	2.50	1.25	1.88	3.75	3.75	1.25	1.88	5.00
In Sitcoms	77	11.61	77.92	3.90	-	2.60	2.60	3.90	2.60	1.30	5.19
In Dramas	83	12.74	79.52	1.20	2.41	1.20	4.82	3.61	-	2.41	4.82
Hawkins Point	32	4.83	65.62	9.38	-	3.12	3.12	9.38	6.25	3.12	-
The Beat	41	9.64	82.93	-	4.88	2.44	4.88	-	-	2.44	2.44
Savannah	51	7.94	80.39	1.96	-	-	1.96	5.88	-	-	9.80
The Turnaround	36	8.76	83.33	-	-	2.78	5.56	-	-	2.78	5.56
All Marijuana	160	18.05	1.25	82.50	2.50	-	1.88	5.62	0.62	1.88	3.75
In Sitcoms	73	12.39	-	86.30	1.37	-	-	6.85	-	1.37	4.11
In Dramas	87	13.15	2.30	79.31	3.45	-	3.45	4.60	1.15	2.30	3.45
Hawkins Point	38	11.43	-	92.11	-	-	-	2.63	-	-	5.26
The Beat	35	7.96	5.71	80.00	2.86	-	-	2.86	-	2.86	5.71
Savannah	40	6.59	-	77.50	7.50	-	5.00	10.00	-	-	-
The Turnaround	47	9.06	-	80.85	-	-	2.13	6.38	2.13	4.26	4.26
All Environment	160	15.52	0.62	-	80.00	1.25	3.12	5.62	1.25	0.62	7.50
In Sitcoms	87	12.19	-	-	81.61	1.15	1.15	5.75	2.30	1.15	6.90
In Dramas	73	9.75	1.37	-	78.08	1.37	5.48	5.48	-	-	8.22
Hawkins Point	39	4.75	-	-	76.92	-	-	2.56	-	2.56	17.95
The Beat	41	9.64	2.44	-	82.93	-	4.88	2.44	2.44	-	4.88
Savannah	40	6.23	-	-	80.00	-	5.00	12.50	-	-	2.50
The Turnaround	40	8.85	-	-	80.00	5.00	2.50	5.00	2.50	-	5.00
All LGBTQ	159	10.50	1.26	-	4.40	69.81	2.52	6.29	2.52	1.26	11.95
In Sitcoms	83	6.74	-	-	6.02	66.27	2.41	8.43	2.41	1.20	13.25
In Dramas	76	8.27	2.63	-	2.63	73.68	2.63	3.95	2.63	1.32	10.53
Hawkins Point	51	7.73	1.96	-	3.92	74.51	3.92	5.88	1.96	-	7.84
The Beat	43	4.40	2.33	-	2.33	62.79	4.65	6.98	4.65	2.33	13.95
Savannah	28	6.91	-	-	3.57	82.14	-	3.57	-	3.57	7.14
The Turnaround	37	3.33	-	-	8.11	62.16	-	8.11	2.70	-	18.92

Note: All *t*-tests are statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level except for LGBTQ on The Turnaround, which was $p = .002$.

Table B.4. *Percentage of pre-testers who guessed the genres depicted in stimuli for Study 4.*

Show	***N***	***t***	**Sitcom**	**Drama**	**Game**	**News**	**Reality**	**Sports**	**Travel**	**Cooking**
All sitcoms	320	11.75	67.81	17.19	1.25	1.56	3.75	4.69	2.50	1.25
Hawkins Point	89	4.23	59.55	22.47	1.12	3.37	3.37	5.62	2.25	2.25
The Beat	80	7.30	75.00	15.00	1.25	1.25	3.75	2.50	-	1.25
Savannah	78	7.20	70.51	12.82	1.28	1.28	2.56	8.97	2.56	-
The Turnaround	73	5.41	67.12	17.81	1.37	-	5.48	1.37	5.48	1.37
All Dramas	318	31.41	3.14	84.59	1.57	1.89	2.52	2.83	1.89	1.57
Hawkins Point	71	13.44	5.63	87.32	-	2.82	1.41	2.82	-	-
The Beat	80	11.85	5.00	77.50	3.75	1.25	5.00	1.25	3.75	2.50
Savannah	81	16.98	2.47	85.19	2.47	2.47	2.47	2.47	2.47	-
The Turnaround	86	16.21	-	88.37	-	1.16	1.16	4.65	1.16	3.49

Note: All *t*-tests are statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.

