DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE
JUN 2 2 2001		
JUL 0 3 2002 0 4 3 0 0 2		

TOWARD A THEORY OF MASS COMMUNICATION PROCESSING POTENTIAL

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Mass Media Ph.D. Program

Departments of Advertising, Journalism, and Telecommunications

1998

ABSTRACT

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The information made available through the mass media may serve as a valuable tool in helping individuals improve the conditions of their everyday lives. More specifically, individuals who are capable of translating the information made available through the mass media into practical knowledge may use that knowledge to become involved with issues occurring in their environments.

It is conceivable that individuals who acquire personally relevant knowledge from the information made available through the mass media will use that information to enhance their quality of life. In an effort to provide a richer explanation of this relationship between mass media use and knowledge acquisition, this study examines individuals' media use habits in conjunction with their perceived knowledge acquired from the information made available through the mass media.

The mass communication processing potential was developed to examine this relationship and is defined as the likelihood that an individual will use information made available through the mass media to improve the conditions of his or her everyday life.

The concept is comprised of five dimensions: new technology media use, newspaper media use, radio media use, television media use, and perceived knowledge.

Individuals with low levels of mass communication processing potential more often had lower education, income, and occupational skill levels. In contrast, individuals with higher levels of mass communication processing potential more often had higher education, income, and occupational skill levels.

Though the mass media are pervasive and readily available to most individuals from all walks of life, the findings of this study suggest that individuals who are less capable of processing information in general—because they have poor literacy skills and less prior knowledge about many issues—acquire less knowledge from the information made available through the mass media.

However, individuals with lower levels of mass communication processing potential were heavy users of the mass media. Thus, it is suggested that the mass media make a concerted effort to provide more information in a format that is user friendly to individuals with limited information processing skills.

This is not to suggest that the mass media are responsible for educating the general public about the issues of the day, but that they become more cognizant of the need to provide information in various formats. Success will be realized in this regard when individuals in possession of limited information processing skills are consistently able to take information of objective value (e.g., status of the U.S. social security system) from the mass media and consistently translate it into subjective knowledge (e.g., how the information applies personally) that helps them improve the conditions of their daily lives.

To my family who understands the struggle of the journey, as no others can, and to the memory of my father, Odie Mastin, Sr., who would have been pleased with this accomplishment simply because it pleases me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation represents a treasured beginning. The final signature sealed the realization of a piece of a dream I almost dared not nurture. I sincerely hope that the completion of this acclimation process will enable me to bridge a gap that sometimes exists between the academic community and some of the communities it desires to serve. That being said, successful completion of this process could not have been achieved without the help of numerous people.

Dr. Charles Salmon, the chair of my committee, has been an invaluable resource throughout my journey to learn the process. I sincerely appreciate his continual support of my way of looking at things, and his willingness to listen to my "pet concept" long before it was a concept.

Dr. Steve Lacy, a member of my dissertation committee, also contributed tremendously to my learning the process. His door was always open, and he was never too busy for one more question. His genuine dedication to sharing the process with graduate students is admirable.

Drs. Alison Barber, James Dearing, and Vernon Miller also served on my dissertation committee. They generously shared information from their areas of expertise.

Several members of my cohort were very special friends throughout the process: Alice Chan, Kathy Bradshaw, and Hyunyi Cho. Each of these remarkable women listened

to me even when I refused to talk. Although we are literally from different worlds, we have in common a desire to make the world a better place for everyone.

Marilyn Britt and her four lovely daughters, Raven, Tia, Ean, and Ariel, befriended me in true sisterhood throughout this process. I look forward to watching the girls' careers. I know they will make the world a better place.

Each time I went into the Advertising Department office, Connie Williams greeted me with warmth and kindness, regardless of the weather conditions. Her genuine concern and kindness made a great difference.

I would also like to thank the 125 individuals who agreed to be interviewed about their mass media use. I enjoyed immensely the richness of our conversations, and it made me appreciate anew both the diversity and strength of character that exists in the African American community.

Sandra Kowalk, of the Lansing Housing Commission, was instrumental in helping me coordinate the interviews with the public housing resident sample. She has been both a valuable resource and a trusted friend. Her dedication to ensuring the residents, especially the children, have the resources they need to succeed is commendable.

Special appreciation goes to Dr. Maxie Jackson and his staff who coordinate the Minority Competitive Doctoral Fellowship (MCDF), of which I was a recipient during the 1994-1995 academic year. The fellowship support allowed me to spend my first year in the program developing a strong academic foundation.

Finally, I want to thank my family for always being there for me, especially my younger sister, Gail, who has taught me a lot about unconditional love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 5 (cont.)

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF TABLES (cont.)

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The information made available through the mass media may serve as a valuable resource in helping individuals improve their quality of life. In particular, individuals who are capable of translating the information made available through the mass media into practical knowledge may use that information to become involved with issues occurring in their environments (Alfonso, 1996; Andrews, 1986; Andrews & Withey, 1976; Childers with Post, 1975; Dervin & Greenberg, 1972; Haywood, 1995; Katzman, 1974; Nowak, 1977; Smith, 1975; Suominen,1976; Thunberg, Nowak, Rosengren, & Sigurd, 1982).

It is conceivable that individuals who acquire personally relevant knowledge from the information made available through the mass media will use that information to enhance their quality of life. In an effort to provide a richer explanation of this relationship between mass media use and knowledge acquisition, this study examines individuals' media use habits in conjunction with their perceived knowledge acquired from the information made available through the mass media.

The mass communication processing potential concept was developed to examine this relationship and is defined as the likelihood that an individual will use information made available through the mass media to improve the conditions of his or her everyday life. The concept is comprised of five dimensions: new technology media use, newspaper media use, radio media use, television media use, and perceived knowledge acquired from mass media use.

The underlying logic of this concept is that individuals who are able to translate information—made available through the mass media—into personally relevant practical

knowledge are more likely to use that information to become involved with the issues occurring in their environments. Such involvement could help them improve the conditions of their everyday lives.

For example, an individual who frequently reads the newspaper might read an article that discusses renters' rights. In that article she may learn that under certain conditions (e.g., landlord's failure to make major repairs) she has a legal right to withhold monthly rent payments. If she uses the "for more information" telephone number listed in the article to obtain procedural information related to her situation, she may then, for example, use the information to "encourage" her landlord to attend to the major repair in question. In this scenario, she used information made available through the mass media to improve a condition of her life.

Receipt of information through the mass media is only one way in which individuals acquire knowledge for improving the conditions of their everyday lives. Interpersonal relationships, for instance, serve a notable role in providing individuals with information they need to function in daily life. In fact, interpersonal communication has been documented as a most valued resource for individuals who are of lower socioeconomic status and have limited literacy skills (Childers with Post, 1975; Greenberg & Dervin, 1970; Nowak, 1977; Suominen, 1976; Weir, 1994).

This study, however, focuses primarily on the mass media's role in providing information that can lead to knowledge acquisition. Although individuals' abilities to communicate are likely to affect both their habit of sending and receiving information through the mass media, this study considers primarily their ability to receive information from the mass media.

No one definition of communication can be satisfactory. Its meaning, therefore, is usually shaped by the nature of a particular issue, and the context within which the issue is placed (Chang, 1988; Derrida, 1989; Murphy, 1991). Broadly speaking, in the context of mass communication, communication is typically examined as either a transfer of signals, symbols, and signs (Shannon & Weaver, 1949), as a symbolic interaction between and among individuals (Blumer, 1969), or as a combination of both, whereby the key components are a sender, a message, and a receiver (Lasswell, 1948).

This study examines communication in regard to the knowledge individuals perceive they acquire from information made available through the mass media to help them to improve the conditions of their everyday lives.

Clearly, individuals who receive the information made available through the mass media will differ in their ability to process the information provided therein. As the level at which individuals are able to communicate varies, it is logical to conceptualize individuals' potential to process the information made available through the mass media as spanning a continuum rather than a fixed quantity that they either do or do not possess. Individuals may use the mass media equally (i.e., number of hours, type of media, etc.), but individuals whose information processing skills are more developed gain more knowledge from the information provided therein.

In this study, the information made available through the mass media positioned as being of consequence is that which enables individuals to (a) locate organizations that will help them resolve problems, (b) wield political power, and (c) take advantage of opportunities that are available to them as citizens. In other words, it is information that imparts the knowledge needed to acquire a share of the standard American dream as

opposed to information whose end result is merely entertainment (Childers with Post, 1975; Weir, 1994).

This is in no way meant to belittle the value of the contemporary practice of using entertainment to educate and encourage viewers to practice a form of responsible behavior (i.e., writing into scripts safe-sex practices, hazards of teen smoking and drinking, etc.). However, this study is primarily concerned with individuals' mass media use that encourages involvement with issues that occur in their larger environment (e.g., community) as opposed to issues related to personal and interpersonal behaviors.

This study proposes that individuals who can translate the information made available through the mass media into personally useful knowledge are better able to stay abreast of and interact with issues and opportunities that occur in their immediate and extended environments. As a result, these individuals may perceive they have a higher quality of life.

In contrast, individuals who are less capable of translating the information made available through the mass media into personally useful knowledge are less likely to use this information to stay abreast of and interact with issues and opportunities occurring in their environments. As a result, they are less likely to get involved with the issues in their environments, which may serve to diminish their quality of life.

The nature of certain mass media creates constraints that prevent detailed coverage of issues. As a result, individuals who have prior knowledge about the issues covered in the mass media are often better able to acquire knowledge from the provided information (Browne-Miller, 1994). Of course, this assumes that at least some of the information made available through the mass media is perceived by the individuals receiving it to be of

value. However, media use research studies suggest that this is not always a true assumption, especially as far as disadvantaged communicators are concerned (Nowak, 1977; Suominen, 1976).

Messages sent through the mass media are most often produced by professional communicators (i.e., employees of media organizations, advertisers, artists, politicians, etc.). As such, an unequal relationship can exist between senders and receivers of mass media as the ". . . sender usually has more prestige, power, resources, expertise and authority than the receiver" (McQuail, 1994, p. 37).

This condition becomes a matter of concern when one considers research studies which indicate that individuals of lower socioeconomic status, as compared to individuals of higher socioeconomic status, often acquire less knowledge from the information made available through the mass media (Childers with Post, 1975; Dervin & Greenberg, 1972). This issue of unequal knowledge acquisition across social groups began to receive considerable attention in the 1960s from both poverty researchers (Allen, 1970; Herzog, 1963; Miller, 1970; Rainwater, 1970), and communication researchers (Childers with Post, 1975; Dervin & Greenberg, 1972; Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970).

Extensive studies of disadvantaged communicators revealed that, in general, individuals of lower socioeconomic status typically acquire less knowledge from information distributed through the mass media (Greenberg & Dervin, 1970). They were also reported to have limited interaction with information resources located outside their immediate "subculture," which served to place them in an "information void" (Childers with Post, 1975, p.33). That many individuals of lower socioeconomic status have poor

literacy skills contributes further to this information void (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Hammad, & Mullholand, 1992; Mayer, 1997; Williams, et al., 1995).

As a result, individuals of lower socioeconomic status tend to acquire less knowledge from information distributed through the traditional mass media (i.e., newspapers, radio, and television) that are, for all practical purposes, equally available for everyone. Past research studies indicate that a primary reason for this uneven knowledge acquisition is that individuals of lower socioeconomic status, as a group, are more likely to have less developed communication skills, and, therefore, are less able to process the information made available through the mass media (Childers with Post, 1975; Greenberg & Dervin, 1970). As a result, they gravitate toward the mass media that require minimal information processing skills, which also provide less information that leads to knowledge.

This study attempts to extend this theme of mass media use research by identifying, explicating, and measuring the variables that determine individuals' mass communication processing potential. An identification of these variables is important because they are believed to affect individuals' ability and desire to interact with information made available through the mass media that could aid their improving the conditions of their daily lives.

Traditional mass media use studies have provided a better understanding of individuals' media use, primarily as a function of their socioeconomic status, level of education, or both. Knowing which mass media individuals use is valuable; however, a next important step is to examine how individuals' ability to process information influences their mass media use. That is, it is important to examine mass media use as a function of individuals' ability to process information.

An examination of mass media use in regard to individuals' mass communication processing potential is important because traditional mass communication systems (i.e., newspapers, radio, television) are ubiquitous, readily available to most individuals from all walks of life, and therefore, can potentially serve to provide a diverse group of individuals with information that can be used to improve their quality of life.

Traditional Mass Media Research

Traditional mass media are: print (newspapers, news services and syndicates, magazines, book publishing); radio and recording; and electronic and film (television, cable television, video, photographic and graphic communications). In regard to knowledge acquisition, all things being equal, print media is superior to electronic media. In particular, researchers have found that individuals remember more (Browne, 1978; Furnham, Benson, & Gunter, 1987; Furnham & Gunter, 1989; Furnham, Procter, & Gunter, 1988) and acquire more knowledge (Williams, Paul, & Ogilvy, 1957; Wilson, 1974) from print-based materials.

Several explanations are offered for the primacy of print (a) printed materials can go into much more detail than can electronic-based media (e.g., television and radio), and (b) individuals can pace themselves when interacting with print-based media (Gunter,1987). Moreover, individuals are more cognitively involved when reading print media, and, therefore, acquire more knowledge about a particular topic when they are interacting with print-based media (Culbertson, Evarts, Richard, Sandell, & Stempel, 1994; Rubin, 1993).

Furthermore, individuals who have a preference for print-based mass media interact with them regularly, and when interacting with them make a conscious effort to do so (Bogart, 1981; McLuhan,1964). This is in contrast with individuals' manner of interacting with electronic-based mass media, which provide little detail and do not demand individuals' full attention (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Tan, 1981; Webster & Wakshlag, 1983).

Whereas print-based mass media provide individuals with more information that can be translated into knowledge than do electronic-based mass media, electronic-based mass media maintain an important role of providing awareness (Culbertson, Evarts, Richard, Sandell, & Stempel, 1994). This is not to suggest, however, that all print-based media promote knowledge acquisition. For example, magazines have been categorized as either information-rich or entertainment focused (Towers & Hartung, 1983, cited in Payne, Severn, & Dozier, 1988), and as either environmental diversion, environmental surveillance, or environmental interaction (Payne, Severn, & Dozier, 1988). Thus, when investigating individuals' print media use, it is important to identify which print media they use because the goal of some print media is entertainment, not knowledge acquisition.

Additionally, mass media use research studies indicate that individuals frequently choose mass media based on the topic and type of information they are seeking. In particular, individuals more often use television to gain awareness of issues, and newspapers to acquire a better understanding of local issues and complex information (Culbertson et al., 1994; Reagan, Pinkleton, Aaronson, & Chen, 1995; Reagan, 1996; Stempel, 1973).

Nonetheless, individuals who are actively seeking information gain more knowledge regardless of the medium used, which suggests that a high level of interest leads to knowledge acquisition no matter the information source accessed (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Culbertson & Stempel, 1986; Garramone, 1984, 1985; Rubin, 1993).

Such findings led Reagan et al. (1995) and Reagan (1996) to argue that it is unwise to consider individuals as either television-oriented or newspaper-oriented. Individuals tend to use both, especially as their interests about a particular topic increase. The more interested individuals are in a particular topic, the more sources they seek out to learn about the topic.

Interestingly, individuals' mass media use for the purpose of obtaining news and general information does not appear to have changed drastically in lieu of the recent emergence of several new media (i.e., the Internet, talk radio, TV magazines, etc.). In a national general population study that investigated the mass media individuals most often used to obtain news, Stempel and Hargrove (1996) presented respondents with 11 mass media choices (i.e., local TV news, network TV news, daily newspapers, radio news, news magazines, TV magazine, radio talk shows, grocery store tabloids, political magazines, Internet, and on-line service). They found that most individuals used traditional mass media to obtain news (i.e., local television news, network television news, newspapers, radio news, and news magazines).

As indicated in the foregoing brief review of mass media use research, studies on this topic typically examine either individuals' mass media use, the level of knowledge they acquire from various mass media, the types of information they gain from various mass media, or their preference for various mass media over time. Research studies conducted

on this topic have not considered individuals' mass media use as a function of their ability to process the information made available through the mass media.

For example, it is commonly assumed that individuals who are of lower socioeconomic status and have lower levels of education gravitate toward the electronic media (Culbertson et al., 1994; Culbertson & Stempel, 1986; Stempel & Hargrove, 1996; Miller & Reese, 1982; Robinson & Levy, 1996). Nonetheless, no overt attempts have been made to examine how individuals' ability to process information might be driving that preference.

Socioeconomic Status

Individuals' socioeconomic status influences their educational experiences, which in turn affects their ability to communicate. The level at which individuals are able to communicate affects their ability to process the information made available through the mass media. Specifically, a review of research studies regarding social status and mass media use, spanning a 15-year period, found that social status influenced "media preference, media use, comprehension of media content, prior knowledge of topics covered by the media, reading level, range of vocabulary, perceived value of education, performance in school, family interaction, interaction within local communication, interest in lifelong education, interest in politics, contact with decision makers" (Nowak, 1977, p. 231).

One of two reasons are usually given to explain why individuals of lower socioeconomic status frequently acquire less knowledge from information made available through the mass media: (a) they have difficulty understanding the information as it is

presented, or (b) much of the information provided is of little interest to them (Childers with Post, 1975; Dervin & Greenberg, 1972; Nowak 1977; Suominen, 1976).

As a result, information that is made available through the mass media to aid many individuals often benefits only those who are of higher socioeconomic status as they more often possess the communication skills needed to process the information (see Haywood, 1995; Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970).

Individuals of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to seek out the electronic media (i.e., television, radio) as information resources (Miller & Reese, 1982; Rubin & Rubin, 1985; Rubin, 1993; Schatzman & Strauss, 1955). Compared to print media, electronic media are less able to provide understanding, new concepts or aid the interpretation of information (Wade & Schramm, 1969).

In addition, lower socioeconomic status individuals' high reliance on television, radio, and interpersonal relationships for information often places them in an "information void," which prevents them from gaining the knowledge they need to make wise decisions. Print media, on the other hand, the preferred media choice of individuals of higher socioeconomic status, provide understanding, new concepts, and aid recipients in interpreting information (Childers with Post, 1975; Wade & Schramm, 1969).

Individuals' socioeconomic status exerts a powerful influence on the development of their ability to communicate as the beliefs and values promoted in a social structure influence both what members of the structure perceive as important and their communication experiences. Substantial differences exist among social classes in the area of communication patterns. These differences appear to be a function of individuals' usual way of communicating (Schatzman & Strauss,1955).

Specifically, not only do individuals of lower socioeconomic status acquire less knowledge from the information made available through the mass media, they also have difficulty relaying the knowledge they do secure. These individuals rarely find themselves in situations that require them to communicate for a purpose of imparting specific, detailed information to those who do not share their immediate world of experiences.

In contrast, individuals of higher socioeconomic status frequently communicate in situations in which it is necessary that they communicate for a purpose of imparting understanding to others. This seems to indicate that individuals of lower socioeconomic status may have difficulty translating, into practical knowledge, information made available through the mass media.

Likewise, the education level individuals have obtained is a strong predictor of their ability to understand communication messages made available through the mass media. This is so because a purpose of higher education is to guide individuals in the development of their analytical skills. Such skills enable them to translate the information made available through the mass media into practical knowledge.

Miyo (1983) offered four reasons why individuals with higher levels of education acquire more knowledge from information distributed through the mass media: they have (a) better communication skills, (b) more stored information, (c) more relevant social contacts, and (d) better retention of information than less-educated individuals.

Education

Higher socioeconomic status, by definition, usually implies a high level of education. The level of education individuals achieve subsequently affects both the employment positions and income levels for which they qualify. Likewise, individuals' educational experiences affect the development of their ability to communicate. Although education is not synonymous with higher levels of mass communication processing potential, typically the more education individuals acquire, the more they develop their communication skills. Furthermore, when individuals develop their analytical skills, they usually begin to prefer the mass media that require the use of those skills (Culbertson & Stempel, 1986; Hammad & Mulholland, 1992).

