GENERATIONS AND
GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS
A Quantification
of Mannheim's Analogy

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Mannheim (1952), in his classic essay "The Problem of Generations," developed an analogy between a generation and a social class as units in a social system. Since a generation, like a class, is an objective grouping of individuals inherent in the structure of society and, like a class, is a potential source of group consciousness leading to collective action, generational consciousness is analogous to class consciousness. It exists when individuals having a similar generational location think of themselves as members of that objective aggregate and perceive society as divided along the lines of generational interests. It is a subjective state of being which can be more or less prevalent in a society. Our intention is to explore the analogy between generational consciousness and other forms

of group consciousness empirically. Using identical proce-
dures to measure generational consciousness, class conscious-
ness, and racial consciousness, we will compare the extent of
these forms of group consciousness in a sample from a com-
munity in the United States.

VALUE DIFFERENCES VERSUS
GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS

Since the late 1960s, the terms *generation gap, generational
conflict,* and *generational consciousness* have appeared re-
peatedly in sociological writings. Many theoretically oriented
observers interpreted the youth movement and counterculture
as behavioral manifestations of a well-developed generational
consciousness among young adults in an era of rapid social
change. But researchers, from the late 1960s to the present,
have failed to examine the extent of generational conscious-
ness in American society. With few exceptions, all empirical
studies of the generation gap, while citing Mannheim's essay
on generational consciousness as an inspiration, have focused
simply on value differences between the younger and older
generations.

Two research designs have been used in the study of value
differences between generations. In one, attachments to a
variety of values are measured among independent samples of
younger and older respondents, and mean scores are compared
for the two generations (Flacks, 1971; Thurner et al., 1974).
In the other, parent-child dyads (and sometimes grandparent-
parent-child triads) are interviewed. In these studies, com-
parisons among generations within families, as well as aggre-
gate comparisons across generations, can be made. The
conclusion which has emerged from this type of study is that
(a) positive relationships do exist between the value orien-
tations of members of different generations within family
lineages, but (b) generations, as aggregates, do differ from one

another in mean scores on the various dimensions of value orientations (Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Bengtson, 1975; Acock and Bengtson, 1978).

This research provides interesting insights into the cultural dimensions of society, and, in this respect, we have no quarrel with it. However, while intergenerational value differences might provide the basis, or potential, for the development of generational consciousness, such differences by themselves do not indicate the presence of group consciousness. According to Mannheim's (1952: 291) formulation, both classes and generations aggregate individuals into common locations "in the social and historical process." This common location limits each generation and each class "to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action." Thus, inherent in society is the *potential* for the formation of interest groups along generational lines, as well as along class lines. However, like classes, generations do not always develop "consciousness." In any historical era, members of the same objective generation might or might not identify strongly with their generation and might or might not perceive society as divided along generational lines. Generational consciousness, therefore, involves much more than mere objective value differences among aggregates of individuals in different generational locations.

Only three studies represent attempts to measure generational consciousness rather than simply generational differences in values, and all three authors have challenged the "value differences" research as a valid indicator of a generation gap. For example, Lauer (1973: 229) argues: "Can we affirm a gap merely because we find generational differences in attitudes? Most people tolerate at least some diversity of attitudes among others. It would seem, therefore, presumptuous to posit a gap simply because we find generational differences in attitudes." However, while the three studies are motivated by good intentions, all fail to indicate the extent of generational consciousness in society.

Johnstone (1970) attempted to develop a measure of generational consciousness analogous to Leggett's (1968) measure of class consciousness. Unfortunately, all but one of the items in Johnstone's scale referred to student-administration conflict in universities (e.g., "Students who take over university buildings should be forced out by whatever means necessary "). At best, these questions are measuring *student* consciousness. The salient terms in the items do not refer to the relationship between younger and older generations in the larger society.

