It’s not always about the issues: The role of perceived personality trait similarity on interpersonal political discussion.

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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2013

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Abstract

Recently a substantial body of work has sought to identify and understand the relationship between personality traits and political attitudes, opinions and behaviors. One specific line of inquiry has been on the direct and mediated influence of personality traits on interpersonal political discussion behaviors. Interpersonal political discussion among citizens has long been considered a fundamental linchpin for democratic societies and as such, research has consistently sought to explain the factors motivating individuals to engage in or avoid such conversations, both in general and with specific others. This paper looks to set the boundary conditions under which interpersonal political discussion in the real world may in fact flourish.

This paper expands on existing work both theoretically and methodologically. Theoretically this paper considers the effects of personality traits on interpersonal political discussion at the individual and relational level; specifically by considering not only the personality trait of the self, but also the traits of an other within a dyad and the interplay between them. It is hypothesized that as perceived personality trait similarity (PPTS) between an individual and another varies so will their willingness to communicate about politics. Methodologically this paper introduces a novel measure of interpersonal political discussion, willingness to communicate about politics (WTCAP).
WTCAP is a state-based variable referring to a person’s likelihood or propensity to actively engage in an informal political discussion in a specific situation.

An online survey was conducted during the winter of 2013 with complete data from 291 participants. Participants were first asked questions pertaining to their own personality traits using a short Big Five battery, ideological values, political efficacy, political knowledge, willingness to communicate (WTC), willingness to self-censor (WTSC), political discussion history and general demographics before being asked to identify specific individuals within their social networks. Next respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of the personality traits of three of their listed network members. Finally a series of hypothetical scenarios were presented and participants were asked to indicate their willingness to communicate about politics in each situation.

Results from this study found little evidence that PPTS has a significant effect on WTCAP. Conscientiousness was the only personality trait found to have a significant direct effect on WTCAP. Political interest, and political efficacy were also found to be predictive of WTCAP. Individuals reported being most WTCAP with family members, followed by friends and finally with acquaintances. WTCAP was found to vary a great deal between dyads.
Dedication

To my parents, Mom and Paul, your unfailing love, support and encouragement is the sole reason this document exists. While belief in myself may wane, yours never has and for that I am eternally grateful. To Pop-Pop, for teaching me that nothing worth doing is easy, this work stands testament. Finally, to my love, my life, my everything, always and forever.
Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not exist without the countless hours of guidance and endless support from my advisor Dr. William Eveland Jr. Because of his exact and tireless navigation I am leaving the land mine filled labyrinth known as “graduate school” without nary a scratch. His endless call for excellence and inability to allow for even the slightest “short-cut,” often, made me question whether or not I would ever graduate. However, I can now say without any shadow of a doubt that it is only because of his penchant for perfection that I will in fact graduate. Dr. Eveland, I hold you in the highest regard as an advisor and even more so as a person. Thank you for everything, I am leaving Ohio State a better scholar, educator, and person because of you.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee members Brandon Van Der Heide and Erik Nisbet for their insightful contributions to this dissertation and my education at large. Both Erik and Brandon consistently went above and beyond the call of duty to ensure my success at Ohio State. I am also eternally indebted to Dr. Lance Holbert, whose selflessness knows no bounds. He is a mentor in every sense of the word. The loyalty I have experienced from each of these individuals has been humbling.

Finally and most importantly I would like to thank my family. First, to my parents Paul & Linda and Jay & Sheryl, whose unconditional and unrelenting love has made all the difference. In terms of this dissertation a special thank you must go to my stepfather Paul who has spent more time over the past 15 years helping me in my scholastic

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endeavors than anyone else. Paul this dissertation is the culmination of your 15 years of
tireless work. I want to also thank my big sister Ricki whose intelligence and drive
inspires me more than she will ever know. Finally and most importantly to my wife Erin
for being my guiding light, best friend, loudest supporter and favorite person in the
world! Without you nothing else matters.
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Fields of Study

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The importance of interpersonal political discussion among democratic citizens can be traced to the theoretical musings of political scholars as far back as Plato, Aristotle and Pericles of the first Grecian city-states (Guttman & Thompson, 2004). Democracy is “a form of government in which, in contradistinction to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule” (Held, 2006, p. 1). Democracies are expected to provide the boundary conditions by which legitimate decisions can be reached. The deliberative democratic model argues that decisions can be considered legitimate to the extent that all those with a stake in the outcome of a decision be given the right, and opportunity to engage in the collective decision making process through discursive practices (Benhabib, 1996; Cohen, 1989; Parkinson, 2003). More, simply deliberative democracy is a form of governance, whose affairs are controlled through purposeful discussion between its members (Cohen, 1989).

The Framers of the U.S. constitution were so adamant that discussion be a part of America’s future that they attempted to create a form of deliberative democracy, whereby structural constraints were imposed to insure discussion between citizens and government officials before decisions could be reached. The Framers believed that discussion and debate would foster a government and citizenry based on rationality. Furthermore it was
assumed that discussion between citizens would allow for the interchange of ideas that would, in turn, foster mutual appreciation and understanding of opposing viewpoints. Through this process, “quality” public opinion could be reached, which could in turn be used by government officials when engaging in the deliberative processes in government (Pearson, 2004). The US government itself is structured with three branches in a way that promotes accountability through the requirement of discussion between all those with competing ideas before a decision is made on important issues. Even the Electoral College was created to have the electors deliberate over the selection of the president. Thus the importance of discussion is championed at all levels from citizens on up (Fishkin, 2009; Pearson, 2004).

More recently, empirical evidence has been found to support these theoretical underpinnings and finds that political discussion may lead to both enhanced individual level attributes such as citizen knowledge (Bennett, Flickinger, & Rhine, 2000; Holbert, Benoit, Hansen, & Wen, 2002; Lenart, 1994; Scheufele, 2000; 2002), participation (Kwak, Williams, Wang, & Lee, 2005; Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; Leighley, 1990; McClurg, 2003; Scheufele, Nisbet, Brossard, & Nisbet, 2004), and identity maintenance (Kim & Kim, 2008), to more societal level traits in terms of producing more informed, stable and legitimate public opinion (Fishkin, 1991; Price, 1992). Considering the importance of such behavior, research throughout the academy has sought to understand the factors motivating individuals to engage in or avoid such conversations, both in general and with specific others.
While political discussion may be a powerful elixir for democratic health, especially among interlocutors holding diverse political attitudes and opinions,\(^1\) the modern electorate has not always been found to take its medicine (Eliasoph, 1998; Gamson, 1992; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000). Empirical evidence shows political conversations in the public sphere are rather rare and sometimes actively avoided (Eliasoph, 1998; Gamson, 1992). When political discussions do occur they are most often in private and among persons with strong interpersonal ties (close friends and family) (Eliasoph, 1998; Gamson, 1992). These strong ties tend to share similar political attitudes, beliefs and opinions (Beck, 1991; Bennett, Flickinger, & Rhine, 2000; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). Furthermore, when political discussions do occur, people may be unwilling to express their true opinions for a variety of reasons, including fear of disagreement (Dillard, 1989) or social isolation (Noelle-Neumann, 1993).

Giving everybody the right to participate in discussion also gives everybody the right not to participate. The majority of available evidence points to a clear pattern of behavior whereby interpersonal discussion is actively engaged in and avoided with systematic intentions. Understanding how and why people choose to discuss politics in some situations with certain individuals while not in other’s can provide insight into the very real implications these choices have on the democratic process. Considering the normative democratic call for an active and engaged citizenry, better understanding the

\(^1\) This argument is based on the assumption that discussion among diverse political interlocutors has the potential to facilitate unique benefits not present in discussions among like-minded individuals (Habermas, 1989). Discussion across lines of attitudinal differences has the potential to facilitate the exchange of unique information that would not be present in a conversation with like-minded political thinkers (Sunstein, 2001). Individuals who discuss politics with those sharing similar beliefs are thought to predominately exchange information that both parties already know while discussion with diverse others enhances quality opinion formation (Arendt 1967; Benhabib, 1992) and increased understanding of diverse viewpoints (Eveland, 2004; Mutz, 2006). All however are not convinced as opposing arguments have been made claiming cross-cutting discussions can hinder democratic ideals (See Mutz, 2002b; Schudson, 1997).
mechanisms leading people to political discussion should prove quite fruitful. This dissertation looks to set the boundary conditions under which interpersonal political discussion in the real world may in fact flourish. Specifically, it explores the effects of people’s perceptions of others’ personality traits on their willingness to communicate about politics. This dissertation builds on past empirical work by exploring one antecedent of political discussion, the behavioral intention that I shall refer to as the willingness to communicate about politics (WTCAP).

Historically, it has been argued that political attitudes, opinions and behaviors are a function of societal, psychological, biological and interpersonal forces (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). This dissertation adds to the existing canon of research by exploring the effect of interpersonal perceptions on political behaviors specifically willingness to communicate about politics.

Interpersonal perceptions are the summary judgments we have about others “based on all our past and present sensory information.” (Glynn, Herbst, O’Keefe, Shapiro, & Lindeman, 2004, p. 212). These perceptions are a product of impression formation whereby information is processed and “a cognitive representation of what we know and believe about another person” is made (Hamilton, 1989, p. 239).

I am specifically interested in perceptions formed of the personality traits of others—especially the degree of similarity between them and one’s own personality—and the subsequent effects these impressions have on political behavior. Perceptions of similarity rather than actual similarity are of primary importance, given the large volume of research showing that people form interpersonal relations based on their own perceptions
of other’s personality traits (Condon & Crano, 1988; Hoyle, 1993; Ptacek & Dodge, 1995).

Recently, a substantial body of empirical work has begun to recognize the direct
effect of personality traits on political attitudes and behaviors, including political
discussion (Fowler, Baker, & Dawes, 2008; Smith, Oxley, Hibbing, Alford, & Hibbing, 2011). Winter (2003) goes so far as to argue that “one of the central axioms of political
psychology is that political structures and actions are shaped by people’s personalities”
(p. 110). Most past work has treated specific personality traits as independent variables
directly affecting some individual-level political outcome. For example, Hibbings and
colleagues (2011) find a strong positive relationship between extraversion and the
frequency of engaging in political discussions. Other work has explored the direct links
between personality traits and political knowledge (Mondak, 2010; Mondak & Halperin,
2008), participation (Mondak, 2010), and ideology (Caprara, Vecchione, Barbanelli, &
Fraley, 2007). In a rare few cases research has examined the link between personalities
and political behaviors as an indirect mediated effect through more traditional behavioral
predictors such as political interest or efficacy (Blais & Labbe-St-Vincent, 2011; Gallego
& Oberski, 2012; Mondak, 2010;). I believe it is important that future research considers
not only direct effects but also other unique ways in which personalities may influence
political ends.

This dissertation attempts to do just that, by theoretically exploring both the direct
effects of personality traits on interpersonal political discussion intentions as well as
interpersonal perceptions of personality traits and their effects on interpersonal political
discussion intentions. Specifically, in terms of the latter a model is proposed predicting a
person’s willingness to communicate about politics (WTCAP) interpersonally (within dyads) based on the degree of perceived personality trait similarity (PPTS) between that person and potential interlocutors.

Before continuing it is important to briefly discuss the dependent variable of interest, WTCAP. For the purposes of this dissertation, WTCAP is defined as a state-based variable referring to a person’s likelihood or propensity to actively engage in an informal political discussion in a specific situation. WTCAP is a novel construct, based on previous work on antecedents of general interpersonal communication, such as willingness to communicate (WTC), unwillingness to communicate (UWC), and communication apprehension (CA), as well as measures of public opinion-expression (e.g., willingness to speak out (Noelle-Neumann, 1993); willingness to self-censor (WTSC) Hayes, Glynn & Shanahan, 2005a, 2005b)). Willingness is conceptualized here as a behavioral intention and operationalized as the likelihood that it will occur.

Past literature on antecedents of behavior is riddled with semantic confusion, utilizing terms such as intentions, expectations and willingness in confounding ways (Gibbons, 2006). It is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to determine whether or not these are in fact unique constructs or merely dimensions of a larger overarching concept (see Pomery, Gibbons, Reis-Bergan, & Gerrard, 2009). Nevertheless, the current conceptualization is consistent with past measures of interpersonal discussion intentions, also labeled willingness. A more detailed explication will be provided in chapter 3.

Rationale

Given the effects that political discussion is expected to have on the democratic process, it is hardly surprising that many political scholars have investigated different
dimensions of this construct. One prominent line of investigation has attempted to uncover the who, what, where, when and why of willingness to discuss politics interpersonally. All political discussion is not created equal, and numerous psychological, sociological, relational and contextual factors are expected to moderate potential benefits of political talk. One factor of particular importance speaks to the nature of the diversity of discussion partners and the opinions expressed during discussion.

Research often finds that political discussions most often occur between individuals who share similar political attitudes, beliefs and opinions (Mutz, 2006). Typically, it is argued that this similarity occurs for two reasons: (a) people purposefully select interpersonal political discussion partners with similar political opinions as a means of avoiding cognitive dissonance that may occur when a person encounters information that runs counter to pre-held beliefs, or (b) because of the potential social ramifications of interpersonal disagreement (Festinger, 1957).

This explanation falls a bit flat, however, when considering a dissenting body of evidence that finds heterophily within political communication networks is neither rare nor avoided (Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, & Levine, 1995; Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2002; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). Recently Eveland and Kleinman (2013) utilized full sociometric network data for 25 bounded groups to show that neither general nor political discussion networks were politically homogenous. Furthermore, in over half the groups, political discussion trended toward being heterophilous when controlling for the general political homophily of the group. Simply put, political discussion among people who are not like-minded does occur at least to some degree.
A holistic consideration of these findings leads to the conclusion that factors above and beyond similarity of political opinion do affect the choice of discussion partners. Otherwise, heterophily would never be found. Thus, I propose that the inconsistent findings regarding diversity in political discussion can be reconciled by considering different causal mechanisms for how people choose political discussion partners. Specifically, this dissertation proposes that a person’s willingness to discuss politics interpersonally will be at least partly a function of the perceived similarity between their own personality traits and those of their potential conversation partners. This argument is based on a substantial body of work on interpersonal relationships and attraction that finds perceptions of personality traits to have a major effect on people’s selection of friends, co-workers, romantic partners and the like (Duck, 1973; Montoya, Horton, & Kirchner, 2008). Considering the essential social element of political discussion, it seems quite plausible that people select discussion partners based not solely on whether they agree with other’s political opinions, as has been argued, but rather based on more general interpersonal attraction that arises from similarity of personality traits.²

² It is important to note that selection of interpersonal discussion partners is structurally limited. The idea of “structurally induced homophily” (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987) is predicated on our lives existing within tight social boundaries and that “we are more likely to have contact with those who are closer to us in geographic location than those who are distant” (p. 429). For example, the neighborhoods in which individuals live and the jobs at which they work tend to include others who are similar to them. Houses in a neighborhood tend to be of similar size and price and therefore people of similar financial means tend to live in them, which is known as residential balkanization (Katznelson & Weir, 1986). Furthermore we tend to cluster in Ghettoes (Fischer, 1982; Marsden, 1987; Park & Burgess, 1921; Wirth, 1927), with people of similar race and ethnicities. Similar structural forces are also present in the workplace. While everyone doesn’t hold the same position at a company or place of work, for the most part people tend to work most closely with those on an equal level. This implies that these individuals have similar educational backgrounds, skills, and career aspirations. Hence, the people that are most available to us are people who are most similar to us (Feld, 1981, 1982).
This is not to say, however, that increased similarity will always lead to greater communicative intentions. While the importance of similarity or *homophily* in determining who relates to whom is one of the most substantiated findings in all the sciences, it is by no means a law (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Montoya, et al., 2008). While people may be attracted to others who are similar to themselves most of the time, there may well be instances when opposites do attract (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997). Research on interpersonal attraction often finds competing evidence for the impact of personality trait similarity, in the sense that under certain conditions people display a preference for others whom they perceive to have similar personality traits to their own, while at other times preference is given to those who are dissimilar or “complementary” (Cohen, 1956; Winch, 1955; Winch, Ktsanes, & Ktsanes, 1954). In the current work, arguments will be advanced for conditions under which both similarity as well as dissimilarity in perceived personality traits within a dyad may increase or decrease one’s willingness to discuss politics.

Returning to the findings on discussion diversity, I argue that the common finding of similarity in political attitudes, beliefs, and opinions may be only a partial causal mechanism, and may be confounded with personality similarity. Simply put, selective exposure based on opinion may not be the sole factor motivating discussion, and may actually be a “secondary consequence of decisions unrelated to ideology” (Garrett, 2009, p. 678). Considering the often found link between personality traits and ideology, it follows that people with similar personality traits are likely to share political attitudes and beliefs (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Jost, 2006). Thus, if people are motivated
to select political discussion partners whose personalities are similar to their own, they are also likely to have homophilous political opinions.

Conversely, on occasions when heterophily in opinion is found in political discussion networks, it may be that people are more than happy to discuss politics with others whose personality traits are agreeable to their own, even if their political beliefs differ. In some cases, this might mean selecting individuals whose personality traits are complementary to their own. And if there is indeed a link between personality traits and ideology, then different personality traits may also mean holding divergent political opinions.

Contributions

This dissertation adds to existing work both theoretically and methodologically. First, existing work shows that personality traits at the individual level directly influence political discussion behavior. Works of this nature provide a solid foundation from which to build further arguments regarding the effects of personality on political discussion.

However I believe it is of essential importance that future work begin to consider not only the personal traits of the self but also the traits of the other within a dyad and the interplay between them to further capture the relationship between personalities and political discussion. Interpersonal communication (defined here as dyadic) is an interactive process and therefore relations between the message source and receiver should be taken into account (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970).³

³ Following a situational perspective of interpersonal communication, both individuals within a dyad share the role of message sender and receiver. More specifically, “Interpersonal communication (refers) to dyadic communication in which two individual, sharing the roles of sender and receiver, become connected through the mutual activity of creating meaning” (Trenholm & Jensen, 2008, p. 29).
When looking at the role of personality traits as antecedent to communication behavior, it is exceedingly fruitful to consider more than the characteristics of an individual person but rather the relationship itself (Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000). This means taking into account the personal traits of not only the self, but also the other and the interaction between them (Villaume & Bodie, 2007, p. 103). When considering whether or not to enter into a political discussion, it is expected that an individual will consider the degree to which their personality traits are agreeable to their perceptions of the potential others. In most cases it is expected that similarity will breed agreeableness (or preference) however in certain instances dissimilar or complementary traits may be preferred.

The second contribution this dissertation makes is methodological. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, past work on political discussion has focused on either actual discussion or behavioral intentions related to a willingness to express certain opinions, or self-censor (Hayes et al., 2005a). This dissertation builds on these works through the construction of a novel measure, WTCAP, which is capable of capturing unique dimensions of political discussion not easily gleaned with past measures. Before hypotheses are advanced for each domain of the Big Five in terms of PPTS on WTCAP, a theoretical argument will be provided elucidating the importance of a person’s perceptions of personality traits on WTCAP.

Finally this dissertation adds to the literature by testing the direct and indirect effects of personality traits on WTCAP. Research linking personality traits to political discussion is a rather new area of inquiry and, as such, methodological triangulation is essential. In nearly every existing study the dependent variable of political discussion has
been operationalized as “frequency” of discussion. This dissertation will build on these works by treating WTCAP as dependent variable and personality traits as independent variables.

**Goal of Study**

In the following chapters, I will build a theoretical case for a line of empirical research providing evidence of a causal link between perceived personality trait similarity within a dyad and one’s willingness to discuss politics. First, I will provide a theoretical rationale for this causal link. Next, I will spend a significant amount of time conceptualizing and operationalizing about the large, overarching concepts of WTCAP and PPTS, along with their many underlying dimensions. In Chapter 3 I will develop the concepts of interpersonal discussion generally and political discussion more specifically, drawing on conceptualizations and operationalizations in previous literature. I then explain the dependent variable of central interest in this study, WTCAP. The focus on methods in this section serves to support the need for this new variable (WTCAP) and also brings to light many ways in which this variable has the unique ability to shed light on questions that the field has wanted to answer. Next, in Chapter 4, a similar review of literature on the general topic of personalities will be provided, which then leads to a thorough explication of the principal independent variable in this study, PPTS. Finally, once the concepts of WTCAP and PPTS have been sufficiently explicated, extant literature linking PPTS and WTCAP will be forwarded, leading to specific hypotheses, and research questions.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Rationale

Only recently has empirical work begun to investigate the role of psychological phenomena such as personalities on political discussion. When political discussion research has taken personality traits into account, it has done so almost exclusively by considering individual personality traits and their direct or mediated influence on actual political discussion behavior (Gallego & Oberski, 2011; Hibbing, et al., 2011; Mondak, 2010; Mondak & Halperin, 2008).

One of the central findings from this work has been the significant relationship between extraversion and frequency of political discussion (Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Gerber et al., 2010). This finding is consistent with the inherent nature of the construct of extraversion itself, defined by Costa and McCrae (1992) as “the degree to which a person needs attention and social interaction” (p. 9). Other traits have been less consistent in their effect on political discussion. Some evidence points to agreeableness and emotional stability having a negative impact on political discussion, but the relationships have not always been statistically significant (Mondak & Halperin, 2008).

Arguably, the most detailed account of personality and political discussion comes from Hibbing, Ritchie, and Anderson (2011). The authors utilized survey data from a “community survey fielded in 2004…from within a single medium-sized metropolitan
area” to investigate the link between personality traits and numerous characteristics of political discussion. Extraversion was found to increase a person’s likelihood of discussing politics in formal settings such as “clubs, churches and workplace” while openness to experience was associated with “discussing politics with friends, but not with any other contexts” (Hibbing’s, et al., 2011, p. 610). A particularly interesting finding was that “respondents with higher emotional stability scores were more likely to have discussion partners with different political views” (p. 611). Hibbings and colleagues (2011) argue that emotional stability may help individuals “overcome” a natural tendency to discuss politics with like-minded people.

Theoretical Argument

Empirical evidence shows political conversations in the public sphere are rather rare and sometimes actively avoided (Eliasoph, 1998; Gamson, 1992). When political discussions do occur they are most often in the home, among persons with strong interpersonal ties holding similar political attitudes, beliefs and opinions (Beck, 1991; Bennett, et al., 2000; Wyatt, 1991). In terms of the content of the conversation itself, research consistently finds that people are quite purposeful in choosing topics, issues and opinions they are willing and not willing to express during conversation (Glynn, Hayes, & Shanahan, 1997; Hayes, Glynn, & Shanahan, 2005a, 2005b). People strive for social harmony and avoid disagreement that could disrupt otherwise healthy interpersonal relationships.

Regarding political discussion, it is not uncommon for people to “holster” opinions they believe run counter to their interpersonal discussion partners’ views as a means of maintaining social homeostasis (Conover, et al., 2002; Hyde & Ruth, 2002;
In this sense individuals may wish to protect themselves from saying something that may be embarrassing, misunderstood or generally disagreeable. For reasons of self-preservation many people do not purposely wish to offend someone else, or hurt their feelings, which is always possible when expressing a dissenting political opinion. Arguably the most powerful determinant of a person not speaking their opinion relates to the potential social consequences of speaking out and disrupting social amity (Hyde & Ruth, 2002; Wyatt et al., 1996). As Marques and Maia (2010) note, “engaging in discussion is a necessary gamble, because discussion partners do not know, prior to this, if others will reject their point of view which may become the cause of conflict” (p. 65).

