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**The Missing Generation:
Youth Political Participation in the United States following the 2000
Presidential Election and September 11, 2001**

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ABSTRACT

The events of the 2000 United States Presidential Election and the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 occurred as a particular group of young people reached voting age. In this thesis, I use a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to examine whether these events could be said to have created a “generation effect” that substantially affects the political identity and behavior of young people ages 18-25. I find that while these events were significant influences on young people’s perception of and interest in policy and United States politics, there is little evidence to suggest that this is more than a typical age effect accompanying the transition out of adolescence.

Introduction

Young people between the age of 18 and 25 share a common birth cohort—we grew up with the Smurfs and Fraggle Rock on television, only vaguely remember Ronald Reagan as President, and share a nostalgic appreciation for tie die and oversized t-shirts. And just like age cohorts before us, we entered college and high school, somewhat naïve, somewhat unaware, and somewhat uncertain of what our future would hold. In our eyes, our experiences were new, unique and unparalleled. To adult bystanders, we were simply another group of young people going through adolescence and transitioning into “adult” life. Starting in the November of 2000, however, our experiences were no longer mundane and unoriginal.

Up until November 2, 2000, the 2000 United States presidential election could be described as similar to other presidential elections. Vice President Al Gore campaigned to follow (although not too closely given the Monica Lewinsky scandal) in President Bill Clinton’s footsteps. He ran on a non-descript campaign remembered for the social security lockbox and inventing the internet. Republican nominee George W. Bush, on the other hand, hammered home themes

of cultural decline in the United States and his promise to rejuvenate government with “compassionate conservatism.” There was sound bite after sound bite, campaign ad after campaign ad, and the occasional third party candidate emerging out of the woodwork. It was fairly standard fare until they began counting the votes. As the election returns came in throughout the evening, network television channels shaded states red for Republican or blue for Democrat based on their outcome, projecting possible scenarios for victory for either candidate. Then came Florida. Depending on what network one watched, Florida was shaded red, then blue, then red again, until it finally remained un-tinted. Typically, the networks declared the unofficial winner of the Presidential election at the end of election night, but 2000 was different. The Election remained undecided, and recounts continued, until ultimately the Supreme Court decided that it was time to stop counting votes—George W. Bush was the next President. What began as a typical election ended in a deadlock that resonated through the culture.

Less than one year later, on September 11, 2001, two planes crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City. A few hours

later, one plane crashed into the side of the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Across the country and around the world, the media replayed images of planes flying into buildings which were then consumed by smoke and flames. Talk of terrorists, Al Qaeda, Afghanistan and Iraq dominated the media, while families mourning their losses and seeking out other relatives maintained the human element of otherwise political and sensational television.

Although very different, these events each independently consumed the attention of media and citizens. As the 2000 Presidential Election remained undecided, Congress debated the status and function of the Electoral College, citizens protested in front of the United States Supreme Court building, and butterfly ballots and chads were the topic of bumper stickers, t-shirts, and news programs. On September 11, 2001 and the weeks immediately following, it was impossible to turn on the news without repeatedly watching the footage of the World Trade Center collapsing. Vigils were held daily, and the terrorist hunt was at the forefront of both media and everyday conversations. Once again, the news temporarily halted to make room for this momentous happening.

These events were deeply felt by young people ages 18 to 25. High School and college students hotly debated whether or not the Electoral College should be abolished and the possible implications of foreign policy in the wake of September 11th. Meanwhile, at home, young people comforted friends who lost family in the terrorist attacks on September 11th and questioned the legitimacy of the 2000 election. These two events jolted young people awake to the reality of a world of more complex relationships and politics.

As the 2004 Presidential Election approached, media reports praised increased youth political interest, increased political participation, and successful efforts by organizations such as Rock the Vote and MoveOn.org. For example, on October 7, 2004, Christine Laue reported for the Omaha-World Herald,

Young-voter participation has declined almost every year since the voting age dropped from 21 to 18 in 1972. But young voters are expected to go to the polls this year in possible record numbers. A culmination of influences is feeding the ambitious predictions—a pop culture overflowing with politics, issues that affect young people and an unprecedented amount of voter mobilization efforts that have made registering to vote easier. (Omaha-World Herald, October 7, 2004)

Similarly, a county clerk was quoted in the St. Louis Post Dispatch as saying,

A lot of issues are bringing young voters out—the war in Iraq, terrorism, loss of good paying jobs to overseas, health care . . . Young people, as do most people, see this as a very important election, one that’s going to tell how the country will go for the next 20 years. Young people are going to have a big impact on this election.” (St. Louis Post Dispatch, September 23, 2004)

And Benjamin Chavis Muhammad, former President of NAACP, predicted, “I think we’re going to have the largest youth voter turnout in American history.” (Washington Post, July 4, 2004) Each of these statements describes a widespread expectation that young voters would come out to vote in record numbers in the 2004 Presidential Election. Because of the contested nature of the 2000 Presidential Election and the tragic events of September 11, 2001, there was a sense that young voters would have a special stake in politics.

This thesis considers these predictions and expectations. Specifically, I examine quantitative and qualitative evidence to consider the question of whether the 2000 Presidential Election and the terrorist attacks on

September 11, 2001 can be understood as catalysts for a deeper, long lasting generation effect among young voters.

Conceptual Foundations

In our day to day conversations, we hear and use the word generation without hesitation. We haphazardly refer to familial generations, television advertising campaigns, such as those by Pepsi-Cola, target the “new generation” of consumers, and most recently, predictions of increased political participation refer to a new generation of young voters. However, while common in everyday conversation, these concepts of generation are imprecise. In each of the above examples, generation carries a different meaning, ranging from generation by kinship to generation by cohort. I would argue that a richer sociological understanding of generation encompasses age effects, period effects, and the interaction of these two. In order to piece together young people’s experiences with the events of September 11, 2001 and the 2000 Presidential election and seek out a potential generation effect, it is first necessary to develop a more clear definition of generation.

In a review of literature on the sociology of generations, David Kertzer (1983) begins the process of untangling various definitions of generation. He argues that there are four ways of conceptualizing

generation: generation based on descent or kinship, generation based on a common life stage, generation based on a group of individuals living at a common historical moment and lastly, generation based on a cohort (1983:126). The first three definitions of generation Kertzer offers are not applicable within the scope of this research. First, generation based on descent or kinship refers to familial generations. This definition of generation is most commonly used in demographic research interested in population replacement, particularly through female reproduction. Second, when generation is used to refer to a group of individuals living in a common time in history, it refers not only to a single cohort but to a group of cohorts. Kertzer argues that this definition of generation typically is less sociological and more historical (1983:127). Third, Kertzer argues that generation can be used to refer to life stage differences. He suggests that this usage is most beneficial to research considering intergenerational conflicts. Such research may consider the response of people of different ages to shared events, or how social attitudes and political beliefs change as a generation reaches a certain point in the life-cycle.