For example, a study that included a group of individuals who received public television signals (i.e., public broadcasting service) in their homes in 1973 found that 24 percent of the individuals who had a grade-school education, 35 percent of the individuals who had a high-school education, and 49 percent of the individuals who had a college education watched educational programming at least once a week (Bower, 1973). These statistics support an assumption of the knowledge gap hypothesis, which proposed that the mass media are oriented toward the more educated groups in society (Donohue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1975; Olien, Donohue, & Tichenor, 1983; Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970).

Clearly, individuals' preference for particular mass media, their socioeconomic status, and their level of education are related.

Study Overview

This chapter introduces the mass communication processing potential concept and traces its emergence from mass media use research. The relationship between mass communication processing potential and quality of life is examined within the context of the impact that comes about as a result of individuals' socioeconomic status and educational experiences.

In other words, mass communication processing potential is likely to be a significant predictor of quality of life as individuals in possession of a high level of mass communication processing potential are more likely to be aware of, and have the communication skills needed to interact with, the issues and opportunities occurring in their environments. As a result, they are likely to acquire more knowledge from the information made available through the mass media.

Chapter 2, the literature review, begins with a historical account of the original communication potential concept and examines the study's primary independent (i.e., mass communication processing potential, socioeconomic status, locus of control orientation, and community and political involvement) and dependent (i.e., quality of life) variables.

Chapter 3 discusses the method used to examine the proposed research questions and hypotheses. Chapter 4 presents the results, and Chapter 5 follows with a discussion of the findings and conclusions.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Potential

The concept of communication potential originated from research commissioned by the Swedish government during the early 1970s. The Committee for Future-Oriented Research conducted studies that focused primarily on human problems associated with information and communication as perceived from the vantage point of underprivileged communicators, who were described as individuals who have difficulty communicating within their environment (Thunberg, Nowak, Rosengren, & Sigurd, 1982).

For example, underprivileged communicators often have difficulty processing and understanding certain types of information, such as what factors to consider when deciding on a major purchase, the function of various social service agencies, how to evaluate the credentials of repair services, or an understanding of the rights that are synonymous with citizenship. As a result, the quality of their lives could be adversely affected.

Although the primary researchers (Thunberg, Nowak, Rosengren, & Sigurd, 1982) did not define communication potential, they noted that individuals' communication potential is a "function of structural factors, positional factors, and individual factors, as well as the interplay among them" (p. 61). Their study focused on the inequality of communication. Individuals were perceived as having free will, and, therefore, in need of possessing a strong hand in organizing and controlling their lives, in order to establish and nurture a positive identity with others. If such an environment is to exist, society must be

structured in a way that encourages and supports this development (Thunberg et al., 1982).

In particular, the structure of a society should be conducive for its citizens to benefit from a core set of six basic values. Three of the values are experiential: experiencing (a) "self-esteem and self reliance," (b) "a sense of belonging and communion with one's fellows," and (c) "solidarity with the society of which one is a part." The other three values are influence based: influencing (d) "one's personal life situation," (e) "one's immediate surroundings," and (f) "the society of which one is a part" (Thunberg, et al., 1982, p. 48).

The common element of each of these experiential and influencing values is that they are largely dependent on individuals' ability to communicate. The resources and preconditions individuals begin with obviously exert a tremendous influence on their chances of being able to experience and influence their environment optimally. There is a positive correlation between number of resources and individuals' quality of life as determined by their ability to participate with and influence events that occur in their environments.

This being said, individuals' resources are not necessarily equally weighted (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Sharp, 1980; Strawn, 1994; Verba, Schlozman, Brady, & Nie, 1993). This can be seen, for example, by considering several important resources—money, time, and energy. An individual who has substantial discretionary income can opt to hire someone to complete certain tasks so that she might have more free time for other activities. In contrast, an underprivileged person having minimal money, time, or energy

might be unable to take advantage of even those societal opportunities available to her as a result of her citizenship.

This perspective suggests, for example, that if a state senator were to host a district meeting for all residents for the purpose of discussing an issue that might affect the quality of life of underprivileged citizens living in a particular area located within the district, they would be the least likely to attend the meeting. Continuing this scenario, the senator might present a proposal that considers the construction of a public housing development adjacent to an upper-middle-class neighborhood. Individuals of lower socioeconomic status would not only benefit from housing, but they would also have access to the wealth of public goods that are generally located in more prosperous neighborhoods.

However, in principle, research indicates that individuals of lower socioeconomic status would not usually be the citizens attending the meetings to share how such an investment would enhance their lives. Instead, it would typically be the residents of upper-middle-class neighborhoods fearful of "undesirable elements" and decreased property value who would attend the meeting for a purpose of sharing how the quality of their lives might be adversely affected (Adams, 1972; Hammad & Mulholland, 1992; Newton, 1988; Saegert & Winkel, 1996; Strawn, 1994; Weir, 1994).

The primary difference between the two groups is that one group has advanced communication skills, and the benefits that result from them. The ability to communicate, whether it be in a written, spoken, or organizational form clearly is of tremendous benefit in enabling individuals to positively experience and influence their environments, which is

also likely to determine if they will take specific actions to affect the conditions of their everyday lives.

It is this line of reasoning that caused Thunberg et al. (1982) to identify the social structure of a given society as either enhancing or hampering individuals' communication potential. The researchers named a society's communication technical infrastructure, economic, and socio-political structures as determining individuals' communication potential. Simply, individuals' capacity to communicate is further influenced by the characteristics of the social structure in which they reside, their position within the social structure, and their personal characteristics. As illustrated in Table 1, individuals' ability to communicate is either enhanced or hampered by the nature of a societal structure, their position in the society, and their individual characteristics. The information provided in Table 1 suggests that individuals who are of low socioeconomic status and also have minimal literacy skills often have few communication prerogatives.

To address issues of communication inequality, Thunberg et al. (1982) outlined a plan of action that included an examination of the role of family, education, employment, politics, and media in developing individuals' communication potential. They stated a short-term goal of launching an active conversation regarding the individual's right to communicate—present and future. Toward that end, Thunberg et al. (1982) shared with researchers their perspectives of how communication potential might be most effectively approached based on their examination of a Scandinavian welfare-state policy established to "abolish economic, political, and social injustices" that result from individuals' inability to communicate effectively within their environments (p. 7).

Table 1

The Communicative Prerogatives of Selected Actors

Communicative prerogatives	Pupils in a classroom	Participants in a meeting (unchaired)	Chair-person Teacher	Doctor examining patient	Judge in Court	Officer commanding troops
The right to listen	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
To talk about what one pleases	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
To demand others' comments	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
To demand answers to one's own questions	—	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
To decline to answer others' questions	—	—	—	—	Yes	Yes
Not to listen	—	—	—	—	—	Yes
Number of communicative prerogatives	1	2	3	4	5	6

From Thunberg et al. (1982) p. 62.

The results of their review led to a long-term goal "to improve the ability of the individual to safeguard his or her interests with the aid of language or other means of communication, and to protect the individual against authoritarian and hierarchic information systems" (Thunberg et al., 1982, p. 7).

Although Thunberg et al. (1982) introduced the concept of communication potential in the early 1980s, there has been minimal research surrounding the topic since (Nowak, 1997). Nevertheless, the concept continues to be worthy of examination. The volume of research associated with the empowerment construct (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Saegert & Winkel, 1996; Strawn, 1994; Weir, 1994) that has flourished during the

past two decades can be seen as an attempt to address similar needs of disadvantaged communicators as those posed by Thunberg et al. (1982). However, as a whole, empowerment research is not concerned with communication and information issues but rather with linking individuals with their larger social and political environments (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). It seems logical to propose, however, that individuals' mass communication processing potential would naturally play a crucial role in their being able to effectively interact within their social and political environments (Saegert & Winkel, 1996). In other words, minus the ability to process the information made available in their social and political environments, individuals cannot become empowered.

Clearly, it is crucial that individuals' mass communication processing potential be examined in regard to their use of communication and information for a purpose of navigating in their environments, especially as the western world continues to become increasingly entrenched as an information-driven society (Haywood, 1995; Hundt, 1996, 1997; Katzman, 1974). In this regard, individuals who are incapable of interacting with information made available through the mass media are less likely to be able to take an active role in their environments.

General Mass Media Use

Individuals must have access to the mass media if they are to make use of the information provided therein. Without firsthand exposure to the mass media, individuals cannot use the information provided therein to improve their everyday lives.

For example, some rural areas do not have access to cable television; therefore, individuals residing in those areas cannot benefit from the information distributed solely

through cable television systems. Similarly, some individuals have access to cable television, but choose not to subscribe to the service for various reasons (e.g., can't afford the subscription fee, don't feel a need for the programming, etc.).

This study examines a population residing in a limited geographic area to ensure that all respondents essentially have equal access to the same mass media. The mass media individuals use affect their level of mass communication processing potential. In particular, print-based mass media have been reported to provide individuals with more knowledge than electronic-based mass media (Culbertson, Evarts, Richard, Sandell, & Stempel, 1994; Furnham & Gunter, 1989; Williams, Paul, & Ogilvy, 1957; Wilson, 1974).

For example, two individuals may have access to both a newspaper and a television report that covers the same event associated with an issue. All things being equal, if the individuals could choose only one of the two media from which to learn about the event—and one chooses newspaper and the other chooses television—typically the individual who chooses to interact with the print medium would acquire more knowledge from the information provided therein than would the individual who chooses to interact with the television report (Furnham & Gunter, 1989).

Hundreds of mass media use studies have considered individuals' mass media use primarily as a function of their socioeconomic status or level of education; however, media use studies have not typically looked beyond those variables to determine underlying factors associated with socioeconomic status that drive mass media use preferences.

Individuals who live in higher socioeconomic status social structures learn to communicate in formal ways in an almost unconscious manner as they have access to more diverse public and private goods that aid their ability to communicate (Adams, 1972;

Benabou, 1996; Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Newton, 1988; Verba, Schlozman, Brady, & Nie, 1993).

In contrast, individuals who are members of lower socioeconomic status groups tend to possess fewer of the communication skills that lead to power in the public affairs social system because their societal structural environments more often have a shortage of the public and private goods that serve to enhance communication skills (Benabou, 1996; Childers with Post, 1975; Dervin & Greenberg, 1972, Nowak, 1977; Suominen, 1976; Weir, 1994).

That is, the information that is readily available to most individuals of lower socioeconomic status is not of the type that "help[s] you get to the proper source of help, wield your political power, demand your entitlements—the information that imparts the knowledge needed to secure a share of the standard American dream . . ." (Childers with Post, 1975, p. 34). Further hampering the information needs of disadvantaged communicators is their heavy reliance on television for information. Television typically provides information that relates to wants as compared to print media, which more often provide information that tells people how to achieve (Wade & Schramm,1969).

Nowak (1977), in sharing the results of the efforts of several Nordic countries to provide their citizens with equality of information, noted the lack of importance that individuals of lower socioeconomic status, as compared to individuals of higher socioeconomic status, appeared to place on civic information. Nowak's (1977) findings were in agreement with Suominen's (1976) study, which reported that most respondents in a study designed to examine their information needs had a desire for information that affected their daily lives (e.g., old-age pension, dinner recipes, etc., p. 116). Especially

telling was Suominen's (1976) finding that individuals of lower socioeconomic status did not express a need for information generally perceived by society as being important. For example, individuals of lower socioeconomic status did not express a subjective need for information about their government.

Suominen (1976) went on to report that informational inequalities seem to be a function of economic and social inequality as social groups who are passive in general are also passive information recipients. Simply, the objective need of information appears to be greatest where other basic social and economic needs are also less satisfied. The mass media seem to contribute to this information inequality.

In particular, the media typically use language and terminology that is familiar to higher socioeconomic status groups; and the media have a tendency to talk about issues in abstract terms. As such, much of the information distributed by the mass media is meaningful only to those who have substantial prior knowledge about the issues being discussed (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Culbertson & Stempel, 1986; Miyo, 1983; Olien, Donohue, & Tichenor, 1983;Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970; Williams & Ogilvy, 1957).

Therefore, it appears that disadvantaged communicators are less likely to be aware of information that could enable them to enhance the quality of their lives, and they are less likely to know which mass media to use to obtain such information. Merely having access to the mass media does not mean that individuals will either access the information or that they have the communication skills needed to translate the information into knowledge.

However, several research studies indicate that having access to a wider range of information helps individuals stay better informed. Chaffee & Wilson (1977) found that individuals who had access to more mass media systems acquired more information about issues and opportunities that affected their lives. In contrast, individuals who have access to a narrower range of information through mass media systems are more often less aware of issues and opportunities that take place in their environment (Chaffee & Wilson, 1977; Golding & Murdock, 1986; Haywood, 1995; Murdock & Golding, 1989).

In particular, individuals residing in "media rich" communities as compared to "media poor" communities gave more diverse answers in response to a "most important problem facing the country" question (Chaffee & Wilson, 1977). Similarly, Allen & Izcaray (1988) found that individuals who lived in media-rich environments were able to identify more of the problems that existed in their region and country.

It seems logical that residing in environments that provide access to multiple information resources positively affects individuals' mass communication processing potential, especially for those individuals who have the communication skills needed to interact with a wide range of informational resources. However, choosing to use available resources is a personal decision, and individuals of lower socioeconomic status are less likely to take advantage of a wide range of available information resources as they more often have limited information processing skills (Nowak, 1977; Suominen, 1976; Weir, 1994; Williams et al., 1995).

As a result, their "information universe is a closed system" as most of the information that comes from outside their immediate environment is one-way information communication flow, via the mass media. Moreover, even the opinion leaders of

disadvantaged communities have limited information, as compared to opinion leaders of privileged communities, because natural community barriers prevent them from accessing all the information available to those outside their communities (Childers with Post, 1975, p. 32).

Obviously it is impossible to acquire knowledge from information when you are unaware of its existence. In an examination of relationships that exist between new communication technologies and the distribution of information in a society, Katzman (1974) offered several propositions that provide an understanding of the implications of these relationships. Of particular interest in regard to the mass communication processing concept was Katzman's (1974) proposition which stated, "With the adoption of a new communication technology, people who already have higher levels of information and ability will gain more than people with lower initial levels" (p. 50).

In particular, Katzman (1974) noted that individuals who have more money are better able to purchase new technologies, and children who are enrolled in the schools of wealthier school districts more often have firsthand exposure to advanced communication technologies. Thus, prior knowledge and skills cannot be emphasized enough as they enable individuals to acquire additional skills and knowledge. Sometimes technical knowledge is needed, and at other times higher levels of literacy are needed. Such advantages are more important than personal ability (Katzman, 1974).

The power of initial advantage can be seen in reviewing data associated with the children's television program Sesame Street. Specifically, advantaged children watched Sesame Street more often than did disadvantaged children. Of great encouragement was that when disadvantaged children watched as often as did the advantaged children, the

knowledge gap between the two groups of children—in regard to information provided in the programs—failed to widen (Ball & Bogatz, 1970).

Past research studies indicate that an investigation of individuals' mass communication processing potential should consider why individuals use a particular mass medium. That is, it is possible that individuals who possess lower levels of mass communication processing potential are hindered more by the mass media they choose to use than by the mass media they can physically access.

In other words, individuals' general mass media use is most likely a function of their ability to process the information provided therein as opposed to their not having access to particular mass media. For example, individuals with low literacy skills may choose an electronically based media because it is the media that is easiest for them to understand. If so, they are doubly disadvantaged as their limited communication skills force them to rely on a family of media that provides awareness as opposed to understanding.

Furthermore, these individuals may know that print media provide more information, but if they do not have the skills needed to translate the information into knowledge (e.g., certain vocabulary level, prior knowledge) that is of practical value in their daily lives, the level of knowledge they can acquire from print-based media is restricted. Consequently, the mass media's availability to them is less important than their inability to acquire knowledge from the information provided therein.

Therefore, it is important to consider the relationship that exists between the mass media individuals use and their reasons for using particular mass media.

Specific Mass Media Use and Perceived Knowledge Acquired from the Mass Media

The mass media individuals use to obtain information affects the amount of knowledge they acquire. If individuals are to acquire knowledge from mass communication systems, they must understand that different mass media provide different levels of information. Therefore, in this study, the specific mass media individuals use to obtain information about issues that occur in specified geographic areas is examined (i.e., international and national, state and local).

Print-based mass media provide more in-depth information and electronic-based mass media provide awareness. Still, having an awareness of the types of information typically gained from specific mass media is of minimal value if individuals are incapable of acquiring knowledge from the information provided therein.

In this study, perceived knowledge is defined as the level of understanding individuals perceive they acquire from information made available through the mass media. For example, it is safe to assume that individuals who possess both higher and lower levels of mass communication processing potential have fairly equal access to newspapers. Nevertheless, individuals with advanced literacy skills are likely to acquire more knowledge from information provided in newspapers for two reasons. First, they are more likely to use newspapers as a source of information. Second, they are more likely to have the communication skills needed to acquire knowledge from the information provided in newspapers.

In contrast, mass media research indicates that individuals with low literacy skills often turn to electronic mass media because they cannot successfully interact with text (Browne-Miller, 1994; Childers with Post, 1975; Dervin & Greenberg, 1972).

Unfortunately, they acquire less knowledge from electronic based mass media as many of these systems are structured primarily to create awareness as opposed to providing information that leads to knowledge gain.

Browne-Miller (1994) proposed that it is incorrect to portray knowledge as being synonymous with intelligence. To clarify her perspective she divided intellectual competence into two basic categories: (a) material knowledge, commonly known as "expertise" or book learning, and (b) control skill or "control knowledge," which is how individuals use their book learning. Based on this distinction, the process of thinking is more important than the actual material content because the process determines how individuals evaluate and apply the information with which they interact (Browne-Miller, 1994).

Control knowledge is a close relative of critical thinking. Critical thinking is the product of an element of intelligence which "involve[s] the mental process, strategies, and representations that people use to solve problems or make decisions" (Ryder, 1994, p. 210). Three elements are necessary for successful critical thinking: the ability (a) to draw upon background information, (b) to obtain or derive meaning from diverse sources of information, and (c) to recognize or generate objectives that direct attention and regulate thinking (Ryder & Graves, 1994).

Individuals apply critical thinking strategies when they use their existing knowledge and available information to further their understanding about a particular topic. "Critical thinking does not demand a complex array of learned skills, but competence in whatever you are thinking about" (Smith, 1990, p. 103). Thus, it is

important that individuals acquire control knowledge as it affects the level of understanding they acquire from information (DiSessa, 1979).

Both expertise and control knowledge are needed if individuals are to reach a high level of mass communication processing potential. Individuals who practice control knowledge have learned how to learn, think about, and use information effectively. Once individuals master this process of interacting with newly presented information, their ability to learn from new information increases substantially because, in effect, they are drawing from a well-developed knowledge base (Browne-Miller, 1994; Ryder, 1994; Ryder & Graves, 1994; Smith, 1990).

Smith's (1990) conceptualization of critical thinking and Browne-Miller's (1994) rendering of control knowledge provide insight into the skills individuals need if they are to acquire knowledge from newly presented information. In particular, individuals are able to learn new information: if they (a) understand the new information, (b) remember the information, and (c) are able to effectively use the information in the future (Bransford, Stein, Shelton, & Owings, 1981). Individuals who practice these skills acquire more knowledge from written texts because they are in the habit of comparing newly presented information with knowledge they already have on the issue, which strengthens their overall understanding about the issue.

Thus, individuals who have learned to use control knowledge and critical thinking skills are more likely to have higher levels of mass communication processing potential as they have learned to think beyond the actual information presented to them about a particular issue. In contrast, individuals who have less developed communication skills are

more likely to perceive presented information as isolated facts (Bransford et al., 1981; Browne-Miller, 1994; Ryder, 1994; Ryder & Graves, 1994; Smith 1990).

