I Think I Can: The Interaction Between Self-Efficacy and Anxiety Predicting Who We Talk To

Dissertation

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Abstract

The role of communication has been theorized to be crucial to the development of a functioning democracy; however, not all communication is created equal in regard to this process. Characteristics of the individuals with whom we discuss politics can result in very different discussions, which have different consequences for many democratic outcomes. A key characteristic of discussion partners which is often considered is whether or not a given discussion partner shares the same political affiliation as the survey respondent. Discussion with partners that share a party affiliation is termed safe discussion, and discussion with someone of a different party affiliation is termed dangerous discussion. The proportion of safe and dangerous discussion partners in an individual’s network is termed network diversity. While recent research has examined the political outcomes of these different types of discussion, limited research has been conducted in regard to the antecedents of choosing to in engage in these various forms of discussion. Two concepts which have both proven to be important for political communication are political self-efficacy and political anxiety. These concepts are crucial not only due to both of their unique influences, but also because these two variables often interact when used to predict various behaviors.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the role of political self-efficacy and political anxiety, both separately and the interaction between them, as predictors of various forms of political discussion and the makeup of participants’ discussion.
networks. First, political self-efficacy, political anxiety, and political discussion are all explicated and the expected relationships are presented. Hypotheses are presented both for the individual influence of political self-efficacy and political anxiety in addition to the interaction between these two concepts.

Survey data available from the American National Election Study were analyzed to test the proposed hypotheses. 951 individuals who indicated they discussed politics with at least one person, and had a preference for a major party candidate were utilized in the analyses. In addition to the key measures of political self-efficacy, political anxiety, and political discussion, variables assessing respondents’ age, gender, education level, income level, political interest, the size of their political network, and how often they discuss politics in general where utilized as control variables in the regressions.

Results suggest that political self-efficacy was related to frequency of discussion with all discussion partners and frequency of safe discussion. Political anxiety was also related to frequency of discussion with all discussion partners and frequency of safe discussion. None of the expected interactions were found. Supplementary analyses uncovered the expected interaction for network diversity when the analysis was constrained to political moderates, and an interaction between strength of ideology and political anxiety emerged for dangerous discussion. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the implications of the results and suggestions for future research.
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Political theorists argue that in order for a democracy to function at its optimal level, citizens need to be informed and need to make decisions based on the best information available. Many scholars would assert that much of the information that the average individual acquires is gleaned from interpersonal sources, yet the characteristics of these sources can vary widely. Will someone chose to engage in a conversation that they expect to be confrontational or a conversation in which they expect to have their own views echoed back to them? To what extent will what an individual feels – both emotionally and in regard to their own ability – influence their decision to engage in different forms of discussion?

All of the above alluded to concepts – the role of both cognition and affect, in addition to discussion – are areas of research that have been examined in the past, but not necessarily together. While research on each individual topic is vast, the relationships between these concepts is not always clear, and furthermore the relationships between the various dimensions of these concepts is often clouded even further.

Scholars agree on the importance of self-efficacy in predicting what behaviors individuals will attempt in a variety of situations (e.g. Abramson, 1982, Witte & Allen, 2000). Additionally, scholars have theorized that individuals’ emotional responses interact with their perception of self-efficacy and lead to differential decisions in regard
to their behaviors. Specifically, individuals will react differently in response to a threatening situation depending on their levels of efficacy (Witte, 1992). One commonly used dual-process model is the Extended Parallel Process Model (Witte, 1992, 1996) which suggests that individuals with high levels of efficacy will engage in danger control. Danger control results in individuals trying to remove the threat through adaptive behaviors. Individuals with low levels of efficacy will engage in fear control, which results in individuals attempting to deny the threat through maladaptive behaviors. While the assumptions for the terminology used in the Extended Parallel Process Model does not perfectly match the assumptions involved with understanding individuals’ choice to engage in political discussion, it does provide a useful theoretical lens through which one can explore the interaction of affect and cognition in political discussion contexts.

Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen’s (2000) theory of Affective Intelligence suggests that individuals who feel anxious about politics will tend to seek information in order to reduce that anxiety. If this theoretical proposition is combined with the predictions of dual processing models, more precise predictions could be made about engaging in discussion which will depend on the characteristics of the discussion partner. Research examining the affect heuristic suggests that there are two routes can be taken when a decision needs to be made (Slovick, Finucane, Peters, & MacGregor, 2002; Slovic, Peters, Finucane & MacGregor, 2005). Individuals can either respond primarily to cognitive cues when processing information. This is typically referred to as a cognitive or logical decision making. The second process that can be followed is responding to the affective cues that the individual is experiencing. Responding to the “affect heuristic” tends to lead to a more reactionary decision being made. Discussion could be described
as a logical, cognitive response if an individual chooses to gain information by talking with others who may disagree with the individual but could provide unique information. Conversely, it would be considered an affective, reflexive, response to anxiety if the discussion occurs with others who agree with the individual but are less likely to provide new information. This theoretical proposition appears to have not been tested in the literature.

*Goal of the Dissertation*

The goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate the relationships between self-efficacy, anxiety and various aspects of discussion. Particular attention will be paid to the interaction between self-efficacy and anxiety when predicting various forms of discussion. Chapter Two explores the ways that the interaction between efficacy and emotion has been examined in the past, and how I will utilize these variables throughout this dissertation. Chapter Three summarizes the literature addressing political discussion and will explicate the dimensions of discussion that I will utilize throughout. Chapter Four presents the hypotheses and theoretical rationales for the relationships between the explicated concepts. Chapter Five presents the method for the study which was conducted to test the hypothesized relationships. Chapter Six presents the result of the study, and Chapter Seven addresses the conclusions and implications that can be drawn from the study, presents supplementary analyses, and addresses limitations and directions for future research.
Chapter 2: Self-Efficacy and Anxiety

Key to understanding the communication process is understanding what it is that leads individuals to engage in various forms of communication. These antecedents to communication can be cognitive, affective, or both. On the cognitive level, a variable that has been demonstrated to be one of the most consistent predictors of political behavior is political self-efficacy (Abramson, 1982). Affectively, an emotion that has gained prominence as an important predictor of political behavior is anxiety, or a perception of threat (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000). More importantly, perhaps, is that these two important predictors of political behavior are also theorized to interact with each other (Gamson, 1971; Witte, 1992). This chapter will explicate both self-efficacy and anxiety, and describe how these two variables are theorized to interact with each other.

Self-Efficacy

A frequent goal of social scientists, across a variety of contexts, is to explain why individuals behave in a certain manner (Abrahamson, 1982; Maibach & Murphy, 1995; Witte, 1992). Critical to many of the theoretical explanations of behavior is an individual’s belief in his or her ability to perform a given action, referred to as self-efficacy. Social science is replete with references that we must, and suggestions as to how to, increase individuals’ sense of self-efficacy. At the most general level, self-efficacy is conceptualized as an individual’s belief that he or she is capable of engaging in a
behavior designed to elicit a specific outcome (Bandura, 1977). Later conceptualizations also include managing thoughts and affective responses under the behavioral umbrella of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 2002).

*The Roots of, and Pathways to, Self-Efficacy*

A key theorist in the area of self-efficacy is Albert Bandura, who examined self-efficacy in his research developing Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986). SCT, which grew out of Bandura’s earlier Social Learning Theory, seeks to explain how an individual’s personal, behavioral and environmental determinants are all interconnected and provide insight as to how various sources of information influences cognitive and behavioral processes. In SCT self-efficacy is a mechanism that guides what behaviors individuals will consider engaging in based on what they believe they are capable of doing (Bandura, 1997; Collins, 1982). Theorizing utilizing self-efficacy as a key variable assumes that individuals will lack the motivation to attempt behaviors that they do not feel personally capable of completing successfully (Bandura, 1986; White, 1982).

SCT suggests that self-efficacy should be considered a personal determinant (Bandura, 1986). That is, self-efficacy is a characteristic of the individual as opposed to the environment; however, behavioral and environmental characteristics can influence self-efficacy. This outside influence would occur because individuals’ perceptions of whether or not they are able to engage in a behavior might be dependent on environmental characteristics. For example, the extent to which an individual believes he or she is capable of using a condom can depend on how well the individual knows his or
her partner, how much the individual has had to drink, and cultural norms tied to condom use (Maibach & Murphy, 1995).

Self-efficacy is a multi-dimensional construct; there are three aspects that should be considered when assessing self-efficacy: magnitude, generality, and strength (Bandura, 1977; DiClemente, 1986; Hofstetter, Sallis, & Hovell, 1990). Magnitude refers to the extent that an individual’s perception of self-efficacy will remain strong even when the difficulty of a behavior is increased. An example of this would be self-efficacy regarding speaking about political views to close friends who agree in comparison to self-efficacy regarding speaking about political views to a group of people whose political preferences are unknown. The magnitude of the individual’s self-efficacy about speaking out would be greater if he or she expressed confidence in his or her ability to speak to the unknown others. Research has suggested many individuals feel discussing political views with audience members who many hold different views is highly uncomfortable (Eliasoph, 1998), and this is much more likely to occur with strangers than with close friends and family members (Mutz, 2006). Generality reflects the extent to which an individual’s self-efficacy about performing a behavior can be applied to various situations. Continuing with the example provided above, generality would refer to the extent that an individual’s self-efficacy could be applied to a variety of political topics as opposed to a select few topics. Strength is by far the most commonly measured aspect of self-efficacy and it refers to the degree of confidence an individual has in regard to performing the behavior in question.

There are a host of constructs that refer to different aspects of ability or cognitions surrounding ability, but Bandura has indicated what concepts he believes are clearly
separate from self-efficacy (Bandura, 1984). Self-efficacy is not an individual’s self-concept, self-esteem, locus of control, or outcome expectancy, even though these are a few of the more commonly used concepts that various researchers have employed as synonyms for self-efficacy (Ajzen, 2002; Bandura, 1997; Maibach & Murphy, 1995). Self-concept and self-esteem both refer to individual characteristics but are much more broad than self-efficacy. Whereas self-concept and self-esteem refer to general ideas about the self, self-efficacy refers specifically to the action and context in question (Bandura, 1986). While there were previous attempts to create a general measure of self-efficacy (Sherer et al., 1982), later theorizing about the concept has left no ambiguity in regard to the need for specificity in self-efficacy measures. Locus of control addresses controllability and attribution of the behavior, which is a separate construct from beliefs about capabilities to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 2002). Outcome expectancies refer to what an individual expects to happen if the behavior is performed (Bandura, 1977, 1997, 2004). This belief is much closer to what has been termed “response efficacy” in the health literature and “external efficacy” in the political literature. This belief is crucial to understanding behavior, as are several others, but it is clearly a distinct concept from self-efficacy.

In addition to the predictive strength of self-efficacy, a reason that this concept is often incorporated in the communication literature is the theoretical paths through which self-efficacy is presumed to be affected. Bandura (1986, 1997) indicated that there are four primary ways in which self-efficacy can be influenced, and these paths involve a variety of communicative behaviors. The four processes that are assumed to influence
self-efficacy are mastery experiences, vicarious modeling, interpretation of arousal and affect, and verbal persuasion.

Mastery experiences have been demonstrated to be the most powerful mechanism through which self-efficacy is influenced (Bandura, 1977). Mastery experiences occur when the individual has the opportunity to engage in the behavior and does so successfully (Bandura, 1997; Feltz, Landers & Raeder, 1979, Gist, Schwoerer & Rosen, 1989). Success is defined based on the behavior in question. For example it could involve expressing one’s opinion in a public hearing or choosing an apple instead of french fries at lunch. Through repeated instances of completing the behavior, the individual’s confidence in his or her ability to perform the behavior is increased. An especially successful method has been referred to as participant modeling, where an individual physically works with a model, typically a therapist, while engaging in the behavior. These types of experiences will often limit the number of failures that the individual experiences, and also can remove some anxiety about performing the behavior through watching a model complete the behavior first. Although this pathway to increased efficacy is the most powerful, it is generally not incorporated into communication theories.

Vicarious modeling occurs when an individual observes someone else – a “model” – engaging in a given behavior (Brown & Inouye, 1978; Schunk, Hanson, & Cox, 1987). This differs from participant modeling in that the model is not physically present with the individual guiding them through the behavior. There are several characteristics of the model and how the behavior is demonstrated that can affect the extent to which the behavior is adopted and increases in self-efficacy are observed. In
regard to the model, theory suggests that the model should be attractive and similar to the individual (Bandura 1986, 1997). Attractiveness is not simply addressing physical beauty, but attractiveness is judged as the extent to which the individual has desirable characteristics. The similarity of the model is crucial to help the individual be able to imagine him or herself also engaging in the behavior in question. The ease with which the model executes the behavior is also important. Prior research has demonstrated that it is necessary for the model to be seen putting effort into performing the behavior (Brown & Inouye, 1978). If the model is seen performing the behavior easily, but the individual experiences difficulty when trying to perform the behavior, self-efficacy is reduced. However, if the model appears to have some difficulty, but in the end does execute the behavior, individuals are less likely to be discouraged when they experience setbacks. It is also possible for individuals to learn strategies to deal with setbacks through observing the models.

The concept of reward is also instrumental in the process of vicarious learning. Individuals are more likely to model the behavior if they observe the model being rewarded for engaging in the behavior. If no action occurs after the model engages in the behavior, or if the model is punished, individuals are less likely to attempt the behavior. While the lack of reward is not harmful to an individual’s sense of self-efficacy per say, it perhaps goes without saying the model must attempt the behavior in order to vicariously increase an individual’s self-efficacy. The pathway of increasing self-efficacy through modeling is frequently employed in communication theories.

The way in which individuals interpret affective arousal can also play a role in self-efficacy generation. When an individual becomes aroused, the arousal can be
interpreted positively or negatively (Bandura, 1997). If the arousal is interpreted negatively and results in reactions of fear or anger, it leads to avoiding the behavior in question and damaging the individual’s perception of self-efficacy. However, if the arousal is interpreted positively and results in reactions of excitement or anticipation, it leads to an approach tendency. Successful approaches result in increased perceptions of self-efficacy. Instructing individuals how to interpret affect differently can be accomplished through modeling or through clinical settings, and communication is believed to play a large role through these methods (Bandura, 1994, 1997).

The last process through which self-efficacy can be influenced, and the process which is the most explicitly related to communication, is verbal persuasion. Verbal persuasion is simply having individuals try to persuade others that they are capable of engaging in the behavior. If individuals feel supported they are less likely to harbor doubts when faced with difficulties (Schunk, 1982). Although this may not in and of itself lead to increased self-efficacy, it will lead to prolonged attempts – which increases the chances of an individual experiencing success, which then leads to increased self-efficacy (Schunk & Rice, 1986). Verbal persuasion is a commonly used technique within experimental studies due to its short term effects; therefore, an individual’s abilities must be constantly reinforced in order to have an impact outside of a laboratory setting (Bandura, 1997).

**Related Aspects of Efficacy**

Thinking about the broad concept of efficacy visually, it could be described as a 2 X 2 matrix. One dimension would distinguish between self- and response efficacy, and the second dimension would distinguish between individual and collective aspects of
efficacy. To be clear, within this manuscript I am concerned only with one of these cells - individual self-efficacy. However, I will briefly describe the other aspects of efficacy due both to their important role for predicting behavior and also to point out confusion in terminology.

Two related aspects of efficacy are noteworthy due to their key roles in whether or not individuals will engage in various behaviors. The first of these related efficacy concepts is response efficacy (K. H. Beck & Frankel, 1981), also known as output efficacy (Craig, 1979) or external efficacy (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990) in the political communication literature. Response efficacy is defined as an individual’s belief that engaging in a behavior will result in the desired response. In early research examining self-efficacy, the analogous concept would be outcome expectancies (Bandura, 1977). Response efficacy is crucial to understanding behavior because even if an individual feels entirely capable of performing the behavior, if the individual is not confident that the behavior will have a positive result, the individual is unlikely to perform the behavior. It is also important to note that the concept of response efficacy does not refer to the individual’s capability in the least. Response efficacy does not encompass whether or not an individual thinks that he or she can perform the behavior well – that would be incorporated in the strength element of self-efficacy. Response efficacy is simply the expected result of the behavior.

Collective efficacy is the other related efficacy component which I will distinguish from self-efficacy. Collective efficacy is conceptualized as a generalized form of self or response efficacy and it is often utilized when considering behaviors that require some form of collective action (Bandura, 1997; Joslyn & Cigler, 2001). When
collective efficacy is conceptualized in terms of self-efficacy, it refers to an individual’s belief that a group or organization is capable of executing a given behavior. An example of collective efficacy in this sense would be when an individual is considering whether a PTA group will be able to competently speak to a school board. When collective efficacy is considered in terms of response efficacy, it reflects an individual’s belief that a group’s behavior will have the desired outcome. For example, will the school board listen to the PTA group and then implement the PTA group’s recommendation? While the individual will be part of the collective, the focus is not on the individual’s behavior but rather that of the group and the expected ability and result of the group’s behavior.

**Self-Efficacy Operationally**

As referenced earlier, Bandura indicates that measures of self-efficacy need to be specific to the behavior in question. As such, multiple operational definitions can be found, and they vary widely across different behaviors. Critical to all measures, however, is assessing individuals’ perceived capabilities. When the focus is narrowed to consider only political behavior, operational definitions become more consistent from study to study. In political contexts, self-efficacy is typically referred to as *internal efficacy*, which is conceptually defined as an individual’s belief that he or she can competently participate in politics (Craig et al., 1990; Morrell, 2003; Niemi, Craig & Mattei, 1991). While there are differences that can be found in various operational definitions employed by researchers, there are a core set of items that are consistently used to measure internal political efficacy. When these core items are not used, typically one of two things is occurring. Either researchers include items typically associated with external (or response) efficacy in the measures for internal efficacy (De Vreese, 2005; Robinson,
Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1999; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995), or they simply do not reference which form of efficacy they are considering, which can lead to confusion as to whether or not internal or external efficacy is the focus of the study (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001, 2002; Pinkleton, Austin & Fortman, 1998; Scheufele, 2002).