Based on these arguments, it follows that for many people political discussions are seen as a rather challenging form of interaction. Because of the inherently contentious nature of the topic itself, people are quite purposeful about choosing whom to discuss politics with and what to say, in an effort to minimize the possibility of these negative consequences. Returning to the argument first made in chapter 1, this dissertation proposes that a person’s willingness to discuss politics interpersonally will be at least partly a function of the perceived similarity between their own personality traits and those of their potential conversation partners. This argument is based on a substantial body of work on interpersonal relationships and attraction that finds perceptions of personality traits to have a major effect on people’s selection of friends, co-workers, romantic partners and so on (Duck, 1973; Montoya, et al., 2008). Extending this to political discussion, it seems quite plausible that people’s WTCAP will increase if they
see another person’s personality as agreeable to their own because that would minimize interpersonal conflict even if a disagreeable political opinion or belief is expressed.

In this sense even though a person may express a disagreeable opinion the manner in which this opinion is expressed may be more palatable than if it came from someone with a dissimilar personality. When an individual perceives another to have a similar personality to their own, they see this person as acting in “a logical and meaningful manner” (Byrne, Griffitt, & Stefaniak, 1967, p. 83). Even if what they are saying is disagreeable how they are saying it may be preferable.

People with similar personalities tend to handle conflict in similar ways and communicate in similar patterns (Antonioni, 1998). People are often more comfortable engaging in conflict with someone whose personality is similar to their own, because they are better able to predict how that person will act which minimizes uncertainty (Myers-Briggs, 1980).

The next step is to explore what an “agreeable” personality trait looks like. In this context “agreeable” refers to a person’s perception of their own personality and that of a potential co-interlocutor, and the degree to which they will interact in a positive manner. Considering a goal-oriented approach to communication, a positive manner means one that is successful in accomplishing a pre-described goal. Much of the time it is found that “birds of a feather flock together” and people seek out others who are similar to themselves in terms of personality traits (Byrne, et al., 1967). However in certain specific contexts the opposite may in fact occur, and complementary or dissimilar traits are preferred (Byrne, et al., 1967; Levinger, 1964).

Similarity
Dyadic discussion most often occurs between two individuals who are homophilous in some way (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). Homophily of dyadic pairs speaks to the degree of similarity between two people on any number of characteristics including, but not limited to, beliefs and attitudes (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954), race and ethnicity (Marsden, 1987; Mayhew, McPherson, Rotlo, & Smith-Lovin, 1995), age (Marsden, 1987), sex (Marsden, 1987; Verbugge, 1977), socioeconomic status (Marsden, 1987; Louch, 2000) political values (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Ikeda & Huckfeldt, 2001) and most importantly for the present work, personalities (Banikiotis & Neimeyer, 1981; Byrne, et al., 1967; Duck, 1973).

Conversely, heterophily refers to how unlike and incongruous people are (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). Considering the broad range of disciplines that have studied the homophily vs. heterophily phenomenon, a diverse range of terms have been used to label the relationship: similarity and dissimilarity (Lott & Lott, 1965); co-linear and non-linear (Runkel, 1956); social closeness and social distance (Barnlund & Harland, 1963); similarity and complementarity (Jones & Daugherty, 1959; Newcomb, 1956; Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). For the purposes of this dissertation, homophily and similarity will be used interchangeably to refer to the amount of overlap between two people.

Regardless of the term used to describe the degree of heterogeneity among people, groups or societies, the story told is roughly the same. When given the choice, people have a strong propensity to associate with similar others; the “similarity-attraction principle” is, in fact, one of the most consistent and omnipresent empirical findings in the social sciences (Goel, Mason, & Watts, 2010). As Festinger argued (1954), “A person
will be less attracted to situations where others are very divergent from him than to situations where others are close to him for both abilities and opinions” (p. 123).

Simply stated, people are generally more attracted to others who are similar to themselves. Attraction in this case should not be understood in the colloquial sense of romantic attraction. Rather, attraction refers to a more general “positive attitude of liking another person” (Dickens & Perlman, 1981, p. 91). With regard to personalities, research consistently finds that interpersonal attraction increases when people perceive others as having similar personality traits to themselves. This phenomenon has been found during all stages of relationships and across different relationship types (Banta & Hetherington, 1963; Byrne & Nelson, 1965; Izard, 1960; Maisonneuve, 1954; Mehlman, 1962). Byrne and colleagues (1967) claim that “the relationship between personality similarity and attraction is entirely consistent with the findings of attitude-similarity studies” (p. 1). This positive relationship between the degree of similarity and liking has come to be labeled the law of attraction (Byrne & Rhamey, 1965).

Two people who have similar personalities are more likely to “see eye to eye” than those with dissimilar personalities (Senger, 1971). Individuals with similar personalities are expected to build trust more easily than with people of divergent personalities (Baur & Green, 1996). Furthermore similarity is expected to breed amiable relations free of conflict (Byrne, 1971).

Theoretical argument for homophily

A few paradigms have been proposed as general theoretical models explaining people’s drive toward similar others. The first set is known as reinforcement models. These models predict that interpersonal similarity is associated with experiencing positive
stimuli and, conversely, interpersonal dissimilarity is associated with negative stimuli (Byrne, 1971; Byrne & Clore, 1970). People will be driven to positive experiences, which are more rewarding and more often sought out. Byrne (1971) and, more recently, Fiske (2004) argue that validation of one’s attitude, interests, and beliefs through congruence with another’s represents “a positive reward” and as such, acts as a powerful reinforcement (Caprara, Vecchione, Barbaranelli, & Fraley, 2007).

Self-categorization theory (SCT) provides further theoretical support for reinforcement models (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). According to SCT a person’s self-concept is derived from the social groups they identify with. Thus we prefer to interact with similar others with whom we share group identities and, in the process, rate these similar others more positively, which reinforces our own self-concept.

A second set of theories is based on a human drive toward cognitive-consistency or balance. The earliest balance perspective was Heider’s (1946) balance theory, followed by Osgood and Tannenbaum’s congruity theory (1955) and Festinger’s canonical theory of cognitive dissonance (1957). These theories all argue in some way that humans prefer mental consistency. Information, beliefs, or attitudes that diverge from pre-held beliefs will lead to inconsistency or imbalance. In these cases people are presumed to like certain aspects about themselves, and thus engaging with others with similar attributes is cognitively consistent.

In terms of understanding balance within interpersonal dyads, Newcomb’s (1953) A-B-X model and McLeod and Chaffee’s model of co-orientation (1972, 1973) are two of the most prominent. Newcomb believed communication was used as means of relating to others and the environment. In Newcomb’s model “A” and “B” relate to people in a
dyadic pair and “X” relates to an object of which A and B both have a perception. Within the triad, four relationships are present: A’s attitude towards B, B’s attitude towards A, and both A and B’s attitude towards X. The model proposes that people strive to keep consistency or balance between these four relationships, and communication is the tool used to achieve it. The more similar A and B are, the easier it is to balance these cognitions because their attitudes towards each other as well as towards the object of interest will be aligned.

In terms of A and B’s attraction to one another, the more similar A perceives its attitude towards X to be with B’s attitude toward X, the greater the chance that A will have a positive attitude towards B. If A perceives B to like X, then A is also more likely to like X. Finally if A has positive feelings towards B and X, then A will be more likely to perceive B as liking X as well. In this sense actual similarity will lead to perceived similarity and vice versa.

A final attribution based approach argues that people like to have a clear understanding of the world so that they have control and are able to predict future events (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965). By surrounding themselves with similar others, people are better able to predict how these people will think, act and behave in the future. Similarity allows communication between individuals to be more predictable, and understandable, which is often cited as being more enjoyable (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Brim & Hof, 1957; Pervin, 1963).

Berger and Calabrese’s (1975) Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) specifically accounts for the role of communication in helping people gain knowledge and understanding of a situation. The central tenet of URT is that, when two individuals meet,
a great deal of uncertainty exists, and this uncertainty is uncomfortable for people as they are unable to make accurate predictions “about the behavior of both themselves and others in the interaction” (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 100). URT advances eight axioms to help explain uncertainty and relational development. Of particular note for the current argument is axiom 6 which posits that “Similarities between persons reduce uncertainty, while dissimilarities produce increases in uncertainty” (p. 106). Simply put, if two individuals are similar they inherently know more about the other person because they themselves share similar thoughts, attitudes, opinions…

Each of these theoretical approaches do a satisfactory job of explaining the underlying psychological mechanisms that motivate people towards similar others in a general sense. A somewhat more practical view can also be used to explain people’s attraction towards *discussion* partners specifically. According to a strategic approach to communication, all communication is motivated by goals (Dillard, 1997). Communication is engaged in “not simply to use language but to accomplish things” (Berger, 2010, p. 117). Assuming people act *rationally*, a social exchange theory of communication would imply that people engage in discussion that will minimize costs and maximize gains (Blau, 1964; Thibault & Kelley, 1952). Gains in this sense relate to the achievement of communicative goals. These assumptions lead to the conclusion that the most beneficial form of communication is that which is most effective at achieving these desired ends (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). Communication effectiveness is expected to increase when two people are similar to one another because they share common meanings, attitudes and beliefs about the world. These commonalities lead to a “mutual code of communication” or *common ground*. 
Common ground is a shared self-awareness of a situation in terms of knowledge, beliefs and assumptions between interlocutors (Clark, 1996; Clark & Schafer, 1989). According to Clark (1992), there are three properties that constitute common ground. First, participants work together “against a background of shared information” (Davidson, 2002, p. 1276). Second, through dialogue, shared information is accumulated. Third, “speakers design their utterances so that their addresses can readily identify what is to be added to that common ground” (Clark, 1992, p. 4-5).

While there is no denying the power of similarity in breeding favorable interpersonal relations, it is not a cure all. There are times when dissimilar or complementary traits may be preferred.

*Complementarity*

Early observational work by Freud (1925) and Ohman (1942) found that, when choosing mates, individuals may seek out those who are not necessarily similar but rather those who are complementary and are able to “complete ourselves emotionally” (Ohman, 1942, p. 15). Winch (1952) was the first to theoretically argue in favor of a model of interpersonal attraction based on complementarity of personality traits. Winch argued that individuals are attracted to others who “maximize need gratification” (p. 406). Needs are something that an individual either requires or wants. Thus, two individuals with *complementary* needs will maximize gratification more so than two individuals with similar needs. Applying this to personalities, Winch, Ktsanes and Ktsanes (1954, p. 242) argued that “If A is highly ascendant, we should expect A to be more attracted maritally to B who is submissive than to C who, like A, is ascendant…” Winch (1952) specifically
theorized that complementarity would be powerful on the dimensions of nurturance-receptivity and dominance-submissiveness (Becker, 1964; Rychlak, 1965).

Numerous studies show that individuals who are dominant prefer interacting with others who are submissive, and those who are submissive prefer interacting with individuals who allow them to be submissive (i.e., dominants) (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997). Thus their complementary traits allow for their needs (either to be dominant or submissive) to be gratified (De Raad & Doddema-Winsemius, 1992).

Newcomb (1956) proposed that people may be attracted to complementary personalities when they expect others to think, act or behave in specific ways. In other words, complementarity attraction is “due to an explicit or implicit agreement to behave differently” (Seyfried & Hendrick, 1973, p. 15). Seyfried and Hendrick (1973) find support for this argument in the context of sex-role expectancies. Whether biological, socially constructed or some combination of the two, the expectation is that men and women will behave in different ways. These expectations of how a “male” and “female” should act are collectively known as sex-role expectations (Seyfried & Hendrick, 1973). This study found (particularly among women) a significant preference for members of the opposite sex who demonstrated traditional sex role attitudes; which is to say that they were more attracted to individuals whose sex-role attitudes were complementary to their own.

Work on complementarity has proceeded beyond just mate selection. Gross (1956) investigated groups of military personnel at an Air Force Base. He found that groups comprised of dissimilar individuals were more capable of providing each other with rewards not possible in groups of similar individuals. A 1975 investigation of
summer camp counselors between the ages of 18-22 years of age found further support for the complementary need hypothesis (Wagner, 1975). Wagner studied pairs of counselors working together and found that the most compatible were those who were complementary “on the need pairs of nurturance-succorance, aggression-abatement, responsibility-nurturance, exhibition defense and dominance autonomy” (Husain & Kureshi, 1998, p. 65)

In the tradition of Seyfried, and Hendrick’s (1973) work on complementary role attraction, Grush, Clore, and Costin (1975) found that students were more attracted to teachers who enacted complementary “role-relevant” traits to their own. In other words students believed that teachers should possess traits that would enable them to help students learn, traits that students themselves don’t have. Conversely students believed that if teachers possessed similar traits to themselves, they wouldn’t be able to learn from them.

Finally, evidence suggests that individuals may seek out complementary traits in others that they don’t like in themselves. Khlonen & Mendelsohn (1998) found that among romantic partners, couples chose those who were similar to themselves in terms of personality traits that they liked about themselves, but they sought out others who had complementary traits to those they didn’t like about themselves. Schimel and colleagues (2000) experimentally tested this and found study participants “distanced” themselves from confederates who displayed negative traits they themselves earlier claimed to possess.

Far less support has been found over the years for the complementary hypothesis than for the similarity attraction hypothesis. Nonetheless complementarity is hardly non-
existent. This dissertation respects these findings and advances hypotheses mostly in favor of PPTS leading to an increased WTCAP. However, it is also believed that complementarity will be preferred in some contexts, and hypotheses will also be advanced that are consistent with this principle. In the following chapters both concepts will be explicated by forwarding an extant literature review of the use of similar variables in past research and an argument will be forwarded for the unique conceptualization and operationalization of these traits in the present dissertation.
Chapter 3: Willingness to Communicate About Politics (WTCAP): Conceptualization and Operationalization

The concept, willingness to communicate about politics (WTCAP) is defined in this dissertation as a *state-based variable referring to a person's likelihood or propensity to actively engage in an informal political discussion in a specific situation*. This is a novel concept that draws on existing literature on motives for interpersonal communication and opinion expression.

Most typically research on political discussion has focused on either self-reports of *actual* past communication practices or on measures of hypothetical *opinion expression*. While these works provide a solid theoretical and methodological foundation from which to study political discussion they are unable to capture all dimensions of the construct. The current work utilizes a novel measure, WTCAP, as a means of capturing unique information in regards to political discussion not possible with existing measures. WTCAP advances existing research in the realm of political discussion both theoretically and methodologically.
WTCAP is a broad concept encompassing many dimensions. As such, a full explication involves reviewing a wide swatch of relevant literature. First, a review of general communication willingness measures will be discussed paying close attention to the various operationalizations of “communication willingness” throughout the literature. This is especially important considering the lack of conceptual and operational consistency in existing work on related concepts. An argument will then be advanced for the present operationalization of willingness as a behavioral intention measured by the likeliness of an interaction occurring. Next, an overview of “political discussion,” generally, will be discussed before an argument will be made for the specific conceptualization of what it means to “communicate about politics.” This will be followed by a review of past methodological tools used to assess this form of talk including measures of actual discussion and opinion expression and avoidance. Finally, an argument will be made for this dissertation’s proposed use of a unique data collection procedure, a cued-recall name generator as a means of best exploring the dependent variable of interest WTCAP.

Willingness to Communicate

An important aspect of all interpersonal discussion is one’s motivation to engage in it. The strategic approach to interpersonal communication assumes that all communication is motivated by goals (Burleson, Mett, & Kurch 2000; Dillard, 1997). A goal is the “desired ends toward which communicative efforts are directed.” (Burleson et al., p. 246). These interpersonal communication goals can also be thought of as needs that an individual attempts to fulfill through discussion (Graham, Barbato, & Perse, 2003).
These needs dictate, “whom we talk to, how we talk to them, what we talk about…” (Martin, Myers, & Mottet, 1999, p. 156).

The needs people have for communicating influence a person’s *willingness to communicate* (WTC). As the needs for communicating change so too will one’s willingness to initiate communication in a given situation. Originally WTC was conceptualized as a general orientation or probability that a person will initiate communication when presented with the opportunity (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). This was both conceptualized and operationalized as an individual-level, trait-based predisposition, expected to be stable across time and contexts and *not* expected to be influenced by situational goals. McCroskey and Richmond (1987) developed a twenty-item survey instrument tapping this general “intention and desire to initiate communication.” (Risati & Noordin, 2011, p. 74). It’s important to note that this scale specifically operationalizes willingness as a person’s general “likelihood” of initiating conversation.

The WTC scale consists of twenty items relating to different situations (for example “talk in a small group of strangers”) and asks individuals to indicate the percentage of times between 0 = “never” and 100 = “always” they would choose to initiate communication. Again, WTC is a trait based variable expected to be an inherent predisposition in an individual that accompanies one across situations. The WTC scale

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4 Other individual-level traits such as *introversion*, *communication apprehension*, *communication competence* and *self-esteem* have all been found to influence one’s WTC (Kang, 2005; McCroskey & Richmond, 1990).
has been widely adopted and used throughout the field as independent variable (McCroskey, 1992).

More recently a second, state-based, explication of WTC--understood as both situation dependent and variable across contexts--has come to challenge the original trait-based perspective (Kang, 2005). This state-based perspective is in line with this research’s conceptualization of WTCAP. While an individual may have an innate proclivity to be more or less willing to communicate on a trait-based level, there are also many situational factors that may alter a person’s willingness to communicate in a given setting. Even McCroskey and Richmond (1987) themselves argued when developing the original WTC scale that a person’s willingness to engage in a communication event is “probably to a major (through as yet to be determined) degree situationally dependent” (p. 129).

Situational WTC (SWTC) speaks to “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons…” (MacIntyre, Dornyei, Clement, & Noels, 1998, p. 547). Discourse in this case refers to a colloquial understanding as “verbal interchange of ideas” (“Discourse,” Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary), rather than more formal conceptualizations advanced by the academy referring to a serious form of rule-governed argumentation (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs, 1997). Differing from the trait approach to WTC, situational WTC does not necessarily mean one must initiate a conversation, rather situational WTC speaks to a more general interest in perpetuating a communicative act whether it was initiated by oneself or another. Also, unlike a trait approach, the state approach acknowledges that situational factors such as the identity of potential discussion partners and the topic of conversation can influence a
person’s WTC. Situational WTC “is influenced by the immediate situational antecedents-the desire to communicate with a specific person… and more enduring influences such as interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, self-confidence, intergroup anxieties, social situation…” (Kang, 2005, p. 279). Just as a person’s goal for communicating in any given situation will change, so too will one’s WTC.

Measuring Situational Willingness in Context

Prior to the development of specific situational willingness scales in the early 2000’s, very little work theoretically or methodologically explored situational WTC. Rather, the few communication motive measures that did exist spoke more to motivations or antecedents of communication rather than willingness to engage in future conversations (see, Zorn 1991 for review). Recently, however, situational WTC has been investigated within families (Avtgis, 1999), interculturally (Lin & Rancer, 2003), regarding health topics (Wright, Frey, & Sopory, 2007) and in second-language situations (Cao & Philp, 2006).

Situational WTC in the context of provider-patient health communication (Wright, et al., 2007) has been a particularly fruitful line of research, especially in terms of people’s willingness to discuss health topics both with health service providers and with other lay persons (Crowell, 2004; Gotcher, & Edwards, 1990; Morgan & Miller, 2001). Like political subjects, health topics are often uncomfortable for people to talk about given the “social stigma attached to some diseases and conditions and the potentially embarrassing information about one’s body that can come up in conversations about health…” (Wright et al., 2007, p. 36). Wright and colleagues (2007) were the first to develop a specific measure of willingness to communicate about health scale (WCHS).
Specifically, 10 items referring to different situations of potential communication exchanges about their health and health concerns with a variety of people is presented (for example, “I am comfortable talking about health with my health care provider”). Response options ranged on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree.”

Crowell (2004) measured people’s specific willingness to communicate about condoms. Crowell studied forty HIV positive heterosexuals to determine their willingness to discuss condoms and safe sex practices. Measuring discussion willingness in terms of condom use was done through five survey items asking about past actual discussions including when, where and with whom conversations about condoms occurred. This is obviously different from Wright and colleagues in that willingness in this case though operationalized as past behaviors not general attitudes and intentions of communicating in hypothetical future situations.

Studies on the contexts of willingness to communicate in second-language situations and in classroom settings have taken a more qualitative approach to state-level measures of WTC. In tutoring sessions between non-native language speaking students and native speaking tutors, Kang (2005) observed that WTC evolved over time. The more time students and tutors spent together the more willing students were to speak in second languages. House (2004) also took a qualitative approach to the study of second-language learners. He had students report their experiences in ESL classrooms and their willingness to communicate over a five-week period. House found that many contextual factors influenced the learner’s willingness to communicate including physical location, presence of opposite sex, mood and the topic of discussion.
Cao and Philp (2006) used a mixed methods approach to compare trait WTC and situational WTC among students in second language classrooms. Study participants included a diverse group of second language English speaking international students enrolled in an “intensive General English program at a university-based private language school in New Zealand.” (Cao & Philp, 2006, p. 483). Each student was first asked to complete a survey instrument measuring trait based WTC. Next, state level WTC was assessed through four-weeks of classroom observations by the research team. Seven categories (e.g., “volunteer an answer”, “ask the teacher a question”) of behavior referencing a person’s willingness to communicate were identified for coding and a quantitative content analysis was performed.

As can be seen no single measure of situational WTC exists. Rather in each situation that has been studied a novel measurement technique has been utilized. While the term *willingness* is conceptualized in almost all cases as a persons’ likelihood of communicating in a particular situation it is measured in a variety of ways *including* not only intentions but also *behavioral expectations* and *actual communication*. The current research challenges past measures and methods of situational WTC by creating a specific survey instrument for the situation of political communication. Individuals will be presented with a series of hypothetical situations and asked to indicate the likelihood that they would communicate about politics. The current measure most closely resembles a cross between Noelle-Neumann’s (1993) *train test*, and Hayes, Glynn & Shannahon’s, (2005a, 2005b) willingness to self-censor (WTSC) scale, however does differ in distinct ways that will be expanded on below.
The current measure WTCAP is a behavioral intention operationalized as the likelihood of occurrence. This is in line with past work on behavioral intentions that use measures of likelihood. Furthermore, WTCAP differs from McCroskey’s original measure of WTC in that it does not necessarily reference the initiation of a conversation. WTCAP speaks to an individual who either initiates or responds to engagement and works to advance the conversation. This includes situations where someone willingly continues a conversation that has been started as well.

WTCAP in this case most closely resembles a behavioral intention or desire to communicate in a given situation. The fact that situational WTC is a behavioral intention and not an overt action is an important distinction. While there is a strong theoretical link between behavioral intentions and behaviors, they are hardly one and the same.

The linkage between attitudes, behavioral intentions and behaviors has been a popular area of study in psychology and communication (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Ajzen and Fishbein’s Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (1980) and Ajzen’s (1988, 1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) are arguably the two most influential theories regarding behavioral intentions. The TRA argues that behavioral intentions are most predictive of behaviors in situations where behaviors are under the complete volitional control of an individual. Behavioral intentions are a result of a person’s weighted assessment of his or her attitudes toward a specific behavior as well as the perceived subjective norms surrounding the behavior. A person’s attitude towards a behavior is the comparative evaluation one has regarding the consequences and desirability of performing a behavior. The second factor contributing to one’s behavioral intentions are
subjective norms; or the degree to which an individual perceives that significant others favor or oppose the performance of a behavior.

In terms of the current discussion where the behavior of interest is interpersonal communication, the TPB would seem to be a better theoretical base. The TPB extends the TRA to situations where a behavior is not under the complete control of an individual. In this case behavioral intentions as well as the amount and type of control a person has over the ability to perform a behavior are used to predict behaviors. Considering that interpersonal discussion involves more than one person, it inherently is never under the complete control of any single person.

Currently, no studies exist that explore situational willingness to communicate on the topic of politics in line with the aforementioned works. Most typically research on political discussion has focused on either self-reports of actual past communication practices or on hypothetical willingness to express opinions. It is important to explore these works in greater detail to differentiate WTCAP and past concepts utilized in studies of political discussion. Before discussing these parallel studies and further exploring the variable of interest (WTCAP) it is necessary to first explicate the underlying dimension of “political discussion” itself. Specifically, what exactly is meant by “political discussion”?