Most significant to this paper is generation when used to refer

to cohort, or “succession of people moving through an age strata” (Kertzer 1983:126). This use of generation is often used to consider shared beliefs and attitudes among a particular group of individuals. Many scholars who use generation to denote cohort (including Mannheim (1952), Braungart (1986), and Alwin (1998) argue that these common beliefs emerge as a result of common historical and political events. Thus, explicating Markides (1978) and Faver (1981), Kertzer argues that a cohort effect is then “an effect exerted upon people by life experiences attributable to the historical slice of time in which they have lived” (1983: 128). However, I would suggest that this understanding masks the importance of age effects. While period effects, such as particular historical and political experiences might be of particular importance in understanding commonly held beliefs, the interaction of these period effects with age effects tells a more comprehensive story.

Karl Mannheim's legacy sheds light on the problem of clarifying the concept of generations (1952). Mannheim argues that generations are the driving forces for social change. His reasoning that as successive generations come into contact with new experiences, they

have the opportunity to mobilize and potentially challenge the previous generation's norms and values (1952: 287). Thus, I would suggest that what is significant for Mannheim is not merely generation as a concept, but rather how generations act as a conscious group and the political and social implications thereof.

Mannheim's theory first addresses the notion of generations as a broader concept. Whereas a biologist might argue that generations are rooted strictly in "natural facts", or when an individual is born, Mannheim makes the distinction that generations are based in, but not deducible from, natural facts. (1952: 291) In other words, while generations would not exist without certain locational characteristics, namely being born at a specific time, there are characteristics of generations which are not immediately a product of these "natural facts."

Mannheim particularly emphasizes that generations are not necessarily any sort of cohesive unit. He writes,

The generation is not a concrete group in the sense of a community, i.e. a group which cannot exist without its members having concrete knowledge of each other, and which ceases to exist as a mental and spiritual unit as soon as physical proximity is destroyed. (1952: 289)

In other words, a generation can exist without active group consciousness¹. Simply because the members of a generation do not possess some sort of collective identity does not therefore preclude any possibility of a generation.

Mannheim uses class as an example to further clarify the concept of generations. He argues that in a wide sense, class is a locational position tied to particular economic and power structures in a given society. Individuals occupy a particular class position as a direct result of their social location. Similar to class positions, according to Mannheim, within any particular generation individuals do not necessarily recognize themselves as a part of a larger collective. For example, simply because several individuals are members of the working class does not necessarily imply that they as a group share any collective consciousness (1952: 289).²

¹ Arguably, generation without active group consciousness is by definition a statistical generation. It is useful in quantitative analysis, but has little potential for change on the ground.

² As is the case with any metaphor, class does have its limitations when compared to generations. Class membership is not a fixed category. Individuals are able to potentially move throughout different class positions with different economic advantages or disadvantages. If, as Mannheim suggests, generations are based on the natural fact of when an individual is born, then there is little room for mobility between generations. Regardless, class illustrates the general argument compellingly—there are individuals who regularly mobilize around their class identity and there are those who are a member of a particular class only for statistical purposes.

Mannheim repeatedly emphasizes that not all generations form a concrete group or share collective consciousness. In order to account for different manifestations of generations, his theory distinguishes between three different "degrees" of generation: generation as location, generation as actuality, and generation units. Generation as location, Mannheim argues, is a biological marker. An individual is a part of a specific generation simply by biologically entering the world at a given time. He writes,

. . .a generation in the sense of a location phenomenon falls short of encompassing the generation phenomenon in its full actuality. The latter is something more than the former, the same way as the mere fact of class position does not yet involve the existence of a consciously constituted class (1952:303).

In other words, generation as location suggest a potential generational consciousness and thus the possibility of a generational group creating social and political change, but this remains no more than a possibility.

Generation as actuality, on the other hand, is characterized by Mannheim as

. . . individuals of the same age. . .only united as an actual generation in so far as they participate in the characteristic social and intellectual currents of their

society and period, and in so far as they have an active or passive experience of the interactions of forces which made up the new situation (1952:304).

Actual generations share common historical experiences, and are influenced by common social and historical factors which shape their experience (1952:303). However, while Mannheim does indicate that there is an increased consciousness between generation as location and generation as actuality, generation as actuality still does not imply mobilization on the behalf of a generational group (1952:304).

For Mannheim, the generation unit is a social actor, with the most potential for creating social and political change. He argues that "those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their own common experiences in different specific ways constitute separate generation units" (1952:304). These generation units are more than actual generations in that they mobilize on the basis of their shared experiences and history. It is important to note that Mannheim argues that within an actual generation, there may be several generation units, mobilizing and working up their experiences in different ways (1952:307).

The distinguishing characteristic of a generation unit from other

types of generations, according to Mannheim, is that there is some degree of collective action or mobilization in response to similar events. However, Mannheim emphasizes that a generation unit does not intrinsically comprise a concrete group. At first, this notion seems contradictory. It would seem to make sense that in order to mobilize collectively there must be some degree of collective consciousness. However, it is important to realize that a generation unit is not a group of individuals setting out to cause social change; instead it is a means of explaining recent social changes and predicting future social change. In other words, to assume collective consciousness seems to imply that there will then be intentional collective action on the part of the generation unit. Thus, I would argue that the distinction lies between a generation unit which is not self-aware and a generation unit which intentionally organizes and mobilizes as a collectivity.

Mannheim's slightly problematic metaphor of class offers a useful insight into this issue. Individuals can choose to set out and collectively act on the basis of class, such as during labor strikes. However, class can also be used to explain certain phenomenon, such as home ownership. In other words, individuals are not always acting

as conscious members of the working class, but their actions are nonetheless always navigated through their class. Thus while there might not be a perpetual collective action based on class, there are moments in which the individual does realize themselves as a part of a larger class and act accordingly. I would suggest that the same is the case with generation units. While an individual does not always have to be acting on behalf of their generation unit, their experiences are mediated through their generation. Similarly, there is the possibility for the individual to recognize themselves as a part of a larger group, such as the generation unit.

If there are these three different “degrees” of generation as Mannheim suggests, then the important question is "What causes a generation unit to emerge from an actual generation?" (1952: 304) While Mannheim proceeds to offer various arguments regarding the psychological ties within a group, as well as the emotional significance of historical and political events, I would suggest that he is unclear about what exactly causes a group of individuals to become a generation unit actively influencing social change, as opposed to passively acting as an actual generation. One possible explanation of

this different level of consciousness is the nature of the historical, social and political events that mark the generation. So although each age group is a part of a locational generation by Mannheim's definition and shares a particular social, political, and historical context, if this context is not understood to be distinct from that which marked the previous generation then there is little likelihood they will become a generation unit involved in social change.