As a result, they are less likely to connect newly presented information with their existing knowledge about a particular issue. Thus, newly presented information adds little to their knowledge base. Because they acquire less knowledge from newly presented information, they fail to enhance their knowledge about the particular issue being discussed, and are more likely to be in possession of lower levels of mass communication processing potential. This line of reasoning suggests that individuals who more often choose print media have learned to employ control knowledge and critical thinking skills. Therefore, they will perceive that they acquire more knowledge from information provided through the mass media.

In an effort to explain how different levels of knowledge influence understanding, Park (1940) defined knowledge in terms of "acquaintance with" and "knowledge about" an issue or opportunity. Acquaintance-with knowledge is knowledge that individuals acquire as a result of personal and firsthand experiences in their environment—common sense. In contrast, knowledge-about knowledge is that which is "formal, rational, and systematic. It is based on observation and fact but on fact that has been checked, tagged, regimented, and finally ranged in perspective, according to the purpose and point of view of the investigator. Knowledge-about knowledge is formal knowledge; that is to say, it is knowledge that has achieved some degree of exactness and precision by the substitution of ideas for concrete reality and of words for things" (Park, 1940, p. 672).

Park (1940) noted that knowledge-about knowledge and acquaintance-with knowledge "are distinct forms of knowledge—forms having different functions in the lives

of individuals and of society—rather than knowledge of the same kind but of different degrees of accuracy and validity" (pp. 674-675).

The type of knowledge individuals are accustomed to using in their daily communication acts influences the amount of understanding they gain from information. This manner of presenting information in a knowledge-about-knowledge format provides insight into how knowledge gaps (Nowak, 1977; Suominen, 1976; Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien,1970) that exist between individuals of different socioeconomic status groups are often reinforced by the mass media. That is, individuals of higher socioeconomic status groups are more likely to be in possession of knowledge-about knowledge, and, therefore, are more likely to acquire knowledge from information presented in a knowledge-about knowledge formats, which is the common presentation format used by many mass communication systems.

In contrast, individuals of lower socioeconomic status are more often in possession of acquaintance-with knowledge, and as a result are less likely to acquire the same level of knowledge from information made available through mass communication systems. The mass media, then, seem to reinforce and/or increase information knowledge gaps (Childers with Post, 1975; Dervin & Greenberg, 1972; Donohue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1975; Gaziano, 1983; Olien, Donohue, & Tichenor, 1983; Park, 1940; Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970).

Still, knowledge-about knowledge has its advantages as it allows many individuals to engage in discussions about issues and opportunities using an agreed upon terminology (Park, 1940). However, this manner of interacting with information also serves to exclude individuals from conversations. In particular, individuals who are not conversant in the

terminology used to engage in conversations about an issue or opportunity cannot benefit from subsequent conversations (Katzman, 1974).

In such situations, individuals who may have a great deal of understanding that emerges from real-life experiences—acquaintance-with knowledge—would not be capable of conversing about a particular issue using the terminology agreed upon by respondents in possession of knowledge-about knowledge. Taking this scenario a step further, even if a new communication technology (i.e., the Internet, electronic bulletin boards, electronic mail, etc.) made ongoing conversations accessible to individuals who possessed acquaintance-with knowledge, the individuals in possession of acquaintance-with knowledge would not be able to participate because they would be unfamiliar with the terminology used by those already engaged in conversations discussed in a knowledge-about knowledge format.

Therefore, if individuals with lower levels of mass communication processing potential were interested in a particular issue, they would be less able to increase their knowledge about the issue as they would be less able to acquire knowledge from information presented in a knowledge-about knowledge format.

In contemporary society, it seems that a higher value is placed on information that is presented in a knowledge-about knowledge format (Browne-Miller, 1994; Jeffres, 1983; Nowak, 1977; Suominen, 1976). Societal structural factors strongly influence the type of knowledge—acquaintance-with versus knowledge-about—in which individuals are more likely to converse. Higher socioeconomic status groups more often converse in knowledge-about knowledge formats, and lower socioeconomic status groups more often converse in acquaintance-with knowledge formats. Little communication takes place

between social groups that converse within the parameters of acquaintance-with knowledge and knowledge-about knowledge.

Furthermore, because information that is presented in a knowledge-about knowledge format has a higher standing in mainstream society, individuals who are able to converse in this manner attain both higher educational levels and occupational positions than do individuals who converse within the parameters of acquaintance-with knowledge. As a result, individuals who converse more often in an acquaintance-with knowledge format have limited access to information that is readily available to individuals who converse in a knowledge-about knowledge format, even though the information may be theoretically and technically available to everyone (Adams, 1972; Browne-Miller, 1994; Jeffres, 1983; Newton, 1988; Nowak, 1977; Suominen, 1976).

Consequently, individuals who converse within the parameters of acquaintance-with knowledge are less likely to be aware of certain issues and opportunities that affect their lives, and when they are aware, they are less likely to be able to discuss them in a knowledge-about knowledge format, which reduces their chances of reaching solutions to their problems (Saegert & Winkel, 1996; Strawn, 1994; Weir, 1994).

As a result, their quality of life might be negatively impacted. For example, individuals who need to discuss an issue before their city council would be required to follow the proper procedures before their problems would be heard by the council. Research seems to suggest that individuals who converse in acquaintance-with knowledge formats would be less likely to either know that they have a right to present their problems before the city council or know the proper procedures that must be followed to do so (Hammad & Mulholland, 1992; Saegert & Winkel, 1996; Strawn,1994).

Though individuals who more often converse in acquaintance-with knowledge formats may have equal access to and be aware of the same information as individuals who converse in a knowledge-about knowledge format, they often gain less knowledge from the same information as they more often choose the mass media that do not promote knowledge acquisition. Additionally, individuals who communicate within the parameters of acquaintance-with knowledge are often less able to translate information into knowledge as their ability to utilize control knowledge and critical thinking skills are less developed.

As a result, they often fail to perceive the value that certain information holds for them (Greenberg & Dervin, 1970, Dervin & Greenberg, 1972, Childers with Post, 1975), which often results in their failure to take full advantage of information made available through the mass media.

Awareness of the types of information that can be obtained from specific mass media is important if individuals are to acquire knowledge from the information distributed through them; however, individuals must practice control knowledge and critical thinking skills if they are to acquire substantial knowledge from the information made available through the mass media.

The mass media that individuals use will affect their ability to become involved with the issues occurring in their environments. It is logical to assume then that a major reason for individuals' mass media choices is their ability to process the information as it is presented in a particular medium. For example, individuals in possession of low literacy skills might choose to use print-based media less often because of their inability to translate the information into personally useful knowledge. Yet, they might be quite

capable of processing the same information as it might be presented in a radio talk show format that provides the pros and cons of a given issue and how that issue, for example, relates to various societal groups.

Therefore, the issue is not one of providing information in an elementary format but instead providing all the facts so that individuals with limited background knowledge about the issue are able to make relevant associations and therefore understand the information in a context that is personally relevant.

Skill level, then, especially individuals' ability to process information, influences their mass media use, which in turn affects the amount of knowledge they acquire from the information made available through various mass media. As eloquently noted by Yankelovich (1991), it is unwise to assume that more information automatically leads to "good judgment" or increased knowledge. He goes on to argue that a distinction should be made between expert opinion and public opinion, if the general public is to once again become a part of the democratic process in a meaningful way (i.e., become involved with the issues in their environments).

In an effort to make this distinction, Yankelovich (1991) labeled "mass opinion" as poor quality public opinion because it displays characteristics of inconsistency, volatility, and non-responsibility. In contrast, he labeled "public judgment" as good quality public opinion as it has characteristics of consistency, stability, and responsibility.

To clarify, Yankelovich (1991) noted that labeling individuals' opinions on issues as having reached public judgment does not mean that they understand all the relevant facts or that they agree with the views put forth by experts. What it does mean is that the public has thought about the issues at length in their own terms, have formed an opinion

about the issues and are willing to stand by their decisions in regard to the issues. In other words, they are exercising their critical thinking skills by considering all the information they have about a particular issue.

This perspective suggests that having access to information about an issue or simply being aware of a particular issue will not necessarily enable individuals to form stable, consistent opinions about issues currently being discussed in their environments. Yankelovich (1991) pointed an accusatory finger at the mass media noting that they do not help individuals reach public judgment (i.e., an informed opinion).

The mass media dutifully provide individuals with a wealth of information thereby raising awareness (i.e., consciousness raising), but they do not provide the average citizen with the information he or she needs to reach public judgment. In other words, the mass media do not present information in a manner that encourages individuals to choose between difficult choices.

Yankelovich (1991) offered a three-stage model designed to help people arrive at public judgment (a) consciousness raising, (b) working through, and (c) resolution. He maintained that though the mass media are quite effective at helping to raise individuals' consciousness about numerous issues, they perform poorly in the areas of working through and resolution.

In the best of conditions, working through is a difficult process as it comes about as a result of the interaction of cognitive, emotional, and moral factors (Yankelovich, 1991). Therefore, individuals who, from the beginning, struggle with cognitive obstacles (e.g., difficulties related to perceiving, thinking, judging, connecting, sorting out, and absorbing information) are greatly disadvantaged.

Yankelovich's (1991) rendering suggests that individuals who have less developed cognitive processing skills are likely to find it more difficult to work through the various consequences of a given issue. This is meant in no way to suggest that the average person cannot reach public judgment, but instead that they must have opportunities and guidance in working through the consequences attached to their opinions. Such an approach has been used successfully on a small scale by the Public Agenda Foundation.

Once individuals' consciousness have been raised, they are helped to work through the difficult choices that are most often attached to a particular issue. For example, it is necessary that choices be translated into language that can be understood by the general public, and that the aspects of the issues they perceive as being important are addressed along with those expressed by experts as being important (Yankelovich, 1991). As a result, members of the two groups are able to talk with one another.

The mass media have the ability to assume a more active role in this area by helping individuals move past consciousness raising. Yankelovich (1991) proposed that the mass media can help the public in the working through stage by reshaping the concept of knowledge. This can be done by providing individuals with the choices associated with particular issues. Some media representatives have begun experimenting with this procedure by working with the Public Agenda Foundation in promoting "public choice campaigns" about issues of importance to most publics (e.g., health care cost, public school reform, drug abuse, the environment, etc.).

As a result, individuals who have great objective needs for information as defined by mainstream society are aided in understanding that the information has subjective value in their daily lives.

Locus of Control

Locus of control is defined by Rotter (1966) as individuals' overall belief that the outcomes in their lives are determined primarily by either what they do (i.e., internal control) or by outside forces (i.e., external control). Rotter's (1966) theory of Internal-External Locus of Control (I-E control) emerged from the social learning theory. That is, internal-external control is not thought of as being a personality trait, but instead a behavior learned through social reinforcement.

Individuals who believe that their actions can affect the outcomes of events that occur in their lives are more likely to practice behaviors that are directed toward changing conditions in their environment, thereby exhibiting an internal locus of control orientation. In comparison, individuals who do not believe that their actions affect the outcomes of events in their lives are more passive in attempting to affect change in their environments (Rotter, 1966; Rotter, Seeman, & Liverant, 1962).

The internal-external locus of control theory has been tested in many areas (for reviews see Lefcourt, 1982; Phares, 1976): political activity (Deutchman, 1985; Gore & Rotter, 1963; Majete, 1987); public information campaigns (Ingold, 1989; Lefcourt, 1976; Phares,1968; Wolk & DuCette, 1974); job satisfaction (Hawk, 1990); academic success (Findley & Cooper, 1983; Lefcourt, 1982); coping with stress (Anderson, 1977; Lefcourt, Miller, Ware, & Sherk, 1981; Parkes, 1984); and health behavior (Kaplan & Cowles, 1978; Marks, Richardson, Graham, & Levine, 1986; Wallston, Maides, & Wallston, 1976).

In general, individuals with an internal control orientation, as compared to individuals with an external control orientation, are reported to be more likely to seek out

information (Phares, 1968), to recall task-relevant information (Wolk & DuCette, 1974), and to make use of available information (Lefcourt, 1976). Despite the wide use of Rotter's (1966) internal-external locus of control scale, it has received a fair amount of criticism.

In particular, researchers have questioned whether or not the scale measures a single concept (i.e., unidimensionality), and whether or not the concept measured is consistent across situations (i.e., specificity). Factor analyses generated from locus of control research studies indicate that more than one personality variable is being measured by the scale (Collins, 1974; Levenson, 1974; Paulhus, 1983).

Paulhus (1983) and Paulhus & Christie (1981) identified three "spheres" in which locus of control scores can be measured: (a) personal efficacy, (b) interpersonal control, and (c) sociopolitical control. When each of these spheres was examined separately, an increased predictability in the specific areas resulted; however, a price was paid in regard to generalizability. This suggests that if a need to know about a specific area is present, it is better to use a specific locus of control measurement similar to those identified by Paulhus (1983) and Paulhus & Christie (1981). If the goal is to gain a general understanding of individuals' locus of control, it is perhaps best to use Rotter's (1966) original locus of control scale.

In addition, claims have been made that Rotter's I-E Scale is ideologically tainted (Abramowitz, 1973; Fink & Hjelle, 1973; Thomas, 1971). More specifically, the external items are said to be reflective of the liberal ideology as they suggest that behavior is determined by environmental conditions, and that the internal items are more reflective of

the Protestant work ethic and the ideological belief of individuals shaping their own destiny.

Moreover, past locus of control studies have shown that the scale may be culturally biased, and as such African American populations should be examined within a cross-cultural framework (Dawson, 1971; Gurin, Gurin, Lao, & Beattie, 1969; Jones & Zoppel, 1979; Triandis, 1976). This argument has been empirically supported by Jones & Zoppel (1979) who found that an African American sample most similar to the populations usually used to test locus of control orientation (i.e., white, middle class students under 30 years of age) had results that were more reflective of the underlying theory of the scale as proposed by Rotter (1966).

Regardless, the scale has proven to be a valuable measure of individuals' willingness to take action to make changes in their environment. Past locus of control research studies suggest that individuals with an internal locus of control orientation will have higher levels of mass communication processing potential as they are more likely to be in the habit of practicing communication activities that initiate change (i.e., writing letters of support/complaint, involvement with community groups, campaigning for a political party, etc.) (Ingold, 1989; Lefcourt, 1976; Phares, 1968; Wolk & DuLette, 1974).

Hence, individuals' locus of control orientation is believed to strongly influence whether or not they become actively involved in their environments to improve the conditions of their everyday lives. For example, two individuals might have equal access to, awareness of, and knowledge about information distributed through a particular mass medium; however, all things being equal, the individual with an internal locus of control

orientation would be more likely to use the information to interact with issues and opportunities that exist in his or her environments. Individuals with an internal locus of control orientation are more likely to be able to translate information made available through the mass media into knowledge that can be used to improve the conditions of their everyday lives.

Community and Political Involvement

Community and political participation are often offered as primary ways in which individuals can affect change in their environments. Such participation has been found to increase throughout the life span, peaking at midlife (Conway, 1985; Milbrath & Goel, 1982; Flacks, 1988; McAdams, 1988; Kotre, 1984; McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1992).

Political participation covers a broad range spanning from low-end participation (i.e., voting) to high-end participation (i.e., running for public office) (Verba & Nie, 1972), with the following political activities occurring between the two endpoints: working on campaigns, making financial contributions, contacting public officials, attending protests, actively following issues, etc. (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995).

It seems logical that individuals' community and political participation would enable them to affect change in their environments, which could lead to their experiencing a better quality of life. Nonetheless, many individuals are politically inactive. When asked why they do not participate in politics, individuals frequently give one of three answers: (a) they can't (e.g., limited resources—time, money, civic skills), (b) they don't want to

(e.g., lack of interest not related to lack of resources), or (c) nobody asked them to (e.g., isolation from recruitment process) (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995).

Both community and political participation suggest the possession of a certain level of communication skills (e.g., writing letters, being comfortable while speaking, organizing and taking part in meetings, etc.). Therefore, individuals who possess advanced communication skills are more likely to be community and political activists.

Social responsibility has been identified as affecting political participation. The concept of social responsibility (Gamson, 1992) says that one reason individuals become politically active is a desire to perform actions that will benefit the larger group. The socially responsible person has been described by Gogh, McClosky, & Meehl (1952) as (a) being concerned with social and moral issues, (b) being committed to results that are the best for the group as opposed to personal gain, and (c) having a general trust in society. All things being equal, individuals usually exhibit their higher social responsibility characteristics in midlife as social responsibility is positively correlated with a strong sense of personal efficacy and personal security (Gogh et al., 1952).

A close relative of social responsibility is the concept of generativity (Erikson, 1968), which is individuals' desire to make a lasting contribution that will ensure the well-being of future generations. Generativity is often manifested in political participation, especially for individuals who made political and ideology commitments in their youth (Cole & Stewart, 1996).

Though strong actions of social responsibility and generativity are typically attributed to reduced demands of family life, it is likely that individuals who continue to have high family demands and many stressors in midlife may also be highly politically

active as they have a desire to protect younger members of their group from certain experiences.

For example, in the 1960s in the United States a large percentage of African Americans became politically active as national events created a perception that their votes would make a difference (Franklin, 1969; Verba & Nie, 1972). During this time, the church was a powerful force in the African American community and served to mobilize the membership to exercise their right to vote (Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975). In fact, many of the early civil rights leaders emerged from the church (Franklin, 1969; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Verba, Schlozman, Brady, & Nie, 1993).

As a large number of African Americans are marginalized in many areas, it is of value to determine if they, as a group, are more likely to use community and political involvement to shed inequality. Previous research has found that African Americans are as politically active as are Caucasian Americans after differences in politically resources are controlled (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, & Nie, 1993). In particular, the church, especially Protestant congregations, was found to provide African Americans, who had lower levels of income and education, with experiences that develop the skills needed to become politically active (i.e., public speaking skills, writing skills, etc.) (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Knoke, 1986; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Schlozman, Brady, & Nie, 1993; Wald, 1992).

Moreover, research suggests that African American women, a group who labors under the weight of "multiple jeopardy" status (i.e., membership with two somewhat disempowered groups, King, 1988; Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980), may actually be

encouraged to become more politically active as a result of this status (Cole & Stewart, 1996; Collins, 1990; Giddings, 1984; hooks, 1984).

Determining the effect that individuals' mass communication potential has on their community and political involvement, and its affect on their quality of life will provide a better understanding of whether or not individuals' ability to communicate encourages them to become active respondents in their environments.

Individuals' community and political involvement is likely to be a reflection of their ability to process information made available through the mass media. When individuals are able to process this information, they are more likely to use the information to stay abreast of issues and opportunities that occur in their environments.

Quality of Life

How individuals function in modern society is reflected in their quality of life. For the purposes of this study, quality of life is conceptualized as a combination of individuals' subjective and objective well-being. Quality of life and life satisfaction are used interchangeably in this study as they are related concepts of the well-being construct.

Andrews & Withey's (1976) seminal work on social indicators of well being identified several domains as the areas of life that appear to be important to most people: job, family, recreation, self efficacy, government, neighborhood, and global satisfaction. Similarly, Diener (1984) reported that "the domains that are closest and most immediate to people's personal lives are those that most influence SWB [subjective well being]" Self, income, job, and relationships were identified as key domains (p. 345).

Global well-being refers to happiness or satisfaction with life-as-a-whole or life in general, and focuses either on global well-being or on specified life concerns or domains (i.e., employment, housing, family, self, etc.) for a purpose of summing up the quality of individuals' lives within their society. Well-being is commonly found under several headings (a) mental health, (b) quality of life, (c) social gerontology, and (d) life satisfaction (Robinson, Shaver & Wrightsman, 1991). As subjective well-being is an attitude, measures that are developed to tap into individuals' subjective well-being consider both cognition and affect (Ostrom, 1969).

