

# Accounting for the Child in the Transmission of Party Identification

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## Abstract

The transmission of party identification from parent to child is one of the most important components of political socialization in the United States. Research shows that children learn their party identification from their parents, and parents drive the learning process. The vast majority of studies thus treats children as passive recipients of information and assumes that parent-child concordance equals transmission. Rather than relying on a single pathway by which parents teach children, we propose an alternative view by focusing on children as active agents in their socialization. In so doing, we introduce a two-step model of transmission: perception then adoption. Utilizing two unique family-based studies that contain self-reported measures of party identification for both parents and children, children's perceptions of their parents' party affiliations, and measures of the parent-child relationship, we find children differentially learn and then choose to affiliate, or not, with their parents. These findings challenge several core assumptions upon which the extant literature is built, namely that the majority of children both know and adopt their parents' party identification. We conclude that there is much to be learned by focusing on children as active agents in their political socialization.

## Keywords

political affiliation, party identification, transmission, values, perception, child agency

The transmission of political party identification from parents to children remains one of the most studied concepts in political sociology (Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Bengtson 1975; Campbell et al. 1960; Glass, Bengtson, and Dunham 1986; Jennings and Markus 1984). Such attention is not surprising given the profound influence political parties and identities have on the individual and society. The classics of postwar political sociology initially focused on membership in social groups—such as ethnicity, class, and religion—as the source of political identities and conflicts in democratic societies (Franklin, Mackie, and Valen 1992). This view has given way to more recent scholarship that finds ideological

and partisan identities have increased in importance (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Brooks and Manza 1997; Inglehart 1990; Iyengar and Westwood 2015). Laws and policies on marriage, how we can have sex, how income is distributed, human rights, free speech, healthcare, freedoms and tolerance, competing visions of equality of condition

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versus equality of process, who is deserving of representation and benefits, and every other aspect of group life are influenced by electoral outcomes in western democracies. In the United States, political parties both encapsulate and set the policy stances for these issues.

Identification with political parties is equally pervasive in our personal lives. Whom we choose to affiliate with and marry, where we choose to live and go to school, and so many other social experiences are guided in part by our political identities (Alford et al. 2011; Cavior, Miller, and Cohen 1975; Kalmijn 1998; McAuley and Nutty 1982; Rubinson 1986; Stoker and Jennings 2006; Watson et al. 2004; Zuckerman 2005). Understanding the origins of political identity, specifically the transmission of party identification, contributes to a larger understanding of how party politics define and influence social life. The majority of the political socialization literature proposes that through either active or passive teaching, children “learn” their political party identification from their parents, and this identification, in turn, becomes part of their identity (Bengtson 1975; Jennings and Niemi 1968; Miller and Glass 1989). This view is supported by the purportedly high concordance between parents’ and their adult children’s political party identification, and the belief that positive transmission between parents and children occurs the majority of time. Indirect modes of transmission, such as the social milieu created by parents, have also been proposed as operating on the socialization of party identification, although to a lesser degree (Knoke 1972; McAllister and Kelley 1985).

These foundations have yet to be revisited using more recent sociological theory. The sociology of childhood has continued to develop and given birth to the *social* child, one who has more agency<sup>1</sup> and competence than is implied in the political socialization literature (Haug 2013; Morrow 2002). In this view, models of top-down parental socialization do not adequately reflect the socialization process. Rather, as Maccoby and Martin (1983:78) argue, an emphasis on parent-child

interaction is needed to lead “us away from viewing parental behavior as something that is done *to* children or *for* children towards the view that it is done *with* children.” This perspective, in contrast to historical work that treats children as a *tabula rasa* onto which parents and other socializing agents inscribe political values, is increasingly reflected in modern sociological explorations of values writ large (e.g., Calarco 2014; Corsaro and Fingerson 2006). Nevertheless, the majority of research on political value transmission continues to rely almost exclusively on models that present an asymmetric relationship between parents and children. These models propose that children observe and imitate the behaviors of authority figures, most commonly parents, with little control over what is learned.

Psychosocial development theories, in which children seek to establish an identity both separate and apart from their family (Erikson 1968), and self-determination theories, in which individuals internalize social values by integrating them into their sense of self (Grolnick, Ryan, and Deci 1991), extend the social learning approaches. Sociological and psychological studies that focus on these mechanisms of child learning reveal that individual differences in child learning are as important as parental teaching (Middleton and Putney 1963; Patterson, DeBaryshe, and Ramsey 1989). Calarco (2014), for example, uses longitudinal ethnography to show that the passage of class-based cultures from parents to children is neither automatic nor immediate. She found that children were often reluctant to adopt the problem-solving strategies modeled by parents. Children play a critical role in their learning; they create their own realities, have their own cognitive and emotive biases, selectively attend to experiences, and differentially process information, including that from parents. This is true for social values and norms, as well as religious and group affiliations (Bao et al. 1999; Block and Block 2006; Fraley et al. 2012; Knafo and Schwartz 2003; Koleva and Rip 2009; Miller and Glass 1989; Nelson and Tallman 1969). If party identification adheres

to the same mechanisms of learning common to other social traits, then a child's perception of parental party identification should be paramount to the transmission process.

These countervailing assumptions about children, one in which children have no agency and another in which children have agency, raise issues about how children are ontologically treated and studied in political socialization research. Kohn's (1983:1) critique of parent-driven models of political socialization suggests there is a lack of research focusing on the child because "[t]he object of research has generally been, not to demonstrate a similarity in parents' and children's values, but to explain a similarity that was assumed to exist." We attempt to resolve these inconsistencies and continue to build on recent work in the sociology of childhood by presenting a two-step model of political identity transmission that provides agency to children within the context of social learning. We argue that children observe and often imitate parents' attitudes and behaviors, but they do so critically. Children must perceive and evaluate parents' attitudes and behaviors and then determine whether to adopt or reject those attitudes and behaviors as their own. While our focus is on the transmission of party identification, we propose that our two-step model is applicable to a wide range of social identities, values, and attitudes. Party identification is a good initial test of the model because of the breadth of research on political socialization that uses the direct transmission model, the enduring quality of party identification over the life course, and the importance of party identification in shaping other social attitudes and behaviors (Alwin and Krosnick 1991).

Current models of partisan identification, what are labeled *direct transmission models* (see Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009), point to trait-to-trait correlations as evidence that the parent, or other relevant socializing agent, has successfully passed on values to the child. Trait-to-trait evidence assumes transmission occurs if the correlation is positive. Yet in order for real transmission to occur, children must actually know parents'

political values and then choose to adopt them. Introducing a model that explicitly tests this assumption is important, because children might discount, ignore, or choose to reject their parents' values. This possibility is significant because the direct transmission model treats children who accurately perceive and adopt their parents' party identification the *same* as children who misperceive and reject their parents' party identification—thus returning a false positive. Imagine, for example, Republican parents with two children. The first child chooses to identify as a Republican because she perceives her parents as being Republican and wants to adopt this affiliation; the second child, however, chooses to identify as a Republican because he incorrectly perceives his parents to be Democrats and want to reject this affiliation. These cases share empirically equivalent outcomes but are qualitatively different from one another. Transmission occurs in the former but not the latter. Thus, the mechanics of parent-child transmission remain obfuscated by ignoring children's perceptions in the political socialization process.

This study makes two important contributions to understanding the intergenerational transmission of party identification. First, and most important, we show that children play a critical role in the transmission of party identification; how children perceive and respond to parental values affects their own values. Second, we show that one of the core assumptions in political sociology, that children typically adopt their parents' political values, is not valid. Rather, once measures of child perceptions are included, we find parent-child concordance of political identification is far lower than previously believed.

