MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

Montana Boys State and Montana Girls State: Political Socialization of the Adolescents in Transition to Adulthood in the Context of Family, School, and Community
by Patricia McNulty Nelson

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education
Montana State University
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Abstract:
Many young people in the United States are not being adequately prepared for the roles and responsibilities of democratic adult citizenship and political participation. Research has shown that the trends of increased disengagement have continued throughout the years. From elementary level to college level, students appear to be less informed and concerned with politics and political participation.

Political socialization research attempts to explain the basically sociological conception of political activity. Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development theory provides the environment of family, school, community and the dimension of individually to study Elder's life course transition of the adolescent to adulthood. The theories of identity formation, formal operational cognition and post-conventional moral development converge in adolescence. These theories provide multifaceted ways to examine the development of the life long trajectory of political socialization.

The sample for the study were 16 to 18 year old boys (289) and girls (177) who were carefully chosen on the basis of leadership, citizenship and scholarship to represent Montana youth at the American Legion and its Auxiliary-sponsored Boys' State and Girls' State held in Helena, Montana in June, 2002. Respondents were a good cross sectional representation of various size schools and geographical locations in Montana.

The questionnaire was developed by the researcher to specifically answer the question: How is this group of Montana students who were chosen to be members of Montana Boys' State and Montana Girls' State being politically socialized in the political and civic structures of society, and in what is often considered the "non-political" crucibles of family, school and community? The sampled youth appear to be more involved in church- related programs than in either voluntary or political activities. Surprisingly, the youth did not organize their thinking about sociopolitical policies or laws in accordance with their reported political partisanship or their religious affiliation.

The values, beliefs and actions of prior generations are transmitted in the political and non political institutions of our society. The family, school and community and the influences operating within them are instrumental in politically socializing our youth and perpetuating democracy.

MONTANA BOYS' STATE AND MONTANA GIRLS' STATE: POLITICAL

SOCIALIZATION OF THE ADOLESCENTS IN TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

by

Patricia McNulty Nelson

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Education

in

Education

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

June 2004

APPROVAL

of a dissertation submitted by

Patricia McNulty Nelson

This dissertation has been read by each member of the dissertation committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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ABSTRACT

Many young people in the United States are not being adequately prepared for the roles and responsibilities of democratic adult citizenship and political participation. Research has shown that the trends of increased disengagement have continued throughout the years. From elementary level to college level, students appear to be less informed and concerned with politics and political participation.

Political socialization research attempts to explain the basically sociological conception of political activity. Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development theory provides the environment of family, school, community and the dimension of individually to study Elder's life course transition of the adolescent to adulthood. The theories of identity formation, formal operational cognition and post-conventional moral development converge in adolescence. These theories provide multifaceted ways to examine the development of the life long trajectory of political socialization.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Political and civic competencies can be transferred to adolescents through a democratic heritage as well as contemporaneous political and non-political agents. American families, schools, and communities have been entrusted with safekeeping of the values, beliefs, and actions of prior generations and now serve as transmitters to future generations.

> The accident of birth places the individual into a particular family environment which nurtures political (or apolitical) outlooks early in life and locates the individual in a sociopolitical setting that may last a lifetime....Family environments may be important not only for direct transmission...but also for providing children with sets of predispositions that will effect their later reactions to political events and forces at work in the polity. (Beck and Jennings, 1991, p. 742-745

Families are primary agents of political socialization for the adolescent. However, schools also have a special responsibility for the democratizing of each generation. "Schools fulfill the competency and civic responsibility through both formal and non-formal education beginning in the earliest years and continuing through the entire educational process" (Branson, 1998, p. 7 of 28). Schools must synthesize inherited standards and traditions with contemporary experiences and events into a core curriculum that will later draw students into the macro-level political arena.

"Involvement in high school extra-curricular activities is predictive of several indicators of healthy adult development, including active participation in the political process and other types of volunteer activities" (Eccles, Barber, 1999, p.12).

Yet, the civic skills that facilitate political participation are acquired beyond the family and school. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) believe that the "workplace, voluntary associations and church are the backbone of civil society, lying between the personal world of the family and the public world of politics" (p. 369). Graber (1997) saw the media as a tremendously powerful force which contributes to the life-long process of political socialization and learning (p. 193). Participation in community activities, sports, and leisure and recreation nurture non-political roles and responsibilities of membership, as well as organizational and communication skills that can be transferred to the political realm.

Background of the Problem

Research shows that the premature formation of families, the breakup of families, and the rise of families never formed by past generations are causing rippling effects associated with multi- generational welfare dependency, prenatal difficulties, abortion, child abuse, divorce, single-parent families, poverty, and crime (Eberstadt, 1988, 1996; Murray, 1996; Herrinstein and Murray, 1994). Symbolic of profound social and economic distress, political policies have significantly altered the formations of families and considered by some to be destructive. For example, Poznar (October 1995) writes about the tyranny of majority opinion:

> How tragically have some of the authoritarian ideologies of our century debased the worth of the individual life. How blandly and passively we accept quantification as the basis of legislative and social reforms. How pervasive the temptation to think of human beings in groups and how gradually we cease to be able to conceive of each human being as an end it itself (p. 4).

