OUR HOUSE OF CARDS?
POLITICAL FICTION AND BELIEF CHANGE
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On February 1, 2013 the Netflix original series, *House of Cards* (*HoC*), premiered. The series is based on a BBC drama with the same title, and tells the story of a fictional United States Representative's quest to exact revenge on those who promised, then denied him the Office of Secretary of State. The main character of the story is Francis "Frank" J. Underwood (D-SC5) who, as the House Majority Whip, knows every secret of every member of the House and uses this information to manipulate, embarrass or destroy anyone that stands between him and power. In the series, Underwood acts as a kind of virtual tour guide for what many Americans may assume is the dark, seamy underbelly of real-world Washington politics. From time to time, Underwood, who is played by Kevin Spacey, looks directly at the camera – into the eyes of the viewer – and with his South Carolina accent provides insight to his motivations, the logic behind his actions or his personal character. For example, in order to explain his extramarital affair with a young female reporter who is hungry for success and whom he can use for political purposes, Underwood tells us that "Everything is about sex. Except sex. Sex is about power." He tells us that "The best thing I like about human beings is that they stack so neatly" as he revels in a political victory. And, when he returns to his district to address a problem facing his constituents, he expresses open disdain for the democratic process: "I just hate this small ball crap." In each the thirteen episodes of its first season, *HoC* portrays politicians as manipulative, ruthless, unethical, and morally rudderless human beings. And Americans loved it.

This is not surprising: political fiction is among the most popular subgenres in the United States. It is a subgenre that is populated by classic films like *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Birth of a Nation, Meet John Doe,* and *The Manchurian Candidate*, and more recent additions including *Primary Colors, Wag the Dog*, *JFK*, and *Election*. As Christensen and Haas (2005) point out, most films "send political or proto-political messages that audiences may not even notice," but political fiction is "political in a way that we all can readily perceive: they focus on politicians, elections, government, and the political process" (p.8). Films in the genre are fundamentally political in that their settings, scenes, characters, and dialogue frequently address political processes, events, people, or places. Importantly, the messages they convey are known to effect individuals' real-world attitudes towards and beliefs about the political world. For example, Lenert and McGraw (1989) found that individuals who viewed the series, *Amerika*, which was

set in a post-war Soviet-controlled communist America, had heightened concern about the Soviet Union. Likewise, Butler, Koopman and Zimbardo (1995) found the film *JFK* had a significant impact on people's moods, beliefs and judgments about issues related to the film, while Holbrook and Hill (2004) found that viewing two fictional television programs had an effect on how people perceive real-world political actors. Other researchers have found that viewing the fictional television program, *The West Wing,* encouraged more positive perceptions of the presidency and presidents (Holbert et al., 2003), and that watching the film *Cider House Rules* encouraged individuals to adopt a particular frame when approaching the issue of abortion (Mulligan, 2011). Most recently, an experiment conducted by Mulligan and Habel (2012) found that individuals who viewed the film *Wag the Dog*, which told the story of a president who manufactured a fake war to direct attention away from a personal scandal, were more likely than those who did not view the film to believe that presidents will stage a fake war in the future and that they had done so in the past. They conclude, "the fact that we find viewers [of political fiction] changed their beliefs cannot be overstated. Our results suggest that scholars of political science should take fiction seriously" (p. 17).

One way political science might be persuaded to take fiction seriously is to demonstrate that fictional narratives have long-term effects on beliefs associated with concepts of importance to scholars in the field, such as political efficacy and beliefs about politicians, or on behaviors that are of critical importance to democratic processes. To date, nearly all research on fictional narratives and belief change has focused on stories' short-term effects, and very little has focused on beliefs related to important concepts in the discipline. This is surprising given that there is some evidence (e.g. Appel & Richter, 2007; Jensen, Bernat, Wilson, & Goonewardene, 2011) that fictional narratives' effects of on individuals' beliefs may not only be long-lasting, but they may increase over time because they possess what Hoveland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield (1949) called a "sleeper effect. It has been theorized that the long-term persistence of new beliefs occurs when, while consuming a fictional narrative, individuals experience a state of transportation, where they are so absorbed in a story that they "lose track of time or fail to observe events going on around them because of their focused involvement in the world of the narrative" (Green, 2004, p. 313). The potential for fictional narratives to have a sleeper effect means that we may be underestimating the impact of political films on peoples' beliefs simply because we failed to comprehend how enduring they are.