Given that the conceptual definition of political self-efficacy contains competent participation, the items used to assess internal efficacy tend to have a focus on an individual’s perception of his or her knowledge of politics, or capability to serve. While only assessing the generality and strength dimensions of self-efficacy, this approach is beneficial for political scholars. The focus on knowledge should translate to individual’s perception of their capabilities in a variety of political situations, whether it be discussing politics, making educated voting decisions, or deciding how to otherwise spend their political capital through donating, volunteering or supporting candidates. Empirically, scholars have consistently found a strong relationship between political knowledge and political participation, suggesting that individuals who know more about politics engage in the political process more frequently (J. M. Mcleod, Scheufele, Moy, 1999; Scheufele, M. C. Nisbet, & Brossard, 2003; Scheufele, M. C. Nisbet, Brossard, & E. C. Nisbet, 2004).

Anxiety

The affective component of interest in this manuscript is anxiety, which is often considered to be a motivating emotion (Ekman, 1992; Izard, 1993, 1992; Lazarus, 1991). There are several theories regarding how emotions arise, with the two most common approaches being cognitive appraisal models and perceptual/biosocial approaches (Charland, 1997). Cognitive appraisal models suggest that emotions occur after
cognitively processing a stimulus and develop from particular appraisals or motivations (Lazarus, 1991). On the other hand, perceptual theories argue that external stimuli trigger a particular neural process and that different neural processes create different emotions associated with each process (Izard, 1992). The emotion creates a feeling-state that may lead to unconscious or conscious cognition (Izard, 1992). However, cognition, judgment, or appraisal is not necessary for the emotion to initially develop. The approach to emotion that is most commonly used in political studies of emotion is a cognitive appraisal approach, which has been suggested is due to the cognitive revolution in political psychology (Brader, 2006). This is an important distinction because it highlights that most political scholars currently utilizing emotion believe that an approach or avoidance response will result from experiencing different emotions. Anxiety results from an uncertainty appraisal which is consequently associated with an approach action tendency because of the potential loss of meaning. In a political context this uncertainty can be the result of many different types of communication. This anxiety could be the result of a lack of information, or it could be the result of hearing partisan information about upcoming political events. An example of a lack of information resulting in anxiety could include the time preceding a primary election when individuals may not have a wealth of information about the candidates. Not knowing where the various candidates stand could result in feelings of anxiety. Anxiety that occurs as a result of hearing partisan information but not knowing what may be the outcome could include hearing information about a bill which has yet to be passed but is foreseen to have negative consequences for some individuals. For example, many Democrats in Arizona may be anxious about the bill which is being proposed to enforce immigration laws and will
allow police to pull over individuals whom they suspect to be illegal immigrants. This could create feelings of anxiety in regard to consequences on the economy and tourism for the state, or negative perceptions about Arizona residents by other citizens.

Another division which exists in the literature examining emotions is the number of discrete emotions that are considered. Some scholars assert that emotions should be classified simply based on their valence - either positive or negative - which results in two emotions (Zajonc, 1998). Other scholars assert that there is value to naming specific emotions which leads to a much wider variety of emotions being considered (Marcus, 2000). The view that many distinct emotions can be assessed is the approach that I will take here given the prevalence of this approach within the political literature and the overwhelming evidence that various negative emotions have differential effects in the political world (Brader, 2005, 2006; Huddy, Feldman, & Cassese, 2007; Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000; Valentino, Hutchings, Banks, & Davis, 2008).

*Emotion in Politics*

For centuries, political scientists focused on the role of rational thought in understanding and predicting political and civic behavior (Hilgard, 1980). Still today, knowledge and belief systems are often studied by political scientists. It is not that political philosophers did not consider emotions to be important to the political sphere; emotional appeals were recognized by Aristotle as being important in gaining influence over an audience (Marcus, 2000). Nevertheless, emotions, feelings, and sentiment in the political sphere were, until recently, not as highly regarded as rational thought, cognition,
and reason (Arkes, 1993). It is possible that emotions were considered too difficult or mysterious to study in the political realm (Marcus, 2000).

Brader (2006) asserts that the political world has typically viewed the role of emotion in politics through one of two lenses. Either individuals are cold-hearted rationalists, or individuals are hot-headed overly emotional beings, yet nothing in the middle is considered. Both of these views of emotion’s influence on political thinking and behaving lead individuals to downplay the role of emotions in politics because of their unpredictable or tangential role in politics. While scholars may have downplayed the role of emotion, the common rhetoric surrounding politics is often fraught with emotion (Brader, 2006). The role of negativity in campaign advertisements on voter turnout has been studied in depth, and politicians themselves often accuse the other side of using fear to their benefit (Brader, 2006; Marcus, 2002; Valentino et al., 2008). Interest in the function of emotion in politics has steadily increased in the past decade, perhaps in response to this rhetoric, and more scholars are looking at the role of emotion and specific negative emotions in the political environment.

An approach to understanding emotion’s role in the political world, which the authors refer to as Affective Intelligence (Marcus et al., 2000), has recently lead to a resurgence of scholarship focusing on the role of emotion. These scholars assert that various emotions trigger various responses in a cognitive system, which then influences how individuals learn and behave. The disposition system “provides people with an understanding, an emotional report card, about actions that are already in their repertoire of habits and learned behaviors” (Marcus et al., 2000, p. 10). The surveillance system “acts to scan the environment for novelty and sudden intrusion of threat” (p. 10). The
surveillance system is inactive and generates a sense of calm, or contentment, until an unexpected event occurs, which will then create anxiety and increased attention to the unexpected stimuli (Marcus et al., 2000). Therefore, rational thought and deliberation, traditionally conceptualized as being cool and collected, is prompted by emotions. In fact, the authors provide evidence that when exposed to anxiety-producing stimuli, the area of the brain associated with affect is activated before the area of the brain associated with cognition. In an illustration of this process, Marcus et al. (2000) note that negative emotions (e.g., fear, anxiety, guilt) and negative events capture our attention more often than positive emotions and events. Additionally, novel, unusual, and unexpected events trigger high surveillance and attention. Therefore, higher cognitive attention to negative and novel stimuli produces greater motivation for learning (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Marcus et al., 2000).

Defining Political Anxiety

When examining the role of emotion in politics, there are a few aspects of emotions and responses to emotions which must be clarified. First, given the common perspective in political science that there are multiple discrete emotions beyond simple valence, the specific emotional response of interest needs to be established. Second, how this emotional response is activated should also be established.

In this manuscript, the specific emotional response of interest is the extent to which individuals experience anxiety, which is a negative, motivating emotion. In the political literature, most of the research has focused on distinguishing anxiety from another negative emotion – anger. Research assessing the ability of emotional reactions to direct attention to communication sources confirmed that anxiety and anger both had
behavioral outcomes, but the behaviors produced by the two emotional reactions were different (Huddy et al., 2007). Anger was associated with individuals reporting thinking about a specific political event, whereas individuals who were feeling anxious indicated that they were thinking and talking about the political event in addition to reporting higher levels of perceived risk associated with a political event (Huddy et al., 2007). The finding that individuals experiencing anxiety felt increased levels of risk is essential to understanding how researchers have distinguished anxiety from anger. The key difference between these two negative emotions is that anxiety is the result of a feeling of threat, or the potential for an individual’s goal to be blocked, whereas anger is associated with a reaction to an event that has already occurred (Lazarus, 1991). Therefore, anxiety occurs after an individual perceives something to be threatening in the environment, but before a resolution has been made. For example, individuals who were unhappy with the healthcare reform legislation would have felt anxious prior to the bill being passed, but that likely would have changed to anger once the bill was signed into law.

There are two sources of anxiety which are relevant for political communication. The first potentially threatening source is engaging in political discussion, which could have unknown relational consequences leading to feelings of anxiety (Eliasoph, 1998). Ethnographic scholarship surrounding political discussion suggests that individuals consider politics a taboo subject which leads some individuals to not discuss political matters (Eliasoph, 1998). Discussion could produce anxiety due to the fact that individuals are unsure of how their discussion partners will respond, or whether or not there will be relational consequences for the discussion that takes place. There are many avenues that could be explored here in regard to relational characteristics or personality
traits that influence responses to this potentially threatening situation; however, I will only be examining individuals who do indicate that they talk about politics with at least one individual. Given the individuals used in my analyses engaged in political discussion, examining how anxiety due to interpersonal threat prohibits discussion may not be especially relevant in this case.

The second potential source of threat, and what I will focus on, is threat that exists in the political environment. This is source of threat that political scholars have typically examined (Brader, 2005; Marcus, 2000; Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, & Daniel Stevens, 2005; Miller & Krosnick, 2004; Rudolph, Gangl, & Dan Stevens, 2000; Valentino, Gregorowicz, & Groenendyk, 2009; Valentino, Hutchings, Banks, & Davis, 2008). There are two types of political threat individuals respond to that may result in anxiety. The first source of threat is either a specific policy or situation (Huddy et al., 2007; Miller & Krosnick, 2004; Valentino et al., 2008). The second source of political threat considered is what scholars refer to as the general political environment, which is operationalized through individuals’ reactions to political actors (Brader, 2005; Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Marcus et al., 2000; Rudolph et al., 2000). Regardless of whether or not the source of threat was a specific situation or political actors, the results of the subsequent anxiety have been very consistent in that it produces information seeking. In conclusion, I will focus on anxiety as the resulting emotional response after an individual has been presented with threatening information in the environment to which a resolution has not yet been achieved.
Importance of Self-Efficacy and Anxiety for Communication

In order to be able to accurately measure the effect of communication, regardless of whether it is mediated or interpersonal, we need to think more broadly about the process in which it is occurring and include important mechanisms that either precede, mediate, or moderate communication’s influence. Self-efficacy and anxiety are variables which have been found to play all of these roles, in a variety of contexts, and therefore appear to be concepts that should be crucial to our theorizing about the role of communication in behavior. This is especially important given that these two variables are often thought to interact when predicting behavior.

Frequently self-efficacy is seen as a mediator of the effects of communication on a given outcome. Examples of treatments such as this include Slater’s (1999) interpretation of Stages of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983) in the context of communication campaigns, and various renditions of Markus & Zajonc’s (1985) O-S-O-R model (D. A. McLeod, Kosicki, & J. M. McLeod, 2002; J. M. McLeod et al., 1999; Moy & Gastil, 2006; Rojas, 2008; Scheufele, 2002). The role ascribed to self-efficacy in the application of the Stages of Change model to media campaigns was that of a mediator of the influence of interpersonal and mediated communication. That is, individuals are exposed to messages, which in turn increase their self-efficacy, which then leads to increased intentions to engage in the behavior and later sustained changed behavior. This role is very consistent with Bandura’s conceptualization of the ways in which vicarious learning and verbal persuasion might influence self-efficacy. It is also consistent with Bandura’s conceptualization of the role of self-efficacy in that he indicates that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy will put more effort into maintaining a
behavior and are more likely to rebound from set-backs. These tendencies would result in a higher likelihood of maintaining the given behavior over time (Bandura 1977, 1986, 1997).

The O-S-O-R framework suggests that an individual’s preexisting orientations influence how a stimulus is perceived, and orientations again take a role in shaping an individual’s response to said stimulus. In political communication, the first O is generally considered to represent “structural, cultural, cognitive, and motivational characteristics the audience brings to the reception stimulus” (D. A. McLeod et al., 2002, p. 238), whereas the second O is considered to represent what “is likely to happen between the reception of the messages and the subsequent response” (p. 239). This is a useful approach to consider the potential role of anxiety in fostering political communication.

Given that political scholars have defined political anxiety as a response to threatening information, individuals must first be exposed to this threatening information, which when processed results in feelings of anxiety, and these feelings of anxiety will have an effect on the subsequent response. It is important to point out the role of mass media in the production of anxiety as it has been addressed by political scholars. The renewed focus on emotion in politics occurred, in part, due to the negativity that exists in the media coverage surrounding politics (Brader, 2006; Farnsworth & Lichter, 2007). This suggests that media content is the threatening stimulus, which leads to the second orienting response of anxiety, which in turn influences how individuals respond. Much of the research surrounding political anxiety highlights that individuals who are more anxious seek out more information (Huddy et al., 2007; Marcus et al., 2000). Research has also suggested that individuals who are made to feel anxious in experimental settings
through exposure to various media messages respond to information differently than individuals who feel content or angry (Brader, 2005; Miller & Krosnick, 2004). These experimental manipulations typically utilized policies (Miller & Krosnick, 2004) or political candidates (Brader, 2005) as the anxiety producing stimulus. In both cases, it tends to be an ideological threat that is utilized as opposed to threat due to a lack of information.

Across the literature there is not a consensus as to where political self-efficacy fits into the O-S-O-R framework. Occasionally it is viewed as a predisposition that must be controlled for when considering the effect of communication (Eveland, 2005; Scheufele, 2002), although more often it is viewed as the outcome of communication and a potential mediator of the relationship between communication and political participation or knowledge (J. M. McLeod et al., 1999; Moy & Gastil, 2006; Rojas, 2008). Given Bandura’s discussion of self-efficacy as a construct which is influenced by many things and is quite capable of being changed, it is probably most appropriate to consider self-efficacy to play a role in both stages of orientation in the O-S-O-R model. That is, an individual’s self-efficacy may influence what s/he exposes him or herself to or how s/he processes the message, but that choice influences subsequent self-efficacy evaluations and consequently any resulting behavioral or cognitive change.

However, what is of particular interest for this study is that self-efficacy moderates the influence of anxiety in regard to message or interpersonal effects (Stacy, Suassman, Dent, Burton, & Flay, 1992; Witte, 1992; Witte & Allen, 2000). A very commonly used theory in health communication is Witte’s (1991, 1992) Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM), which proposes that the extent to which individuals will
change their behavior in response to a fear inducing message is based on the interaction between their perceptions of threat and perceptions of efficacy. According to the EPPM, a fear message is assessed based on individuals’ reactions to four elements of the message: perceived susceptibility, which is an individuals’ perception that they are at risk; perceived severity, which is the belief that the portrayed outcome is of consequence; response efficacy, which is the belief that the recommended action will remove the threat; and self-efficacy, which is the individuals’ belief that they have the ability to perform the recommended action. Analysis of the EPPM frequently involves grouping perceived severity and susceptibility together as the “threat” component of the message and response and self-efficacy together as the “efficacy” portion of the message (Witte 1991, 1992, 1993).

Use of the EPPM focuses on individuals’ responses to the message based on their levels of efficacy and threat. Individuals who are high in both efficacy and threat result in a danger control response, where the message is accepted and the desired behavior is completed. For example, if an individual saw a message discouraging cigarette smoking, and s/he felt that he or she was in danger of the negative consequences of smoking, the consequences were adequately severe, s/he was capable of not smoking, and not smoking would remove the negative consequences, s/he would process the message in a way that would result in the individual continuing to not smoke or to attempt to reduce his or her cigarette usage. If the individuals perceives threat, but has low efficacy, a fear control response occurs wherein the message source or message itself is denigrated and the recommended behavior is not adapted. For example, if an individual saw a message discouraging cigarette smoking, and s/he felt that s/he was in danger of the negative
consequences of smoking and the consequences were adequately severe, but s/he either was not capable of quitting, or that not smoking would fail to remove the negative consequences, s/he would process the message in a way that would result in the individual continuing to smoke. Message denigration would involve either assuming the source of the message was biased, or otherwise not looking out for the best interest of the message recipient. Message denigration could also involve simply counterarguing the message, for instance, “my grandfather smoked a pack a day and none of these bad things happened to him.” This conceptualization of self-efficacy and threat in health contexts has received extensive empirical support (Lee, Hwang, Hawkins, & Pingree, 2008; Witte & Allen, 2000).

There are two aspects of EPPM that make a direct application to political communication somewhat problematic. First is the concept of threat that produces the resulting emotional reaction of anxiety. In health communication, the threat is a physical consequence that results from engaging in, or failing to engage in, a specific behavior. In political communication, the threatening message is rarely addressing a physical consequence, but instead focuses on a policy or politician to which an individual is ideologically opposed. Theoretically the response to the emotional outcome of threat, whether it is physical or ideological, should be the same. In health communication the response is action. Either the individual accepts the message and behaves accordingly, or denigrates the message and behaves accordingly. In political communication the response to political anxiety is action as well. In the political context the action that is taken is information seeking. Therefore, on the surface it appears that the physical vs. ideological
source of threat should not be a concern for the application of EPPM to a political context.

The other hindrance to directly applying EPPM to political communication is not as easily resolved. This hindrance is the message denigration involved in the message processing which results from a fear control response. As previously outlined, political anxiety is considered to be the emotional response to some form of communication that creates a sense of ideological threat. From a deliberative democratic perspective, the ideal reaction – or danger control response – would be to discuss the threatening information with someone who could provide information that the individual previously did not hold. The less ideal situation – or fear control response – would be to discuss the source of the anxiety with someone who would bolster the individual’s previously held beliefs. The ideal situation here is defined as what would be considered to be a normatively beneficial outcome. In deliberative democracy, the normatively good outcome is that multiple perspectives are heard so all individuals become more informed and outcomes that are beneficial for the most individuals can occur (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Goodin & Niemeyer, 2003; Fishkin, 2007). Theoretically this is more likely to occur when we talk to individuals who are ideologically opposed to ourselves (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Mutz, 2006). Whether the source is denigrated in this discussion, which is critical to the definition of fear control responses in health communication, may not actually occur. An example of how this could occur is exemplified in the following situation.

If someone heard Glenn Beck discussing “Obamacare” and how it was really Socialism and was going to result in a variety of problems, that communicative message could produce anxiety in that individual. In a Democrat, it could produce anxiety because
of concern that some individuals see health reform as an extreme policy and that individual may be worried that the reform would be repealed. The ideal response to that anxiety, would be for that individual to discuss Obamacare with a Republican in his or her social network to gain more information about how individuals view Obamacare and to what extent the view espoused by Beck are representative of Republicans in general. This would meet the normative goals of deliberative democracy in that both individuals have more information following their interaction. The less ideal response would be for the Democrat to discuss Beck’s comments with a Democrat from his or her social network. In this case, much of the discussion is likely to involve denigration. Source denigration could include labeling Beck as an extremist who is seeking ratings. Message denigration might include discussion of how the reform is similar to something that Republicans had suggested in the past; therefore, Beck’s message of socialism completely baseless and should be ignored.