Quality of life, more or less, refers to individuals' satisfaction with their lives. It is perceived to be a collective attribute that characterizes groups of people. Thus, the concept of life quality is an attempt to tap into objective and subjective conditions of individuals' lives (Solomon et al., 1980; Szalai & Andrews, 1980).

Contemporary quality of life research commonly frames the concept in terms of relative prosperity (i.e., an objective measure) and as a state of mind or being (i.e., a subjective measure) (Andrews, 1986; Diener, 1984; Griffin, 1986; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993).

However, investigating the quality of life in this regard is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to World War II, three quality of life viewpoints competed for attention: (a) democratic politicism—perfect democratic government and quality of life will naturally follow, (b) economism—provide economic prosperity and a sense of well-being will result, and (c) ethicism—improvement of individual and social morals result in better social institutions and better quality of life (Diener, 1984; Lane, 1994; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993).

During the postwar era, the quality of life empirical studies began in earnest. The first wave of studies focused primarily on objective measures (i.e., economic measures, e.g., per capita income). It was during the 1960s and 1970s that subjective well-being (i.e., happiness, overall life satisfaction) emerged as a concept of the quality of life construct, thereby adding a subjective component. Since then human development has been added as an indicator of quality of life (Bolger, Caspi, Downey, & Moorehouse, 1988; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hurrelmann, 1988).

In a review of quality of life perspectives, Lane (1994) reported that the primary concepts identified as affecting individuals' quality of life are "economic standard of living, social, ecological, physiological circumstances, utilitarian happiness, and humanistic standards of human development" (p. 221). In an effort to synthesize the concepts, he proposed that the quality of life concept comprises two components: "quality of persons," which represents a "sense of subjective well-being and personal development, learning, growth," and "quality of conditions," which represents "opportunities for exploitation by the person living a life" (p. 222).

Lane (1994) identified nine elements—which comprise skills or capacities, beliefs and knowledge, emotions and evaluations, and states of being—as those necessary for the development of quality of persons: "capacity for enjoying life, cognitive complexity, a sense of autonomy and effectiveness, self-knowledge, self-esteem, ease of interpersonal relations, an ethical orientation, personality integration, and to take advantage of opportunities for work and income, a productivity orientation" (p. 224).

If a thorough representation of quality of life is to be obtained, in conjunction with the quality of persons, the quality of conditions should be investigated. Many empirical

studies have conceptualized objective quality of life as level of income (see Diener, 1984 for a review) in an effort to tap into the quality of conditions; however, results have shown that wealth is not highly positively correlated with the quality of life (Land, 1983; Lane, 1991; Nordhaus & Tobin, 1973).

In an attempt to offer a better objective measurement of the quality of life, Lane (1994) identified nine opportunities and assets needed for the attainment of a high quality of conditions: "adequate material support, physical safety and security, available friends and social support (including secure and accepted membership in society or at least in some niche in that society), opportunities for the expression and receipt of love (because satisfaction with family life makes a large contribution to subjective well-being), opportunities for intrinsically challenging work marked by discretion and self-direction, the kinds and amounts of leisure that give scope to skills, creativity—and relaxation, an available set of values (especially moral) that can give meaning to life, opportunities for self-development with the assistance of such help as may be needed, and objective justice, that is, justice assessed by a disinterested, competent judge or other assessor" (p. 230).

It is obvious that quality of conditions can be fully experienced only by individuals who have a vast majority of the characteristics ascribed to the quality of persons. Both the quality of persons and the quality of conditions are necessary for a high quality of life. The interaction between the quality of persons and the quality of conditions defines individuals' quality of life. The additive power of individuals' quality of persons and quality of conditions provide them with either many or few choices in life.

Theoretically, then, individuals who have more choices are more likely to experience a higher quality of life. This suggests that individuals who have high levels of

mass communication processing potential will perceive that they have a higher quality of life as they are more likely to be in possession of more quality of persons and quality of conditions characteristics, which would in turn enable them to have both a greater knowledge of the happenings in their environments and the skills needed to effectively interact with issues and opportunities occurring in their environments. They would, therefore, more likely be actively involved with more of the issues and opportunities that affect their quality of life. This being said, quality of life is extremely difficult to measure. Lane (1994) lamented that no quality of life measurement instrument exists that adequately measures individuals' quality of persons and conditions.

Global well-being studies consistently report weak relationships between sociodemographic variables and satisfaction and happiness (Andrews, 1982; Broman, 1997; Thomas & Holmes, 1992). Researchers who have examined this relationship in different racial and ethnic groups have reported similar findings (Campbell 1981; Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Andrews & Withey, 1976).

However, other researchers, though reporting a weak relationship between sociodemographic factors and subjective well-being, have shown that African American samples have slightly different patterns than those reported for the general population (Campbell et al., 1976; Herzog, Rodgers & Woodworth, 1982; Jackson, Herzog, & Chatters, 1980).

In particular, kinship ties as a means of material and emotional support, social integration and participation, and religious participation are consistently found to be primary determinants of African Americans' life satisfaction (Chatters, Taylor, & Jackson, 1985; Cohen & Willis, 1985; Ellison & Gay, 1990; Jewell, 1988; Stack, 1974).

Jackson et al. (1980) suggested that the differences might be attributed to inferior social, political, and economic conditions that many racial and ethnic minorities face in American society. In other words, there might exist a vast difference within racial and ethnic populations if gaps between aspirations and accomplishments play a major role in defining individuals' subjective satisfaction and happiness (Broman, 1997; Michalos, 1980).

Nonetheless, both happiness and life satisfaction research studies frequently report that African Americans evaluate the overall quality of their lives less positively than do Caucasian Americans (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Jackson, Chatters, & Neighbors, 1986; Jackson et. al, 1980). In an examination of global life quality in a national sample of African Americans, conducted during the period of 1979-1980, Jackson et. al (1986) found that overall, socioeconomic factors (i.e., income and education) had no effect on the respondents' well being. Education exerted a significant effect, but only in the young group (18-34, young; 35-54, middle aged; 55 years and above, old). As would be expected, living arrangements and interpersonal relationships proved to have a substantial effect.

Life satisfaction appears to be more reflective of individuals' subjective quality of life. This perception is supported in quality of life literature. Thomas and Holmes (1992) defined satisfaction as "a result of an interplay between the objective situation and the individual's perception of that situation" (p. 460). Campbell (1981) defined satisfaction as "a function of the gap the individual perceives between his or her present situation or status and the situation or status he or she aspires to, expects, or feels entitled to" (pp. 23-24).

Thus, it seems logical that any examination of individuals' life quality that considers life satisfaction accounts for both subjective and objective life circumstances. This study examines quality of life by focusing on subjective life satisfaction in an effort to provide a richer understanding of individuals' life quality as sociodemographic variables (i.e., income, education, employment) typically prove to be poor predictors of quality of life (Andrews, 1982; Thomas & Hughes, 1986).

A review of scales designed to measure life satisfaction indicated the need for a scale that could measure life satisfaction in several life domains (Alfonso, 1995; Andrews and Robinson, 1991; George, 1981; Larsen, Diener & Emmons, 1985; & Okun & Stock, 1987). Alfonso's (1996) Extended Satisfaction with Life Scale (ESWLS) was an attempt to respond to this need. The ESWLS is a modification of a scale developed by Alfonso, Allison, & Dunn (1992) to investigate fantasy and satisfaction.

The ESWLS measures satisfaction in nine areas: general life, self, marital, family, social, job satisfaction, physical appearance, sex, and school (Alfonso, 1996). General life, self, marital, family, social, and job satisfaction were included because they were identified (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Diener, 1984; Myers & Diener, 1995) as the most consistently rated areas of life that related to overall subjective well being. Physical appearance and sex satisfaction were included because they are areas that are common to many individuals and are frequently reported by many individuals as critical areas that influence life quality. The school subscale was added because it is an area that encompasses a large portion of many individuals' lives (Alfonso, 1995, 1996; Alfonso, et al., 1992).

As social and demographic variables are typically weak predictors of life quality, this study focuses primarily on the life satisfaction component of life quality—life

satisfaction as the results of life satisfaction measures provide insight into both objective and subjective aspects of life quality. More specifically, this study is concerned with how individuals use the information made available through the mass media to improve the conditions of their everyday lives. It is likely that individuals who frequently use the information made available through the mass media will report that they have a higher quality of life as the information may provide them with the knowledge they need to solve various problems that occur in their lives.

A high level of mass communication processing potential is believed to be positively related to quality of life because individuals who have higher levels of mass communication processing potential will more often know how to acquire knowledge from the information made available through the mass media.

In summary, the purpose of this study is not to test specifically the process by which individuals acquire knowledge from the information made available through the mass media (i.e., information processing skills); however, the literature seems to indicate that individuals who have higher levels of mass communication processing potential have developed strong information processing skills. In contrast, individuals who have limited information processing skills will most likely acquire less knowledge from the information provided through the mass media. As such, they are more likely to gravitate toward electronic-based mass media, which often requires less processing (Browne-Miller, 1994; Smith, 1990).

Consequently, as the nature of many electronic-based mass media often does not lend itself to providing information that can be translated into knowledge that can be used to enhance one's quality of life, individuals who rely heavily on electronic-based mass

media are more likely to have low levels of mass communication processing potential, and as a result are likely to perceive that they have a lower quality of life as they are less able to acquire knowledge from information distributed through the mass media.

The foregoing literature review examined: (1) the five dimensions comprising the mass communication processing potential concept: new technology media use, newspaper media use, radio media use, television media use, and perceived knowledge acquired from the information made available through the mass media, (2) the study's independent variables (i.e., socioeconomic status, mass communication processing potential, locus of control, and community and political involvement), and (3) the study's dependent variable (i.e., quality of life).

Figure 1 provides a pictorial representation of the relationships posed in the study.

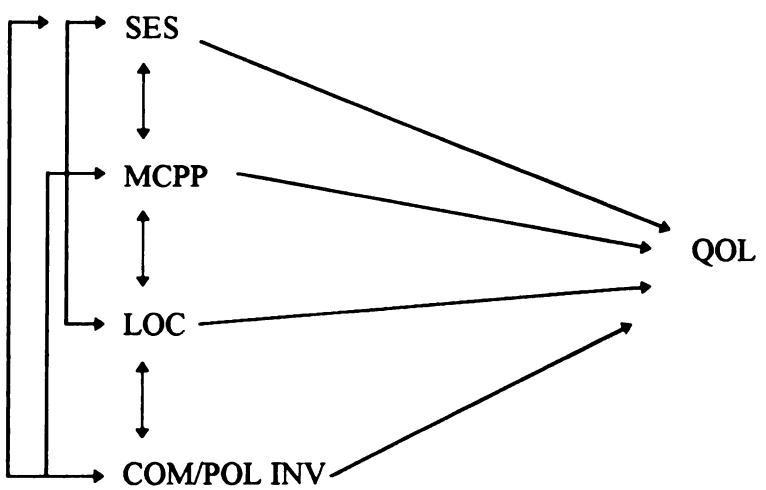

Figure 1 - Research Model

The following research questions and hypotheses were generated to test the proposed relationships:

RQ1: How are gender and age related to mass communication processing potential?

RQ2: How are gender and age related to quality of life?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference between the mass communication processing potential of the public housing resident sample and the university employee sample?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference between the quality of life of the public housing resident sample and the university employee sample?

RQ5: Is socioeconomic status a more powerful predictor of mass communication processing potential than are education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level alone?

RQ6: Is socioeconomic status a more powerful predictor of quality of life than are education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level alone?

H1: Socioeconomic status is positively correlated with mass communication processing potential.

H2: Socioeconomic status is negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation.

H3: Socioeconomic status is positively correlated with community and political involvement.

H4: Mass communication processing potential is negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation.

H5: Mass communication processing potential is positively correlated with community and political involvement.

H6: External locus of control orientation is negatively correlated with community and political involvement.

H7: Socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of quality of life.

H8: Mass communication processing potential is a significant predictor of quality of life.

H9: Locus of control orientation is a significant predictor of quality of life.

H10: Community and political involvement is a significant predictor of quality of life.

Chapter 3

METHOD

Face-to-face interviews were used to collect the data. The face-to-face survey method was chosen as a means to increase response rate (Dillman, 1978; Suchman & Jordan, 1990) as many individuals comprising the surveyed population were believed to be unfamiliar with a fair amount of the terminology used in the questionnaire.

However, the face-to-face survey method is not without problems. Suchman & Jordan (1990) provided a detailed review of the most common problems associated with face-to-face interviews. In particular, the researchers discussed how the nature of face-to-face interviews "suppresses crucial elements of ordinary conversation" (p. 232). This suppression is believed, to varying extents, to undermine the validity of survey data (Briggs, 1986; Mishler, 1986; Suchman & Jordan, 1990).

That being said, face-to-face interviews can be of tremendous value as they allow for more interaction between interviewers and respondents. This interaction is of tremendous value when interviewers are knowledgeable about the nature of the study, and are therefore able to alter the questionnaire, if need be, for a purpose of ensuring that the questions asked are understood by respondents as intended by the researcher (Briggs, 1986; Suchman & Jordan, 1990).

This problem was not an issue of concern in this study as all interviews were conducted by this researcher. Moreover, several clarity issues were addressed in the pretest phase of the study.

Sample

A stratified random sample was drawn from two African American populations. African American populations were chosen because, as a racial group, they are disproportionately disadvantaged in several areas proposed to affect individuals' level of mass communication processing potential. In particular, as a group, they suffer from economic marginality (Hill, 1980), and many members of this group have low literacy skills (Williams et al., 1995; Childers with Post, 1975).

Because the city from which the samples were taken has a small African American population, a random sample of the local university's African American faculty and professional staff population was interviewed to ensure that an adequate number of African Americans who were of higher socioeconomic status and had higher levels of education would be included in the sample. Similarly, to ensure that African Americans who were of lower socioeconomic status and have lower levels of education were represented, a sample was taken from three public housing developments located in the same city as the university.

A list of individuals comprising the university's African American faculty and professional staff was obtained from the Black Faculty & Administrators Association (N =199). From the list, a random sample was chosen. These individuals received a telephone call to inform them about the study and were extended a verbal invitation to participate (see Appendix B). A lottery of $25 was established as an incentive. Once all questionnaires were completed, a drawing was held to determine the winner.

Likewise, a list of names and telephone numbers of African Americans residing in three of the city's public housing developments was obtained from the city's housing

commission (N= 340). A random sample was drawn from the list. Respondents received a telephone call from the researcher describing the nature of the study. They were then extended a verbal invitation to participate (see Appendix B). A lottery of $75 (i.e., one $25-winner per site) was established as an incentive. Once all questionnaires were completed, a drawing was held to determine the three winners.

For both groups, the researcher left a fairly detailed message for potential respondents who were not reached during the first telephone attempt. Several attempts were made to contact individuals who did not return the researcher's initial call. Individuals were called a total of four times before their names were replaced with another member of the group's population. Approximately 7.4% (25) of the total public housing sample population could not be reached, and approximately 6.0% (12) of the total university sample population could not be reached. Of those who could be reached, the response rate was 92% and 94%, respectively.

Measurement

Dependent variable. This study's primary dependent variable was quality of life. A life satisfaction scale was used to measure respondents' quality of life. As quality of life and life satisfaction are related concepts of the well being construct, several of the subscales comprising Alfonso's (1996) Extended Satisfaction With Life Scale (ESWLS) were used to form an additive index to measure respondents' quality of life. Because sociodemographic variables have proven to be poor predictors of quality of life, variables that have served as better predictors of individuals' sense of belonging in both their

personal and work environments are frequently used to examine quality of life. Along a similar vein, this study's examination of quality of life focuses on subjective quality of life. However, it can be argued that any measure of individuals' subjective quality of life also serves as a reflection of their objective quality of life.

The ESWLS was developed to measure satisfaction in nine areas: general life, self, marital, family, social, job satisfaction, physical appearance, sex, and school (Alfonso, 1996). Scale items for the nine areas are typically rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A computation of Cronbach's α revealed a range of internal consistency from .81 to .96 for the nine subscales included in Alfonso's ESWLS (Alfonso, 1996).

In this study, the seven-point Likert scale was reduced to a four-point scale for a purpose of providing scale-point consistency throughout the survey. Additionally, in an effort to reduce the survey length, only four (i.e., general life, self, family, and job) of the nine subscales included in Alfonso (1996) ESWLS were used as an additive index to measure quality of life. The four subscales were factor analyzed to ensure they all represented the same underlying concept. Each subscale loaded on a separate factor and were then added together as a single index.

A computation of Cronbach's α revealed that each subscale had high internal consistency: general life satisfaction, .89; self life satisfaction, .80; family life satisfaction, .89; and employment life satisfaction, .91.

The five items included in general life satisfaction subscale were (1) In most ways my life is close to my ideal; (2) The conditions of my life are excellent; (3) I am satisfied

with life; (4) So far I have gotten the important things I want from life; and (5) I am generally pleased with the life I lead (Cronbach's α = .89.)

The five items included in the life satisfaction subscale were (1) In most ways my actual self is close to my ideal self; (2) As an individual I consider myself excellent; (3) I am satisfied with myself as an individual; (4) So far I have gotten the important things I want from myself; and (5) I am generally pleased with myself as an individual (Cronbach's α =.80).

The five items included in the family life satisfaction subscale were (1) In most ways my family life is close to my ideal; (2) The conditions of my family life are excellent; (3) I am satisfied with my family life; (4) So far I have gotten the important things I want from my family life; and (5) I am generally pleased with the quality of my family life (Cronbach's α = .89).

Finally, the ten items included in the job life satisfaction subscale were (1) The chance for advancement on my job is good; (2) I like the company policies and practices; (3) I like or respect my coworkers; (4) I am pleased with the praise I get for doing a good job; (5) I am given enough freedom to use my own judgment; (6) I like the way my job provides for steady employment; (7) My boss handles his or her employees well; (8) I am happy with the competence of my supervisor; (9) The working conditions of my job are excellent; and (10) Overall, I am satisfied with my job (Cronbach's α = .91).

Independent Variables

Mass communication processing potential. This study's primary independent variables were mass communication processing potential[1], socioeconomic status, locus of control, and community and political involvement.

Mass communication processing potential was defined as the likelihood that an individual will use information made available through the mass media to improve the conditions of his or her everyday life. The mass communication processing potential concept is comprised of five dimensions (1) new technology media use, (2) newspaper media use, (3) radio media use, (4) television media use, and (5) perceived knowledge acquired from information made available through the mass media.

Thirty items were factor analyzed to determine factors that best expressed the mass communication processing potential concept. The 30 items included three separate indices developed by this researcher to tap into individuals' general mass media use, their specific mass media use, and their perceived knowledge acquired from the information they encountered during their general and specific mass media use.

More specifically, the index developed to measure individuals' general mass media use was tailored after categories developed by Robinson & Levy (1996) to obtain a media use information score. On a Likert-type index, ranging from never to regularly, with one representing never, two representing hardly ever, three representing sometimes, and four representing regularly, respondents were asked, "How often would you say you do the following for the purpose of obtaining news and general information" (1) Watch local TV; (2) Watch network TV; (3) Watch cable TV; (4) Read a daily newspaper(s);

[1] In RQ5 mass communication processing potential is analyzed as a dependent variable.

(5) Listen to the radio; (6) Read a general interest magazine(s); (7) Read a news or political magazine(s); (8) Listen to a radio talk show(s); (9) Read a grocery store tabloid(s); and (10) Access information through the Internet/online service(s).