Political Discussion

While simple enough on the surface, the notion of interpersonal political discussion is actually quite complex and has been conceptualized and measured in a multitude of ways. Dimensions of political talk may include the characteristics of the discussants, the topic of the discussion, and the structure of the dialogue itself.
Interpersonal political discussion rests on a continuum anchored at one end by *informal political talk* and at the other end by *formal deliberation*.

The appropriate conceptualization of political discussion for the current work covers a great deal of this continuum, including most of the area not covered under the heading of formal deliberation. In this section I will first review past literature on different forms of political discussion before reviewing existing measures of actual discussion and opinion-expression. Finally a connection will be made between this existing work and the dependent variable of interest, WTCAP.

*Formal deliberation.* Deliberation is a special type of communicative act. At a fundamental level, deliberation is a rule governed format of discourse with the ultimate goal of reaching a *legitimate* decision (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Mansbridge, 1999). Deliberation is a formal argumentation procedure that requires diverse viewpoints to be expressed in procedurally justifiable ways with the goal of reaching “pure procedural justice” (Elster, 1998). Deliberation is goal-driven argumentation among individuals who stand to be affected by the outcome in some way (broadly speaking). Argumentation in this case should not be understood in the colloquial sense but rather as reasoned discourse that “uses language to justify or refute a standpoint, with the aim of securing agreement in views” (Van Eemeren, et al., 1997, p. 209). Argumentation is a type of critical discussion aimed at solving a dispute in a satisfactory way to all parties in the dispute. Reasoned discourse requires that all deliberators provide warrants for “advancing proposals, supporting them or criticizing them” (Cohen, 1989, p. 22).

Furthermore, the deliberative act is only considered legitimate when discussion is “among free equals” (Cohen, 1989, p. 22). Equality in deliberation is two-fold,
encompassing both procedural and substantive neutrality. Procedural equality ensures that everyone is provided equal time and opportunity to present their arguments as well as reflect on the arguments of others. No person or group of persons is allowed to dominate the structural properties of the deliberation. Furthermore, deliberative members are substantively equal in that “the existing distribution of power and resources does not shape the chances to contribute to deliberation, nor does that distribution play an authoritative role…” (Cohen, 1989, p. 23). This is to guard against any hegemonic influence and ensure “no force except that of the better argument is exercised” (Habermas, 1975, p. 108). Assuming these constraints of equality are in place, it is expected that the collective-decision is made without any unjust motivations and is based solely on the quality of the arguments presented (Cohen, 1989). Furthermore, arguments need to be made intelligibly, and participants must consider each argument equally. According to this logic, if equality in the process is present, legitimacy in the end will be also.

Under this model of talk, only issues dealing directly with the government, laws, policies and elections are considered “political” (Marques & Maia, 2010). The standards set forth by deliberative theorists are idealistic to say the least; rarely, if ever, does talk among citizens ever reach the level called for (Mansbridge, 1999; Moy & Gastil 2006). In reality, this form of talk may be procedurally impossible in everyday interactions when considering human capabilities. Thus this type of talk is not of particular interest for the current study. Rather this dissertation is concerned with a form of more natural, everyday political conversation free of procedural constraints and formal rules.
Everyday political talk. Within the literature, a veritable glut of terms has been used to label some variation of informal discussion among free citizens regarding a wide range of political issues. These include political discussion (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002; Eveland, 2004; Hively & Eveland, 2009; Kennamer, 1990; Kwak, et al., 2005), political conversation (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994; Rojas, 2008; Schudson, 1997), political talk (Hardy & Scheufele, 2009; McClurg, 2006; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Walsh, 2004), informal deliberation, ordinary political conversation, and everyday political talk (Kim & Kim, 2008). This type of conversation “takes place outside of formal, rule bound structures and is closely intermeshed with everyday life and social interaction outside of the political realm” (Eveland, Morey, & Hutchens, 2011a, p. 1083).

Whereas formal deliberation is explicitly intended to solve a problem, informal political talk need not be so formally politically goal driven. Rather, goals of informal political talk might be more focused on social and personal gains. As Tarde (1898/1989, p. 87) put it some one hundred and twenty years ago, conversations of this kind are sometimes “without direct and immediate utility…one talks primarily to talk for pleasure, as a game, out of politeness.”

In contrast to the conceptualization of politics in the deliberative model, politics in the current case covers a broad range of topics. Topics as diverse as news, government, crime, education, the economy, foreign relations, society, and art could theoretically all be considered political. Operationalizing precisely what is and is not a political topic is somewhat difficult. Wyatt and colleagues (2000) find that what the public considers “political” is rather subjective and changes across contexts. Self-report measures of “political discussion” in this sense can be problematic considering the public’s diverse
view of what constitutes a political issue. Recently, Eveland, Morey, and Hutchens (2011a) argued that a more systematic definition of politics is of vital importance to the advancement of political discussion research.

Furthermore, while deliberation may be the gold standard in terms of collective-decision making it is less than ideal in other ways. In actuality there are normative advantages to less formal talk over structured political discourse especially in that it promotes socialization, community bonding and a safe-place to try out fresh ideas or informally constructed arguments (Kim & Kim, 2008; Conover & Searing, 2005).

Informal political talk can act as a powerful socializing agent whereby individuals create and maintain identity (Barber, 1984). As Kim & Kim (2008) argue everyday political communication may be “the most readily available method of constructing the concept of the sociopolitical self in their daily lives” (p. 58). The creation of the self is formed through interactions with others (Mead, 1934). Informal political talk allows individuals to explore their opinions in comparison to others and in such develop a better understanding of their own beliefs as well as those of others (Kim & Kim, 2008). While the public may not be particularly astute in terms of political affairs or facts they are able to discuss the issues of the day in a competent manner (Gamson, 1992; Wyatt et al., 2000).

Interpersonal political discussion in the current model most closely follows the conceptualization of Eveland and colleagues (2011a), which refers to “interpersonal and small group interactions about the broad topic of politics that take place outside of formal deliberation settings” (p. 1083). The one note that should be made is that this dissertation
is only concerned with interpersonal communication about politics within dyads and not in small groups.

Measuring Political Discussion

Past work on political discussion has focused on either actual discussion or behavioral intentions related to a willingness to express certain opinions, or self-censor (Hayes, Glynn, & Shanahan, 2005a, 2005b). While measuring actual discussion and opinion-expression have proven to be wildly fruitful approaches to the study of political discussion, they have not and potentially are not capable of capturing all dimensions of the construct. The current work uses a novel concept WTCAP as a means of capturing unique information in regards to political discussion.

The current measure WTCAP differs from actual discussion in that it allows for theoretical exploration of unique or novel situations either not possible or methodologically feasible via traditional measures of actual behaviors. Furthermore studying these intentions to communicate can tap into times when a person may want to communicate but not necessarily have the opportunity. Finally it builds on measures of opinion expression by focusing on political talk in general rather than specifically what opinions are or are not expressed during conversation.

I will now discuss both theoretically and methodologically current models of actual discussion research and opinion expression research.

Actual Discussion

Ethnographic studies (Eliasoph, 1998; Walsh, 2004), interviews (Graber, 1984), focus groups (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994; Gamson, 1992; Marques & Maia, 2010) and surveys (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Mutz, 2006; Mutz & Martin, 2001; Wyatt et
al., 2000) are all methodologies that have been used to study interpersonal political discussion. Research exploring political talk most in line with the present working conceptualization has, however, relied heavily on survey data.

One dimension of political discussion often measured is the frequency with which people engage in it. Survey questions ask subjects, “how many days in a week do you discuss politics?” (Eveland, 2004), “how many days in the past week did you discuss politics with family or friends?” (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004), “how often do you discuss national politics or national affairs with others?” (Scheufele, 2002). More specifically, Eveland and Hively (2009) ask, “how many days per week on average do you talk to Democrats about national politics?” and “how many days per week on average do you talk to Republicans about national politics?”

Another dimension of discussion that has been a focus of recent research relates to the nature of the content of discussion as well as the characteristics of the conversation partners themselves. A popular methodology used to assess these more nuanced characteristics of political discussion is through a social network approach. This methodology differs from a more traditional survey approach in that respondents are asked to list specific people with whom they discuss politics and report on the nature of those conversations. Social network data affords the opportunity to address questions not only about the relationship between a survey responder and his or her political discussion partners, but also the relationship between those others outside of his or her relationship with the focal respondent.

Two perspectives can be utilized to study political discussion networks; full and ego-centered. Most often, political discussion research utilizes an ego-centered approach.
Ego networks include a focal central node (person/ego) and the nodes directly attached to the ego (the people they discuss politics with/alters).

Ego-centered data assess the difference between an ego and their alters. To collect ego-centered data, a set of open-ended questions known collectively as a name generator is utilized (e.g., Beck, 1991; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; Mutz, 2002a, 2002b, 2006; Mutz & Martin, 2001; Nir, 2005). The basic name generator asks people to list a predetermined number of individuals with whom they have some type of relation. The name generator is used as a means of identifying specific individuals within an individual’s social network. In terms of political discussion networks, name generators ask focal respondents, “with whom do you most discuss politics” (Mutz & Martin, 2001) or “with whom do you discuss political matters?” (McClurg, 2006). While not exactly the same as asking people about politics, similar results are found when using a name generator approach that asks people “how often do you discuss important matters?” (Klofstad, McClurg, & Rolfe, 2009).

For each person listed through the name generator, follow-up questions probing the ego’s perception of each individual and their relationship with them are often gleaned. Some of these questions attempt to tap the nature of the content discussed. Specifically, these measures are usually used to assess what opinions people do or do not express during conversation. Morey, Hutchens & Eveland (2012) along with Mutz (2006) ask participants to report frequencies of disagreement and/or avoidance in political conversations. Morey and colleagues (2012) asked specifically “When you discuss politics with [alter 1], how often do you try to avoid discussing political issues about which you tend to disagree?” (p. 93). Other research takes a more general approach and
asks questions such as “when you talk with (discussant) do you discuss politics some, a little, or very rarely?” (Mutz, 2002).

Another type of question asks specifically about similarities and differences between an ego and their alters. These questions usually ask the focal respondents to provide perceived evaluations of their alters across a variety of characteristics. For example Morey, Hutchens, and Eveland (2012) ask “When it comes to various politics and public affairs topics, do you tend to have the same or different opinions as [alter #]?” (p. 93). Other common questions ask people to report their perception of an alter’s voting record, partisanship, ideology or specific issue stance (Eveland & Kleinman, 2013; Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2004; Pattie & Johnston, 2008).

Most name generators limit the number of alters that an ego may list, thereby inherently constraining the size of a person’s network (Marsden, 2005). In terms of political discussion name generators, it is most common to ask people to list either three (Mutz & Martin, 2001), four (Eveland, 2004), or five (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995) fellow discussants (Fowler, Heaney, Nickerson, Padgett, & Sinclair, 2011). A critique of this approach is that by constraining the number of listed alters, research is missing the portion of potential political talk that occurs with individuals outside of the three to five listed (Eveland & Hively, 2009). Evidence that political discussion may be underestimated is provided by studies that break the traditional mold of name generators and simply ask people to list the number of people with whom they discuss politics, not including names or characteristics (Kwak et al., 2005; Moy & Gastil, 2006). Both general (McCormick, Salganik, & Zheng, 2010) and political discussion networks (Eveland et al.,
2011b) have been found to be quite a bit larger than what is found when using traditional name generators.

Consider the following example. Imagine yourself at a party that your friend is hosting. After a few minutes you strike up a conversation with another person whom you have never met but is also a friend of the party host. After introducing yourselves, a political topic is innocuously broached. Maybe you chat for ten or fifteen minutes with this person about the topic before you’re interrupted by an old friend. You bid farewell to the new acquaintance and think nothing more of it. This type of interaction would not typically be captured with a traditional name generator approach. Nevertheless it is, in fact, a political discussion.

Another issue with constraining the number of discussants is people’s increased likelihood of only listing strong ties as political discussion partners (Beck, 1991; Huckfeldt & Marsden, 2005). Strong ties are characterized by relationships between people whose interactions are frequent, emotionally intense, intimate, and mutually beneficial (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361). Most research has reported that political discussion occurs most commonly among those with strong ties; however, this could simply be a function of the structural constraints the methodology places on people. In other words, individuals may be selecting politically similar others first and foremost because they are most cognitively salient. Furthermore, homophily in terms of political attitudes found within people’s political networks could be a confounded result of the listed individuals being strong ties. Strong ties opposed to weak ties are more likely to be more politically homophilous (Morey, Eveland & Hutchens, 2012; Mutz, 2006). Thus, it
may not be that political diversity is non-existent in political networks, only that the available data constrain it to seem that way.

**Full-network data**

The second approach to studying networks is done by ascertaining measures not just from a single ego but from an entire population (Eveland & Kleinman, 2013). Compared with an ego-centered approach, this type of data provides much more potential to explore more macro-social research questions. Utilizing “total network data” makes it possible to evaluate relationships among all people in a network not just between an ego and alters (Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004). Full network data also allows for exploration of “weak tie relationships” (Eveland & Kleinman, 2013). While there are substantial benefits associated with full network data, there is little existing social science research that utilizes it. Gathering full network data is incredibly difficult and exceedingly costly.

Even full network data, however, does not feasibly provide the means of capturing all discussions. Considering the above example of partygoers, this discussion still would not be captured unless the network data included hundreds of individuals and measures on each of them, which is practically impossible.

**Opinion Expression**

Just as an individual’s willingness to communicate varies, so too does that person’s willingness to express certain opinions. In terms of the content of political conversations, research consistently finds people are quite purposeful in choosing what opinions they are and are not willing to express. It is particularly common for disagreeable political issues to be avoided all together or oppositional viewpoints to be
silenced (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). The inherently contentious nature of politics leads people to avoid expressing opinions that could potentially lead to conflict. Political opinions are often tied to a person’s core beliefs and values as such a great deal of self-disclosure is present when expressing such an opinion. People may be hesitant to express these opinions for fear of encountering “unsympathetic audiences” (Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2004, p. 16).

Noelle-Neumann’s (1974) spiral of silence is arguably the most prominent theory of personal opinion expression, arguing that individuals vary in their willingness to express opinions not perceived to be in the majority. The spiral of silence argues that people constantly survey their environment and assess the degree to which their actual opinions match their perception of the majority of opinion via a “quasi-statistical sense.” It is hypothesized that when individuals perceive that their opinion is in the minority, they are less willing to publicly express it.

Hayes, Glynn, and Shanahan (2005a, 2005b) created a measure tapping a person’s proclivity to not express political opinions or a Willingness to Self Censor (WTSC). A person’s willingness to self-censor is conceptualized as “an individual difference that plays a role in people’s decisions to withhold their true opinion from others beyond what situational variables explain” (Hayes et al(a), 2005, p. 302). A person who is more willing to self-censor will be less likely to express their true opinions in the presence of what they perceive to be a “dissenting audience across situations” (p. 304). Hayes, Scheufele, and Huge (2006) find that individuals who score higher on WTSC are more likely to be “influenced by the climate of opinion when choosing whether or not to voice
an opinion” (p. 259) and subsequently less likely to engage in public political activities (including discussion).

Important distinctions need to be made between these concepts and the current variable of interest, WTCAP. The former are either measures of public opinion relating to the influence of perceptions of macro-level opinion climate (which is not necessarily transferrable to interpersonal dyads) or they are trait-based variables. The current variable of interest, WTCAP, while similar to those above is both conceptually and operationally different in that it is neither an actual behavior nor a measure of opinion expression. Rather, it is a behavioral intention to engage in discussion without addressing what opinion is expressed if any, and is expected to be influenced by interpersonal perceptions within dyads outside of the macro-level opinion climate. Currently there does not exist a measure specifically exploring WTCAP. Thus an instrument will be developed to answer the questions of interest in this research.

The instrument created to measure one’s WTCAP differs from these existing measures in a number of unique ways. This measure allows for theoretical exploration of unique or novel situations either not possible or methodologically feasible via traditional measures of actual behavior, especially in terms of weak tie relationships. Furthermore, studying these intentions to communicate can tap into times when a person may want to communicate but not necessarily have the opportunity. Secondly this measure specifically focuses on measuring political discussion generally, not opinion expression.

As discussed above, existing ego-network measures utilized in the study of political discussion tend to leave out weak ties and acquaintances. In order to study pre-existing relationships, this dissertation uses a method that incorporates a more random
sample of all potential political encounters, thereby gleaning information about both strong and weak ties simultaneously. To collect such data, a unique name generator tool utilizing a “cued recall procedure” was used (Brewer, 1997; McCarty, Bernard, Killworth, Shelley, & Johnsen, 1997). Technically, the current measurement tool provides the means of constructing an ego network akin to a traditional name generator; however, it differs in the means by which an ego’s, alters are selected (See Chapter 6 for measurement details).

WTCAP is a somewhat complex concept and measuring it is certainly not achieved with a name generator. Rather, the name generator is merely a means of identifying potential discussion partners. The second step in the process is measuring individuals’ WTCAP with these individuals. To do this a measure was created that specifically taps situational (that is, political) willingness to communicate within a specific dyad.

Study participants were asked to identify pre-existing relationships through a name generator, and report their WTCAP with said individuals in different situations. Thus, the current work utilizes existing relationships similar to studies of past actual communication; however, differs in that potential rather than actual interactions. The following chapter will continue investigating the link between personality and WTCAP by offering a review of personality in general as well as forwarding a review of literature supporting the use of the independent variable of interest, PPTS for the current study.
Before tackling the independent variable of interest, perceived personality trait similarity (PPTS), it is important to unpack the core concept that is personality. Defining personality is not a simple task as a single clear conceptualization does not exist within the literature. Personalities, like most abstract theoretical concepts, have been conceptualized in a number of diverse ways, sometimes complementary and at other times adversarial. Some of the most prominent psychological scholars of the last century, including Freud (1925), Maslow (1954), Rogers (1951), Jung (1910), Skinner (1938), and Bandura (1977), to name a few, have all advanced unique theories of personality following different psychological perspectives. Each ontological foundation—biological, cognitive, humanistic, learning, psychodynamic, behavioral, and trait—highlights unique insights, all contributing to an understanding of personality (Cloninger, 2009).

For this dissertation, an understanding of personalities based on trait psychology is adopted, for two reasons. First, traits provide a pragmatic functional view of personalities that allow for empirical study. Traits offer the opportunity to observe and quantify underlying psychological characteristics of an individual. Second, a great deal of existing empirical research linking personality traits and communicative behaviors
follows a trait perspective. Thus, there exists a canon of work to build upon. (See Mondak, 2010).

This chapter begins with a brief review of relevant trait personality research, including both theoretical and methodological approaches. This will serve as an example of the perspective that this dissertation will follow in developing new hypotheses concerning trait personality. Second, an investigation of the effect of personalities on interpersonal relationships will be synthesized paying specific attention to the role that perception plays in the process. Finally, a case will be made for the inclusion of a specific concept of perceived trait similarity (PPTS) for use in the current model.

What is a Personality?

At a fundamental level, personalities are underlying “biologically influenced and enduring psychological structures” that are believed to influence behaviors in profound ways (Cattell, 1945; Gerber, Huber, Doherty, & Dowling, 2011a). Personalities are internalized structures that dictate who we are, what we think and how we act. They are the core of an individual and “provide an integrative framework for understanding the whole person” (McAdams & Pals 2006, p. 204). These are innate, overarching, psychological structures that help explain individual-level variation in how people respond to the environment (Gerber et al., 2011a). As Allport (1937) notes, “Personality is and does something… it is what lies behind specific acts and within the individual” (p. 48). Furthermore according to the trait-psychological perspective personalities are stable across contexts and directly influence behaviors. These two qualities allow for predictions to be made about “what a person will do in a given situation” (Cattell, 1950, p. 2).
A trait psychological view posits that personalities are a single multidimensional internal structure that encompass “an array of capacities or dispositions that may be engaged, primed, or brought forward depending on the demands of the situation and a person’s own executive apparatus” (Winter, 2003, p. 112). While the totality of one’s personality is unlikely to change, the dimensions that manifest in a given situation can and do change. Personalities, nonetheless, have been found to be stable and enduring properties across contexts and the life-cycle. Thus, when people behave inconsistently, it is not so much a change in their personality itself but rather a conscious or subconscious choice to enact one dimension of a personality over another.

Much of the stability we see in personalities results from their genetic roots. Research estimates that roughly 40-60% of personality variability is genetic (Pervin, 2003). Biologists have recently attempted to identify relationships between specific genetic markers and specific personality traits (Canli, 2008). This work has proven to be laborious and quite difficult because multiple genes “of varying but small effect size” (Plomin & Caspi, p. 262) are thought to contribute to the total variance in each trait. 

Traits

Traits are the fundamental “building blocks of personalities” (Allport, 1961; Pervin, 2003). They are biologically rooted internal structures that, when combined with goals and values, work to make up the essence of one’s individuality. Traits are the manifest observable units of one’s underlying personality dimensions (Allen, Fertig, & Mattson 1994). They are the “atoms” of personality if you will. Both within the academy and out, traits are the basic units by which personalities are discussed; people’s personalities are described by the traits they exhibit. Most of the descriptive terms we
have about people in language are in fact trait names (e.g. sincere, funny, compassionate, etc.).

Sir Francis Galton (1884) was arguably the first to propose this natural language approach to exploring personality traits (Matthews, Dear, & Whiteman, 2003). Such an approach presupposes that humans use natural language to discern individual differences between one another and incorporate these words into everyday life (John, Angleitner, & Ostendorf, 1988). When describing individual differences between people, trait names are used, such as argumentative or funny. In reality, each trait-name can be better understood as a “range-name” identifying a category of meaning sharing general properties (Allport, 1961; John et al., 1988; Wiggins, 1979). For example, describing two people as “funny” does not imply that they are identical, but rather that they both possess the essence of a quality that leads them to amuse others.

Engaging in empirical research on internal constructs such as personalities can be quite difficult. However, traits provide readily available units of measurement that reflect the unseen latent dimensions of one’s personality. That is, traits “are hypothetical constructs rather than observable entities… they are not an end but rather they are ‘place holders’…” (Plomin & Caspi, 1999, p. 252). These qualities make traits a relevant characteristic of study within the social sciences and provide the means for empirical measurement of personalities. In terms of our current focus on political discussion, Mondak (2010) sums it up best by arguing that traits provide “an excellent foundation for the derivation of hypotheses regarding the possible link between personality and political behavior” (p. 6).
Before continuing, an important disclaimer must be made. The view taken in this dissertation does not discount the complexity of personalities and does not assume them to be merely the summation of one’s traits. For example, Winters (2003) advances a view of personalities that identifies four basic units (*traits, motives, cognitions, social contexts*) that combine to form the totality of a personality. While these dimensions of personalities are certainly important, they may not be essential for the current research. The current trait-based view has been the dominant theoretical grounding in political psychology for many years (John & Srivastava, 1999). Furthermore, what constitutes a trait in the current model is quite broad and pragmatically capable of capturing the same amount of variability found in other more nuanced conceptualizations. In reality, a good proportion of the difference between these perspectives is semantic labeling.

Moving from conceptualizing to operationalizing trait psychology has been an evolving task over the years. Currently the Big Five Measure of personality traits has become the dominant measuring tool for personality research in the political and more generally, social, sciences. Therefore, measuring personalities in this dissertation will utilize a Big Five approach.

*The Big Five*

While the genesis of trait psychology can be found nearly 3,000 years ago in the teachings of Theophrastus (371–287 BCE) and other ancient Greek scholars, empirical exploration proved a rather difficult task for the centuries that followed (Matthews, et al., 2003). The sheer number of potential traits that could be used to describe a person made theoretically-based empirical study virtually impossible. Choosing which trait to include in a model and developing a measure for each one independently nearly paralyzed the
field, rendering a landscape of great potential but limited practical application.