In addition to its contribution to a deeper sociological understanding of generations, Mannheim's theory incorporates the interaction between age effects and period effects. While Mannheim's theory of generations particularly emphasizes the emergence of generation units in which individuals mobilize on the basis of common historical or cultural experiences, each degree of generation is also based on membership in a common birth cohort. Competing methodological approaches suggest that changes in attitudes or beliefs occur either as the result of passing through a particular stage in the life cycle (life course analysis) or as the result of common historical and social experiences (generational analysis). However, while it is fairly easy and straightforward to discuss life-course and generation

analyses as analytically distinct categories, in quantitative analysis the line between the two is never clearly demarcated. In other words, individuals don't age in isolation from historical and political events, so to consider these factors as distinct and separate does not accurately capture the nature of social reality.

Uncovering the interaction of age effects and period effects is thus not an easy task when relying solely on quantitative data. The challenge is to decipher how the age effect operates within the bigger picture. To use Braungart & Braungart's example: "Are older people more conservative because as people reach old age they get more conservative, or are they more conservative because their views haven't changed, while society's have?" (Braungart 1986:212) In order to understand more precisely how age and period effects overlap, I would argue that it is useful to not only consider quantitative data, but also to incorporate qualitative data. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, often provide information that quantitative data cannot, and in this way provide crucial insight into the nature of generations. Qualitative research will not necessarily enable one to concretely label certain results as age effects or generation effects; qualitative research,

too, is subject to interpretation. However, I would suggest that qualitative research, in conjunction with formal data analysis, offers the widest, most grounded perspective on a situation.

Following in Mannheim's footsteps, the challenge of this work is not only to uncover the potential effects of events such as September 11, 2001 and the 2000 Presidential Election, but also to chart the intersections of age effects and period effects as they relate to these events. Following Mannheim, I would argue that young people ages 18-25 comprise a generation unit. They are not only passively marked by the political and historical events of our time, as an actual generation might be, but have also actively "worked up their experiences." In other words, I hypothesize that increased political participation among young voters following 2000 and 2001 can be read as a generation "working up their experiences." If in fact this is the case, then I would expect the quantitative and qualitative evidence to reveal evidence of a strong age effect, as well as efforts by young people to mobilize and act in response to their experiences.

Before and After: A Quantitative Analysis

This section is a comparative quantitative analysis of youth political participation in the 2000 Presidential Election and the 2002 midterm election. In it I examine if there was a change in voting behavior among 18 to 25 year olds that might be associated with the events of the 2000 Presidential Election and September 11, 2001. If there is in fact a generation unit emerging, I would expect that these events would function as a focal point, both changing young people's political opinions, as well as bringing together young people as a more cohesive cohort.

The data for this analysis are from the 2000 and 2002 National Election Studies (NES) surveys. (Burns et. al., National Election Studies, 2000 and 2002) NES conducts extensive surveys during national election years six months prior and six months following the election. The surveys are nationally representative and ask a wide variety of questions about social background and political behavior.

In spite of their depth and magnitude, these data sets are not without limitations. First, at the time of this research, data from the 2004 Presidential Election had yet to be released. 2002 was not a

Presidential election year, and as midterm elections tend to garner less attention and enthusiasm from the electorate there is a chance that a generation effect might be present, yet not evident within these data. The second significant obstacle the data present is small sample size for my population of interest. NES surveys are conducted primarily by telephone, throughout the day. Because many young people are either enrolled in school or at work, young voters comprise only a small fraction of the sample.³ This does not render the data useless, but instead requires that additional caution be used when generalizing findings from the analysis.

In order to analyze patterns in young people's political participation in the 2000 Presidential Election, I considered six dependent variables and four independent variables. The dependent variables described political behavior, asking whether or not individuals voted, who they voted for, whether they registered, and their political party identification.⁴ Because they are common

³ In the 2000 NES data, the sub-sample size of young people ages 18-25 was 172. In the 2002 NES data, the sub-sample size of young people ages 18-25 was 87.

⁴ The specific variables I used were "Did you vote in 2000?", "Who did you vote for in 2000?", "Did you vote in 1996?", "Who did you vote for in

predictors of social values and political participation, the independent variables were race, education, political party, and age (Brady et. al. (1995), Brady et. al. (1999), Schlozman et. al. (1999), Verba et. al, (1993). Due to the comprehensive nature of the NES surveys, many of the variables were quite extensive and specific. For example, race was broken down into 12 categories. However, for a sample of approximately eighty to one hundred respondents, this was too complex for meaningful comparisons between groups. As such, I collapsed race and other overly complicated variables to enable more useful analysis.⁵ A simple summary of statistics for these variables are presented in Tables 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

1996?”, “Are you registered to vote?” and “Do you identify with a particular political party?”.

⁵ Race was recoded into three categories--black, white and other. Political party identification was also recoded into three variables--Democrat, Republican, and other. The variables about for whom a respondent voted for were recoded to include the two primary party candidates and an “other” category which encompassed third party candidates. Each of the variables pertaining to whether or not an individual voted were coded into four possible responses: I am sure I voted, I thought about voting but didn’t, I usually vote but did not this time, and I did not vote. Each of these variables was recoded into dichotomous variables with “I am sure I voted” as an affirmative response and the other three responses indicating a negative response. Lastly, any responses of “Don’t know” or “Not applicable” were excluded as missing data.

Table 1
2000 National Election Studies Variable Frequencies

| <i>2000 NES Variables</i> | <i>Frequencies</i> |
|---|--------------------|
| Did you vote in 2000? | |
| Yes | 55.8% |
| No | 44.2% |
| Who did you vote for in 2000? | |
| Gore | 61.3% |
| Bush | 30.7% |
| Other | 8.0% |
| Did you vote in 1996? | |
| Yes | 25.6% |
| No | 74.4% |
| Who did you vote for in 1996? | |
| Clinton | 69.8% |
| Dole | 14.0% |
| Other | 16.3% |
| Were you registered to vote in 2000? | |
| Yes | 41.7% |
| No | 58.3% |
| Do you identify with any political party? | |
| Democrat | 29.1% |
| Republican | 15.7% |
| Independent | 41.3% |
| Other | 14.0% |
| Race | |
| Black | 18.6% |
| White | 62.8% |
| Other | 18.6% |
| Education | |
| High School | 44% |
| College | 52.4% |
| Graduate | 3.6% |
| Age | |
| 18 | 7.0% |
| 19 | 9.3% |
| 20 | 13.4% |
| 21 | 13.4% |
| 22 | 13.4% |
| 23 | 13.4% |
| 24 | 15.1% |
| 25 | 15.1% |
| Sex | |
| Male | 25.6% |
| Female | 74.4% |
| N | 172 |