The purpose of this study is to determine if this is, in fact, the case. Drawing on Green and Brock's (2000) transportation theory and Hoveland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield's (1949) description of the sleeper effect, this study explores Mulligan and Habel's claim that fiction is worthy of the attention of political scientists. It does this with an experiment that assesses the impact of viewing a fictional political narrative

– *House of Cards* – on important political beliefs and behaviors, and provides one of the few direct tests of whether or not fictional narratives presented in film possess a sleeper effect. Finding that long-term changes in beliefs and behaviors do result from viewing *HoC* would support Mulligan and Habel's contention and should encourage other researchers to seriously address the issue. Failure to find-long term belief change among those who view the program – particularly if they experience a state of transportation – would call into question the importance of fictional narratives as a source of important real-world political beliefs and behaviors.

FICTIONAL NARRATIVES, BELIEF CHANGE AND BEHAVIOR

Narratives, broadly defined, are accounts of connected events. They are and always have been ubiquitous. Attesting to this fact are prehistoric cave paintings depicting events that may have occurred tens of thousands of year ago and which are found on nearly every continent on Earth. So, too, does modern day phenomenon such as the rapid growth of households with televisions, enormous success of cable and satellite television, popularity of Hulu and Netflix, and existence of a thriving global movie industry. The reason narratives are coeval with humans is that they play a critical role in the way we make sense of the world around us. Narratives organize unfamiliar experiences into meaningful events and allow for meaningful action (Polkinghorne,1988), facilitate the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another, assist in the perpetuation of social systems, and teach appropriate values and behaviors to younger generations. This is why narrative psychologists including Sarbin (1986), Bruner (1986) and Polkinghorne (1988) describe narrative as far more than a social convenience, but rather as a basic property of the human mind; and why some rhetoricians, such as Fisher (1984), argue that narrative is a constitutive part of human nature.

Narratives can also be persuasive, and this true even of fictional narratives. Evidence that fictional narratives can cause individuals to change beliefs related to the story first appeared decades ago. Since then, studies have sought to clarify the means by which fictional narratives cause belief change and the conditions that facilitate this change. Early studies explored the persuasive effects of fiction using the dominant dual-process models of persuasion, such as the elaboration-likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981), that understand persuasion to the be the result of active evaluation of a message's content and passive evaluation of cues unrelated to the argument (e.g. context of the message or credibility of the source). In these models, long-term belief change usually occurs when message recipients engage in elaboration, where they cognitively engage message. Individuals with a tendency to engage in and enjoy thinking, or who possess a high "need for cognition," are more likely to engage in the elaboration necessary for long-lasting belief change (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992). According to Haugtvedt

and Petty (1992), experimentally-created beliefs of high need for cognition individuals are more resistant to change and longer-lasting than experimentally-created beliefs of low need for cognition individuals.

When it comes to narrative fiction, however, explanatory power of dual process models has been challenged. More recent studies have offered evidence that fictional narratives are most persuasive when a reader experiences a state of transportation, which is "an integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings focused on story events" (Greene and Brock, 2000) that is psychologically similar to flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) or absorption (Tellegen, 1982). Unlike the dual-process models of persuasion, transportation theory claims that persuasion is the result of more than a cognitive process: being transported is a holistic experiential state that facilitates changes in beliefs by making individuals more susceptible to information provided in a story. This holistic experiential state occurs only when an individual is fully engaged in a narrative, where his/her reality is populated by the story's characters and shaped by its setting, situations and plot. In other words, transportation occurs when an individual "lives" the story. Thus belief change occurs regardless of an individual's relative need for cognition.

The reason that "living" a story may make individuals particularly susceptible to its explicit or implicit message is that transported individuals offer little, if any resistance to the message. There are two related explanations for why this is the case. First, Gilbert (1991, 1993) argues that the default response to information is to initially believe every assertion encountered. While individuals may, with some effort, correct inaccurate information, the experience of transportation prevents this process from occurring. As the mental correction literature suggests, individuals need both motivation and ability to correct inaccurate assertions, and individuals experiencing the enjoyable state of transportation have no such motivation. Because individuals do not automatically create separate mental categories for information acquired from fiction and nonfiction, uncorrected inaccurate information learned from fiction may form the foundation of a future belief (Johnso, Hashtroudi & Lindsay, 1995). Second, Green, Garst and Brock (2004) theorize that individuals may be persuaded by fiction because awareness that they are reading, viewing or listening to fiction serves as a cue to engage in a less critical form of mental engagement. When motivated individuals read, view or listen to, for example, a news report or campaign message, they tend to engage in elaboration, which may entail counter-arguing. When consuming fiction, on the other hand, individuals process information unsystematically and often uncritically (Prentice & Gerrig, 1999). Instead of assuming a defensive posture toward information, consumers of fictional narratives focus their attention on experiencing the story emotionally. When fully immersed in the narrative, individuals are, in essence, living in the fictional world created by the author. Experiencing this state of transportation causes an individual to lose access to real-world facts and adopt the fictional narrative as the frame of

reference for evaluating assertions encountered in the story. The effect is that belief-incongruent and even blatantly false assertions are accepted without challenge, then stored alongside experiences the individual has had in the real world. Because individuals are not engaging in elaboration, the knowledge that a fictional narrative is the source of information is lost as time passes. The fictional narrative becomes, like any experience, a foundation for beliefs.