## SOCIALIZATION AND THE TRANSMISSION OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION

Political socialization, the process through which adolescents and young adults acquire political beliefs, attitudes, and identities and

begin to understand and engage the political world around them, is fostered by, and mediated through, interactions with agents of socialization (Greenstein 1965). These agents, through exposure to information and social reinforcement, create environments and convey perceptions and orientations to individuals, all of which are mediated by societal context (Boehnke 2001; Huckfeldt 1979; Weiner and Eckland 1979). The past century of research has identified the most important agents of political socialization as the family, peers, education, schools, neighborhoods, religion, mentors, the mass media, social movements, issue and partisan salience, economic conditions and status, global events, opinion leaders, gender, and age (Gauchat 2012; Haynes and Jacobs 1994; Janowitz and Segal 1967; Lopreato 1967; Manza and Brooks 1997; Thompson 1971). The opportunities under which these agents can exert an influence are unlimited and mostly informal, especially outside the structure of the election cycle. Politics is simply infused in almost every aspect of modern group life (Langton 1969). Young people are socialized into politics through conversing with family members at dinner, watching television, participating in Facebook, or texting with friends, for example.

Given its prominence in U.S. culture as the most central component of political identity, the acquisition of political party identification has been the subject of intense study. Extant research overwhelmingly shows that the family, parental influence specifically, is the single most important political socialization agent. There are many other social contributors to party identification that have a lesser role in the development and transmission of political identification. Upon closer review, however, the literature provides evidence that for many non-familial socializing agents, children's disposition at least partially guides their perception of and selection into these experiences. Thus, before we turn to the family, we briefly review this literature.

Much research argues that education plays a prominent role in political socialization (Haste and Torney-Purta 1992). Initially, this

socialization is less pertinent for political identity and more often focused on civic duty and institutional understanding. For example, primary and high school environments often stimulate political learning through civics education, reciting the pledge of allegiance, or extracurricular activities such as student government (Hess and Torney-Purta 1967; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996). College, on the other hand, invites a more complex process of political socialization through interaction with teachers and students, self-selective exposure to new ideas, and the identity gained by voluntarily joining groups and engaging in student activism (Alwin, Cohen, and Newcomb 1991; Dey 1997; Nasatir 1968; Weiner and Eckland 1979).

Peer influences, unlike familial and institutional forces such as religion and primary school that have a hierarchical and authoritative foundation, offer a form of group-identity, where fitting in has a more substantial role in the acquisition of beliefs (Walker, Hennig, and Krettenauer 2000). Individuals, however, most often gravitate toward groups that hold beliefs similar to their own to minimize conflict and reinforce their own values. Nevertheless, there is pressure to conform and young people desire acceptance. Thus, they tend to preferentially select into like-minded groups and then continue to adopt the specific attitudes, viewpoints, and behaviors of those groups (Harris 1995).

The mass media is also a powerful socialization force (Krueger 2006; McLeod 2000; Merriam 1931). With few exceptions, exposure to political persons and events is experienced through the media, whether it is news on the Internet or television shows depicting political happenings. Starting in the 1980s, mass-media experiences have become gradually more individual experiences, especially for young adults, who spend an increasing amount of time on smart phones and computers. The Internet and its unlimited forms of social media allow for personalized exposure to information and permit people to self-select into their preferred forum for every type and view of any political or social topic.

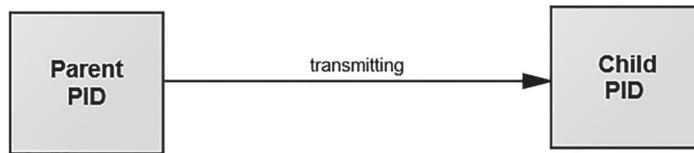
Social identities, such as class, ethnicity, cultural groups, gender, sex, and religion, all affect political preferences and how individuals believe those preferences might be realized vis-à-vis political parties (Beutel and Marini 1995; Knoke and Felson 1974; Knoke and Hout 1974; Orum and Cohen 1973; Rubinson 1986; Sears and Valentino 1997). Exploring in detail the influences of every type of social identity on party affiliation is beyond the scope of this article; suffice to say that their influences during childhood and adolescence operate largely through parental transmission and the environments parents directly or indirectly provide (Glass et al. 1986; Kohn, Slomczynski, and Schoenbach 1986).

Of the array of socialization processes, Hyman's (1959:51) proclamation over 50 years ago that "foremost among agencies of socialization into politics is the family" remains the majority view today. The family is the primary supplier of the home environment, culture, and nurturance, and it provides the neighborhood, religion, schools, and resources that children grow up in during their formative years. A hierarchical structure exists within all families, even in the most non-authoritative families, in which parents set the rules and establish familial values. The strong emotional relationships that exist between parents and children compel many children to adopt behaviors and attitudes that will please their parents, but at times children also challenge or refuse parent-approved behaviors and attitudes.

In some cases, parents directly teach their children about political values, institutions, and processes of government, but this is not common. Rather, parents' greatest influence in the development of political values is through political party identification (Kohn 1983); as agents of political socialization, parents are most successful in passing on their political identity (Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Campbell et al. 1960; Hyman 1959; Knoke 1972; Merelman 1986). In the United States, this identity is most often gained through affiliation with either the Republican or Democratic Party.

The empirical foundation for this view, that parents pass on their party identification to their children, relies almost entirely on the uniformly positive trait-to-trait correlations found between self-reported parent and child political party identification (Bengtson 1975; Campbell et al. 1960; Dalton 1980; Glass et al. 1986; Jennings and Niemi 1968, 1981; Langton and Jennings 1968; Niemi and Jennings 1991; Tedin 1974). Based on these correlations, three important assumptions have been made in this literature: (1) children are passive learners; (2) a majority of children know their parents' party identifications; and (3) a majority of children adopt their parents' party identifications. This view remains the modal and near constant approach for studying the transmission of party identification. Perhaps the past 50 years of research in this area can be summarized by Jennings and colleagues (2009), who recently affirmed the importance of the direct transmission model: "As expected on the basis of social learning theory . . . [t]he direct transmission model is robust, as it withstands an extensive set of controls. Early acquisition of parental characteristics influences the subsequent nature of adult political development." Parents are believed to be the primary force in the formation of children's political values because they control the flow of political information that children receive (Easton, Dennis, and Easton 1969; Greenstein 1965) and provide the environment in which children develop. Figure 1 shows this viewpoint as a simple model.

The parent-child correlations, ranging in value from .3 to .6, are high enough to support an important role for parents but low enough to suggest that party identification is not perfectly transmitted like information through a fax machine. Scholars have offered several explanations to explain the discrepancy between the claims of the social learning hypothesis and the often modest size of the parent-child correlational evidence. The primary explanation for the correlation not being higher is that parents are not always able to send clear and consistent cues about their



**Figure 1.** The Direct Trait-to-Trait Transmission Model

*Note:* PID = political party identification.

beliefs (Beck and Jennings 1991; Knoke 1972; Tedin 1980). That is, more successful transmission will supposedly occur with better communication and higher quality parent-child interactions (e.g., Calarco 2014). Additional research shows that the political climate of the home, the salience of political issues, and the nature of the times also have a role in the concordance between parents and children deviating from unity (Boehnke, Hadjar, and Baier 2007; Sears and Valentino 1997).