Personality research became little more than a grab bag with studies randomly choosing traits to measure and developing those measures “on the fly” (John & Srivastava, 1999). Before more productive research could be done, structure was needed.

In an effort to resolve this difficulty, Allport and Odbert (1936) created a formal taxonomy of traits using a *lexical approach*. Using the dictionary, they identified roughly 18,000 potential terms that could be used to describe a person. Of these, 4,500 were explicitly identified to relate to *personality traits*.

Attempting to add more parsimony to the study of personalities, Cattell (1943, 1956) took this abbreviated list of 4,500 and performed factor analyses to find groupings of traits. Cattell eventually identified 16 core tenets believed to make up the essence of one’s personality; however, Cattell’s findings were not universally accepted. Follow-up work by Fiske (1949), Tupes & Christal (1961) and Norman (1963) all agreed that personalities could be understood and explored in a rather limited set of five factors, not sixteen.

These five traits, including *agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, emotional stability* (aka *neuroticism*), and *openness (to experience)*, collectively known as the “Big Five” (or Five-Factor Model (FFM)), have revolutionized the field (John, Naumann & Soto, 2008; McCrae & Costa, 1996). While, superficially, five seems like a fairly small number to fully capture all of the variability in a personality, research across time, contexts, and individuals has continually demonstrated the Big Five to be an

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5 The Big Five and Five Factor model are quite similar and many argue differ only in how they are measured (Mondak & Halperin, 2008). Despite this, measures of the Big Five and the Five Factor model have been found to be highly correlated and as such within political science literature are often treated as one and the same (Digman, 1996).
exceedingly robust, thorough, and reliable set of distinct and “relatively non-overlapping personality dimensions.” (Carney, et al., 2008, p. 815). As John and colleagues (2008) note in their thorough review of the history of the Big Five, “…the Big Five structure does not imply that personality differences can be reduced to five traits. Rather these five dimensions…each summarize a large number of distinct, more specific personality characteristics.” (p. 119).

Empirical work utilizing the Big Five rose to great prominence during the late 1980s. Studies across disciplines utilized the Big Five battery of traits as independent variables to explain all types of behaviors from “job and school performance to alcohol and tobacco consumption, to musical tastes and the way we dress, to our overall health…” (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, & Dowling, 2010, p. 6). In the years between 1999 and 2007, John and colleagues (2008) identified almost 2,000 new articles published incorporating the Big Five.

*Five Factors Explored:*

Each of the five factors will be briefly discussed. Further explication of each trait is provided in Chapter 5 where hypotheses relating to each are advanced.

*Openness to experience.* Openness to experience references “the depth, breadth, and complexity of an individual’s mental and experiential life” (John et al., 2008, p. 120). People who are open to experience tend to be creative, curious, intelligent, and

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*Again it is important to note that the Big Five, while robust and thorough, is not expected to explain all variability in personality. Rather the Big Five provides broad overarching categories containing numerous smaller dimensions.*
welcoming to new things (Mondak, 2010). These individuals seek out information, knowledge, activities and situations that are novel. As such, openness is associated with “positive responses to novel stimuli” (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, & Dowling 2011b, p. 269). Individuals who are open tend to be less rigid and more willing to “go with the flow.” These people tend to be more responsive to other’s divergent opinions and more likely to reassess and reformulate their own beliefs.

Openness as coined by Costa and McCrae (1992) has been linked to what Goldberg (1992) refers to as intellect. Both openness and intellect reference cognitive capacities and propensities towards thought and analysis. While the two concepts certainly share a great deal of variance they are not one and the same. Intellect as conceptualized by Goldberg is a narrower trait than openness, which incorporates “not only intellect and perceptiveness, but also aesthetic sensitivity, an intrinsic attraction to new experiences…” (Mondak, 2010, p. 48). In this sense intellect refers to a dimension of the larger overarching construct of openness.

Neuroticism (Emotional Stability). Neuroticism is “the degree to which a person experiences the world as threatening and beyond his/her control” (Costa & McCrae, 1992, p. 2). Individuals high on neuroticism experience negative emotionality, “such as feeling anxious, nervous, sad, and tense” (John & Srivastava, 1999, p. 30). These people are more easily upset and sensitive to novel situations. Conversely those low on neuroticism are emotionally stable, easy going, and calm under pressure. They are also more likely to be comfortable during times of interpersonal conflict and disagreement (Gerber et al., 2011b). The opposite of neuroticism is emotional stability.
**Extraversion.** The oldest dimension, extraversion refers to an “energetic approach toward the social and material world” (John et al., 2008, p. 120). High extraverts are socially adventurous, active, energetic, talkative and “out-going.” Those who score low on extraversion (introversion) tend to be shy, avoid social settings and confrontation and also “keep quiet.” Verbal labels used to describe extraversion include energy or enthusiasm. Extraverted individuals are socially poised and seek out interactions with others.

**Conscientiousness.** This trait describes a “socially prescribed impulse control that facilitates task- and goal-directed behavior” (Gerber et al., 2010, p. 113). Conscientiousness references both a dispositional predisposition towards responsibility as well as a volitional dimension highlighting a propensity towards diligence and intensity.

Individuals who rate as conscientious are dependable, reliable, organized and plan for the future (John et al., 2008; Costa & McCrae, 1992). These people tend to be hard-working, high-achieving, and persevering (Mondak, 2010; John et al., 2008). Other terms used to describe the trait of conscientiousness include “prudence” (Hogan, Hogan, & Gregory, 1992) and “control” (Tellegen, 1991). People who score low on conscientiousness tend to be careless, disorganized, and irresponsible.

**Agreeableness.** One of the less understood traits, agreeableness, is least likely to appear in empirical study (Mondak, Hibbing, Canache, Seligson, & Anderson, 2010). Agreeableness has been conceptualized as encompassing two dimensions. The first relates to a pro-social attitude reflecting “warmth,” “kindness” and “altruism.” (John & Srivastava, 1999). The second dimension of agreeableness speaks to a tendency to be “cooperative,” “trusting,” and “modest”. Agreeable individuals avoid conflict and
disagreement and look to “keep the peace.” People who rate low on agreeableness are often “combative”, “cold” and “unfriendly.” Not surprisingly individuals who rate high on agreeableness tend to be more popular among their peers (Jensen-Campbell & Malcolm, 2007; Jensen-Campbell, Knack, Waldrip, & Campbell, 2007).

For the current work, the underlying foundation for the main independent variable of interest, perceived personality trait similarity (PPTS). As past research has shown and as this paper will look to corroborate, certain traits may be more or less important in terms of a person’s willingness to discuss politics. However, additionally this dissertation adds to the literature through it’s innovative focus on the influence that perceived personality trait similarity has on people’s willingness to discuss politics. A theoretical justification for this proposed link will be provided later in the dissertation; however, before this can be done it is important to explain what exactly is meant by perceived personality trait similarity and its significance in the communication process, generally speaking.

PPTS

The current dissertation is interested in the perceptions people have of the personality traits of others. Specifically, I propose that a person’s willingness to communicate about politics interpersonally will be dependent on the perceived similarity between their own personality traits and those of their potential conversation partner. For this dissertation, Turban and Jones’ (1988) conceptualization of PPTS is used as a foundation for our understanding of the variable--as a measure of person A’s (the rater’s) perception about the degree of similarity between their own personality traits and that of another person B (the target).
This is a decidedly different concept than *actual similarity*, which assesses the degree to which two people *actually* share various personality attributes (Byrne, 1971; Ferris & Judge, 1991; Montoya et al., 2008). In terms of interpersonal interaction, PPTS is expected to play a key role in relationship building and attraction more so than actual similarity (Condon & Crano, 1988; Hoyle, 1993; Ptacek & Dodge, 1995). The difference between reality and the perception of reality should not be understated. While reality can be defined as the “truth”, a perception is what a person believes is the truth. While the “truth certainly matters realistically most of the time, people react on the bases of perceptions of reality, not reality *per se*” (Ferris & Judge, 1991, p. 464). As Lippmann (1922) noted, the world is entirely too big and complex to understand in full, so people develop perceptions or “pictures in our head” to understand the world around us. These perceptions are not carbon copies of reality, but rather a sketch of what one *thinks* reality is.

Perceptions are formed through information processing whereby data taken in from the environment is encoded into the mind and stored as information, which in turn is used to construct an attitude or opinion (Massaro & Cowan, 1993). Reality and what a person perceives to be reality can be wildly different. Considering the amount of sensory information a person encounters on a daily basis, it would be impossible to assess each and every piece of data with great cognitive elaboration. Thus, perceptions are formed through economizing cognitive aids at all stages of the processing cycle (i.e., *selective attention* through *information integration*). This multistage filtration process of environmental stimuli means that perceptions are “always incomplete and usually less than accurate” (McCall & Simmons, 1978, p. 104).
The current perception of interest is a form of *impression formation* whereby information is processed and “a cognitive representation of what we know and believe about another person” is made (Hamilton, 1989, p. 239). Social psychologists identify two types of information that can be used to form impressions of people. First are observable cues such as behaviors, personalities and language use. Second are elements resulting from the inferences we make about these behavioral cues and include *stereotypes, attitudes and schemas* (Bem, 1972; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hancock & Dunham, 2001).

Forming impressions of the personality traits of others falls under the broad theoretical umbrella of *person perceptions*. Simply, person perception refers to the act of selecting, interpreting and integrating cognitions from the environment to form impressions of others. In terms of forming perceptions of personality traits most often “we learn about others through direct observation over a period of time within a complex social situation in which we take part in” (Battistich, Assor, Messe, & Aronoff, 1985, p. 189).

*Theoretical models of interpersonal judgment:*

The Realistic Accuracy Model (Funder, 1995) focuses on the accuracy of interpersonal personality judgments. This dissertation is *not* necessarily concerned about the accuracy with which a person is able to perceive other’s personality traits, but rather with the consequences of their perception, regardless of its accuracy. Nevertheless, the RAM provides a relatively thorough explanation of the mechanisms involved in perception formation generally, while specifically making note of the steps necessary to develop accurate judgments.
Accuracy in one’s assessment of another’s personality, according to the RAM, is defined by an observer’s rating of the personality traits associated with the target that are in agreement with the target’s “actual standing on a trait” (Blackman & Funder, 1998, p. 165). A four-stage process through the *relevance, availability, detection* and *utilization* of behavioral cues is necessary, according to the model, to elicit accurate personality assessments. Logically, spending more time with a target leads to increased information available to make accurate judgments. Empirical evidence corroborates these theoretical claims, and also shows that increased relational closeness also increases the accuracy of both perceived and actual personality assessments (Funder, Kolar, & Blackman, 1995).

Another relevant model, Kenny’s (1991) Weighted Average Model (WAM) is an extension of Anderson’s (1968) information integration model. This model states that people judge others based on the information they have about them. Stimuli from the environment are encoded into the brain as information and each piece of information is given an *affective* weight. Anderson argues that people take the totality of available information and weigh the importance of each part to arrive at an overall evaluation of another (Anderson, 1970). In terms of personality perceptions, this means assessing all relevant information pertaining to a person’s personality, and weighing this evidence to obtain an overall evaluation of whether or not (and to what degree) a person has certain traits.

*PPTS in Past Research*

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7 Actual standing on a trait has been measured through self-other agreement, clinical evaluations, and behavioral predictions (Funder, 1995).
A good deal of research finds evidence that perceptions of reality are more influential in cultivating attitudes, opinions and behaviors than is reality itself (See recent meta-analysis, Montoya, et al., 2008). In terms of interpersonal interaction, PPTS is expected to play a key role in relationship building and attraction more so than actual similarity (Condon & Crano, 1988; Hoyle, 1993; Ptacek & Dodge, 1995). In all relationship stages from new acquaintances (Davis, 1963) to married couples (Buunk & Bosman, 1986) people tend to perceive more similarity between one another than there actually is. In other words people may perceive significant others around them to be more similar to themselves than they actually are. Nevertheless, people who perceive others’ personalities to be similar to their own “are more likely to be friends with them, regardless of whether individuals actually are more similar in personality.” (Selfhout, Denissen, Branje, & Meeus, 2009, p. 1161).

The variable PPTS has a long history in the social science fields as an important variable that predicts a variety of outcomes. For example, the relationship between perceived personality similarity and interpersonal attraction has been found across a wide variety of contexts. A strong line of work coming out of organizational behavior finds perceived personality similarity to be positively related to job performance ratings (Strauss, Barrick, & Connerley, 2001). In both survey and observational data, job supervisors rate employees with perceived personality traits similar to their own more positively in terms of job performance than for those employees whose personalities are perceived as divergent (Strauss et al., 2001). Interestingly this similarity-liking relationship has recently been corroborated in human computer interactions. Al-Natour, Benbasat, and Cenfelli (2005) found that people who shopped on e-commerce websites
rated “computer generated shopping assistants” more positively when they were perceived to have personalities more similar to their own. Arguably the most novel exploration of the similarity-attraction paradigm is Turcsan and colleagues’ (2012), finding that dog owners prefer dogs with personality traits perceived to be similar to their own.

These studies bring to light interesting and useful findings concerning PPTS, however, no known studies have looked at PPTS or person perception of personalities in the political realm. This dissertation looks to do just that.

Measuring PPTS

Lab vs. Real world setting. PPTS has been studied in both the real world and laboratory settings. Roughly, studies fall into one of three categories based on the relationship the subjects have with one another. The first group of laboratory studies asks individuals to assess others whom they have never met (phantom-other) based only on information provided by the researchers. A second category of study, also common in laboratory settings, asks individuals to assess others based on short (roughly 5-10 minute) initial meetings. The final category of studies asks people to assess others based on “real world” relationships that already exist. These relationships run the gamut from friends and coworkers to married couples and romantic partners.

Laboratory experiments utilizing the “phantom-other” technique have been criticized a great deal on the grounds of ecological invalidity (Sunnafrank & Miller, 1981). Critics argue that the phantom-other technique, which provides people with specific attitudinal or personal information about a person, is unrealistic considering the ways in which relationships and self-disclosure naturally increase over time.
Furthermore, this type of measure does not allow people to directly assess behaviors, which as noted above, are considered an essential part of personality perceptions (Funder, 1995; Kenny, 2004). Initial meeting studies do not suffer from this same disadvantage because assessments are based on people’s direct perception of an individual through personal interaction. However studies of this nature are criticized on the grounds that accurate perceptions of others’ personalities cannot rightfully be made in just 5-10 minutes. Thus the information gleaned from a study of this kind only speaks to “new relationships” and results are not generalizable to more intimate relationships (e.g., friends, family members...), which are often the focus in studies of personality trait similarity. Furthermore traits represented during initial meetings may not be indicative of a person’s broader personality structure.

For this dissertation perceived personality trait similarity will be assessed within preexisting real world relationships. Two measurements are needed to assess an individual’s PPTS with another. Let’s use two people “A” and “B” as an example. To measure A’s PPTS with B, we need a measure of A’s actual personality (“W”), and a measure of A’s estimate of B’s personality (“Z”). It’s important to note that Z is not person A’s estimate of what they believe person B thinks about their own personality but rather what person A actually estimates person B’s personality to be.

Studies assessing PPTS have utilized different methods to assess PPTS. In a study of supervisors and peers in the workplace, Strauss, Barrick, & Connerley (2001) gave subjects a modified version of the Goldberg Personality Inventory (1992). For each trait on the self-report measure, subjects were asked to rate themselves compared to another on a scale of “less,” “same,” or “more.” If “less” or “more” was selected, “an absolute
difference of one was added to the perceived difference score” (p. 643). The smaller the final number, the more similar individuals perceived themselves to be in relation to the target.

Curry & Kenny (1974) assessed PPTS among college roommates. Using a form of the Allen J. Edwards’s Personal Preference Schedule (1953), 18 pairs of adjectives covering 15 purported aspects of personalities were presented to subjects. Each subject was asked to select the item out of each pair that best described themselves. They were then asked to indicate which item best described the target individual. Correlations between A’s rating of A and A’s rating of B were then calculated using Spearman’s Rho.

Selfhout, Denissen, Branje, & Meeu (2009), also assessed PPTS among college students; however, they were interested in how PPTS changed through the friendship cycle and therefore measured subjects’ PPTS at five different times throughout their freshman year. Selfhout and colleagues (2009) had subjects rate themselves on the full BFI while assessing others on a much shorter TIPI scale. To assess perceived similarity scores, each measure was standardized and averaged before correlations were assessed. In a final relevant example, Djikstra & Barelds (2010) used a modified version of Shafer’s “30-item bipolar rating scale” to construct a ten-item measure of the five-factor model of personality (Shafer, 1999) to measure PPTS among “ideal romantic partners.” A five point semantic differential scale asked subjects to assess where they fell on each pair of adjectives as well as where they thought their “last romantic partner” and their future “ideal” romantic partner would fall. Correlations between their own ratings and others were then performed.
As seen, past research has tended to assess PPTS as either the correlation between A’s actual personality (W) and Z or the absolute value of the difference between A’s actual personality (W) and Z. Both of these analytical approaches have advantages and disadvantages (see Edwards, 1994, and Cohen & Cohen, 1983). These forms of computation are known as dyadic indexes “or measures of profile similarity” (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006, p. 321). Profile similarity measures are commonly used to assess the degree of self-other agreement within dyads on personality trait similarity (Furr, 2008). In this case an individual’s score on a personality profile is matched with their perceived score of another’s personality profile.

There are two forms of dyadic indices, similarity and dissimilarity measures. When using similarity scores, larger values indicate greater similarity between two measures, conversely when using dissimilarity measures smaller scores indicate greater similarity (Kenny et al., 2006). Cronbach and Gleser (1953), argue that the magnitude of a dyadic index (both similarity and dissimilarity) will be a function of the level, spread, and shape of the two scores being compared. Indices differ in their ability to accurately assess each of these dimensions. The type of data being input and the questions being asked should dictate the relative importance of each dimension to a researcher and in turn should dictate whether a similarity or dissimilarity index is used and specifically which one.

Measuring the Big Five

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8 Regression coefficients can also be used to assess similarity if and only if a causal relationship between two measures is thought to exist. In this case one score within the dyad is dependent variable and the second score acts as independent variable.

9 As noted by Kenny and colleagues (2006) the described methods can be applied to dyadic research where two sets of scores come from the same person (e.g., perceived similarity) or from two separate individuals (e.g., actual similarity).
Instruments measuring the Big Five most often take the form of self-report survey batteries that include either a series of words or phrases, and ask respondents to indicate how well each describes them (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). A second approach is to use semantic differential pairs where participants place themselves on the continuum between the two polar terms (Hibbing, et al., 2011 & Mondak & Halperin, 2008).

The expanse of available Big Five measures is rather impressive, ranging from brief batteries which include as few as two items per trait (BFI-10: Rammstedt & John, 2007) to larger batteries that have tens of items per factor (Big Five Inventory (BFI): John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991; NEO-Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R): Costa & McRae, 1992; International Personality Item Pool (IPIP): Goldberg et al. 2006; Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI): Hogan & Hogan, 1992; Personal Characteristics Inventory (PCI): Barrick, Mount, Lafitte & Callans, 1999). Larger scales are advantageous insofar as they show “internal consistency, temporal stability, and convergent and discriminatory validity…” (John et al., 2008, p. 125). For example, Costa and McCrae’s NEO-PI-R (1985, 1992) consists of 240 items, with each of the Big Five trait domains measured with 48 items. Internal reliability (coefficient alphas) of each domain item ranges from 0.86-0.92 (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Weiner & Greene, 2008).

While there are obvious advantages to using this measure and others like it there are also serious disadvantages. The biggest problem is the time it takes to complete. The NEO-PI-R can take upwards of 45 minutes and the questions are quite repetitive (Gosling et al., 2003). Furthermore, including this measure in a survey that also includes other content puts a great deal of cognitive strain on the respondent. Survey respondents are likely to grow frustrated, uninterested, and bored with the repetitive nature of the
questionnaire (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). Considering the amount of response error that can arise from overly-long surveys (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000), measures such as the NEO-PI-R are not often used in communication or political science studies.

In an effort to combat the time and cognitive commitment necessary to complete the aforementioned survey instruments, condensed scales like the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI: Gosling et al., 2003) and the BFI-10 (Rammstedt & John, 2007) have been created. These scales include two items per factor, which greatly reduces item redundancy that is associated with longer scales (Gosling et al., 2003). Whereas longer scales can take upwards of 45 minutes to complete the TIPI and others like it require less than 5 minutes. Evidence shows these shorter scales to be highly correlated with longer measures and an accurate proxy of personalities (Gosling et al., 2003).

For the current study the TIPI will be used to assess personality. The rationale for this choice is two fold. First, the current study requires participants to complete a rather extensive questionnaire that includes rating their own as well as multiple others’ personalities. Considering the time and cognitive strain of this the brevity of the TIPI is of paramount importance. Second the TIPI has become a trusted measure utilized throughout studies within the social sciences. (See Gosling, 2013 for a full list). The TIPI was selected over other condensed personality measures because it was the first of its kind and the most utilized to date.

An ego-centered name generator will be used to identify specific individuals within one’s social network. Respondents will then indicate their own self-reported
personality trait assessment on the TIPI as well as their perceptions of a sample of those listed others on the TIPI as well.

Two measures of PPTS are utilized in this study and their effects on WTCAP are compared. The first PPTS index for each trait is calculated as the absolute value of the difference between A’s actual personality (W) and A’s estimate of B’s personality (Z). The second measure of PPTS is somewhat more complex and is based on an interaction between W and Z that results from the multi-level analytic strategy used to analyze the hierarchical structure of the data collected to test this dissertation’s proposed hypotheses. Now that all variables of interest have been explicated and theoretical rational has been offered, the next chapter will look specifically at the hypothesized relationships between PPTS and WTCAP.
Chapter 5: Hypotheses and Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to assess dyadic discussion outcomes (WTCAP) based on characteristics of a focal individual (ego), characteristics of a potential discussion partner (alter) and the similarity of the ego-alter (dyad).

While the main crux of this dissertation specifically deals with the role of PPTS on WTCAP some preliminary hypotheses relating to ego and alter personality traits in isolation from each other and WTCAP will also be advanced. When clear predictions can be made, hypotheses will be put forward, while research questions will be advanced when theoretical justification is unclear.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, the data structure is hierarchical. The dyadic discussion outcome, WTCAP, is based on characteristics of an ego, characteristics of an alter and the characteristics of the ego-alter (i.e., the dyad). A dyad “can be viewed as a group with two members” (Kenny et al., 2007, p. 79). The data are hierarchically structured insofar as multiple alters (level 1) are nested within groups defined by an ego (level 2) (Kenny & Kashy, 2011). The design of the current study is therefore what Kenny and colleagues (2006) have come to label a “one-with-many indistinguishable partner” design whereby each ego has multiple alters, however each alter is only associated with a single ego. See Appendix, C Figure 1.
Three predictions will be made for each of the Big Five traits on WTCAP. The first set of hypotheses account for the direct effect of an ego’s personality traits on their WTCAP. These inquires assess what personality traits of an ego are positively associated with WTCAP regardless of whom the alter is or the environment in which the conversation takes place. Existing work studying the direct relationship between personality traits and political discussion has most often done so by connecting the specific trait of an ego with frequency of actual political discussion (Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Mondak, 2010). This study adds to the literature by exploring the link between specific traits and WTCAP, which, captures a unique dimension of political discussion above and beyond frequency alone. The second set of hypotheses concerns an ego’s perception of the personality traits of an alter and the effect of said perception on their WTCAP. In other words, are there specific personality traits that, when displayed by potential interlocutors, increase an ego’s WTCAP. Past research shows that when choosing relationship partners (e.g., romantic partners, friends, teammates etc…) certain characteristics are generally more attractive than others (Cottrell, Neuberg, & Li, 2007; Wortman & Wood, 2011). To the author’s knowledge, the current work is the first study of its kind to specifically consider the personality traits people value in others, when communicating about politics.