Kasschau et al. (1974) drew upon Morris and Murphy's (1966) paradigm for measuring group consciousness. Unlike Johnstone's study, the items did refer to general issues. However, while the authors report such figures as "well over 60% of each group [white collar youth and blue collar youth] report only low or medium levels of perceived conflict with older generations" (Kasschau et al., 1974: 81), the findings are difficult to evaluate. Do the 40% who perceive generational conflict to be high indicate a high or low level of generational consciousness in the sample? This question can be answered only in a comparative framework in which the extent of generational consciousness is examined to the extent of other forms of group consciousness. Had Kasschau et al. also measured class consciousness in their sample with analogous questionnaire items, they could have determined whether young people perceive a greater polarization along generational lines than along class lines.

Lauer (1973) used a sociometric-choice procedure for measuring generational consciousness, arguing that a "breakdown of communications" between generations would indicate the presence of generational consciousness. He presented a sample of 14- to 19-year-olds with a list of topics and asked them to identify the person with whom they would prefer to talk about each subject. Lauer then ascertained the ages of the respondents' choices. The results, however, are difficult to interpret for the same reason that the exact meaning of Kasschau's results is unclear. Lauer reports, for example, that the mean age differential between respondent and pre-

ferred communication partner ranged from nine years for the topic of sex to twenty years for the topic of career. But without some kind of comparison with other forms of group consciousness, the meaning of these numbers is ambiguous. Had Lauer also ascertained other characteristics of the preferred communication partner such as social class or race, the extent of breakdown in communications between generations could be compared to the extent of breakdown in communications along other dimensions.

In summary, none of the previous studies measures types of group consciousness other than generational consciousness, even though scales measuring the latter lack a conceptually meaningful zero point. The sample's average score on a measure of generational consciousness indicates very little unless it is compared with average scores on comparable measures of other types of group consciousness. Thus, the extent of generational consciousness must be examined relative to the extent of other forms of group consciousness. A second problem with all three previous studies is that the samples are restricted to young people. To be consistent with Mannheim's formulation, the extent of generational consciousness in both the older and younger generation should be examined. Generational consciousness is not necessarily restricted to young people. Our research design is intended to overcome both of these limitations of the previous research.

COMPONENTS OF GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS

To refine the concept of group consciousness, we examined the literature on class consciousness and also articles which attempted to extend the concept to groups other than classes (Dahrendorf, 1959; Morris and Murphy, 1966; Hurst, 1972; Pitts, 1974; Foner, 1975). Three distinct components emerge from this literature, although there is a lack of consensus concerning what to call them. We will use the term *group con-*

sciousness as a general term and call the three dimensions of group consciousness "group identification," "group affiliation," and "group politicization." Each of these, under various names, has a tradition in the study of stratification. We are not suggesting that the three dimensions form a Guttman-type scale of group consciousness or that they are necessarily correlated.

"Group identification" refers to the perception of discrete groups and the subsequent ability of individuals to place themselves in the group corresponding to their objective characteristics. Thirty years ago Centers (1949: 27) defined class identification as a sense of "belongingness" with others having the same objective location in the social structure. This definition has not been altered in subsequent research (Morris and Murphy, 1966; Hodge and Treiman, 1968; Guest, 1973). Recently, however, Vanneman and Pampel (1977) made a significant contribution to this literature by suggesting that the pattern of responses to a question about subjective class identification indicates the clarity of class boundaries in the population. To the extent that individuals having the same subjective identification share the same objective class characteristics, the class boundaries in a population are clearly defined. This strategy can be extended to compare the clarity of generational, class, and racial boundaries in the minds of individuals.

Several authors have argued that class boundaries, as described above, sometimes, but not always, are accompanied by other group characteristics (Rosenberg, 1953; Hodge and Treiman, 1968; Jackman and Jackman, 1973). One of these is "group politicization," which entails the perception of group-based political interests. Group politicization exists when individuals in a group believe that their life chances are affected by competition with each other groups over scarce resources, leading to the belief that political issues are conflicts between "us" and "them" (Dahrendorf, 1959; Sartori, 1969). Politicization, as we use the term, is what traditionally has been called

class consciousness in the stratification literature (Leggett, 1968; Logan, 1977). However, in our scheme, group politicization can be based on generation and race, as well as on class, and is only one dimension of the more general subjective phenomenon of group consciousness.