If the individual exposed to the Glenn Beck message was instead a Republican, the ideal response and less ideal response would flip, and then source denigration for the less ideal response is not likely. A Republican who hears Beck’s concerns about health reform may be anxious because he or she is concerned about the negative results that may occur from the passage of the reform. The ideal response, or danger control response, would be for the Republican to discuss the issue with a Democrat from his or her social network, to learn more about the issue and what type of changes he or she expects. The less ideal response would be to discuss the issue of health reform with a fellow Republican, which may result in denigration of the health bill or Obama, but support for the source and message.
In both cases, if the Democrat hears threatening information or the Republican hears threatening information, the most desirable response is to discuss the information with someone who disagrees with the ideological perspective of the individual. The categorization of this as the most desirable response is based on deliberative democracy, which asserts the most desirable situation is for multiple perspectives to be heard. Prior research suggests that we tend to discuss politics with similar others more often than with dissimilar others. Therefore discussing information with someone who disagrees with the individual is more likely to increase the variety of views heard by the individual. Willingness to discuss this ideological policy with someone who may disagree with the individual’s view is likely to require higher levels of political self-efficacy given this would probably be the more difficult conversation to have. This would be the more difficult conversation to have because many individuals already see politics as contentious and therefore avoid discussing it (Eliasoph, 1998), therefore purposefully discussing with someone whom we expect to disagree increases the perceived contentiousness of the conversation. Seeking information from an ideologically consistent source requires less political self-efficacy, and is the less desirable response, but source or message denigration will not always be the result.

Given the lack of source denigration, it is more appropriate to view the application of EPPM to the political context as the use of a dual-process model with well known terminology, but not a strict application of the theory. However, consistent with EPPM is that the ideal response, in this case discussing politics with someone who is not ideologically consistent with the respondent, occurs when both self-efficacy and
perceptions of anxiety are high and the less ideal response occurs when self-efficacy is low and anxiety is high.

An additional dual process theory that incorporates self-efficacy as a moderator is referred to as the Gamson Hypothesis (Gamson, 1971). Gamson examined the interaction between political efficacy and trust in predicting the extent to which individuals engaged in various forms of political participation. Gamson (1971) defined efficacy as an individual’s perception that he or she could influence the government and trust was defined as an individual’s perception that he or she needs to influence the government. Although it is not explicitly acknowledged by Gamson, a lack of trust could be considered a perceived threat, which should result in heightened levels of anxiety. The combination that was most predictive of nonconventional political behavior, such as engaging in protests, was high efficacy and low trust. Conventional political behavior, such as voting, was predicted by high efficacy and high trust. These patterns have been empirically verified in later literature as well (Hollander, 1997; Seligson, 1980). From a democratic perspective, the desired behavior is participation, and both types of political participation occurred when political efficacy was high.

What is common in both the Gamson Hypothesis and EPPM is that self-efficacy’s influence must be considered in the presence of the individual’s emotional state. Specifically, when an individual feels threatened, and by extension anxious, either by a health message or a perception that government is not looking out for us, an individual will act differently based on how efficacious they feel. In a communication context, when individuals feel anxious, they are going to seek information, but the type of information that they seek will depend on what they feel is most useful (Valentino et al., 2009). The
different forms of political discussion that have been considered in the past will now be addressed.
Chapter 3: Political Discussion

When considering the relationships between self-efficacy, anxiety, and political discussion it is first important to clarify what is meant by political discussion. Does true political discussion only take place within a structured deliberation? Is offering a political opinion while standing in line at the grocery store considered a political discussion? At the broadest level, political discussion would subsume any conversation regarding governance whether it be policy, electoral, or community based; however, a conceptualization this broad would hamper our ability to understand the effects of more nuanced elements of discussion. A distinction that has previously been made is between deliberation -- discussion that takes place in order to reach a formalized decision -- and more casual political discourse termed talk, conversation, or discussion (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002; Gamson, 1992; Scheufele, 2000; Wyatt, Katz, & J. Kim, 2000). Both deliberation and casual conversations are forms of political discussions and both have political consequences. The frequency of these events varies widely and it is likely that the distinct characteristics of these forms of communication would have different consequences. Therefore, these should be treated as conceptually distinct concepts and I will focus on various aspects of more casual political conversations. In order to clarify why I am excluding deliberation from my larger explication of political discussion a brief explication is necessary.
Deliberation

Deliberation can generally be conceptualized as a tool which informs a rational public through discussion of all sides of an issue with the goal of reaching a decision (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Goodin & Niemeyer, 2003; Mansbridge, 1999; Sanders, 1997). While some scholars do not require that a decision be made in their conceptual definition, the need to engage in thoughtful consideration of alternatives is consistently invoked (Delli Carpini, Cook, & L. R. Jacobs, 2004; Dutwin, 2003). The key distinction between deliberation and discussion is that deliberations are formally structured. The reason for this structure, according to theorists, is that in order to engage in successful deliberation there are three key criteria that must be met: non-tyranny, that the deliberation occur publicly, and that all participants are viewed as having equal status and have equal opportunity to participate (Dutwin, 2003; Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Goodin & Niemeyer, 2003; Sanders, 1997). These characteristics are necessary to ensure that all points of view are heard and subsequently the best decision can be made based on all available information. It is presumed that without this formal structure participation will be unequal and status will play a role in that inequality.

Research has suggested that engaging in deliberation does tend to have positive outcomes for the individuals who participate (Dutwin, 2003; Gastil & Dillard, 1999), but the primary critique of deliberation is that very few of our political interactions can meet such stringent requirements (Conover et al., 2002; Mansbridge, 1999; J. M. McLeod et al., 1999; Moy & Gastil, 2006). Scholars have determined that some of the goals of deliberation – the rational, thought provoking interactions – can occur in more casual conversations which occur much more frequently than formal deliberation (Conover et
al., 2002; J. Kim & E. J. Kim, 2008; Mansbridge, 1999). Therefore, because of the required structure in order for an interaction to reach the threshold of deliberation, I will exclude formal deliberation from my explication of political discussion, but still will acknowledge and explore the potentially deliberative aspects of informal discussions.

*Political Talk, Conversation, and Discussion*

Aside from the formal structure distinction between deliberation and informal discussion, there are semantic differences that should be acknowledged in the conceptualization of political discussion. When examining the literature on political interpersonal interactions, it is rare to find an explicit conceptual definition for whatever term the scholar chooses to employ. When discussing informal political interactions the most commonly used terms include political talk (Hardy & Scheufele, 2009; J. Kim & E. J. Kim, 2008; McClurg, 2006a, 2006b; M. C. Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Pan, Shen, Paek, & Sun, 2006; Pattie & Johnston, 2008; Walsh, 2004), political conversation (de Boer & Velthuijsen, 2001; Delli Carpini & B. A. Williams, 1994; Rojas, 2008; Schudson, 1997; Southwell & Torres, 2006; Wyatt et al., 2000) or most commonly political discussion (Conover et al., 2002; Eveland, 2004; Eveland & Thomson, 2006; L. Feldman & Price, 2008; Hively & Eveland, 2009; Kennamer, 1990; Kwak, A. E. Williams, Wang, & Lee, 2005; Lenart, 1994; J. M. McLeod et al., 1999; Mondak, 1995; Price, Nir, & Cappella, 2006). It appears that most scholars consider talk, conversation, or discussion to be a primitive term, one that need not be broken down any further, yet slight differences among authors can be found.

While most do not give explicit conceptual definitions, Kim and Kim (2008) defined the term *political talk* as “nonpurposive, informal, causal and spontaneous
political conversation voluntarily carried out by free citizens, without being constrained by formal procedural rules and predetermined agenda,” (p. 53). However, this is at odds with another explicit definition of political talk provided by Scheufele (2000) which defines political talk as “inherently goal oriented” (p. 729). The goals involved may be as simple as exchanging information, but nevertheless Scheufele paints a more formal picture than what is provided by Kim and Kim (2008). It appears that the majority of individuals who utilize the term “political talk” rely on a conceptual definition that much more closely mirrors that of Kim and Kim as opposed to that of Scheufele, (although see Pan et al., 2008 for an exception). For example, Walsh studied the role of political talk as it naturally appeared in conversations of defined groups and she reported that none of her participants indicated they joined the groups for political purposes despite the high frequency of political talk (Walsh, 2004).

Scheufele (2000) distinguished talk from conversation and indicated that conversation is more casual and does not serve an informational goal. However, upon closer examination the operationalization that led Scheufele to distinguish between talk and conversation appeared to be the object of the discussion as opposed to whether or not the nature of the discussion was goal oriented. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the literature which utilizes the term political conversation does not differ much conceptually from the literature which utilizes the term talk. The exception to this is Schudson (1997) who conceptualizes two forms of conversation – democratic and social – which correspond to Scheufele’s talk and conversation. A more prototypical approach to conversation can be seen in Wyatt, Katz, and Kim’s (2000) conceptualization. Wyatt, et al. consider a variety of things to fall under the umbrella of conversation, “For it is in
this ordinary conversation about politics – which may at times include informal
deliberation or spirited argumentation as well as casual discussion – that we, following
Tarde, believe democratic culture receives its most concrete realization” (p. 72).

The last of the typical terms is political discussion. This is the most commonly
used term throughout the literature and consequently the term I will utilize throughout
this manuscript. Conover, Searing, and Crewe (2002) conceptually define political
discussion as “conversations that are spontaneous, unstructured, and without clear goals,”
(p. 24), which is extremely similar to the conceptual definition of political talk put forth
by Kim and Kim (2008). Again, authors tend not to give explicit conceptual definitions of
exactly what they mean when invoking the term political discussion. Most often when the
term political discussion is used, references to interpersonal discussion of issues (J. M.
McLeod et al., 1999), politics (Hively & Eveland, 2009; Scheufele, 2002), campaign
information (Mondak, 1995), or important matters (McClurg, 2003) are mentioned;
however, typically none of the above mentioned constructs are explicitly tied to a
conceptual definition. Mansbridge (1999) has gone as far to say political discussion is
“that which the public ought to discuss,” (p. 214) which even further clouds the
conceptual definition. Given the overlapping conceptual definitions between these three
terms, from this point forward I will just utilize the term political discussion, regardless
of the term originally used by the author. To be clear, I will conceptualize political
discussion as unstructured, informal interpersonal discussion of issues, politics, or
important matters.

The explication of political discussion is not yet complete. What has been
addressed up to this point is perhaps a satisfactory explication of only one dimension of
political discussion, *frequency*, how often individuals engage in these casual conversations. The frequency with which individuals discuss politics tends to be measured fairly consistently with a few slight variations. A common measurement strategy is to ask respondents to indicate how many days in a week they discuss politics (Eveland, 2004; L. Feldman & Price, 2008; Hively & Eveland, 2009; Mutz, 2002b; M. C. Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Pan et al., 2006; Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002). A slight variation of that type of measurement occurs when participants are asked how often they discuss politics on some form of continuum using vague quantifiers, such as always to never or, not at all often to very often (Eveland & Thomson, 2006; Kwak et al., 2005; Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; McClurg, 2003, 2006a; Scheufele, 2000). Another variation occurs when participants are asked to what extent they discuss “important matters” rather than politics (Huckfeldt, P. A. Beck, Dalton, & Levine, 1995; Knoke, 1990; McClurg, 2006a, 2006b; Mutz, 2002b; Pattie & Johnston, 2008). Still others will break down discussion frequency in regard to the type of issue that is discussed or where it is discussed (Conover et al., 2002; Kennamer, 1990; J. M. McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele, Hardy, Brossard, Waismel-Manor, & E. Nisbet, 2006; Southwell & Torres, 2006; Wyatt et al., 2000). The primary area of contention is the use of politics or important matters when assessing frequency of discussion.

McClurg (2006a) utilized a split ballot where half of the respondents were given the political stem and the other half was given the important matters stem. He indicated differences between the two survey stems in regards to frequency of discussion did not emerge; however, other research suggests that individuals may make a distinction. Huckfeldt et al. (1995) first asked for individuals to name up to four individuals with
whom they discuss important matters, and followed that up with a single question asking about who they most often discuss politics with. Ten percent of the sample who did not name a single discussant for the important matters prompt did provide a name for the political discussion prompt. This indicates that at least for some individuals important matters and politics do not overlap. For the sake of explicitness and consistency, I would recommend that operationalizations assessing frequency of political discussion explicitly refer to politics as opposed to important matters.

Aspects of the Discussion Partners and Discussion Network

Frequently, political discussion scholars want to understand not only how often individuals discuss politics, but also who these individuals are discussing politics with. These discussion partners are then considered the “discussion network” and characteristics of the discussion partners individually, and of the whole network, have been found to have important implications for various political outcomes. The aspects that will be addressed here are the number of discussion partners in an individual’s network, whether or not the discussion partners are similar or dissimilar to the individual, and the overall makeup of the network.

Size. The most commonly studied aspects of individuals’ discussion networks include the size of the network and the extent to which there is agreement, disagreement, or a mix of views represented within the network. The size of the network is very straightforward and simply addresses how many others an individual talks to about politics (Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004; Kwak et al., 2005; Moy & Gastil, 2006; Mutz, 2002b; Nir, 2005; Price et al., 2002; Scheufele et al., 2006; Scheufele, M. C.)
Nisbet, Brossard, & E. C. Nisbet, 2004; Straits, 1991). This is a conceptual definition that appears to be uniform across the literature.

In regard to measuring network size, there are three primary strategies that appear to be used. The first asks respondents a general question regarding the number of individuals with whom they discuss politics (Kwak et al., 2005; J. M. McLeod et al., 1999). The second strategy is to name locations where individuals might discuss politics, (i.e. at home, work, or church) and asks respondents if they discuss politics with any individual at these locations. Size is then is calculated based on the number of locations that an individual indicated they have a political discussant (Leighley, 1990) or size is calculated separately for each location (Scheufele et al., 2004, 2006). The last strategy is the use of a discussant generator. The discussant generator approach asks respondents to provide the names of their discussion partners, and respondents are generally limited to naming anywhere from three to five discussion partners (Huckfeldt et al., 1995; Huckfeldt et al., 2004; Knoke, 1990; Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; Mutz, 2002a, 2002b; Nir, 2005; Pan et al., 2006; Pattie & Johnston, 2008), although some data collection efforts have not included limits on the number of discussion partners who can be listed (i.e. General Social Survey). The number of names which the respondent provides then is used as an estimate of network size.

On the surface the most prevalent use of a discussant generator as a tool for assessing network size could be problematic due to the fact that it is censoring responses, which seems to be inconsistent with the conceptual definition of the concept. The rationale for using a discussant generator approach is that individuals are likely not being overly careful when simply giving a number as with the first strategy presented here. The
simple numeric response provides researchers with an estimate which might have a lot of variability and may encourage individuals to think about weak ties, but is also likely to incorporate a lot of error. Therefore all of the operational definitions have their limitations. Research assessing the extent to which these different operationalizations produce different findings is somewhat unclear. Research utilizing discussant generators show that there is variability in the number of discussion partners which are reported (Huckfeldt et al., 1995; Mutz, 2006; Nir, 2005). Therefore, even though the ceiling for the number of discussion partners is restricted, many survey respondents are not meeting the ceiling. However, recent research comparing network size using a single open ended question and a three respondent discussant generator demonstrated that the mean number of discussants was significantly different in the two approaches, and only the discussant generator measure of size was a significant predictor of political participation once demographics and discussion frequency were controlled (Eveland, Hively, & Morey, 2009).

*Dangerous.* While frequency and network size have been fairly straightforward conceptually, when the characteristics of discussion partners are considered the literature appears fairly murky. A variety of terms have previously been used to describe the characteristics of an individual’s discussion network, all of which assess the extent to which individuals in a network agree or disagree with the ego. These terms include cross-cutting exposure (Mutz, 2002a, 2002b), ambivalent networks (Nir, 2005), heterogeneous networks (Marsden, 1987; J. M. McLeod et al., 1999; Moy & Gastil, 2006; Scheufele et al., 2006; Scheufele et al., 2004), dangerous discussion (Eveland & Shah, 2003), and diverse exposure (Marsden, 1987). Still others focus more explicitly just on the
disagreement that an individual is exposed to and utilize the term disagreement (Huckfeldt & Mendez, 2008; McClurg, 2006b; Pattie & Johnston, 2008; Price et al., 2002). The last technique describes the makeup of the network as the proportion of agreement and disagreement in the network irrespective of the ego and has utilized the term diversity or ambivalence (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Hively & Eveland, 2009; Huckfeldt et al., 2004; Nir, 2005).

Eveland and Hively (2009) examined the extent to which various conceptual definitions were used and found that despite the wide range of labels, many of the terms were addressing the same concept – the extent to which individuals engage in discussion with individuals who are not likeminded. They referred to this as dangerous discussion. For example, Mutz (2002a, 2002b) defines cross-cutting exposure as “interactions that cross lines of political difference,” and Moy and Gastil (2006) refer to heterogeneous discussion as “discussion with unlike others.” Here a conceptual distinction is made between political difference and difference that may or may not have a political consequence but both are still generally referring to dissimilarity with the ego in some domain as the defining characteristic of the conversation.

How scholars assess political discussion with non-likeminded individuals differs depending on whether a discussant generator is utilized or if more general questions are asked. In discussant generator approaches, several questions are typically asked about the discussion partners and perceptions of vote choice (Huckfeldt et al., 2004; McClurg, 2006a) or party identification (Knoke, 1990; Pattie & Johnston, 2008). Others who rely on name generators have asked respondents about how often they disagree with their discussant (L. Feldman & Price, 2008; Leighley, 1990; Mutz & Martin, 2001; Mutz,
or some combination of items which employ all of the above mentioned measures (Mutz, 2002a). In rare cases, the survey respondent’s vote choice is compared to the discussion partner’s actual vote choice as opposed to the survey respondent’s perception of the discussion partner’s vote choice (McClurg, 2006b).