Table B.5. *Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for alignment measures.*

Alignment	**Democrats**	**Liberals**	**Republicans**	**Conservatives**
Liberals	.85***	-		
Republicans	-.22***	-.22***	-	
Conservatives	-.22***	-.26***	.87***	-
M	3.16	3.19	2.54	2.55
SD	1.24	1.26	1.35	1.33

Note: ***$p < .001$

Table B.6. *Tests of statistically significant differences between alignment measures.*

Alignment	**Democrats**	**Liberals**	**Republicans**
Liberals	$t(1271.5) = -0.35$, $p = .730$	-	
Republicans	$t(1264.9) = 8.60$, $p < .001$	$t(1266.6) = 8.86$, $p < .001$	-
Conservatives	$t(1267.3) = 8.61$, $p < .001$	$t(1268.4) = 8.87$, $p < .001$	$t(1273.8) = -0.04$, $p = .967$

Table B.7. *Conditional means of alignment variables by issue and position.*

	Align with Democrats		Align with Liberals		Align with Republicans		Align with Conservatives	
	DL	RC	DL	RC	DL	RC	DL	RC
Healthcare	3.60 (1.06)	2.73 (1.21)	3.61 (0.99)	2.72 (1.19)	2.14 (1.26)	3.05 (1.32)	2.14 (1.25)	3.18 (1.29)
Marijuana	3.47 (1.06)	2.77 (1.25)	3.46 (1.05)	2.73 (1.21)	2.12 (1.19)	2.93 (1.19)	2.17 (1.24)	2.94 (1.20)
Environment	3.47 (0.99)	2.80 (1.38)	3.55 (1.09)	2.74 (1.38)	2.43 (1.38)	2.89 (1.28)	2.21 (1.18)	2.91 (1.23)
LGBTQ	3.67 (1.05)	2.79 (1.34)	3.88 (1.06)	2.81 (1.39)	1.89 (1.27)	2.92 (1.38)	1.89 (1.29)	2.96 (1.36)

Note: DL = Show expressing a Democratic/liberal position; RC = show expressing a Republican/conservative position. *t*-tests revealed that the differences between the DL and RC means for each alignment variable and each issue is statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level except for alignment with Republicans for Environment, which was statistically significant at $p = .028$.

issue position, controlling for pre-tester's political conservatism, genre, the issue depicted, and the unique show premise. Shows delivering a Republican/conservative message were rated as less aligned with the views of Democrats and liberals and more aligned with the views of Republicans and conservatives; see Table B.8. This demonstrates that the manipulation of issue position was robust to any effects of the respondent's political ideology, genre, issue, and show, and thus worked as intended.

All pre-tests also asked the extent to which each show sounded the following on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*): exciting, likable, boring, similar to my real life, interesting, realistic, entertaining, enjoyable, relaxing, stressful, easy to follow. All show descriptions can be found in Appendix A.

PRM Scale Pre-Test

One of the considerations for developing the PRM scale was to ensure that the scale items would not be affected by incongruence between the attitudes of the viewer and the perceived issue positions of the shows, particularly for the perception of persuasive intent dimension. I developed a total of 12 items to measure perception of persuasive intent; see Appendix C. To test whether these items would be affected by incongruence, I pre-tested these 12 items along with the 14 items tapping into the other two scale dimensions, using the previously pre-tested Study 4 stimuli that included issue positions. I also used this pre-test as an opportunity to test items measuring issue public membership and tolerance for ambiguity (TA).