The final component, group affiliation, has received less attention in stratification research (Hollingshead, 1952; Lauer, 1973; Laumann and Senter, 1976). As a dimension of group consciousness (as distinct from group-based behavior), group affiliation refers to perceptions and beliefs concerning social interaction within and across group boundaries. It does not refer to actual patterns of interaction. Individuals might tend to interact with others having objective characteristics similar to their own, not because they consider intragroup interaction preferable but because structural constraints place limits on who can interact with whom (Laumann and Senter, 1976: 1308). Group affiliation, therefore, refers to the belief that people prefer "their own kind" as partners in social interaction. Generational affiliation exists to the extent that members of a society believe that people prefer interaction with members of their own generation and believe that interaction across generational boundaries is uncomfortable and unpleasant.

HYPOTHESES

In his assessment of social differentiation from a cross-cultural perspective, van den Berghe (1973) argues that the relative salience of an age-based cleavage in various societies is inversely related to the number of "competing" sources of differentiation. He suggests that, in an industrial society such as the United States, age should prove a relatively unimportant source of group consciousness because of the significance which is attached to class, racial/ethnic, religious, and other dimensions of group formation. However, three recent studies consider generations in the same context as classes and races

(although they do not explicitly consider the concept of group consciousness). Contrary to van den Berghe's argument, these findings suggest the tentative hypothesis that generational consciousness might be as prevalent as class consciousness in the United States.

Verbrugge (1977) has extended Laumann's (1966, 1973) research on the homogeneity principle in social interaction by considering several dimensions along which homogeneity might occur. While Laumann found that people tend to interact with others whose occupational status is similar to their own, Verbrugge reported a significant level of homogeneity along the additional dimensions of age, sex, marital status, education, and employment status. Although the data do not permit precise comparisons, homogeneity in friendships along the dimension of age seems just as prevalent as homogeneity along the other dimensions. To the extent that homogeneity occurs in Verbrugge's data because of the intentions of actors (rather than because of structural constraints), we might expect generational consciousness to be as prevalent as group consciousness along the socioeconomic dimension.

In a second somewhat relevant study, Kasschau (1977) interviewed blacks, Mexican-Americans, and Anglo-whites, measuring their perceptions of the extent of age and race discrimination in society. The author provided a rationale for predicting less perceived discrimination by age than by race, but the data did not support the prediction. Rather, all three racial groups thought age discrimination was as prevalent as racial discrimination. For the issue we are addressing, these findings imply that patterns of interaction might be based on a "consciousness of kind" along the age dimension to the same extent as along the racial dimension.

The third suggestive study in Klorman's (1978) analysis of data from the 1974 University of Michigan Center for Political Studies (CPS) election survey. Respondents were given a list of seventeen groups (e.g., big business, labor unions, blacks) and asked to indicate whether they thought each group had

"too little," "just about the right amount," or "too much" influence in "American life and politics." For the entire sample the group "older people" received the second lowest score, indicating that a relatively large proportion of the sample thought this group had too little influence. This finding is consistent with the notion that a large segment of the population believes that a conflict of generational interests is manifest in the political arena.

On the basis of these three marginally relevant studies, therefore, we suspect that generational consciousness, relative to class and racial consciousness, might be more prevalent than van den Berghe has suggested.

DATA AND METHODS

Data were gathered as part of an annual survey in Minneapolis and its surrounding suburbs. The sample was stratified according to the proportion of the population eighteen years old and older residing in the central city and suburbs (46% from the central city and 54% from the suburbs) and was drawn randomly from lists of names in the Polk Minneapolis City Directory and the Polk Minneapolis Suburban Directory. From the list of 250 names which were selected, 221 interviews were completed (a response rate of approximately 85%) by trained interviewers.

