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Age and History: Generations and Sociopolitical Change

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NOTE: At the time of publication, the author was affiliated with Columbia University. Currently January 2008, he is a faculty member of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Age and History: Generations and Sociopolitical Change

Abstract

It is the possibility of change in the human condition that underlies both the practice and the study of politics. History is chronicled by deviations from the past. Political philosophies have come into existence, individuals have risen to power, governments have toppled, because of the promise of change or the fear of it. Even a preoccupation with stability, which characterizes many political ideologies, governments, and traditions of research, is driven by the specter of potential change.

Politics is the art/science of controlling changes in the human condition. Not surprisingly, therefore, institutions, processes, periods, and moments of real or potential change dominate its study. It is at points of discontinuity, such as the outbreak of war or the peaceful transfer of power among competing elites, that visions of Utopia and Armageddon flick momentarily into our collective mind's eye. Even periodic change that occurs under the constraints of carefully developed rituals, traditions, and institutions contains the possibility of major disjunctures from the past and so also evokes the hopes and fears associated with the unknown. Of course, such controlled change is usually much less traumatic for the political system. Indeed, one of the major functions of political institutions is to cope with the inevitability of change in a way that maximizes its predictability. In the United States, for example, the holding of periodic, staggered elections, the existence of a two-party system, the separation of powers, and so on, all work to channel political change along a predictable, moderate course (Burnham 1970; Ginsberg 1982).

It is in this context of continuity and change that the importance of generations to the study of politics is best understood. There is no more fundamental transfer of power, and therefore no more *fundamental* potential for change, than that which occurs between generations. This is so because, unlike any other type of change, it is *inevitable*, it is *all-inclusive*, and it is *untested*.

Comments

NOTE: At the time of publication, the author was affiliated with Columbia University. Currently January 2008, he is a faculty member of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

POLITICAL
LEARNING
in
ADULTHOOD

A Sourcebook of Theory
and Research

Edited by
Roberta S. Sigel

The University of Chicago Press
Chicago and London

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One
Age and History: Generations and
Sociopolitical Change
MICHAEL X. DELLI CARPINI

All is flux, nothing stays still. . . . Nothing endures but change.
Heraclitus

Introduction

It is the possibility of change in the human condition that underlies both the practice and the study of politics. History is chronicled by deviations from the past. Political philosophies have come into existence, individuals have risen to power, governments have toppled, because of the promise of change or the fear of it. Even a preoccupation with stability, which characterizes many political ideologies, governments, and traditions of research, is driven by the specter of potential change.

Politics is the art/science of controlling changes in the human condition. Not surprisingly, therefore, institutions, processes, periods, and moments of real or potential change dominate its study. It is at points of discontinuity, such as the outbreak of war or the peaceful transfer of power among competing elites, that visions of Utopia and Armageddon flick momentarily into our collective mind's eye. Even periodic change that occurs under the constraints of carefully developed rituals, traditions, and institutions contains the possibility of major disjunctures from the past and so also evokes the hopes and fears associated with the unknown. Of course, such controlled change is usually much less traumatic for the political system. Indeed, one of the major functions of political institutions is to cope with the inevitability of change in a way that maximizes its predictability. In the United States, for example, the holding of periodic, staggered elections, the existence of a two-party system, the separation of powers, and so on, all work to channel political change along a predictable, moderate course (Burnham 1970; Ginsberg 1982).

It is in this context of continuity and change that the importance of generations to the study of politics is best understood. There is no more fundamental transfer of power, and therefore no more fundamental *potential* for change, than that which occurs between generations. This is so because, unlike any other type of change, it is *inevitable*, it is *all-inclusive*, and it is *untested*.