Although the transportation theory literature is silent on the question of whether belief change resulting from consuming fictional narratives leads to changes in behaviors, there is good reason to believe that it does. Social cognitive theory, for example, asserts that self-efficacy beliefs, or "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986), "are the foundation of human agency" (Bandura, 2001) and therefore important determinants of individual behavior. The sources of self-efficacy information are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological states. Of these sources of self-efficacy information, mastery experiences have been shown to be the most effective at enhancing or diminishing a person's perception of self-efficacy. In other words, efficacy with regard to some behavior is developed most effectively when one builds a history of successfully engaging in the behavior. Vicarious experiences, too, lead to the development of efficacy beliefs, but are not as effective as mastery experiences at shaping individuals' perceptions of their competence to achieve a desired outcome. These "second tier" learning experiences occur when an individual watches and/or listens to a live model demonstrate a behavior, is taught verbally about a behavior, or reads, listens to or watches symbolic representations of a behavior. Assuming Bandura's understanding of how self-efficacy information is learned is correct, there is good reason to assume that fictional narratives may have a powerful effect on peoples' real-world beliefs and behaviors. It is not unreasonable to assume that experiencing a state of transportation while consuming a narrative transforms a second-tier source of self-efficacy information - a vicarious learning experience - to a first-tier mastery experience. By losing oneself in the world of the fictional narrative one is nearly directly experiencing the narrative's world, albeit only for the duration of the story. Thus being transported by narrative fiction may lead to even greater behavior-shaping belief change than normal vicarious learning experiences. This would be particularly true as the source of the information becomes dissociated from the new beliefs, or the source is forgotten.

TRANSPORTATION AND THE PERSISTENCE OF NEW BELIEFS

If the disassociation of information and its source, or forgetting, is a critical means by which fictional narratives acquire persuasive power, it seems reasonable that belief change may manifest itself long after the narrative is consumed. As time passes the disassociation of information and its source becomes more

likely. As a result, belief change resulting from fictional narratives should be more apparent in the long-term than in the short-term. This phenomenon is by no means unusual: it is what Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield (1949) called the *sleeper effect*. Simply stated, the sleeper effect is "a delayed increase in persuasion observed when the discounting cue (e.g., non-credible source) becomes unavailable or 'dissociated' from the communication in the memory of the message recipients" (Kumkale & Albarracin, 2004, p. 143). The phenomenon was first observed by Hovland and his colleagues (1949) in the context of attempts to change the opinions of soldiers during World War II. Specifically, the researchers measured opinions of soldiers either 5 days or 9 weeks after they viewed a film and found that difference in opinions of those who watched the film and those who did not was greater among those assessed at 9 weeks than 5 days. In subsequent research the sleeper effect failed to manifest almost as frequently as manifest, leading many to discount the existence of the phenomenon (Gillig & Greenwald, 1974). However, meta-analyses conducted by Cook, Gruder, Hennigan, & Flay (1979) and Kumkale & Albarracin (2004) demonstrate that the preponderance of evidence indicates that a sleeper effect does occur under certain conditions; namely, (a) the message alone has a strong impact, (b) the discounting cue is sufficiently negative to suppress the positive impact of the message and (c) cue decay/message-cue disassociation occurs more rapidly than the content of the message.

In recent years, researchers in psychology and communications have begun to recognize the logical fit between the sleeper effect and persuasion resulting from fictional narratives. Appel and Richter (2007) conducted an experiment to directly test whether reading a fictional narrative could produce long-term changes in beliefs, and indirectly test the mechanisms that are supposed to underlie persuasion (elaboration likelihood model v. transportation model). They found "In line with expectations, agreement to statements expressing everyday beliefs was shifted into the direction of the false information conveyed by the fictional narrative;" and this shift was even greater 2 weeks after being exposed to the fictional narrative than it was immediately after. In other words, readers of a fictional narrative were persuaded according to the pattern predicted by the sleeper effect literature. Because the persuasive effect of the fictional narrative increased, rather than diminished over time, they argue: "The results of this study are well in line with models of narrative persuasion, which assume that readers are mentally transported into the fictional world of a narrative that temporarily alters the frame of reference for their emotional and cognitive processes. As a consequence, mechanisms that allow for a critical evaluation of text information are partly neutralized, opening the door for persuasive effects." They conclude that it would be worthwhile "to conduct belief assessments at several time points to study the gradient of belief shifts over time to advance our understanding of fictional narratives and belief change."