Poznar also suggested that "one of the major goals of all education and experience ought to be reverence for life; for a life lived without reverence is essentially hollow and personally destructive" (p. 4).

Baungart and Baungart (1998) gathered information from seven National Survey of Youth studies conducted from 1990 to 1995 looking at 13 to 25 year olds from across the United States. A central finding of the investigation was that there is too much emphasis on individual freedom and not enough attention to personal and collective responsibility.

> While the fundamental task of the adult generation is to transmit political values and the national heritage to its offspring, the task is made more difficult when the political culture is perceived as fragmented and contentious, the electorate is alienated from politics, and Americans' passion for individual freedom overrides their sense of civic or collective responsibility. Exacerbating the political socialization process, young peoples' attitudes and behavior in the United States appear at odds with traditional American values (p. 99).

They also found that the surveyed youths and adults strongly endorse their country and its traditional values, but are highly critical of politics, politicians and the way the federal government operates.

One of the nation's comprehensive assessments of the attitudes of freshman at 469 institutions in American colleges and universities, *The American Freshman* is conducted annually at the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California in Los Angeles. *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall, 1998,*

states: This year's college freshmen exhibit higher levels of disengagement both academically and politically than any previous entering class of students (p. 1).

    The New Millennium Project was commissioned by the National Association of Secretaries of State to conduct a nation-wide study of American youth aged 15-24 years old. The most disturbing conclusion drawn was..."Young Americans have only a limited, vague understanding of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society...Young people today lack interest, trust, and knowledge about American politics, politicians and public life generally" (*New Millennium Project*, 1999, p.1).

    Lief Carter and Jean Bethke Elshtain, members of the American Political Science Associations Task Force on Civic Education expressed concerned about the evidence regarding the failure to politically educate students in the craft and practices of the political machine (*Task Force on Civic Education*, December 1997, p. 745). Charles Quigley (1999) agreed that civic education is an important part of the student's overall education, but is seldom given sustained and systematic attention in the kindergarten through twelfth grade curricula:

> Education in civics and government should not be incidental to the schooling of American youth, but a central purpose of education essential to the well being of American democracy. Effective instruction in civics and government should include attention to the content of the discipline as well as to the essential skills, principles, and values required for full participation in and reasoned commitment to our democratic system. (p. 1426)

> Branson (June 1999) added, ...democratic predispositions need to be nurtured-they do not develop so spontaneously that it can be taken for granted that every new generation will be so supportive of America's political and civic traditions and institutions as previous generations (p. 8).

Problem Statement

The problem is that many young people in the United States are not being adequately prepared for the roles and responsibilities of democratic adult citizenship and political participation. Research has shown that the trends of increased disengagement have continued throughout the years. From elementary level to college level, students appear to be less informed and concerned with politics and political participation.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the political socialization of a select group of adolescents who are in transition to adulthood. The study identifies factors related to family, school, and community that have been shown to provide the adolescent with structural opportunities and constraints that have political consequences in adulthood.

The theoretical framework for this study was both psychological and sociological. The psychological dimensions of political socialization focused on the cognitive, affective, and moral determinations of the adolescent in transition to adulthood. The sociological model considered the development of the political socialization trajectory in the environment of family, school and community. Multi-disciplinary constructs of human development and life course transition with tenets of political socialization are examined to determine how these components are linked with the importance of life-long learning of citizenship and leadership in a democratic society.

Research Questions

The research questions in this study were designed to explore how the participants in the Montana Boys' State and Montana Girls' State programs were socialized in the political and civic structures of society in the context of family, school and community.

To explain the political socialization process, this study considered many pathways to social and political participation. The following research questions guided the exploration of the relationships of these contextual elements of the students' lives and their political socialization:

1. What is the demographic profile of the young people who attended Montana Boys' State and Montana Girls' State (age, gender, and grade point average)?

2. How did the factors of home-town population, ethnicity, and "new demography" (both parents, single mothers, single fathers, grandparents, or guardians in the role of principal care giver) define the young adults in this study?

3. What are the academic choices, interests, abilities and achievements that are likely to contribute to citizenship development and leadership attainment through the political socialization agents of the family, school, community and the mass media?

4. Using a time-budget scale of hours per week, hours per month, and frequency distribution, how did respondents spend their school and non-school time (with attention to family reciprocity, involvement in school and extracurricular programs, and participation in community related activities of sports, church,

employment, youth groups, leisure and recreation, mass media, voluntarism and politics)?