Generational change is inevitable. As noted by Ferrari (1874), approximately every thirty years the reigns of government are handed to a completely new set of leaders, the unavoidable result of our mortality (cited in Braungart and Braungart 1984; Marias 1970). Generational replacement is all-inclusive as well. That is, every aspect of society and every individual within that society is affected by it. The collected cultural, social, economic, and political systems of humanity are left to the care of each new generation. Even in the most affluent modern societies, the cycle of birth and death means that entire populations are replaced every century. Finally, in addition to being inevitable and inclusive, generational replacement involves the filling of societal roles by individuals who are, by definition, untested in those roles. If "all the world's a stage," every thirty years or so the actors are replaced not by seasoned veterans but by their understudies. In the light of personnel replacement of this magnitude, the transfer of power that occurs in elections, or through assassinations, or even in revolutions, pales. This generational process cuts across all eras and all types of political systems. From monarchies to democracies, no type of system is free from this inevitable changing of the guard.

Despite the magnitude of the physical reality of generational replacement, however, generationally inspired sociopolitical changes are more the exception than the rule. An analogy to this change in the individuals who make up a society is the changing physiology of the human body. Over time the cells that make up an individual die and are replaced by new ones. Over the course of an individual's life, almost all of the cells of the body are replaced several times. In terms of the *physical* makeup of the person, it is not inaccurate to say that the individual standing before you at age fifty is not the same person who stood before you at age thirty. And yet to argue that these are different persons in the same sense that you and I are different people is to miss something important. In spite of the (almost) total replacement of individual cells, much has not changed. Each new cell is not free to take on an entirely new function but instead takes on the responsibility of the particular cell it replaces. Groups of cells combine in ways that vary only imperceptibly from those they have replaced. Hands do not need to relearn how to tie a shoe, feet and legs do not relearn how to walk. One's personality survives the physical metamorphoses, memories and experiences intact.

A person maintains individuality in spite of such physical changes because one's personal genetic coding orchestrates these changes down to the most minute detail, and because the cells of the brain, in which reside the sum of what one has learned about oneself and about the world, are not periodically replaced. The result is a life span that, despite physical changes of growth and ultimately of decay, allows for the cumulation and the synthesis of experiences. Without this continuity each new moment would be as if the first.

The process of continuity and change in the human body is analogous to generational replacement in the body politic. With the passage of time, individuals die and are replaced by new ones. Eventually an entire generation of people is replaced. The new generation does not enter the system as it pleases but is molded into preestablished roles, classes, and the like. In addition, the experiences of prior generations are not completely lost but are transmitted to the new generation. Of course the body politic does not undergo this process of replacement without some changes, but the actual change relative to the potential change is usually quite small.

To carry the analogy a bit further, socialization is the societal equivalent of genetic coding, and political institutions are equivalent to the human brain. That is, members of a new generation do not develop their values, opinions, and behaviors independently of the generation they are replacing, but instead learn them from that generation. This learning of what values to hold, as well as how and when to express them, is at the heart of the political socialization literature and places the study of generations firmly within that school (Easton and Dennis 1969). Institutions such as the family, schools, the media, and the workplace are the agents of this socialization process (Dawson et al. 1977; Dennis 1973). In that they serve as both the repositories of the cumulative values of prior generations and the transmitters of those values to future generations, their role is analogous to that of the human brain.

There are, of course, limits to the analogy with the human body. Unlike genetic coding, socialization, even in the most controlled of societies, is a very imperfect process. The political socialization literature establishes quite clearly that while the transmission of values, opinions, and behaviors through socializing agents does occur, it is a complex, interactive process that seldom results in the exact replication of specific orientations from sender to receiver (Chaffee et al. 1970; Dawson et al. 1977; Elden 1981; Jennings and Niemi 1974, 1981; Klapper 1960; Langton and Jennings 1968). These agents only partially influence the orientations of new generations. In addition, because the social, economic, political, and cultural environment is extremely changeable, new generations are often socialized under unique circumstances that are not controlled by any single agent. Finally, the pluralistic nature of most modern societies means that different socializing agents often send different, competing messages. It is in this inability of society to control all the relevant aspects of the socializing environment, and in the resultant inability to guarantee its own replication, that the potential for generational change resides. In fact, the biggest distinction between the study of political socialization in general and the particular study of generations is that the former emphasizes *continuity* in attitudes, opinions, and behaviors between socializer and socialized while the latter focuses on *discontinuity*. Generations play a key role in the interpretation of certain historical periods (Europe in the first half of

the nineteenth century and again in the early twentieth century; the 1930s in those countries hit by the Great Depression; and the 1960s on a global scale) precisely because they were times of conflict between generations (Braungart 1982, 1984; Braungart and Braungart 1984). In many ways, the study of political generations becomes important when the process of political socialization fails.