Individuals' specific mass media use was measured by examining their mass media use for the purpose of staying informed about news and general information associated with geographic locations (i.e., international and national; state and local). Survey respondents were asked on a scale of one to four, with one representing never, two representing hardly ever, three representing sometimes, and four representing regularly, "How often would say you do the following" (1) Use television news to help yourself stay informed about international and national news, (2) Use radio news to help yourself stay informed about international and national news, (3) Use a newspaper(s) to help yourself stay informed about international and national news, (4) Use magazines to help yourself stay informed about international and national news, (5) Use the Internet/online services to help yourself stay informed about international and national news, (6) Use television news to help yourself stay informed about state and local news, (7) Use radio news to help yourself stay informed about state and local news, (8) Use newspaper(s) to help yourself stay informed about state and local news, (9) Use magazines to help yourself stay informed about state and local news, and (10) Use the Internet/online services to help yourself stay informed about state and local news.

Knowledge was measured by examining individuals' perception of their knowledge about issues covered in the mass media. News items that received substantial news coverage during a specified two-week period were included in the knowledge index. In particular, respondents were asked: on a scale of one to four, with one representing no

knowledge, two representing not much knowledge, three representing a little knowledge, and four representing a lot of knowledge, "How much knowledge would you say you have about the following issues," (1) United Nations Weapons Inspectors' Visits to Iraq, (2) The Winnie Mandela Hearings in South Africa, (3) South Korea's Economic Crisis, (4) The Democratic Campaign Fundraising Scandal, (5) Au Pair Louise Woodward's Murder Trial, (6) Michigan's Post-Labor Day School Openings, (7) Michigan's Underfunding of Special Education Programs, (8) The Local Rain Tax, (9) The Ballot Proposal to Create an Independent Investigative Board for Complaints Against Lansing Police, and (10) The Possibility of General Motors Leaving Ingham County.

All 30 items were factor analyzed, with five factors remaining after items with low communalities were eliminated. The five factors were labeled as new technology media use, newspaper media use, radio media use, television media use, and perceived knowledge.

In particular, the items included in the new technology factor were (1) Access information through the Internet/online services, (2) Use the Internet/online services to help yourself stay informed about international and national news, and (3) Use the Internet/online services to help yourself stay informed about state and local news. The items were internally consistent with a Cronbach's α of .89.

The items included in the newspaper factor were (1) Read a daily newspaper(s), (2) Use a newspaper(s) to help yourself stay informed about international and national news, and (3) Use a newspaper(s) to help yourself stay informed about state and local news. The items had a Cronbach's α of .86.

The items comprising the radio factor were (1) Listen to the radio, (2) Use radio to help yourself stay informed about international and national news, and (3) Use radio to help yourself stay informed about state and local news. The items were sufficiently reliable in regard to internal consistency with a Cronbach's α of .82.

The items included in the television factor were (1) Watch local television, (2) Use television to help yourself stay informed about international and national news, and (3) Use television to help yourself stay informed about state and local news. The items formed a reliable index with a Cronbach's α of .78.

The items included in the perceived knowledge factor were (1) United Nations weapons inspectors' visits to Iraq, (2) South Korea's economic crisis, (3) The democratic campaign fundraising scandal, (4) Michigan's Post-Labor Day school openings, and (5) Michigan's Underfunding of special education programs. The items were internally consistent with a Cronbach's α of .81.

Socioeconomic status index. The second independent variable, socioeconomic status, was measured with an additive index that included characteristics of individuals' education, income, and occupation levels. In conducting several extensive reviews of knowledge-gap studies (Gaziano,1983, 1997; Gaziano & Gaziano,1996), Gaziano repeatedly suggested that researchers investigating knowledge gap-related issues move beyond education as the sole predictor of knowledge gaps.

Level of education and socioeconomic status are commonly used as sole predictors of knowledge gaps that result from individuals' interaction with the mass media. In an effort to test the combined strength of socioeconomic status variables as a predictor, this

study used an additive socioeconomic index, which included education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level to predict mass communication processing potential and quality of life.

Occupational skill level was added based on Brady, Verba, & Schlozman's (1995) study which found that individuals who had employment responsibilities that require they use advanced communication skills more often participated in political activities regardless of their education or income levels. This finding suggests that individuals who have employment responsibilities that require they use advanced communication skills will most likely have higher levels of mass communication processing potential—regardless of their education and income levels—as practicing these communication acts increases their communication abilities.

Each category was divided into nine subcategories. Respondents' scores ranged from one to nine in each category, with one representing the lowest score and nine representing the highest score. The education level category included: (1) No Formal Education, (2) Some Grade School, (3) Completed Grade School, (4) Some High School, (5) Completed High School, (6) Some College, (7) Completed College, (8) Some Graduate Work, and (9) A Graduate Degree.

The annual household income category included: (1) Under $10,000; (2) $10,000 - $14,999; (3) $15,000 - $24,999; (4) $25,000 - $34,999; (5) $35,000 - $44,999; (6) $45,000 - $54,999; (7) $55,000 - $64,999; (8) $65,000 - $74,999; and (9) $75,000 or more.

Finally, the interval-level occupational skill level category was developed based on U.S. Census data categories and occupation prestige rankings (U.S. Bureau of the Census,

1996; Parker, Cunningham, Chan, Thomas, Kaskel, & Kates, 1995). The subcategories for occupation included: (1) Farming, Forestry, and Fishing; (2) Operators, Fabricators, and Laborers; (3) Precision Production, Craft, and Repair; (4) Private Household Service Occupations (e.g., childcare, cleaners, servants, etc.); (5) Public Service Occupations (e.g., health services, protective services, food service, cleaning services, etc.); (6) Technical, Sales, and Administrative Support; (7) Professional Specialty (e.g., architects, engineers, mathematical and computer scientists, educators); (8) Professional Corporate (e.g., executive, administrators, managerial); and (9) Professional Service (e.g., doctor, lawyer, judge, etc.).

However, the manner in which these categories were established dictated that fast food workers be placed in category five (5), that is, public service occupation. For the purposes of this study, this researcher decided that these individuals would be better classified as operators, and as such should be placed in category two (2), as their employment responsibilities required minimal information processing skills. Without this adjustment they were placed in the same category, for example, with medical and dental assistants whose day-to-day employment responsibilities required that they use higher level information processing skills.

A factor analysis was computed that included the three variables comprising the socioeconomic status index, education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level. All variables loaded on one factor. A total of 27 points was possible (see Appendix D). However, the 27 points were eventually collapsed as nine points for ease of analysis.

Locus of control. The third independent variable, locus of control, was measured with selected questions from Rotter's (1966) Internal-External Locus of control scale. Ten of the 29 pairs were chosen. The ten items listed in Table 2 were chosen as they were identified by this researcher as the items that indicate whether or not individuals are more internally or externally oriented. The italicized items in Table 2 are the ones for which respondents earned points (i.e., external locus of control).

Twenty six university employee sample respondents refused to answer a total of 68 item pairs, and six public housing resident sample respondents refused to answer 11 item pairs. The locus of control measure was calculated without those answers.

A factor analysis of the locus of control items revealed two factors, which were labeled as individuals' perception of their personal locus of control and individuals' perception of others' locus of control orientation. The two factors were added together to form the locus of control index. The items comprising the index were (1) *Choice A*, What happens to me is my own doing, or *Choice B*, Sometimes I feel I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking; (2) *Choice A*, When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work, or *Choice B*, It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune anyhow; (3) *Choice A*, In the long run people get the respect they deserve in this world, or *Choice B*, Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he or she tries, and (4) *Choice A*, Without the right breaks, one cannot be an effective leader, or *Choice B*, Capable people who fail to become leaders have not taken full advantage of their opportunities.

Table 2

Selected Pairs From Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale

1.	*a.*	*Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck.*
	b.	People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make.
2.	a.	In the long run people get the respect they deserve in this world.
	b.	*Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he or she tries.*
3.	*a.*	*Without the right breaks one cannot be an effective leader.*
	b.	Capable people who fail to become leaders have not taken advantage of their opportunities.
4.	*a.*	*I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.*
	b.	Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to take a definite course of action.
5.	a.	Becoming a success is a matter of hard work, luck has little or nothing to do with it.
	b.	*Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time.*
6.	a.	When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.
	b.	*It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune anyhow.*
7.	a.	In my case getting what I want has little or nothing to do with luck.
	b.	*Many times we might just as well decide what to do by flipping a coin.*
8.	*a.*	*Most people don't realize the extent to which their lives are controlled by accidental happenings.*
	b.	There really is no such thing as "luck."
9.	a.	*Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me.*
	b.	It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life.
10.	a.	What happens to me is my own doing.
	b.	*Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking.*

Community and political involvement. The fourth independent variable, community and political involvement, was added in an effort to determine respondents' actual levels of involvement in their environments.

To measure respondents' habits of participating in community and political activities, several items were taken from Miller's (1977) Scorecard for Community Services Activity and Scorecard for Citizen Political Action.

Specifically, the following yes or no response questions were posed to the respondents. "In the past year, have you" (1) Contributed money to a church, (2) Contributed money to a charitable organization, (3) Served on a committee that worked to improve civic life, (4) Informed yourself about civic issues and problems, (5) Written letters or circulated literature, or held home meetings in regards to a public issue, (6) Belonged to one or more organizations that took a stand on community issues and problems, (7) Voted in a political election, (8) Written or talked to your congressperson or any other public official, (9) Volunteered for a candidate who ran for public, and (10) Discussed public issues frequently with more than one person.

Factor analysis revealed that the variable had one underlying factor, which included four items. The items comprising the factor were [In the past year, have you] (1) Served on a committee to improve civic life, (2) Written letters, circulated literature, or held home meetings about a public issue, (3) Belonged to one or more organizations that took a stand on community issues and problems, and (4) Written or talked to your congressperson or any other public official.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Overview of Data Analysis

The data set was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). First, preliminary examination of the data set included a review of frequencies to detect incorrect entries. Missing data were managed based on the nature of the data being examined. In general, when the missing data were items that were a part of an index, the items were replaced with the mean as this method allows the mean for the distribution to remain the same (Hair, Anderson, Tathan & Black, 1995; Tabachnik & Fidell, 1983). Otherwise, the data were computed without the missing data.

Second, the data set was examined for outliers and, in turn, the assumptions related to multivariate data analysis procedures were examined: normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and singularity.

Skewness was examined and determined not to be a problem for this data set. This also suggested that there was variability across the variables, homoscedasticity. Examination of bivariate scatterplots indicated that the data were fairly linear.

An examination of a correlation matrix of the study's variables did not reveal any problems of multicollinearity. In addition, tolerance was examined for the multiple regression analyses and not found to be extremely low.

Third, the research questions and hypotheses were examined using either univariate, bivariate or multivariate statistical measures. In particular, correlational analysis, ANOVA, and simple and multiple regression were used to analyze the data.

Descriptive Statistics

Univariate measures. Table 3 presents the sample distribution of this study's demographic variables. The sample was well distributed. Sixty-three men and 62 women were interviewed (N=125). Approximately 34% of the sample respondents were young (18-34); 52% were middle aged (35-54); and slightly more than 14% were senior citizens (55 years or older).

Approximately 26% of the sample respondents had a low level of education (no formal education through high school); slightly more than 31% of the respondents had a medium level of education (some college through some graduate work); and approximately 43% of the respondents had a high level of education (a graduate degree).

The annual household income of sample respondents comprised three distinct categories: low ($24,000 or less), 34.4% of the sample respondents; medium ($24,001 - $54,999), 23.2% of the sample respondents; and high ($55,000 and above), 42.4% of the sample respondents.

Three occupational skill levels were represented in the sample population. Approximately 35% of the sample respondents had low skilled jobs; 22% of the respondents were employed in semi-skilled jobs; and the remaining 43% were employed in skilled or professional jobs.

Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations of this study's independent and dependent variables.

Table 3

Distribution of Demographic Variables

Variables	*f*	%
Gender		
Men	63	50.4
Women	62	49.6
		100.0
Age		
18-34	42	33.6
35-54	65	52.0
55 years and above	18	14.4
		100.0
Education Level		
Low	32	25.6
Medium	39	31.2
High	54	43.2
		100.0
Annual Household Income		
Low ($24,000 or less)	43	34.4
Medium ($24,001 - $54,999)	29	23.2
High ($55,000 and above)	53	42.4
		100.0
Occupational Skill Level		
Low Skilled	44	35.2
Semi Skilled	27	21.6
Skilled or Professional	54	43.2
		100.0

N=125

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender	1.00										
2. Age	.05	1.00									
3. SES	-.10	.41**	1.00								
4. Perceived Knowledge	-.03	.30**	.65**	1.00							
5. New Technology Media Use	.00	-.09	.34**	.27**	1.00						
6. Newspaper Media Use	-.24**	.01	.22*	.24**	.04	1.00					
7. Radio Media Use	.04	.13	.14	.11	-.02	.05	1.00				
8. Television Media Use	.12	.07	-.02	.02	-.15	.26**	.02	1.00			
9. Locus of Control	.03	-.04	-.29**	-.25**	-.15	.03	.02	-.03	1.00		
10. Community and Political Involvement	.03	.22*	.35**	.34**	.20*	.20*	.12*	.15*	-.24**	1.00	
11. Quality of life	-.07	.23*	.30**	.35**	.02	.17	.05	.14	-.26**	.36**	1.00
M:	.50	1.91	6.34	13.37	6.32	10.02	8.94	10.49	1.46	1.74	77.61
SD:	.50	.67	2.41	4.01	3.00	2.32	2.65	2.08	1.04	1.54	11.30

N=125

* $p < .5$. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 2 presents the beta weights of quality of life regressed on the independent variables.

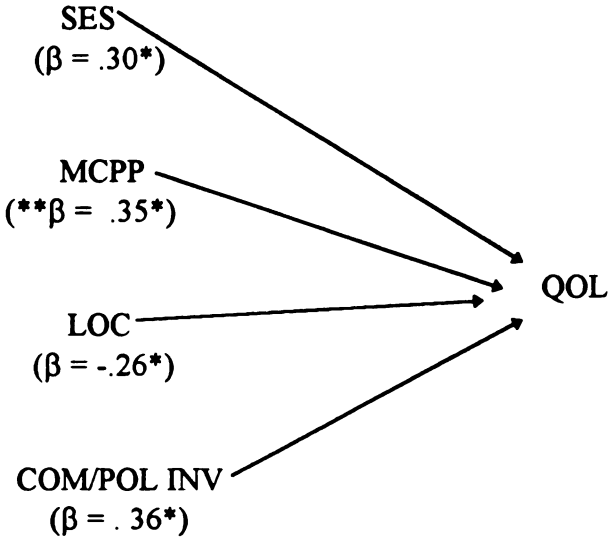

Figure 2

Research Model with Beta Weights

Note. * $p < .05$. ** Beta weight for the perceived knowledge dimension of the mass communication potential concept.

Figure 3 displays the relationships that exist between the independent variables and the relationships that exist between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

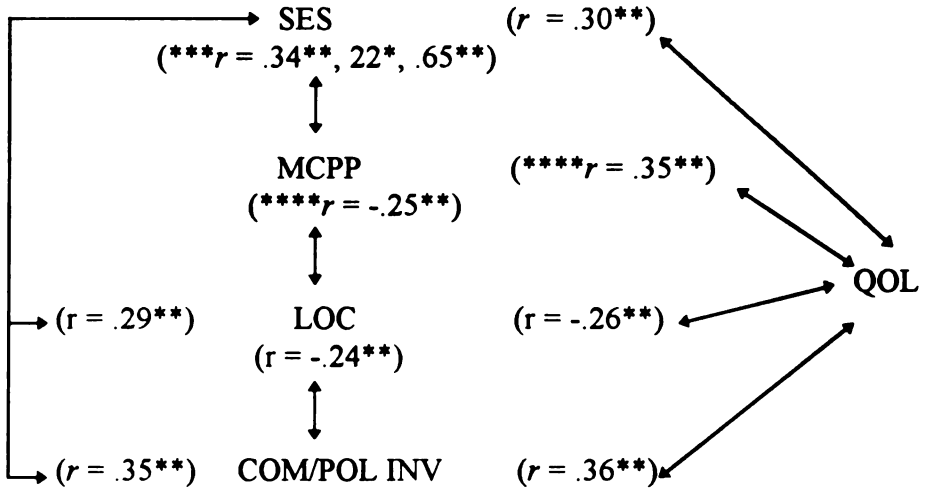

Figure 3

Research Model with Correlations

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** Correlations for new technology, newspaper, and perceived knowledge, respectively. ****Correlation with the perceived knowledge dimension of the mass communication potential concept.

Analysis of Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1. How are gender and age related to mass communication processing potential?

ANOVA was computed to examine the relationships between gender and mass communication processing potential and age and mass communication processing potential. A statistically significant difference as a function of gender was revealed in the newspaper media use variable of the mass communication processing potential concept[2]. As seen in Table 5, men read newspapers more often than do women (F (1,123) = 7.45, $p < .05$.

In regard to the relationship between respondents' ages and mass communication processing potential, a significant difference was found for the perceived knowledge dimension (F (2, 122) = 7.63, $p < .05$) and is shown in Table 6. Moreover, a computation of the Scheffe post hoc test revealed that the young respondents perceived that they acquired significantly less knowledge from the information provided in the mass media than did both middle-aged (t = -2.75, $p < .05$) and senior respondents (t = -3.06, $p < .05$).

Research Question 2. How are gender and age related to quality of life?

No statistically significant difference was found as a function of gender in regard to respondents' quality of life, F (1,123) = .67, p = .42. Although there was a statistically significant difference in quality of life as a function of age, F (2,122) = 3.36, $p < .05$, the

[2] The mass communication processing potential concept included (1) new technology media use, (2) newspaper media use, (3) radio media use, (4) television media use, and (5) perceived knowledge. Any discussion of the mass communication processing potential concept considers these five dimensions.

Table 5

Summary Data and Analysis of Variance Data for
Mass Communication Processing Potential as a Function of Gender

	Gender	
	Men (n = 63)	Women (n = 62)
New Technology		
M:	6.32	6.32
SD:	2.87	3.15
Newspaper		
M:	10.57	9.47
SD:	2.15	2.37
Radio		
M:	8.83	9.05
SD:	2.93	2.36
Television		
M:	10.24	10.74
SD:	2.36	1.74
Perceived Knowledge		
M:	13.38	13.35
SD:	3.87	4.18

Source	*df*	*SS*	*MS*	*F*
New Technology				
Between Groups	1	.08	.08	.00 (.99)
Within Groups	123	1117.20	9.08	
Total	124	1117.20		
Newspaper				
Between Groups	1	38.06	38.06	7.47 (.01)*
Within Groups	123	626.86	5.10	
Total	124	664.93		
Radio				
Between Groups	1	1.55	1.55	.22 (.64)
Within Groups	123	869.93	7.07	
Total	124	871.49		
Television				
Between Groups	1	7.93	7.93	1.84 (.18)
Within Groups	123	529.30	4.30	
Total	124	537.23		
Perceived Knowledge				
Between Groups	1	.02	.02	.01 (.97)
Within Groups	123	1997.05	16.24	
Total	124	1997.07		

* $p < .05$.

Table 6

Summary Data and Analysis of Variance Data for
Mass Communication Processing Potential as a Function of Age

	Age		
	Young (n = 42)	Middle-aged (n = 65)	Senior (n =18)
New Technology			
M:	6.71	6.15	6.00
SD:	3.19	2.87	3.09
Newspaper			
M:	10.00	10.02	10.11
SD:	2.12	2.36	2.72
Radio			
M:	8.21	9.45	8.78
SD:	2.73	2.44	2.92
Television			
M:	10.17	10.71	1.04
SD:	2.17	2.00	2.18
Perceived Knowledge			
M:	11.50	14.25	14.56
SD:	3.30	3.93	4.46

Source	*df*	*SS*	*MS*	*F*
New Technology				
Between Groups	2	10.17	5.08	.56 (.57)
Within Groups	122	1107.03	9.07	
Total	124	1117.20		
Newspaper				
Between Groups	2	.17	.08	.02 (.99)
Within Groups	122	664.76	5.45	
Total	124	664.93		
Radio				
Between Groups	2	39.24	19.62	2.88 (.06)
Within Groups	122	832.24	6.82	
Total	124	871.49		
Television				
Between Groups	2	7.51	3.75	.87 (.42)
Within Groups	122	529.72	4.34	
Total	124	537.23		
Perceived Knowledge				
Between Groups	2	222.07	111.03	7.63 (.001)*
Within Groups	122	1775.01	14.55	
Total	124	1997.07		

* $p < .05$.

difference was not powerful enough to reveal a difference among the three groups using the Scheffe post hoc test.