Similarly, Jenson and his colleagues (2012) identified a "delayed message effect" for individuals exposed to a fictional television narrative containing false information. Individuals were more likely to express narrative-consistent beliefs 2 weeks after being exposed to the narrative than immediately after viewing it. Interestingly, Jenson and his colleagues directly assessed the extent to which experiencing a state of transportation was associated with expressing narrative-consistent beliefs. The result of their analysis was that experiencing a state of transportation was not significantly related to an endorsement of narrative consistent beliefs. Instead, they found that only the variable "identification with a character" in the story was positively related to endorsement of narrative-consistent beliefs. In the words of Jenson and his colleagues, "two studies have now shown that fiction (written and televised) can produce a delayed message effect. Insufficient evidence exists to definitively say whether the delay hypothesis is accurate" (2011, p. 523).

HOUSE OF CARDS EXPERIMENT

A small body of research suggests that experiencing a state of transportation increases the likelihood that consumers of fictional narratives will adopt narrative-consistent beliefs and behaviors. Theory and very modest body of empirical research indicates that the persuasive effects of narratives should be persistent and may, in fact, increase over time. However, for fictional narratives to matter to political scientists, their power to induce *long-term changes* in *important beliefs and behaviors* should be established. Among the beliefs in which political scientists are interested are those related to political efficacy. The concept of political efficacy has played a prominent role in the subfield of political behavior since it was first conceived six decades ago. This prominence of political efficacy in the literature is well justified as it is a relatively effective predictor of political participation (Milbrath, 1965; Verba and Nie, 1972, Verba, Schlotzman and Brady, 1995). In fact, many contemporary scholars consider political efficacy to be a barometer of democratic political systems. Political efficacy is the "feeling that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play of part in bringing about this change" (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954, p. 187). Since being introduced to the field, the concept has been refined in a number of ways. Chief among these refinements has been to demonstrate political efficacy is not a unidimensional construct (e.g. Balch, 1974), but consists of two distinguishable concepts: 'internal' and 'external' efficacy. Internal efficacy refers to individuals' perception of their ability to understand and influence political processes and outcomes, while external efficacy denotes individuals' perception of political institutions' responsiveness to citizens' actions in the political process.

Also important to political scientists are beliefs about politicians. Beliefs about the personal qualities of elected officials are recognized by many as an important influence on overall attitudes toward

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government. As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001) point out, public attitudes toward government are not merely the result of policy satisfaction or dissatisfaction, but also individuals' assessments of the process of government. Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht (1997), for example, demonstrate that the openness of Congressional deliberations and their contentiousness are important reasons for the institution's consistent lack of popularity. As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse note, "we cannot fully understand [the public's] orientation toward government without knowing how the it thinks government ought to work and how it thinks government works in practice." Kimball and Patterson (1997) suggest that the concept of "process of government" must include public perceptions of elected officials' personal characteristics, and find that disappointment with government is concentrated among those who expect elected officials to be honest, caring, and altruistic but perceive them to be otherwise.

In terms of political behaviors on interest to political scientists, perhaps none have received more attention than political participation in campaigns and elections. Political participation is essential to a democracy: not only does political participation lead to political stability, individuals who participate express higher levels of satisfaction with the political system. While participation in the political process may include both conventional and unconventional forms, the former is of fundamental importance to democratic systems. So important is conventional participation, which includes such activities as voting, working for a campaign, giving money to a political party, and advertising for a campaign, that the American National Election Study has inquired about it in every iteration since its commencement in 1948.

If, as the literature addressing the persuasive effects of fictional narratives suggests, belief change and changes in behavioral intentions resulting from consuming a fictional narrative is characterized by a sleeper effect, then one would expect that the new beliefs would manifest themselves more powerfully after days or weeks than they do immediately after reading or watching a narrative. In the context the present experiment: *(H1) Immediately after viewing HoC, individuals will express the same level of political efficacy, the same beliefs about politicians and indicate that they are as likely to participate in a 2014 congressional election than individuals in a control group;* and *(H2) two weeks after viewing HoC, individuals will express lower levels of political efficacy, more negative beliefs about politicians and indicate that they are less likely to participate in a 2014 congressional election than individuals in a control group.* Finding evidence of a sleeper effect or, at the very least, that belief change persisted for two weeks would offer support for the contention that fictional narratives deserve greater attention from political scientists.