Generational Replacement and Rates of Political Change

To study generational politics is to study mass political change. The concept of mass political change, however, can refer to a variety of occurrences. In the history of the United States, one need only consider the revolt from England and the attempted revolt of the South from the North, the sudden changes in voting patterns that marked the 1890s or the 1930s, or the gradual decline in partisan support in the twentieth century to see the range this concept includes. While there are many dimensions along which mass political change can be distinguished, an important one for the study of generations is the rate at which it takes place. One of the first students of American politics to emphasize rates of political change was V. O. Key, Jr. In 1955 Key wrote his seminal piece on critical change in U.S. politics. In it he noted the tendency in the electorate for sudden, radical shifts in support for competing political elites. Four years later he published a second article emphasizing gradual demographic change and its incremental impact on mass opinions and behaviors. While Key was focusing on electoral politics in the United States exclusively, his basic distinction between episodic and incremental change is applicable to the general study of mass opinions and behaviors.

Perhaps the best example of research on dramatic alterations in the established opinions and behaviors of a population is the work on critical elections (Key 1955; Sundquist 1973; Burnham 1965, 1970). These studies concentrate on brief, intense periods during which fundamental shifts in mass support for particular elites and/or agendas take place. Such shifts are triggered by new issues that challenge established coalitions in both the mass population and among political elites. Often a particularly intense event (such as a war or a depression) serves as the catalyst for the emergence of new political coalitions, agendas, and opinions. Realignment is the exception that defines the rule. That is, they are occasional adjustments to the political system that are distinct from more normal patterns and that ultimately define those patterns.

At the other end of the spectrum is the study of evolutionary change in opinions and behaviors. Such change is often more difficult to detect, especially over short periods of time. It results not from sudden reactions to brief periods of intense politics but from gradual economic, social, and political

development. The work of Nie, Verba, and Petrocik (1979) or Inglehart (1977) exemplifies research of this genre, though much of Burnham's work could be placed here as well.

While distinguishing between episodic and evolutionary political change is a useful technique for studying mass politics, one must not lose sight of the links between the two kinds of change. In particular, these extreme types of political change are interconnected in two ways. First, incremental change is the condition that exists between periods of more dramatic, intense activity. That is, rather than conceptualizing the normal pattern within political periods as one of stasis, it is more accurate to characterize it as a period of gradual change, with the rate and nature of the shift determined by the social, economic, and political parameters set during the more dramatic periods of upheaval.

Second, and perhaps more important, the nature of critical change is determined in part by the evolutionary shifts in mass politics that preceded it. While issues and events no doubt trigger such change, the reaction to those issues and events (indeed sometimes their very occurrence) can only be understood in light of the more subtle movements that occurred since the last such "eruption." In short, the political orientations of a population over time are best understood by considering not only episodic change and incremental change but also the interaction between the two. This interaction is particularly important in the study of generations.

Both episodic and incremental change involve the impact of issues, events, and social and economic developments on the pattern of mass political attitudes and behaviors. These patterns necessarily develop over time, however, and over time the individuals who make up a population also change, due largely to the natural cycles of birth and death. If, in addition to documenting change, one is interested in explaining its sources, a distinction must be made between aggregate change resulting from net shifts within individuals who already are part of the population, and that resulting from the replacement of one set of individuals with another.

Consider the concept of incremental change discussed above. If one finds a gradual loss of support for the Democratic party over a twenty-year span, that loss could be the result of either former supporters becoming slowly disenchanted with the party or older citizens dying and being replaced by a new generation that is less enamored of the Democratic party right from the start (or some combination of both processes). Determining the actual reason for the loss of support is critical both for understanding the nature of the change and for speculating on its long-term consequences.