When discussant generators are not used, discussion with non-likeminded individuals is most often measured by assessing how often individuals talk to people who have different demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnicity) and political characteristics (i.e. extreme left or right views) in comparison to themselves. An average of the frequency of discussion with these “different” discussion partners across the various categories is then created (Kwak et al., 2005; J. M. McLeod et al., 1999; Moy & Gastil, 2006; Rojas, 2008; Scheufele et al., 2004, 2006). Occasionally discussion with non-likeminded individuals is assessed by only assessing political party/ideological difference (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Eveland & Shah, 2003) or only assessing a demographic difference (Conover et al., 2002).

In almost all of the approaches that exist in the literature there is some element of political identification, either explicitly or implicitly through vote choice. This is probably a better measure of understanding the extent to which individuals are exposed to political views that are different from their own in comparison to measuring demographic characteristics. With all of these measures, however, there is by no means a guarantee that dissimilar views will be actually shared. For example, it is quite possible that individuals perceive that they will disagree with someone, but never broach the topics that may result in sharing conflicting views. For this reason, directly asking respondents
the extent to which they engage in conversations with individuals who do not share the respondent’s political views is much more face valid.

Safe. Another aspect of an individual’s network that was identified by Eveland and Hively (2009) was the extent to which individuals engage in discussion with likeminded individuals, which they termed safe discussion. Although this concept is rarely utilized within the literature (see Eveland & Shah, 2003 for an exception), it does represent a perhaps very important dimension of the discussion network. Going back to early social psychology experiments, an individual was much more likely to go against the majority if there was a single person who agreed with him or her in comparison to when the whole room was against him or her (Asch, 1955). Similarly, if all scholars are measuring is the extent to which individuals are surrounded by disagreement but don’t bother to assess the extent to which there is agreement, we may be missing a large part of the individual’s network. This incomplete view may be hampering our ability to explain effects based on the makeup on an individual’s network.

Since very few scholars have measured the extent to which individuals engage in conversation with likeminded individuals, the operationalization of this variable is much clearer than previous variables. Mutz (2002a) assessed safe discussion through several measures which all tapped the extent to which the discussants’ views were similar to the ego, both on specific issues and political party. Eveland and colleagues (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Eveland et al., 2009; Eveland & Shah, 2003) assessed safe discussion through political party or ideological agreement. As with the above stated conclusion for dangerous discussion, the most straightforward way to assess discussion with likeminded
individuals would be to simply ask them the extent to which they engage in discussion which features discussion focusing on agreement on political issues.

*Diverse.* Although much more rare than measuring disagreement or dangerous discussion, there are conceptualizations that do not refer to the ego but instead focus on the relationship between network members (Hively & Eveland, 2009; Huckfeldt et al., 2004; Nir, 2005). These conceptualizations encompass both safe and dangerous discussion. Huckfeldt et al. (2004) utilize a variety of terms throughout their manuscript but one that they share with Nir (2005) is ambivalence. Huckfeldt et al. (2004) conceptualize ambivalence as the “distribution of preference within the network” (p. 66) and Nir (2005) conceptualizes network ambivalence as “the balance of competing considerations perceived by an individual” (p. 425). Similarly Eveland and Hively (2009; Hively & Eveland, 2009) conceptualize diversity as the extent to which discussion partners are evenly distributed across discussion characteristic categories such as political party affiliation.

To assess the proportion of views that exist in the network three different strategies have been employed. Nir (2005) calculated a measure of network ambivalence which utilized the individual’s perception of their discussion partners’ presidential vote choice and the extent to which the choice was the same or different from the survey respondent’s. Respondents were able to mention up to four discussion partners and the calculation for ambivalence was: $\text{Ambivalence}_{\text{network}} = \frac{A + D}{2} - |A - D|$. The item theoretically ranges from -2 to 2 and although differs from the conceptual definition of diversity being independent of the respondent, it does address the proportions of views represented in the network. Huckfeldt et al. (2004) took a similar approach in that the
perceived presidential vote choice was used to categorize the discussion partners. Their operationalization utilized only three discussion partners and comparisons to the ego’s vote choice was not considered when defining the network as homogenous or heterogeneous. The last technique measures diverse discussion with a measure of Simpson’s D: 
\[ D = 1 - \sum p_i^2 \] (Simpson, 1949). The formula gives the proportion of individuals in all available categories (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Hively & Eveland, 2009). The researchers used the number of days per week individuals talked to Republicans and Democrats as the two categories which restricts the range of the variable from 0, no diversity, to .5, perfect diversity.

Simpson’s D is the measure that most closely reflects the conceptual definition of diverse discussion, but how it has been implemented is less than perfect. A simple categorization of Republican or Democrat is likely not going to be enough categories to capture all of the different views which may exist in the network. Although, if this measure was expanded to include a wider variety of political parties, or perhaps views on current issues which may be important to the dependent variable in question, it would represent the conceptual idea of diverse discussion quite well.

Returning to the earlier discussion of deliberation, the extent to which individuals’ political discussion is diverse could assess the extent to which their discussions emulate the characteristics that are considered to be valuable from a democratic perspective. If the goal of deliberation is for a wide variety of views to be heard, then an individual who is situated in a diverse discussion network is more likely to be exposed to a larger subset of ideas. It is through these types of discussion that Conover et al. (2002) and Mansbridge (1999) assert that there is democratic value in everyday communication.
In sum, there are four characteristics of the network that are important to consider when examining political discussion: size, or how many individuals are in an individual’s discussion network; dangerous discussion, or the extent to which individuals engage in discussion with non-likeminded individuals; safe discussion, or the extent to which individuals engage in discussion with likeminded individuals; and diverse discussion, or the extent to which a variety of views are represented in an individual’s network.
Chapter 4: Hypotheses and Rationale

The relationship between political self-efficacy and communication has been addressed at least superficially in the literature (Conover et al., 2002; McLeod et al., 1999, Moy & Gastil, 2007). However, research on the relationships between political self-efficacy and the subcomponents of political discussion is almost nonexistent. The same is true for the relationship between political anxiety and discussion. How anxiety influences the amount of discussion has been addressed, but research on the relationships between political anxiety and the subcomponents of discussion is essentially non-existent. Furthermore, applying theories in which self-efficacy interacts with anxiety when examining political discussion is lacking even further. However, if one approaches engaging in discussion as a behavior, and considers the expected results of engaging in various forms of discussion, theoretical predictions can be derived.

Bonito (2007) developed a theoretical model for information sharing in which, although not explicitly named, self-efficacy is an important contributor leading to information sharing. Bonito considers information sharing to be a fluid, dynamic process in which both individual and contextual factors should be considered. At the individual level, information must be activated in memory in order for the information to have the potential to be shared. It is then at the contextual level where the choice is made whether or not to share the activated information. Bonito suggests that there are several individual
difference variables that should be considered due to the impact that the variables will have on whether or not someone chooses to share information. One of these variables could be self-efficacy, especially in contexts that would be considered dangerous or diverse. It is worth noting that engaging in political discussion does not inherently imply that information is being shared. For example one could be seeking information in a political discussion as opposed to sharing. However, applying Bonito’s theory to political discussion more broadly suggests that self-efficacy is an important contributor to engaging in communication.

Research which has explicitly addressed the relationship between discussion and self-efficacy has focused primarily on the relationship between self-efficacy and discussion frequency (Conover et al., 2002; J. M. McLeod et al., 1999; M.C. Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Scheufele, 2002; Southwell & Torres, 2006). In these studies efficacy is typically seen as the outcome of frequent discussion (J. M. McLeod et al., 1999; M.C. Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004) or as something that should be controlled when determining communication’s effect on some other variable (Scheufele, 2002). However, when an individual’s self-efficacy is considered as a predictor of engaging in political discussion, it has been found to be positively related to engaging in more frequent conversations (Conover et al., 2002; Southwell & Torres, 2006).

H1: People who have relatively more political self-efficacy will have relatively more frequent political discussions.

This tends to be where the research literature will stop when considering how self-efficacy is related to discussion. While engaging in political discussion is important, much of the more recent scholarship has begun to look at the characteristics of the
discussion partners or the characteristics of the network. As has been previously outlined, a characteristic of discussion partners that is frequently assessed when utilizing discussant generators is perceptions of the discussion partners’ vote choice (Huckfeldt et al., 2004; McClurg, 2006a) or party identification (Knoke, 1990; Pattie & Johnston, 2008). Engaging in discussion with someone of a different political party identification or vote preference is likely perceived as something that is more difficult than engaging in discussion with individuals who we perceive to be similar to ourselves given the contentious nature of political discussion more generally (Eliasoph, 1998; Walsh, 2004) and conversational goals such as relationship maintenance which may be contrary to engaging in a disagreeable conversation (Dillard, 1989; Dillard, Segrin, & Harden, 1989). Given that talking with individuals who are different from us is probably a more difficult situation than talking with individuals who are similar to ourselves, individuals will benefit by having higher levels of political self-efficacy when discussing politics with discussion partners who have a different political outlook than the survey respondent. Survey respondents who engage in more frequent discussion with dangerous discussion partners will also be more likely to have diverse networks. Both of these predictions consider individuals’ overall tendency to engage in political discussion. When predicting these subcomponents of discussion, prior research has demonstrated that it is important that overall political discussion frequency is accounted for (Eveland & Hively, 2009).

H2: People who have relatively more political self-efficacy will have relatively more frequent dangerous discussion.

H3: People who have relatively more political self-efficacy will have relatively higher network diversity.
Prior research examining political anxiety has also typically focused on frequency of discussion irrespective of discussion partner characteristics. Within this limited research the results have been fairly consistent. Scholars suggest that when individuals feel anxious, they are driven to reduce their feelings of anxiety. The data suggests that individuals reduce their feelings of anxiety through seeking information regardless of whether or not the information is mediated (Marcus et al., 2002; Valentino et al., 2008, 2009) or interpersonal (Huddy et al., 2007). This evidence would suggest that individuals who are relatively more anxious would engage in relatively more frequent political discussions regardless of the party affiliation of their discussion partners.

H4: People who have relatively more political anxiety will have relatively more frequent political discussions.

As with political self-efficacy, however, the literature tends to stop at discussion frequency and not consider the characteristics of the discussion partners or the nature of an individual’s discussion network as a whole. There are two different logical predictions that could be presented given how prior research is interpreted. One interpretation would suggest that individuals who feel relatively more anxious will seek varied information. The research that has examined differential information-seeking in online contexts suggests that individuals who feel relatively more anxious will seek information that is useful. Useful information in this experimental context was determined to be relatively more balanced information-seeking (Valentino et al., 2009). Given that our discussion networks tend to made up of primarily of safe discussion partners (Huckfeldt et al., 2004; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995), when individuals engage in balanced information seeking
there should be an increase in the frequency of discussions with dangerous discussion partners, which ultimately will result in more diverse discussion networks.

H5a: People who have relatively more political anxiety will have relatively more frequent dangerous discussions.

H6a: People who have relatively more political anxiety will have relatively more network diversity.

The alternative prediction that can be offered in regard to the type of discussion that anxious individuals would seek is that individuals will seek similar discussion partners, which will further decrease the diversity of their discussion networks. Exposure to political anxiety, especially if it is ideologically based, could drive individuals to discuss politics with the individuals that they feel closest to. Research based on the affect heuristic suggests that when individuals experience various affective reactions they can respond either logically or in reactionary fashion (Slovic et al., 2002; 2005). The prior rationale provided was logically based. However, if instead individuals respond in a reactionary fashion, they may be more likely to seek out supportive information, or the closest source of information. Given that our closest ties also tend to be similar to ourselves (Huckfeldt et al., 2004; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995), both reactionary responses would lead to an increase in safe discussion. This increase in safe discussion would then also impact the diversity of our networks, making the networks of relatively more anxious individuals relatively less diverse.

H5b: People who have relatively more political anxiety will have relatively more frequent safe discussions.
H6b: People who have relatively more political anxiety will have relatively less network diversity.

Given the prevalence of dual process models in decision making theory, predictions may be more precise if the interaction between political self-efficacy and political anxiety are considered. The normatively good outcome tends to occur when an individual has high levels of efficacy and high levels of perceived threat. More simply stated, beneficial outcomes tend to occur when individuals perceive something is wrong and also perceive that they have the ability to do something about it. When individuals feel that they do not have the ability to engage in actions to alleviate the problem, action is still taken but it is typically seen as action that soothes individuals without actually addressing the problem.

In a discussion context, engaging in discussion with those who are similar to oneself could be viewed as soothing the individual without addressing the problem, whereas engaging in discussion with those who are dissimilar to oneself could be viewed as proactively addressing the problem. Consider the potential responses of a Democrat hearing information about the health policy debate. If this individual hears that some Republicans are discussing Obamacare as a socialist movement and does not understand why this is so, two things could happen. The individual could discuss this perception with a Republican and try gain information about how Republicans are viewing Obamacare. This discussion could benefit both participants in that both individuals could leave the discussion more informed. This hopefully would reduce anxiety, especially if the source of the anxiety was a lack of information. The other alternative would be that the Democrat could discuss this perception with other Democrats and in turn could simply
bash the other side, where no information is gained. While the individual may feel stronger about his or her own perspective and perhaps less anxious after the discussion, s/he did not actually do anything to remove the source of anxiety. Research examining the role of selective exposure in exposure to attitude consistent or inconsistent media messages suggests that individuals tend to select consistent information, especially when individuals are more certain about their views (Knoblock-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). This may support the soothing nature of consistent information and individuals desire to actively seek this type of information. I argue that what will predict which of these paths an individual takes will be dependent upon their level of political self-efficacy.

Research looking at online information-seeking suggests that when individuals feel anxious they will seek information that they feel is useful, which tends to be a balanced information environment (Valentino et al., 2009). This assumes that the source of the individuals’ anxiety is a lack of information. If this is the case, individuals are more likely to encounter novel information from sources that differ from themselves (Dutwin, 2003; Gastil & Dillard, 1999). However, the finding regarding individuals’ information-seeking habits did not take an individual’s level of self-efficacy into account. If an individual does not feel efficacious, it is likely that the individual will not perceive information from a dangerous discussion partner as useful. If an individual has a relatively low level of political self-efficacy, s/he will not feel that s/he can use that information and integrate it into his or her current political views. One of the items commonly used as an indicator of political self-efficacy refers to the complicated and complex nature of politics (Morell, 2003; Neimi et al., 1991). If an individual has low political self-efficacy s/he is more likely to view the political process as complex, and
information from a dangerous source will further complicate his or her view of politics and therefore is not likely to be useful. However, information that is consistent with his or her views, and reinforces his or her beliefs, could be useful in reducing his or her feelings of anxiety. Research has suggested that most often individuals’ discussions are safe (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Mutz, 2006) and extra confidence in their capabilities are probably not necessary in order to have discussions where their discussion partners are likely to agree with them. Therefore, controlling for general political discussion frequency, individuals with low levels of political self-efficacy are likely to engage in more frequent safe discussion as their political anxiety increases; however, individuals with high levels of political self-efficacy are likely to engage in more frequent dangerous discussion as their political anxiety increases.

H7: There will be an interaction between political self-efficacy and political anxiety, such that people with relatively low levels of political self-efficacy will be relatively more likely to engage safe political discussion as their political anxiety increases.
H8: There will be an interaction between political self-efficacy and political anxiety, such that people with relatively high levels of political self-efficacy will be relatively more likely to engage dangerous political discussion as their political anxiety increases.
Figure 2. Interaction between political self-efficacy and political anxiety for dangerous discussion.

I do not expect the interaction to be present for overall discussion frequency. There is no reason to expect that overall discussion will change differentially for individuals with varying levels of political self-efficacy. Instead, the main effects of increased discussion as political anxiety increases, and increased discussion for individuals with higher levels political self-efficacy will be observed.
Figure 3. Interaction between political self-efficacy and political anxiety for frequency of political discussion.

As political anxiety increases, individuals with different levels of political self-efficacy are expected to change the frequency with whom they discuss politics. Individuals with relatively higher levels of political self-efficacy are expected to increase the frequency of their dangerous discussion and individuals with relatively lower levels of political self-efficacy are expected to increase the frequency of their safe discussion. Given that individuals tend to have primarily safe networks (Huckfeldt et al., 2004), the increase in safe discussion will lead to less diverse networks for individuals with low levels of political self-efficacy. Likewise, the increase in dangerous discussion will lead to more diverse discussion networks for individuals with high levels of political self-efficacy.
H9: There will be an interaction between political self-efficacy and political anxiety, such that individuals with relatively high levels of political self-efficacy will be more relatively likely to have more diverse networks as their political anxiety increases, and individuals with relatively low levels of political self-efficacy will be more likely to have relatively less diverse networks as their political anxiety increases.

Figure 4. Interaction between political self-efficacy and political anxiety for network diversity.
Chapter 5: Method

In order to test the relationships between self-efficacy, anxiety, and discussion, data collected for the 2000 American National Election Study (ANES) were examined. The ANES is a national survey that has been conducted each presidential election year since 1948 as part of a time-series data collection (ANES, 2010). The survey is collected face-to-face and is considered to be nationally representative. The 2000 data collection was selected because it was the most recent data collection that contained all key variables of interest: political self-efficacy, political anxiety, characteristics of discussion partners, and frequency of discussion with those individuals. The only more recent ANES data collection that contained characteristics of discussion partners occurred in a 2006 pilot data collection, but political self-efficacy and political anxiety were not available in that data set. Another commonly used publicly available data set is the National Annenberg Election Study (NAES). Unfortunately the characteristics of discussion partners that are available only extend to the relationship, not any sort of political identification. Additionally, in the 2004 NAES data collection political self-efficacy and political anxiety were not measured on the same questionnaires.

A total of 1806 individuals participated in any part of the 2000 ANES data collection. 1366 individuals completed both the pre-election and post-election surveys.
and reported either who they voted for, or who they preferred. 1151 individuals completed both the pre- and post-election surveys and indicated that they discussed politics with at least one individual. Of these individuals, 104 did not vote for a major party candidate. Given that discussion partners cannot be characterized as safe or dangerous for the “other” vote choice options, these participants were excluded from the analysis. Therefore there were 1047 respondents that met the criteria for my major hypotheses. However, of these participants, 108 chose not to respond to the “income” control variable question therefore they were excluded from the final regressions. All descriptive statistics that follow are based only on the participants that were utilized in the final regression equations.