Regardless of whether a sleeper effect manifests, transportation theory predicts that changes in beliefs resulting from consuming fictional narratives should persist among those who "live" the story. It also predicts that the elaboration that is characteristic of dual process models of persuasion should be unrelated to changes in beliefs. This implies that a need for cognition, which is indicator of the motivation needed for central route processing to occur, should not be correlated with changes in beliefs. Since central route processing is most often the path to long-term belief change, transportation theory predicts that there should be no correlation between a need for cognition and belief change days or weeks after consuming a fictional narrative. In the context of the present experiment, *(H₃) there will be statistically significant positive correlations between scores on the Transportation Scale and the expression of narrative-consistent beliefs and behavioral intentions two weeks after viewing HoC.* Alternatively, *(H₄) there will be no statistically significant correlations between scores on the Need for Cognition Scale and the expression of narrative-consistent beliefs and behavioral intentions two weeks after viewing HoC.*

METHOD

Participants

Eighty-seven participants (34 male, 53 female) were recruited in introductory communications, education, and political science classes at Mercyhurst University in Erie, Pennsylvania and Idaho State University in Pocatello, Idaho. Their mean age was 21.2 years and they received course credit for participating in the study. The assessment of personality traits and preferred television programs was announced as the focus of the study.

Procedure

Each participant was randomly assigned to one of three conditions: immediate assessment, delayed assessment, or the control. Regardless of their assigned condition, each participant took part in two experimental sessions. For sessions carried-out at Mercyhurst University, the first occurred in the university's Center for Applied Politics laboratory. In the case of those that took place at Idaho State University, the first session was held in a classroom. The first sessions were conducted in groups of 12 – 35 participants between September 23 and October 1, 2013. In all cases, the second sessions involved completing an online questionnaire at a location found to be convenient. The second sessions occurred between October 7 and 15, 2013.

In session 1, participants in the immediate and delayed assessment condition were introduced to the study, then watched Season 1, Episode 1 of *HoC*. After viewing the episode, participants were informed, both verbally and writing, that *HoC* was a work of fiction, then instructed to complete the Transportation (into

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narrative worlds) and Need for Cognition scales, and answer demographic questions. Participants in the immediate assessment condition (50% of each session) were also administered questionnaires that assessed the dependent variables – *political efficacy beliefs, beliefs about politicians, and intent to participate in the 2014 congressional elections*– and filler questions. In contrast to participants in the immediate assessment condition, those in the delayed assessment condition (50% of each session) received a questionnaire with an equal number of questions assessing various personality traits and television viewing habits.

In session 2, which occurred two weeks after session 1, participants in the immediate assessment condition were electronically sent the questionnaire assessing various personality traits and viewing habits. Participants in the delayed assessment condition were electronically sent the questionnaire containing the dependent variables under investigation, namely *political efficacy beliefs, beliefs about politicians,* and *intent to participate in a 2014 congressional election*. Participants had 48 hours to complete and return the questionnaire, at which time they were thanked and fully debriefed.

Participants in the control condition also took part in two sessions. In session 1, participants were introduced to the study, then watched season 1, episode 1 of the popular television program, *The Office*. After viewing the episode they were informed – verbally and in writing – that the program was a work of fiction. Participants then completed a questionnaire that contained the Transportation (into narrative worlds) and Need for Cognition scales, demographic questions, and assessed the dependent variables under investigation. In session 2, which occurred two weeks after session 1, participants in the control condition were electronically sent a questionnaire assessing various personality traits and television viewing habits. With the exception of the treatment, the procedure utilized with the control was identical to the procedure for the participants in the immediate assessment condition.

Treatment

The first episode in the first season of *HoC* was employed as the treatment. The episode was chosen because, like the first episode of many series, much attention is given to introducing the viewer to the personalities and motivations of the characters; and understanding the narrative does not require prior knowledge gained from previous episodes. Additionally, episode 1 contains scenes and dialog that may have the effect of lowering viewers' political efficacy, encouraging negative views of politicians and reducing the likelihood that they will participate in future elections. This was verified by a pre-test conducted with 14 participants (mean age = 19.2, 6 male, 9 female) drawn from an introductory American Government course.

Dependent Variables

Political Efficacy. Political efficacy was measured with three questions based on those utilized by the American National Election Survey (ANES) to assessed both internal (IE) and external (EE) efficacy beliefs: (1) Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on (IE); (2) Public officials don't care about what people like me think (EE); and (3) People like me don't have any say about what the government does (EE). Individuals' agreement or disagreement with each statement was measured with a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strong disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

Beliefs about Politicians. To assess beliefs about politicians we relied on four statements for which participants provided their level of agreement or disagreement on a seven point Likert-type scale (1 = strong disagree; 7 = strongly agree). The statements included: (1) To be an effective politician you must be ruthless; (2) To be an effective politician you must be manipulative; and (3) To be an effective politician you must spend a lot of time scheming.

Intent to Participate in a 2014 Congressional Election. Intent to participate in a 2014 congressional election was measured with three questions: (1) During the next elections for Congress in 2014, how likely is it that you will talk to any people to try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates? (2) During the next election for Congress, how likely is it that you do any other work for one of the parties or candidates? (3) How likely is it that you will vote in the 2014 Congressional elections? The likelihood that an individual would engage in each form of participation was measured with a seven-point Likert-type scale (1= very unlikely; 7 = very likely).