The final set of hypotheses builds on the first two sets, and are the main focus of this dissertation. They deal with the effect of an ego’s PPTS with an alter on ego’s WTCAP.

Hypotheses Set 1- Level 2 (ego):
Extraversion is defined by Costa and McCrae (1992) as “the degree to which a person needs attention and social interaction” (p. 9). Extraverts tend to be more talkative and outgoing, while less extraverted individuals tend to be more reluctant to engage in communicative activities, especially during initial meetings (Paulhus & Trapnell, 1998; Selfhout et al., 2010).

In research on political discussion and personalities, one of the more robust findings is the positive association between extraversion and political participation, including political discussion frequency, such that people who rate high on extraversion tend to discuss politics more frequently than those who rate as less extraverted (Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Gerber et al., 2011). Considering this, it should follow that egos who rate higher on extraversion will generally be more WTCAP.

H1(a) Ego extraversion will be positively associated with WTCAP.

Openness is positively related to self-reflection and a general propensity to try new things and be open to alternative ideas, situations and people (John et al., 2008). Similarly to extraversion, openness also has been found to be predictive of political participation (Gerber, et al., 2011). This is consistent with findings that show people high in openness “are more interested and knowledgeable about politics” (Gerber et al., 2011, p. 276). Recent research has suggested a link between openness and frequency of political discussion (Hibbings, et al., 2011; Mondak, 2010).

H1(b) Ego openness will be positively associated with WTCAP.

Conscientious individuals like to follow norms and rules, and champion order above all else (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2004). Conversely, individuals low in conscientiousness are comfortable “flying by the seat of their pants” and challenging
norms. Conscientiousness is negatively related to risk taking. This finding exists not only generally but also in terms of certain political ends. Kowert and Hermann (1997) found among college students that conscientiousness was positively related to risk avoidance in public policy decisions.

Little empirically is known about the influence of conscientiousness on political discussion. In tests of political discussion frequency results have been inconsistent as to whether or not a relationship exists. For instance Mondak and Halperin (2008) find a significant positive relationship between conscientiousness and discussion frequency in one of three tested samples, however Hibbing and colleagues (2010) as well as Gerber and colleagues (2012) find a negative (but not always significant) relationship between conscientiousness and discussion.

Despite the empirical ambiguity, theoretically conscientiousness should be negatively related to discussion. On one hand, high conscientious individuals’ long for order and structure as such these individuals will be more likely to avoid political discussions for fear of interpersonal unrest or conflict. Conversely, less conscientious individuals may think less about the outcome of expressing potentially disagreeable political opinions and jump head first into a conversation.

H1(c): Ego conscientiousness will be negatively associated with WTCAP.

Individuals high on agreeableness have a general tendency towards cooperation, empathy and conflict avoidance. Agreeableness is negatively related to interpersonal discrepancies, with people seeking out low-confrontation environments (Park & Antonioni, 2007). Conversely people rating lower on agreeableness have a tendency to
enjoy debate and not actively avoid competition or conflict (Park & Antonioni, 2007). Considering the nature of political talk, agreeable individuals should be less WTCAP.

Furthermore Gerber and colleagues (2011) found that, in terms of political participation, people high on agreeableness “are particularly reluctant to participate in ways that are likely to involve contact (with others)” (p. 272).

H1(d) Ego agreeableness will be negatively associated with WTCAP.

The effect of ego neuroticism on WTCAP is somewhat difficult to predict. Theoretically neuroticism speaks to the degree “to which a person experiences the world as threatening and beyond his/her control” (Costa & McCrae, 1992, p. 9). Neurotic individuals “tend to be anxious, sensitive, and easily upset” (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, & Dowling, 2012, p. 854). Furthermore, neuroticism is positively related to interpersonal discomfort and nervousness (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998). In terms of politics those low in neuroticism tend to be more politically interested and knowledgeable (Gerber et al., 2011b). These facts would lead one to presume neuroticism to be negatively associated with WTCAP. However past research has found inconsistent findings regarding neuroticism and political discussion.

In three studies (Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Mondak, 2010; Hibbing, et al., 2011), no relationship was found between neuroticism and frequency of political discussion. Conversely, in one recent work (Gerber et al., 2012), neuroticism was negatively related to political discussion frequency. In terms of general political participation neuroticism is not found to have any significant effect (Vecchione & Caprara 2009). As Mondak and Halperin (2008) note, neuroticism is “the Big Five trait for which we have the thinnest
basis to voice concrete predictions with respect to political behavior” (p. 345).

Considering these inconsistencies no clear prediction can be made.

RQ1: What effect does ego neuroticism have on WTCAP?

*Hypotheses Set 2 - Level 1 (Alter):*

Interpersonal attraction is quite complex. Just as some people prefer apples to oranges some people are more attracted to potential romantic partners who have brown hair over black hair. While no two people will be attracted to exactly the same thing, there are situations when a general preference among the population is present. For example, research shows people seek out friendships with others who are seen as trustworthy rather than dishonest or deceitful (Cottrell et al., 2007). Anderson (1968) presented a group of study participants a list of 555 trait adjectives and asked each subject to “think of a person as being described by each word and rate the word according to how much you would like the person” (p. 272). The highest rated traits were *sincere, honest, understanding, loyal, truthful, trustworthy, intelligent, dependable, open-minded,* and *thoughtful.*

Considering these findings and other’s like it leads to the presumption that certain personality traits will be more attractive than others to people when considering engaging in a political conversation. The next set of hypotheses explore the direct influence that an alter’s personality traits may have on an ego’s WTCAP.

As discussed above, people who are extraverted are by nature more talkative, friendly and welcoming to discussion. Extraversion is also found to be positively related with larger social networks (Swickert, Rosentreter, Hittner, & Mushrush, 2002). These individuals are comfortable engaging in conversation and as such may make others feel
more comfortable during conversations. Discussion may flow more naturally than with a more introverted individual who is more reluctant to engage in a consistent flow. Everyone has experienced occasions of trying to converse with someone who had little intention of carrying on a conversation. It can be quite frustrating and feel like a lot of “work.” Considering this it should theoretically follow that egos will be more WTCAP with an extraverted alter than an introverted alter.

H2(a) Perceived alter *extraversion* will be positively associated with WTCAP.

A large body of research finds that people seek out others who are high in openness when choosing, friends, romantic partners, co-workers, teammates, and discussion partners generally (Cotrell, et al., 2007). Again, considering the potential for disagreement when discussing politics, alters who are perceived to be open may be seen more favorably.

Research on interpersonal messages by Hodges and Byrne (1972) found that “open-minded disagreement is more tolerable than dogmatic disagreement” (p. 315). Similarly, Broome (1981) found that individuals who were presented with views dissimilar to their own in an “open manner” as opposed to a “closed manner” responded significantly more positively. Furthermore, when messages were presented in an open manner, focal respondents reported a greater propensity to learn more about the other.

H2(b) Perceived alter *openness* will be positively associated with WTCAP.

High conscientious individuals tend to be reliable, efficient, and practical (John, et al., 2008). Conversely low conscientiousness individuals are often described as lazy, careless and even disorderly (John, et al., 2008). All things being equal qualities
possessed by high conscientious individuals should be more attractive than those possessed by low conscientious individuals as they are more sociably desirable traits.

H2(c): Perceived alter conscientiousness will be positively associated with WTCAP.

Individuals who score high on agreeableness tend to be warm, understanding and open to compromise. Conversely less agreeable individuals tend to be “hardheaded and skeptical” (Gerber et al., 2012, p. 8). When seeking out a political discussion partner, an alter who is less likely to argue, disagree or cause conflict will likely be preferred to one that is combative or argumentative.

H2(d) Perceived alter agreeableness will be positively associated with WTCAP.

Predictions about the final trait, neuroticism, are somewhat more difficult to make. There is no clear theoretical reason to assume alter neuroticism will be positively or negatively related to an ego’s WTCAP.

RQ2: What relationship does perceived alter neuroticism have on ego WTCAP?

Hypotheses Set 3- Cross-level interaction (PPTS):

The final set of hypotheses builds on the first two by accounting for both the traits of an ego, an alter and the interaction between the two—“the dyad.” Specifically predictions regarding PPTS on WTCAP will be advanced. See Appendix C, Figures 2-6 for hypothesized interaction graphs.

Competing arguments can be made regarding the effect of PPTS on extraversion and WTCAP. On one hand it makes a great deal of sense to suppose that individuals who score high on extraversion will be more interested in engaging with others who also enjoy social interaction and communicating generally (other extraverts). A person who ranks
high on extraversion may grow inpatient or bored with someone not engaging in a similar level of message exchange. Conversely, less extraverted individuals may be more comfortable with the communication style of other less extraverted individuals. Based on uncertainty reduction theory, it should follow that less extraverted individuals will have a reduced sense of uncertainty when interacting with someone whose communication style is similar to their own.

A theoretical argument could also be made supporting a complementarity hypothesis for the effect of PPTS in extraversion on WTCAP, based on the significant body of work which finds that individuals who are dominant prefer interacting with others who are submissive, and that submissive individuals prefer interacting with individuals who allow them to be submissive (i.e., dominants) (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997). Thus, their complementary traits allow for their needs (either to be dominant or submissive) to be gratified (De Raad & Doddem-Winsemius, 1992). While dominance and extraversion are by no means one and the same, they do share similar properties.

A person higher on extraversion may prefer to discuss politics with someone lower on extraversion as they will have a greater opportunity to express their view points than when conversing with another highly extraverted individual. Conversely, an individual lower on extraversion may enjoy discussing politics with an individual higher on extraversion so they feel less responsible to “carry the conversation.”

RQ3: What effect does PPTS on extraversion have on ego WTCAP?

Openness is expected to be positively related to WTCAP at both the level of the ego and alter. Thus it could readily be assumed that PPTS on openness is positively related to WTCAP. Thus, an individual who is open would most likely wish to seek out
another individual who is open. As openness scores increase, so too should PPTS and WTCAP.

If an individual rates low on openness they may be considered “closed-minded.” Being closed-minded inherently means having a lower propinquity to engage with alternative viewpoints or learning about novel perspectives. Thus a person who is considered “closed” minded may prefer communicating about politics with another closed-minded individual if that individual shares similar political views to their own. In this case PPTS would be positively associated with WTCAP. Furthermore even if two closed-minded individuals do hold differing political views it is quite possible that these individual’s may enjoy arguing with one another considering the nature of the trait (Rokeach, 1960).

H3(a): PPTS on openness will be positively related to ego WTCAP.

People low in conscientiousness have low impulse control and often engage in behaviors that people high in conscientiousness find “annoying.” (Jensen-Campbell & Malcolm, 2007). People high in conscientiousness experience great uncertainty when interacting with less conscientious individuals. Less conscientious individuals may dislike the structured nature of conversation that conscientious individuals prefer. Thus it should follow that conscientious egos will be more WTCAP with conscientious alters and conversely low conscientious ego’s will be more WTCAP with low conscientious alters.

H3(b) PPTS on conscientiousness will be positively related to ego WTCAP.

An agreeable individual will most likely seek out another individual who like themselves wish to avoid conflict, arguments and the like. Conversely people rating lower on agreeableness have a tendency to enjoy debate and not actively avoid
competition or conflict (Park & Antonioni, 2007). Considering this it would not be surprising if low agreeable individuals would prefer to engage in a political discussion with another who like themselves wish to debate. These individuals may grow bored or uninterested in an individual who, unlike themselves, wish to avoid debate.

H3(c) PPTS on *agreeableness* will be positively related to ego WTCAP.

Neuroticism is related to greater anxiety, self-consciousness, insecurity and irritability. Individuals high on neuroticism are generally more uncomfortable around individuals who are unlike themselves insofar as it leads to greater uncertainty of the other which inherently causes greater levels of discomfort. People who are more neurotic are self-conscious and as such will work to “get in sync” with their interpersonal partners (Cuperman, & Ickes, 2009). The more neurotic they perceive another person the more likely they are to also perceive them as similar in other ways as well. Thus when neuroticism is high a person may perceive another highly neurotic individual as similar to themselves and as such have a general proclivity to engage in conversation with them at a higher level than someone they perceive to be more dissimilar.

Being low on neuroticism (high emotional stability) leads one to be more relaxed under stressful conditions and as such more comfortable discussing contentious issues such as politics. Hibbing, et al., (2011) found that individuals with lower scores on neuroticism (higher emotional stability) were even more likely to “have a discussion partner with different political views” (p. 614). They argue that emotional stability may help individuals “overcome” a natural tendency to discuss politics with like-minded people.

H3(d) PPTS on *Neuroticism* will be positively related to ego WTCAP.
Chapter 6: Methods

Overview

An online survey was conducted during the winter of 2013 with complete data from 291 participants (egos). The survey instrument was accessed online through the Qualtrics survey software. Participants were first asked questions pertaining to their own partisanship, ideological values, personality traits, political efficacy, political knowledge, willingness to communicate (WTC), willingness to self-censor (WTSC), political discussion history, and general demographics before being asked to identify and name specific individuals within their social networks. Next respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of the personality traits of three of their listed network members (alters). Finally, a series of hypothetical scenarios were presented and participants were asked to indicate their willingness to communicate about politics in each situation. Appendix A shows complete item wording for survey measures.

Participants

Participants were recruited from communication classes at a large Midwestern University. Class credit was offered as incentive for study participation. Complete data
from 291 participants, 26% male and 73% female were collected. Respondents’ demographics including race (77% White, 5% Black, 12% Asian, and 5% other) and political partisanship (35% of the sample identified as Democrat (Strong = 39%, Not very strong = 61%), 33% as Republicans (Strong = 42%, Not very strong = 58%), and 32% as Independent or other) were measured. Additionally, participants were asked to provide information about their relationship with three members of their social networks (alters). Specific information about 873 alters was collected.

Procedure

Data were collected by a computerized questionnaire. The researcher made the questionnaire available to students enrolled in the School of Communication’s research participant pool. Class credit was offered as incentive for study participation. Information about the study was posted on the student research participant pool webpage, where it was explained that the study would involve completing a questionnaire pertaining to their personal attitudes and opinions as well as making assessments of others’ personal traits. At this time participants were also made aware of the estimated time requirement (approximately 35 minutes). Additionally, a link leading to the online study site hosted at Qualtrics.com was provided.

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10 Originally 303 participants engaged with the survey instrument however 12 individuals were excluded from the final working sample. Six of these individuals completed the entire survey in under 8 minutes (which was ten minutes less than the next closest participant) which indicated they merely clicked through the survey and did not actively engage with the questions. Another six individuals were excluded because they did not provide complete data for TIPI scores of alters.

11 Two questions measuring political partisanship, adopted from the American National Election Study (ANES) were used to identify each participant’s political partisanship. Individuals were first asked whether they think of themselves as a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or something else. A follow-up question then asked whether they consider themselves to be a “Strong” or “Not very strong” party identifier.
Once they logged on to the study site, participants were provided further information and details about the study (including technical requirements and the like). At this time participants were asked to sign an online consent and begin the survey.

**Survey Instrument**

Each participant completed the same survey instrument. Participants were first asked to report their own political partisanship, political ideology, political interest, general political discussion behaviors, willingness to communicate (WTC), willingness to self-censor (WTSC) and general demographics. Details regarding these measurements are presented later in this chapter. Next participants were asked to assess their own personality traits based on the 10-item TIPI.

Next a “name generator” was used to identify persons within an individual’s ego-network. The name generator presented participants with a series of eight letters, A, J, M, S, L, T, E, and R. For each letter, respondents were asked to indicate whether they “know someone whose first name begins with that letter.” The specific eight letters used are those found to be the most common first letters of first names in the United States according to the United States Census Bureau (2010). Full survey question wording can be found in Appendix A.

Letters in this case are intended to act as “cueing mechanisms to enhance” recall free from biases commonly found in personal network elicitation (McCarty & Govindaramanujam, 2005, p. 10)\(^\text{12}\). By only priming respondents with a letter, the

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\(^{12}\) This procedure is a modification of McCarty et al.’s., (1997), “first name cued recall procedure.” In an effort to elicit a representative sample of a person’s total social network, McCarty and colleagues presented study participants with a list of 50 common first names. Respondents were instructed to indicate when they “heard a name that matched someone they knew.” (p. 305). Knowing a person meant being able to
recalled name will theoretically be the one that is most salient. While it is quite possible
that the most salient name will be that of a strong tie (Brewer, 1993), it is not guaranteed.
It may be equally likely to assume that the most salient name is that of the person an
individual last spoke to, or received an email from or any variation of interaction. In this
case it is quite feasible that a friend, relative, or simple acquaintance may be listed.
Furthermore, on occasions when the name of an alter is not readily available, a person
may search their memory for acquaintance names regardless of the person’s location
within their social network (Brewer, 1997).

A person indicated that they “knew” such a person by providing said other’s first
name (McCarty et al., 1997). For each name listed participants were asked to specify
whether the individual was a friend, relative, or acquaintance. This resulted in 54% of
discussion partners being friends, 21% being acquaintances and 25% being family\textsuperscript{13}.
(Appendix B, Table 1). These percentages are based on the final 873 alters for whom
complete data was collected. Initially each ego listed up to eight alters however detailed
information was only gleaned for three of the eight. The mean number of alter’s listed per
ego was 7.82 ($SD = .791$) (Descriptive statistics for each letter provided, Appendix B,
Table 2).

This form of name generator technique is used here as a means of identifying a
representative sample of ties within an individual’s ego-network. Since this research is
not interested in past actual discussions, asking traditional ego-network questions (i.e.,
with whom do you discuss politics) is not required. Again, this dissertation is not
\textsuperscript{13}Family members typically comprise roughly 50% of all named discussants when traditional name
generating procedures are utilized (Klofstad, et al., 2009; Morey et al., 2012).
concerned with whether or not a person has ever discussed politics with a particular person, only whether their WTCAP will vary based on PPTS (perceived personality trait similarity).

Finally, given that measures of not only an individual’s personality but the perceived personality traits of a potential discussion partner are needed, existing relationships need to be studied. While laboratory techniques have been used to study PPTS among new acquaintances and “phantom others”, for the current work they are not the best means of study (See Chapter 4 for further discussion). In the next step, the survey instrument randomly selected three of the eight listed alters and a single question was used to measure similarity between a respondent and listed alter. Respondents were asked, “Generally speaking how similar are you to [alter]?” (very dissimilar (1), dissimilar (2), neither similar nor dissimilar (3), similar (4), very similar (5)). On average similarity scores tended to be neither similar nor dissimilar ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.17$). (Appendix B, Table 1).

To obtain personality trait information, the focal respondents (ego) provided self-reports of their own personality traits as well as their perceptions of the personality traits of the three selected individuals within their social networks (alters). Furthermore information about the relationship between an ego and each alter was collected through ego’s report. Thus the final data set is hierarchically structured insofar as alter’s are nested within groups defined by an ego (Kenny & Kashy, 2011). The design of the current study is therefore what Kenny and colleagues (2006) have come to label a “one-with-many indistinguishable partner” design whereby each ego has multiple alters, however each alter is only associated with a single ego.
More specifically, the survey instrument asked respondents to indicate their perceptions of the personality traits of the three selected individuals on the TIPI. Finally, participants indicated their willingness to communicate about politics with these same three alters using the WTCAP scale.

The resulting data structure includes 291 egos, each with 3 alters, which equates to 873 dyads (3 per ego). Each dyad consists of an ego and one of the three randomly selected alters for which relational information was gleaned. These data are “nonreciprocal” in that outcome scores on the dependent variable only come from the ego and not both members of the dyad.

**Measures**

*Personality Traits:* Personality characteristics were assessed with the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) (Gosling, et al., 2003). The TIPI survey instrument utilizes a list of ten trait adjective pairs (e.g., “Dependable, self-disciplined”). Each pair of traits represents prototypical trait adjectives used to describe and define the Big Five dimensions. Each of the five traits are represented by two items, and subscales for each are computed by respondents average response across both items per scale (See Appendix A). Participants report whether “I see myself as” each of these trait pairs on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = “disagree strongly” to 7 = “agree strongly.”

For each of the Big Five traits, a separate score was computed by averaging all item responses across each subscale. By design, five of the ten phrases were reverse coded (one for each trait). In terms of raters’ self reports of their own personalities, scores on the TIPI for each domain were: Openness \((M = 5.58, SD = .99)\), Extraversion \((M = 4.91, SD = 1.25)\), Neuroticism \((M = 4.61, SD = 1.19)\), Agreeableness \((M = 4.93, SD = 85)\)
1.11), Conscientiousness ($M = 5.46, SD = 1.11$). These scores were in the normal range of those reported with larger and more diverse samples (Gosling et al., 2003). (Appendix B, Table 3).

The average score for alters (based on ego’s perception) were: Openness ($M = 4.84, SD = 1.20$), Extraversion ($M = 4.84, SD = 1.43$), Neuroticism ($M = 4.54, SD = 1.31$), Agreeableness ($M = 4.53, SD = 1.29$), Conscientiousness ($M = 4.83, SD = 1.34$). (Appendix B, Table 3).

Correlations between all items for each of the five TIPI scales were computed for both egos and alters (Appendix B, Table 4). Correlations for ego scores on the five traits scales ranged from .403 to .613 (Appendix B, Table 3). It is important to note that superficially these correlations appear to be lower than what is ideal when assessing the internal structure of a scale. However, the somewhat low alpha scores are a function of there only being two items per scale, and they are very much inline with other studies utilizing the TIPI (Gosling et al., 2003). Furthermore Gosling and colleagues report numerous tests supporting the validity of the TIPI. Intercorrelations between each of the five trait scales for egos ranged from .082 to .343 (Appendix B, Table 5).

Correlations for alters’ scores on the five traits scales ranged from .46 to .62 indicating solid internal consistency (Appendix B, Table 3). Intercorrelations between each of the five trait for alters’ scales were low ranging from .025 to .435 (Appendix B, Table 5). Intercorrelations between ego and alter trait scales were also low ranging from .023 to .420 (Appendix B, Table 5).

Willingness to Communicate About Politics (WTCAP): A measurement instrument was created by the author to assess WTCAP. The final survey instrument asked
respondents to evaluate eight items on a 5-point Likert-like scale (1 = “Very unlikely” to 5 = “Very likely”). Each item asked respondents to indicate how likely they would be to communicate about politics in hypothetical situations with a specific individual. Scale items were created based on similar measurement tools discussed at length in Chapter 3. (For complete question wording see Appendix A). The specific individuals in this case were the three randomly selected by the computer from those listed on the position generator. The instructions were presented as follows (adopted and modified from Gibbons, Gerrard, Blanton, & Russell (1998)):

*We will now ask you to imagine yourself in certain types of situations. We are not suggesting that you would be in these situations. However we would like you to please think about these situations and how you would respond to them. Then answer each of the questions that follow.*

The entire WTCAP scale was completed for each of the three selected alters at a time. The name of the target alter was automatically loaded into the question by the computer program (e.g., “Suppose you ran into (Listed alter e.g., Bob) at a party...”). The summated score across all items was computed to reflect an individual’s willingness to communicate about politics. Higher scores reflect a greater willingness to communicate about politics.

*Scale Creation*

The original eight statements yielded a Chronbach’s alpha (α = .759) indicating solid internal reliability (See Appendix B, Table 6). A histogram of the distribution of WTCAP scores is provided in Appendix C, Figure 7. The mean score was 2.56 (SD = .851). Next a principal components factor analysis was conducted and a two-factor
solution (using the Kaiser criterion: eigenvalues > 1) (Hayes et al., 2005; Kaiser, 1960; Preacher & MacCallum, 2003) was found. Considering this was the first test of the WTCAP scale it was necessary to perform an exploratory rather than confirmatory analysis on the item pool. In general, confirmatory analyses are not conducted until after an exploratory analysis is first conducted.