5. What are the sources of knowledge concerning political issues and trends that research has shown to lead to political socialization?

6. What were the relationships between parental/primary care giver(s)' church involvement in educational, charitable and social programs and the young adults' own involvement in such programs?

7. What were the relationships between parental/primary care giver(s)' structured community volunteer activities and the young adults' involvement in such activities?

8. What were the relationships between parental/primary care giver(s)' political participation and the young adults' involvement in politics or political affiliation?

9. What were the perceptions and beliefs of young adults about abortion, pornography, and the definition of family as related to traditional Christian mores.

Significance of the Study for Young Adults in Transition to Adulthood

The study is significant in terms of its contribution to adult education program planning for young adults. Darkenwald and Knox (March, 1984) discuss the apparent neglect, both in the literature and practice of young adults as a distinctive population for continuing education programming (p. 99). They believed that encouraging young adults to participate in adult education requires an understanding of their distinctive needs and characteristics as a basis for curriculum and program development.

If late adolescents are not "adult enough", persons in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties are "too adult" in the sense that they are prototypical, constituting the prime age category for most providers of continuing education (Darkwald and Knox, p.100).

Adult educator Stephen Brookfield (1995) comments on the adolescent-adult education connection:

Adult learning is frequently spoken of by adult educators as if it were a discretely separate domain, having little connection to learning in childhood or adolescence. To understand adult learning we need to know of its connections to learning in childhood and adolescence and to the formation during these periods of interpretive filters, cognitive frames and cultural rules. (p.8)

A person's ability to act as a civil member of community is always central to democratic political engagement and the genesis of this ability can be traced back through the entire history of interpersonal relationships (Damon, 1998, p. 622-623). Taken together, the experience of the child and of the adolescent are the mold from which the adult emerges (Elliot, Feldman, 1990, p. 6).

Significance of the Study for Practitioners

The study is significant for practitioners in the fiscal and social domains. Curricula and program planning must meet the specific needs and qualities of the individual student. "...responsive educational activities for young adults must relate directly to practical tasks associated with role performance and adjustments" (Knox, 1984, p. 38).

The transitional period between adolescence and adulthood is an ideal time to prepare for the world of work. The centrality of this period in the life of the adolescence in shaping political values and behaviors has long been recognized. Early preparation

and the choices made available to adolescents have important life-long consequences for their well-being. "Adolescence is the last stage of the life course during which society has reasonably ready access to the entire population, so such potential cannot be ignored" (Elliot and Feldman, 1990, p. 6)

Significance of the Study for Policy Makers

"Public policy is a part of the macrosystem determining the specific properties of the exo-meso-and microsystem that occur at the level of everyday life and steer the course of behavior and development" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 9). "... it is essential to determine which policies and programs can do most to enable families to perform the magic feat of which they alone are capable: making and keeping human beings human" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 738).

Eventually, some members of this sample are likely to enter political careers and become the policy makers of the future. There are moral and social implications that current political policies and legal decisions hold for the adolescents' own future and for their legacy to future generations after their own. It is important to raise the consciousness of the adolescents themselves to the opportunities available to assist in policy making.

Policies concerning continuing education and life long learning "need to be proposed, formulated, discussed, approved, appropriated and implemented. Constituents need to be able and willing to articulate needs in ways that are meaningful to legislators at all levels of government" (Jackson,1999, p. 39).

Basing life-long learning policy decisions on research not only leads to increased effectiveness, but it also imparts an objectivity and an enduringness that is indispensable in the highly political charged arena in which policy is made (Sherrod, 1997, p. 17).

Zaslow and Takaniski (1993) believe that "research to understand the conditions that contribute to optimal development during this period {young adulthood} and research informed interventions that sustain that development should be given high priorities for federal and private research support for the future" (p.191). Thomas (1991) explained that legislation is significant for adult education policy makers because it may be considered the centerpiece of political science, "further examination of its role in the relationship to adult education promises increased clarity about the relationship between the two domains of inquiry" (p.313).

Finally Small (1995) believed research must lead to action:

If we are interested in understanding how context can impact adolescent trajectories, and ultimately the more practical but challenging problem of enhancing the contexts that affect adolescents, we need to give more attention to how research can lead to action, as well as to the value of collaboratively designing research with the citizens who can benefit from it (p. 231).

Appropriate political and social environments can be provided for the young adult if adolescents, parents, teachers, school administrators, and key community constituents combine their expertise to become active participants in all phases of the research.

Definitions for the Purpose of the Study

The Adult Education Act and other legislation defines adults broadly to include late adolescents.

The term "adult" means an individual who has attained 16 years of age or who is beyond the age of compulsory school attendance under state law....The purpose of the Adult Education Act is to improve educational opportunities for adults who lack the level of literacy skills requisite to effective citizenship and productive employment (*Adult Education Act* November 3, 1966, and April 28, 1988).