I used CloudResearch's Panel feature to recruit 75 MTurk participants on Feb. 26, 2020, divided between self-identified Democrats (n = 23), Republicans (n = 21), and Independents/Others (n = 31). Participants first answered eight questions regarding how strongly held their beliefs were regarding eight issues (the cost of healthcare, marijuana, the environment,

Table B.8. *Linear mixed models predicting alignment measures.*

	Democrats	**Liberals**	**Republicans**	**Conservatives**
Position: Republican/Conservative	-.79*** (.08)	-.89*** (.08)	.82*** (.08)	.90*** (.08)
Conservatism	.11*** (.03)	.09** (.03)	.11** (.04)	.10* (.04)
Genre: Drama	-.02 (.08)	-.08 (.08)	-.01 (.08)	.03 (.08)
Issue: Health	.03 (.11)	.03 (.11)	-.04 (.11)	.10 (.11)
Issue: LGBTQ	.11 (.11)	.20 (.11)	-.25* (.11)	-.13 (.11)
Issue: Marijuana	-.01 (.11)	-.04 (.11)	-.13 (.11)	-.00 (.11)
Show: Savannah	.17 (.11)	.07 (.12)	-.04 (.11)	.07 (.11)
Show: The Beat	.19 (.11)	.21 (.11)	-.16 (.11)	-.11 (.11)
Show: The Turnaround	.05 (.11)	.11 (.11)	.04 (.11)	-.08 (.11)
Intercept	3.06*** (.17)	3.24 *** (.17)	1.92*** (.18)	1.80*** (.18)
Random Effects var (*SD*)				
Respondent	0.37 (0.61)	0.33 (0.58)	0.6 (0.77)	0.56 (0.75)
Residual	0.98 (0.99)	1.03 (1.02)	1.01 (1.01)	0.99 (0.99)
$N_{observations}$	638	636	638	638
Log likelihood	-981.69	-988.83	-1017.13	-1006.71
AIC	1987.38	2001.66	2058.27	2037.42
BIC	2040.88	2055.12	2111.77	2090.92

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. $N_{respondents} = 160$ for all models. Reference categories are Environment for Issue and Hawkins Point for Show.

and LGBTQ discrimination, plus four filler issues: abortion, immigration, sex education, and voter ID) coded from 0 (*Strongly believe [the Democratic/liberal position]*) to 1 (*Strongly believe [the Republican/conservative position]*) across seven response options, the middle option being "Believe or disbelieve both to the same degree." As with the Study 4 stimuli pre-tests, the positions were derived from the 2016 party platforms, with slightly different wording used for the issue positions here and the ones that appear in the show descriptions.

Participants then completed the nine TA items from the need for closure scale (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). These items served the primary purpose of acting as a distractor task between the issue public membership items and the show descriptions and PRM scale. Next the participants were presented with four shows (two sitcoms, two dramas, with two Democratic/liberal messages and two Republican/conservative messages). After each show they responded to the PRM scale items, a single item asking how political they thought the show was, and a single item asking how well they thought the views presented by the show aligned with their own views. Finally, they answered a series of standard demographic questions, including political partisanship and ideology.

To examine possible incongruence effects, I used linear mixed models to predict the score for each of the PRM scale items based on the interaction between the show position and how strongly held the participant's beliefs were on that issue, controlling for the issue and the order in which the show was presented, along with a random effect for respondents to account for the repeated measure. Rather than examine the statistical significance of the interaction term alone, I plotted and visually inspected the interactions (Brambor et al., 2006). An incongruence effect would be evidenced by individuals who more strongly believe either position giving a higher score on the measures when presented with a show conveying the opposing position. No

item demonstrated a uniform incongruence effect; in fact, most items failed to demonstrate any sort of effect of issue position belief whatsoever. The only items demonstrating any sort of congruence or incongruence effects were pe_affectnum, pe_topaff, and pe_topavg from the CDC dimension. For pe_affectnum, respondents who strongly believe the Democratic/liberal position gave higher scores than respondents who strongly believe the Republican/conservative position, but only when presented with shows conveying the Democratic/liberal position. For pe_topaff, respondents who strongly believe the Democratic/liberal position gave higher scores than respondents who strongly believe the Republican/conservative position, but only when presented with shows conveying the Republican/conservative position. For pe_topavg, respondents who strongly believe the Democratic/liberal position gave higher scores than respondents who strongly believe the Republican/conservative position, but only when presented with shows conveying the Democratic/liberal position.