To examine indicators of young people's political participation before the 2000 Presidential Election and September 11, 2001, I cross tabulated the six dependent variables with the four independent variables, controlling for sex. Furthermore, I calculated Chi-Square statistics to test if the relationships were statistically significant. As evidenced by the Chi Square tests in table 3, the findings are fairly scattered. When analyzing the relationship between who they voted for in 2000 and the independent variables, only education was statistically significant, and only at the $p < .05$ level. Moreover, these effects also appear to have varied by sex. For young women in 2000, education was statistically significant at $p < .05$, and race and political party identification was statistically significant at $p < .01$.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Table 2
2000 NES Chi Square Values

| | Vote in 2000? | | Who for in 2000? | | Vote in 1996? | | Who for in 1996? | | Register in 2000? | | Party ID? | |
|-----------|---------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> |
| Race | 4.378 | 1.173 | 0.393 | 13.831** | 1.58 | 0.11 | 2.811 | 4.941 | 0.845 | 6.005 | 12.202 | 7.875 |
| Education | 10.316 | 18.335* | 9.756 | 17.107* | 12.962 | 23.111** | 8.233 | 6.513 | 13.261 | 3.438 | 29.615 | 21.773 |
| Party ID | 4.28 | 6.811 | 5.05 | 23.656** | 0.548 | 11.339 | 14.309* | 21.706** | 7.814 | 4.239 | -- | -- |
| Age | 4.807 | 4.386 | 1.905 | 12.008 | 13.758** | 14.3** | 6.431 | 5.422 | 5.87 | 1.8 | 12.884 | 14.802 |

*p < .05

**p < .01

It is not terribly surprising that education and political party identification were the most consistent predictors of whether or not, and in what direction, young women participate. What is more interesting, however, is that these relationships are only statistically significant for women. Whereas young women appear to be somewhat predictable in their political participation, young men's political participation does not appear to follow any standard sort of pattern. Age was statistically significant in relation to men's decision whether or not to vote in 1996, and political party identification was statistically significant in relation to men's decision whom to vote for in 1996 but these effects are not found in the 2000 data. Young men's political participation, on the other hand, is a bit more complicated. One possible explanation for this finding is that young men are more fickle as a group of voters. Another plausible possibility, however, is that this is a symptom of the limited sample size available using NES data. Without conducting further data collection, which is beyond the scope of this project, it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions.

While it is unlikely than a generation effect would fully emerge within just one year of the 2000 Election and September 11th, I would nonetheless expect that the 2002 NES data might at least hint at

changes in young people's political participation if such an effect is indeed emerging. In order to compare the 2000 NES findings with the 2002 NES findings, I selected five similar dependent variables, and the same four independent variables. Furthermore, in order to specifically consider the relationship of the 2000 Presidential Election and September 11, 2001 on young people's political participation, I also incorporated opinion variables from the 2002 NES regarding respondent's level of approval of the 2000 Election and 9/11.⁶ Table 3 reports simple summary statistics for each of these variables.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

⁶ These variables were originally coded with four possible responses: I approve strongly, I somewhat approve, I disapprove strongly, I disapprove somewhat. I collapsed these variables into a dichotomous variable, with the two approval responses being affirmative, and the two disapproval responses as negative.

Table 3
2002 NES SUMMARY STATISTICS

| <i>2002 NES Variables</i> | <i>Frequencies</i> |
|---|--------------------|
| Did you vote in 2002? | |
| Yes | 28.1% |
| No | 71.9% |
| Do you approve or disapprove of how George Bush is handling his job as President? | |
| Yes | 67.9% |
| No | 32.1% |
| All things considered, would you say the 2000 Election was fair or unfair? | |
| Yes | 50.9% |
| No | 49.1% |
| All things considered, do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush has responded to the terrorist attack on Sept. 11? | |
| Yes | 68.6% |
| No | 31.4% |
| Were you registered to vote in 2002? | |
| Yes | 58.7% |
| No | 41.3% |
| Do you identify with any political party? | |
| Democrat | 43.9% |
| Republican | 18.3% |
| Independent | 34.1% |
| Other | 3.7% |
| Age | |
| 18 | 1.1% |
| 19 | 4.6% |
| 20 | 8.0% |
| 21 | 5.7% |
| 22 | 24.1% |
| 23 | 16.1% |
| 24 | 21.8% |
| 25 | 18.4% |
| Sex | |
| Male | 43.7% |
| Female | 56.3% |
| Race | |
| Black | 16.1% |
| White | 58.6% |
| Other | 25.3% |
| Education | |
| High School | 35.5% |
| College | 61.3% |
| Graduate | 3.2% |
| N | 87 |

Using the 2002 NES data, I again cross tabulated each of the dependent variables with the independent variables controlling for sex, and calculated a Chi-Square value to test if the variables were statistically significant. Similar to Table 2, Table 4 below shows Chi Square values; the findings for 2002 are quite similar to 2000. Again, with regards to whether or not an individual voted, education was statistically significant. Political party identification, however, was not statistically significant in 2002, replaced instead by race. It is difficult to definitively draw any conclusions regarding why political party identification may have become not significant, whereas race became so. However, one likely possibility is that this is an effect of this being a mid-term election. Because presidential elections are perceived as having a driving influence on policy decisions, young people, like the general electorate, are more committed to voting along party lines for an overall party platform.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

Table 4
2002 NES Chi Square Values

| | Vote in 2002? | | Register in 2002? | | Approve of 9/11? | | 2000 Fair or Unfair? | | Approve of Bush? | | Party ID? | |
|-----------|---------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> |
| Race | 1.477 | 14.488** | 2.59 | 9.398 | 1.305 | 10.664* | 7.203 | 8.77 | 1.966 | 8.185 | 39.669** | 16.979 |
| Education | 6 | 8.4* | 9.34** | 5.015 | 6.335 | 3.069 | 1.833 | 3.056 | 6.688 | 3.675 | 6.312 | 13.226 |
| Party ID | 1.577 | 1.221 | 2.085 | 0.238 | 1.425 | 4.481 | 3.938 | 9.825* | 5.469 | 4.578 | XX | XX |
| Age | 6 | 9.75 | 6.875 | 5.033 | 3.034 | 5.617 | 2.006 | 8.421 | 2.221 | 2.757 | 6.49 | 17.466 |

*p < .05

**p < .01

While there are slight differences in which relationships are statistically significant, the overall picture is quite similar to that of the 2000 findings. These findings, most importantly, present a fairly confusing picture of youth political participation. Very few variables are statistically significant when controlling for sex. Finally, there is no evidence of drastic changes in quantitative findings across time.