This work has yet to include modern research that embraces child agency and the mechanics of child learning (see Mayall and Zeiher 2003; Middleton and Putney 1963; Morrow 2002; Nelson and Tallman 1969). Including child agency has significant implications for understanding why the concordance between parents and children deviates from unity, even when communication is high and issues are salient. Unlike the direct transmission model, we consider mismatches of political identification between parents and children to be an inherent part of, rather than an error in, the transmission process. We propose the transmission of political party identification between parent and child is a social and psychological process that entails at least two steps: (1) one individual (i.e., the parent) impresses information upon another individual (i.e., the child), and (2) the latter individual (i.e., the child) receives and evaluates that information. Both the parent and the child have active roles in this process and might deviate, either intentionally or unintentionally, from perfect transmission. Parents might not disclose their partisanship, for example, to let their children choose a party identification for themselves. On the other hand, children may either misperceive or reject their parents' values. Transmission fails to occur in

either case, yet parents and children still may hold the same party identification, and trait-to-trait correlation would erroneously count this as transmission.

Earlier sociological and psychological studies that focus on child development find the quality of value transmission depends on the disposition of the child, with considerations based on developmental stage and age (Abendschön 2013; Piaget 1965; Whitbeck and Gecas 1988). More specifically, as children grow up and develop social sophistication, they gain understanding of the issues, become increasingly aware of the import of political identity, and can exert a greater influence on the transmission process. Political identification crystallizes in adolescence and young adulthood (Sears and Valentino 1997), a time at which individuals have developed a great deal of agency but are often still influenced by parents. This balance between the child's agency and the parent's influence has been all but overlooked in interpretations of the greater political socialization research, although it is hinted at in numerous studies (e.g., Hyman 1959; Jennings and Niemi 1968). In addition, several studies, when combined, provide reason to specifically address this issue. For example, children can direct the flow of information they receive about politics by initiating conversations with parents (McDevitt 2006; Saphir and Chaffee 2002) and often seek alternative information that reflects their own values by talking to peers (Atkin and Gantz 1978). Similar variability in information-seeking behaviors, which in part are dispositional and reflect one's personality (Belsky 1984; Pirolli and Card 1999), account for differences in how children perceive and evaluate parental information and values. Indeed, studies of households with more than

one child, including children of the same age, attest to profound differences in interpretation of the same parental cues and messages (Hetherington, Reiss, and Plomin 2013).

The fact that party identification does not crystallize until late adolescence has two important implications for this study. First, it is possible to study this two-step process of transmission using a sample of adolescents and young adults. One problem that child socialization research encounters is a dearth of data, often due to the difficulties of capturing socialization near or at the time it occurs. Party identification is less susceptible to this problem because of the developmental stage during which it emerges. Second, adolescence and young adulthood is a time when individuals have developed enough agency to determine, at least in part, their own social identity. This latter point is important because it lends plausibility to the argument that models of transmission should account for the role of the child.

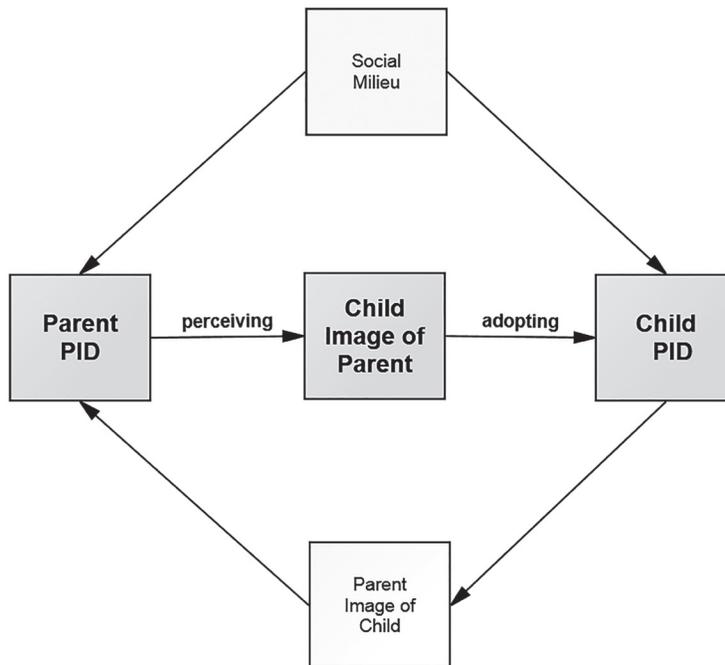
Critical to our argument, research shows that children's perceptions of their parents' values and attitudes are more important in value transmission and child behavior than are parents' actual values and behaviors (Cashmore and Goodnow 1985; Knafo and Schwartz 2003). Yet little empirical work explores this area regarding political orientations, with two exceptions. With respect to political attitudes, Acock and Bengtson (1980) assessed 446 parent-child triads drawn from a population of Los Angeles residents belonging to a shared health plan. They found that "within the family, the actual opinions of parents appear to have little direct bearing on children's orientations, except as the actual orientations are perceived and reinterpreted by the children. It is not what parents think, but what their children think they think, that predicts their offspring's attitudes" (p. 513). Tedin (1980), relying on a very small sample of parents and children ( $n = 155$ ), found that value transmission was greater in children who knew their parents' political preferences. Critically different from our view, he considered child perception a measure of parental communication and not a factor of the child.

Thus, while sociologists have long voiced concerns over the inadequacies of the unidirectional conception of socialization (see Kohn 1983), only a handful of studies provide preliminary evidence that child agency is important for political party identification, one of the most important indicators of political and social identity in the United States.

## **A PERCEPTION-ADOPTION MODEL**

We operationalize and extend previous social learning and perceptual models (Bao et al. 1999; Westholm 1999) by further integrating the nature of child learning into the study of political affiliation. Figure 2 presents our baseline perception-adoption model. The model also depicts other factors that influence transmission, such as the social milieu of the family and any potential feedback from the child to the parent. This milieu can be viewed as a larger latent construct that encompasses the greater societal context (e.g., events, social movements, and economic conditions), as we do in this study, or it can be operationalized to include those forces individually. The model does not assume trait-to-trait parent-child congruence is evidence of positive transmission. Rather, it assumes parents and children both affect the transmission process. Children must first perceive their parents' party identification and then choose to adopt it for transmission to occur. This extension allows us to answer several important questions: To what degree does the transmission of party identification in the U.S. electorate depend on the child's perception and adoption of parents' values? What enhances or depresses the ability of children to perceive their parents' party identifications? Why do some children choose to adopt their parents' political identification while others reject it?

The first step in the transmission process is perception. Accurate perception depends on the availability of relevant information and the ability of the perceiver to detect and utilize that information (Funder 1995). Research on party identification tends to focus on the availability and relevance of information by



**Figure 2.** The Perception-Adoption Model

Note: PID = political party identification.

emphasizing top-down processes in which parents exert control over the information children receive (Easton et al. 1969; Greenstein 1965). For example, research consistently finds that the probability of transmitting party identification modestly increases as parents' cues about political partisanship become more clear and consistent (Knoke and Hout 1974; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). However, even the most communicative of homes have a substantial gap in parent-child values, because the role of the child in detecting and utilizing that information is not accounted for.

The second step in the transmission process is adoption. In this step, children decide whether to adopt their parents' perceived party identification or to reject it. The adoption step has not been examined for political affiliation, but it has been explored for other social values through both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. In the former, parents are motivated to transmit values to their children (Whitbeck and Gecas 1988), but parenting styles influence the adoption of values

(Schönplflug 2001). Research on bottom-up processes focuses on children's motivation to adopt or reject parents' values (Knafo and Schwartz 2004). Motivation for adopting parents' values may be based on the perceived moral desirability of those values, the desire for a constrained self-identity, the anticipation of reward or the avoidance of punishment, the desire to rebel against parents, or the desire to avoid feelings of shame or guilt that may result from parent-child value incongruence (Achen 2002; Knafo and Assor 2007; Middleton and Putney 1963). The political socialization literature has given less attention to why children *choose* to adopt what they believe to be their parents' party identification as their own. The overwhelming assumption in the trait-to-trait model is that adoption generally occurs when party identification is known.