Transportation

Transportation was assessed with a modified Transportation (into narrative worlds) Scale (Green & Brock, 2000). The Transportation Scale was originally designed for use with fictional texts, not fictional television programs. As a result, the number of items on the scale was reduced from 12 to 10 in order to eliminate items that were specific to textual material. The reliability of this 10 item scale was acceptable (Cronbach's Alpha = .72).

Need for Cognition

Need for cognition was assessed with the short version of the Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1982). The reliability of this 18 item scale was acceptable (Crobbach's Alpha = .903).

RESULTS

Of the 87 participants who attended session 1, eighty five returned completed session 2 questionnaires and 1 returned a partially completed questionnaire. The average delay in returning session 2 questionnaires was 15.1 days.

Belief Acquisition or Change and Persistence of Beliefs

A One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the question of whether participants' who viewed *HoC* and were immediately assessed, viewed *HoC* and were assessed after a two week delay, and those in the control condition differed with respect to efficacy beliefs, beliefs about politicians, and intentions to participate in a 2014 congressional election; and whether belief change manifested in a way that was consistent with a sleeper effect. See Table 1 for the mean and standard deviation for each of the three groups.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Belief and Behavior Scores by Condition

| | Condition | | | |
| | Experimental, Immediate Assessment | Experimental, Delayed Assessment | Control | Total |
Efficacy Beliefs	(*N, SD*)	(*N, SD*)	(*N, SD*)	(*N, SD*)
Politics is too complicated	4.29 (34, 1.78)	5.07 (30,1.55)	3.38 (21, 1.68)	4.35 (83, 1.77)
No say about government	3.53 (34, 1.48)	3.9 (31, 1.59)	3.29 (21, 2.10)	3.58 (85, 1.67)
Officials don't care	4.12 (34, 1.25)	4.23 (31, 1.28)	4.19 (21, 1.75)	4.16 (85, 1.38)
Beliefs about Politicians				
Effective politicians must be ruthless	4.59 (34, 1.35)	3.9 (29, 1.76)	2.90 (21, 1.67)	3.93 (85, 1.69)
Effective politicians must be manipulative	4.68 (34, 1.60)	3.47 (30, 1.79)	2.75 (20, 1.94)	3.79 (84, 1.91)
Effective politicians must spend a lot of time scheming	4.26 (34, 1.33)	3.53 (30, 1.52)	2.90 (21, 1.94)	3.67 (85, 1.64)
Behavioral Intentions				
Persuade others	2.65 (34, 1.9)	2.97 (30, 1.90)	3.10 (21, 1.94)	2.87 (85, 1.90)
Work for a campaign	1.65 (34, 1.07)	1.53 (30, .81)	2.48 (21, 1.91)	1.81 (85, 1.30)
Vote in 2014	4.59 (34, 2.31)	4.47 (2.24)	5.19 (21, 2.44)	4.69 (85, 2.31)

The test for normality, examining standardized skewness, and the Shapiro-Wilks test indicated that the data were statistically normal. However, the *Levene's F* test revealed that the homogeneity of variance assumption for ANOVA was not met. As a result, the *Welch's F* test was used. An alpha level of .05 was used for all subsequent analyses.

Concerning the two measures of external political efficacy beliefs, one-way ANOVAs revealed no statistically significant main effects, indicating that average scores for each measure of external political efficacy was the same for the immediate assessment, delayed assessment and control groups. However, an analysis of the average scores for the single measure of internal political efficacy revealed a statistically significant main effect, *Welch's F*(2, 48.862) =7.29, *p <.05*. The estimated omega squared (ω^2=.13) indicated that approximately 13% of the total variation in average internal efficacy scores is attributable to participants' assigned condition. A post hoc comparison, using the Games-Howell post hoc procedure, was conducted to determine which pairs of the three conditions' mean internal efficacy scores differed significantly. These results indicate participants in the delayed assessment condition (*M=5.07, SD =1.55*) were significantly more likely to agree that "politics is too complicated for a person like me to understand" than participants in the control condition (*M=3.38, SD=1.68*). The effect size was 1.07. While viewing *HoC* appears to have had no significant impact on external efficacy belief scores, it did have an impact on internal efficacy scores. This impact was, as predicted by H_1, characterized by a "sleeper" or "delay" effect.