Because the population from which the sample was drawn is nearly all white (96.8%), we are unable to perform certain segments of the ideal analysis. With so few blacks in the sample (2.4%), it is impossible to measure the clarity of racial boundaries (i.e., group identification) with the procedure we are using. Thus, we can only examine the relative clarity of generational and class boundaries. Our procedures for measuring group affiliation and group politicization enable us to compare the extent of racial, generational, and class consciousness along these two dimensions, but only with data from whites since our sample is nearly all white.

We measured group identification using the standard procedure for measuring subjective class identification. For class, respondents were asked: "Most people tend to consider themselves as members of either the working class or the middle class. Which do you consider yourself a member of?" Those respondents who said "don't know" or refused were asked a second question: "If you had to call yourself a member of either the working class or middle class, which would you say?" On the basis of these two questions, 41.5% of the sample classified themselves as working class and 58.5% as middle class. Generational identification was measured with exactly the same format, substituting "younger generation or older generation" for "working class or middle class." On the basis of the two questions, 45.1% classified themselves as members of the younger generation and 54.9% as members of the older generation. Responses to these items, plus objective measures of socioeconomic status and age, will be used to judge the relative clarity of class and generational boundaries.

Since group affiliation refers to perceptions concerning social interaction within and across group boundaries, we developed a question referring to each of these two forms of interaction. Each of the two questions listed below was asked three times—once for each of the three types of groups (i.e., class, generation, and race):

Do you think that members of the same generation/class/race
   a. usually stick together.
   b. sometimes stick together.
   c. hardly ever stick together.

Do you think that when members of different generations/classes/races mix with one another they
   a. usually get along well.
   b. sometimes get along well.
   c. hardly ever get along well.

To judge the relative extent of group affiliation along the three dimensions of stratification, we can simply compare the

marginal distributions for each question phrased in terms of generation, class, and race.

A similar procedure was used to determine the relative extent of group politicization along the three dimensions. Each question listed below was asked in terms of each of the three types of groups.

> Which of the following statements best describes the policies and programs of the Republican party:
>   a. They usually help the younger generation/working class/ blacks more than the older generation/middle class/whites.
>   b. They usually help the older generation/middle class/whites more than the younger generation/working class/blacks.
>   c. They affect both generations/classes/races about equally.
>
> Which of the following statements best describes the policies and programs of the Democratic party:
>   (The response options are identical to those in the question above.)
>
> Do you think that government policies which help one of the two generations/classes/races
>   a. are usually not so good for the other.
>   b. are sometimes not so good for the other.
>   c. have no effect on the other.
>   d. affect both about equally.

Again, a comparison of marginal distributions will indicate the extent of generational politicization relative to class and racial politicization.

FINDINGS

### GROUP IDENTIFICATION AND
THE CLARITY OF GROUP BOUNDARIES

Vanneman and Pampel (1977) have developed a simple technique for examining the clarity of class boundaries from survey data. A graph can be constructed with some objective

indicator of socioeconomic status along the horizontal axis and the percent of respondents identifying themselves as belonging to the working class along the vertical axis. If class boundaries are unclear, then the percent identifying themselves as members of that class should decrease at a fairly constant rate with increasing levels of objectively measured status. On the other hand, if class boundaries are clearly defined, the percent identifying themselves as members of the working class should remain constant and high up to a certain level of objective status. The same procedure can be used to judge the clarity of generational boundaries. Age can be plotted along the horizontal axis and the percent identifying themselves as members of the younger generation along the vertical axis.

The results of this procedure are presented in Figure 1A (for class boundaries) and Figure 1B (for generational boundaries). Consistent with Vanneman and Pampel's analysis, we find that the percent identifying themselves as working class drops suddenly between "no college" and "some college."[1] The importance of college per se, rather than additional years of education, is captured by the finding that there is no drop between high school completion (12 years) and vocational education (but no college) beyond high school. In terms of subjective class identification, people with vocational education are closer to high school graduates than to people with some college.