The final component of our perception-adoption model is the social milieu. Social milieu—sometimes called third-party, parallel experiences or *zeitgeist*—refers to factors common to both parents and children that

affect the party identification of each (Boehnke et al. 2007; Nelson and Tallman 1969). The influence of the social milieu has warranted less attention in the transmission of party identification. McAllister and Kelley (1985), for example, argue that “the social milieu of the family has little or no effect on the preferences of the children and it is the partisanship of the parent that is the dominant factor.” Nevertheless, recent years have seen renewed attention to the social milieu, particularly regarding one’s perceptions of one’s own values relative to that of society’s. Boehnke and colleagues (2007), for example, show that the transmission of values from parent to child is stronger when families have values that appear further from the mean of preferences within a given society, but transmission is weak-to-insignificant when family values appear similar to the zeitgeist. Given that we are providing the baseline model and focusing on the most proximal component of value transmission (parent to child) we do not explicitly include zeitgeist factors in these analyses. We do, however, offer several specific and implementable suggestions in the conclusion for incorporating the social milieu into the baseline model articulated here.

Overall, the perception-adoption model reveals the complexity of transmission by including perception, adoption, and the social milieu common to both parents and children. It does not propose the abandonment of past research that relied on the direct transmission model. Rather, we consider the direct transmission model to represent a simpler, macro model of transmission, because it reduces perception and adoption into a single unidirectional trait-to-trait relationship. The perception-adoption model unpacks these steps, and in so doing, gives agency to the child in the transmission process.

## WHAT INFORMS PERCEPTION AND ADOPTION?

We operationalize our perception-adoption model by focusing on how the quality of the parent-child relationship affects the child’s

ability to both correctly perceive parental values and choose to adopt or reject those values. Two established aspects of the quality of parent-child relationships—discussion and social support—are important mechanisms facilitating value transmission through a better understanding of the parent (i.e., perception) and a desire to model parents’ behaviors (i.e., adoption). We elucidate their role in more detail below.

One consistent finding in the values socialization literature is that communication within a household helps facilitate the transmission of values from parents to child (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006; Myers 1996). As Hooghe and Boonen (2013:143) note, “talking about politics within the family context can indeed significantly increase the likelihood of adolescents sharing the same voting intention as (one of) their parents.” Within the context of the perception-adoption model, however, these findings raise additional questions. Which step of the transmission process is affected by discussion? Are children better at perceiving parents’ party identification because of discussion, or are they more likely to adopt parents’ party identification due to affective or other reasons? Discussion is one way individuals reveal preferences to others and thereby set the stage for change (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1991). Nevertheless, discussion in and of itself does not immediately suggest change in one direction or another; discussion could as easily lead to agreement as to argument. Thus, we further refine the importance of discussion by arguing that it allows children to better know their parents’ political party identifications, but it does not necessarily lead to higher rates of adoption.

A second component of the quality of the parent-child relationship found to have an important role in child learning is parent-child affect (Nelson and Tallman 1969). One measure of affect—social support—has been widely used in the psychological literatures to measure the quality of parent-child interaction. Social support includes the size and interconnectedness of social networks, the

perception of being reliably connected to others, and the assistance provided by others (Barrera 1986). We propose social support is important to the transmission process because it brings about feelings of belonging and affiliation resulting from inclusion in family and in-group activities (Kaplan, Cassel, and Gore 1977). Positive affect between parents and children enhances value transmission (Murray and Mulvaney 2012). For example, Tedin (1980) classified children into parent-oriented and peer-oriented groups depending on how much affect they expressed toward parents and peers; parent-oriented children had stronger attitude concordance with parents than did their peer-oriented counterparts. Research on similar affiliatory behaviors provides evidence that good relationships between parents and children, especially those characterized by openness and warmth, lead to a higher quality of parental transmission of religious commitment and affiliation (Taris and Semin 1997). These findings demonstrate that affect is an important facilitator of value transmission.

In contrast to parent-child communication, we propose that positive social support facilitates the adoption of parents' political identification but does not necessarily enhance children's perceptions of it. Because social support cultivates feelings of belonging and affiliation, it is likely to improve children's identification with parents. In contrast, children who perceive little support from parents will have a lesser sense of belonging and cohesion with their parents. This may have one of two contrasting effects. First, children who perceive lower social support will be less likely to identify with parents; they may look for social support elsewhere, which opens up the possibility that their party identification will be grounded in extra-familial sources (e.g., Huckfeldt and Sprague 1991; Tedin 1980). Second, children who perceive lower social support may be motivated to please their parents in the hopes of cultivating feelings of social support; in this case, children may be more likely to adopt their parents' party identification.

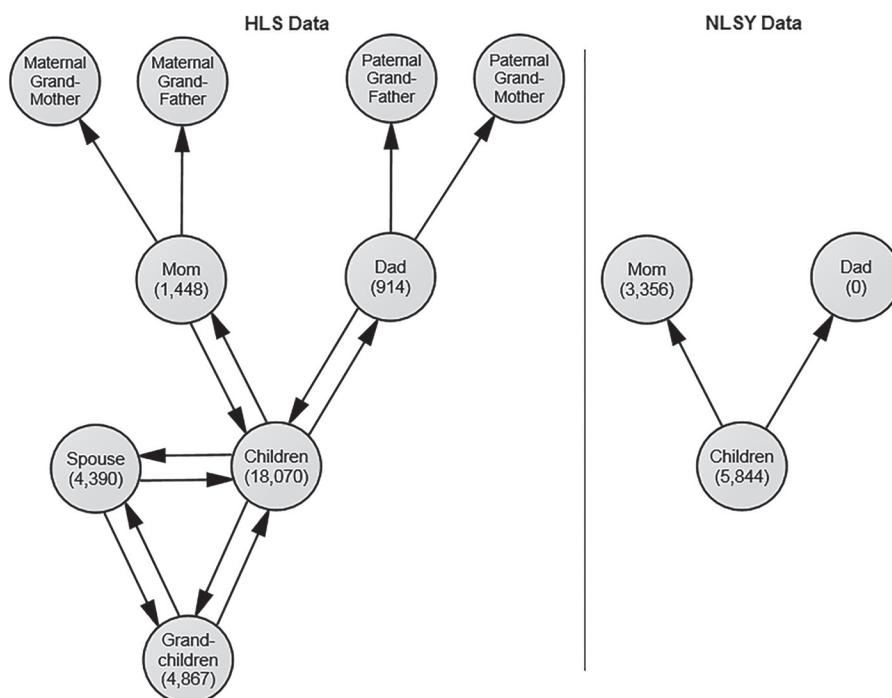
## METHODS

### *Data and Measures*

Data come from two sources. The first dataset, the Health and Lifestyles Study (HLS), is a 1988 survey of 8,636 families in the United States, which includes parents, adult children, spouses, and other relatives. Families in the HLS were identified through state birth records and national advertisements (for a full description of the data, collection techniques, and method see Eaves, Martin, and Heath 1990). Figure 3 presents a diagram of the family members represented in this study and their respective sample size. What makes these data unique, and particularly suited for this study, is that respondents answered questions about other family members, including their political identification, and the dataset includes measures of the quality of parent-child interactions. Arrows in Figure 3 indicate the direction of cross-reporting. Cross-reports are crucial because they reveal the *perceptions* of each family member, which allows one to compare a respondent's self-reported attributes with others' perceptions of those attributes.