Concerning beliefs about politicians, the one-way ANOVAs indicate statistically significant main effects for all three items: effective politicians must be ruthless, *Welch's F*(2, 45.42) =7.71, *p <.001*; effective politicians must be manipulative, *Welch's F*(2, 44.88) =8.23, *p <.001*; and effective politicians must spend a lot of time scheming, *Welch's F*(2, 44.72) =4.79, *p <.05*. The estimated omega squared for the beliefs about politicians are .14, .15, and .08 respectively. Post hoc comparisons are provided in Table 2 and indicate that in every instance participants in the immediate assessment condition expressed significantly higher levels of agreement with the statements than those in the control condition. In one instance – effective politicians must be ruthless – there was a statistically significant difference between average scores for participants in the immediate and delayed conditions. The mean score for participants in the delayed assessment condition was significantly lower than that of those in the immediate assessment condition. While the analysis of internal efficacy offered evidence of a sleeper effect and, therefore, evidence that belief change resulting from consuming a fictional narrative are enduring, the analysis of beliefs about politicians offers evidence that belief change is anything but enduring. Viewing *HoC* appears to have a significant impact on beliefs about politicians, but these newly acquired beliefs

dissipate rapidly. Indeed, in one case – effective politicians must be ruthless – the degree of dissipation between the two experimental groups was statistically significant.

Table 2. Post Hoc Results for Beliefs About Politicians by Condition

Question/Condition	Mean	Mean Differences (Effect Sizes)		
		1	2	3
Effective politicians must be ruthless				
1. Experimental, Immediate Assessment	4.59	--		
2. Experimental, Delayed Assessment	3.9	-.692	--	
3. Control	2.90	-1.683* (1.67)	-.992	--
Effective politicians must be manipulative				
1. Experimental, Immediate Assessment	4.68	--		
2. Experimental, Delayed Assessment	3.47	-1.21* (1.82)	--	
3. Control	2.75	-1.926* (1.35)	-.717	--
Effective politicians must spend a lot of time scheming				
1. Experimental, Immediate Assessment	4.26	--		
2. Experimental, Delayed Assessment	3.53	-.713	--	
3. Control	2.9	-1.36* (1.95)	-.629	--

Finally, one-way ANOVAs indicated no statistically significant main effects for any of the three behavioral items. In contrast to the analysis of internal efficacy and beliefs about politicians, viewing *HoC* appears to have had very little impact on individuals' intent to participate in an upcoming election.

Collectively, H_1 and H_2 predicted that individuals who viewed *HoC* would express more narrative-consistent beliefs than a control group, but that statistically significant differences between those who viewed *HoC* and the control would only manifest after a two weeks had elapsed.   The same pattern was also predicted for behavioral intentions. This was true for only one belief: the sole measure of internal efficacy. Viewing *HoC* led to the predicted changes in all three beliefs about politicians, but these changes dissipated within two weeks. Finally, the evidence seems to suggest that viewing the program had no impact on the likelihood that one will participate in an election.

Transportation and Need for Cognition

Spearman's Rank Order correlations were run to determine the relationship between the degree of transportation experienced while watching *HoC* and efficacy beliefs, beliefs about politicians, and intent to participate in a 2014 congressional election. There were moderately strong, positive correlations only

between scores on the Transportation Scale and the three beliefs about politicians among those who received a delayed assessment. In other words, among individuals who viewed *HoC* and were in the delayed assessment condition, higher scores on the Transportation Scale were correlated with higher levels of agreement that (1) to be an effective politician you must be ruthless ($r_s(31) = .430$, $p = .02$); (2) to be an effective politician you must be manipulative ($r_s(31) = .467$, $p = .008$); and (3) to be an effective politician you must spend a lot of time scheming ($r_s(31) = .392$, $p = .03$). No statistically significant correlations existed between scores on the Transportation Scale and any scores on any efficacy or behavioral items. Similarly, Spearman's Rank Order correlations yielded no significant relationships between scores on the Need for Cognition Scale and any of the dependent variables in either immediate or delayed assessment conditions.

H_2 predicted that individuals in the delayed assessment condition who experienced higher degrees of transportation would express higher levels of narrative-consistent beliefs and behavioral intentions. A correlation between scores on the Transportation Scale and narrative-consistent beliefs about politicians was observed among individuals in the delayed assessment condition, and the direction of the correlation was consistent with the hypothesis. However, there was no statistically significant correlation between scores on the Transportation Scale and any efficacy beliefs, or the expressed likelihood of participating in a future election. H_4 predicted that, among individuals in the delayed assessment condition, there would no significant correlations between need for cognition and narrative-consistent beliefs and behaviors. The results of the present experiment are consistent with the hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

The present experiment was conducted to determine whether, as Mulligan and Habel (2012) contend, "scholars of political science should take fiction seriously" (p. 17). We suggest that for this to occur, the effects of consuming fictional narratives on beliefs and behaviors that are important to political scientists, such as political efficacy beliefs, beliefs about politicians and participation in an election, should be established. In addition, we contend that belief change that does occur should be enduring: narrative-consistent beliefs should persist beyond the minutes following exposure to the book, movie or television program. As our four hypotheses suggest, there is some theoretical and empirical evidence that this is the case. The results of the present experiment, however, allow us to neither clearly accept nor clearly reject Mulligan and Habel's claim.