Adolescence is a transitional developmental period between childhood and adulthood which is characterized by psychological, biological and social changes.

The sample for this study is a birth cohort born between the years 1984 and 1986. Connecting this group of cohorts to politics is the hotly-contested presidential election of 2000. Political and social beliefs and values, and a sense of patriotism could have been influenced by the terrorists' September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC.

Montana Boys' State and Montana Girls' State programs are structured to teach young adults how to participate in the political process. A simulated government environment, modeled after local and state government bodies, offers young leaders an opportunity to experience the political, social and moral realities of modern democracy. American Legion and its Axillary respectively sponsor the Montana Boys' State and Montana Girls' State programs.

The following theories used in the study are defined: the ecology of human development, the life course paradigm, tenets of political socialization, and the adult theories of adult education and learning.

The Ecology of Human Development Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) relates to:

the scientific study of the progressive mutual accommodations between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between those settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 21)

Bronbrenner's ecology defines different political and social relationships in an individual's biography situated in historical time (chromosystem), in the context of family (microsystem), school and community (mesosystem and exosystem), and the institutions, organizations and associations of the distal world (macrosystem).

Contexts are the developmental pathways for the political socialization of the adolescents. For the purpose of this study, the contexts of family, school, community and the mass media are considered transmitters of society's sociopolitical heritage to future generations.

Elder's life course paradigm, for the purpose of this study considers the adolescent's trajectory of political socialization in transition to adulthood. The four themes central to the life course paradigm used in this study are "the interplay of human lives and historical times, the timing of lives, linked or interdependent lives, and human agency in choice making" (Elder, 1994, p. 5).

Trajectories and transitions, for the purposes of this study are:

elements of established pathways, individual life courses, and developmental patterns. Trajectories provide a long view by linking social and psychological states over a substantial part of the life span.... Transitions depict a short view... transitions are always elements of trajectories...each transition, combining a role exit and entry, is embedded in a trajectory that gives it specific form and meaning...the meaning of a transition has much to do with its timing in a trajectory (Elder, 1998, p. 955).

The sample of adolescents used for this study are at the stage called late adolescents and will soon be eligible for full political participation.

Political Socialization is a life-long learning process by which citizens mature politically as they participate across a whole range of political and social domains. The tenets of political socialization for the purpose of this study are the intergenerational transfer of political orientations, generational involvement of cohorts, and programs and projects specifically designed for the development of citizenship and leadership in the context of family, school and community.

Andragogy is an exclusive word for different methods of adult learning. "Theories of adult learning are examples of theory-based knowledge that is borrowed, cumulative and central to the core issues of adult education" (Peters, Jarvis, 1991, p.23).

Life long learning: For the purpose of this study, life-long learning embraces basic skills, literacy skills, problem solving, training and retraining for social, political and economic purposes, accreditation, certification, and licensing.

Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations

Assumptions:

The young men and young women who participated in Montana Boys' State (n. 346) and Montana Girls' State (n. 336) during the first week of June, 2002, met stringent requirements of personal scholarship, patriotism, and leadership to be chosen.

This study was constrained by several limitations and delimitations.

Limitations include:

1. The absence of longitudinal data beyond this snapshot makes it impossible to track the sequencing steps of the young men and women in their political socialization.

2. The study was conducted immediately after a national presidential election that suffered unique procedural problems with the counting of votes.

3. Selection of participants at Montana Boys' and Girls' State was controlled by school level personnel and local parents.

Delimitations include:

1. The sample for this study was purposefully selected for their activities and academic achievement and as such the findings can not be generalized to all young men and women.

2. This study examined only students attending Montana Boys' and Girls' State in the summer of 2002.

The Research Approach

Young men and young women attending Montana Boys' and Girls' State Conference in the summer of 2002 participated in this study. They were asked to complete a 120-item questionnaire that examined their involvement in activities in the family, school and community. The directors and other adults distributed the instrument at a simulated government meeting. The boys in Dillon returned their questionnaire before they left the room while the girls responded over a five-day period. Using mark-sense forms the responses were converted into an electronic base. These data became the basis of the descriptive analysis, the results of which are reported and discussed in the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature includes a wide range of socialization opportunities available to adolescents who are constructing viable pathways to the adult world of politics. Intergenerational resources along with cohort influences supply necessary prerequisite skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. Participation in high school and extracurricular activities shape the political and civic components of emerging identities into life-long entities. The community, by offering religious activities, employment, leisure, recreation, political and voluntary programs, serves as a pillar of political strength by contributing to the positive development of citizens and leaders.

This chapter examines the literature relevant to the psychological, emotional, and moral processes of adolescence that facilitate meaningful political deliberations. The integrated constructs of the ecology of human development, life-course paradigm, and tenets of political socialization are applied to the theories of adult education and lifelong learning. Next, political and non-political environments in the contexts of family, school, and community through which political understanding occurs are explored. Focusing on the ideologies of the Political Platform of the Democratic and Republican Parties, attention is next drawn to the current political stands concerning the definitions

of the family, abortion and pornography. These are issues that will affect the adolescents' own future and their legacy to later generations.