However, the graph does contain two apparent deviations from the model of clearly boundaried groups. First, there is a steady decrease in the percent identifying themselves as working class along the very low end of the educational attainment scale, while the bounded groups model implies a line parallel to the horizontal axis at this segment of the scale. These cases represent mainly older persons for whom, we suspect, "low" educational attainment was less a barrier to status attainment than it currently is for younger people. Another important deviation occurs between "some college"

A. Identification With the Working Class by Years of Education

Percent
Identifying
Themselves
As Working
Class

Years of Education
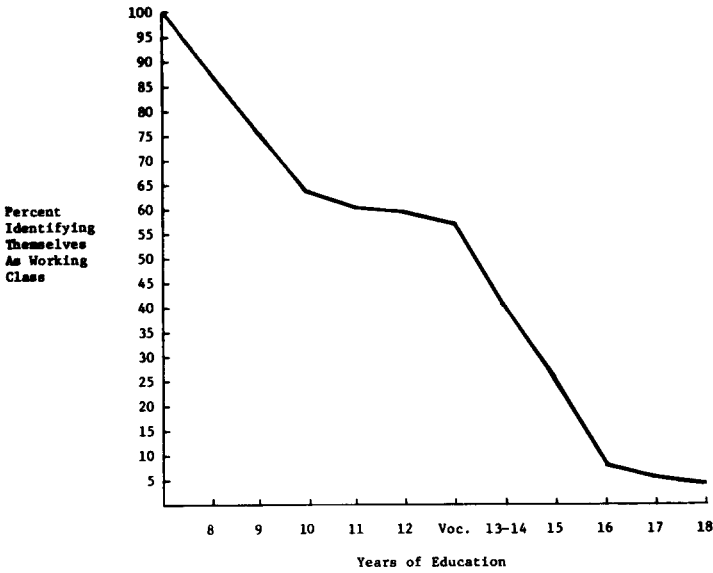
B. Identification With the Younger Generation by Chronological Age

Percent
Identifying
Themselves
As Younger
Generation

Chronological Age
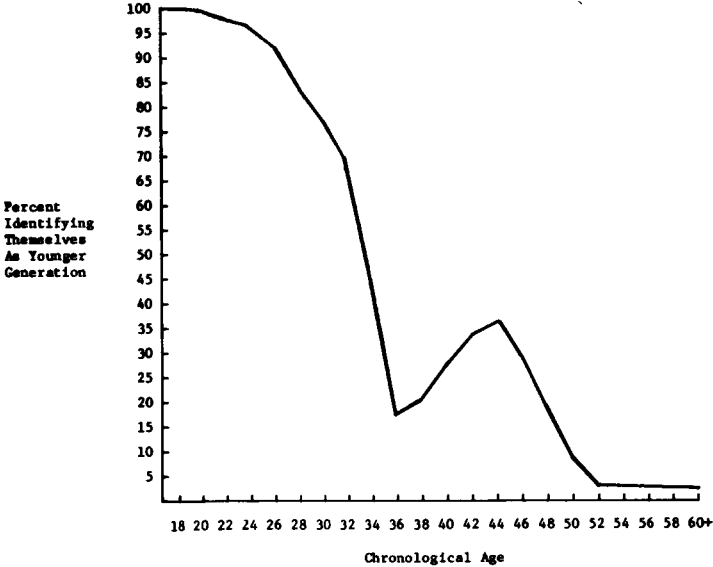
a. The percent of subjective identifiers for each level of an objective measure is a sliding average based on the number of cases falling one level above and below the point being graphed.

Figure 1: Subjective Group Identification Across Levels of an Objective Group Characteristic[a]

(13-14) years and completion of college (16 years). The line does not become parallel to the horizontal axis at the point "some college" as it would if class boundaries were clearly defined. Rather, the line slopes downward at a steady rate between "some college" and "completion of college" and only then becomes relatively flat. These deviations suggest some ambiguity in class boundaries among our respondents.