Mean scores for the eight item ranged from 2.05 to 3.16. However the two highest mean scores and the only two scores above 3.0 were those items found to load on the second factor. A correlation between all eight items was next run and results indicate that these same two items were poorly correlated with all other scale items (see Appendix B, Table 7). Upon further reflection there was reason to believe that the nature of these two items were substantively different from the others.

In six of the eight initial statements participants were asked how likely they would be to either “engage in a conversation,” “initiate a conversation,” or “continue discussing…” politics in a specific scenario. However in the other two items (those which loaded on the second factor) participants were asked how likely they would be to “listen to what a person had to say?” Listening is a categorically different form of behavior than is active communication. While someone may not be willing to seek out or actively participate in a political discussion they may still be willing to “sit back” and listen to what is being said. Depending on the style of listening a person engages in greatly moderates the amount of cognitive strain involved \(^1\) (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Keyton & Rhodes, 1994; Watson, Barker, & Weaver, 1995). Finally, a person may find something

\(^1\) It has been argued that listening styles are influenced at both the trait and state level (Imhof, 2004; Roberts, & Vinson, 1998).
someone has to say interesting or insightful without necessarily wanting to discuss or
debate a topic.

Next the same tests were run excluding these two items. With the exclusion of
these two items the remaining six yielded a substantially higher Chronbach’s alpha (α = .906) indicating powerful internal reliability (See Appendix B, Table 6). The mean score
was 2.37 (SD = .99), a paired samples t-test indicated a significant difference between the
six and eight item means (t (868) = 16.7, p = .000)\(^{15}\). Next a principal components factor
analysis was conducted and a clear single factor solution was found. Finally the resulting
inter-item correlations were extremely high ranging from .424 to .837.

Considering these criteria two items were excluded in computing the final
WTCAP scale. The final measure was constructed as the mean of the six items indicated
to load on a single factor\(^{16}\).

*Perceived Personality Trait Similarity* (PPTS): Two measures of PPTS are
utilized in this study and their effects on WTCAP are compared. The first measure of
PPTS was a calculation of the absolute difference between an individual’s self score on a
TIPI trait subscale and their perception of an alter’s score on that same trait subscale
(Shiota & Levenson, 2007; Sunnafrank, 1986; Berger, 1975). In actuality five
independent variables were calculated, one for each of the Big Five trait scales. Simply

\(^{15}\) The lower mean score is purely a reflection of dropping the two items that had the highest means. Superficially having higher means does not mean these were bad items, however the higher means take on greater meaning when considering the support they provide indicating the potential behavior difference between listening and discussing.

\(^{16}\) To further test the scale all analyses in Chapter 7 were run with the eight-item scale and the six-item scale. There were no significant differences between the two. Considering the lack of significant difference between the two scales the more parsimonious 6-item scale was selected.
put, PPTS scores were calculated for Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, and Openness.

\[ PPTS_{Trait} = |\text{TraitX1} - \text{TraitX2}| \]

The second approach to modeling PPTS is to include an interaction term between an ego’s measure on a personality trait and their perception of an alter’s score on that same trait. That allows the effect of the alter’s personality trait to depend on the level of the ego’s personality trait. This approach is less restrictive than using the absolute value of the difference, because it allows for the possibility of a complementarity preference, such that ego prefers to communicate with dissimilar alters.

As detailed below, multilevel modeling (MLM) is used to test the relationship between PPTS and WTCAP (Lyons, et al., 2002). MLM has been shown to be a powerful tool for uncovering dyadic congruence (i.e. similarity) and incongruence (i.e. dissimilarity) as well as the direction and magnitude of these phenomena (Lyons, Zarit, Sayer & Whitlatch, 2002). The dependent variable WTCAP with each alter is measured at level one. As predictor variables, ego’s personality scores are entered at level two and alter’s personality scores are entered at level one. The cross-level interaction for each personality trait indicates whether the effect of ego’s score depends on alter’s score and vice-versa. By creating a product term between the ego and alter scores, we are able to determine if WTCAP is predicted by some combination of the dyad member scores (Campbell & Kashy, 2002). Thus, the interaction term between ego and alter creates a measure of similarity, or in this case perceived similarity.

**Controls**
Descriptive statistics for all control variables can be found in Appendix B table 8. Bivariate correlations for all ego level variables provided in Appendix B table 16.

Willingness to Communicate: It is theoretically fair to assume that an individual who is generally high on trait WTC will inherently score higher on WTCAP just as we would expect someone low on WTC to score lower on WTCAP. To further substantiate the claim that WTCAP is a state based variable it is important to control for trait based communicative characteristics that may confound the relationship between personality traits and WTCAP.

McCroskey & Richmond’s (1987) willingness to communicate survey instrument is a 20-item measure of a person’s trait-level willingness to initiate conversation. The measure consists of 20 statements concerning feelings about communicating with others (e.g., “Talk with a salesperson in a store”). Respondents indicate the percent of time they would choose to communicate in each situation (0 = Never to 100 = Always). Of the 20 items, 8 are designed to distract attention from the remaining 12 scored items. A total score is then computed based on the summation of the 12 scored responses ($M = 68.45$, $SD = 16.94$). Alpha reliability for the scale was high ($\alpha = .897$). (For item wording see Appendix A).

Willingness to Self-Censor (WTSC): Again, to further substantiate the claim that WTCAP is a state based variable it is important to control for trait based communicative characteristics such as WTSC.

Hayes, Glynn & Shanahan’s (2005) WTSC survey instrument is an 8-item measure of an individual level characteristic “of the person that will enhance the likelihood that the person will refrain from speaking his or her opinion around a
dissenting audience across situations…” (p. 304). The measure consists of 8 statements concerning ways in which individuals interact with others (e.g., “When I disagree with others, I’d rather go along with them than argue about it.”). Respondents indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree”). Two of the 8 items are designed to be reverse scored before summating all responses to obtain a single scale average. The mean was 2.89 (SD = .704) the median WTSC was 3.00 and the alpha reliability was high (α = .897). (For item wording see Appendix A).

Political Ideology: On a fundamental level, a political ideology references a core set of beliefs held by a person regarding how a society should be run (Converse, 1964; Erikson & Tedin, 2003). Where a person’s ideology originates and how it evolves overtime are complex questions and oft debated. A link has been found between personality traits and ideology such that certain traits are more likely to be found in conservative leaning persons while other traits are expected to be found in liberal leaning persons (Carney, et al., 2008; McCloskey, 1958, 1964). Recently, Albert, Funk, and Hibbing (2005) advanced the argument that ideology may be at least partially a genetic predisposition. Mondak (2010) suggests, “the impact of biology on ideology may operate in large part through personality” (p. 127). Considering the possible confounding nature of personalities and ideology it is important to control for their effect.

Two questions were used to assess individuals’ ideology pertaining to social and economic issues. The two questions asked “How liberal or conservative do you consider yourself to be in regards to social issues?” and “How liberal or conservative do you consider yourself to be in regards to economic issues?” Response options for both were
on a seven-point scale ranging from: Very conservative - Very liberal, with more liberal responses coded high. A composite measure of political ideology was created by summing each individual’s scores for the two question ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.56$). The two questions were positively and significantly correlated with one another ($r = .583$, $p < .001$).

**Political interest**: Past research has consistently found a positive relationship between political interest and frequency of political discussion (Huckfeldt, 2007). Theoretically this makes a great deal of sense. You would certainly expect a person who is very interested in politics to be more willing or have a greater drive to engage in discussion about politics than their less interested counterparts. Political interest is found to be a strong predictor of not only political discussion but also various forms of civic engagement including voting, and rally attendance (Bimber, 2001; Brady, Verba, & Scholzman, 1995).

A single question asking, “Generally speaking, how interested are you in what’s going on in government and politics?” was used to measure political interest. A three-point response scale was used with response options of Not at all interested, Somewhat interested, and Very interested ($M = 1.92$, $SD = .636$).

**Political efficacy**: Political efficacy refers to a person’s confidence in participating in the political process and their ability to influence social change (Morrell, 2003). We expect that the more capable a person feels in terms of influencing the political process the more willing they are to communicate about politics. This is consistent with past research has shown political efficacy to be positively related to political discussion frequency (McLeod, et al., 1999; Conover et al., 2002).
A single statement, “Sometimes politics and governments are so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on.” Was used to assess internal political efficacy. Participants indicated their level of agreement with the aforementioned statement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree”) ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.11$).

**Political Knowledge:** Past research finds more politically knowledgeable are more likely to discuss politics (Bennett et al., 2000; Kwak et al., 2005). These individuals may have the cognitive skills necessary to understand political matters better than those who are less knowledgeable. We expect political knowledge to influence WTCAP in substantive ways.

Political knowledge was assessed through five basic questions (Delli Carpni & Keeter, 1996). To obtain a measure of factual knowledge, questions asked (1) *What job or political office does Joe Biden now hold?*, (2) *Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional, The President, The Congress or The Supreme Court?*, (3) *How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto, 2/3, 3/4, or 4/5?*, (4) *Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington, Democrat or Republican?*, (5) *Would you say one of the parties is more conservative than the other at the national level, which party is more conservative, Democrats or Republicans?* Answers were marked as either correct or incorrect and each person’s score was their proportion of correct to total questions attempted. Again a composite variable was created combining answers of all five questions ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.09$).
**Political Discussion:** Four questions relating to political discussion were asked. Instructions for this set of questions read: “From time to time people discuss government, elections, and politics with other people. We would like to know how frequently you have these kinds of conversations.” The first measure of political discussion captured overall discussion frequency with a single item, “How many days per week, on average, do you talk to someone about national politics?” (0-7 days, \(M = 3.021, SD = 2.144\)).

Next, two questions assessing the frequency of political discussion with partisan partners was asked. “How many days per week, on average, do you talk to one or more Republicans about national politics?” and “How many days per week, on average, do you talk to one or more Democrats about national politics?” (0-7 days, Republicans, \(M = 3.01, SD = 2.56\), Democrats, \(M = 2.99, SD = 2.54\)). Finally an open-ended question asked “About how many people do you talk to about national politics in an average week?” (\(M = 2.34, SD = 3.07\)). (See Appendix B, Table 9).

In the final analyses only one measure of political discussion behavior was included as control, “How many days per week, on average do you talk to someone about national politics?” Other questions regarding discussion frequency were not included because they were found to be highly correlated with each other.

**Analytic Framework**

The purpose of this study is to assess dyadic discussion outcomes (WTCAP) based on characteristics of an ego, characteristics of an alter and characteristics of the ego-alter (i.e., the dyad). A dyad “can be viewed as a group with two members” (Kenny et al., 2006, p. 79). The data are hierarchically structured insofar as multiple alters (level 1) are nested within groups defined by an ego (level 2) (Kenny & Kashy, 2011). Because
of the hierarchical nature of the data, multilevel modeling (MLM) was used to assess the proposed hypotheses and research questions. This method adjusts for lack of independence among the multiple alters within the same ego.

Here is a formal statement of the multilevel model, with \(i\) referring to ego and \(j\) referring to alter:

\[
y_{ij} = \beta x_{ij} + y_{i} + \alpha_i + \epsilon_{ij}, \quad i = 1, \ldots, n; j = 1, \ldots, 3
\]

where \(b\) and \(g\) are row vectors of coefficients, and \(a_i\) and \(e_{ij}\) are random error terms.

\(a_i\) represents all differences between egos that are stable over alters and not otherwise accounted for by \(gz_i\). It can be said to represent “unobserved heterogeneity.”

We assume that \(a_i\) is normally distributed with a mean of 0, constant variance \(\tau^2\), and is statistically independent of \(e_{ij}, x_{ij}\), and \(z_i\). We assume further that \(\text{corr}(e_{ij}, e_{ik}) = 0\) for any \(j\) not equal to \(k\), that is, any two different alters.

This model is sometimes called the random intercepts model. It implies that

\[
\text{corr}(y_{ij}, y_{ik} | x_{ij}, x_{ik}, z_i) = \frac{\tau^2}{\tau^2 + \sigma^2_e}
\]
where \( j \) and \( k \) are two distinct alters within the same ego. Because this implies equal correlations for all pairs of alters with a given ego, the model is sometimes described as “exchangeable” or as having a “compound symmetry” structure. This common correlation is called the intraclass correlation coefficient.
Chapter 7: Results

For all proposed hypotheses and research questions, WTCAP was the dependent variable. For the first set of hypotheses (H1(a)-H1(d) and RQ1), three models were run. The first model included only ego’s scores on each of the big-five trait scales. Next the same model was run with selected control variables before a final third model was run including all controls. To assess the second set of hypotheses (H2(a)-H2(d) and RQ2) a single model was run. This model included ego trait scores, select controls and alter scores on the Big Five.

The final set of hypotheses (H3(a)-H3(d) and RQ3) were tested through multiple models. First a model was run which included all interaction terms for the Big 5. Finally a model was run where Big 5 interaction terms were replaced with the absolute difference scores for the ego and alter personality trait scores.

For all models, the parameters were estimated by maximum likelihood using the xtmixed command in Stata 12. Standard errors were calculated by the Huber-White method. These standard errors are robust to heteroskedasticity, non-normality and departures from the exchangeability assumption.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis set 1-Ego level personality
Appendix B, Table 10 shows the results of the three MLM’s run with WTCAP as dependent variable, ego personality traits as predictors and controls. Cells contain unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Model 1 includes WTCAP at level 1 (coded as 1 to 5 with higher scores reflecting greater WTCAP) and the independent variables (ego’s personality trait scores) at level 2. The data from model 1 suggest that no ego-level personality trait has a direct significant effect on WTCAP (openness, $\beta = -0.043, p = .446$; agreeableness, $\beta = -0.084, p = .059$; neuroticism, $\beta = 0.019, p = .645$; conscientiousness, $\beta = -0.065, p = .124$; extraversion, $\beta = 0.080, p = .080$)\(^{17}\). While falling just short of significance, the relationships between agreeableness and WTCAP as well as extraversion and WTCAP were in the hypothesized direction.

An estimate of the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was computed as $\frac{\tau^2}{(\tau^2 + \sigma^2_e)}$ where $\tau^2$ is the variance of the random intercept and $\sigma^2_e$ is the residual effects variance. The ICC for model 1 is $0.505 (0.484/(0.484 + 0.476))$. The ICC is a measure of dependence and quantifies the proportion of variance due to being a member of a group, in this case a dyad. The ICC tells us 50.5% of the variation in scores is a function of the being a member of a particular dyad.

For each model (models 1-7), the proportion of variance accounted for by predictors (pseudo $R^2$) was calculated at each level. To calculate the proportion reduction in variance for each model and for each level, the empty residual variance, is subtracted by the model residual variance, and divided by the empty residual variance (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Finally to calculate the percentage of variance explained for each model the proportion reduction in variance is multiplied by 100. The percentage of variance

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\(^{17}\)Throughout the document “$\beta$” represents unstandardized coefficients.
explained at level 2 for model 1 is 4.7% \((100 \times ((.5089 - .4847)/.5089))\). (Appendix B, Table 11).

Next a second model was run where ego’s ethnicity, average level of political knowledge, political ideology, political interest, and gender were added at level two. The categorical relationship variable was also added, if an ego rated an alter as a friend, they were coded 0. If an ego rated an alter as a relative, they were coded 1. And, if an ego rated an alter as an acquaintance, they were coded 2. With controls added, ego conscientiousness has a strong negative effect on WTCAP supporting H1(c) \((\beta = -.120, p = .001)\). No other personality trait was found to have a significant effect on WTCAP, which leads us to reject H1(a), H1(b) and H1(d) \((extraversion, \beta = .035, p = .323; openness, \beta = -.070, p = .137; agreeableness, \beta = -.035, p = .310)\). In terms of RQ1, neuroticism was not found to have a significant effect on WTCAP either positively or negatively \((\beta = -.005, p = .872)\).

Political interest was found to have a significant positive effect on an ego’s WTCAP \((\beta = .649, p < .001)\), as was political efficacy \((\beta = -.168^{18}, p < .001)\). Relationship was also found to be a highly significant predictor of WTCAP \((\text{Wald } \chi^2 = 19.33, p < .001)\). Specifically, egos are most WTCAP with relatives \((\beta = .138, p = .060)\) followed by friends (no test statistic provided for friends who acted as baseline) and finally acquaintances \((\beta = -.235, p = .001)\). This is consistent with past literature on political discussion, which has found similar results (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995).

A final model (model 3) was run with the addition of other ego level communication variables. Specifically, ego’s WTSC, general WTC, and political

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18 Lower scores indicate greater efficacy.
discussion behaviors were added. These were omitted from the preceding model because of the likely possibility that they would mediate (and, hence, obscure) the effects of ego’s personality variables on WTCAP. However, there were no changes between models 2 and 3 on any of the already tested variables. An ego’s WTC ($\beta = -.003, p = .197$) was not found to significantly influence WTCAP. However, frequency of weekly discussion about national politics positively increases WTCAP such that those who discuss politics more frequently are more WTCAP ($\beta = .073, p = .001$). Consistent with the nature of the construct WTSC was found to have a significant negative effect on WTCAP ($\beta = -.194, p = .001$).

*Hypothesis set 2- Altern traits*

Appendix B, Table 12 shows the results of model 4, which adds alter scores on the Big 5 at level 1. Alter conscientiousness was found to have a significant positive effect on ego’s WTCAP providing support for H2(c), such that egos are more WTCAP with alters who are more conscientious (conscientiousness, $\beta = .119, p < .001$).

Hypotheses H2(a), H2(b) and H2(d) that alter’s extraversion, openness, and agreeableness would be positively associated with ego WTCAP, were not supported (openness, $\beta = .047, p = .087$; agreeableness, $\beta = -.006, p = .821$; extraversion, $\beta = .002, p = .908$). In terms of research question two, alter neuroticism was not found to have a positive or negative effect on ego WTCAP (neuroticism, $\beta = -.029, p = .260$).

*Hypothesis set 3- Dyad PPTS*

The main focus of this dissertation is the final set of hypotheses, which specify the effects of PPTS on WTCAP. To test these effects two models were run with WTCAP as dependent variable. The first model (model 5, Appendix B, Table 13) was run with
interaction terms between ego’s personality trait scores and alter’s scores on the same trait. Ego’s scores are entered at level 2 and alter’s scores are entered at level 1. The cross-level interaction term quantifies PPTS for each of the five traits. By creating a product term between the ego and alter scores we are able to determine if WTCAP is predicted by some combination of the dyad member scores (Campbell & Kashy, 2002).

A second model (model 6) was run replacing the interaction terms with absolute difference scores. As this dissertation has discussed assessing perceived similarity can be done in several ways and considering the many advantages and disadvantages of each, the researcher chose to quantify PPTS in two ways and assess them separately. Model 6 is identical to model 5 except difference scores are used to model PPTS on WTCAP instead of interaction terms.

Appendix B, Table 13 shows the results for models 5 and 6, which include all previous controls, as well as interaction terms between ego’s and alter’s scores for each of the Big 5 in the case of model 5, and difference scores between ego’s and alter’s scores for each of the Big 5 in the case of model 6. Hypotheses 3(a)-(d), that PPTS on openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness and neuroticism would be positively related to ego WTCAP, were not supported in model 5 (\(E\)-openness \(x\) \(A\)-openness, \(\beta = .021, p = .357\); \(E\)-agreeableness \(x\) \(A\)-agreeableness, \(\beta = .139, p = .540\); \(E\)-neuroticism \(x\) \(A\)-neuroticism, \(\beta = -.011, p = .630\); \(E\)-conscientiousness \(x\) \(A\)-conscientiousness, \(\beta = .012, p = .625\)). The hypotheses also failed to receive support in model 6 (\(|E\)-openness \(-\) \(A\)-openness|, \(\beta = .003, p = .936\); \(|E\)-agreeableness \(-\) \(A\)-agreeableness|, \(\beta = -.034, p = .321\); \(|E\)-neuroticism \(-\) \(A\)-neuroticism|, \(\beta = .048, p = .159\); \(|E\)-conscientiousness \(-\) \(A\)-conscientiousness|, \(\beta = -.028, p = .429\)). In terms of Research Question 3, a clear prediction was not advanced in
terms of PPTS on extraversion and WTCAP. The data did not provide evidence that
PPTS either positively or negatively had any significant effect on ego WTCAP in either
model 5 or model 6 ($E$-extraversion $\times A$-extraversion, $\beta = -.008$, $p = .613$; $|E$-

In model 5, ego political interest is positively related to WTCAP ($\beta = .661$, $p <
.001$) while ego political efficacy is negatively related to WTCAP ($\beta = -.172$, $p < .001$)
however again lower efficacy scores relate to greater efficacy. Whereas in model 4 ego
openness and conscientiousness, and alter conscientiousness had significant effects on
WTCAP, in model 5 with the addition of the five interaction terms these effects fall short
of statistical significance. But that’s merely because these main effects now represent the
effect of each variable when the other variable (in the interaction) has a value of 0, which
is not even possible for those variables.

Model 6 is similar to model 4 insofar as ego conscientiousness, and alter
conscientiousness once again have a significant effect on WTCAP ($E$-conscientiousness,
$\beta = -.121$, $p = .001$; $A$-conscientiousness, $\beta = .107$, $p < .001$).

When introducing product terms into a model the potential for collinearity
increases. In an effort to eliminate any potential issues between the product terms being
collinear with the two main effects variables, each variable was mean centered before
creating the product terms (Cronbach, 1987). Mean centering does nothing to the
statistical test of the interactions, but it does reduce multicollinearity (Hayes, 2005).
Various diagnostics tests of multicollinearity were performed. Tolerance levels were
comfortably high and ranged for all variables between .74 and .94 ($M = .91$). Considering
this, variance inflation factors were inherently quite low ranging between 1.06 and 1.39
\( M = 1.24 \) for all independent variables. Thus multicollinearity was not an issue in these data.
The primary goal of this dissertation has been to call attention to and provide deeper insight and evidence into the relationship between personality traits and political discussion. Specifically, the focus has been on perceived personality trait similarity and the willingness to communicate about politics. This work expands on existing work both theoretically and methodologically. Theoretically this paper considers the effects of personality on interpersonal political discussion, at both the individual and the relational levels, by considering not only the personality traits of the self but also the traits of the other within a dyad and the interplay between them. Methodologically, this paper introduces a novel measure of interpersonal political discussion, willingness to communicate about politics (WTCAP). Past research on political discussion has most often focused on either self-reports of actual past communication practices or on measures of hypothetical opinion expression. Our measure of WTCAP is used to capture unique information regarding political discussion that is not obtained with existing measures.

Although results from this study failed to confirm nearly all of the proposed hypotheses, significant insight was gained through these null findings. Moreover, a substantial amount of information was gained from a number of un-hypothesized but
significant relationships present in the data. I will now discuss the findings for each set of hypotheses and provide a rationale for those that were unsupported. Further supplementary analyses will be presented wherever relevant.

Summary of Results

WTCAP Correlations:

Appendix B, Table 16, shows the bivariate correlations between WTCAP and all individual level control variables, as well as ego personality traits. These correlation scores help to establish convergent validity (Hayes et al., 2005a). The first set of relationships that should be noted, are, those between WTCAP and extraversion, WTC, WTSC and political discussion frequency. Each of these variables specifically reference communication behaviors and as such should be related to WTCAP in significant ways. Results of these relationships show significant positive correlations between WTCAP and extraversion ($r = .175, p < .005$), WTC ($r = .377, p < .001$), and political discussion frequency ($r = .495, p < .001$). These positive relationships are supportive of the fact that people who are generally more extraverted, WTC and discuss politics more frequently are also more WTCAP. Conversely, WTSC and WTCAP are significantly and negatively correlated ($r = -.343, p = .001$), which indicates people who are more reticent to express opinions are also less WTCAP.

Political interest ($r = .459, p < .001$), political knowledge ($r = .181, p < .001$) and political efficacy ($r = .354, p < .001$) were all positively and significantly correlated with WTCAP. These are important relationships when considering each has been shown in past empirical work to positively influence general political discussion frequency.