For example, generational replacement was a critical component in the decline in partisanship in the 1960s and in the more recent rise in Republican party adherence among new voters, though the exact role of generational

change (relative to life cycle and period effects, which will be discussed later) is still being debated (Abramson 1979, 1983; Beck 1974; Claggett 1981; Converse 1976, 1979; Crittenden 1962; Cutler 1969–70; Delli Carpini 1986; Glenn 1972, 1977; Glenn and Hefner 1972; Knoke and Hout 1974; Nie et al. 1979; Shively 1979). The bulk of the evidence suggests that the choice of a particular party (or of independence) is determined primarily by generational forces and secondarily by period effects. There is also some evidence of slightly increased partisanship generally and Republican affiliation specifically with age. Finally, it appears that the strength of party attachments, once formed, also increases slightly with age.

While generational replacement may appear more relevant in discussions of evolutionary change, even dramatic shifts in opinions and behaviors can result from alterations in the makeup of the population. Andersen, for instance, finds that most of the rapid rise in support for the Democratic party in the 1930s can be attributed to first-time voters and not to disenchanted Republicans (1979a, 1979b). While many of these new voters were immigrants or long-time citizens who had forgone their franchise, a large percentage of them were members of a new generation that had slowly been changing the makeup of the eligible electorate.

The Biological, Psychological, and Historical Foundation of Generations

Distinguishing between change resulting from the succession of generations and change attributable to other sources is both methodologically and theoretically difficult. Methodological issues are considered later in this chapter. Here some theoretical issues are discussed. One of the most important and difficult issues in the study of generations is the distinction between an “age cohort” and a “generation.” While there is general agreement in the literature concerning this distinction (Braungart and Braungart 1984; Delli Carpini 1986; Jansen 1975; Marias 1968; Ortega y Gasset 1962), the influence of early writings that did not distinguish between biological and sociological definitions of generation can still be found in the literature.

While concern with generational conflict can be traced back four thousand years (Braungart and Braungart 1984; Lauer 1977), current thinking about generations is strongly influenced by two schools of thought: the nineteenth-century French positivists and the largely German romantic-historical movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Braungart and Braungart 1984; Jansen 1975). The positivists saw a strong link between the biological process of aging and the sociopolitical process of generational replacement. As a result, their study of generations (much like those of the ancient Greeks) emphasized stages of psychological and biological development through the individual life cycle. In addition, inasmuch as biological development was

inevitable, so too was the regular occurrence of generational replacement. The influence of generations on the sociopolitical process was, therefore, viewed as occurring with clock-like regularity. Ferrari (1874), for example, believed that approximately every thirty years a new generation left its mark on the political landscape (cited in Braungart and Braungart 1984; Marias 1968). There were, of course, areas of disagreement within this school of thought. The impact of generations over time was seen by some (such as Ferrari) as cyclical and by others as unilinear (Jansen 1975). In addition, some generations, for a variety of reasons, are more likely to have an impact on society than are others. The two unifying themes among the positivists, however, were the importance of life-cycle stages to generational development and a somewhat mechanistic view of generational replacement.

The legacy of the French positivists can be seen in much of the current research on generations. Research that emphasizes the link between generational development and individual biological and psychological development has at least some of its roots in this tradition (Beck 1974; Delli Carpini 1986; Inglehart 1977; Jennings and Niemi, 1974, 1981). In addition, the conceptualization of generations as systematic, equal-sized age cohorts is still found in much of the empirical research (Abramson 1975, 1979, 1983; Abramson and Inglehart 1986; Converse 1976; Cutler 1969–70, 1977; Kritzer 1983; Glenn 1977). This approach is especially prevalent in the research on partisanship discussed above, though it exists as well in the study of other topics, such as post-materialism (Abramson and Inglehart 1986), alienation (Cutler and Bengston 1974), and political efficacy and trust (Abramson 1983).