The graph for generational boundaries (Figure 1B) contains a much steeper drop than the graph for class boundaries. In the 15-year span between the ages of 18 and 32, there is a decrease in the percent identifying themselves as younger generation from 100% to 75%. But in the five years between the ages of 32 and 36, the decrease is from 75% to 15%. We could interpret this as evidence that generational boundaries are clearly defined were it not for the unexpected *increase* after age 36 in the percent identifying themselves as younger generation. This increase continues to a peak of 40% in the mid-40s, and then the percentage declines. After age 50, no one in the sample identifies with the younger generation.

There is a plausible explanation in the aging literature for this admittedly unexpected finding. Brim (1976: 169-173) describes the "resurgence of youthful aspirations" as part of a middle-age life crisis, which a significant proportion of people experience. According to Brim, endocrinal changes, a gap between aspirations and actual achievement, a reevaluation of what is being sacrificed to maintain occupational and familial roles, and/or a growing awareness of the pending confrontation with death contribute to this phenomenon. Whether this pattern is part of the general process of aging (as Brim suggests) or is unique to this particular cohort in this age category is a question we cannot answer with our data (Riley, 1973; Cutler and Bengtson, 1974).

In either case, the current younger generation, defined in terms of subjective self-identification, comprises two categories of persons: nearly everyone 30 or younger, and a large proportion of persons in their early 40s. We must conclude

that there is some ambiguity in both class and generational boundaries, although the source of ambiguity differs. We turn now to a consideration of the relative levels of group affiliation and group politicization within these somewhat ill-defined boundaries.

GROUP AFFILIATION

Table 1 contains a summary of responses to items designed to measure the group affiliation dimension of group consciousness. Absolute levels of generational, class, and racial affiliation appear fairly substantial, although generational and class affiliation are less extensive than racial affiliation. The distribution of responses to the first item shows that about half the respondents say that persons of the same generation and persons of the same class "usually stick together" (57.1% for class and 52.4% for generation). Three-fourths of the respondents (74.5%) perceive this to be so for persons of the same race. The slight difference between levels of class and generational affiliation is not statistically significant. Thus, for this item at least, generational affiliation is as prevalent as class affiliation and less prevalent than racial affiliation.

The second item is intended to tap beliefs concerning the presence of intergroup antagonism when people do interact across group boundaries. Fewer people perceive intergroup antagonisms between generations than between either classes or races. Only one-fourth of the respondents say that members of different races (22.9%) or of different classes (27.8%) who interact with one another "usually get along well," whereas about half (49.0%) think members of different generations usually get along well when they interact with one another.

Also in Table 1 we have examined the responses of the younger and older respondents separately. As noted earlier, previous studies have not attempted to measure generational consciousness among older persons. For both items presented in Table 1, those respondents identifying themselves as mem-

TABLE 1
Generational, Class, and Racial Affiliation
by Generational Identification

Members of the same (generation) (class) (race). . .

	usually stick together.[a]			Comparisons[b]		
Generational Identification	(generation)	(class)	(race)	g/r	g/c	c/r
Total	52.4%	57.1%	74.5%	19.13*	.52	12.73*
Younger[c]	53.8%	63.1%	81.1%	32.50*	3.13	15.21*
Older	50.0%	51.2%	68.3%	12.59*	.00	10.53*

When members of different (generations) (classes) (races) mix with one another, they. . .

	usually get along well.[a]			Comparisons		
Generational Identification	(generation)	(class)	(race)	g/r	g/c	c/r
Total	49.0%	27.8%	22.9%	26.29*	16.92*	.89
Younger	47.1%	26.6%	22.7%	24.54*	16.28*	.51
Older	50.1%	29.2%	23.2%	29.24*	17.50*	1.04

*p $<$ .05

a. Remaining percentage for each group adding to 100% fall into the categories **sometimes** and **hardly ever** "stick together" or "get along well."

b. Test of significance is Ryan's (1960) multiple comparison of proportions. For each set of comparisons, the tabled value of χ^2 is 5.76 for the comparison between the two most extreme proportions and 4.54 for the two remaining comparisons in the set.

c. Younger generation, n = 106; older generation, n = 84.

bers of the younger generation report greater degrees of generational affiliation (as well as class and racial affiliation) than do those classifying themselves as older generation. However, the differences are not large, and the basic patterns reported above for the total sample also characterize the older and younger subsamples as indicated by the breakdown in Table 1.