The study's subsequent chapters are arranged as follows: Chapter 3, the methodology section, describes the study design. The study group of young men and women who attended 2002 Montana Boys' and Girls' States represents those who are at the life stage marked by the initial entry into the adult world of politics. The survey instrument was distributed and collected by the director and other adults at a simulated city meeting on a specified evening. In Chapter 4, mark-sense forms were used as the measuring device. The answers to the questions were scanned at the Montana State University Information Technology Center. Descriptive statistics were used for the data analysis of the 120-item questionnaire. Chapter 5, the discussion section, considers the results of the survey, and how they apply to the participants and the literature.

The Psychology of Adolescents in Transition to Adulthood

The cognitive development approach "concentrates on the developing understanding of economic and social issues, of how political systems function, and of citizens' relationship to them; the individual actively makes sense of experience, generating an increasingly complex theory of how the world works" (Haste, Summer 1992, p.2). The environmental and emotional affective spheres are considered "inextricable aspects of cognition" by Ceci and Hembrooke:

> The environment including physical, mental, social and historical contexts
> assumes a pivotal role in the development of cognition. Additionally, bio-
> ecological theory assumes that within each of these contexts, the interactions that

transpire between the child and other people, objects and symbols are what unleashes unactualized potential contained within (Ceci & Hembrooke 1995, p. 308).

Piaget viewed human cognition as a "specific form of biological adaptation of a complex organism to a complex environment... the Piagetian mind always reconstrues and reinterprets that environment to make it fit in with its own existing mental framework" (Flavell, Miller and Miller, 1993, p.4). To explain the development and transformation of cognition, intelligence and morality, Piaget synthesized biological concepts with his psychological theory. All organic systems must function within an organization and adapt to the environment. Schemata in Piaget's theory are the basic units of cognition. "Sequentially constructed schemata become progressively more adequate in enabling the organism to adapt to a wider range of internal and external disturbances" (Piaget, 1977). From the point of view of psychology, using biological concepts of assimilation and accommodation, Piaget explained how the transition is made from a lower to higher level of knowledge:

> Psychological assimilation as well as biological assimilation is the transformation of the external world in such a way as to render it an integral part of oneself. In the case of intelligence, it is the integration of external objects to the schema of subjective actions, fusing pre-existing schema and a new object. (p.216)

Accommodation occurs when an organism is altered as it adjusts to the external stimuli. The word used by Piaget to signify the balance between assimilation and accommodation and the balance between self and other is equilibrium. When the assimilation and the corresponding accommodation are not balanced, disequilibrium is the result. When they

become balanced again, equilibrium is achieved, and the sequence is repeated. The adolescent thus moves to a higher level of knowing.

Genetic Epistemology: The Piagetian Analysis of Political Thought

Piaget's (1970) comprehensive theory of cognitive and intelligence formation is called genetic epistemology. Piaget defined genetic epistemology as an attempt to: "explain knowledge, and in particular scientific knowledge, on the basis of its history, its socio-genesis and especially the psychological origins of the notions and operations upon which it is based" (p.1). Genetic epistemology deals with both the formation and the meaning of knowledge:

> Our problem from the point of view of psychology and from the point of view of genetic epistemology, is to explain how the transition is made from a lower level of knowledge to a level that is judged to be higher...the transitions are historical or psychological or sometimes even biological...the fundamental hypothesis of genetic epistemology is that there is a parallelism between the progress made in the logical and rational organization of knowledge and the corresponding formative psychological process. (1970, p. 7-13)

Piaget engaged in epistemological analysis as well as psychological research "to chart intellectual development, but more importantly as an effort to develop a general theory of thinking" (p.19). Rosenberg et al (1980) extended Piaget's research to adults and politics. They suggested:

> Extending the example (of genetic epistemology) to political science, we argue that the discipline can benefit by adapting Piaget's analysis of the transformations of thought in general to the transformations of political beliefs in particular...the mechanisms by which thought is transformed are the basics of genetic epistemology. The purpose of the transformation is to provide more adequate knowledge, and genetic epistemology studies the ways in which the

transformations move an individual from less adequate to more adequate systems of knowledge (p.40).

They argued that Piaget placed the "locus of structure in one individual...it calls for a truly social psychological conception of political life, one which realizes the full ramifications of the claim that politics is at once an individual and a collective phenomenon" (p.19).