A somewhat different view of generations developed out of the romantic-historical movement of mid-nineteenth-century Germany. Though early thinkers on the subject were often influenced by *both* positivism and romantic-historicism (Dilthey 1976), in the latter school the concept of a biological age cohort was more clearly distinguished from that of a generation as a socio-political force. Not every age cohort necessarily develops into what Dilthey (1875) called a “social generation” (cited in Braungart and Braungart 1984; Esler 1982; Jansen 1975; Marias 1968; Schorske 1978). An age cohort is simply a group of individuals who all fall into the same age group at a particular time: all individuals who are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight in 1984 for example. Nothing is implied concerning the individuals who make up this cohort beyond the similarity in ages. A generation, in contrast, implies some shared experiences, some common bond that is “imprinted” on a particular age cohort within a population (Mannheim 1972).

The distinction between an age cohort and a generation is laden with implications. Most importantly and despite the etymology of the word (*genos*), it suggests that “generations are made, not born” (Braungart and Braungart 1984, p. 350). That is, an age cohort is a “potential generation” that may or

may not develop the common bond that transforms it into an "actual generation" (Mannheim 1972).

How is it possible that the inevitable process of biological lineage does not always translate into distinct sociological generations? The answer, for the romantic-historicists, lay in the deemphasis of psychological and biological stages of development and greater emphasis on sociological and historical forces. While the relative openness of youth to new ways of thinking was still considered important to generational development, it was the interaction of this tendency with intellectual (Ortega y Gasset 1974), social and historical (Dilthey 1976; Mannheim 1972), and political (Heberle 1951) forces that was the key (Braungart and Braungart 1984). The possibility of a new generation existed with the coming of age of each new cohort, but the actuality of a new generation, as well as the specific attitudes that developed and the specific ways in which those attitudes were expressed, depended on the external environment.

Contemporary research on generations and politics in part reflects a synthesis of the positivist and historical schools of thought, and in part reflects a continued debate on the relative merits of each approach. Generational personae develop out of the combination of social forces and personal life-cycle stages. This "imprinting" results from a process that lies somewhere between the socialization of an individual and the development of an entire political culture. On the one hand, unique personality development results from the interaction of the self, the socializing experiences of family, peers, school, the mass media, and other social agents, and the idiosyncratic experiences derived from one's daily routine. A national culture, on the other hand, is the summation of those personal traits, socializing experiences, and historical occurrences that are common to most individuals within a society. Generations result from a similar process, but one that acts on a particular age cohort within the population. That is, generations result from a "socialization" process that is less general than that for an entire culture, but more general than the unique experiences of particular individuals.

The logic behind the notion of generational development lies in the assumption that there is an interaction between age and experiences. This interaction occurs in two ways. First, there is a tendency for people within the same age cohort to be exposed to similar historical, social, cultural, and political experiences. The rise of mass education, the Vietnam War, the development of the home computer--these all affected the entire society of the United States in many ways, but they also provided unique experiences to different age cohorts. Certain age cohorts were the first to enjoy the opportunity to be gained from extensive public education; certain age cohorts were required to fight in Vietnam; certain age cohorts are growing up with computers as part of their daily routine. The sum of these common experiences,

opportunities, and situations creates a "Zeitgeist" or historical spirit that bonds the individuals who are a part of it (Mannheim 1972; Lambert 1972). Beck (1974), for example, makes a convincing argument that it was experiencing the Depression (and the parties' responses to it) as young voters that seared a Democratic partisanship on a generation of Americans in the 1930s. Later generations could not hold the same intensity of opinions precisely because they had not experienced the same events.

The second assumption underpinning the age-experience link is that different age groups perceive and react to the same experience in different ways because of the particular stage of personal and social development they have reached when the event occurs. That is, not only is each generation likely to have a unique set of experiences, but each is also likely to react to the same experiences in different ways. In this vein, Inglehart (1977, 1981, 1984) demonstrates that the economic and political security of the 1950s and 1960s had a unique and lasting impact on the youth of Western Europe and the United States. Those raised during that period are significantly more likely to demonstrate "post-materialist" tendencies: liberal political and social values and opinions, an internationalist rather than nationalist worldview, a rejection of traditional institutions and cultural norms, and a greater acceptance of system-challenging forms of political participation. This distinctiveness occurred despite the fact that older cohorts also experienced the changed economic and political climate of this era.