GROUP POLITICIZATION

The extent of group politicization is indicated by two types of questions. The first set reveals whether respondents believe that the policies and programs of the Republican and Demo-

cratic parties are aimed at the interest of a specific generation, class, or racial group, or believe that party policies crosscut group boundaries. The second set attempts to determine whether respondents view national politics as a zero-sum struggle in which one group's gain is another group's loss. The results are summarized in Table 2.

People believe that the major political parties are more oriented toward class interests than toward generational interests. The majority of respondents believe the policies of the Republican party (57.6%) and of the Democratic party (68.8%) have uniform consequences for the younger and older generations. Fewer respondents, however, believe that the policies of either the Democrats (26.5%) or the Republican (37.1%) party have similar consequences for both classes.

The racial versus generational comparison is not consistent for the two parties. More respondents believe that the Republican party has more nearly uniform consequences for both generations than for both races (57.6% versus 42.3%), whereas more believe that the Democratic party's policies have similar effects on both races and on both generations (75.2% versus 68.8%).

A slightly larger percentage of respondents believe that national politics is a zero-sum struggle between classes and between races more than between generations. Nevertheless, 61.1% of the respondents believe that government policies which help one of the two generations "usually or sometimes are not good for the other." This figure is not much lower than' the 74.0% and 72.2% who hold this belief in terms of class and racial groups.

In Table 2 the responses to the group politicization questions are reported separately for the younger and older subsamples as well as for the total sample. In general, the patterns reported above for the whole sample are reflected in the responses of the two subsamples. However, as in the responses to the group affiliation items, members of the younger generation display slightly more group politicization than members of the older generation. For example, whereas 55.6% of the members of the

TABLE 2
Generational, Class, and Racial Politicization
by Generational Identification

Policies and programs of the Republican party usually help. . .

Generational Identification	both or neither[a]			Comparisons[b]		
	generation(s)	*class(es)*	*race(s)*	g/c	g/r	c/r
Total	57.6%	26.5%	42.3%	36.26*	8.25*	9.75*
Younger	51.0%	24.5%	38.5%	26.54*	8.63*	7.61*
Older	67.5%	30.7%	47.4%	52.34*	15.56*	9.94*

Policies and programs of the Democratic party usually help. . .[b]

Total	68.8%	37.1%	75.2%	36.78*	1.30	52.36*
Younger	64.4%	43.4%	74.6%	16.12*	4.00	37.20*
Older	74.0%	32.1%	76.6%	65.95*	.23	72.88*

Government policies which help one of the two (generations) (classes) (races). . .

Generational Identification	usually or sometimes are not good for the other[c]			Comparisons		
	(generation)	*(class)*	*(race)*	g/c	g/r	c/r
Total	61.1%	74.0%	72.2%	6.45*	4.73*	.06
Younger	65.1%	81.0%	77.9%	11.27*	6.84*	.40
Older	55.6%	66.7%	65.0%	4.42	3.17	.05

*p < .05 (see Table 1, note b).

a. Total sample, younger and older generation percentages for other generational categories are: **younger more than older generation** (3.2%, 2.8, 4.0), **older more than younger generation** (39.2%, 46.2, 28.5); for class: **working more than middle class** (4.2%, 4.7, 2.9), **middle more than working class** (69.3%, 70.8, 65.4); for race: **blacks more than whites** (3.3%, 0.0, 7.9), **whites more than blacks** (54.4%, 61.5, 44.7).

b. Percentages for other generational categories are: **younger more than older generation** (18.8%, 25.0, 11.7), **older more than younger generation** (12.4%, 10.6, 14.3); for class: **working more than middle class** (50.0%, 44.3, 53.8), **middle more than working class** (12.9%, 12.3, 14.1); for race: **blacks more than whites** (6.6%, 4.8, 9.1), **whites more than blacks** (18.8%, 22.1, 14.3).

c. Remaining percentages for each group adding to 100% fall into the category **affect both equally or do not affect the other (generation) (class) (race)**.

older generation believe that government policies which help one of the two generations "usually or sometimes are not good for the other," 65.1% of the members of the younger generation hold this belief.