Research Question 3. Is there a significant difference between the mass communication processing potential of the public housing resident sample and the university employee sample?

To answer RQ3, a *t*-test analysis was conducted to compare the mass communication processing potential of the two sample populations. A significant difference was found to exist between the mass communication processing potential of individuals residing in public housing and individuals employed by the university. Specifically, the university employees more often used new technology media, and they perceived that they acquired more knowledge from the mass media (see Table 7).

Research Question 4. Is there a significant difference between the quality of life of the public housing resident sample and the university employee sample?

An examination of *t*-tests revealed that individuals comprising the university employee sample reported a significantly higher quality of life than did individuals comprising the public housing resident sample, $t\ (1, 123) = -.2.87, p < .05$.

Table 7

Means, Standard Deviations, and *t*-tests of Sample Populations' Mass Communication Processing Potential*

	Public Housing (n = 61)	University Employees (n = 63)	*t*
New Technology			
M:	5.18	7.41	-4.45(.00)**
SD:	2.74	2.85	
Newspaper			
M:	9.82	10.22	- .96 (.34)
SD:	2.22	2.40	
Radio			
M:	8.64	9.22	-1.22 (.23)
SD:	2.58	2.70	
Television			
M:	10.57	10.41	.45 (.66)
SD:	2.10	2.08	
Perceived Knowledge			
M:	11.11	15.52	-7.31 (.00)**
SD:	3.69	3.02	

Note. * Mass communication processing potential is comprised of five variables: new technology media use, newspaper media use, radio media use, television media use, and perceived knowledge. ** $p < .05$.

Research Question 5. Is socioeconomic status a more powerful predictor of mass communication processing potential than are education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level alone?

A standard regression analysis was computed to compare the strength of the socioeconomic status index, education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level to predict mass communication processing potential. R^2 was compared to determine the amount of variance explained in mass communication processing potential by each independent variable.

A comparison of the resultant R^2 revealed that education level was the best predictor of new technology media use, that annual household income was the best predictor of newspaper media use, and that the additive socioeconomic status index was the best predictor of perceived knowledge (see Table 8).

Research Question 6. Is socioeconomic status a more powerful predictor of quality of life than are education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level alone?

Simple regression analysis was used to generate R^2 to compare the amount variability explained in quality of life by independent variables, the socioeconomic status index, education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level. Annual household income was the best predictor of quality of life followed by the socioeconomic status index, occupational skill level, and education level, respectively (see Table 9).

Table 8

Simple Regression of Mass Communication Processing Potential* on the Socioeconomic Status Index, Education Level, Annual Household Income, and Occupational Skill Level

	Independent Variables			
	SES Index	Education Level	Annual Household Income	Occupational Skill Level
Dependent Variables	R^{2**}	R^2	R^2	R^2
New Technology Media Use	.11***	.13***	.07***	.09***
Newspaper Media Use	.04***	.02	.06***	.03***
Radio Media Use	.01	.01	.02	.00
Television Media Use	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01
Perceived Knowledge	41***	.39***	.35***	.35***

Note. *Mass communication processing potential comprises new technology media use, newspaper media use, radio media use, television media use, and perceived knowledge. ** All R^2 are adjusted. *** $p < .05$.

Table 9

Simple Regression of Quality of Life on the Socioeconomic Status Index, Education Level, Annual Household Income, and Occupational Skill Level

	Independent Variables			
	SES Index	Education Level	Annual Household Income	Occupational Skill Level
Dependent Variables	R^{2*}	R^2	R^2	R^2
Quality of Life	.08**	.05**	.09**	.07**

Note. *All R^2 are adjusted. **$p < .05$.

Hypotheses 1 through 6.

H1: Socioeconomic status is positively correlated with mass communication processing potential.

H2: Socioeconomic status is negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation.

H3: Socioeconomic status is positively correlated with community and political involvement.

H4: Mass communication processing potential is negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation.

H5: Mass communication processing is positively correlated with community and political involvement.

H6: External locus of control orientation is negatively correlated with community and political involvement.

Table 10 presents the correlation matrix of the study's independent variables. Socioeconomic status was significantly positively correlated with three of the five dimensions of the mass communication processing potential concept (i.e., new technology media use, $r = .34, p < .01$; newspaper media use, $r = .22, p < .05$; and perceived knowledge, $r = .65, p < .01$) and community and political involvement ($r = .35, p < .01$), and significantly negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation ($r = -.29, p < .01$).

External locus of control orientation was negatively correlated with the perceived knowledge dimension ($r = -.25, p < .01$) of the mass communication processing potential concept, and community and political involvement ($r = -.24, p < .01$). Like the socioeconomic status independent variable, the community and political involvement

independent variable had a significant relationship with all independent variables expect radio and television media use.

In particular, community and political involvement was positively related to socioeconomic status ($r = .35, p < .01$); perceived knowledge ($r = .34, p < .01$); new technology media use ($r = .20, p < .05$); newspaper media use ($r = .20, p < .05$), and negatively related to external locus of control orientation ($r = .24, p < .01$).

Table 10 - Correlation Matrix of Independent Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. SES	1.00							
2. Perceived Knowledge	.65**	1.00						
3. New Technology	.34**	.27**	1.00					
4. Newspaper	.22*	.24**	.04	1.00				
5. Radio	.14	.11	-.02	.05	1.00			
6. Television	-.02	.02	-.15	.26**	.02	1.00		
7. Locus of Control	-.29**	-.25**	-.15	.03	-.02	-.03	1.00	
8. Community and Political Inv.	.35**	.34**	.20*	.20*	.11	.15	-.24**	1.00
M:	6.34	13.37	6.32	10.02	8.94	10.49	1.46	1.74
SD:	2.41	4.01	3.00	2.32	2.65	2.08	1.04	1.54

N = 125

* $p < .05$ level (2-tailed). ** $p < .01$ level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 7. Socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of quality of life.

A standard regression analysis revealed that socioeconomic status was a significant predictor of quality of life, explaining nine percent of the variance in the dependent variable (R^2 (1, 123) = .09, $p < .05$) (see Table 11).

Table 11

Simple Regression of Quality of Life on Socioeconomic Status

Independent Variable	*b*	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*Partial*[3]	*Part*[4]
Constant	68.78	2.73		25.18		
Socioeconomic Status	1.39	.40	.30	3.46 (.00)*	.30	.30

R^2 = .09 (Adjusted R^2, .08), $p < .05$. * $p < .05$.

Hypothesis 8. Mass communication processing potential is a significant predictor of quality of life.

Of the five dimensions comprising the mass communication processing potential concept (i.e., new technology media use, newspaper media use, radio media use, television media use, and perceived knowledge), only perceived knowledge was a significant predictor of quality of life ($\beta = .35, p < .05$). Perceived knowledge accounted for 10% of the unique variance in quality of life. Together the five variables comprising the mass communication processing potential concept accounted for the additional five percent of variance explained in quality of life (see Table 12).

[3] In standard regression the partial correlation squared "expresses the unique contribution of the IV as a proportion of total variance of the DV" (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1983, p. 107).

[4] In standard regression the part statistic squared expresses "the unique contribution of the IV as a proportion of R^2" (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1983, p. 107).

Table 12

Regression Analysis of Quality of Life on
Mass Communication Processing Potential

Independent Variable	*b*	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*Partial*	*Part*
Constant	56.62	7.15		7.92		
New Technology Media Use	-.24	.34	-.06	-.72 (.48)	-.07	-.06
Newspaper Media Use	.31	.44	.06	.70 (.49)	.06	.06
Radio Media Use	.02	.36	.01	.08 (.94)	.01	.01
Television Media Use	.58	.48	.11	1.20 (.23)	.11	.10
Perceived Knowledge	.98	.26	.35	3.82 (.00)*	.33	.32

R^2 = .15 (Adjusted R^2, .11), $p < .05$. * $p < .05$.

Hypothesis 9. Locus of control is a significant predictor of quality of life. Locus of control was a significant predictor of quality of life, explaining 7% of the variance in quality of life (see Table 13).

Table 13

Simple Regression Analysis of Quality of Life on Locus of Control

Independent Variable	*b*	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*Partial*	*Part*
Constant	81.71	1.70		48.18		
Locus of Control Orientation	-2.82	.95	-.26	-2.96	-.26	-.26

R^2 = .07 (Adjusted R^2, .06), $p < .05$. * $p < .05$.

Hypothesis 10. Community and political involvement is a significant predictor of quality of life.

A standard multiple regression analysis was computed to examine whether or not community and political involvement was a significant predictor of quality of life. Community and political involvement was a significant predictor of quality of life explaining 13% of the variance in respondents' quality of life.

Table 14

Simple Regression Analysis of Quality of Life on Community and Political Involvement

Independent Variables	*b*	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*Partial*	*Part*
Constant	73.09	1.43		51.02 (.00)**		
Community and Political Involvement	2.60	.62	.36	4.21 (.00)**	.36	.36

R^2 = .13 (Adjusted R^2, .12), $p < .05$. * $p < .05$.

A multiple regression analysis which examined socioeconomic status, the mass communication processing potential concept, locus of control and community and political involvement regressed on quality of life revealed that only community and political involvement explained unique variance in predicting respondents' quality of life (i.e., 4%). The four independent variables together accounted for the other 19% of variance explaining respondents' quality of life (i.e., R^2 = .23 (Adjusted R^2, .18), $p < .05$).

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Purpose

Individuals use of the information made available through the mass media may positively affect their quality of life. In an effort to examine relationships that exist between mass media use and quality of life, this study considered individuals' mass media use in regard to how the information made available through the mass media might be used for a purpose of improving the conditions of their everyday lives.

Many mass media (i.e., radio, television, newspapers) are both pervasive and accessible to most individuals from all walks of life. As a result, there appears to be a tendency, perhaps more subconscious than conscious, for educators, policy makers and others who are well integrated into mainstream American society to equate this pervasive availability with a belief that most individuals attain practical knowledge from the mass media that they can use to improve the conditions of their everyday lives. The results of this study suggest that this is likely an incorrect assumption, especially when disadvantaged communicators are being considered.

If individuals are to acquire practical knowledge from the mass media, they must first be able to translate the information provided therein into information that is of personal use. It appears that often many individuals are unable to decipher the wealth of information made available through the mass media that undoubtedly has a potential to help them better navigate within their environments. In other words, many individuals are unable to translate objectively beneficial information made available through the mass media into information that is personally relevant.

The findings of this study support previous mass media research studies which concluded that individuals of lower socioeconomic status often do not perceive that information made available through the mass media has subjective value in their daily lives (Nowak, 1977; Suominen, 1976; Thunberg et. al., 1982). For example, underprivileged communicators more often have difficulty processing and understanding information that could be of value to them for a purpose of enhancing their life quality (e.g., comparison shopping, purpose of social service agencies, etc.). Previous research has accused the mass media of aggravating this problem by providing information in a form that is not easily understood by individuals who are not in possession of a lot of prior knowledge about various issues.

Yankelovich (1991), for example, noted that the mass media do an excellent job of making individuals aware of issues taking place in their environment, but they perform miserably in providing individuals with information they need to work through complicated issues.

The results of an inability to understand commonly available information is poignantly captured in a poem that shares a young Swedish girl's classroom experience. The poem, titled "On the Outside," was written by Kjell Espmark.

On the Outside

She's listening with her whole body.
The teacher's lips are moving. And she hears
yet misses his words by a few inches
like trying to catch hold of a stone in water.
There's another world, a handsbreadth from hers.
Right against the map of Sweden
there hangs a map of *Sweden*—
the same towns and jagged lakes
the same yellow and green fields
yet a country shimmering and inaccessible.
They're discussing something now, their mouths in motion.
Of course she can hear. But what's really said
flies sparkling past her ears
to those living in the proper country.

Yet she can catch them in the interval
with her sniffling story of daddy being picked up
resisting, pulled out in every direction.
And mother tried to hide herself in her hands.
Everything's sold for twenty wrinkled laughs.
Talks, straddling, stockings rumpling.

But nothing's changed by her success.
When she tries to take her place in their talk
she stumbles into that thin membrane
separating the world from *the world*
and that smile which hurts so much
because it's not intended to be seen.
If she could wangle herself into their Sweden
and carefully sit down among them
would her chair not change into a *chair*
and herself become quite real?
One step to the side is all she needs.
But finds not even a word for that step.
And the classroom knows: she'll never find it.
The language between these four walls
knows her life to come.
She can struggle till she's pulled out in every direction.
In this amiably inexorable grammar
each has his final place.

From Thunberg et al. (1982), p. 101.

It appears that many individuals have difficulty understanding information that is readily available in their environments. This problem prevents them from benefiting from information that could be used to enhance their life quality. Clearly, the importance of being able to acquire knowledge from the information that is readily available in one's environment cannot be overemphasized. Because the mass media are pervasive, they have the potential to provide most individuals with a wealth of information about numerous topics that could be used to improve their life quality. However, if individuals are not capable of translating the information in a form that is of personal relevance, their mass media resource repertoire is severely limited.

Whereas hundreds of mass media use studies have examined individuals' mass media use as a function of standard demographic variables (e.g., education level, annual household income), none of these studies have been framed overtly within the context of individuals' ability to process the information made available through the mass media.

Therefore, an examination of individuals' use of the mass media within the context of their ability to acquire practical knowledge from the information provided therein seems the next logical port of departure. Previous mass media studies have concluded that individuals who are immersed in poorer socioeconomic status structures more often gravitate toward electronic-based mass media, and that individuals who reside in wealthier socioeconomic status structures more often gravitate toward print-based mass media.

Thus, a primary purpose of this study was to take the first step in an in-depth examination of individuals' mass media use as a function of the knowledge they perceive they acquire from the information made available therein, and the impact that this information may have on their quality of life.

Toward that end, the mass communication processing potential concept was introduced and defined as the likelihood that an individual will use information made available through the mass media to improve the conditions of his or her everyday life. Five dimensions were identified as best expressing the mass communication processing potential concept: a) new technology media use, b) newspaper media use, c) radio media use, d) television media use, and e) perceived knowledge acquired.

Mass communication processing potential was proposed to affect individuals' quality of life in regard to their using the information made available through the mass media to become more involved with issues and opportunities occurring in their environments. In other words, individuals who have the ability to translate the information made available through the mass media into knowledge that is of practical use in their daily lives will be more likely to use that information to become involved in their environments, which may serve to enhance their life quality. In contrast, individuals who perceive that the information made available through the mass media has little practical value in their daily lives are not likely to use that information to improve the conditions of their everyday lives.

Sample population. Two African American populations were chosen to test the proposed relationships between the mass communication processing potential concept and quality of life as this racial and ethnic group suffers disproportionately from what appears to be an inability to take full advantage of the information made available through the mass media. Moreover, this population was perceived to be ideal as there exists among its

members a wide range of variability in regard to education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level.

Summary of Results

RQ1: How are gender and age related to mass communication processing potential?

Findings: There was a significant difference in mass communication processing potential as both a function of gender and age, with male university employees reading newspapers more often than female university employees. In addition, young respondents perceived that they acquired less knowledge from the mass media than did middle-aged and senior respondents.

RQ2: How are gender and age related to quality of life?

Findings: There was not a significant difference in quality of life as either a function of gender or age.

RQ3: Is there a significant difference between the mass communication processing potential of the public housing resident sample and the university employee sample?

Findings: Individuals comprising the university employee sample reported a higher level of mass communication processing potential than did individuals comprising the public housing resident sample.

RQ4: Is there a significant difference between the quality of life of the public housing resident sample and the university employee sample?

Findings: Individuals comprising the university employee sample reported they had a higher quality of life than did individuals comprising the public housing resident sample.

RQ5: Is socioeconomic status a more powerful predictor of mass communication processing potential than are education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level alone?

Findings: Only marginal differences were found when comparing the predictive power of the socioeconomic status index with the individual variables comprising the index. In particular, the socioeconomic status index was the best predictor of perceived knowledge; education level was the best

predictor of new technology media use; and annual household income was the best predictor of newspaper media use.

RQ6: Is socioeconomic status a more powerful predictor of quality of life than are education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level alone?

Findings: The differences revealed in this analysis were marginal. However, annual household income was the best predictor of quality of life, followed by the socioeconomic status index, occupational skill level, and education level, respectively.

H1: Socioeconomic status is positively correlated with mass communication processing potential.

Findings: Socioeconomic status was positively correlated with three of the five dimensions comprising the mass communication processing potential concept: new technology media use, newspaper media use, and perceived knowledge.

H2: Socioeconomic status is negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation.

Findings: Socioeconomic status was negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation.

H3: Socioeconomic status is positively correlated with community and political involvement.

Findings: Socioeconomic status was positively correlated with community and political involvement.

H4: Mass communication processing potential is negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation.

Findings: The perceived knowledge dimension of the mass communication processing potential concept was negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation.

H5: Mass communication processing potential is positively correlated with community and political involvement.

Findings: Several dimensions of the mass communication processing potential concept were positively correlated with community and political involvement: new technology media use, newspaper media use, and perceived knowledge.

H6: External locus of control orientation is negatively correlated with community and political involvement.

Findings: External locus of control orientation was negatively correlated with community and political involvement.

H7: Socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of quality of life.

Findings: Socioeconomic status explained 9% of the variance in quality of life.

H8: Mass communication processing potential is a significant predictor of quality of life.

Findings: The perceived knowledge dimension of the mass communication processing potential concept explained 10% of unique variance in quality of life. In total, the mass communication processing potential concept accounted for 15%of the variance in quality of life.

H9: Locus of control orientation is a significant predictor of quality of life.

Findings: Locus of control orientation explained 7% of the variance in quality of life.

H10: Community and political involvement is a significant predictor of quality of life.

Findings: Community and political involvement accounted for 13% of the variance in quality of life.

Discussion

Each research question and hypothesis is discussed in the order of its appearance in the study.

Research Question 1. How are gender and age related to mass communication processing potential?

Of the five dimensions expressing the mass communication processing potential concept, there was a significant difference in respondents media use as a function of gender. Men read newspapers more often than did women. More specifically, an in-depth examination of newspaper media use revealed that no significant difference existed as a function of newspaper media use in the public housing resident sample as a function of gender. The newspaper mass media use gender difference occurred between the men and women comprising the university employee sample.

Overall, there was no difference as a function of gender in the areas of new technology media use, radio media use, television media use, and perceived knowledge. When men and women in the university employee sample were compared with their counterparts in the public housing resident sample, it was found that those in the university group more often used new technology, and they perceived that they acquired more knowledge from the information they encountered when they used the mass media.

These findings seem to suggest that African American men and women who share similar socioeconomic status have similar media use habits. This finding is logical as African American men and women have shared a similar history in this country, where, for all practical purposes, they are equals. In other words, although they share many

obstacles, neither group has necessarily been denied outright access to various resources at the expense of the other. For instance, by the time African Americans could legally obtain an education in this country, it was as acceptable for women to seek an education as it was for men.

In regard to age, young respondents perceived that they acquired less knowledge from the information they encountered while interacting with the mass media than did either middle-aged or senior respondents. As there were no significant difference between the middle-aged and senior citizen groups, the difference that was found is most likely a function of the priorities typically associated with various life stages.