Overall, this demonstrates that most of the PRM scale items, in particular the PPI items, are not prone to congruence or incongruence effects. Considering which items demonstrated any sort of (in)congruence effect, this information informed my item reduction strategy between studies 1 and 2. Moreover, because my objective is to use the scale as a whole and at most to examine changes on dimensions as a whole, it is unlikely that any single item, when included on the whole scale or on a dimension-specific subscale, would skew the scale enough to cause an (in)congruence effect for the scale itself. Thus, after item reduction, I used this pre-test data to determine if there were any (in)congruence effects for the PRM scale as a whole or for the sub-scales.

Appendix C

Politically Relevant Media (PRM) Scale

Items retained for the final scale are marked with an asterisk.

Dimension 1: Collective Concerns, Decisions, and Consequences

*pe_propcare Thinking of the topics presented on [name of show], how many people would you say care about those topics?

No one at all (1)
A few people (2)
A good number of people (3)
Most people (4)
Everyone (5)

pe_topaff When it comes to the topics presented on [name of show], those topics affect:

No one at all (1)
A few people (2)
A good number of people (3)
Most people (4)
Everyone (5)

*pe_topavg When it comes to the topics presented on [name of show], the average person is:

Not at all affected (1)
Somewhat affected (2)
Moderately affected (3)
Very affected (4)
Extremely affected (5)

pe_docare Thinking of the topics presented on [name of show], how much do you think people in general care about those topics?

Not at all (1)
A little (2)
A moderate amount (3)
A lot (4)
A great deal (5)

pe_affectnum Thinking of the topics presented on [name of show], when our society makes decisions about those topics, those decisions affect:

No one at all (1)
A few people (2)
A good number of people (3)
Most people (4)
Everyone (5)

*pe_affectavg Thinking of the topics presented on [name of show], when our society makes decisions about those topics, the average person is:

Not at all affected (1)
Somewhat affected (2)
Moderately affected (3)
Very affected (4)
Extremely affected (5)

pe_influence Thinking of the topics presented on [name of show], how much control do you think our society is able to have over those topics?

None at all (1)
A little (2)
A moderate amount (3)
A lot (4)
A great deal (5)

*pe_possible Thinking of the topics presented on [name of show], how possible do you think it is for our society to make choices that affect those topics?

Not at all possible (1)
A little possible (2)
Somewhat possible (3)
Very possible (4)
Extremely possible (5)

Dimension 2: Perception of Persuasive Intent

pe_persuade Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: The purpose of [name of show] is to persuade people.

Strongly disagree (1)
Somewhat disagree (2)
Neither agree nor disagree (3)
Somewhat agree (4)
Strongly agree (5)

pe_entertain Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: The purpose of [name of show] is to entertain.

Strongly disagree (1)
Somewhat disagree (2)
Neither agree nor disagree (3)
Somewhat agree (4)
Strongly agree (5)

*pe_change Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: [name of show] seems interested in changing people's opinions.

Strongly disagree (1)
Somewhat disagree (2)
Neither agree nor disagree (3)
Somewhat agree (4)
Strongly agree (5)

pe_dismiss How easy would it be to dismiss [name of show] as simply a form of entertainment?

Extremely difficult (1)
Somewhat difficult (2)
Neither easy nor difficult (3)
Somewhat easy (4)
Extremely easy (5)

pe_serious How serious do you think [name of show] is about advancing the views presented in the show?

Not at all serious (1)
A little serious (2)
Somewhat serious (3)
Very serious (4)
Extremely serious (5)

*pe_think How likely do you think it is that [name of show] is trying to get people to think a certain way?

Not at all likely (1)
A little likely (2)
Somewhat likely (3)
Very likely (4)
Extremely likely (5)

pe_point Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: [name of show] is trying to prove a point.

Strongly disagree (1)
Somewhat disagree (2)
Neither agree nor disagree (3)
Somewhat agree (4)
Strongly agree (5)

pe_message Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: [name of show] is trying to get a message across.

Strongly disagree (1)
Somewhat disagree (2)
Neither agree nor disagree (3)
Somewhat agree (4)
Strongly agree (5)

pe_attention Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: [name of show] is trying to call attention to something.