CONCLUSION

Although we would not argue that a generational cleavage is the most salient cleavage in American society, we believe our data reveal a sufficiently high level of generational consciousness to justify further research on the topic. In our sample, generational boundaries are as clearly defined as class boundaries, and the belief that people prefer to interact with members of their own generation is nearly as prevalent as the belief that people prefer to interact with members of their own class. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of our respondents feel that legislation which benefits one generation often does so at the expense of the other.

Previous researchers interested in the subjective aspect of stratification have examined the determinants and consequences of variation in the level of class consciousness among individuals. A similar research strategy could be employed in the study of generational consciousness. One important question is the extent to which the level of generational consciousness varies across socioeconomic and racial categories in the population. Is it primarily a characteristic of middle and upper class whites who hold the privileged positions on other dimensions of stratification, or is it more widespread throughout all sectors of the population? The study by Kasschau (1977) concerning perceived discrimination by race and age suggests that generational consciousness probably is not restricted to whites. Our own data suggest it is not restricted to a particular age group. Although we did not report the results in this article, we have examined the level of generational consciousness separately for the two categories of subjective class identification. The data indicate a slight tendency for middle-class respondents to display a higher level of generational affiliation and politicization than working class respondents. In terms of the consequences of generational consciousness, an obvious question is whether the age homogeneity in friendships observed by Verbrugge (1977) results from structural constraints or from the conscious intentions of actors.

Future research ought to consider the possibility that in the minds of the public there are more than two generations. In our research, we forced people to respond in terms of "younger and older" generations, but perhaps this is not the set of categories people use in their everyday lives. In our analysis of generational boundaries, we found that an unexpectedly large proportion of respondents in their late 30s and early 40s considered themselves members of the younger generation. Perhaps these people actually think in terms of three generations —young, middle and old. When confronted with a forced choice between younger and older, they randomly pick one. Furthermore, it is possible that at different age levels people perceive a different number of generations. Issues such as these should be raised in the study of class consciousness as well as generational consciousness and provide opportunities for sociologists interested in studying stratification from an ethnomethodological perspective (see, as an example, Wieder and Zimmerman, 1974).

A final, more global issue concerns Mannheim's argument that the level of generational consciousness in a particular society at a particular point in time is a function of unique historical events, especially those which produce a rapid rate of social change. An alternative, ahistorical perspective is that a certain level of generational consciousness is inherent in a particular social and economic system. In a society with a relatively open class system, young people tend to enter the economy in the positions having relatively low status, income, and authority. People move upward as they grow older. In such a social system there may always be some latent conflict of generational interests to serve as the basis for generational consciousness.

NOTE

1. Vanneman and Pampel's (1977: 430) data point to the importance of "no college" versus "some college" as the boundary separating those who subjectively identify themselves as working class from those who subjectively identify themselves as middle class. Since our hypothesis is that generational boundaries are as clearly defined as class boundaries, we are introducing a conservative bias by choosing education, rather than income or occupational prestige, as the variable for the horizontal axis. Furthermore, many younger respondents in our sample can reasonably expect rather large increases in income and occupational prestige as they grow older and move upward through the occupational structure. We suspect that such people would base their subjective class identification on their future expected income and occupational prestige rather than on their current levels of these variables. However, for most people, educational attainment (especially the distinction between "no college" and "some college," which Vanneman and Pampel found to be crucial) will remain relatively fixed at its current level throughout the person's life-cycle.

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