**Measures**

*Political self-efficacy.* Five items measured on a five-point strongly disagree (coded as 1) to strongly agree (coded as 5) scale were utilized in order to create a measure of self efficacy. The items are: I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics, I consider myself to be better informed about government than other people, I have a good understanding of the political system, I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country, I feel I could do as good a job in public office as most other people, and Other people seem to have an easier time understanding complicated issues than I do (reverse coded) ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .98$, $\alpha = .80$). These are the items that have been previously determined to measure internal political efficacy (Craig et al., 1990; Morrell, 2003).

*Political anxiety.* Responses to two items were summed to create a measure of anxiety. The items ask how frequently presidential candidates Albert Gore and George
W. Bush have made the respondent feel afraid on a five-point never (coded as 0) to very often (coded as 4) scale ($M = 1.25, SD = 1.62, r = -.038, p = .239$). Summing across candidates is the anxiety measurement strategy employed by Marcus and colleagues in their initial test of Affective Intelligence theory (Marcus et al., 2000); therefore I did the same here. They argued that this represented a measure of total anxiety that the individual is experiencing regarding the current political environment. Some could argue that a more valid strategy would be to look only at the anxiety expressed for the candidate that a given respondent did not vote for, or to look at the absolute difference between the two anxiety scores. Given that anxiety about the candidate the individual prefers is relatively low, some would argue that examining how much more anxiety the alternative candidate creates in comparison to the preferred candidate could better predict dangerous discussion. A similar line of reasoning would suggest examining just the anxiety produced by the non-preferred candidate. I created these measures as well, and all three measures were highly correlated with each other ($r = .843 - .937$). Additionally, I tested my hypotheses using these various measures of political anxiety and the results remained substantively the same. Thus, I have chosen to report only the results using the measure already employed in previous research on Affective Intelligence.

**Political discussion.** In order to calculate the measures of political discussion which are used as the dependent variables in this manuscript, individuals’ responses to discussant generator data were used. Participants were asked, “From time to time, people discuss government, elections and politics with other people. I'd like to ask you about the people with whom you discuss these matters. These people might or might not be relatives. Can you think of anyone?” If respondents answered yes, the discussion
partner’s name was recorded and they asked if there was anyone else, and the process continued for up to four discussion partners. For each discussion partner, how often the respondent discussed politics with that individual and the respondent’s perception of that discussion partner’s vote choice was assessed. The respondents used for the final sample on average reported that they discussed politics with more than 2 individuals ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.14$). Twenty percent of the respondents named a single discussion partner, 25.3% reported named two discussion partners, 21.46% named three discussion partners, and 33.25% named four discussion partners.

To calculate political network discussion frequency individuals’ responses to how often they talked about politics with each discussion partner on a four-point never (coded as 0) to often (coded as 3) scale was summed across all discussion partners ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 2.71$). Less than .3% of the sample ($n = 6$) indicated that they “never” discussed politics with one of their named discussion partners.

To calculate safe discussion and dangerous discussion, the vote choice of the respondent, and the perception of the vote choice for each discussion partner was used. For the respondents’ vote choice, if they voted, they were asked to indicate whether or not they voted for Al Gore, George Bush, Pat Buchanan, Ralph Nader, or other. If respondents indicated that they did not vote, they were asked which candidate they preferred, Al Gore, George Bush, Pat Buchanan, Ralph Nader, or other. To assess the discussion partners’ vote choice, each respondent was asked to indicate whether or not s/he believed that each discussion partner voted for Al Gore, George Bush, someone else, or did not vote. Due to the mismatch between the response options for the respondent and for the discussion partners, only individuals who indicated that they voted for either Gore
or Bush are considered, as previously mentioned. If the respondent perceived that a given discussion partner voted for the same candidate as the respondent, or the candidate the respondent preferred if s/he did not vote, this was coded as a 1 for safe discussion and 0 for dangerous discussion. If the respondent perceived that a given discussion partner voted for a different candidate as the respondent, or the candidate the respondent preferred if s/he did not vote, this was coded as a 0 for safe discussion and a 1 for dangerous discussion. If the respondent did not think that the discussion partner voted, a score was not given. This eliminated no more than 8% of the discussion partners. The safe and dangerous discussion score for each discussion partner was multiplied by how frequently the respondent discusses politics with that discussion partner, and responses were summed across all discussion partners (safe: $M = 3.72, SD = 2.64$, dangerous: $M = 1.20, SD = 1.74$). Therefore an individual’s political network discussion frequency score is a combination of his or her safe and dangerous scores, unless a discussion partner was excluded for being perceived to vote for a non-major party candidate or to not vote at all. This is a measurement strategy that was employed by Mutz (2006) in her analysis of individual’s political discussion networks. This measurement strategy allows for the amount of discussion that occurs which is relatively safe or dangerous to be considered as opposed to simply counting the number of safe of dangerous partners. The finding that individuals in general engage in relatively more safe discussion than dangerous discussion is expected given prior research which has found that individuals tend to reside in fairly homogenous discussion networks (Huckfeldt et al., 2004; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Mutz, 2006).
To assess *network diversity*, the formula for Simpson’s D presented earlier will be employed. The two categories used will be safe discussion and dangerous discussion, which assess the proportion of discussion that occurs that is relatively safe versus dangerous \((M = .14, SD = .21)\).

*Analysis Plan*

To test the above hypotheses, moderated OLS regressions were run. Controls in the regressions included age, education, income, gender, political interest, television news viewing frequency, newspaper reading frequency, general political discussion frequency and size of discussion network. Age, gender, education, income, and political interest are commonly used controls in political communication research due to their consistent relationship with political communication variables.

Age has been found to be negatively related to engaging in dangerous discussion (McLeod et al., 1998; Scheufele et al., 2004, 2006) and residing in more diverse networks (Marsden, 1987). The reason given for this relationship is that as individuals age they tend to not expand their social networks and instead focus on the central, primary links in their discussion networks. Given that networks tend to be composed of strong ties that are similar to the self, as out networks become denser with age, the tendency to engage in dangerous discussion decreases.

The relationship between gender and political discussion is somewhat murky. Some scholars have found a positive relationship between being female and engaging in dangerous discussion (McLeod et al., 1998), some have found negative relationships (Eveland et al., 2008; Scheufele et al., 2004) and others have found no relationship between gender and dangerous discussion (Mutz & Martin, 2001). However, scholarship
in political science tends to suggest that men are generally more politically active and reinforces the idea of politics being an “Old Boys Club” (Verba et al., 1995). Therefore, while the relationship between political discussion and gender is still not established, prior research would suggest that gender should be considered when examining a political topic.

Education has been associated with a tendency to engage in dangerous discussion (McLeod et al., 1998; Scheufele et al., 2004, 2006) and to have more diverse networks (Marsden, 1987). Education is generally associated with increases in political participation, and some view discussion as a type of participation (Verba et al., 1995). Higher education is generally related to higher cognitive capabilities, as noted by the consistent relationship between education and political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1991). The same cognitive capability that is associated with increased political knowledge could also be what leads these individuals to engage in political discussion more frequently, especially when considering dangerous discussion.

Scholarship examining the relationship between income and discussion has produced mixed results. In some cases it has been positively associated with engaging in dangerous discussion (McLeod et al., 1998), while in others scholars have not found a relationship between income and engaging in dangerous discussion (Scheufele et al., 2004). The logic for including income as a control variable is that income is seen as a marker of socio-economic status. Higher levels of socio-economic status tend to be associated with political participation and education (Verba et al., 1995) which also tend to be associated with political discussion.
Political interest has been found to be positively related to frequency of discussion and safe discussion and negatively related to dangerous discussion (Eveland, Morey, & Hively, 2008). It seems logical that those who are interested in politics would discuss politics more. Also, those who are highly interested in politics also tend to be much more ego-involved in the political process and consequently their preferred political party. This ego involvement is what tends to lead to a positive relationship between political interest and safe discussion and a negative relationship between political interest and dangerous discussion.

Given that it is likely that individuals are becoming anxious due to negative information about politics in news media (Brader, 2006; Farnsworth & Lichter, 2007), it is important that respondents’ news media use is also accounted for. Additionally, news media use and political discussion are frequently found to be positively related to one another (Scheufele, 2000) and individuals could choose to seek media information rather than interpersonal information in response to political anxiety (Valentino et al., 2009). Given these relationships, and the desire to assess the unique relationship between political anxiety, political self-efficacy and the various forms of discussion, I should account for the influence of news media.

Prior research has demonstrated that it is important for general frequency of political discussion to be controlled for in order to examine the unique effects of other forms of discussion (Eveland & Hively, 2009). Eveland and Hively (2009) demonstrated that the relationships between various forms of discussion were highly correlated with one another, and the relationship between frequency of discussion and all the other forms of discussion were the most problematic from a multicollinearity perspective.
Lastly, because all of the various measures of discussion are summed across discussion partners, size needs to be controlled as well. Without this control, individuals who have networks of different sizes will be unable to be fairly compared. If an individual talks to one discussion partner very frequently, and another talks to 3 discussion partners rarely, given the coding scheme these individuals would have identical scores for political discussion. However, what these individuals are experiencing is very different, especially when the characteristics of discussion partners are considered.

Age was reported by the respondent and measured in years ($M = 45.93, SD = 15.60$). Education was measured on an eight point ordinal scale ranging from less than 8 years of education (1) to an advanced degree (9) (median = 4, more than 12 years of schooling). Income was measured on an 21 point ordinal scale ranging from less than $5000 (1)$ to over $200,000 (22)$ (median and mode = 5, $25,000 to $34,999). Gender was recorded by the interviewer and measured as a dichotomy (46.8% male, coded as 0). Political interest was measured on a 3 point ordinal scale ranging from not much (1) to very much (3) (median and mode = 2, somewhat). Newspaper reading frequency was measured through a single question which asked how many days per week the individual indicated they read a daily newspaper ($M = 3.78, SD = 2.88$). Television news viewing frequency was created by summing responses to two questions. The first question asked how many days per week the individual indicated s/he watched local television news, the second question ask how many days per week s/he watched national television news ($M = 9.14, SD = 6.41$). While some may argue that only national television news viewing should be assessed given that safe and dangerous discussion is defined by individuals’
responses to a national election, the newspaper measure does not assess only national news. Therefore, to more closely match the newspaper measure both local and national news is assessed. General political discussion frequency was measured through a single question which asked participants how many days in the past week they talked about politics with family or friends ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 2.12$). This measure of general political discussion frequency differs from the political network discussion frequency measure in that it measures an individual’s general tendency to discuss political matters, beyond just the (up to) four primary discussion partners while the political network discussion frequency measure assessed frequency of political discussion only with the individuals explicitly named. Network size was operationalized by the number of discussion partners the respondent reported ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.14$).

These variables were mean centered, or centered on their mode in order to make their coefficients more interpretable. The main variables of interest, political self-efficacy and political anxiety, were also mean centered prior to creating the interaction term and prior to being entered into the equations. Four separate models were run for each dependent variable. The first model included the controls and political self-efficacy. The second model included the controls and political anxiety. These two models were run to give political anxiety and political self-efficacy the strongest opportunity to demonstrate effects on the four dependent measures. The third model included both political anxiety and political self-efficacy in addition to the control variables. The fourth model included the controls, political self-efficacy, political anxiety, and the interaction term. Predicted values were calculated for all regressions to assess the extent to which predicted values were outside the bounds of possible values for the outcome variables. None of the
predicted values were outside the bounds of possible values for the regressions examining political network discussion frequency. Less than 1% of predicted values for safe discussion, 2% for dangerous discussion, and 6% for network diversity values were outside the possible range of responses. Hypotheses 1-3 were tested by examining the first model, hypotheses 4 – 6 were tested using the second model, and hypotheses 7-9 were tested by examining the interaction term in the fourth model. Hypotheses 1-6 were also reexamined in the third model.
Chapter 6: Results

Preliminary Results

Before proceeding with the hypothesis testing, I will first address the bivariate relationships between the variables of interest and the control variables, which are presented in Table 1. The first relationship of potential interest is the positive, significant correlation between the two independent variables of interest, political self-efficacy and political anxiety ($r = .210$). This indicates that individuals who have relatively more political self-efficacy also are relatively more anxious about politics. Although this relationship is not especially strong, it is significant.

Examining the relationships between the two key independent variables and the outcomes without controlling for any other variables suggests initial support for some of the proposed hypotheses while suggesting a lack of support for others. The zero-order correlations indicate that political self-efficacy is related to political network discussion frequency, safe discussion and dangerous discussion; however, it is unrelated to network diversity. Without controlling for any other variables, political anxiety is related to political network discussion frequency and safe discussion, but unrelated to dangerous discussion and network diversity.

Table 1 also reveals significant relationships between many of the control variables and the four dependent measures. Relatively higher levels of political network
discussion frequency is correlated with higher levels of education, higher levels of income, being male, higher levels of political interest, more frequent TV news viewing and more frequent newspaper reading. Relatively higher levels of safe discussion frequency is correlated with being older, higher levels of education, higher levels of income, being male, higher levels of political interest, more frequent TV news viewing and more frequent newspaper reading. Relatively higher levels of dangerous discussion and relatively more diverse discussion networks are correlated only with higher education levels.
<table>
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<td>.322*</td>
<td>-.279*</td>
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<td>.591*</td>
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<td>.104*</td>
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<td>.108*</td>
<td>.121*</td>
<td>.276*</td>
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<td>.124*</td>
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<td>.180*</td>
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<td>-.086*</td>
<td>-.075*</td>
<td>-.050</td>
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<td>-.033</td>
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<td>.153*</td>
<td>.217*</td>
<td>.169*</td>
<td>-.093*</td>
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<td>.078*</td>
<td>.105*</td>
<td>.094*</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>-.024</td>
<td>.192*</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.328*</td>
<td>-.066*</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.266*</td>
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<td>15. Newspaper</td>
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<td>.063*</td>
<td>.140*</td>
<td>.114*</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>-.006</td>
<td>.173*</td>
<td>.133*</td>
<td>.310*</td>
<td>.163*</td>
<td>.205*</td>
<td>-.112*</td>
<td>.186*</td>
<td>.214*</td>
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</table>

Table 1. Bivariate zero-order correlations. Note * indicates a significant relationship at the $p < .05$ level, two tailed.
As can be seen in the table, there are strong significant relationships between the four dependent variables and the two discussion related controls, general political discussion frequency and network size. The exceptions to this are the lack of a relationship between general political discussion frequency and both dangerous discussion and network diversity. Given the strong relationship between these variables, a correlation table displaying the relationship between political self-efficacy, political anxiety, and the four dependent variables controlling for general political discussion frequency and network size are presented in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>2. Political anxiety</td>
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<td>3. Political network discussion frequency</td>
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<td>4. Safe discussion</td>
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<td>.195*</td>
<td>.578*</td>
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<td>5. Dangerous discussion</td>
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<td>-.064</td>
<td>.103*</td>
<td>-.587*</td>
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<td>6. Network diversity</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>-.041</td>
<td>-.102*</td>
<td>-.354*</td>
<td>.531*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Partial correlations controlling for general political discussion and network size. Note * indicates a significant relationship at the $p < .05$ level, two tailed.

There are a few interesting things to note once these controls are put in place. First, the relationship between political self-efficacy and dangerous discussion is no
longer significant; however, the remaining relationships between political self-efficacy, political anxiety and the four outcomes remain substantively the same. The most striking differences that emerge with the implementation of these two controls are the relationships between the various forms of discussion and network diversity. Network diversity is now negatively related to political network discussion frequency and safe discussion, where prior to the implementation of the controls there was a positive relationship with political network discussion frequency, and a non-significant relationship with safe discussion. The relationship between network diversity and dangerous discussion, however, remains essentially unchanged. Another interesting change is the increase in the negative relationship between safe and dangerous discussion. Most research that has examined these two concepts has found a significant positive relationship, or a non-significant relationship once frequency is controlled (Eveland & Hively, 2009).

**Hypothesis Testing**

Table 3 presents the results for the four equations utilizing political self-efficacy as a predictor of the various types of discussion and network diversity. The cell entries contain unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses and all p-values presented are one-tailed given that directional hypotheses were provided. The data suggests that Hypothesis 1, people with relatively higher political self-efficacy will engage in political discussion relatively more frequently, is supported (β = .305, \( p < .001 \)).

Hypothesis 2, that individuals with relatively higher political self-efficacy will engage in dangerous discussion more frequently was not supported (β = .081, \( p = .147 \)).
nor was Hypothesis 3, that people with relatively higher political self-efficacy would have relatively more diverse discussion networks (β = .001, p = .437). The coefficient suggests that the direction of results is consistent with Hypothesis 2, and the zero order correlation presented in Table 1 also suggests support for this hypothesis; however, the results do not reach the conventional level of significance. Contrary to expectations, results suggest that individuals with relatively higher political self-efficacy engaged in relatively more safe discussion (β = .259, p = .005).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political Network Discussion Frequency</th>
<th>Safe Discussion Frequency</th>
<th>Dangerous Discussion Frequency</th>
<th>Network Diversity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient (std error)</td>
<td>Coefficient (std error)</td>
<td>Coefficient (std error)</td>
<td>Coefficient (std error)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.054* (.076)</td>
<td>3.152* (.134)</td>
<td>1.298* (.103)</td>
<td>.156* (.012)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.003 (.003)</td>
<td>.003 (.005)</td>
<td>-.002 (.004)</td>
<td>.000 (.000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>.077 (.044)</td>
<td>.014* (.005)</td>
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<td>Income</td>
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<td>.029 (.025)</td>
<td>-.011 (.020)</td>
<td>-.003 (.002)</td>
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<td>Gender (male = 0)</td>
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<td>.097 (.163)</td>
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<td>Interest</td>
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<td>-.039* (.013)</td>
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<td>TV News Viewing Frequency</td>
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<td>.004 (.013)</td>
<td>.012 (.010)</td>
<td>.001 (.001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspaper Reading Frequency</td>
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<td>.014 (.029)</td>
<td>-.003 (.023)</td>
<td>-.002 (.003)</td>
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<td>General Political Discussion Frequency</td>
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<td>.003 (.003)</td>
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Table 3. Political Self-efficacy as a predictor of various forms of discussion and network diversity. Note * indicates a relationship that is significant at the p < .05 level, one tailed.
Table 4 presents the results for the four equations utilizing political anxiety as a predictor of various types of discussion. The cell entries contain unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The data indicate that people with relatively higher political anxiety engaged in relatively more frequent political discussion ($\beta = .122, p < .001$), which supports Hypothesis 4.