More specifically, it is possible that this study's young group (i.e., 18-34 years of age) is experiencing a life stage in which they are less involved with community and political issues occurring in their environments as they are likely to be more involved with career and family planning. This is not to suggest that being involved with community and political issues and career and family planning are mutually exclusive. In the young age category, however, community and political issues are likely to be less important as a result of lifestyle (e.g., employment that does not require involvement with issues occurring in their environments, not being invested in the community where they reside, being encumbered with the day-to-day responsibilities of making ends meet, etc.).

Moreover, the study's findings in regard to age and life stages are consistent with characteristics typically associated with the middle-aged and senior citizen life stages. That is, during these life stages, involvement (e.g., either community or political or both) often has a higher priority. Additionally, these two groups more often have employment

positions that require them to be aware of and involved with many of the issues that take place in their environments.

Research Question 2. How are gender and age related to quality of life?

Surprisingly, no significant difference was found in quality of life as a function of either gender or age. Typically, well-being research, whether it be under the heading of quality of life or life satisfaction, reports not only that African Americans as a group more often report a lower quality of life, but that African American women report a lower quality of life than do African American men. It is conceivable that the difference found in this study is an artifact of the two African American populations studied.

In particular, it is possible that there is little variation in the quality of life as a function of gender of individuals living in public housing and individuals who are university employees. However, this is not likely as individuals who live in public housing are of lower socioeconomic status and contend with a wide range of problems that are associated with living in such a social structure (e.g., chronic financial and health problems, unsafe living environments, etc.).

It could be argued that the women in the two environments might not be found to have a significantly different quality of life because, women, irrespective of their social structure, often have more stressors than the men immersed in the same social structures (i.e., the bulk of parenting responsibilities, working outside the home and having the primary responsibility for maintaining the household, etc.).

To provide a clearer understanding of this phenomenon, a post hoc *t*-test was computed to determine whether or not there was a significant difference in the quality of

life for men and women within and across samples. Whereas there was not a significant difference in the quality of life of men and women immersed in the same social environment, there was a significant difference across samples that was quite unexpected.

University female employees reported a significantly higher quality of life than did females residing in public housing; however, there was no significant difference between the quality of life of male university employees and males residing in public housing. Had there been no difference in the two female populations, the results would have at least seemed intuitively logical as women tend to have more stressors no matter what their socioeconomic status.

That no difference was found between the male members of the sample populations is not in accord with past quality of life studies, which have examined this population. This finding is worthy of further examination with a larger African American sample, especially as the "inclining significance of race versus the declining significance of race" debate continues to be waged.

Another uncommon finding of this study was a lack of difference in the respondents' quality of life as a function of age. Traditional quality of life research studies usually report that individuals' quality of life increases with age as they are often less encumbered with life stressors (e.g., career development, parenting, etc.). This finding of increased quality of life with age is also a prevalent finding in African American populations (Jackson et al., 1986).

A probable explanation for this finding is that the individuals comprising the senior group were small in number (n = 18) and perhaps exceptions to the rule. That is, the senior respondents were either high ranking university administrators, senior faculty

members, or residents of public housing developments. Each of these environments is oftentimes associated with stressful conditions, and, therefore, may result in a perception of reduced life quality.

This study's quality of life results seem to indicate that the passage of time has diluted the strength of race as a predictor of life quality. This is in no way meant to suggest that race is an obsolete predictor of quality of life, but that it is important that race and class be examined both separately and simultaneously.

Clearly race remains a significant, powerful predictor of life quality; however, as can be seen in the results that emerged from this sample, race tells only a portion of the story. Class is perhaps of greater importance than race in this phase of African American history when lower socioeconomic status often means less access to opportunities (e.g., higher education, exposures that are common to higher socioeconomic status structures) that are typically reported as ensuring—or at least increasing one's chances—that individuals will achieve the objective component of quality of life (i.e., higher income, occupational prestige, etc.). Future studies that examine a large, heterogeneous African American population would be invaluable in clarifying these differences.

Research Question 3. Is there a significant difference between the mass communication processing potential of the public housing resident sample and the university employee sample?

As expected, individuals comprising the university employee sample reported a significantly higher level of mass communication processing potential than did the individuals comprising the public housing resident sample.

More specifically, individuals comprising the university employee sample perceived they acquired more knowledge from the information they encountered in the mass media. They also used new technology more often. This was an important finding because both sample populations had readily available access to the Internet. That is, members of the university employee sample had access to the Internet at work, and members of the public housing resident sample had access to the Internet through computer learning centers located at each development site.

Each public housing development from which samples were drawn has a computer learning center that is available to adult residents during certain hours of the week and by appointment. However, adult residents rarely take advantage of the resource. Casual conversations with adult residents and with staff members who provide computer support services in the computer learning centers seem to suggest that limited computer skills and general lack of awareness about the resource capabilities of the Internet explains why adult residents rarely use the Internet as a resource. This remains true even though introductory classes have been offered.

This finding is in support of Katzman's (1974) claim that people with limited technical and education skills are less likely to benefit from new technology even when it is readily available. Moreover, it supports Suominen (1976) and Nowak (1977) who concluded that individuals with objective information needs do not always perceive a subjective need for the information.

For example, health information that is made available on the Internet could be of tremendous help to adult public housing residents, many of whom suffer from numerous health problems. The Internet could provide them with information from various sources

about the symptoms and the health management techniques associated with their particular heath problem(s). However, they do not view the Internet as a subjective answer to their objective need for health information. Evidently, having access to information is necessary but not sufficient for knowledge acquisition.

Research Question 4. Is there a significant difference between the quality of life of the public housing resident sample and the university employee sample?

Respondents comprising the university employee sample reported a higher quality of life than did respondents comprising the public housing sample. Again, this finding suggests that class is an important predictor of quality of life and is worthy of examination in a much larger heterogeneous African American population to tease out the strength of each variable as a predictor of quality of life. The findings of such a study would be of tremendous value to further development of the mass communication potential concept in regard to its relationship with quality of life.

Research Questions 5 and 6. RQ5: Is socioeconomic status a more powerful predictor of mass communication processing potential than are education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level alone?

RQ6: Is socioeconomic status a more powerful predictor of quality of life than are either education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level alone?

Gaziano (1983, 1997) has repeatedly encouraged researchers examining knowledge gaps to use more than one independent variable as the sole predictor of

knowledge acquisition. Education is the independent variable most often used as a predictor of knowledge acquisition.

Responding to Gaziano's challenge, this study compared the strength of an additive socioeconomic status index, which included three variables—education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level—with the strength of the individual variables comprising the index to predict both mass communication processing potential and quality of life.

The mass communication processing potential concept is comprised of five dimensions (i.e., new technology media use, newspaper media use, radio media use, television media use, and perceived knowledge). In regard to those dimensions, education level explained the most variance in respondents' new technology media use, annual household income explained the most variance in newspaper media use, and the socioeconomic status index explained the most variance in perceived knowledge. Neither the socioeconomic status index, education level, annual household income, or occupational skill level explained any variance in either radio or television media use.

Annual household income explained the most variance in quality of life followed by the socioeconomic status index, occupational skill level, and education level.

Certainly there is a strong interrelationship among individuals' education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level and their ability to acquire knowledge from the information they encounter in the mass media and their quality of life. However, the results of this study indicate that the individual predictor variables provide a richer explanation of the relationship that exists between a particular sociodemographic variable and a particular type of media use, and that the additive index provides a better

understanding of the overall knowledge individuals acquire as a result of specific training (i.e., education exposure) and increased exposure (i.e., higher annual household income).

For example, it is likely that individuals who have higher levels of education are more often exposed to new technology and that they more often have a reason(s) (e.g., employment responsibilities) to use that technology. Individuals with higher annual household incomes, all things being equal, have greater access to (i.e., can more easily afford the cost) and need for the information made available in newspapers (e.g., both employment related, i.e., responsibilities require they stay abreast of issues; and personal interest, i.e., they are more invested in the communities within which they live, etc.).

The socioeconomic status index, then, provides a better overall picture of individuals' knowledge, and the individual variables allow for a more in-depth understanding of the source of the relationship that exists between the variables.

It is conceivable that the same results would be found if the quality of life concept were to be examined with the individual dimensions that comprised the additive index, as opposed to the additive index used in this study.

As data for each of these sociodemographic variables are usually collected in most mass media use related research studies, it would benefit researchers to consider both the separate and additive effect of variables used to conceptualize socioeconomic status. The results of this study suggest that if the goal is to reveal the strongest predictor, a combined socioeconomic status index should be used. If the goal is to learn more about the nature of the relationship between a variable and the phenomenon it is attempting to predict, the results of the individual variables should be analyzed.

Hypothesis 1 through 6.

H1: Socioeconomic status is positively correlated with mass communication processing potential.

H2: Socioeconomic status is negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation.

H3: Socioeconomic status is positively correlated with community and political involvement.

H4: Mass communication processing potential is negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation.

H5: Mass communication processing potential is positively correlated with community and political involvement.

H6: External locus of control orientation is negatively correlated with community and political involvement.

The finding of each of the proposed correlational relationships was in accord with research studies that consider the relationships that exist between socioeconomic status, mass media use, and knowledge acquisition. In particular, socioeconomic status was positively correlated with several dimensions comprising the mass communication processing potential concept (i.e., perceived knowledge, new technology media use, and newspaper media use). Socioeconomic status was also positively correlated with community and political involvement and negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation.

That socioeconomic status would be positively correlated with several dimensions of the mass communication processing potential concept and community and political involvement is intuitively logical. The variables comprising the socioeconomic index (i.e., education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level) very much affect

and are affected by individuals' mass media use, the knowledge they acquire from the mass media, and their community and political involvement.

For example, individuals of higher socioeconomic status are more often in possession of higher levels of education and have employment responsibilities that require critical processing of information from various sources. It is logical that they would use these same skills when they are interacting with information made available through the mass media. As a result, they develop higher levels of mass communication processing potential than do individuals who have less developed information processing skills. Their manner of processing information enables them to acquire more knowledge from the information with which they interact whatever its origin.

In a related fashion, socioeconomic status is negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation. This finding supports locus of control orientation research studies which reported that individuals who perceive that their actions make a difference in the outcomes of their life events are more likely to exhibit an internal locus of control orientation. Simply, individuals who experience successes, as a result of their actions, are more likely to take similar actions in the future.

Moreover, individuals of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to have positive experiences in this regard because they more often have higher levels of education, which has equipped them with the skills needed to handle themselves in various situations. In addition, their higher annual household incomes afford them more opportunities, and their employment responsibilities typically require them to solve various problems on a somewhat regular basis.

It stands to reason that higher levels of mass communication processing potential would be negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation. Thus, it was an expected finding that the perceived knowledge dimension of the mass communication potential concept was significantly negatively correlated with external locus of control orientation. This finding appears to suggest that individuals who perceive that they have more knowledge also perceive that they have more control over the events that occur in their environments, which may result in a self fulfilling prophesy. That is, those who take action because they believe that it can affect results more often have positive results, and those who do not take action experience fewer success thereby confirming their perceptions.

This condition was aptly expressed in this study. Individuals comprising the university employee sample had significantly difference locus of control orientation than did individuals comprising the public housing resident sample though there was no significant difference within population samples as a function of gender. However, there was a significant difference between the locus of control orientation of female university employees and female public housing residents, and between male university employees and male public housing residents.

Hypothesis 7. Socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of quality of life.

The results of this study supported this hypothesis. That socioeconomic status explained only 9% of variance in quality of life is not surprising because many factors determine quality of life. The socioeconomic demographic variable has never been a

strong predictor of quality life for either general population samples or for racial and ethnic minority samples. This remains so even though there is currently a larger percentage of African Americans immersed in higher socioeconomic status environments than there has been at any other period in U. S. history.

Hypothesis 8. Mass communication processing potential is a significant predictor of quality of life.

The mass communication processing potential concept, like socioeconomic status, should also be a predictor of quality of life because characteristics associated with higher socioeconomic status are necessary for the achievement of higher levels of mass communication processing potential

Of the five dimensions comprising the mass communication processing potential, only the perceived knowledge dimension explained any unique variance. This finding suggests that it is important that knowledge acquisition be considered in conjunction with individuals' mass media use when considering the value of the information made available through the mass media.

When considering the potential of the mass media to provide individuals across various socioeconomic status structures with a wealth of informational resources, it is important to determine 1) if individuals with lower levels of education are able to understand (i.e., effectively process) a large part of the information made available through the traditional mass media, 2) if the information being provided through the mass media is perceived as being of value by individuals of lower socioeconomic status who perhaps need it more because they often have limited information resources, and 3) the interaction

that comes about in regard to ability to process information and perception of information value.

The results of this study seem to suggest that in order for individuals to acquire a high level of knowledge from information made available through the mass media, they must possess a fairly high level of background knowledge. For example, though there was virtually no difference in the mass media use habits of the two sample populations, all things being equal, the individuals of lower socioeconomic status perceived that they acquired less knowledge from the information made available through the mass media. These two populations differed significantly in regard to education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level.

In other words, it is intuitively pleasing to argue that the major difference between the two sample population groups is the ability of the university employee population to acquire more knowledge from the information provided through the mass media because their higher education levels, higher annual household incomes, and higher occupational skill levels have equipped them with highly developed information processing skills.

Quite simply, the results of this study suggest that the information processing skills individuals bring with them when they interact with the mass media serves as a prerequisite for their attainment of high levels of mass communication processing potential.

Hypothesis 9. Locus of control orientation is a significant predictor of quality of life.

Individuals' manner of interacting with issues and opportunities that occur in their environments can be expressed by the locus of control orientation concept. It is successful experiences that enable individuals to develop an internal locus of control orientation. When individuals make an effort to affect issues and situations that occur in their environments and are subsequently successful, they are more inclined to become actively involved with future issues. The manner in which individuals choose to interact with issues that occur in their environments can have an effect on their quality of life

A frequently reported in locus of control orientation research studies, this study revealed that individuals who perceived that their actions can influence the outcome of events in their lives (i.e., internal locus of control orientation) reported that they had a higher quality of life. Moreover, they were more active respondents in their environments (i.e., high levels of community and political involvement).

Hypothesis 10. Community and political involvement is a significant predictor of quality of life.

Both mass media and political science research studies indicate that individuals who are community and political activists will have higher levels of mass communication processing potential, irrespective of socioeconomic status (Brady & Nie, 1993; Brady, Veba, & Schlozman, 1995).

Community and political involvement was a significant predictor of quality of life. This is an encouraging finding as it suggests that the advantages of knowledge acquisition that are associated with higher socioeconomic status structures can be overcome if

individuals become active participants in their environments. This seems to be an underlying theme of the movement to empower underprivileged communities.

Nonetheless, if individuals are to become empowered, they must have the ability to acquire knowledge from information made available through a wide range of resources. Thus, a unified effort to help individuals' develop their mass communication processing potential might encourage individuals to become more involved in their communities, which might positively impact their quality of life.

This can be seen in the relationship between the perceived knowledge dimension of the mass communication processing potential concept and community and political involvement. A standard multiple regression analysis of quality of life regressed on community and political involvement revealed that the perceived knowledge dimension of the mass communication processing potential concept and community and political involvement explained equal amounts of unique variance in quality of life.

That community and political involvement accounted for a large portion of the variance is encouraging. It suggests that actual involvement leads to understanding, regardless of an individual's socioeconomic status (Chafee & Schlueder, 1986; Culbertson & Stempel, 1986; Garramone, 1984, 1985; Reagan et. al, 1995; Reagan, 1996; Rubin, 1993; Yankelovich, 1991).

Individuals who report high levels of community and political involvement are in the habit of taking action to enact change. Therefore, individuals who are actively involved with situations that occur in their environments, perceive that they can control—or have some degree of control—over events that occur therein. It stands to reason that

such behavior would be positively related to their life quality because they are actively working to improve the conditions that affect their life quality.

What is most interesting about this relationship is the direction of causality. In particular, does proactive community and political involvement serve as a catalyst for the development of mass communication processing potential or is it the development of mass communication processing potential that encourages communication and political involvement?

Research studies that have examined the contribution of local media to community involvement indicate that the direction of causality begins with community participation. Specifically, research in this area stress the importance of interpersonal communication in encouraging involvement (Stamm, 1985; Stamm, Emig, & Hesse, 1997). When people talk with one another they tend to use the mass media to bolster the interaction. Such interaction is of great importance because it is likely to aid the development of individuals' mass communication processing potential. This, in turn, would both enable and encourage them to use information made available through mass media to improve the conditions of their everyday lives. Future mass communication processing potential research should examine the nature of this relationship in regard to a variety of mass media.

The results of this study revealed that though there were no differences within sample populations as a function of gender, there was a difference across sample populations. That is, university women reported more community and political involvement than did public housing resident women; however, there was no significant difference across sample populations for men. This was an unexpected finding as research

studies suggest that African American women across socioeconomic status groups are more apt to become involved to make conditions better for future generations. Future research testing a large heterogeneous African American sample might provide a more clear understanding of this finding.

Conclusion

Overall, the results of this study suggest that individuals with low levels of mass communication processing potential less often perceive that information made available in the mass media provide them with personally relevant knowledge that helps them improve the conditions of their everyday lives. However, it is not possible to tell from this study the source of the problem. Future studies about this issue should seek to determine whether the problem stems from individuals' inability to process the information that is made available through the mass media, which could help them improve the conditions of their everyday lives, or if the mass media is perhaps neglecting content areas that could help individuals comprising this population better navigate within their environments. Future research conducted to further understand the mass communication processing potential concept should seek to determine the role of each phenomenon.

Of great importance was the finding that individuals' mass media use can positively affect their quality of life, if they are able to acquire knowledge from the information made available therein. This seems to be heavily dependent upon individuals' existing information processing skills, which explains why individuals of lower socioeconomic status less often perceive that they acquired knowledge from the information made available in the mass media.

Yet, it is unrealistic to suggest that a large percentage of the U. S. population be encouraged to return to the classroom to strengthen their information processing skills. However, there is reason to believe that the mass media, especially the electronic media, can serve as conduits that help individuals develop their information processing skills by providing program formats that present the pros and cons of the issues that impact their daily lives.

Such a model has been established by the Public Agenda Foundation and has shown promising results (Yankelovich, 1991). In essence, the Foundation helps individuals learn more about the inner workings of issues that affect their daily lives (e.g., healthcare, crime, education reform, welfare reform, social security reform, etc.). As a results, individuals begin to perceive objective information as having subjective value in their daily lives because they learn how to place the information within the context of their day-to-day lives.

Presenting information in this fashion is not "dummy down information" but ensuring that individuals have access to all the information needed to make an informed decision. That is, issues are first placed within a historical context, and then they are placed in a current context in a manner that stresses how they affect individuals' day-to-day lives. As a result, individuals have the information they need to make decisions about particular issues. Such a format is extremely important for individuals of lower socioeconomic status who may have little exposure to the inner workings of issues that affect their daily lives. For example, it is possible that individuals with lower levels of education have a limited understanding of how the federal social security system works. However, decisions that are currently being made about the social security system are

likely to affect the retirement financial security of those of lower socioeconomic status moreso than those who have a better understanding of how the system functions.

If individuals are provided with a forum that guides them through the crucial factors of issues that affect their lives, they are more likely to acquire knowledge from the information. They could use this knowledge to become active participants in initiating change for the purpose of improving the conditions of their everyday lives.

The findings of this study suggest that such a forum would bring about positive results. Keep in mind that both sample populations reported fairly high levels of community and political involvement. Therefore, both sample populations would likely benefit from a forum that stressed how they could join forces to make a lasting contribution that would ensure the well being of future generations (i.e., generativity, Erikson, 1968). Such a forum, which could be sponsored by the mass media, could serve to bridge the chasm that exists between individuals who converse in knowledge-about-knowledge formats and individuals who converse in acquaintance-with-knowledge formats (Park, 1940).

Limitations and future research. The sample design for this study, though a random sample, was a random sample within two distinct African American populations (i.e., public housing residents and university employees). Members of these groups provide neither a sufficient representation of the diversity represented in the African American population nor the general population. Therefore, this study is limited in its generalizability. Future studies conducted to examine this concept should strive to use

populations that are more representative of both African American and general populations.