The second dataset consists of the 2006 and 2008 waves of the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY, Center for Human Resource Research 2004). The NLSY data initially contained 12,686 respondents; additional interviews were conducted as the women in this dataset had children, thereby allowing for a mother-child dyad dataset to be generated (3,356 families). Several questions about politics were asked in 2006 and 2008 of both mothers and children, including children's cross-reports on parents' party identification and measures of parent-child communication.

The combination of datasets presents several strengths. First, it allows us to replicate findings. Replicating a study in all its important details establishes the reliability of results. Second, both datasets survey children in adolescence, young adulthood, and adulthood, thereby capturing the full range of the life course. Finally, the two datasets can be used to confirm the robustness of the findings



**Figure 3.** Sample Sizes of Kinship Linkages

across a three-decade time span—HLS data are from the late 1980s and NLSY data are from the late 2000s.<sup>2</sup>

To assess political party identification (PID) in the HLS, respondents were asked to indicate a political affiliation for themselves, their sibling, mother, father, and spouse, where applicable. Self-reports and cross-reports rely on the same measure. Responses include five options: “always support Republicans,” “usually support Republicans,” “varies,” “usually supports Democrats,” and “always support Democrats.” Higher values indicate a stronger Democratic affiliation. Values of children’s self-reported PID are distributed as follows: 9 percent always support Republicans, 30 percent usually support Republicans, 36 percent vary, 20 percent usually support Democrats, and 5 percent always support Democrats. Subsequent analyses of the HLS data use the five-point measure of party identification unless otherwise indicated. In the NLSY, child respondents were asked about their self-reported and cross-reported PID in either 2006 or 2008; mothers were asked about their

self-reported PID in 2008. Self-reported PID in the NLSY follows the American National Election Studies seven-point scale of “strongly Republican,” “Republican,” “leaning Republican,” “neither Republican nor Democrat,” “leaning Democrat,” “Democrat,” and “strongly Democrat,” in which higher values indicate a strong Democratic affiliation. The cross-reported PID, in which children report on their mother’s PID, is limited to a three-point scale of “Republican,” “Independent,” and “Democrat.” To make self-reports and cross-reports commensurable, we collapse the self-reported PID into the three-point scale; all subsequent analyses of the NLSY data use the three-point measure. About 31 percent of children report a Republican affiliation, 27 percent report no affiliation, and 42 percent report a Democratic affiliation.

### ASSESSING THE PERCEPTION-ADOPTION MODEL

As an initial assessment of our hypothesis that parent-child concordance does not

**Table 1.** Transmission Does Not Occur in a Majority of Child-Parent Relationships

<i>HLS Sample (Child-Mother Dyads)</i>		
	<u>Correctly Perceive</u>	<u>Incorrectly Perceive</u>
Adopt	46.5%	18.5%
Reject	23.3%	11.7%
<i>HLS Sample (Child-Father Dyads)</i>		
	<u>Correctly Perceive</u>	<u>Incorrectly Perceive</u>
Adopt	45.9%	19.0%
Reject	22.9%	12.3%
<i>NLSY Sample (Child-Mother Dyads)</i>		
	<u>Correctly Perceive</u>	<u>Incorrectly Perceive</u>
Adopt	48.8%	20.2%
Reject	18.0%	13.0%

*Note:* Values are cell percentages of children who report on the perception of their parents' political party identification (correctly perceive versus incorrectly perceive) and the evaluation of their parents' party identification (adopt versus reject). True transmission occurs when a child correctly perceives and adopts the parent's party identification. Sample size for HLS is 4,963 mother-child dyads and 3,466 father-child dyads. Sample size for the NLSY is 2,048 mother-child dyads.

necessarily reflect transmission, we examine the frequency with which children correctly perceive and adopt parents' party identification. All significance tests are two-tailed unless otherwise noted. Table 1 is a 2x2 display of the perception and adoption steps. In the perception step, children either correctly or incorrectly perceive their parents' PID. In the adoption step, children either adopt or reject parents' PID. This leads to four potential outcomes: correctly perceive and adopt (true transmission), correctly perceive and reject (true rejection), incorrectly perceive and adopt (false transmission), and incorrectly perceive and reject (false rejection). True transmission occurs only when a child correctly perceives and chooses to adopt the parent's PID.

The results show that true transmission (i.e., correctly perceiving and adopting) fails to occur in a majority of parent-child relationships. This finding turns the extant literature on its head and requires reconsideration of how to interpret the parent-child correlations from previous research on political value transmission, if not the main thesis behind the similarity in parent-child party affiliation. That is, we find that one of the core assumptions of the trait-to-trait model—that value

transmission occurs the majority of time—is not valid. With the HLS mothers and fathers, true transmission occurs about 46 percent of the time. The remaining 54 percent of children either misperceive or reject parents' party identification and transmission does not occur.<sup>3</sup> The results are similar in the NLSY, which is composed of younger adult children. Less than half of these children correctly perceive and adopt the mother's party identification. In contrast, about 20 percent of children adopt a misperception of their mother's PID, while another 18 percent of children reject the correct perception of their mother's PID. The first results from our two-step approach provide evidence that the transmission process is more complicated than what is captured using only trait-to-trait evidence.

Table 2 reports correlations between children's self-reported PID, children's perception of parents' PID, and parents' self-reported PID. These correlations are labeled trait-to-trait (child self-report and parent self-report), perception (parent self-report and child-report on parent), and adoption (child-report on parent and child self-report). Trait-to-trait correlations are .39 and .37 for mothers and fathers, respectively, in the HLS, and .46 for mothers

**Table 2.** Correlations Indicate an Important Role for Perception in the Transmission Process

	HLS Sample		Concordant HLS Parents		Discordant HLS Parents		NLSY Sample
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers
Trait-to-Trait	.39	.37	.48	.48	.21	.09	.46
Perception Step	.70	.68	.76	.77	.47	.38	.61
Adoption Step	.51	.48	.58	.55	.41	.36	.63
Observations	4,963	3,466	2,228	2,228	942	942	1,810

*Note:* Direct or trait-to-trait transmission is the correlation between parent's political party identification (PID) and child's PID, perception is the correlation between parent's PID and child's perception of parent's PID, and adoption is the correlation between child's perception of parent's PID and child's PID.

in the NLSY. These values reflect the traditional approach to studying the transmission of PID and are consistent with previous findings (Acock and Bengtson 1980; Jennings and Niemi 1968).<sup>4</sup> The perception and adoption correlations reflect the two-step learning process, in which a child first perceives the parent's PID and then chooses to adopt or reject it. The correlations for perception and adoption (.36 to .77) are significantly larger than the trait-to-trait correlations (.09 to .48) in both samples, indicating that the trait-to-trait correlations mask important learning processes, again providing additional evidence for our hypothesis. The correlations when parents are concordant for party identification, defined as jointly Republican, Democratic, or Independent, are uniformly higher than when parents are discordant, akin to extant findings (Acock and Bengtson 1980; Beck and Jennings 1991). This indicates that children better perceive parents' PID and are more likely to adopt it when parents have the same self-reported party identification.

To more adequately identify the role of perception, we use a series of logistic regressions that predict children's party identification. These models compare the influence of parent's self-reported PID to the child's perception of parent's PID. The first model is the direct transmission model and uses parent's self-reported PID as the main predictor. The second model is the perception-adoption model; it builds on the direct transmission model by including children's perception of their parents' PID. If the transmission of

political affiliation more closely reflects a direct transmission model, then the parent's self-reported PID should be the strongest predictor of the child's political affiliation. If, on the other hand, the child plays the more important role in the transmission of political affiliation, then children's perception of their parents' PID should be the strongest predictor.