People with relatively more political anxiety appear to be relatively more likely to engage in safe discussion ($\beta = .158, p < .001$), but they not appear to be relatively more likely to engage in dangerous discussion ($\beta = -.036, p = .159$), which supports Hypothesis 5b, as opposed to Hypothesis 5a.

In regard to Hypotheses 6a and 6b, political anxiety is unrelated to network diversity ($\beta = -.004, p = .164$), therefore neither hypothesis is supported.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Political Network Discussion Frequency</th>
<th>Safe Discussion Frequency</th>
<th>Dangerous Discussion Frequency</th>
<th>Network Diversity</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Coefficient (std error)</td>
<td>$sr^2$</td>
<td>Coefficient (std error)</td>
<td>$sr^2$</td>
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Table 4. Political anxiety as a predictor of various forms of discussion and network diversity. Note * indicates a relationship that is significant at the $p < .05$ level, one tailed.
Table 5 presents the results of including both political self-efficacy and political anxiety in the equation simultaneously. Doing this did not change the results of the hypothesis tests that were previously presented. Therefore considering that individuals have an average level of political anxiety does not have an effect on the significance of the expected discussion outcomes for individuals who differ in political self-efficacy by one unit. The same is true in regard to the expected outcomes for individuals who differ in political anxiety by one unit; there is no change in the significance of the outcomes when considering that individuals who have an average level of political self-efficacy.
<table>
<thead>
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</table>

Table 5. Political self-efficacy and political anxiety as simultaneous predictors of various forms of discussion and network diversity. Note * indicates a relationship that is significant at the $p < .05$ level, one tailed.
Table 6 presents results for the proposed interactions, again with cell entries containing unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The interaction term for all four equations is nonsignificant, and significant terms were expected for safe discussion (Hypothesis 7, $\beta = .021$, $p = .337$), dangerous discussion (Hypothesis 8, $\beta = -.041$, $p = .150$), and network diversity (Hypothesis 9, $\beta = .003$, $p = .257$), therefore these hypotheses are not supported.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political Network Discussion Frequency</th>
<th>Safe Discussion Frequency</th>
<th>Dangerous Discussion Frequency</th>
<th>Network Diversity</th>
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<td>$sr^2$</td>
<td>Coefficient (std error)</td>
<td>$sr^2$</td>
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<td>.001 (.020)</td>
<td>.004 (.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.0001 (.162)</td>
<td>.0003 (.127)</td>
<td>.001 (.015)</td>
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<td>.009 (.13)</td>
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<td>.0004 (.162)</td>
<td>.0002 (.123)</td>
<td>.0007 (.014)</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>.007 (.098)</td>
<td>.005 (.077)</td>
<td>.001 (.009)</td>
</tr>
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<td>.008 (.037)</td>
<td>.0006 (.004)</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>950</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>825</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Interaction between political self-efficacy and political anxiety predicting the various forms of discussion and network diversity. Note * indicates a relationship that is significant at the $p < .05$ level, one tailed.
Chapter 7: Discussion

Summary of Results and Supplementary Analyses

The goal of this dissertation was to examine what leads individuals to engage in various forms of discussion utilizing two theoretically important predictors, political self-efficacy and political anxiety. The hypotheses regarding political network discussion frequency were supported; however, the majority of the hypotheses focusing on the frequency of discussion based on discussion partner characteristics were not supported. I will now address each of the hypotheses in turn, and for the hypotheses that were not supported provide possible explanations for why my expectations were not met and supplementary analyses to test these explanations when possible.

The first set of hypotheses addressed the simple effects of political self-efficacy on political discussion. The first hypothesis, which was supported, suggested that people with relatively higher levels of political self-efficacy would engage in relatively more frequent political discussion. Evidence of this relationship can be seen in both the zero order and partial correlations, and in the final regression model. Implications of this analysis suggest that individuals who feel relatively more confident in their ability to effectively participate in the political process tend to engage in relatively more political discussion regardless of the characteristics of the discussion partners. This would be consistent with Bonito’s (2007) information sharing approach to knowledge, which
indicates that information must not only be activated to be shared but the individual also
must be willing to share the information. Broadening this theory and examining
communication engagement as opposed to explicitly information sharing, this analysis
suggests that feeling capable about their general ability to competently participate in
politics makes individuals more willing to engage in political discussion. This finding is
also consistent with prior research that has identified a positive relationship between self-
efficacy and political communication (J. M. McLeod et al., 1999; Moy & Gastil, 2006;
Rojas, 2008). While both prior research and the research presented here is cross-sectional
in nature, the finding that the two are related continues to be supported.

The second hypothesis stated that individuals with relatively higher levels of
political self-efficacy would engage in dangerous political discussion relatively more
frequently. There was initial evidence of this relationship when examining the zero-order
correlation; however, the subsequent analyses suggest that this relationship does not
exist. The third hypothesis predicted that individuals with relatively higher levels of
political self-efficacy would have relatively more diverse discussion networks. This
hypothesis also was not supported. The analysis suggests that individuals who have
relatively higher levels of political self-efficacy tend to engage in safe discussion
relatively more frequently, but the relationships between political self-efficacy and both
dangerous discussion and network diversity were statistically zero. These findings are
contrary to what research has found and what theory would suggest.

Prior research demonstrated that individuals with relatively higher levels of
political self-efficacy tended to have relatively more diverse discussion networks and also
were relatively less likely to indicate they actively avoided political disagreement
(Hutchens, 2009). Others have determined that political self-efficacy was positively related to discussion in private settings and private discussion settings were more likely to feature discussion of political disagreement (Conover et al., 2002). All of these findings would suggest that political self-efficacy should be positively related to dangerous discussion, and subsequently more diverse networks.

A limitation in this prior research is the lack of random sampling. Therefore the previous findings could be due simply peculiarities of the sample, given that neither study utilized a probability based, representative sample. However, prior theorizing would also suggest that dangerous discussion and network diversity should be positively related to political self-efficacy. Bandura suggests that self-efficacy is more crucial for more difficult behaviors, and engaging in discussions with individuals with various viewpoints should be considered to be more difficult than political conversations where we expect to agree with our discussion partners. Given that a significant positive relationship was found for political network discussion frequency, one would expect that a positive significant relationship would be found for dangerous and diverse discussion. It is possible, however, that the increase in political network discussion frequency was driven by an increase in safe discussion as opposed to dangerous discussion. Given the positive relationship between political self-efficacy and safe discussion, this is most likely the case.

Perhaps the lack of relationships observed in this study is due to a mismatch in measurement, as opposed to an incorrect theoretical justification or interpretation of prior scholarship. As stated previously, Bandura’s scholarship regarding self-efficacy suggests that general measures of self-efficacy should not be used. Instead, he argues that specific
measures which assess the behavior in question should be utilized. In this study, the measure of political self-efficacy employed was not specific to political discussion, nor was it specific to the various forms of discussion. The measure of political self-efficacy that was used, however, is a measure commonly used in political communication research. This non-communication specific measure of self-efficacy has consistently been found to be related to multiple forms of political communication including Internet use (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Tewksbury, Hals, & Bibart, 2008), news media exposure (Moy & Gastil, 2006; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004) and political discussion (Hutchens, 2009).

Given these prior findings, I was not concerned about the mismatch between the focus of the self-efficacy measure and the communication behaviors I was examining. Furthermore, a mismatch between cognitive and behavioral measures is common in political discussion research. For example, the relationship between discussion and knowledge has been examined fairly systematically. The measures of political discussion are often quite broad and general while the measures of knowledge are often specific to a candidate or campaign (Eveland, 2001; Kwak et al., 2005; Scheufele, 2000). Despite this mismatch, research examining the relationship between knowledge and discussion consistently finds statistically significant results.

For the political network discussion frequency measure, which examined how often individuals reported they discussed politics with the (up to) four named discussion partners, the expected positive relationship with political self-efficacy was apparent. Once the more specific forms of political communication were considered, the expected relationships were not found. Given the forms of communication that have been commonly examined in conjunction with political self-efficacy in prior literature have
been more general in nature (i.e., exposure to news in general as opposed to a specific
type of news or channel), perhaps considering the need for more specific political self-
efficacy measures for more specific forms of communication is warranted. Questions
could be developed that focus either specifically on perceptions of capabilities in regard
to discussing politics, or they could be more specific in regard to perception of
capabilities about discussing politics in specific contexts or with individuals which
certain characteristics. This would result in a measure of political discussion self-
efficacy. Creating a measure that examined confidence explicitly in regard to political
discussion and also discussion in various contexts could be beneficial especially
considering that a measure that addresses all three aspects of self-efficacy (magnitude,
generality, and strength) previously put forward by Bandura (1977) could be created.

In the interpersonal literature there are two concepts which tap aspects of comfort
with speaking which could be related to the political discussion self-efficacy measure I
propose: communication apprehension (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984) and communication
competence (Cegala, 1981). Communication apprehension is conceptualized as fear
associated with engaging in communication and is typically applied to face-to-face
communication (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984). Communication competence measures the
extent to which individuals feel they will be able to reach their desired goal from a
communicative encounter and again tends to focus on face-to-face communication
(Cegala, 1981). On the surface, it appears that communication apprehension is the
opposite of discussion self-efficacy, and communication competence may function as a
form of discussion response efficacy. What is missing from these measures is an explicit
focus on politics, which is likely important when examining political discussion as the
outcome. If a measure of political discussion self-efficacy is created, researchers should ensure that it predicts political discussion uniquely and is not simply an additional measure that clouds the literature but does not actually add to our understanding of the relationship between self-efficacy and behavior.

The second set of hypotheses addressed the relationship between political anxiety and discussion. The fourth hypothesis stated that individuals with relatively higher levels of political anxiety would have higher political network discussion frequency scores. This hypothesis was supported in the zero-order correlation, partial correlation, and multiple regression results. This finding is consistent with prior research and with the theory of Affective Intelligence (Brader, 2006; Huddy, S. Feldman, & Cassese, 2007; Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000). This indicates that individuals who feel politically anxious are likely to attempt to reduce this anxiety through discussing politics with others.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 were presented as having two competing alternatives. Research examining information seeking in an online setting indicates that individuals who feel more politically anxious will seek balanced information (Valentino et al., 2009). This would suggest that individuals who feel relatively more politically anxious would be more likely to engage in relatively more dangerous discussion (H5a) given our networks tend to be fairly homogenous (Huckfeldt et al., 2004). It logically follows that the increase in dangerous discussion will then also affect the individual’s network diversity, leading to a more diverse network (H6a). The alternative perspective would suggest the opposite. Individuals who feel relatively more politically anxious will be more likely to engage in relatively more safe discussion (H5b) and consequently have less diverse networks (H6b). The rationale for this perspective is based on the affect heuristic (Slovic
et al., 2002; 2005) which suggests that individuals can have reflexive responses as opposed to cognitive responses when reacting to affective stimuli. Given the source of the political anxiety in these measures, individuals may seek to bolster their own views by talking to similar others, which would have a negative effect on the respondent’s network diversity. Looking more closely at the findings of Valentino et al. (2009) in regard to balanced information seeking, they determined that individuals sought information that they found to be useful in a given context. In the online context provided by the researchers, balanced information seeking was seen to be useful. However, in an interpersonal context, considering an ideological source of anxiety, it is quite possible that what individuals would consider useful would be safe discussion.

The analysis supports hypothesis 5b; individuals who were relatively more politically anxious tended to engage in relatively more safe discussion. However, the relationship between political anxiety and network diversity was not statistically different from zero. The rationale given for hypothesis 5b hinged on the ideological nature of the political anxiety measure used, and suggested that in the case of ideological anxiety information that bolstered an individual’s views would be considered more useful than information which is more likely to challenge his or her views. Given this rationale appears to have been supported, the political anxiety measure used perhaps should be examined further.

In this study political anxiety was measured through responses to how often the two major party presidential candidates made the survey respondents feel afraid. Although the responses were summed across candidates to be consistent with prior research that has utilized the ANES (Marcus et al., 2000), these scores are driven
primarily by responses to the candidate the survey respondent opposed. The correlation between the two items is statistically zero ($r = -.038, p = .239$), and reporting a more conservative ideology (on a seven point scale from very liberal to very conservative) is positively correlated with expressing anxiety about Gore ($r = .306, p < .05$) and negatively correlated with expressing anxiety about Bush ($r = -.277, p < .05$). Using a seven point scale ranging from strong Democrat to strong Republican, the relationships remain the same except the correlation coefficient is even larger. Identifying as a stronger Republican is positively correlated with expressing anxiety about Gore ($r = .353, p < .05$) and negatively correlated with expressing anxiety about Bush ($r = -.325, p < .05$). Only one person in the entire sample used for these analyses indicated that both candidates made him or her feel afraid very often.

An alternative approach to assessing the role of political preference and political anxiety would be to further consider the role of informational utility (Knoblock-Westerwick, 2008). Informational utility is a perspective in selective exposure that suggests that individuals will seek useful information along four difference facets, surveillance, performance, reinforcement and guidance. Information that satisfies a surveillance function may be especially helpful in this context given that the surveillance function is tailored towards attending to information that may require a response to a threat (Knoblock-Westerwick, 2008). To examine if this, discussion partners were recoded as to whether or not they supported Bush or Gore, irrespective of respondent vote choice. Frequency of discussion with Bush or Gore supporters was then calculated as the average frequency of discussion with Gore supporters and Bush supporters. These measures were then correlated with individuals’ political anxiety toward the two candidates.
candidates as individuals. Information utility would suggest that individuals who were anxious about Bush would talk to Bush supporters, and individuals who were anxious about Gore would talk to Gore supporters. This was not supported in the analysis. The correlations indicate that individuals who are relatively anxious about Gore talk to Bush supporters relatively more frequently ($r = .254, p < .001$) but do not talk to Gore supporters relatively more frequently ($r = .069, p = .077$). The same pattern exists for individual who were relatively more anxious about Bush. They discuss politics with Gore supporters relatively more frequently ($r = .178, p < .001$), but do not discuss politics with Bush supporters relatively more frequently ($r = .021, p = .578$). This provides evidence similar to what was previously discussed in regard to safe and dangerous discussion.

When individuals are anxious about a candidate, and the anxiety tends to be about the candidate the individual did not support, they discuss politics relatively more frequently, especially with similar others.

The third set of hypotheses focused on the interaction between political self-efficacy and political anxiety. It was predicted that there would be an interaction between political self-efficacy and political anxiety for safe discussion (H7), dangerous discussion (H8) and network diversity (H9). It was expected that individuals with relatively low political self-efficacy and relatively high levels of political anxiety would engage in safe discussion relatively more frequently in comparison with individuals who are similarly low in relative levels of political self-efficacy but are also relatively low in political anxiety. Additionally, it was expected that individuals with relatively high political self-efficacy and relatively high political anxiety would engage in dangerous discussion more frequently in comparison with individuals who are similarly high in political self-efficacy.
but are also relatively low in political anxiety. The expected differences in the type of discussion that individuals seek with relatively high anxiety based on their political self-efficacy would result in divergent network diversity scores. Individuals with relatively high political self-efficacy would have more diverse networks and individuals with relatively low political self-efficacy would have less diverse networks than individuals with similar levels of political self-efficacy but relatively lower levels of political anxiety. None of these hypotheses were supported in the data.

Potential justifications for why these hypotheses were not supported have already been provided when explaining the lack of significant results for the simple effects of political self-efficacy and political anxiety on the various forms of discussion and network diversity. This includes a potential mismatch between the focus of the political self-efficacy measures and the outcome of interest and the ideological focus of the political anxiety measure. However, there are two more potential considerations which have not yet been addressed - the role of strength of ideology and the respondent’s perception of the discussion partner’s political knowledge.

Two findings that were consistent across all of the regression models were (a) the negative relationship between political interest and both dangerous discussion and network diversity and (b) a positive relationship between political interest and safe discussion. Mutz (2006) suggests that as a nation we can either a deliberative society or an activist society, but not both. A deliberative society is one in which individuals will discuss politics with diverse others, yet not participate fully in the system. An activist society is one in which individuals are highly interested and participatory, yet tend to reside in networks full of similar others. The negative relationship between interest and
dangerous discussion and network diversity, and the positive relationship between interest and safe discussion, seems to support this view. A variable that was not included in any of these analyses, but which may prove to be important, is the strength of an individual’s political ideology. Individuals who indicate that they are a “strong” liberal or conservative also tend to be highly interested in the political process, therefore may also be more likely to shun dangerous discussion and consequently have less diverse networks. While I expected and tested this negative relationship between interest and discussion with various others, I did not examine the role ideological strength which was significantly correlated with political anxiety ($r = .148, p < .05$). Ideological strength may be useful to examine when considering the relationships between political anxiety and political discussion.

The unique role of ideological strength in tandem with political anxiety was considered in the scholarship of Marcus et al. (2000). They examined the interaction of ideological strength with political anxiety predicting participation in elections. They considered the strength of political ideology an important predictor of political behavior, but one that is lessened in the presence of anxiety. They determined that the interactive role of ideology was not a factor when considering the relationship between anxiety and information seeking, however, the main effects did remain. The main effects applied to my study would suggest that individuals who have stronger liberal or conservative ideologies would be less likely to discuss politics with dangerous discussion partners but more likely to discuss politics with safe discussion partners. The impact of the ideological strength on the earlier presented hypotheses could be tested in several ways. One method to examine the impact of ideological strength on the previously found
results would be to consider the three-way interaction between political self-efficacy, political anxiety and strength of political ideology. The expectation would be that the three-way interaction term would be significant, and demonstrate that the proposed hypotheses were supported for those with relatively weak ideological strength, but would not hold for those with relatively strong ideological strength.