The fundamental notion of a generation of individuals mobilizing in response to a common experience rests on the assumption that they act cohesively, and share similar beliefs and values. This is not the picture suggested by the NES data. Indeed, these data show young people to be an inconsistent electorate, moved by a broad spectrum of variables. This does not preclude the possibility of a generation effect. It might be the case that the generation effect is more nuanced than these data reveal. It is also possible that 2002 was too early to capture young people's mobilization around the events of the 2000 Election and September 11, 2001. But at this point, in spite of media hoopla predicting an emerging generation effect, this quantitative analysis fails to find evidence of such conclusions

Continuing the Search: Constructing Narratives of 9/11 and 2000

Popular media and academic framings of the 2000 presidential election and the tragedy of 9/11 suggest that these events were a defining moment in young people's political and social life. As such, it seemed obvious that one consequence might be increased political participation in future elections. Yet, previous analysis of the NES survey data provided insufficient evidence of a generation effect in Mannheim's fullest sense of the term. It might be however, that this quantitative analysis is not nuanced enough to pick up the presence of this effect. It might also be that it is not possible to observe this effect in survey data at all. For this reason, I consider in this section the effects and significance of the Presidential election in 2000 and the events of September 11th by analyzing qualitative data. These data collected in informal interviews with young people who came of age at this time, those who comprise the current 18-25 year old cohort in the United States, many of whom are in college. Again, using Mannheim's theory of generation, I conduct an interpretive analysis of political narratives of current college students to ask: "Is there a generation

effect in the making among current college seniors in the United States?”

As I discuss earlier in the paper, Mannheim’s distinctions between different kinds of generation effects grounds my analysis. First, Mannheim’s degrees of generation are characterized by individuals in similar birth cohorts. In other words, if there is a generation effect among young voters in the United States consequent to their collective experience of September 11, 2001 and the 2000 Presidential Election, there should also be evidence that young people’s political attitudes and behaviors have shifted as a result of the transition from adolescence into adulthood. If this is the case, I expect to find themes regarding the development of a more mature world view and efforts on the behalf of young people to set themselves apart from their parent’s views which, they previously might not have challenged.

After establishing an age effect, the question remains whether or not there is a generation effect beyond the generational location which accompanies the age effect. According to Mannheim’s theory, a generation unit is characterized by individuals who share a similar birth cohort and who “work up” their experiences in a similar fashion.

Mannheim's language of "working up" is useful here; if there is in fact a generation effect, I would expect to find not only a passive interest in political participation among the interviewees, but instead a political fervor emerging in response to these events.

Considering these characteristics of generations, I would suggest that there are three possibilities hidden in the narratives from my interview materials. First, there could be no evidence of an age effect, and thus, no possibility of any kind of generation effect. Second, there could be evidence of an age effect, but still no evidence of a generation effect. Lastly, there could be an age effect which is accompanied by a generation effect. Based on the nature of the political and media discussions regarding young people and political interests in conjunction with the events of September 11th and those surrounding the 2000 Presidential Election, I would expect there to be a generation effect in the way members of this age group discuss their political interest and activity

In order to examine how people thought about their own involvement in politics and experiences with the events in question, I conducted interviews with 26 women, all of whom were current students, or recent alumnae of, Mount Holyoke College. In recruiting

a sample, I attempted to have some balance with regard to region of the country they came from, age, racial identity, and self-professed placement on the political spectrum. While not perfectly representative, the data should accurately reflect the makeup of this group of educated women.

The 2000 Effect

I began each interview by asking the respondents to reflect on their experience with the 2000 election. While most respondents remembered being excited about being able to vote for the first time, their first election seemed to highlight the challenges of the American electoral system. For example, when asked about the 2000 Presidential election, Anna, a 21 year old responded, “. . . I would also say [the 2000 Election] was negative. . . a lot of people who really look highly on the political process in the United States were really disappointed.”

(Interview December 5, 2004)

Similarly, Sarah said, “. . . I couldn't believe that there was any question that Bush was not being elected. . . I remember the insecurity of knowing that the election was basically decided by the Supreme Court. . .” (Interview December 7, 2004) Susan remarked, “I thought it was really ridiculous. . . I felt like they hadn't counted all the votes and

then there was all this other skeptical stuff out there. It was so close it was just really hard to believe.” (Interview Data, February 18, 2005) In addition to conveying overall disbelief and frustration with the electoral process, the responses recall a pivotal moment in which these young people began to doubt the political values they had been taught. Sarah and Susan’s expressions of disbelief suggest that this experience was a moment at which young people paused and reconsidered what they had been taught about U.S. democracy and politics. Their narratives describe the first time they realized that that perhaps there was more to the electoral system than free, representative elections.

Within the broader narrative of the 2000 Presidential Election, several sub-groups also emerged. More specifically, the first reflects age differences among respondents. When I asked each individual to reflect on their experience with the 2000 Presidential Election, those who were not able to vote in the election emphasized their frustration with being outside of the process during such a contested election. For example, Cassie, an 18 year old, commented,

I was really upset because I was really involved and into the whole thing and. . . . I felt as though my voice would never be heard . . . I just had no control over it and it really angered me. . . I was like everyone should be able to vote! (Interview, November 16, 2004)

Lisa echoed this, remarking,

I think that really drove me into wanting to participate, and wanting to vote in the recent election. The outcome was so close that I know my one vote might not count, but if I'm voting then I have a reason to yell at my friends and family and the people around me to vote, so that hopefully the outcome might be more clear. (Interview November 13, 2004)

Those who were old enough to vote in the 2000 election had a different reaction. Similar to those youths who were unable to participate, they shared a sense of “new-ness” about the political process. That is to say, like the non-voters, these first time voters were new to the system and both confused and interested by the actual results. However, those who participated did not share the same energy for voting in the next election as the younger non-voters did. One individual, Megan, a 24 year old, commented that she had been quite active in the 2000 election because it was her first election. She recalled spending the night in her dorm living room with other Gore supporters and being really upset by the results. Megan remarked that she took it really personally; she had put a lot of effort into getting her friends motivated to vote, campaigning, and voted herself, but still felt as though she lost. (Interview January 27, 2005)

While Megan was more politically active than most of her peers, others expressed a similar feeling of personal loss following the 2000 Election. One could argue that this is not uncommon—many individuals are disappointed when “their” candidate loses. However, the evidence suggests that the 2000 election affected first time voters differently. I would argue that this is because it was different in the sense that it was arguably not a clear victory or defeat. Not only were these individuals unhappy that their own candidates had lost, but they had also seemingly lost in terms of the overall political process as well. They had done all the “right things”—they educated themselves on candidates, they went to the polling place, and they voted. But in the end, that was not enough. They all maintained that there was an intrinsic value to voting nonetheless, but they were not sure it counted and there was not the same energy for future participation that youths who had not voted shared.