Each model has standard errors clustered at the family level to account for the structure of the data. Analyses using HLS data control for sex, age, educational attainment, income, political attitudes, and education of parents. Both respondent and parental education is measured with dummy variables, one indicating a high school degree and one indicating some college education, with no high school degree serving as the reference category. Income is measured with income brackets but operationalized for the analysis as the minimum value of the income bracket in increments of \$10,000. Political attitudes are measured using a Wilson and Patterson (1968) conservatism index, with higher values corresponding to more conservative attitudes. Race and ethnicity are not included in the HLS analyses because the sample is 98 percent Caucasian. Analyses using NLSY data include the same covariates, but with three exceptions. First, the model does not include a measure of political attitudes, as there are not suitable ones in the NLSY. Second, we use parental income (in increments of \$10,000) rather than respondent income, because the sample consists primarily of

**Table 3.** Characteristics of the HLS and NLSY Samples

	HLS Mothers		HLS Fathers		NLSY Mothers	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Child Characteristics						
Black					.21	
Hispanic					.08	
Age	34.71	9.46	33.31	7.93	24.81	3.42
Male	.43		.44		.52	
High school degree	.17		.14		.72	
Some college +	.80		.84		.19	
Income	17,662	14,024	17,776	13,848		
Attitudes	20.62	7.78				
Parent Characteristics						
High school degree	.35		.23		.77	
Some college +	.51		.61		.16	
Income (\$)					75,209	72,430
Observations	4,963		3,466		1,810	

young adults, many living at their parents' home, for whom parental income is a better indicator of economic status. Third, we control for race by including dummy variables for Black and Hispanic, with Caucasian serving as the reference category. The models use sample weights to correct for the oversampling of Blacks, Hispanics, and the economically disadvantaged. Table 3 lists descriptive statistics for these variables.

Table 4 reports results of the analyses for HLS mothers and fathers as well as NLSY mothers. The direct transmission models confirm the notion that parents' PID is a strong predictor of children's political affiliation. Children are more likely to report a strong Democratic affiliation when parents report a strong Democratic affiliation, and likewise with Republican affiliations. However, our perception-adoption models show that children's perception of their parents' PID is the most important predictor of transmission. These models reveal that the actual PIDs of mothers and fathers offer very little additional benefit in explaining transmission when compared to the influence of the child's perception. This is seen most explicitly by examining the first differences reported in Table 4. The first differences for the HLS mothers and

fathers represent the change in the probability of claiming to "usually support Democrats" given a one standard deviation change in the independent variable, when all other variables are held at their median value. A one standard deviation change in the child's perception is associated with a 15 percent increase (HLS mothers model), a 14 percent increase (HLS fathers model), and a 23 percent increase (NLSY mothers model) in the child reporting a Democratic affiliation.<sup>5</sup> These findings strongly suggest a mediating effect of perception between parents' self-reported PID and child's self-reported PID.

We conduct mediation models and sensitivity analyses as alternative modeling strategies and report results in the online supplement (<http://asr.sagepub.com/supplemental>). These results mirror findings from the main analyses by showing that the influence of parent PID occurs almost exclusively through the child's perception. Because transmission of party identification from parent to child occurs primarily during adolescence and young adulthood, when individuals first encounter the political world and their place in it, we conduct additional analyses by restricting the sample to adolescents and young adults (i.e., respondents age 16 to 24).

**Table 4.** The Perceptual Pathway Model Better Explains the Transmission of Party Identification

	HLS Mothers			HLS Fathers			NLSY Mothers		
	Trait-to-Trait	Perceptual Pathway	First Differences	Trait-to-Trait	Perceptual Pathway	First Differences	Trait-to-Trait	Perceptual Pathway	First Differences
Parent Self-Reported PID	1.949* (.06)	1.094* (.04)	1%	1.989* (.07)	1.168* (.05)	2%	2.527* (.23)	1.298* (.13)	4%
Child Perception of Parent PID		2.580* (.13)	15%		2.337* (.13)	14%		4.141* (.46)	23%
Child Characteristics									
Black									
Hispanic									
Male	.957 (.06)	.942 (.06)	-1%	.908 (.07)	.891 (.06)	-2%	.641* (.08)	.641* (.08)	-9%
Age	1.021* (.00)	1.019* (.00)	2%	1.025* (.00)	1.024* (.00)	3%	.984 (.02)	.996 (.02)	0%
High school degree	.873 (.19)	.974 (.19)	0%	.555* (.14)	.640 (.15)	-6%	1.027 (.88)	.888 (.16)	-2%
Some college +	.668 (.14)	.785 (.15)	-4%	.430* (.11)	.512* (.12)	-11%	1.026 (.92)	.857 (.22)	-3%
Income	.850* (.02)	.841* (.02)	-3%	.868* (.02)	.868* (.03)	-3%			
Political attitudes	.885* (.00)	.887* (.00)	-13%	.874* (.00)	.873* (.00)	-15%			
Parent Characteristics									
High school degree	.863 (.08)	.895 (.09)	-1%	.886 (.10)	.929 (.11)	-1%	.986 (.18)	1.213 (.024)	4%
Some college +	.867 (.08)	.892 (.09)	-2%	.863 (.09)	.941 (.10)	-6%	1.012 (.28)	1.161 (.33)	3%
Income							.999 (.01)	.997 (.01)	0%
Observations	4,963	4,963		3,466	3,466		1,810	1,810	
Clusters	2,592	2,592		1,824	1,824		1,216	1,216	

*Note:* The dependent variable is child's self-reported party identification. Models are ordered logistic regressions, cell entries are odds ratios, and standard errors are reported in parentheses. First differences are percentage point changes in the probability of reporting "usually supports Democrats" (HLS) or a Democratic affiliation (NLSY) given a one standard deviation change in the continuous variables or a 0 to 1 change in the dichotomous variables when all other variables are held at their median.  
\**p* < .05 (two-tailed).

Results using this restricted sample are consistent (i.e., same direction and significance) with results of the full sample (see the online supplement).

Until this point, our models treat parental influences as independent of one another. Additional insight into the transmission process can be gained by simultaneously modeling the effect of *both* parents. Modeling parents together allows us to parse out the relative influence of mothers and fathers and the effect they have on each other's influence, an issue that has long been a concern in the study of political socialization. Figure 4 presents a structural model based on the assumed causal pathways. In this model, the PID of both parents may directly inform the child's PID. This path is indicated by arrows from the mother's and father's PIDs to the child's PID. The child's perception of parents' PIDs is also informed by the parents' PIDs. These paths are indicated by arrows from mother's and father's PIDs to the child's image of mother and father. The child's adoption of parental PID is indicated by arrows from the child's image of mother and father to the child's PID. Child attributes, including sex, age, education, income, and political attitudes, are included in the model, indicated by arrows from child attributes to child's perceptions and self-reported PID. For this analysis, we use only HLS data, which have measures for both mothers and fathers. We conducted analyses using the SEM procedure in Stata 12.0 and standard errors are clustered by family. Figure 4 shows that pathways from the mother's and father's PID to the child's PID are not statistically significant after both parents are included in the model. These results illustrate the importance of the child's perception in the transmission process. That is, the most important causal pathways are parents' PIDs on the child's perception and the child's perceptions on the child's adoption.

### *Informing Perception and Adoption*

Earlier we highlighted two mechanisms through which we expect transmission of

party identification to improve: political discussion and social support. Here, we use regression analysis to determine which step of the transmission process is affected by these aspects of parent-child relationships. Do children better *perceive* parent PID when exposed to discussion or social support? Or are children more likely to *adopt* perceived parent PID when exposed to discussion or social support? Or do these factors operate on both steps of the transmission process? To answer these questions, we run three regression models: a trait-to-trait model, a perception model, and an adoption model.