The regression equations were all reestimated adding strength of ideology, the interaction between political self-efficacy and strength of ideology, the interaction between political anxiety and strength of ideology, and the three-way interaction to the previously used models. Strength of ideology was coded such that individuals who indicated they were moderate were coded as 0, if they leaned liberal or conservative it was coded as 1, weak liberal or conservative was coded as 2, and strong liberal or conservative was coded as 3. The results, which are presented in Table 7, indicate that none of the three-way interaction terms were significant for any of the four outcome variables. However, there was a significant interaction between political anxiety and strength of ideology for dangerous discussion ($\beta = -.113, p < .05$, two-tailed). Given the more exploratory nature of this analysis, tests of significance were based on two-tailed $p$ values as opposed to the one-tailed tests previously employed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Network Frequency</th>
<th>Safe Discussion</th>
<th>Dangerous Discussion</th>
<th>Network Diversity</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>.064(.045)</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>825</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Three-way interaction predicting various forms of discussion and network diversity. Note * indicates a relationship that is significant at the $p < .05$ level, two tailed.
The model was rerun removing the additional interaction terms and probed further. Without the additional terms in the model, the interaction between political anxiety and strength of ideology was still significant ($\beta = -0.104$, $p < .05$, two-tailed). Using one standard deviation above and below the mean as the definition of relatively high and relatively low, the interaction is presented below as Figure 5. By visually examining the figure, it appears that strength of ideology moderated political anxiety such that individuals with relatively high political anxiety engaged in relatively less dangerous discussion when they had relatively strong ideological perspectives. The reverse occurred for individuals with relatively weak ideological views. As anxiety increased, individuals with relatively weak ideological views engaged in relatively more frequent dangerous discussion. To determine if the conditional effect of political anxiety is significant for all values, or for only some of the values, the Johnson-Neyman technique was employed (Hayes & Matthes, 2009). The Johnson-Neyman technique calculates the values of the moderating variable – in this case ideological strength – at which the conditional effect of the focal variable – in this case political anxiety – is significant. Implementing the Johnson-Neyman technique via the MODPROBE macro for SPSS, it can be determined that the conditional effect of political anxiety is only significant, and negative, for individuals with ideological strength values above 2.1601. Conversely, the relationship between political anxiety and dangerous discussion is not significant, and statistically zero for participants with ideological strength values below 2.1601.
These findings suggest that fairly strong ideologues will shun dangerous discussion when feeling anxious, but individuals with less strong ideological views are not discouraged from engaging in dangerous discussion, nor do they seek it out, when they feel more political anxiety.

To examine if moderates respond differently to political anxiety than individuals with stronger ideological views, an additional strategy would be to examine just individuals who consider themselves to be moderates. The original analyses were rerun after filtering the data to include just individuals who initially reported that they were moderate, including those who when further probed indicated that they leaned either liberal or conservative (n = 426). Results for all four outcomes are presented in Table 8 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Safe Discussion</th>
<th>Dangerous Discussion</th>
<th>Network Diversity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1.238(.145)*</td>
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<td>Income</td>
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<td>-.005(.003)</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Interest</td>
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<td>-.050(.018)*</td>
</tr>
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<td>TV News Viewing Frequency</td>
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<td>-.022(.019)</td>
<td>-.002(.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Reading Frequency</td>
<td>-.026(.025)</td>
<td>-.010(.040)</td>
<td>-.024(.031)</td>
<td>-.003(.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
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<td>1.019(.094)*</td>
<td>.442(.072)*</td>
<td>.073(.009)*</td>
</tr>
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<td>.004(.005)</td>
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<td>Political Self-Efficacy</td>
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<td>.149(.110)</td>
<td>.021(.013)</td>
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<td>.141(.043)*</td>
<td>.077(.071)</td>
<td>.048(.054)</td>
<td>-.001(.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Self-Efficacy*</td>
<td>-.016(.048)</td>
<td>.017(.080)</td>
<td>-.033(.061)</td>
<td>.012(.007)#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R*</td>
<td>.729</td>
<td>.322</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Political self-efficacy and political anxiety predicting various forms of discussion and network diversity for political moderates. Note * indicates a relationship that is significant at the $p < .05$ level, two-tailed. # indicates a relationship that is significant at the $p < .10$ level, two-tailed.

These analyses reveal a significant interaction between political self-efficacy and political anxiety for network diversity, which was consistent with Hypothesis 9 ($\beta = -$
.012, \( p < .10 \), two-tailed). The interaction using one standard deviation above and below the mean to distinguish relatively high and relatively low values for political self-efficacy and political anxiety is presented in Figure 6. A visual examination of Figure 6 demonstrates that individuals with relatively high levels of political self-efficacy were likely to have relatively more diverse networks as their political anxiety increased, and individuals with relatively low levels of political self-efficacy were likely to have relatively less diverse networks as their political anxiety increased. The Johnson-Neyman technique described above can determine at what levels of political self-efficacy the influence of political anxiety is significant. The analysis indicates that the positive conditional effect of political anxiety is significant only for individuals who have a political self-efficacy score 1.968 units above the mean of political self-efficacy. Put plainly, moderate individuals who have very high levels of political self-efficacy will tend to have relatively more diverse discussion networks as political anxiety increases.
These two analyses in combination suggest that we should perhaps be thinking about the electorate as two electorates composed of ideologues and moderates. These individuals appear to react very differently in response to political information. Perhaps scholars should be creating separate theories to address how these individuals will respond to information as opposed to single theories designed to explain the responses of the entire electorate. The affect heuristic (Slovic et al., 2002, 2005) may provide some insight as to why ideologues and moderates respond to information differentially. It appears that ideologues are processing the information relying on the affect heuristic while moderates are responding to political information in a more logical way. It could be that ideologues perceive political information as more threatening and feel the need to
respond immediately. Immediate responses tend to be driven by affect and tend to be more reactionary in nature, which in turn leads ideologues to seek out confirmatory information from their close ties. Moderates, on the other hand, do not have the same reactionary response to political information and instead seek to make sense of the political information by seeking out additional information from diverse sources. Future research examining responses to political information should consider the different tendencies of ideologues and moderates when predicting how individuals will respond.

Another variable that could be important for predicting political discussion is the perceived knowledge of the discussion partners. Prior research utilizing discussant generators has demonstrated that the perception of knowledge of the discussion partner is often a significant predictor of frequency of discussion with this partner (Huckfeldt et al., 1995; Huckfeldt et al., 2004; McClurg, 2006). The potential effect of perceived knowledge on the stated hypotheses was considered in two different ways. One of the questions asked about every discussion partner in the ANES data collection was how much the respondent thought the discussion partner knew about politics: not much at all (coded 0), an average amount (coded 1) or a great deal (coded 2). I first added perceived knowledge of the discussion partners as an additional control when predicting frequency of the various forms of discussion and network diversity. To calculate this for political network discussion frequency and network diversity a sum across all discussion partners was utilized since all discussion partners are utilized in these dependent measures. For safe and dangerous discussion, the knowledge scores only for appropriate discussion partners were summed; that is, perceptions of knowledge for only safe discussion partners were included as a control predicting safe discussion. Although perceptions of
knowledge were indeed related to political discussion, including this control did not substantively change the results and are presented below in Table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network Frequency</th>
<th>Safe Discussion</th>
<th>Dangerous Discussion</th>
<th>Network Diversity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.886(.126)*</td>
<td>.857(.097)*</td>
<td>.317(.054)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.002(.003)</td>
<td>.001(.003)</td>
<td>-.000(.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.018(.031)</td>
<td>-.045(.033)</td>
<td>-.015(.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.020(.014)</td>
<td>-.023(.015)</td>
<td>.005(.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male = 0)</td>
<td>-.054(.090)</td>
<td>-.119(.044)</td>
<td>-.146(.062)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>.254(.076)*</td>
<td>.342(.082)*</td>
<td>-.049(.054)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV News Viewing Frequency</td>
<td>.019(.010)</td>
<td>.022(.010)</td>
<td>-.003(.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Reading Frequency</td>
<td>.018(.016)</td>
<td>.023(.017)</td>
<td>.011(.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>1.406(.055)*</td>
<td>.279(.034)*</td>
<td>.090(.027)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Political Discussion Frequency</td>
<td>.119(.021)*</td>
<td>.076(.022)*</td>
<td>.007(.014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Knowledge</td>
<td>.401(.035)</td>
<td>1.171(.030)*</td>
<td>1.284(.025)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>.212(.055)*</td>
<td>.018(.058)</td>
<td>-.003(.038)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Anxiety</td>
<td>.099(.027)*</td>
<td>-.003(.028)</td>
<td>.039(.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Self-Efficacy*Political Anxiety</td>
<td>-.001(.028)</td>
<td>.039(.030)</td>
<td>-.013(.019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td>.783</td>
<td>.786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>824</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Perceptions of knowledge as a control variable explaining forms of discussion and network diversity. Note * indicates a relationship that is significant at the $p < .05$ level, one tailed.
The second approach was to consider discussion with knowledgeable discussion partners as an outcome as opposed to a control. The logic behind this choice is grounded in the idea of seeking useful information when anxious (Valentino et al., 2009). Perhaps useful information is not dependent on the perceived party identification of the discussion partner but instead on how knowledgeable that discussion partner is. Additionally, given that we try to manage other’s impressions of ourselves, individuals would probably have to feel more confident about their own capabilities in order to discuss politics with knowledgeable individuals. This would lead to the following expectations: 1) Individuals with relatively higher political self-efficacy would be more likely to discuss politics relatively more frequently with more knowledgeable discussion partners, 2) Individuals with relatively high political anxiety would be more likely to discuss politics relatively more frequently with more knowledgeable discussion partners, and 3) Political self-efficacy would interact with political anxiety, such that individuals with relatively higher political self-efficacy will discuss politics with knowledgeable discussion partners relatively more frequently as political anxiety increases in comparison to individuals with relatively lower political self-efficacy. To test these predictions, the perception of knowledge for each discussion partner was multiplied by how frequently the respondent indicated that he or she discussed politics with that individual. This matches the approach to calculating safe and dangerous discussion. This score was then summed across all discussion partners.

The analyses, reported below in Table 10, reveal the expected relationship between political self-efficacy and frequency of discussion with knowledgeable others ($\beta = .839, p < .05$), and between political anxiety and frequency of discussion with
knowledgeable others (\( \beta = .260, p < .05 \)). However, the interaction was not significant (\( \beta = -.076, p = .157 \), one-tailed).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>6.100(.192)*</th>
<th>6.219(.194)</th>
<th>6.127(.191)*</th>
<th>6.149(.193)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.000(.008)</td>
<td>-.002(.008)</td>
<td>.000(.008)</td>
<td>.000(.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.218(.084)*</td>
<td>.336(.082)*</td>
<td>.220(.083)*</td>
<td>.216(.083)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.038(.039)</td>
<td>.053(.040)</td>
<td>.038(.039)</td>
<td>.036(.039)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male = 0)</td>
<td>.719(.243)*</td>
<td>.426(.239)*</td>
<td>.742(.242)*</td>
<td>.741(.242)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>.720(.205)*</td>
<td>.979(.198)*</td>
<td>.613(.205)*</td>
<td>.603(.206)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV News Viewing Frequency</td>
<td>-.012(.027)</td>
<td>-.005(.027)</td>
<td>-.014(.027)</td>
<td>-.015(.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Reading Frequency</td>
<td>-.014(.044)</td>
<td>.022(.044)</td>
<td>-.009(.044)</td>
<td>-.009(.044)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>2.384(.101)*</td>
<td>2.421(.102)*</td>
<td>2.367(.100)*</td>
<td>2.363(.100)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Political Discussion Frequency</td>
<td>.224(.057)*</td>
<td>.247(.057)*</td>
<td>.214(.056)*</td>
<td>.214(.056)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>.839(.147)*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.832(.146)*</td>
<td>.840(.147)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Anxiety</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.260(.071)*</td>
<td>.248(.070)*</td>
<td>.265(.072)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Self-Efficacy* Political Anxiety</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.076(.075)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R^2</strong></td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>.475</td>
<td>.492</td>
<td>.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>949</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>949</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. Political self-efficacy and political anxiety as predictors of discussion with discussion partners perceived to be knowledgeable. Note * indicates a relationship that is significant at the \( p < .05 \) level one tailed.
Limitations

This study, like any other, has limitations that should be discussed. The first limitation that should be addressed is the restricted sample that I used for my analyses. The sample was restricted to those who discussed politics with at least one individual and indicated that they voted for, or preferred, one of the major party candidates for president. One of the benefits of utilizing the ANES data as opposed to gathering my own data from an available population is the national, representative nature of the respondents of the ANES. Due to the nature of outcome variables I was interested in, the population that my results can be generalized to has been constrained relative to the sample as a whole. To examine if this constraint affected the generalizability of the subsequent sample, t-tests between continuous variables and Chi-squares for nominal or ordinal variables were conducted. The descriptive statistics are presented below in Table 11 for all participants that completed the descriptive information, just those who were utilized in the analyses and just those who were excluded. For all of the variables, with the exception of television news viewing frequency, there were significant differences between the individuals who were included in the analysis and those who were excluded from the analysis – namely those who named no discussion partners, or had a preference for a non-major party presidential candidate, or did not completing the second wave of the data collection. Individuals included in the sample were on average younger, more educated, had higher incomes, had higher levels of political interest, more likely to be male, read the newspaper more often, more politically self-efficacious, and more politically anxious than those who were excluded from the analysis. Given the purpose of this dissertation to examine certain types of discussion, these constraints placed on the sample are justified.
But even though they are appropriate, it should be acknowledged that the data cannot be
generalized to all of the American public. It is notable that these two constraints,
preferring a non-major party candidate and having a network size of zero were positively
correlated \((r = .475, p < .001)\). Therefore it is not that one constraint is driving the
exclusion of subjects more than another, but is excluding a certain type of survey
respondent, one that appears to avoid political engagement and the established political
system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Data</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Excluded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>47.206</td>
<td>45.926</td>
<td>48.643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Median = 4</td>
<td>Median = 4</td>
<td>Median = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mode = 3</td>
<td>Mode = 6</td>
<td>Mode = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Median = 5</td>
<td>Median = 5</td>
<td>Median = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mode = 5</td>
<td>Mode = 5</td>
<td>Mode = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>Median = 2</td>
<td>Median = 2</td>
<td>Median = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mode = 2</td>
<td>Mode = 3</td>
<td>Mode = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>56.3% female</td>
<td>53.2% female</td>
<td>59.7% female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Reading Frequency</td>
<td>3.436</td>
<td>3.714</td>
<td>3.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>2.898</td>
<td>3.088</td>
<td>2.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Anxiety</td>
<td>1.018</td>
<td>1.251</td>
<td>.759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1555</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>604</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11. Descriptive statistics for whole data set, utilized sample, and those excluded
While the use of the ANES allows me to generalize the findings to Americans who discuss politics with at least one individual and prefer a major party candidate, the use of secondary data does present some trade-offs in regard to measurement. In particular there were two issues that could have hampered findings and therefore result in fairly conservative tests of my hypotheses. The first, which has already been addressed, is the mismatch between the focus of the political self-efficacy items and the communication behaviors in question. While I obviously did not perceive this to be a fatal flaw when considering this project (given the established nature of this measure in political communication research), a more specific measure of political discussion self-efficacy could have changed the results.

An additional measurement issue is the limited focus of the anxiety measure. Two items, a single emotional reaction to two political candidates, were all that were available in the ANES. Many scholars who study emotional reactions use multiple emotional reactions to measure anxiety. “Afraid” is one word commonly used to measure an anxious response, but additional terms are also often used to create a scale. These terms include anxious, nervous, jittery, scared, fearful, and worried (Power & Tarsia, 2007). Additional items to measure anxiety would likely result in more variability through increased response options within the measure and potentially would have supported more of my hypotheses. Both the more specific political self-efficacy items and the additional political anxiety items would be something that I could modify if I were creating my own questionnaire. However, I would then have to sacrifice the national scope of the responses.
Another potential area of concern is the nature of the discussant generator questions. Some may be concerned that what is being measured is respondent’s perception of his or her discussion partner’s vote choice and political knowledge as opposed to measurement being taken from the discussion partner directly. One argument against that limitation is that in the few cases where discussion partners have been directly contacted as opposed to using perception measures, respondents have been found to be quite accurate in their perceptions (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; McClurg, 2006). Another argument that can be made for the use of perception measures as opposed to actual measures is that the respondent’s perception of reality is actually much more important to his or her behavior than “reality.” If an individual chooses to not discuss a topic with a discussion partner because he or she perceives that the discussion partner would disagree, it was the perception that affected the decision. Whether or not the discussion partner actually disagrees with the respondent is irrelevant in this case because the outcomes of interest are driven by perception rather than unperceived realities.

The use of the discussant generator is also the likely reason for the negative correlation between safe and dangerous discussion in this study. This is due to the linear dependency of these two measures – having more of one means (at least for some respondents) that they have less of the other. In this context the maximum level of political network discussion frequency would be a score of 12, which equates to indicating that the respondent listed four discussion partners and indicated that s/he discussed politics “often” with each partner. Given that partners can only be coded as safe or dangerous (or missing if the discussion partner did not vote or voted for a non-major party candidate) these two measures are statistically tied to one another. Prior
research (Eveland & Hively, 2009) asked respondents to list how many days per week they discussed politics with individuals of different political party identifications, therefore the two scores were not statistically linked. The measurement strategy used was one that has been employed in prior research utilizing discussant generators (Mutz, 2006), but perhaps findings would have been different if the safe and dangerous scores were not statistically linked, especially given that hypotheses were generated based on research that had used non-linked discussion measures.