Piaget (1958) identified four discrete stages of cognitive development. Each stage appears in sequence and demonstrates cognitive functioning qualitatively different from the previous stage. The first three stages will be treated briefly to demonstrate the sequential development of cognitive thought. The fourth stage is experienced during adolescence and is, thus, relevant to the study. The four stages are defined as follows:

1. The sensorimotor period "extends from birth to two years. Before language appears, the small child can only perform motor actions, without thought activity, but such actions display some of the features of intelligence as we normally understand it" (Piaget, 1958, p. 9).

2. Pre-operational thought extends from two to seven years "the symbolic functions appear, language, play...functional invention...imitation...mental imagery...the internalization of actions into thoughts become possible. The field in which intelligence plays a part becomes considerably enlarged" (Piaget, 1958, p. 1).

3. Concrete operational thought extends from seven to eleven years. Children begin to think logically about the here and now, but not about abstractions. Cognitive exchanges bring together information and place it in relation to other information.

4. Formal operational thought extends from age fifteen and remains throughout life. It is a crystallization and integration of the three proceeding stages of development. The attainment of formal operational thought implies that youth can think abstractly, reason logically, and examine political variables in a scientific manner. The following specifics of formal operational reasoning are important in solving problems, making decisions about cause and effect relationships, presenting proposals and drawing conclusions.

The Characteristics of Formal Operational Thought

Hypothetical-Deductive Thought

Youth with formal operational thought are "capable of reasoning like scientists. They form hypotheses, experiment, control variables, record effects, and from their results draw conclusions in a systematic manner" (Wordsworth, 1989, p. 118).

Reflective Abstraction

During the stage of formal operations, the adolescent becomes "capable of reflective thinking and his thoughts make it possible for him to escape the concrete present toward the realm of the abstract and the possible" (Inhelder and Piaget 1959, p. 342). "The adolescent is capable of projects for the future of nonpresent interests, and of a passion for ideas, ideals or ideologies" (Piaget, 1969, p. 23).

Combinatorial Reasoning

"Reasoning about a number of variables at one time is accomplished in a coordinated manner and can determine the effect of one, all, or some combination of a set of variables" (Wadsworth, 1989, p 118).

Cook (1985) explained the role of formal operations in political socialization:

> Adolescence provides the first opportunity to deal with politics on the level of formal operations. In their ability to visualize other worlds beyond the present one, and to comprehend concepts such as government in an abstract manner, adolescents clearly can think about political objects in a qualitatively different mode than their younger counterparts. ...the use of formal rules is not only associated with reasoning capacity and age, but also the individuals level of politicalization and the familiarity of the political problem at hand (p. 1088).

Baungart and Baungart (1998) contended that employing the scientific method was a practical way for adolescents to investigate political and social issues related to citizenship.

A "schemata" in Piaget's theory is the basic unit of cognition. Political schemas according to Lodge and Hamill (1986) were frameworks that provided "a potentially viable way of organizing information about government and politics...and (producing) distinct patterns of evaluation and action" (p. 507). They wrote:

> ...schemas about politics affect the way citizens think about government and politics and oneself as a citizen. One could, for instance see and interpret information about government and politics in terms of political parties and partisan conflicts, or perhaps, organize one's thinking about politics along ideological lines. Other schemas are possible as well...politics as race against race or policy disputes as the expression of class conflicts. (p.507)

Lodge and Hamill noted that schemas have been found to facilitate the grouping

of information into larger, more meaningful, and more easily retrievable categories.

Torney-Purta (1992, Summer, p. 24) explained:

> Schemata serve functions in the learning and recall of information, the
> comprehension of discourse, and the solving of political problems. This approach
> represents a promising new direction in the study of political socialization,
> conceptualized as the study of expansion and differentiation in individuals'
> private understanding of politics in ways that make public issues meaningful and
> engaging.

Cognitive Theory Summary

Using Piaget's cognitive theory as a political theory connects the sociopolitical

and the psychological conception of politics as being an individual as well as a collective

phenomenon. Genetic epistemology is the process whereby cognitive structures acquire,

modify, or organize schemata to go from a lower level of knowledge to a level that is

considered higher.

Psychologically, the adolescent is capable of integrating into the social political

environment in such a way as to render it a part of herself/himself. Piaget calls this

process assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the cognitive system's

interaction with the environment causing cognitive change. Accommodation occurs

when the schemata are altered to adjust to external stimuli or when there is a complete

reorganization of a schemata or concept. When assimilation and accommodation are in

balance, equilibrium results. When disequilibrium exists, accommodation corrects the

balance. Through this modification, adolescents' schemata become progressively better

adjusted to their world and their intelligence grows. The present study considers

schemata relating to political ideology, parties and policy.

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

The most influential extension of Piaget's cognitive theory and method can be

found in Kohlberg's studies on moral development. Kohlberg theorized that there are

three levels and six stages of moral development that are sequential, invariant and

universal. Progression through the levels is dependent upon cognitive prerequisites and

exposure to sociomoral experiences. Kohlberg (1984) places most adolescents in his

conventional level of moral development. At this level, the individual is able to

understand and conform to social conventions and engage in appropriate behavior to

follow the rules of society.