Hypothesis Set 1 - Level 2 (ego):
The first set of hypotheses predicted the direct effects of personality traits on WTCAP. These hypotheses were tested in the framework of linear mixed models, also known as multilevel models. A first model was run with WTCAP as the dependent variable, and ego personality traits as independent variables. A second model included a selected set of control variables. A final model included additional controls that measured other aspects of political discussion. It was hypothesized that ego extraversion and openness would be positively associated with WTCAP (H1(a), (b)), ego conscientiousness and agreeableness would be negatively associated with WTCAP (H1(c), (d)) and ego neuroticism would not have a clear impact either positively or negatively (RQ1).

In model 1, no ego personality trait had a significant relationship with WTCAP either positively or negatively. In both models 2 and 3 only ego conscientiousness had a significant relationship in either direction with WTCAP. Conscientiousness was found to be negatively associated with WTCAP, supporting H1(c) that more conscientious individuals tend be less willing to engage in political conversations. Again, this is not surprising when considering the potentially contentious nature of political discussions. H1(a), (b) and (d) were not supported. Finally, in terms of RQ1, ego neuroticism did not have a significant effect in either direction on WTCAP.

In models 2 and 3, several of the control variables had statistically significant effects in the expected direction, providing some evidence for the validity of our measure of WTCAP. In both models, ego political interest was significantly and positively associated with WTCAP. This is consistent with prior research that found a positive relationship between political interest and frequency of political discussion (Huckfeldt,
An ego’s level of political efficacy was also found to be significantly and positively associated with WTCAP in both models. The reported relationship between an ego and alter was also a significant predictor of WTCAP in both models. All things being equal, egos reported being most WTCAP with relatives, followed by friends and finally acquaintances. Once again, this is consistent with extant research that consistently finds people are most likely to engage in political discussions with close friends and family (Bennett, Flickinger, & Rhine, 2006; Straits, 1991; Huckfeldt, & Sprague, 1995). As we would expect egos also reported being “most similar” (1 = very dissimilar to 5 = very similar) to family members ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.26$), followed by friends ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.08$) and, finally acquaintances ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.18$). An ANOVA provided evidence that at least two of these means differed significantly ($F(2, 863) = 43.24$, $p < .001$).

Next the two sets of comparisons between means were conducted using independent groups $t$-tests. The first looked at whether similarity scores differed between those labeled friends and those labeled family. The second test compared scores between friends and acquaintances. To compensate for a multiple hypothesis test effect, a Bonferroni correction was applied to the $p$-values of the two $t$-tests conducted. To maintain a $\alpha \leq .05$, each $t$-test was conducted at an adjusted, $\alpha \leq .025$, as mandated by the Bonferroni correction. Results of these tests show that ego’s perceived their friends

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19 Interestingly, in terms of personality traits egos rated themselves most similarly to their friends on 4 (extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness) of the 5 personality traits. ANOVA’s provided evidence that the differences between ratings for friends, family members and acquaintances were significant (extraversion ($F(2, 863) = 4.85$, $p = .008$), agreeableness ($F(2, 863) = 9.19$, $p < .001$), neuroticism ($F(2, 863) = 3.08$, $p = .046$), openness ($F(2, 863) = 4.06$, $p = .018$), conscientiousness ($F(2, 863) = 6.31$, $p = .002$)). Conscientiousness was the only personality trait egos rated themselves most similarly to family members. On every trait acquaintances were ranked most dissimilarly to egos.
significantly differently from acquaintances, $t(396)= 7.55, p < .001$ but not their family members $t(681) = -.289, p = .773$.

Two additional significant findings appeared in model 3. Both WTSC and political discussion frequency were significantly associated with ego WTCAP. Egos that reported more frequent weekly conversations about politics also reported higher scores on WTCAP. Secondly WTSC was found to be negatively related to WTCAP; that is, the more willing someone is to self censor the less willing they are to communicate about politics. This is to be expected considering the inherent nature of the construct of WTSC that quantifies a person’s propensity to holster or disengage in communication exchange.

Before moving forward it is important to reflect on the lack of support for Hypotheses H1 (a), (b), (d) and RQ1. These predictions were made on the basis of both theoretical guidance and previous empirical support (Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Mondak, 2010; Hibbing et al., 2011; Gerber, et al., 2012). A key question to ask is whether methodological inconsistencies exist throughout the literature: in other words, is everyone measuring the same thing, the same way? Quite simply, the answer is no. Research linking personality traits to political discussion is a rather new area of inquiry and, as such, a great deal of variability exists in how related concepts are conceptualized and measured. Shining a light on these methodological deviations can provide important insight into the current findings (or lack thereof).

A great deal of time was spent in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 discussing the numerous ways in which personalities can be measured. Tens, if not hundreds, of self-report personality batteries have been developed over the years. Each time a new measure is created great care goes into insuring it is a valid and reliable measure of the Big Five.
However, each measure differs from every other and sometimes in rather substantive ways. While different measures can provide results quite similar to others, no two will ever elicit identical findings. This dissertation follows Gerber and colleagues (2010) in using the 10-item TIPI. However, others have explored the link between personality traits and political discussion while measuring personalities with the BFI-10 (Gallego & Oberski, 2011) BFI-44 (Gerber et al., 2011) and other batteries utilizing 10-point semantic differential trait pairs (Mondak & Halperin 2008; Hibbing, et al., 2012). These diverse measures may partially explain why our findings differ somewhat from others. It should also be noted that a number of studies collected personality data either via telephone or through face-to-face interviews. In these cases, especially in face-to-face situations, there could be a serious bias arising from social desirability.

Next, we turn our attention to the dependent variable of interest, political discussion. This study tested a novel measure of political discussion, WTCAP. However in nearly every other case political discussion has been operationalized as “frequency” of discussion. Thus it is not appropriate to directly compare our main findings to these others. However, discussion frequency has a substantial correlation with WTCAP ($r = .495$, $p < .001$).

To increase comparability with previous studies, a post hoc exploratory analysis was run with ego discussion frequency as the dependent variable (How many days per week, on average, do you talk to someone about national politics?” (0-7 days)) and ego personality traits as independent variable with political knowledge, interest, efficacy, ideology, gender and ethnicity as controls. Not a single personality trait had significant relationship with discussion frequency, running counter to past empirical evidence.
Political knowledge was the only control variable to be significantly related to discussion frequency ($\beta = .250$, $p = .022$).

These inconsistencies could be partly a function of differences in how “frequency of political discussion” was measured in various studies. For example Mondak and Halperin (2008) measured frequency as the “number of days in the past week” from 0 to 7 an individual “discussed politics” whereas Hibbing and colleagues (2011) asked individuals to consider how often they discuss “local politics” (0 = never to 3 = very often), in different public settings separately (e.g., work, church…). It’s important to note that this no longer is akin to a measure of overall discussion frequency.

Gerber and colleagues also treated political discussion frequency as the dependent variable, but their operationalization of discussion frequency was markedly different from the others. First, Gerber asked study participants to list the person in their family whom they “talk with most frequently.” Next participants were asked to list the person outside of their immediate family whom they “talk with most frequently.” One of the two names was then randomly chosen, and then the respondent was asked follow-up questions regarding discussion frequency with this individual. One question asked participants “how often do you talk to [alter] about current events/politics?” (“daily or more than daily,” “A few times a week,” “Once a week,” or “once a month or less”). This is not a measure of general discussion frequency like the others, but rather a measure of discussion frequency with either the family member or friend whom they most often discuss politics with. Interestingly, no personality variable was found to have a significant effect on discussion frequency with non-family members.
Let us now consider the context in which data were collected. In no less than three studies (Gallego & Oberski, 2011; Mondak, 2010 and Gerber et al., 2012) data were collected via panel designs in the weeks directly proceeding and following national elections. While this should have no influence on the personality variables, it most certainly may influence reports of political discussion behaviors. In the time leading up to and just following an election, it is fair to assume people are discussing politics at a heightened level. People may be much more willing, likely or open to the idea of discussing politics at times such as these when politics are so salient. This dissertation’s data were collected in the winter of 2013, three months after the last national election (2012 presidential) and nearly two years prior to the next (2014 senate).

Finally, before returning to the remaining hypotheses it is worthwhile to note that the relationships between WTCAP and ego agreeableness and extraversion. Coefficients for agreeableness and extraversion both trended in their hypothesized directions while falling just shy of significant (agreeableness, $p = .059$; extraversion, $p = .080$) at the $p < .05$, level. While we cannot make any definitive claims about these relationships because they did fall short of significance the direction of the coefficients and relatively small p-values indicates the potential of a type II error. Two issues with the demographic make-up of the study leads me to believe that the non-representative nature of the sample contributed to the lack of significant findings.

First this study utilized a student sample and as such the results are not necessarily generalizable to a larger population. This is specifically true when considering outcomes relating to political participation such as political discussion. Young adults (ages 18-29) as a group have consistently been shown to be less engaged in the political process than
other demographic groups (Henn, Weinstein, & Wring, 2002). It has been argued that young adults are less likely to engage in the political process because they lack efficacy or interest in politics (Henn, et al., 2002). This is significant insofar as our data reflects political interest and efficacy to be significantly related to WTCAP.

Second, we must acknowledge the gender skew of the sample. Considering 73% of the final participant set was female it is possible that substantive gender differences exist. A substantial body of evidence finds men and women are not significantly less likely to talk with members of the opposite sex about politics (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). Unfortunately this study did not glean gender information in terms of listed alters and thus we are unable to substantiate this claim however it is possible that a similar gender skew is also present among alters in the sample. Another consideration is women may be less likely than men to engage in political disagreement or discuss politics with weak ties (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Miller, Wilford, & Donoghue, 1999).

Hypothesis Set 2- Level 1 (alter):

The second set of hypotheses explore the direct influence that an alter’s personality traits may have on an ego’s WTCAP. A single model (model 4) was run with ego WTCAP as dependent variable, ego’s perception of alter’s personality traits, ego’s own personality traits, and the same controls as those in model 2. It was hypothesized that alter extraversion, openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness would be positively associated with ego WTCAP (H2(a)-(d)), and alter neuroticism would not have a clear impact either positively or negatively (RQ2).

In model 4, only alter conscientiousness was shown to have a significant relationship with ego WTCAP. Specifically, egos are more WTCAP with alters that
display greater levels of conscientiousness, supporting hypothesis 2(c). No other significant effects were found between alter level personality traits and ego’s WTCAP; thus H2(a), (b) and (d) were not supported. Finally, in terms of RQ2, alter neuroticism was not found to have a significant effect in either direction on WTCAP. The addition of alter personality traits did not substantially alter the relationship between any ego level personality trait and WTCAP, nor did it appreciably change the effects of any of the control variables.

Hypothesis Set 3 - Dyad PPTS

The final set of hypotheses predicted the effect of PPTS on WTCAP. Two models were run, both with WTCAP as dependent variable. The first model (model 5) included all of ego’s and alter’s level personality traits as independent variables (along with all control variables), together with interaction (product) terms between ego’s and alter’s personality trait scores. The second model (model 6) was identical to model 5 except that the interaction terms were replaced with absolute difference scores between ego’s and alter’s personality trait scores. It was hypothesized that PPTS on openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness would be positively associated with WTCAP (H3(a)-(c)). It was predicted that PPTS on neuroticism would be negatively associated with WTCAP H3(d), and finally a research question was advanced questioning the role of PPTS on extraversion and WTCAP (RQ3).

In both models 5 and 6, PPTS had no significant relationship with WTCAP. Thus, hypotheses H3(a)-(d) were not supported. These findings are particularly surprising insofar as the principle of homophily of personality traits was uncorroborated.
Considering the lackluster findings in models 5 and 6, further models were run to probe potentially fruitful information. The foundation of this dissertation’s theoretical argument rests on the basic premise of similarity. Accordingly, model 7 was run with difference scores and interactions replaced by the overall “perceived similarity” variable added as a predictor, along with all other controls including ego and alter personality scores.

To assess general similarity, egos were asked to indicate for each of their three alters, “generally speaking how similar are you to [alter]?” (very dissimilar, dissimilar, neither similar nor dissimilar, similar, very similar). Model 7 showed that ego’s perception of general similarity between themselves and alters has a highly significant positive effect on WTCAP ($\beta = .105, p = .001$). Thus, as an ego’s perception of their general similarity to an alter increases, so too does their WTCAP. In this model, ego conscientiousness has a significant negative effect on WTCAP ($\text{conscientiousness, } \beta = -.131, p < .001$) while alter conscientiousness was the only personality variable to have a significant positive effect on WTCAP ($\beta = .104, p < .001$), which is consistent with what was found in model 4. See appendix B, Table 14 for model 7 results.

To determine how overall perceived similarity is related to the individual personality differences, a final model (model 8) was run with similarity as the dependent variable and the personality trait difference scores as predictor variables. An ordered logit analysis was run treating similarity as an ordered categorical variable with five values.

The ordered logit model relies on the notion of cumulative logit, which in turn relies on the notion of cumulative probability (Gullickson, 2007). The cumulative logit is the odds ratio for an ordinal predictor “interpreted as a summary of the odds ratio
obtained from separate binary logistic regression models using all possible cut points of
the ordinal outcome” (Yay & Akinci, 2009, p. 60).

For the current model the outcome variable \( y_i \) has five levels (0 = very dissimilar, 1 = dissimilar, 2 = neither similar nor dissimilar, 3 = similar, 4 = very similar). The cumulative probability \( F_{ij} \) is the probability that person \( i \) is in category \( j \) or higher.

\[
F_{ij} = Pr(y_i \geq j) = \sum_{k=0}^{4} pr(y_i = k)
\]

The cumulative probability can then be modeled as a logistic function of a set of predictors:

\[
\log\left(\frac{F_{ij}}{1 - F_{ij}}\right) = \alpha_j + \beta_1 x_{i1} + \ldots + \beta_k x_{ik}
\]

This model has a different intercept for each level of the dependent variable, however there is only a single set of coefficients (Allison, 1999). The coefficients can be interpreted as the effect of a one-unit change in the independent variable on the log-odds of being in the \( j \) category or higher.

Appendix B, table 15 shows the model results. The personality trait difference scores for agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness all had significant negative effects on similarity (\(|E\text{-openness} - A\text{-openness}|, \beta = -.394, p < .001; |E\text{-agreeableness} - A\text{-agreeableness}|, \beta = -.285, p < .001; |E\text{-conscientiousness} - A\text{-conscientiousness}|, \beta = -.126, p < .001). Simply put, as the differences between ego’s and alter’s scores on openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness increase, general similarity decreases. The personality trait difference scores for extraversion and neuroticism were also
negatively related to similarity but fell short of statistical significance (\(|E\text{-extraversion} - A\text{-extraversion}|, \beta = -0.115, p < .077; |E\text{-neuroticism} - A\text{-neuroticism}|, \beta = 0.045, p = .520\).

To further explore the notion of similarity, we examined differences in average personality scores of egos versus alters. In other words, did egos perceive themselves to be significantly different than they did alters in terms of personality traits?

Paired samples \(t\)-tests showed that egos rated themselves significantly higher overall than they did alters on openness \((t (868) = -9.14, p < .001)\), agreeableness \((t (868) = 7.74, p < .001)\), and conscientiousness \((t (868) = 11.43, p < .001)\). Openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness are all socially favorable traits, so it is not a surprising to find egos rating themselves more favorably than they do others. No significant difference was found between ego and alter scores on either extraversion nor neuroticism.

**Nonattitudes:**

This dissertation utilized a unique name generator tool for collecting ego network data so that a representative sample of an ego’s alters would be available in their responses. The goal of this type of data collection was to avoid egos simply listing family and close friends as members of their social networks, as it’s possible that individuals discuss politics with not only those close family members and friends but also general acquaintances. As a whole, the tool did a very nice job of gathering a variety of types of relationships from each ego’s responses. Unfortunately it is quite possible that egos were unable to provide “true” attitudes to questions regarding some members of their social networks especially those who are acquaintances.
Specifically it may have been quite difficult for egos to accurately assess alters listed as acquaintances on the TIPI measurement tool. Egos were asked to make specific personality judgments about people, whom in some cases they may not have known very well. Thus it may have been very difficult in some cases for participants to accurately report personality traits of these “weak ties”. Furthermore, there is the very real possibility that participants reported “nonattitudes” in regard to these alters, which is a concern for the validity of this data set.

Nonattitudes occur when survey respondents provide an opinion to a question they do not actually hold an opinion about. The idea of nonattitudes arose out of the work from public opinion scholars in the 1950s and 1960s, who found the public lacked consistency when responding to survey questions gleaning policy stances and other political attitudes (Smith, 1984). According to Converse (1964), opinions of this nature are illogical, unreliable and akin to flipping a coin. Responses reflecting nonattitudes can result when a respondent either: (a) doesn’t understand what a question is asking, (b) understands what a question asks but has no real feeling about it, (c) does not have the cognitive ability to properly respond or (d) is asked a question about something they have “no prior feelings about… but who comprehend it and take a position that truly reflects their spontaneous opinion” (Smith, 1984, p. 220).

For the current work it is quite possible that egos were unable to provide “true” attitudes to the TIPI questions for acquaintances for any of the above mentioned reasons. In a more general sense, it is possible that in everyday interactions individuals are not able to assess the personality traits of acquaintances accurately and as such do not use PPTS as a means of determining whether or not to enter a political discussion with a
person. Other heuristics such as cues associated with a person’s physical appearance may be much more influential in these situations. Before behavioral or trait based information based on verbal communication is available with which to assess the character of another, cognitive heuristics such as appearance-based cues may be all that is available. Future research should attempt to address this concern by attending to more heuristic type variables specifically with relationships that are not considered to be strong ties.

On the other hand, PPTS may have an effect in strong tie relationships where information about alters personality traits is based on years of interactions and can be accurately assessed. Thus, the relationship between ego and alter may act as moderator between PPTS and WTCAP.

Significant findings and future directions

A particularly promising finding from this study was that approximately 50% of the variability in the dependent variable WTCAP was dyad dependent. In other words half of an ego’s score on WTCAP depends on what dyad they are in. This provides substantial support for the author’s assumption that WTCAP is in fact a state based variable. On one hand this is quite promising. But, on the other hand, while the variance we had hoped for exists, the reasons for that variability are not quite as clear. The question then is what is driving WTCAP?

While this study did not necessarily support the homophily principal in terms of personality traits, general similarity was significantly associated with WTCAP. Thus similarity does predict WTCAP however the data does not afford us the opportunity to pinpoint specifically what type of similarity. A limitation of the current research is the lack of personal information gleaned for each alter, which leaves us unable to make
comparisons in terms of similarity between ego’s and their alters beyond personality traits and “general similarity.” While general similarity may be associated with WTCAP we are unable to identify what kind of similarity is driving the relationship.

One of the most obvious explanations may be political similarity. A prominent argument throughout the literature is that people choose to discuss politics with others who share similar political attitudes, and beliefs. A shortcoming of this study is the omission of a measure of political similarity. Future work should include measures of political similarity or perceived similarity.

Another possibility is that political similarity is a moderator between PPTS and WTCAP. For example an individual who rates high on openness may be more WTCAP with someone who is closed minded only when that other person shares political opinions similar to their own. Two closed-minded individuals who share similar political beliefs are very likely to enjoy conversing. However, if a closed-minded individual encounters someone with dissimilar political opinions, they may prefer that person be open-minded. A closed-minded individual is likely to avoid situations where they may encounter new or novel ideas. If they do find themselves in a situation of this kind, they will most likely prefer that person be open to considering their dogmatic point of view.

Another possibility is a person’s WTCAP is a function of their perception of an alter’s interest in politics. The perceived strength of a potential alter’s interest in politics may play a significant role in whether or not an ego is WTCAP. It is possible that perceived similarity in terms of personality traits, political ideology or other, will have little effect on a person’s WTCAP if they don’t think an alter is interested. A person may
not be interested in forcing a conversation on someone, especially on a topic such as politics, if they don’t think that person has any interest in the topic.

A second significant finding was the prominent role of conscientiousness on WTCAP at both the level of the ego and alter. This is not a surprise considering the nature of the construct and the nature of political discussion. This dissertation argued at length that people approach discussions about politics with great trepidation. As discussed in Chapter, 2 the strategic approach to interpersonal communication assumes all communication is motivated by goals (Burleson, Mett, & Kurch, 2000). Roughly, communication goals can be organized into two categories, primary and secondary (Dillard, Segrin, & Harden, 1989). Primary goals are the main crux of a conversation and are the motivating force that propels communication to occur; “they are primary in the sense that they initiate the series of constructs that model message production” (p. 67). Secondary goals are those present during conversation, which build on top of the primary goal in the sense that they are pursued within the confines of the primary goal. These goals may include identity interaction, resource, and arousal management functions (Dillard, 1989).

When choosing discussion partners the information in the message is only one aspect to be considered. While the primary goal of a political discussion specifically may be to exchange information, or express an attitude, more relational goals, which act like secondary goals, are also at play. One reason individuals may avoid discussing politics is to avoid any social disagreement or discomfort (Bennett, Fisher, & Resnick, 1994). Individuals strive for harmonious relationships and avoid disagreement that could negatively influence relationships (Eliasoph, 1998; MacKuen, 1990). Both ethnographic
and focus group data show people’s general apprehension to engage in political conversations at all let alone with more disagreeable partners (Conover, et al., 2002; Eliasoph, 1998).

Considering this it is not surprising that conscientiousness plays such a prominent role in WTCAP. At the level of the ego people who are conscientious tend to be less WTCAP. Conscientious individuals will avoid situations where conflict may arise. They will be cognizant of their environment and be more likely to avoid expressing political opinions or discussing the topic of politics all together. Conversely egos are more WTCAP with alters who they perceive to be conscientious. An ego will be more inclined to discuss politics with an alter whom they believe will be more cognizant of social structures and also make efforts to avoid conflict.

This dissertation made a point of differentiating WTCAP from measures of opinion expression. However considering the lackluster findings future work may benefit from considering the relationship between PPTS and measures of opinion expression. Maybe people will be more or less willing to express certain opinions as PPTS increases. Avoiding political disagreement occurs not exclusively through avoidance of non-like minded others but also through a lack of political self-disclosure. People are hesitant to express political viewpoints to avoid “unsympathetic audience members” (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 2004). During political conversations political attitudes and values are expressed. Political opinions in some cases are tied to very deep core beliefs that a person holds. There is a great risk in exposing oneself especially in company of people that they are not close with. “To run the risk of engaging in conversation is a necessary gamble, because discussion partners do not know, prior to this, if others will reject their point of
view, which may become the cause of conflict” (Marques & Maia, 2010, p. 625) This may also help explain why political discussions are more likely to occur at the home than the public sphere and with strong ties. Private discussions are perceived as safer in that they are “more resistant to the dangerous aspects of contestation…opting for private discussion means protecting the privacy of preferences and identity” (Conover et al., 2002, p. 57).

We must recognize that any number of factors may influence a person’s WTCAP in any situation above and beyond what this dissertation has proposed. One other factor this dissertation did not take into account was an ego’s political identity. The strength and salience of a person’s political identity can be expected to play a significant role in not only their WTCAP but also the opinions they are willing to express. As strength and salience of an individual’s political identity (generally speaking not necessarily a function of what that identity is) so will their WTCAP. It is quite feasible to assume that a person with a weakly defined political identity will not likely engage in a political discussion regardless of how similar they perceive a potential co-interlocutor to be in terms of personality traits (or any characteristic). If a person does not have a strong political identity they are not likely to care about politics and as such have no interest in discussing politics.

Another potential moderator of the relationship between PPTS and WTCAP are the communicative goals an ego has for entering a political conversation. As discussed above multiple goals are at play during dyadic exchanges. While the primary goal of a political discussion may be to exchange information or express an attitude, more relationally focused goals, which act like secondary goals, are also at play. The centrality
or importance of these relational goals may moderate the relationship between PPTS and WTCAP. Specifically, the more central relational goals are to a person the more likely PPTS will influence WTCAP. Conversely, if maintaining relational homeostasis is not a primary goal then PPTS may be less important.