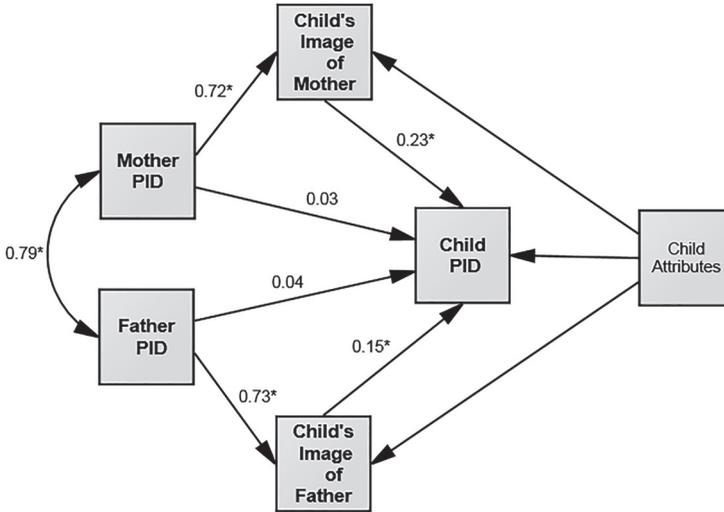
*Trait-to-trait model:* The dependent variable is the child's self-reported party identification; the main independent variables are parents' self-reported PID, discussion (or social support), and an interaction between parent PID and discussion (or social support).

*Perception model:* The dependent variable is the child's perception of parent PID; the main independent variables are child's perception, discussion (or social support), and an interaction of the two.

*Adoption model:* The dependent variable is the child's self-reported PID; the main independent variables are parents' PID, child's perception, discussion (or social support), and an interaction between child's perception and discussion (or social support).

Because each dataset contains only one of these measures, we use NLSY data for the analysis of political discussion and HLS data for the analysis of social support. All the control variables from the models in Table 4 are included in these analyses.

The *political discussion hypothesis* articulated earlier holds that discussion enhances children's perception of parents' PID but will not necessarily lead to a higher rate of adoption. Political discussion is measured by asking respondents, "When you were growing up, how often did you hear the adults in your household talking about politics?" Response



**Figure 4.** The SEM Models Both Parents at the Same Time and Shows the Importance of the Child’s Perception in the Transmission Process

Note: PID = political party identification.  
 \* $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

options include “never” (about 22 percent of respondents), “once in a while” (48 percent), “moderately often” (18 percent), “very often” (8 percent), and “extremely often” (4 percent). Table 5 reports these results. The significant interaction term in the trait-to-trait model suggests that discussion enhances the overall transmission of party identification. Nevertheless, a trait-to-trait approach conceals the two-step process that underlies the transmission of PID and the possibility that discussion has heterogeneous effects on perception and adoption. Indeed, the perception model shows that political discussion significantly increases children’s ability to perceive parent PID—the interaction term indicates that mother’s self-reported PID becomes a stronger predictor of children’s perception as political discussion increases. On the other hand, the adoption model shows that political discussion has no effect on whether children adopt their perception of mother’s PID.

The *social support hypothesis* suggests that social support leads to higher rates of adoption but will not necessarily increase children’s ability to correctly perceive parents’ PID. Social support from parents was measured by the sum of three questions from the Kessler

Perceived Social Support scale (Kessler et al. 1992): (1) How much do your parents listen to you if you need to talk about your worries or problems? (2) How much do your parents understand the way you feel and think about things? (3) How much could you count on your parents to lend you a few hundred dollars if you really needed it? Response options range from 0 to 4 and are “not at all,” “a little,” “some,” “quite a bit,” and a “great deal.” The summed scale ranges from 0 to 12, where 0 indicates no support and 12 indicates a great deal of support (mean = 8.59, SD = 2.52,  $\alpha = .78$ ).

Table 6 reports results of this analysis. The significant interaction term in the trait-to-trait model indicates that parent-child concordance grows stronger as social support increases. The question is whether we are observing this effect because social support improves perception, adoption, or both. The non-significant interaction terms in the perception models show that social support does not enhance the degree to which parent PID predicts children’s perceptions. In other words, children who report high social support are no more likely to know their parents’ PIDs than are children who report low social support. The

**Table 5.** Discussion Affects Children's Ability to Perceive Parent PID but Not the Choice to Adopt or Reject Parent PID

Model:	Trait-to-Trait	Perception	Adoption
Dependent Variable:	Child PID	Child Perception	Child PID
Parent Self-reported PID	1.764* (.24)	2.746* (.46)	1.277* (.13)
Child Perception of Parent PID			3.693* (.56)
Discussion about Politics	.517* (.10)	.464* (.12)	.771 (.15)
Discussion x Parent PID	1.323* (.11)	1.442* (.16)	
Discussion x Child Perception			1.097 (.09)
Child Characteristics			
Black	2.563* (.39)	2.379* (.40)	1.875* (.28)
Hispanic	1.668* (.25)	1.409* (.23)	1.477* (.23)
Male	.632* (.08)	.889 (.12)	.637* (.08)
Age	.981 (.19)	.973 (.02)	.994 (.02)
High school degree	.999 (.19)	1.296 (.30)	.878 (.16)
Some college +	1.025 (.25)	1.462 (.43)	.854 (.22)
Parent Characteristics			
High school degree	.968 (.18)	.790 (.18)	1.222 (.24)
Some college +	1.076 (.30)	1.061 (.33)	1.217 (.35)
Income	.986 (.01)	.966* (.01)	.997 (.01)

Note: Data come from the NLSY. Sample size is 1,810. Models are ordered logistic regressions, cell entries are odds ratios, and standard errors are reported in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

significant interaction term in the adoption model, however, provides evidence in favor of our hypothesis that children are more likely to adopt their perception of parents' PIDs as social support increases.

## DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that children's perception of parental values is a critically important determinant of political identification. The use of two unique datasets with cross-reporting provides evidence that children's perceptions

of their parents' political party identification drives adoption, and this perception improves when parents discuss politics with their children, and parents' PID is likelier to be adopted when children receive greater social support from their parents.

That is not to say that parents' actual partisan values do not play a critical role; they do and they are the main source informing what children perceive. Parental communication significantly influences children's perceptions, but perception is still influenced by parents' actual partisan values, even in households

**Table 6.** Social Support Increases the Probability Children Adopt Parents' PID, but Not Their Ability to Correctly Perceive It

Model:	HLS Mothers			HLS Fathers		
	Trait-to-Trait	Perception	Adoption	Trait-to-Trait	Perception	Adoption
	Child PID	Child Perception	Child PID	Child PID	Child Perception	Child PID
Parent Self-reported PID	1.518* (.14)	4.832* (.48)	1.089* (.04)	1.497* (.18)	4.944* (.64)	1.174* (.05)
Child Perception of Parent PID			1.545* (.18)			1.408* (.19)
Social Support	.903* (.03)	.999 (.03)	.823* (.03)	.885* (.03)	1.019 (.04)	.825* (.03)
Social Support x Parent PID	1.029* (.01)	1.003 (.01)		1.033* (.01)	.994 (.01)	
Social Support x Child Perception			1.063* (.01)			1.060* (.02)
Child Characteristics						
Male	.971 (.06)	1.032 (.07)	.949 (.06)	.897 (.07)	1.014 (.08)	.873 (.07)
Age	1.018* (.23)	1.008* (.00)	1.015* (.00)	1.022* (.01)	1.008 (.01)	1.021* (.01)
High school degree	.877 (.19)	.816 (.18)	.993* (.20)	.614* (.16)	.610* (.18)	.682 (.17)
Some college +	.684* (.15)	.732 (.16)	.820 (.16)	.478* (.12)	.577* (.16)	.564* (.13)
Income	.854* (.02)	.992 (.02)	.849 (.02)	.869* (.03)	.987 (.03)	.871* (.03)
Political attitudes	.885* (.00)	.978* (.00)	.887 (.00)	.874* (.00)	.984* (.00)	.874* (.00)
Parent Characteristics						
High school degree	.877 (.09)	.909 (.10)	.899 (.09)	.882 (.11)	.900 (.11)	.924 (.11)
Some college +	.885 (.09)	.925 (.10)	.905 (.09)	.864 (.09)	.808 (.09)	.939 (.10)