When Lisa’s and Carrie’s narratives are compared to Megan’s narrative, an interaction between age and a larger 2000 election effect on political ideals surfaces. In other words, those who were able to vote viewed the 2000 election from a different vantage point than those who could not vote, and as such, the event took on a slightly different

meaning. Being outside the political system during a critical election made younger respondents simultaneously frustrated and motivated. They felt that if had they been able to vote, their vote might have made a difference. Youths ages 23-25, on the other hand, were similarly disillusioned and frustrated by the political process, but were more personally invested in the election. Instead of emerging from the experience energized to participate, they walked away wary of their own potential to influence the electoral system or political outcomes through voting.

Not surprisingly, there was a distinct difference between the narratives of the liberals and narratives of the conservatives. Whereas the students who identified themselves as liberals felt as though the system was problematic, the students who identified themselves as conservatives downplayed the significance of the system's flaws. For example, Jennifer, a 20 year old remarked, "I was one of those kids who was like, well isn't this great- this is democracy in action, and the system still works, even though the electoral college and the popular vote did not exactly line up." (Interview November 16, 2004) Caroline, a 20 year old conservative remarked, "I just thought of it as kind of the deciding factor between the lesser of two evils." (Interview February

28, 2005) Katie, a 22 year old conservative, on the other hand, recounted that she did not remember the 2000 Election very well, and that it was not terribly important to her. While earlier responses from liberal individuals suggest that this institutional failure was a normative breach which needed to be mended, the conservative's narratives brush over this possibility. In other words, for the liberals, the 2000 Election indicated a "break" in the system. Thus, the obvious response was to repair the deviation in some fashion. For the conservatives, on the other hand, the event was meaningful because it maintained their faith that the system worked. Regardless of these differences, narratives from both conservatives and liberals continued to value the importance of voting.

Analyzing the interview data from students of color, however, rendered significant differences of interpretation. These narratives were characterized by suspicion of corruption and "tricks" which might have taken place in the 2000 Election, as well as in the political sphere. For example, Eliza, an African-American 22 year old, remarked

In this election and the past election, they've just got too many tricks up their sleeve. They've got too much going on in the background that no one ever sees and that clearly we know is there but don't realize just how

powerful their connections really are and what they can do. (Interview February 25, 2005)

Like Eliza, Susan, a 20 year old remarked, "I remember that I thought the entire election was rigged and I really hated it. I thought it was really ridiculous, especially because I felt like they hadn't counted all the votes and then there was all this other skeptical stuff out there." (Interview February 18, 2005). Eliza's and Susan's narrative are on one level simply accounts of how the institutions failed. What is different, however, is that they suggest that the failures were systemic and intentionally biased against racial minorities, and perceived as less likely to be overcome in the long term. Eliza and Susan, along with a few other individuals of color, were also less sure that their vote actually did have value. Interestingly, no individuals who identified themselves as White reported any concern with regards to political trickery or coercion.

Considering the negative responses to the events of the 2000 Election, I expected many respondents to be equally disillusioned by voting. However, this was not the case. Many respondents reported that while there were institutional flaws in the electoral system, this gave them all the more motivation to vote. For example, when asked what effect the 2000 Election had, Jackie replied,

J: I would have to say negative. . . I think that the 2000 election proved that one, every vote counts, but two when it comes to our polling system what we have is really dilapidated and inadequate. So, I think it shows that voting wise we're strong, but in the end it doesn't do it.

I: That said, do you still feel like your vote counts?

J: Yeah, I do. Especially in my state where we have elections decided by five votes, two votes. I'm like yeah, every vote does count. (Interview February 22, 2005)

Alicia echoed Jackie's sentiments when she replied,

Oh I definitely did not become politically disillusioned, even with all of the crap that came after that election. I was like okay well clearly every vote counts and this process made it clear, and I just have to go out and do my part. (Interview December 1, 2004)

Katie commented,

I always saw voting as important just because it was the culture my parents and the school system provided for me. . . after the fact that they had to go and recount every small little vote in FL, I was like OK every vote does sort of matter. (Interview February 22, 2005)

In other words, while these young people found the institutional flaws to be particularly troubling, they also recognized that simply not voting was not an adequate solution to the problem.

When considering possible responses to the 2000 election, I expected there to be two versions of the narrative—first, the events could be considered an example of democracy at work. A system

which has been in place for numerous years was put to the test, and succeeded. On the other hand, one could argue that the public spoke and their voices were not heard, and therefore, what is the point of voting? Young people's responses fell somewhere in the middle of such a spectrum. While they certainly did not consider the 2000 election to be a success, they realized the problem was located outside of the actual voting process, and thus recognized that not voting was not likely to be a viable solution to the problem.

While on the surface, these narratives appear to be somewhat predictable responses to the 2000 Election, there is in fact more to the story. That is to say, within the narratives, there is a moment described at which young people transition from being naïve, outside spectators of the political arena, to being critically thinking actors within the system. For example, Mary recalled

...after the 2000 election I became more interested in how the system really worked because I was getting so many explanations for how the system worked from so many different sources—my school, my parents, the media and they were all portraying the political process differently, so I became interested in my role in the political process and how much of an impact I really did have. (Interview March 3, 2005)

Similarly, Katherine explained that she was not as much driven to find more information because of the election, but rather because she

realized her own ignorance. She commented, “I realized exactly how naïve I was. And that really bothered me. Two classes I took this semester because of that election and because of my frustration about being so ill informed.” (Interview November 30, 2004) Alicia echoed Katherine’s sentiments. She commented,

I was politically active at that time, but I wouldn’t state myself as being fully politically aware. Nor would I state myself as fully politically aware now either, but I would say that I know more than I did then about the basics, you know, the Electoral College and stuff. (Interview December 1, 2004)

The 2000 Presidential Election was a driving force in young people’s political awareness. More important than highlighting institutional flaws in the electoral system for these respondents, it also drove them to reposition themselves as insiders in political discussion and action. Instead of ignoring politics, these young people began to recognize themselves as a part of the political process.