Figure 1

Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Development

Level and Stage	Political Socialization perspective of stage
Level I: Pre-Conventional	
Stage I: Heteronomous Morality. Punishment and obedience orientation.	Egocentric point of view. Confusion of authority's perspective with one's own.
Stage II: Individualism, instrumental purpose and exchange.	Right is what is fair. An equal exchange, a deal, an agreement.
Level II: Conventional	
Stage III: Mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships and conformity.	Being "good" is important. Showing concern for others. Keeping mutual relationships, such as trust, loyalty, respect and gratitude. Belief in the

Golden Rule.

Stage IV: Social Systems and Conscience. Law and order.	Fulfilling agreed-upon duties. Considers individual relations in terms of place in the system.

Level III: Post Conventional or Principled

Stage V: Social contract or utility and individual rights.	Contractual commitment, freely entered upon to family, friendship, trust and work obligation. "...the greatest good for the greatest number." Considers moral and legal points of view: recognizes that they sometimes conflict and finds it difficult to integrate them.
Stage VI: Universal Ethical Principles	Principles are universal principles of justice: the equality of human rights and respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons. A sense of personal commitment to universal moral principles. Persons are ends in themselves and must be treated as such.

(adapted from Kohlberg, 1984, p. 174-176)

Identity Formation

The adolescents of this sample are situated in the period defined by Erik Erickson (1968) as psychological moratorium, during which society allows a delay of adult commitment on the part of youth. The young adult searches for a niche in some section of society that is firmly defined and yet seems to be uniquely made for him/her.

The primary developmental task of adolescence is the *formation of an identity*, the attainment of a stable, coherent and integrated sense of self and what one stands for as a member of society. Erickson (1968) explained:

> The most obvious concomitants to an optimal sense of identity are a feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of knowing where one is going, and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count. (p. 165)

Marcia's (1980) identity model described four clearly differentiated identity statuses based on the amount of exploration and commitment that the adolescent is experiencing or has experienced in two areas of occupation and ideology:

> *Identity achievements* are individuals who have experienced a decision-making period and are pursuing self-chosen occupation and ideological goals.
> *Foreclosures* are persons who are committed to occupational and ideological positions, but these have been parentally chosen rather than self-chosen. They show little or no evidence of having resolved a crisis.
> *Identity Diffusions* are young people who have no set occupational or ideological direction, regardless of whether or not they may have experienced a decision-making period.
> *Moratoriums* are individuals who are currently struggling with occupational and/ or ideological issues, they are in an identity crisis. (p.161)

Yates and Youniss (1998) addressed the "interconnection of political socialization and identity formation of youths who participate in community services by confronting social and political problems" and in the process construct a *political identity* (p. 495). Youniss, McLelllan and Yates (March/April, 1997) posited that being involved in civic voluntarism during the "youth era can be seminal in the construction *of civic identity* that includes a sense of agency and social responsibility in sustaining the community's well being" (p. 620). "A *religious identity* is achieved by the adolescent who makes a well

defined commitment to religion after a period of exploration" (DeHaan and Schulenberg, 1997, p.531).

Hart, Atkins and Ford (1998) suggested moral identity is fundamental to political socialization. They defined *moral identity* as "a commitment consistent with one's sense of self to lines of action that promote or protect the welfare of others" (p.515). Maturation, experience, genetics and environment are important in the sequential development of Piaget's logical stage, Erikson's and Marcia's identity formation stage and Kohlberg's moral stages. All three psychological stages converge in adolescence.

Sociological Theories

The present study uses the contextual variables of family, school and community and the dimensions of individual interests, abilities and achievement in order to understand the political socialization of the adolescent in transition to adulthood. The sociological constructs of the ecology of human development, life course paradigm, and the tenets of political socialization are integrated so that they are applicable to the process of life long learning.

Theory of Ecology of Human Development

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory demonstrated how nested layers in the environment regulate linkages that already exist to facilitate the movement and reciprocal adaptations between the mirco- meso- exo- and macro systems. Social relationships define each level of this ecology. The microsystems include primary relationships,

mesosystems and exosystems consist of inter-group and community relationships, and macrosystems involve local, state, national, and international associations and agencies. Bronfenbrenner's addition of the chronosystem model to his environmental system provided structure to write the students biography in history by taking "into account changes over time not only within the person but also in the environment and-what is more critical-that permit analyzing the dynamic relation between the two" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 724).

The Life Course Paradigm

The role exit from adolescence and the role entry into adulthood is a distinctive part of the life course paradigm. Through a network of shared relationships and linked lives, youth navigate the life course within the challenges and constraints of the historical, cultural and political circumstances of their lives. Human agency, according to Elder is exhibited by individuals who construct their own life course to form a purposeful sense of self during their own biological and psychological development. Elder explained the likeness of his human agency principle with Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development theory: "An ecological view of organism/environment reaction...takes as its point of departure a conception of the person as an active agent who contributes to her own development" (Elder, 1995, p. 111).