Note: Data come from the HLS; sample size is 4,796 mother-child dyads and 3,369 father-child dyads. Models are ordered logistic regressions, cell entries are odds ratios, and standard errors are reported in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

where little to no political discussion occurs. In this way, our approach and findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of how parents matter than is offered by considering only the parent's party identification: parents create the information environment in which children are embedded. Discussing politics leads to better-informed perceptions within a given information environment, but regardless of parental communication, considerable individual differences emerge between children's perceptions. Children must detect and utilize the information provided to them and evaluate that information to determine their own political identification. Some children accurately perceive their parents' party identification, regardless of what parents do, while others do not. Likewise, some children are motivated to adopt what they perceive their parents' identification to be, whereas other children are motivated to identify with a different political party. Children who experience greater social support are more strongly motivated to adopt the political affiliation they believe their parents to have, but they may misperceive what their parents believe and thus more strongly adopt the opposite values of their parents without knowing it. Thus, social support and the motivation to adopt do not necessarily lead to true transmission.

We find children are also much more likely to correctly perceive and adopt parental values when parents are concordant, consistent with past research (Bengtson 1975; Glass et al. 1986). There are two possible reasons for this effect. The first is that parent concordance leads to a more consistent information environment, thereby making it easier for children to detect and utilize the relevant information in the perception process. Another explanation, however, is that discordant parents avoid discussing politics because it is a source of tension, in which case children of discordant parents would receive less or inconsistent information from their parents.

Perceptual approaches to modeling socialization have been slow to progress, in large part, because the assumptions contained in unidirectional parent-driven approaches prevent both theoretical and empirical inclusion

of the role of the child. By empirically testing extant assumptions, we have provided evidence that they are not valid, opening the door to explore any number of topics. Indeed, the role of perception and adoption has importance beyond the transmission of party identification. Religion and religiosity, social and cultural identities, and social and political attitudes, are just some examples of the social classifications that are affected by how individuals perceive one another. Negative social attitudes, and larger cultural patterns that are unwelcome, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia, are often perpetuated through parent-child socialization. Exploring the role of the child in the socialization of these attitudes has the potential to contribute to their eradication.

The data have many strengths: the combination of the large number of families in the HLS, the modernity and representativeness of the NLSY, and the ability to compare the role of perception across three decades and diverse social contexts with differing levels of political polarization is invaluable. Nevertheless, all data remain fallible, and there are limitations in the data and model. Model results may be different across different political, sociological, or cultural contexts. For example, it is hard to say how well the model travels from the United States to other comparative contexts that have less political polarization and different political systems. The same could be said with respect to time; these data cover an unusually large span for social scientific research but are still historically situated. Data from the 1960s or some future time may produce different results due to a host of factors, such as party polarization or changes in technology and communication that affect the flow of information.

Looking beyond the parent-child relationship by collecting data focusing on the larger social milieu is a natural extension to the baseline model offered here and would address some of these limitations. Because the social milieu potentially alters the parent-child link by affecting both parents and children, incorporating specific manifestations of the macro and micro social context—including those of the school, peer group, church, media, or

political unit—may further inform the parent-child perception-adoption model. Indeed, some environments may augment children's perceptual accuracy. Communities with high levels of political competition, for example, may provide an information-rich environment where political divisions are deeply entrenched and more visible to children. In contrast, children who attend schools where civics education is not emphasized may not learn about party politics, thereby reducing their ability to detect and categorize the cues parents provide about political affiliation. Other environments may also increase or decrease the rate at which children adopt parents' party identification. For example, when more facets of children's social milieu are consistent with their parents' values, then children are not provided with a socializing agent that offers an alternative viewpoint. Socially conservative parents who move into a more conservative community and send their children to a socially conservative school, for instance, would reduce their children's exposure to diverse ideas, potentially dampening the possibility that the children opt not to adopt the parents' values. These are only a few possibilities.

### *Conclusions*

Models that include children's perceptions are critical to understanding the transmission of political values. Considering a two-step process of perception and adoption that underlies transmission may challenge the majority of research that relies on trait-to-trait evidence, but in so doing it opens up countless possibilities for future research. There is now reason to revisit the findings and data from previous studies and include measures of cross-reporting in future work. The next step is to explore in detail bidirectional influences, and the environments, traits, and social conditions that affect the perception and adoption process in the transmission of political values. With respect to bidirectional influence, parents' party identifications are not fixed, and while party switching is an uncommon phenomenon, it is not implausible that either adolescent or adult children could

somehow be influential when it occurs. For example, McDevitt and Chaffee (2002) show that children can change the structure of family conversations about politics and prompt parents to increase their civic competence. Socio-emotional and cognitive aspects of development are also probable mechanisms in facilitating individual differences in the perception and adoption of party identification, and yet little is known about how exactly these differences factor into the transmission of political values. Future research should reexamine the effects of value salience and family communication patterns on each step of the process, use more measures on the quality of parent-child relationships (including parental bonding), and include educational aspects, cultural features of value transmission, and other dispositional influences, such as children's personality, emotional condition, and cognitive ability.

The perception-adoption model can also be extended to move beyond parent-child and political socialization processes. For example, it can be used to characterize how norms, from larger social values like equality to specific taboos about how to dress, are circulated in an array of social networks, such as sibling and peer groups, office places, schools, and social media. Current models of how beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors spread within social networks often rely on trait-to-trait analyses. However, if the spread of ideas in a network is at all similar to the socialization of political identification, then perception and adoption have the potential to further inform or complicate past findings on the importance of social networks. Further unpacking the perception-adoption model, and children's role in this process, is an important step in addressing these considerations.

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## Notes

1. The term “agency” has different theoretical foundations, meanings, and practical applications depending on discipline (Hitlin and Elder 2007). We refer to agency as a sense of individual volition that can lead individuals, often unconsciously, to differentially perceive, produce, and reproduce their social world. This broad definition surrounds some level of personal causality in the evaluative, experiential, and constructive dimensions of perception and behavior, within the context of social experience (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).
2. Alternatively, these datasets could be used to compare temporal changes in the transmission process. Corbetta, Tuorto, and Cavazza (2013), for example, compare datasets from different decades to study changes in ideological similarity between Italian parents and children from 1875 to 2010.
3. Frequencies are generated from a three-category measure of PID (i.e., Republican, Independent, and Democrat). Thus, a child who claims a parent “usually supports Republicans” when the parent reports that they “strongly support Republicans” would be classified as *correctly* perceiving the parent’s PID. In this sense, the frequencies are a more generous assessment of the rate of perception and adoption.
4. Treating the three-point scale in the NLSY as a categorical variable returns similar results. The largest chi-square value (i.e., the strongest association) is for perception, then adoption, and then trait-to-trait.
5. It is possible that the three-point PID scale in the NLSY data should be treated as categorical, in which case a multinomial logistic regression would be appropriate. Results of a multinomial logistic regression are consistent with those reported in Table 4.

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