Generational "Imprinting" and Stages of Personal Development

While there is a general consensus on the role of both life cycle and socio-historical forces in the process of generational development, there are still several theoretical and conceptual gray areas. One of these areas is the age at which a generational profile is most likely to form. The rebelliousness and the relatively unformed identity that characterize adolescence make it an important stage. This assumption has its roots in both psychological theory (Freud 1964; Erikson 1968; Piaget 1967; Kohlberg 1968) and in sociological theory (Mannheim 1972; Heberle 1951; Eisenstadt 1956, 1963). Psychological theory provides explanations for the openness of youth to attitudes, opinions, and behaviors that differ from those of their elders (Feuer 1969). Stages of cognitive (Piaget), psychological (Freud; Erikson), and moral (Kohlberg) development make the *very* young unlikely to have acquired the basic stuff from which to develop a distinct identity, and make older individuals more resistant to such new developments. Sociological theory provides explanations for how this very individual process can, in certain circumstances, result in the development of social and political orientations that cut across an entire cohort.

Despite the conceptual emphasis on adolescence, there is some disagreement on the specific years involved in generational development. Often the years from the late teens to midtwenties, a period that straddles late adolescence and young adulthood, are assumed to be critical. For Mannheim (1972) and Rinalta (1968, 1979) the years from seventeen to twenty-five are crucial, for Lambert (1972) the years from eighteen to twenty-six, for Ortega (1961, 1962) fifteen to thirty, and for Heberle (1951) twenty to thirty. The logic behind these assumptions is clear enough. It is the age at which individuals first step out into the world as independent adults that is central to the formation of each generation's unique personality. However, while there is much that is attractive about this notion, for several reasons one should be cautious in accepting it as a general rule.

First, since the idea of a generational personality is based on the idea of individual personalities that share a common worldview, it seems overly simplistic to select one stage of early development as necessarily dominant in the process. Developmental theorists such as Erikson (1968), Maslow (1962), and, to an extent, even Freud (1964) would agree that early adulthood is an important stage, but certainly it is not the only, not the first, and not the last stage at which personality development takes place. To the extent that generational development is based upon the commonalities found in the development of individual personalities, then it too must be forming at various (and varying) stages. Certain writers on generational politics (Ortega, for example) are sensitive to this issue and discuss stages of generational development that extend beyond adolescence and young adulthood.

One might argue that while it is analogous to individual development, generational development is a distinct process that follows distinct patterns. In particular, since generational development involves the impact of larger social and historical forces, it stands to reason that the age at which one first steps out into the world as a somewhat independent adult is critical to that process. Even if, however, one did accept that the processes of individual and generational development are largely unrelated (something that runs counter to the literature on generations itself), it still does not follow that early adulthood must be the critical stage. One certainly would not want to argue that historical, cultural, economic, and social forces do not affect the development of individuals prior to their emergence from the family, or that such forces do not act in similar ways on similar age groups. In addition, the particular age at which one begins to outgrow childhood ties is culture- and time-bound. The point at which one first feels the grasp of the outside world was arguably well before the age of seventeen or eighteen in the England of the mid-1800s, in the United States of the 1930s, and, for very different reasons, the contemporary era in the United States.

A final objection to the often exclusive emphasis placed on adolescence

and young adulthood is the implication that, beyond this age, change that has a unique impact on an entire generation and which becomes part of that generation's personality is unlikely. Again, it is not the case that socialization at the individual level ends with young adulthood (Sigel and Hoskin 1977), nor that historical forces, among others, stop affecting a generation as a group. Why, then, should we assume that a generation's personality will not form its most distinctive characteristics later in life? In sum, while the prominence of adolescence and young adulthood in the study of generations is probably warranted, more attention needs to be paid to generational development that occurs before and after these stages of the life cycle (Delli Carpini 1984, 1986).