Bronfenbrenner and Elder's interdisciplinary theories are relevant to the political socialization of adolescents and young adults. Moen and Erikson (1995) explained how the two theories are interwoven. The life course orientation "emphasizes the potential

importance of trajectories, transitions and their timing ... whereas the ecology of human

development... emphasizes the significance of context and viewing development as a

joint function of characteristics of the person and the environment" (p. 174). "In keeping

with its attention to environmental influences, life course studies place greater emphasis

on the social pathways of human lives, their sequence of events, transitions and social

roles" (Elder, 1995, p. 103). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model was explained by Moen

(1995):

> (it) requires behavior and development to be examined as a joint function of the
> characteristics of the person and the environment. The former includes both
> biological and psychological attributes (e.g., an individual's genetic heritage and
> personality). The later encompasses the physical, social, and cultural features of
> the immediate settings in which humans beings live (e.g., family, school, and
> neighborhood), as well as the still broader contemporary and historical context in
> which these settings are embedded (e.g., the society and times in which an
> individual is born). (p.1)

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) chronosystem model made possible examining the influences of

the person's development of changes (and continuities) over time in the environments in

which the person is living. Elder explained how the idea of chronosystem connects the

ecology of human development and the life course theories.

> "The ecological concepts of a chronosystem were devised to capture all of these
> interacting elements over time: the developing person, the nature of the
> environment, and the proximal processing of interaction. This revision established
> another base of commonality between the ecological and life course paradigm"
> (Elder, 1995). (p. 123)

Elder (1995) noted that the life course paradigm and the theory of the ecology of

human development: "share a common interest in explaining how dynamic worlds

change people and how people select and construct their environments. Indeed, the two

perspectives have evolved and matured through a process of mutual exchange over the past two decades" (p. 103).

Huckfeldt, Plutzer and Sprague (1993) link Bronfenbrenner's concept of context and Elder's linked lives with the political socialization of the adolescent:

> contextual theories of politics build on the argument that individual political preference is not a simple function of individual characteristics alone, but rather the complex product of an individual's own characteristics in combination with the characteristics and predispositions of other surrounding individuals. (p.366)

Tenets of Political Socialization

Political socialization is a "process by which individuals obtain relative knowledge, skills and dispositions that enable them to function competently in the socio-political structure" (Austin and Nelson, 1993, p.420) and as "the learning about structures and environmental factors and internalizing of customs and rules governing public life that affects the quality of interactions between citizens and their government" (Garber, 1997, p. 191). Political scientist Roberta Sigel (1965, 1989, and 1998) asserted the political socialization of each generation contributes to the stability of the political system, and also its perpetuation during the periods of continuity and change. The transitional period of adolescence is a role entry point to full political participation. "Each new role carries with it recognizable expectations of acceptable patterns of activity, responsibility, and privilege that differ from other stages" (Stekenrider and Cutler, 1989, p. 59-60). Sears and Valentino (1997) listed three basic ideas about the pre-adult acquisition of a stable political predisposition:

First, it is often acquired and strengthened through extensive exposure to political events, which in essence provide a catalyst for mass pre-adult political socialization. Second, such events are selective: they make certain attitude objects salient and socialize predispositions toward them, while attitudes toward other objects lie dormant, without further socialization. Third, since potentially socializing events tend to be periodic rather that continuous, political socialization may typically occur in bursts, during a period when political events make particular attitude objects salient rather than through the gradual and incremental accretion of experience (p. 58).

They suggested that as citizens, youth will be called upon to balance three concepts:

readiness to explore and innovate; respect for the knowledge and values that constitute

our heritage; and (the realization that they) are stewards of the future" (p. 79).

Three types of phenomenon cause political continuity and discontinuity over

time: period effects, life cycle effects, and generational effects. Period effects of war,

economic depression and technological innovations leave their marks on all of society.

Life cycle effects are "caused by the demographic metabolism of life and death"

(Putman, 1995, p.674); and generational effects when unique historical, cultural, and

political events are experienced by a generational unit of cohorts, a bond is created and

the mission to change the political status quo is adopted (Baungart and Baungart, 1991;

Flanagan and Sherrod, 1998). The depression generation, the baby boomer generation,

generation X, or the present generation Y are all examples of generational cohorts.

Huckfeldt, Plutzer and Sprague (1993) suggested:

Every citizen lies in the center of a social experience produced by a series of interesting, overlapping, layered environments. Each of the environments, in turn, has potentially important consequences for politics because each serves to modify and deflect the opportunities and constraints that circumscribe social interaction - social interaction that serves as a vehicle for the transmission of political information and guidance. (p. 365)