Moreover, future research examining the mass communication processing potential concept should provide for empirical measurement of individuals' information processing skills in regard to their mass media use. Measurement of information processing skills in relationship to mass media use would strengthen the underlying argument of the concept.

In addition, future research should be conducted to provide a more conceptually clear understanding of the mass communication processing potential concept. For example, mass communication processing potential, socioeconomic status, and community and political involvement appear to be measuring related concepts. This can be more clearly seen by considering the individual components comprising the socioeconomic index. Education level, annual household income, and occupational skill level all greatly influence individuals' ability to process information.

In particular, individuals' socioeconomic status determines the societal structure within which they are immersed, which affects the importance placed on both education and available educational resources. Continuing this line of reasoning, the strength of one's education very much affects the employment opportunities available to him or her, and likewise the income attached to those opportunities.

Although mass communication processing potential is not the same concept as either socioeconomic status or community and political involvement, the fact that individuals who excel in one area typically excel in the others suggests that these variable are measuring similar concepts. These differences should be teased out in future research studies.

Theoretical and practical implications. The results of this study add both theoretical and practical knowledge to the mass media use body of literature. Theoretically, it provides an explication of the mass communication processing potential concept. In addition, it examines the predictive strength of a socioeconomic status index in comparison with the individual items comprising the index.

This study adds to practical knowledge by examining the role of information made available in the mass media in helping a marginalized group (i.e., African Americans) improve the conditions of their everyday lives. The results indicate that when individuals are able to acquire knowledge from the information made available through the mass media, they are more likely to become involved with issues and opportunities that occur in their environments, which could result in their using the information to improve the conditions of their everyday lives.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Interview Time

_____ AM ____ PM
Begin: _____
End: _____

Survey # _____

Notes: _____

_____

_____

_____

First, I would like to ask you some general questions.

Q1. Where do you usually get your news and general information?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Q2. What do you usually use the mass media for (e.g., television, radio, newspaper, magazines, online services, etc.)?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Hand Card A. *Now I would like to ask you about your mass media preferences.*

Q3. Of the following mass media, which ones do you use 1st, 2nd, and 3rd most often to obtain news and general information?

1. Local TV	4. Daily Newspaper(s)	7. General Interest Magazine(s)	10. Grocery Store Tabloid(s)
2. Network TV	5. Radio	8. News or Political Magazine(s)	11. Internet/Online Service(s)
3. Cable TV	6. Talk Radio	9. TV Magazines	12. Other, Please specify

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Q4. Which of the following media present the news and general information in a form that is easiest for you to understand?

_____

Hand Card B. *Now I would like to ask you a few questions about your mass media use.*

ACCESS

Q5. On a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 representing never, 2 representing hardly ever, 3 representing sometimes, and 4 representing regularly, how often would you say you do the following for a purpose of obtaining news and general information?

	Never	*Hardly Ever*	*Sometimes*	*Regularly*
1. Watch local TV.	1	2	3	4
2. Watch network TV.	1	2	3	4
3. Watch cable TV.	1	2	3	4
4. Read a daily newspaper(s).	1	2	3	4
5. Listen to the radio.	1	2	3	4
6. Read a general interest magazine(s).	1	2	3	4
7. Read a news or political magazine(s).	1	2	3	4
8. Listen to a radio talk show(s).	1	2	3	4
9. Read a grocery store tabloid(s).	1	2	3	4
10. Access information through the Internet/online services.	1	2	3	4

Now I would like to ask you several questions about your mass media use for specific types of news.

AWARENESS

Q6. On a scale of 1 to 4, with one representing never, 2 representing hardly ever, 3 representing sometimes, and 4 representing regularly, how often would you say you do the following?

	Never	*Hardly Ever*	*Sometimes*	*Regularly*
1. Use television to help yourself stay informed about international and national news.	1	2	3	4
2. Use radio to help yourself stay informed about international and national news.	1	2	3	4
3. Use a newspaper(s) to help yourself stay informed about international and national news.	1	2	3	4
4. Use magazines to help yourself stay informed about international and national news.	1	2	3	4
5. Use the Internet/online services to help yourself stay informed about international and national news.	1	2	3	4
6. Use television to help yourself stay informed about state and local news.	1	2	3	4
7. Use radio to help yourself stay informed about state and local news.	1	2	3	4
8. Use a newspaper(s) to help yourself stay informed about state and local news.	1	2	3	4
9. Use magazines to help yourself stay informed about state and local news.	1	2	3	4
10. Use the Internet/online services to help yourself stay informed about state and local news.	1	2	3	4

Q7. What issues covered by the mass media during the past several months have your followed most closely?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Q8. What issues would you like to see receive more coverage in the mass media?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Hand Card F. Now I would like to ask you some questions about the importance information made available through the mass media.

Q9. On a scale of one to four with one representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing agree, and 4 representing strongly agree, please answer to following questions . . . .

	Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
1. In general, I often find that information made available on television helps me improve the conditions of my everyday life.	1	2	3	4
2. In general, I often find that information made available on the radio helps me improve the conditions of my everyday life.	1	2	3	4
3. In general, I often find that information made available in newspapers helps me improve the conditions of my everyday life.	1	2	3	4
4. In general, I often find that information made available in magazines helps me improve the conditions of my everyday life.	1	2	3	4
5. In general, I often find that information made available on the Internet/online services helps me improve the conditions of my everyday life.	1	2	3	4

Hand Card C. Now I would like to ask you several questions about issues that have been covered in the mass media recently.

KNOWLEDGE

Q10. On a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 representing no knowledge, 2 representing not much knowledge, 3 representing a little knowledge, and 4 representing a lot of knowledge, how much knowledge would you say you have about the following issues . . . .

		No Knowledge	*Not Much Knowledge*	*A Little Knowledge*	*A Lot of Knowledge*	
1.	United Nations Weapons Inspectors' Visits to Iraq.	1	2	3	4	
2.	The Winnie Mandela Hearings in South Africa.	1	2	3	4	
3.	South Korea's Economic Crises.	1	2	3	4	
4.	The Democratic Campaign Fundraising Scandal.	1	2	3	4	
5.	Au Pair Louise Woodward's Murder Trial.	1	2	3	4	
6.	Michigan's Post-Labor Day School Openings.	1	2	3	4	
7.	Michigan's Underfunding of Special Education Programs.	1	2	3	4	
8.	The Local Rain Tax.	1	2	3	4	
9.	The Ballot Proposal to Create a Citizen's Independent Investigative Board to deal with Complaints Against Lansing Police.	1	2	3	4	10.
	General Motors Leaving Ingham County.	1	2	3	4	

Hand Card D. *Now I would like to ask you some questions about how you believe the mass media have covered certain issues.*

Q11. On a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 representing have not followed this issue, 2 representing not enough information, 3 representing enough information, and 4 representing more than enough information, how much information would you say the mass media have given you to form a firm opinion about the following....

	Have not Followed Issue	*Not Enough Information*	*Enough Information*	*More Than Enough Information*
1. Whether or not Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq, is a threat to the United States.	1	2	3	4
2. Whether or not Winnie Mandela had a role in murders that took place when apartheid existed in South Africa.	1	2	3	4
3. Whether or not the International Monetary Fund (IMF) should help South Korea overcome its economic crises.	1	2	3	4
4. Whether or not the president and vice president of the United States were engaged in in-appropriate campaign fund raising practices.	1	2	3	4
5. Whether or not cameras should be allowed in the courtroom during criminal cases.	1	2	3	4
6. Whether or not post-Labor Day school openings in Michigan will substantially help the state's economy.	1	2	3	4
7. Whether or not lawsuits brought against the state of Michigan, which charged that the state underfunded special education programs, were legitimate lawsuits.	1	2	3	4
8. Whether or not the local rain tax is necessary.	1	2	3	4
9. Whether or not complaints against Lansing police that go before the Police Board of Commissioners are biased in favor of the police.	1	2	3	4
10. Whether or not Mayor David Hollister should make major concessions to persuade General Motors to remain in Ingham County.	1	2	3	4

Now I would like to ask you some questions about your community and political involvement.

Q12. Please answer yes or no to the following questions, In the past year have you . . .

1.	Contributed money to a church.	YES	NO
2.	Contributed money to a charitable organization.	YES	NO
3.	Served on a committee that worked to improve civic life.	YES	NO
4.	Informed yourself about civic issues and problems.	YES	NO
5.	Written letters or circulated literature, or held home meetings in regard to a public issue.	YES	NO
6.	Belonged to one or more organizations that took a stand on community issues and problems.	YES	NO
7.	Voted in a political election.	YES	NO
8.	Written or talked to your Congressperson or any other public official.	YES	NO
9.	Volunteered for a candidate who ran for public office.	YES	NO
10.	Discussed public issues frequently with more than one person.	YES	NO

Hand Card E. Now I would like to ask you about your perception of various groups' influence on the mass media.

Q13. On a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 representing none, 2 representing not much, 3 representing a little, and 4 representing a lot, how much influence would you say the following groups have on the mass media . . . .

		None	*Not Much*	*A Little*	*A Lot*
		1	*2*	*3*	*4*
1.	Advertisers	1	2	3	4
2.	African Americans	1	2	3	4
3.	Asian Americans	1	2	3	4
4.	Business Corporations	1	2	3	4
5.	Democrats	1	2	3	4
6.	Federal Government	1	2	3	4
7.	Hispanic Americans	1	2	3	4
8.	Republicans	1	2	3	4
9.	White Americans	1	2	3	4

Hand Card F. Now I would like to ask you some question about your quality of life.

Q14. QUALITY OF LIFE

On a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing agree, and 4 representing strongly agree, in regard to general life please respond to the following statements . . .

	Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
General Life				
1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.	1	2	3	4
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.	1	2	3	4
3. I am satisfied with life.	1	2	3	4
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want from life.	1	2	3	4
5. I am generally pleased with the life I lead.	1	2	3	4
Self				
6. In most ways my actual self is close to my ideal self.	1	2	3	4
7. As an individual I consider myself excellent.	1	2	3	4
8. I am satisfied with myself as an individual.	1	2	3	4
9. So far I have gotten the important things I want from myself.	1	2	3	4
10. I am generally pleased with myself as an individual.	1	2	3	4
Family—*The questions below pertain to your current "immediate" family not your "extended" family.*				
11. In most ways my family life is close to my ideal.	1	2	3	4
12. The conditions of my family life are excellent.	1	2	3	4
13. I am satisfied with my family life.	1	2	3	4
14. So far I have gotten the important things I want from my family life.	1	2	3	4
15. I am generally pleased with the quality of my family life.	1	2	3	4

Quality of Life (cont.)

JOB

16. The chance for advancement on my job is good.	1	2	3	4
17. I like the company policies and practices.	1	2	3	4
18. I like or respect my coworkers.	1	2	3	4
19. I am pleased with the praise I get for doing a good job.	1	2	3	4
20. I am given enough freedom to use my own judgment.	1	2	3	4
21. I like the way my job provides for steady employment.	1	2	3	4
22. My boss handles his or her employees well.	1	2	3	4
23. I am happy with the competence of my supervisor.	1	2	3	4
24. The working conditions of my job are excellent.	1	2	3	4
25. Overall, I am satisfied with my job.	1	2	3	4

Now I would like to ask you several questions about the control you believe individuals have over their lives. I will read two statement, please let me know which one you perceive as being more true, a or b.

Q15. Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale

1.	a.	Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck.
	b.	People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make.
2.	a.	In the long run people get the respect they deserve in this world.
	b.	Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he or she tries.
3.	a.	Without the right breaks one cannot be an effective leader.
	b.	Capable people who fail to become leaders have not taken advantage of their opportunities.
4.	a.	I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.
	b.	Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to take a definite course of action.
5.	a.	Becoming a success is a matter of hard work, luck has little or nothing to do with it.
	b.	Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time.
6.	a.	When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.
	b.	It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune anyhow.
7.	a.	In my case getting what I want has little or nothing to do with luck.
	b.	Many times we might just as well decide what to do by flipping a coin.
8.	a.	Most people don't realize the extent to which their lives are controlled by accidental happenings.
	b.	There really is not such thing as "luck."
9.	a.	Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me.
	b.	It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life.
10.	a.	What happens to me is my own doing.
	b.	Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking.

Now I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Q16. What is your gender? 1. MALE 2. FEMALE

Q17. What is your age as of your most recent birthday? _____

Hand Card G.

Q18. Which category reflects your marital status?
1. MARRIED 2. LEGALLY SEPARATED 3. DIVORCED 4. WIDOWED 5. SINGLE

Q19. Which of the following categories is representative of the highest education level you have completed?
_____

Q20. Which of the following categories is representative of your parents' education?
FATHER _____ *MOTHER* _____
DON'T KNOW _____ DON'T KNOW _____

Q21. What is your official job title? _____

Q22. Which category is representative of your family's annual household income?
_____

Card A

1. Local TV
2. Network TV
3. Cable TV
4. Daily Newspaper
5. Radio
6. Talk Radio
7. General Interest Magazine(s)
8. News or Political Magazine(s)
9. TV Magazine(s)
10. Grocery Store Tabloids
11. Internet/Online Service(s)
12. Other, please specify

_____

Card B

Never	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Regularly
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

Card C

No Knowledge (1)	Not Much Knowledge (2)	A Little Knowledge (3)	A Lot of Knowledge (4)

Card D

Don't Follow This Issue (1)	Not Enough Information (2)	Enough Information (3)	More Than Enough Information (4)

Card E

None	Not Much	A Little	A Lot
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

Card F

Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)

Card G

Q18. **Which category reflects your marital status?**

1. MARRIED 2. LEGALLY SEPARATED 3. DIVORCED 4. WIDOWED 5. SINGLE

Q19. **Which of the following categories is representative of the highest education level you have completed?**

1 NO FORMAL EDUCATION
2 SOME GRADE SCHOOL
3 COMPLETED GRADE SCHOOL
4 SOME HIGH SCHOOL
5 COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL
6 SOME COLLEGE
7 COMPLETED COLLEGE
8 SOME GRADUATE WORK
9 A GRADUATE DEGREE

Q20. **Which of the following categories is representative of your parents' education?**

FATHER	*MOTHER*	
1	1	NO FORMAL EDUCATION
2	2	SOME GRADE SCHOOL
3	3	COMPLETED GRADE SCHOOL
4	4	SOME HIGH SCHOOL
5	5	COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL
6	6	SOME COLLEGE
7	7	COMPLETED COLLEGE
8	8	SOME GRADUATE WORK
9	9	A GRADUATE DEGREE
DON'T KNOW	DON'T KNOW	

Q21. **What is your official job title?** _____

Q22. **Which number represents your family's annual household income?**

1. UNDER $10,000
2. $10,000 - $14,999
3. $15,000 - $24,999
4. $25,000 - $34,999
5. $35,000 - $44,999
6. $45,000 - $54,999
7. $55,000 - $64,999
8. $65,000 - $74,999
9. $75,000 and over

Appendix B

Telephone Introduction

Note. (in addition, each participant will receive a copy of this introduction (tailored to members of specific samples) at the begin of the interview)

Hello,

My name is Teresa Mastin, and I am a doctoral student in the Mass Media Ph.D. Program at Michigan State University. As an African American woman, I am interested in learning more about the mass media preferences of African Americans. Toward that end, I would like to interview African American men and women in regard to their mass media use and how it affects their quality of life.

I received your name from (Black Faculty & Administrators Association list, or the Lansing Housing Commission), who thought you might like to participate in this study. Though I cannot pay you for your time, I have established a lottery of $100 (three cash prizes of $25 for the public housing participants, one cash prize of $25 for the faculty/professional participants).

The interview will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. All results will be treated with strict confidence and all participants will remain anonymous in any report of research findings. Of course, you are under no obligation to participate in the study. It is strictly up to you. You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing the interview. In addition, please be aware that during the interview you can choose not to answer any or all questions.

If you agree to an interview, I will meet you at a time and location that is convenient for you. I would really appreciate your helping me to learn more about how mass media use affects our quality of life.

Appendix C

Mass Communication Potential Processing Scorecard

Access (General Mass Media Use)

On a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 representing never, 2 representing hardly ever, 3 representing sometimes, and 4 representing regularly, how often would you say you do the following to obtain news and general information?

	Never 1	*Hardly ever* 2	*Sometimes* 3	*Regularly* 4
1. Watch local TV.	1	2	3	4
2. Watch network TV.	1	2	3	4
3. Watch cable TV.	1	2	3	4
4. Read a daily newspaper(s).	1	2	3	4
5. Listen to the radio.	1	2	3	4
6. Read a general interest magazine(s).	1	2	3	4
7. Read a news or political magazine(s).	1	2	3	4
8. Listen to radio talk show(s).	1	2	3	4
9. Read a grocery store tabloid(s)	1	2	3	4
10. Access news through the Internet/ online services.	1	2	3	4

Awareness (Specific Mass Media Use)

How often would you say you . . .

	Never 1	*Hardly ever* 2	*Sometimes* 3	*Regularly* 4
1. Use television to help yourself stay informed about international and national news.	1	2	3	4
2. Use radio to help yourself stay informed about international and national news.	1	2	3	4
3. Use a newspaper (s) to help yourself stay informed about international and national news.	1	2	3	4
4. Use magazines to help yourself stay informed about international and national news.	1	2	3	4
5. Use the Internet/online services to help yourself stay informed about international and national news.	1	2	3	4

Mass Communication Processing Potential Scorecard (cont.)

6. Use television news to help yourself stay informed about state and local news.	1	2	3	4
7. Use radio news to help yourself stay informed about state and local news.	1	2	3	4
8. Use a newspaper(s) to help yourself stay informed about state and local news.	1	2	3	4
9. Use magazines to help yourself stay informed about state and local news.	1	2	3	4
10. Use the Internet/online services to help yourself stay informed about state and local news.	1	2	3	4

Knowledge

How much knowledge would you say you have about the following . . .

	No Knowledge *1*	*Not Much Knowledge* *2*	*A Little Knowledge* *3*	*A Lot of Knowledge* *4*
1. United Nations Weapon Inspectors' Visits to Iraq.	1	2	3	4
2. The Winnie Mandela Hearings in South Africa.	1	2	3	4
3. South Korea's Economic Crises.	1	2	3	4
4. The Democratic Campaign Fundraising Scandal.	1	2	3	4
5. Au Pair Louise Woodward's Murder Trial.	1	2	3	4
6. Michigan's Post-Labor Day School Openings.	1	2	3	4
7. Michigan's Underfunding of Special Education Programs.	1	2	3	4
8. The Local Rain Tax.	1	2	3	4
9. The Ballot Proposal to Create a Citizen's Independent Investigative Board for Complaints Against Lansing Police.	1	2	3	4
10. The Possibility of General Motors Leaving Ingham County.	1	2	3	4

Appendix D

Socioeconomic Status Scale

(Possible total: 27 points)

Education

Please circle the category that represents the highest level of education you have completed?

1 NO FORMAL EDUCATION
2 SOME GRADE SCHOOL
3 COMPLETED GRADE SCHOOL
4 SOME HIGH SCHOOL
5 COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL
6 SOME COLLEGE
7 COMPLETED COLLEGE
8 SOME GRADUATE WORK
9 A GRADUATE DEGREE

Income

1. Under $10,000
2. $10,000 - $14,999
3. $15,000 - $24,999
4. $25,000 - $34,999
5. $35,000 - $44,999
6. $45,000 - $54,999
7. $55,000 - $64,999
8. $65,000 - $74,999
9. $75,000 or more

Employment

1. Farming, forestry, and fishing support
2. Operators, fabricators, and laborers
3. Precision production, craft, and repair
4. Private household service occupations
5. Public service occupations
6. Technical sales, and administrative
7. Professional specialty
8. Professional corporate
9. Professional service (e.g., doctor, lawyer)

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