**WTCAP validity:**

Much of this dissertation has been focused on the conceptualization and creation of the dependent variable of interest WTCAP. After reflection of the present study’s results and deep consideration of the proposed normative implications of political talk, I believe modifications to the WTCAP scale would greatly enhance its validity and lead to substantive empirical gains. Specifically, it appears as though the current WTCAP measure falls somewhat short in terms of its content validity. WTCAP is conceptualized as a state-based variable referring to a person’s likelihood or propensity to actively engage in an informal political discussion in a specific situation.

This construct was created with the intention of capturing a specific form of “political discussion”, under the assumption that political discussion is beneficial for democratic health. Returning to normative democratic theory, political discussion is expected to promote increased tolerance and understanding of competing ideas (Arendt, 1968; Mutz, 2006), political knowledge gains (Eveland, 2004), and deeper reflection of ones own views (Mutz, 2001), just to name a few. As Rawls (1971) argues, “the benefits of discussion lie in the fact that (everybody) is limited in knowledge and ability to reason...Discussion is a way of combining information and enlarging the range of arguments” (p. 359).
These normative outcomes imply that discussion may be a multi-dimensional construct encompassing a full range of communicative acts that make up the process of message exchange. This means both sending and receiving messages. It appears as if the current measure of WTCAP falls somewhat short in terms of content validity when considering this. WTCAP, as it currently stands, does not take into account “receiving” elements of communication. In simpler terms we must pay greater attention to the receiving or “listening” elements of political discussion to fully capture the phenomena. The dynamics of both speaking and listening are not fully captured in the present research and the following discussion will outline why modifications to the scale in this direction are quite important for future research.

Listening can be defined as “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages” (International Listening Association, 1996). Listening is a qualitatively different, and a much more active, process than the act of “hearing”, which refers strictly to the biological process of sound waves being “processed by the central nervous system” (Trenholm & Jensen, 2008, p. 109). However, even all listening is not created equal, as the extent to which an individual engages in each element involved in the listening process will have significant effects on the conversation.

We will return to the aspect of listening and its role in political discussion and ones’ WTCAP, but first let us take a step back and consider the actual mechanism leading to potential gains from political discussion; a mechanism that most certainly involves both sending and receiving (listening) messages. One of the potential gains that result from political discussion is increased political knowledge. Using this normative
expectation of political discussion as just one example, when looking at the causal mechanisms leading to political knowledge, we see that listening is a very necessary component to this process. Eveland (2004) proposes three theoretical explanations of how political discussion leads to political knowledge; they are (a) the exposure explanation, (b) the anticipatory elaboration explanation, and (c) the discussion-generated elaboration explanation. Two of these three explanations (a and c) have a substantial listening element.

The exposure explanation claims that people “glean information from their discussion partner in much the same way that they would gain information from the news media directly” (2004, p.18). During discussion, individuals exchange information with one another. This information acts as either a reinforcement of existing knowledge or encoded as new information (if they have not been already been exposed to the information). Simply, by listening to and processing what a discussion partner has to say a person adds to their existing body of knowledge.

The discussion-generated elaboration suggests that the very act of discussion requires people to further process information, and possibly this recoding of information will lead to further understanding of the subject. This view is similar to the anticipatory explanation in that both involve enhanced information processing. However the two explanations differ in when and how this additional processing takes place. The added cognition during discussion-generated elaboration can be explained in two ways: self-generated and conversation-partner generated. Self-generation plays on the idea that the best way to learn something is to teach it. The additional processing that takes place when involved in discussion inherently leads to cognitive elaboration of this issue in which new
connections are often made, leaving people with a deeper understanding of said topic. Conversation-partner generated elaboration occurs when your discussion partner presents information in a unique way that enables you to make new mental connections and allows you to see things in a new light. Listening and processing what a discussion partner says is a key component to knowledge gains.

These explanatory mechanisms corroborate the idea that gains associated with political communication are a function of an individual being both a sender and receiver of information. Thus the domain may be best served if WTCAP is further developed as a multi-dimensional scale consisting of both speaking and listening components.

When creating the current WTCAP instrument, initially an eight-item question pool was included on the survey instrument. A principal components factor analysis was run on the original eight statements and indicated a clean two-factor solution (Appendix B, Table 6). Further psychometric tests (See chapter 6) ultimately led to the exclusion of the two items not found to load on the same factor as the other six.

In six of the eight original statements participants were asked how likely they would be to either “engage in a conversation,” “initiate a conversation,” or “continue discussing…” politics in a specific scenario. In contrast, the two dropped items asked participants, in two separate contexts, how likely they would be to “listen to what a person had to say”. While the former items all address actively sending messages, the later two speak to receiving messages. Considering sending and receiving messages are categorically different activities it is not a surprise that a two-factor solution was found.

The two “receiving” items, however, speak only to one dimension of a larger listening process. To properly assess the degree to which listening impacts an
individual’s WTCAP, more items must be included. As discussed above, a full interpretation of listening encompasses receiving messages, constructing meaning from messages and then responding to messages. A measure capturing the act of listening would need to address this complex process and ask specific questions regarding attentiveness, perceptiveness and responsiveness (Cegala, Savage, Brunner, & Conrad, 1982).

Cegala, and colleagues (1982) put forth a measure of interaction involvement, which incorporates both speaking and listening aspects of interpersonal communication. Interaction involvement, as a construct, measures the “extent to which an individual participates with another in conversation” (Cegala, et al., 1982, p. 229). The first dimension of interaction involvement is attentiveness. This speaks to the “extent to which an individual is cognizant of stimuli that comprise the immediate environment” (Cegala, et al., 1982, p. 230). The second dimension is perceptiveness, which references one’s knowledge of the meaning of their own and their partner’s behavior. The final dimension, responsiveness, is one’s propinquity to “know what to say and when to say it” (Cegala, 1982, p. 233). These dimensions encompass both sending and receiving activities within a conversation and shed significant light on the need for a more multi-dimensional approach to interpersonal communication.

The measure, WTCAP, is meant to address the full communicative process. In order to address communication in its most complex form, future research must provide a multi-dimensional perspective of the scale. Including items that speak to one’s attentiveness, perceptiveness, as well as responsiveness (Cegala et al., 1982), would add a complexity and precision to the measure that does not exist as it has been tested in the
current research. For example, adding other aspects of listening to the two listening items dropped from the current scale might allow for a clean 2-factor solution involving both listening and speaking. Cegala and colleagues (1982) include measures of listening such as “During conversations I am sensitive to others’ subtle or hidden meanings” and “In my conversations I can accurately perceive others’ intentions quite well”. These types of “receiving” behaviors can be seen to play a significant role in ones’ WTCAP.

Conclusion

The fundamental purpose of this dissertation was to call attention to and provide deeper insight into the role of personality traits in motivating political discussion. Interpersonal political discussion among citizens has long been considered a fundamental linchpin for democratic societies and as such, research has consistently sought to explain the factors motivating individuals to engage in or avoid such conversations, both in general and with specific others. A prominent theory throughout the literature speaks to the notion of homophily driving political discussion such that people are more likely or willing to discuss politics with others if they share similar political attitudes, beliefs and opinions. The current work further explored the notion of similarity on political discussion behaviors through the incorporation of personality trait similarity. The findings of this dissertation are particularly interesting insofar as the principal of homophily was uncorroborated. This is not to say that personality trait similarity is not a factor in WTCAP but that more theorizing must be done in terms of teasing out a more complete explanation of what is occurring. I believe substantial gains can be made in the field once research becomes more focused and methodologically consistent. If an
engaged and active citizenry is the ideal than it would behoove us to continue uncovering
the conditions under, which discussion may flourish.
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Appendix A: Measurement
Willingness to Communicate About Politics (WTCAP)

We will now ask you to imagine yourself in certain types of situations. We are not suggesting that you would be in these situations. However we would like you to please think about these situations and how you would respond to them. Presume you have completely free choice. For each question indicate the likelihood from 1 = “Very unlikely” to 5 = “Very likely” that you would be willing to communicate about politics in each situation.

1) Suppose you ran into (Listed Name 1) at a party. How likely would you be to engage in a conversation with this person about the topic of politics broadly speaking?
2) Suppose you ran into (Listed Name) at a party. How likely would you be to initiate a conversation about politics broadly speaking?
3) Suppose you ran into (Listed Name) at a party. Assume in the natural flow of conversation a political topic arose. How likely would you be to listen to what the person had to say?
4) Suppose you ran into (Listed Name) at a party. Assume that in the natural flow of conversation a political topic generally speaking arose. How likely would you be to continue discussing the topic?
5) Suppose were eating a meal with (Listed Name). How likely would you be to engage in a conversation with this person about the topic of politics broadly speaking?
6) Suppose were eating a meal with (Listed Name). How likely would you be to initiate a conversation about politics broadly speaking?
7) Suppose were eating a meal with (Listed Name). Assume in the natural flow of conversation a political topic arose. How likely would you be to listen to what the person had to say?
8) Suppose were eating a meal with (Listed Name). Assume that in the natural flow of conversation a political topic generally speaking arose. How likely would you be to continue discussing the topic?

Note. Bold items were included in final 6-item scale.
Personality TIPi (Gosling et al., 2003)

Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other. (1 = “Disagree Strongly” to “Strongly Agree”).

I see myself as:
1. Extraverted, enthusiastic.
2. Critical, quarrelsome.
3. Dependable, self-disciplined.
4. Anxious, easily upset.
5. Open to new experiences, complex.
6. Reserved, quiet.
7. Sympathetic, warm.
8. Disorganized, careless.
Name Generator

In the following you will be presented with a list of letters. We ask that you think about if you “know” anyone whose first name begins with such letter. As a criterion for knowing someone we ask that you “imagine accidentally walking into this person on the street, would you know the first name of this person, and be able to have a conversation with them.” This person may be a friend, relative, or acquaintance.

1) Next to each letter please list the first name of the individual whom you know.
   1. J
   2. A
   3. M
   4. S
   5. L
   6. T
   7. E
   8. R

2) For each of the names listed above please indicate whether they are a, *friend, relative or acquaintance.*
Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

Below are 20 situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate. Presume you have completely free choice. Indicate the percentage of times you would choose to communicate in each type of situation. Indicate in the space what percent of the time you would choose to communicate. (0 = Never to 100 = Always)

1. Talk with a service station attendant.
2. Talk with a physician.
3. Present a talk to a group of strangers.
4. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.
5. Talk with a salesperson in a store.
6. Talk in a large meeting of friends.
7. Talk with a police officer.
8. Talk in a small group of strangers.
9. Talk with a friend while standing in line.
10. Talk with a waiter/waitress in a restaurant.
11. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.
12. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.
13. Talk with a secretary.
14. Present a talk to a group of friends.
15. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.
16. Talk with a garbage collector.
17. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.
18. Talk with a spouse (or girl/boyfriend).
19. Talk in a small group of friends.
20. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.
Willingness to Self-Censor (WTSC)

The following statements address ways in which individuals interact with others. For each statement, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with that statement. (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree)

1. It is difficult for me to express my opinion if I think others won’t agree with what I say.
2. There have been many times when I thought others around me were wrong but I didn’t let them know.
3. When I disagree with others, I’d rather go along with them than argue about it.
4. It is easy for me to express my opinion around others who I think will disagree with me.
5. I’d feel uncomfortable if someone asked my opinion and I knew that he or she wouldn’t agree with me.
6. I tend to speak my opinion only around friends or other people I trust.
7. It is safer to keep quiet than publicly speak an opinion that you know most others don’t share.
8. If I disagree with others, I have no problem letting them know it.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarity ((M = 3.29, SD = 1.17))</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Dissimilar (1)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissimilar (2)</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither dissimilar nor Similar (3)</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar (4)</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very similar (5)</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>15.17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for dyad relationship and dyad similarity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>% (SD)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>99 (.083)</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>99 (.083)</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>98 (.130)</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>98 (.130)</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>97 (.164)</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>96 (.199)</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>97 (.182)</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>97 (.182)</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for name generator responses by letter. Note. On average 7.82 ($SD = .791$) total alters were listed by each ego. % = the total percentage of ego’s who listed an alters name for each letter. N = total number of alters listed for each letter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tipi (ego)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 291</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>.613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>4.93&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>5.46&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>5.58&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>.473</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tipi (alter)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 868</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>4.53&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>.469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>4.83&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>.611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>4.84&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.473</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: TIPI personality battery descriptive statistics.
Note. Ego and alter mean's for each trait were compared with each other using paired sample t-tests. Means with same superscripts differ at $p < .05$. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big-Five</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Extraverted, enthusiastic</td>
<td>.451**</td>
<td>.293**</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>.269**</td>
<td>.101**</td>
<td>.208**</td>
<td>.129**</td>
<td>.519**</td>
<td>.253**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reserved, quiet</td>
<td>-.465**</td>
<td>-.068*</td>
<td>-.063</td>
<td>-.027</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>-.082*</td>
<td>.200*</td>
<td>.259**</td>
<td>.220**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sympathetic, warm</td>
<td>.311**</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.311**</td>
<td>.427**</td>
<td>.292**</td>
<td>.382**</td>
<td>.073*</td>
<td>.331**</td>
<td>.194**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Critical, quarrelsome</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>-.262**</td>
<td>.075*</td>
<td>.259**</td>
<td>.275**</td>
<td>.380**</td>
<td>.113**</td>
<td>.216**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dependable, self-disciplined</td>
<td>.311**</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>.293**</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.440**</td>
<td>.473**</td>
<td>.139**</td>
<td>.320**</td>
<td>.164**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Disorganized, careless</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.115</td>
<td>.200**</td>
<td>-.353**</td>
<td>.284**</td>
<td>.248**</td>
<td>.091**</td>
<td>.332**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Calm, emotionally stable</td>
<td>.155**</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.267**</td>
<td>-.193**</td>
<td>.331</td>
<td>-.144*</td>
<td>.397**</td>
<td>.315**</td>
<td>.094**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Anxious, easily upset</td>
<td>-.109</td>
<td>.235**</td>
<td>-.052</td>
<td>.263**</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.169**</td>
<td>-.444**</td>
<td>.259**</td>
<td>.263**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Open to new experiences, complex</td>
<td>.397**</td>
<td>-.132**</td>
<td>.290**</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>.284**</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>.244**</td>
<td>-.117*</td>
<td>.310**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Conventional, uncreative</td>
<td>-.248**</td>
<td>.194**</td>
<td>-.199*</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>-.075</td>
<td>.161**</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>.157**</td>
<td>-.210**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Correlations across 10 TIPI items. Note. Correlations for ego scores are below the diagonal, correlations for alter scores are above the diagonal. * indicates significant relationship at $p < .05$. ** indicates significant relationship at $p < .01$. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Extraversion (E)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Extraversion (A)</td>
<td>.170**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Agreeableness (E)</td>
<td>.081*</td>
<td>.159**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Agreeableness (A)</td>
<td>.111**</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>.186**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conscientiousness (E)</td>
<td>.098**</td>
<td>.118**</td>
<td>.216**</td>
<td>.074*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conscientiousness (A)</td>
<td>.104**</td>
<td>.120**</td>
<td>.179**</td>
<td>.384**</td>
<td>.144**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Neuroticism (E)</td>
<td>.160**</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>.288**</td>
<td>.105**</td>
<td>.224**</td>
<td>.107**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Neuroticism (A)</td>
<td>.137**</td>
<td>.155**</td>
<td>.169**</td>
<td>.414**</td>
<td>.106**</td>
<td>.388**</td>
<td>.206**</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Openness (E)</td>
<td>.339**</td>
<td>.110**</td>
<td>.228**</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>.199**</td>
<td>.138**</td>
<td>.164**</td>
<td>.150**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Openness (A)</td>
<td>.110**</td>
<td>.435**</td>
<td>.137**</td>
<td>.327**</td>
<td>.123**</td>
<td>.327**</td>
<td>.094**</td>
<td>.357**</td>
<td>.143**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Intercorrelations between Big Five Inventory Scales across ego and alters. Note. * indicates significant relationship at $p < .05$. ** indicates significant relationship at $p < .01$. 
Table 6: Descriptive statistics for 8 and 6 item, Willingness to Communicate About Politics (WTCAP). Note. * indicates significant difference at $p < .05$ via paired item $t$-test.
Table 7: Bivariate zero-order correlations. Note. ** indicates significant relationship at $p < .001$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.744**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>.143**</td>
<td>.141**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>.773**</td>
<td>.716**</td>
<td>.154**</td>
<td>.572**</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>.687**</td>
<td>.823**</td>
<td>.136**</td>
<td>.448**</td>
<td>.786**</td>
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<td>.114**</td>
<td>.812**</td>
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<td>.128**</td>
<td>.110**</td>
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<td>.568**</td>
<td>.452**</td>
<td>.278**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Suppose you ran into (alter) at a party. How likely would you be to engage in a conversation with this person about the topics of politics broadly speaking?
2. Suppose you ran into (alter) at a party. How likely would you be to initiate a conversation about politics broadly speaking?
3. Suppose you ran into (alter) at a party. Assume in the natural flow of conversation a political topic arose. How likely would you be to listen to what the person had to say?
4. Suppose you ran into (alter) at a party. Assume that in the natural flow of conversation a political topic generally speaking arose. How likely would you be to continue discussing the topic?
5. Suppose you were eating a meal with (alter). How likely would you be to engage in a conversation with this person about the topics of politics broadly speaking?
6. Suppose you were eating a meal with (alter). How likely would you be to initiate a conversation about politics broadly speaking?
7. Suppose you were eating a meal with (alter). Assume in the natural flow of conversation a political topic arose. How likely would you be to listen to what the person had to say?
8. Suppose you were eating a meal with (alter). Assume that in the natural flow of conversation a political topic generally speaking arose. How likely would you be to continue discussing the topic?
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge (1-5)</td>
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<td>Political Ideology (1-7)</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to Self-Censor (1-5)</td>
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<td>.704</td>
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<td>Willingness to Communicate (0-100)</td>
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<td>16.92</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Interest (1-5)</td>
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<td>.636</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Efficacy (1-5)</td>
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<td>1.11</td>
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Table 8: Descriptive statistics for level-2 controls. Note. * indicates significant relationship at $p < .05$. ** indicates significance at $p < .01$. Note. (XX) = Scale Range
<table>
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<th>Question</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.651**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>2.54</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.657**</td>
<td>.833**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.509**</td>
<td>.372**</td>
<td>.324**</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Descriptive statistics for general political discussion battery including bivariate correlations between battery items. Note. * indicates significant relationship at $p < .05$. ** indicates significant relationship at $p < .01$.

1. How many days per week, on average, do you talk to someone about national politics? (0-7 days)
2. How many days per week, on average, do you talk to one or more Republicans about national politics? (0-7 days)
3. How many days per week, on average, do you talk to one or more Democrats about national politics? (0-7 days)
4. About how many people do you talk to about national politics in an average week? (open-ended)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Coefficient (SE)</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>Coefficient (SE)</td>
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<td>Level-2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.070 (.047)</td>
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<td>-.035 (.035)</td>
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<td>.019 (.042)</td>
<td>.645</td>
<td>-.005 (.034)</td>
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<td>Conscientiousness</td>
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<td>.124</td>
<td>-.120 (.037)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
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<td>.080</td>
<td>.035 (.036)</td>
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<td>.431</td>
<td>-.052 (.044)</td>
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<td>Political Ideology</td>
<td>.031 (.022)</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.031 (.020)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>.649 (.065)**</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.536 (.068)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Efficacy</td>
<td>-.168 (.036)**</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.123 (.037)**</td>
</tr>
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<td>.778</td>
<td>.033 (.103)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTC</td>
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<td>.197</td>
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<td>Political Discussion</td>
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<td>.001</td>
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<td>.911</td>
<td>-.192 (.139)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.772</td>
<td>-.073 (.133)</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>.433</td>
<td>-.152 (.173)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship (friend = 0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relative</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>.131 (.073)*</td>
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<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>-.235 (.072)**</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.231 (.173)**</td>
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</table>

Table 10: MLM predicting WTCAP. Note. For categorical predictors, each coefficient is a comparison with the lowest value of that variable. * indicates a significant relationship at \( p < .05 \). ** indicates a significant relationship at \( P < .01 \).
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Model</th>
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<th>% Explained</th>
<th>L2 Variance</th>
<th>% Explained</th>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>4.7</td>
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<td>0.2477</td>
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<td>0.2182</td>
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Table 11: Proportion and percentage of variance explained at levels 1 and 2.
### Table 12: MLM predicting WTCAP. Note. * indicates a significant relationship at \( p < .05 \), ** indicates a significant relationship at \( p < .01 \).
<table>
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<th>Level-2</th>
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<th>p</th>
<th>Model 6</th>
<th>Coefficient (SE)</th>
<th>p</th>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>-.086 (.050)</td>
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<td>-.121 (.038)**</td>
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<td>.026 (.036)</td>
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<td>-.031 (.045)</td>
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<td>.034 (.023)</td>
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<td>.662 (.069)**</td>
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<td>-.170 (.036)**</td>
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<td>.045 (.136)</td>
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<td>.133 (.072)</td>
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<td>.014</td>
<td>.181 (.072)**</td>
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<td>Table 13: MLM predicting WTCAP. Note. * indicates a significant relationship at p &lt; .05, ** indicates a significant relationship at p &lt; .01.</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
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<td><em>Conscientiousness (A)</em></td>
<td>.104 (.027)**</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>.107 (.073)</td>
<td>.143</td>
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<td>Acquaintance</td>
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Table 14: MLM predicting WTCAP. Note. * indicates a significant relationship at \( p < .05 \), ** indicates a significant relationship at \( p < .01 \).
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<tr>
<th>Level-2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
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<td>Political Ideology</td>
<td>.008 (.046)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
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<td>Political Efficacy</td>
<td>-.017 (.069)</td>
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<td>WTSC</td>
<td>-.162 (.087)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender (male = 0)</td>
<td>.071 (.158)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (white = 0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>-.055 (.375)</td>
<td>.883</td>
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<td>Asian</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Relative</td>
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<td>-1.18 (.152)**</td>
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<td>EgoAgreeable – AlterAgreeable</td>
<td>-.285 (.067)**</td>
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<td>-.126 (.072)</td>
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<td>EgoNeuroticism - AlterNeuroticism</td>
<td>-.045 (.070)</td>
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<td>EgoOpenness - AlterOpenness</td>
<td>-.394 (.077)**</td>
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Cut 1  -4.08 (.597)
Cut 2  -2.36 (.586)
Cut 3  -1.22 (.584)
Cut 4  .682 (.576)

Table 15: Ordered logit with general similarity as dependent variable.

Note. The cut points. The first is the estimate log-odds of being in category 5 vs. 1, 2, 3 or 4, when all covariates are 0. The second is the estimated log-odds of being in category 5 or 4 vs. 3, 2 or 1 when all covariates are 0. * indicates a significant relationship at $p < .05$, ** indicates a significant relationship at $p < .01$. 

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Title 16: Bivariate zero-order correlations. Note. All personality variables are measures of the ego. * indicates a significant relationship at $p < .05$, ** indicates a significant relationship at $p < .01$. 

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Appendix C: Figures
Figure 1: “One-with-many” data structure
Figure 2. Hypothesized interaction between PPTS and WTCAP on extraversion
Figure 3. Hypothesized interaction between PPTS and WTCAP on openness
Figure 4. Hypothesized interaction between PPTS and WTCAP on conscientiousness
Figure 5. Hypothesized interaction between PPTS and WTCAP on agreeableness
Figure 6. Hypothesized interaction between PPTS and WTCAP on neuroticism
Figure 7: WTCAP distribution