Given that these narratives each suggest increased engagement in the political process, it would seem logical that the narratives would also indicate increased political interest and activity. However, this is not the case. When asked about their political activity, only two

individuals replied that they considered themselves politically active.⁷

The others considered themselves to be politically inactive. For example, 21 year old Anna replied that she had voted, but when asked whether or not she considered herself politically active she indicated that while she was interested in particular issues, and certainly would always vote, she did not feel the need to be more active. She commented,

“...other people can fight my battles for me. That’s a really sad way to think about things, but I’m really involved with other things, and I don’t have time for all that [political participation].” (Interview December 5, 2004)

Amber expressed similar sentiments. She replied,

I’ve grown up in a background, you know I’ve been pretty well off. I wouldn’t really call myself a minority in any sense. You know, I’m straight, I’m white, I’m upper middle class, I grew up pretty sheltered. So, I don’t really feel like I have a cause that I have to stand up for. (Interview February 13, 2005)

Katie, on the other hand, explained her political inactivity as a factor of time. She responded, “You’re a Mount Holyoke student, you really

⁷ “Politically active” was purposely left vague in this question. In “Tuning Out or Left Out? Participation and Non-Participation among Young People”, Theresa O’Toole argues that one of the limitations of current research regarding youth political participation is that participation is defined by voting, and thus ignores the non-traditional ways young people find to participate. Interestingly, many of the individuals I interviewed considered themselves to be politically inactive, in spite of the fact that they voted. Of the few individuals who considered themselves to be politically active, they included activities such as campaign participation, letter writing, and protests.

don't have time to watch the news and do stuff like that." (Interview February 22, 2005) Thus, for these young people, voting is more of an action of civic responsibility than an opportunity to let their voices be heard. They vote because they perceived it to be the right thing to do.

Further complicating this contradiction, is my finding that while many of the individuals interviewed claimed that they became more interested and engaged in the political process following the 2000 Presidential Election, this effect seems to have been short-lived. In addition to not considering themselves to be politically active, many individuals also asserted, quite ashamedly, that they did not even spend a great deal of time gathering information and following current events. Perhaps even more interesting was that while most individuals mentioned their friends as sources of information, very few acknowledged that they spent a significant portion of time outside of class engaging in political discussions. Considering that the Mount Holyoke campus prides itself on having an active political culture, this especially indicates that the increased interest and search for knowledge following the 2000 Election was short-lived.

Based on the narrative evidence, I would argue that there is an underlying age effect which explains many of these findings. Life

course analysts often attribute the transition between adolescence and adulthood, voter and non-voter to be a point at which young people begin to take ownership of their own actions, beliefs and attitudes. Instead of blindly following the paths their parents might have selected, young people begin to determine their own direction. The 2000 Election appears to have functioned as a catalyst for this shift. It attracted the attention of young people, and forced them to recognize their own role within the political process, as well as to challenge their previously held beliefs. However, based on these narratives, there is insufficient evidence to indicate that the predicted generation effect is actually taking place. If such an effect were to exist, I would expect that the increased political energy immediately following the 2000 Presidential Election would have served as a driving force for increased activity—through voting, through protest, through campaigning. In other words, voting perhaps would have become more than a civic responsibility; it would function as a locus for change and action. However, such a story does not exist in the narratives. Instead of increasing action and activity, the interest appears to fizzle out, nearly to the point of disappearing.

The 9/11 Effect

While many young people prior to the 2000 presidential election were only passively, if at all, involved in the political process, their narrative accounts of the 2000 election illustrate a shift in social location. Young people came to realize their own position and role within the political process. However, in spite of this transition from political innocence to political adulthood, evidence of the predicted generation effect remains absent. In some ways, September 11th was quite similar to the 2000 Presidential election; both events challenged the political status quo, both events shifted political policy, and arguably both events demarcated “insiders” and “outsiders.” Most importantly, September 11th occurred only one year after the contested 2000 Presidential Election, again as young people approached or crossed the intersection of adolescence and adulthood. Thus, the pertinent question remains: “If there is no evidence of a generation effect in the narratives regarding the 2000 Election, does such an effect exist in the narratives regarding September 11th?”

It was no challenge to get individuals to discuss their memories and the relevance of the 2000 Presidential Election. However, it was initially difficult to piece together narratives regarding the events of

September 11th. In an early series of interviews, individuals were hesitant to discuss the events of September 11th beyond its emotional impact. Certainly, they found it to be tragic, but they also said that it simply was not something that affected their immediate lives.

However, after I reworded questions so that they were more basic and concrete, the narratives piece together to construct two different pictures—one political and one personal.

Following September 11th, there was a clear shift in United States policy attention and rhetoric away from primarily domestic affairs, such as social security and health care, toward foreign policy, the War on Iraq and homeland security. In his New York Times article “Vote Drive Gains Avid Attention of Youth in 2004”, Thomas Egan argues that the reason why young people failed to participate in past elections is that the elections have not been accessible. (September 20, 2004) In other words, candidates have focused on issues which young people consider to be inapplicable to their own lives and unimportant. Considering Egan’s argument, it would seem logical that young people would be more politically active following September 11th. For example, in the wake of 9/11, foreign policy issues no longer seemed to

only take place “over there;” suddenly, foreign policy issues arose at home as well.

After conducting interviews, however, I found that the young people’s accounts were not as straight-forward as I had expected. I was quite surprised to find that no narrative specifically declared issues such as the War on Iraq, homeland security, or foreign policy the deciding factor for their voting or candidate choice. Instead of emphasizing the foreign policy implications of September 11th, young people focused on the absence of other domestic issues. For example, quite a few individuals felt that foreign policy issues and the war were superceding other potentially more important issues. Susan commented,

“ . . . We need to solve our problems here first. We’re cutting education, we’re cutting health care, we’re cutting social security. . . I just don’t think that we’re putting enough importance on what’s going on here, [instead] we’re fighting some war that’s not affecting us and isn’t going to help us solve our issues. (Interview February 28, 2005)

Likewise, Annemarie said, “There was so much rhetoric going on. . . I was really worried about the economy because we are not doing well.” (Interview March 3, 2005) Anna contributed that she strongly disagreed with Bush’s reproductive health policies, which was a

determining issue in her candidate choice. (Interview December 5, 2004) In other words, while I expected that September 11th would motivate individuals to vote because of the new and relevant issues at hand, this was not the case. Instead, young people remained “business as usual” — committed to particular domestic policy issues which were now not at the center stage of United States politics.

This finding, however, is partially explained by the particular social and historical location of the young people interviewed. That the War on Iraq and related policy issues was insignificant remains surprising. Emphasis on particular domestic issues, on the other hand, was not surprising. When asked what issues were particularly important, many individuals mentioned gay and lesbian marriage rights and reproductive rights for women. As all of the respondents were female, and Mount Holyoke prides itself on maintaining a diverse community, including sexual diversity, this casts the events in a particular perspective.