First, evidence that consuming a fictional narrative can alter internal efficacy beliefs and beliefs about politicians is confirmed by the results of the present experiment. Individuals who viewed an episode of

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HoC were more likely than the control group to express lower levels of internal political efficacy and more narrative-consistent beliefs about politicians. The nature of this change, however, is confounding. In the case of internal political efficacy, belief changed appears to be characterized by a "sleeper" or "delay" effect. This is precisely what the small body of literature on the subject predicts. Beliefs about politicians, on the other hand, exhibit characteristics that are contrary to what was expected. In all three cases, beliefs about politicians are narrative-consistent immediately after viewing *HoC*, but return to baseline (control) levels within a two week period. Why do narrative-consistent internal efficacy beliefs and beliefs about politicians manifest at different times?

One possible answer is a threat to the internal validity of experiments that is common anytime there is a significant delay between the first and second measurement: history. It may be that the "sleeper" or "delay" effect observed for internal political efficacy is the result of participants experiencing some belief-changing event during the two weeks between sessions 1 and 2. The experiment occurred at a time when budget negotiations between President Obama and the Republican-controlled House of Representatives were deadlocked. This deadlock ultimately led to a sixteen-day shutdown of the federal government, which occurred between October 1 and 16, 2013. It may be that this event strengthened participants' belief that government was too complex to understand. In other words, it is possible that this major political story had the effect of decreasing participants' internal political efficacy and producing a sleeper effect. Alternatively, and probably less plausible, it may be that some event between sessions 1and 2 encouraged participants to adopt more positive beliefs about politicians, thereby preventing the manifestation of a "sleeper" or "delay" effect for these variables.

Second, and also confounding, is that viewing *HoC* appears to encourage changes in internal, and not external political efficacy beliefs. While political efficacy is largely considered to be relatively stable over time (Abramson, 1983; Iyengar, 1980), some research indicates that internal efficacy is less volatile over time than external efficacy (Acock and Clarke, 1990; Gurin and Brim, 1984). In other words, one's confidence in his/her ability to understand government is more stable than, say, perceptions of government responsiveness. In the case of the present experiment, it is more likely that we should see changes in external political efficacy than internal political efficacy beliefs. This, however, is not the case: viewing *HoC* appears to have an effect only on one's level of internal political efficacy, and only after a two-week delay. This issue deserves further investigation.

Third, it was hypothesized that viewing *HoC* would have the effect of decreasing the likelihood that individuals would participate in an upcoming election. This was decidedly not so. Viewing *HoC* appears to have had no effect on individuals' intent to participate in a future election, and this is true regardless of

whether this intent was assessed immediately or two weeks after viewing the program. One reason for this may be that viewing a single episode of a fictional narrative that portrays elected officials in a negative light may be insufficient to alter the behavioral intentions with regard to the specific behaviors measured in the present experiment. For decades scholars in political science have noted the American public's lack of approval of Congress's job performance. Since 2009, for example, the percent of Americans approving of the job Congress is doing has ranged between 39 and 9%. As is often pointed out, it is not uncommon for individuals to give Congress poor marks, while providing much higher marks for their particular representatives or senators. It may be that a similar phenomenon is reflected in the results of the present experiment. In this scenario, individuals who viewed *HoC* and adopted more negative beliefs about politicians, did so only with regard to politicians in general. Their particular candidates in the 2014 congressional elections, however, are perceived as being worthy of their support. As a result, individuals in the experimental conditions are just as likely (or unlikely) to participate in the election as individuals in the control condition. If this is the case, then the ability of *HoC* or a similar work of political fiction to effect scores on standard measures of political participation may be extremely limited.

Finally, the present experiment offers modest evidence that long-term belief change resulting from the consumption of fictional narratives occurs when an individual is cognitively and emotionally transported into the world of the narrative, rather than when elaboration occurs. In the *HoC* experiment, no significant correlation between the expression of narrative-consistent beliefs and score on the Need for Cognition Scale were found in either the immediate or delayed assessment group. Scores on the Transportation Scale, in contrast, were correlated with each of the three beliefs about politicians in the delayed assessment group. Individuals who experienced higher levels of transportation expressed significantly higher levels of narrative-consistent beliefs than those who experienced lower levels of transportation. These results suggest that experiencing a state of transportation may do exactly what transportation theory indicates – facilitate long-term belief change. Why is this true only of beliefs about politicians and not internal political efficacy is worthy of further investigation.

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