Strongly disagree (1)
Somewhat disagree (2)
Neither agree nor disagree (3)
Somewhat agree (4)
Strongly agree (5)

*pe_stand Thinking of the topics presented on [name of show], how likely do you think it is that [name of show] is taking a stand on those topics?

Not at all likely (1)
A little likely (2)
Somewhat likely (3)
Very likely (4)
Extremely likely (5)

pe_reflect Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: [name of show] wants people to reflect on the topics on the show.

Strongly disagree (1)
Somewhat disagree (2)
Neither agree nor disagree (3)
Somewhat agree (4)
Strongly agree (5)

*pe_express Thinking of the topics presented on [name of show], how likely do you think it is that [name of show] expressing an opinion on those topics?

Not at all likely (1)
A little likely (2)
Somewhat likely (3)
Very likely (4)
Extremely likely (5)

Dimension 3: Perception of Controversy

pe_controversy How controversial do you think the topics presented on [name of show] are?
Not at all controversial (1)
Slightly controversial (2)
Somewhat controversial (3)
Very controversial (4)
Extremely controversial (5)

*pe_argue How often do you think people argue about the topics presented on [name of show]?
Never (1)
Rarely (2)
Sometimes (3)
Very often (4)
All the time (5)

pe_minds How often do you think people are willing to change their own minds about the topics seen on [name of show]?
Never (1)
Rarely (2)
Sometimes (3)
Very often (4)
All the time (5)

*pe_opinions Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: People hold strong opinions about the topics presented on [name of show].
Strongly disagree (1)
Somewhat disagree (2)
Neither agree nor disagree (3)
Somewhat agree (4)
Strongly agree (5)

*pe_divided Thinking of the topics presented on [name of show], how divided do you think people in general are on those topics?
Not at all divided (1)
Slightly divided (2)
Moderately divided (3)
Very divided (4)
Extremely divided (5)

pe_agree Thinking of the topics presented on [name of show], how in agreement do you think people in general are on those topics?
Not at all in agreement (1)
A little in agreement (2)
Somewhat in agreement (3)
Mostly in agreement (4)
Totally in agreement (5)

Single-Item "Political" Measure

pe_political How political do you think the show [name of show] is?
- Not at all political (1)
- A little political (2)
- Somewhat political (3)
- Very political (4)
- Extremely political (5)

Appendix D

Issue Public Membership Items

Item on pre-test:
When it comes to [issue], some people believe [position A or B], whereas some people believe [position B or A]. How about you, which belief do you hold?

Item on Study 2:
When it comes to the issue of [issue], some people believe [position A or B], whereas other people believe [position B or A]. How about you, which belief do you hold?

Response options:
-Strongly believe [position A or B]
-Moderately believe [position A or B]
-Slightly believe [position A or B]
-Believe or disbelieve both to the same degree
-Slightly believe [position B or A]
-Moderately believe [position B or A]
-Strongly believe [position B or A]

All eight issues were presented in random order. The order of presentation for positions A and B was randomly chosen. The list of issues and positions is presented in Table D.1 below.

Table D.1. *Issues and positions for issue public membership items.*

Issue	**Position A (Democratic/Liberal)**	**Position B (Republican/Conservative)**
the cost of healthcare	healthcare should be free for everyone	paying for healthcare is an individual responsibility
marijuana	Pre-test: marijuana restrictions hurt people more than protect communities Study 2: marijuana restrictions hurt people more than they protect communities	marijuana poses a danger to public safety
the environment	we need to make sure businesses do their part to protect the environment	environmental regulations shouldn't be forced on businesses
Pre-test: religious freedom and discrimination Study 2: whether businesses can deny service to gay or transgender people on religious grounds	no one should be allowed to discriminate against gay and transgender people	business owners shouldn't be forced to violate their religious beliefs
abortion	women have the right to access a safe and legal abortion	unborn children have a fundamental right to life
immigration	we should make it less difficult for people to immigrate to the U.S.	Pre-test: we should secure our borders and enforce immigration laws Study 2: we should secure our borders and enforce existing immigration laws
preventing unintended pregnancies	family planning and contraception information is most effective	abstinence until marriage and risk avoidance is most effective
Pre-test: voting Study 2: voter ID	voter ID laws discriminate against already vulnerable groups	voter ID laws protect against voter fraud

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