Research suggests that our close ties tend to be similar to ourselves, even though we do tend to have some diversity in our networks (Huckfeldt et al., 2004). Most individuals tend to access dissimilar views through the “marginals” in their networks – those with whom we tend to have infrequent contact (Mutz, 2006). Given this, the measures that don’t constrict the size of the network when considering safe and dangerous discussion are much more likely to include these marginals and consequently are much more likely to include greater levels of dangerous discussion and more diverse networks (Eveland et al., 2009). Prior research has demonstrated that measures of political discussion created via a discussant generator are correlated with more open ended measures of discussion, but the correlations are fairly weak (Eveland et al., 2009). This same research demonstrated that when overall discussion frequency is not controlled, the measures of dangerous discussion created via a discussant generator were not significantly related to political knowledge or participation. However, they determined that measures created with open ended items were significantly related to these commonly used political outcomes. The relationship between dangerous political discussion and knowledge is one that is frequently stated without question (See Feldman 107
and Price, 2008 for an exception) in the political communication literature, yet it is not apparent at the zero order correlation level when examining measures created via a discussant generator. This suggests that there may be problems making conclusions about the nature of political discussion when utilizing measures that were created via discussant generators.

The issue associated with the use of discussant generators, as previously noted, may be due to lower levels of dangerous discussion measured because of the focus on close ties. Research that examines the relationship between political discussion and political knowledge and participation often hinges on dangerous discussion, either implicitly or explicitly. Scholars posit that one theoretical reason why individuals who discuss politics more frequently know more about politics is that they are being exposed to more information to prepare for these frequent conversations (Eveland, 2004). Discussion is theorized to be associated with participation because of increased chances to be recruited to events that otherwise an individual would not be exposed to (Verba et al., 1995). Both of these explanations for political discussion effects incorporate discussion with individuals who may not be listed as a top four discussion partner.

In this study, being unable to assess increases in dangerous discussion, and consequently network diversity, in marginal discussion partners is detrimental to the hypotheses which focused on explaining changes in dangerous discussion and network diversity. I attempted to compensate for this by examining the frequency of discussion that was safe or dangerous. If political self-efficacy and political anxiety influenced how we discuss politics, hopefully increases in the frequency of discussion with dangerous discussion partners would be seen. However, maybe this was not enough. Individuals are
unlikely to change the makeup of their network in response to the political environment. That is, the four discussion partners that an individual lists is unlikely to change based on his or her level of political self-efficacy or political anxiety. Close ties tend to be significant others that individuals will not be able to avoid in their regular interactions. However, what may be more likely to change are the marginal discussion partners that are sought out. If this study was replicated using discussion measures that assess marginals in addition to close ties perhaps the subtle changes in the frequency of different types of discussion could be seen.

An additional limitation could be the assumption that was made about what is driving the communication process, and how that influenced the hypotheses that were posed. Uncertainty is commonly seen as the driving force behind political anxiety, which is why information seeking is communicative outcome proposed (Huddy et al., 2007; Valentino et al., 2009). To use the same scenario presented earlier, a Republican hears information about Obamacare, is uncertain how it might affect him or herself, therefore seeks information to make sense of the information. If that individual has relatively high political self-efficacy, he or she will seek information from a dangerous source. However, if it is not uncertainty which is driving the process but certainty, communication might still be the expected outcome, but it will take a very different form. The assumption that individuals do not know how they feel about a political candidate and feel the need to seek information could be highly flawed. At the very least an individual will be informed about the political candidate’s political party affiliation, which may be all that an individual feels s/he needs to know in order to make a decision. Discussion in support of his or her preferred candidate or in opposition to the candidate s/he opposed could be the
rational response to anxiety producing information. For example, a Republican hears information about Obamacare, and knows that he or she is opposed to the legislation. If s/he has relatively high levels of political self-efficacy s/he responds by talking to people about the negative impacts of the legislation and tries to encourage individuals to take action against the legislation. Mobilizing like-minded individuals to participate in the political system is a form of political participation (Verba et al., 1995) and could be encouraged in response to anxiety producing information. How this differs from the theoretical argument provided throughout this document is simply the reason behind the anxiety – is the individual anxious about something which he or she is uncertain or is it something which he or she is very certain?

Responding to anxiety producing information through mobilization as opposed to dangerous discussion could still be explained by EPPM, but requires a different interpretation of what is a danger control or fear control response. Instead of considering the deliberatively desirable response as the danger control response, a response that actually addresses the individual’s reaction to the information would be considered a danger control response. Crucial to the EPPM is the focus on the danger control response being a rational response to the perceived threat (Witte, 1992). I have conceptualized the rational response throughout this manuscript as the response that would also be considered ideal from a deliberative democratic perspective. That is, an individual when presented with anxiety producing information seeks out additional information from individuals who are more likely to provide novel information. However, if an individual feels he or she does not need additional information, seeking additional information would not be a rational response. If an individual is certain, the desirable response would
be to try to create mobilization through campaigning for or donating to a political candidate, whereas the undesirable response would be to become apathetic and not participate in the political system. Given that the individual is certain about being opposed to the given candidate or bill, encouraging others to also get involved both directly addresses the anxiety and is beneficial from a participatory democratic perspective. In order to adequately test this alternative interpretation of the EPPM in a political engagement setting, measures addressing why individuals feel anxious would be necessary.

The approach taken here followed the literature which suggested that the reason for anxiety about politics is a result of a lack of information (Huddy et al., 2007; Valentino et al., 2009). However, it appears that it is at least plausible that individuals are not anxious due to uncertainty but rather certainty of impending doom should their non-preferred candidate win the election. Anecdotally, there was significant discussion among many Democrats that they would move to Canada if George W. Bush was elected president for a second term (Lithwick & Lithwick, 2004). In this case, it appears that these Democrats were highly certain about their disapproval of George W. Bush and discussing the issue with Republicans would be unlikely to resolve their anxiety. In this case, the most productive way to resolve their anxiety would be to mobilize fellow Democrats, which since it is a rational response to the anxiety should be considered danger control. This course of action fell outside the theoretical framework of my manuscript given the expected source of anxiety; however, it should be considered in future research.
The last limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the data. I am arguing a casual direction, such that political self-efficacy and political anxiety influence the extent to which individuals choose to engage in different types of discussion. I have no evidence that this is the actual causal direction given the nature of the data. Political anxiety was measured before the election, but political self-efficacy and political discussion were measured after the election. Some may argue that engaging in various forms of discussion leads individuals to assess their political self-efficacy and political anxiety after the fact. There is evidence via panel data that changes in political self-efficacy are causally related to changes political discussion frequency (Hutchens, 2009a), and experimentally manipulating political anxiety leads to changes in information seeking (Valentino et al., 2009). These studies combined suggest that my proposed causal direction is warranted. Additionally, I meet two of three criteria for causality in regard to the relationship between political anxiety and political discussion. Correlation was addressed, and time order was addressed in that political anxiety was measured in the pre-election survey while political discussion was measured post-election. The last criterion -- spuriousness -- was also addressed in the multiple regressions, although additional variables would always be considered. As addressed in the literature review, I agree that this is most likely a dynamic process, and over time self-efficacy and anxiety will influence discussion and discussion subsequently will influence anxiety and self-efficacy. However, there is the appropriate time sequence for the causal direction of political anxiety influencing political discussion, the reverse cannot be argued in this case for those relationships. Self-efficacy, although it can be changed, tends to change very slowly and a single conversation is not likely to have a long term influence on an
individual’s self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1986). I believe the more plausible causal direction in this study is political self-efficacy and political anxiety influencing political discussion rather than the reverse.

**Directions for Future Research**

Although many of the hypotheses were not supported initially, the results do provide some evidence for the benefit of considering a dual process approach to predicting political discussion. In order to move this line of research forward, it is most likely necessary that we take a step back first. Perhaps most importantly future research needs to consider measurement issues to verify that the expected interactions between political self-efficacy and political anxiety exist, even if that requires using a non-representative sample. Here I will describe two surveys that should be conducted to assess any limitations in the measurement of key variables, and also two experiments that should be conducted to address the causal direction of the proposed relationships.

The first concern that should be addressed is the different results generated by utilizing a discussant generator as opposed to more open ended measures assessing political discussion. A survey that randomly assigns individuals to complete either discussant generator questions or the open ended questions used in prior research could be conducted while not changing the political self-efficacy and political anxiety items. If differences are observed in the two different measurement strategies, it would contribute greatly to scholars’ understanding of political discussion networks. It would confirm that changes in frequency of political discussion tends to happen with marginals as opposed to close ties. This has implications for how scholars should move forward in regard to measuring political discussion. The research discussed earlier in this section (Eveland et
al., 2009) suggests that there are substantial differences in these two measurement strategies, although they did not examine if there were differences in the predictors of these different discussion measures. Given that these different measurement strategies had differential relationships with two commonly used outcomes in political communication literature, perhaps further research should be conducted to examine where else in the literature these different measurement strategies may have an impact on scholars’ understanding of political discussion.

Once any concerns about the dependent measures are resolved, measurement of the key independent measures should be addressed. In regard to the measurement of self-efficacy, items need to be created which address magnitude, generality and strength and should be specific to individuals’ perception of their ability to engage in discussion and also their perception of their ability to engage in discussion with individuals who disagree with them. Some items which may be useful in future research, in order of lowest magnitude to highest, are: I feel capable expressing my opinion about politics to individuals close to me whose political opinions match my own, I feel capable expressing my opinion about politics to individuals close to me when engaging in a political disagreement, I feel capable of expressing my opinion about politics with people whom I do not know that well, I feel capable of expressing my opinion about politics with people whom I do not know that well when engaging in a political disagreement, and I feel capable of expressing my opinion about politics when I think my opinions may have some negative outcome for myself.

Items that extend the measurement of political anxiety would also be addressed in a survey that examines the revised measurement of political self-efficacy. As mentioned
previously, many studies that address political anxiety use multiple terms to assess political anxiety as opposed to the single items that used in this study.

Also, many studies include measures of both self-efficacy and response efficacy. This could be a useful approach with political discussion as well. Including political discussion response efficacy acknowledge that it may matter that individuals’ believe engaging in discussions will give them the result they desire on order for them to engage in the political discussion. An issue that must be considered is the various motivations that individuals can have for engaging in political discussion. This was not empirically addressed in this study, although was assumed. A motivation that is assumed by much of the political anxiety literature is an informational motivation – individuals discuss politics in order to learn more about politics. However, many other motivations are possible, such as persuasion or relationship building, which may affect the extent to which individuals are willing to engage in various types of political discussion (Eveland et al., 2008; Morey, Hutchens, & Eveland, 2009). Recent research by Eveland and colleagues (Eveland et al., 2008) examined the extent to which individuals professed different motivations for engaging in discussion with various political discussion partners. When given a series of options for why the survey respondents engaged in political communication, results suggest that when individuals discuss politics with romantic partners or relatives the most common informational goal is to form an opinion, but when neighbors and co-workers are considered the most common motivation is to simply pass the time. Rarely is the goal to teach or persuade. The expectation of an informational motivation to political discussion, it appears, should be questioned. Beyond that, to accurately assess response efficacy all potential motivations for discussion should be to
be considered, in addition to the individual’s personal goal for discussion. This may make a specific measure of response efficacy overly burdensome.

Once the measurement issues with the variables have been addressed, a series of experiments examining both the causal direction of the relationships between political self-efficacy, political anxiety and discussion in addition to fleshing out expectations for the alternative hypotheses presented for dangerous discussion and anxiety should be conducted. To address the causal direction of the relationships, two different studies could be implemented. The first would manipulate self-efficacy and simply measure anxiety. Participants would be informed that they are participating in a study that consists of two parts, an online survey and a discussion group. Upon signing up to participate in the survey, participants would be randomly sent one of two links to a survey. The survey will contain items designed to measure their anxiety about a specific political topic, knowledge questions which would be manipulated to create various levels of self-efficacy in regard to that topic, and an item asking participants which discussion group they would like to join for the second part of the extra credit assignment. Prior research has demonstrated that asking individuals more or less difficult questions leads to respectively lower or higher levels of self-efficacy (Gardiner, Luszcz, & Bryan, 1997). After indicating which session they would prefer to attend, self-efficacy would be measured to serve as a manipulation check.

A similar procedure could be completed that would instead manipulate anxiety and measure self-efficacy. Participants would be informed that they are participating in a study that consists of two parts, an online survey and a discussion group. Upon signing up to participate in the survey, participants would be randomly sent one of two links to a
survey. The first screen of the survey would contain a news story that was manipulated to either create a sense of anxiety in the participants or indicate that changes which are occurring will have no effect on the participants. The survey will contain items designed to measure self-efficacy for discussing the given political topic, and an item asking participants which discussion group they would like to join for the second part of the extra credit assignment. A twist on these experiments that could address the alternative hypotheses for the relationship between political anxiety and dangerous discussion would be to manipulate the source of the anxiety from something that is ideological in nature, such as an ideologically driven political policy, to something that is not ideological in nature, such as the general political environment.

If these experiments were conducted, actually holding the discussion groups could provide valuable information regarding how individuals experience political disagreement and their reactions to disagreement. Hearing a wide variety of views is considered to beneficial from a deliberative perspective, and it is through exposure to disagreement that Conover et al. (2004) and Mansbridge (1999) assert that there is democratic value in everyday communication. What is missing is the literature, however, is an analysis of the actual conversation and if an individual is exposed to a different opinion, is that difference discussed (Eveland et al., 2008; Hutchens, 2009; Morey et al., 2009)?

The conceptual definitions of dangerous and diverse discussion assume that there will be some discussion of topics where there is not agreement and safe discussion assumes that the discussions will be focusing on agreement. However, given research that indicates that individuals view politics as an inherently impolite topic to discuss
(Eliasoph, 1998), it is possible that individuals who are in diverse networks are actually not exposed to any more conflicting views than individuals who reside in fairly homogenous networks. Furthermore, there is some evidence suggesting that more controversial topics will be brought up with conversational partners with whom we are comfortable (Conover et al., 2002; Morey et al., 2009). This suggests that homogenous networks actually experience the most expression of conflicting viewpoints. Therefore the actual level of disagreement which occurs in conversations should be addressed. Having individuals engage in discussion groups with those who either agree with their views, disagree with their views, or are in a fairly mixed group, could shed light on how individuals handle disagreement.

The last area of future research which could result as a logical next step from these studies is to extend the process to include political knowledge. This extension would examine the different forms of discussion as mediators of the relationship between political self-efficacy and anxiety and the frequently measured political outcomes factual and structural knowledge. The relationships between the various forms of discussion and these two types of knowledge have been addressed in the past (Eveland, 2004; Eveland et al., 2005; Eveland & Hively, 2009; Eveland & Thomson, 2006; Feldman & Price, 2008; Hardy & Scheufele, 2009; Hively & Eveland, 2009; Huckfeldt et al., 2004; McLeod et al, 1999; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Rojas, 2008), yet these studies typically do not consider any antecedent variables beyond the typical controls used in political communication. Given the relationships that have been observed between self-efficacy and knowledge (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006; Scheufele, Nisbet & Brossard, 2003), and anxiety and
knowledge (Marcus et al., 2000), it appears that combining all of these variables into an overarching model could be a useful advance for the literature.

In summary, this study sought to illuminate the relationships between political self-efficacy, political anxiety, and various forms of political discussion and political network characteristics. Initial evidence was provided that suggests promise for more in-depth examination of these relationships, although several of the hypotheses were not supported. Potential reasons for the lack of the expected relationships were provided in addition outlining strategies to address the given limitations. Finally, several strategies for addressing future research studies that would continue to progress this line of research were suggested.
References


Hutchens, M. J. (August, 2009). *Measuring change: What’s possible with multiple waves of data and its application to political communication*. Presented to the Communication Theory and Methodology Division at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Boston.

Hutchens, M. J. (November, 2009). *Explaining who we talk to: Democratic variables as predictors of various forms of discussion*. Presented to the Political Communication Division at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Chicago.


### Appendix A: ANES Variable Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Variable Name(s)</th>
<th>Complete Wording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>V000908</td>
<td>What is the month, day and year of your birth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>V000913</td>
<td>Did you get a high school diploma or pass a high school equivalency test? What is the highest degree that you have earned?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>V000997</td>
<td>I am going to read you a list of all income categories. Please tell me which category best describes the total income you had in 1999 before taxes. This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income. Please stop me when I get to your income category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>V001029</td>
<td>Interviewer Determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>V001201</td>
<td>Some people don’t pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you were very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in following the political campaigns this year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV News Viewing Frequency</td>
<td>V000329, V000332</td>
<td>How many days in the past week did you watch the national network news on TV? How many days in the past week did you watch the local TV news shows?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Reading Frequency</td>
<td>V000335</td>
<td>How many days in the past week did you read a daily newspaper?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>V001699, V001700, V001701, V001702</td>
<td>From time to time, people discuss government, elections and politics with other people. I’d like to ask you about the people with whom you discuss these matters. These people might or might not be relatives. Can you think of anyone? What is this person's first name? Is there anyone else you talk with about these matters? What is this person's first name?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12. ANES variable codes.

Continued
Table 12 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Code Numbers</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Political Discussion Frequency</td>
<td>V001205</td>
<td>How many days in the past week did you talk about politics with family or friends?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>V001516, V001517, V001518, V001519, V001529</td>
<td>I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country. I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics. I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people. I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Anxiety</td>
<td>V000411, V000412, V000419, V000420</td>
<td>Has Al Gore (because of the kind of person he is, or because of something he has done) -- ever made you feel afraid? How often would you say you’ve felt afraid -- very often, fairly often, occasionally, or rarely? Has George Bush (because of the kind of person he is, or because of something he has done) -- ever made you feel afraid? How often would you say you’ve felt afraid -- very often, fairly often, occasionally, or rarely?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Network Discussion Frequency</td>
<td>V001708, V001716, V001724, V001732</td>
<td>When you talk with [fill name], do you discuss political matters…often, sometimes, rarely, or never?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe/Dangerous Discussion</td>
<td>V001710, V001718, V001726, V001734</td>
<td>I have another question about the first person you have named. How do you think [fill name] voted in the election? Do you think he/she voted for Al Gore, George Bush, some other candidate, or do you think [fill name] didn't vote?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of Ideology</td>
<td>V000446</td>
<td>When it comes to politics, do you usually think of yourself as extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal; moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely conservative, or haven't you thought much about this? If you had to choose, would you consider yourself a liberal or a conservative?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Knowledge of Discussion Partner</td>
<td>V001709, V001717, V001725, V001733</td>
<td>Generally speaking, how much do you think [fill name] knows about politics? Would you say: A great deal, an average amount, or not very much at all?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>