On a more personal level, September 11th catalyzed young people’s transition from adolescence to adulthood. Prior to September 11th, young people had not experienced war and had not witnessed significant offensive tactics by the United States government.

September 11th challenged young people's notion of inevitable safety and comfort with the United States and its actions. Mary commented,

. . . [I] grew up in a country where we live in a super power; there's no two ways about it. No one would challenge us, no damage would ever happen, no one would attack us on our own soil because our security was so strong, and now that we have seen that security breach, it was unnerving. (Interview March 3, 2005)

Along the same lines, Katie replied,

. . .growing up you're kind of like "whohoo we're the untouchable country, no one invades us, no one bombs us and we're across the ocean from everyone else" and even though you know missiles can go that far, you still feel like you're untouchable. And I think for the first time I felt like we weren't in control and that was a bit of an eerie feeling. (Interview February 22, 2005)

Jennifer, still somewhat in awe, commented that "[it] was an instance where a prominent image in our nationality was attacked- the mainland was attacked. That was just . . . insane." (Interview December 3, 2004) Mary, Katie, and Jennifer's comments tell a common coming of age story. What they once held to be unquestionably true was suddenly not so clear. The events of September 11th, however, focused their attention on particular ideas and values throughout this transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Like the 2000 Election narratives, young people's accounts of September 11th describe a similar sense of "insiders" and "outsiders."

That is to say, individuals who did not have immediate ties to the terrorist attacks were outsiders, unable to really understand how those inside the events felt. For example, Allison, a 24 year old, commented that she did not have any family or friends in New York or Washington, but her roommate did. She further suggested that this became a dividing point in their relationship; Allison felt that even if she tried to be sympathetic to her roommate, her roommate did not value her opinion. (Interview March 13, 2005) Eliza recounted, "9/11 itself, I would say I didn't feel connected to it as New Yorkers did. I saw what happened, and I understood what happened but for me personally I didn't connect." (Interview February 25, 2005) And, Susan commented, "I didn't really know what to do with myself. I have a lot of family in Manhattan which is a little bit frightening, and granted they don't live anywhere near the World Trade Center, but to me, NY is a little bitty island." (Interview February 28, 2005) Of course, it's to be expected that September 11th was a different experience for those who lost individuals. However, Allison, Eliza and Susan's accounts suggest that not only was it a different experience for those who did not have personal ties to New York or D.C., but their experience was devalued. Those who had lost family or friends in the event or even

lived in the cities had an epistemological privilege to which others were inevitably unable to relate.

Additionally, many individuals emphasized the increased rhetoric and presence of patriotism and “American-ness” in their narratives. For many, this was not simply a meaningless, mundane experience; instead, I would suggest that the events of September 11th challenged and changed the way individuals identified themselves. For example, Leslie was in Argentina at the time of the September 11th attacks and recalled,

I grew up in a fairly liberal community and it was a culture shock to come home. . . I came from an area where patriotism, at least the abstract idea of it, didn’t exist. I came home to walk down 5th Avenue and have flags lining everything. . . I was just like, “are you kidding?” Who are we? We’re putting up these flags to support each other, but what are we doing really?
(Interview February 18, 2005)

Tiffany commented, “I tried to prove that I loved America just as much as these [other] people. I was trying to prove that I was a person too, it struck me really hard.” (Interview February 15, 2005) Similarly, Mary replied “I definitely think it [9/11] had an effect on me, it made me stand and take note of all of these rights and privileges, that all of these things we take for granted were definitely challenged.” (Interview March 3, 2005) Although from three unique vantage points, Mary’s,

Tiffany's and Leslie's narratives illustrate the dual nature of patriotism post September 11th. Not only was there a period of redefining and asserting what it meant to be American, but there was also a period of reconsidering how being American and Americanism affects a larger perspective. Similar to the shift in policy interests, these narratives are a somewhat expected coming of age story, catalyzed and mediated by September 11th.

As was the case with the 2000 Presidential Election, young people's narratives of September 11th indicate that there is an underlying age effect in play. As I would expect of narratives describing adolescent's transition to adulthood, there is cynicism, efforts to question previously held beliefs, and a process of reconsidering one's location within a larger perspective. September 11th thus served as both a catalyst for this transition and a historical, political moment in which this change took place. The question still remains whether or not this was an isolated age effect or whether young people actually "worked up" their experiences in a similar way. Respondents seemed to find the political consequences of 9/11 problematic, but as was previously discussed in the section about the 2000 election, there is no compelling evidence to suggest that young

people emerged from this transition and these events with newfound political zest. These accounts clearly describe the prerequisite age effect which marks any degree of generation according to Mannheim, but there is nothing to suggest that young people are more than passive bystanders of these events. Yet again, previous academic and media predictions that young people will emerge out of these events ready to mobilize and create social change are unfounded.

Conclusions

Contrary to initial expectations, there is no compelling evidence within the quantitative and qualitative analysis which suggests that there is in fact a long term generation effect in response to the 2000 Election and September 11, 2001. Additionally, media predictions that young people's political participation would increase in the 2004 presidential election were also off base. Youth voting did increase by 1.8 million people since the 2000 election (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement 2004). However, while organizations specifically devoted to increasing youth political participation claim that this is evidence of shifting political behaviors among youth, popular media sources argue that this increase simply mirrors a widespread increase in voter turnout in 2004 (Haddock 2004, Nevius 2004, Laucius 2004).

Young people ages 18 to 25 present a complex paradox for political pundits, candidates, and academics. On the one hand, their youth is often expected to be accompanied by new insights with great possibilities for bringing about change. More obviously, they comprise a significant subsection of the American electorate. On the other hand, they have remained inactive and passive participants throughout time.

The 2004 election appeared to be the golden opportunity for youth political participation—there were organizations specifically devoted to mobilizing young voters and there were significant historical events which occurred at a pivotal time in young people’s experience. And yet nothing changed.

It would be easy to attribute the absence of a generation unit in response to the events of the 2000 Presidential Election and September 11, 2001 to an overall sense of apathy among young voters, I would argue that this is in fact not the case, however, as evidenced by the qualitative data. Apathy conveys a lack of participation coupled with a lack of interest. The individuals interviewed were not disinterested in politics; instead, they lacked the motivation or ability to actually work up their interests and experiences for social change.

For this reason, I would suggest that it is necessary to focus future research on the question: “If momentous social and historical influences combined with a transition in the life course is not enough to catalyze participation, what will?” In spite of the fact that there is insufficient evidence of a generation effect emerging, young voters have the potential for significant social and political change should they become a politically cohesive unit, and thus it is important to

continue the quest to uncover what influences can and will transform potential into activity.

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