No matter what age (or ages) one considers critical, the definition of generations as the interaction of history and particular age cohorts can be difficult to apply. This definition is based on static notions of aging and history, although both are continuous processes. Consider that you have defined "The Depression generation" as individuals who were between seventeen and twenty-six during the Depression, and the "World War II generation" as individuals who were of that age during that war. Aside from the problem of establishing cutoff dates for periods such as a depression, you have the added problem that a good portion of one generation falls into the age group of the other. In other words, the idea of labeling particular generations and distinguishing them from others is really an artificial characterization of a dynamic process as a categorical one in order to gain a deeper understanding of the consequences of such processes. This problem is exacerbated by the notion put forth above that generations develop their personalities at various ages.

Does all this mean that generational analysis cannot or should not be done, that it is too fluid a process to allow characterizations beyond the most qualitative discussions? Probably not, though the issues raised above do affect the way such research is done. The key lies in returning to the underlying premise of a generation: the juncture of historical events and of age cohorts through time. Proper analysis should therefore start with the question: a generation in regard to what? If one is interested in studying the ramifications of the Depression, then one can talk about the Depression generation. One cannot necessarily distinguish it entirely from other generations that might, under other circumstances, be equally worthy of study. It is, in a sense, only a useful fiction.

Beyond this, however, the points raised above suggest that not only must a researcher choose from among alternative historical boundaries, he or she must consider the age cohort (or cohorts) most likely to be affected by the events selected. Tolley (1973), examining the effects of the Vietnam War (and the more general threat of nuclear war) on a new generation of Americans, focuses on children from seven to fourteen years old. Dalton (1977), in test-

ing. Inglehart's thesis of a post-materialist generation, emphasizes the years from eight to twelve. Whalen and Flacks (1984), interested in the generational effects of "the sixties," interviewed individuals who were in their late teens or early twenties during the 1967-71 period. And an examination of the generational impact of the Depression might very legitimately focus on cohorts that were long-time members of the work force—people between the ages of thirty and sixty for instance.

Generations, Consciousness, and Self-Consciousness

While there is agreement that generational development implies the existence of a common worldview among its members, it is unclear how conscious of this commonality such members need be. Again, an examination of the writings on generations reveals a core of agreement surrounded by differences in specific applications. Much of the more historical literature suggests that self-awareness of generational distinctions is a critical part of the process of generational development. (Braungart and Braungart 1984; Jansen 1975; Mannheim 1972; Marias 1968; Ortega y Gasset 1962). The importance of self-consciousness is in the link between it and generational-based action: "An age group is transformed into a generation when its members are aware of their uniqueness, feel a sense of solidarity, and join together to become an active force for social and political change" (Braungart and Braungart 1984, p. 350). The more quantitative and behavioral analyses of generations place less emphasis on the importance of self-awareness, instead using attitudinal and behavioral differences between generations as evidence of the process at work (Abramson 1975, 1979, 1983; Claggett 1981; Converse 1976; Delli Carpini 1986; Jennings and Niemi 1974; 1981; Markus 1983).

The study of self-awareness in the generational process can be informed by the literature on class, race, and sex consciousness (Alford 1963; Klein 1984; Poole and Zeigler 1984; Shingles 1981; Verba and Nie 1972). In that literature, the development of a group self-consciousness often changes the nature of the attitudinal and behavioral divisions between, for example, blacks and whites, but seldom is seen as the sine qua non for differences of any kind to exist. For example, distinctions in the social and political attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of different classes exist in the United States (Erikson et al. 1980) despite the remarkably low level of class consciousness. While the nature of the distinctions and the degree of conflict that results from them changes as class consciousness increases, one would be misguided to assume that without class consciousness there are no manifestations of class differences. In fact, the development of consciousness often decreases rather than increases differences between the groups involved. For example, differences in political participation between blacks and whites are reduced as black consciousness increases (Verba and Nie 1972; Shingles 1981).

Rather than seeing self-consciousness as a necessary element in generational formation, it is perhaps better to see it as an ingredient that affects the particular way in which a generation (or some portion of a generation) expresses its distinctiveness. Generations, paralleling workers, blacks, and women, might be more likely to become politically active or even disruptive when they develop a certain level of consciousness. Jennings (1987) and Jennings and Niemi (1981), for example, found that members of the sixties generation who were active in protests during that period (and so probably more conscious of their generational identity) were by far the most distinct on a host of political opinions and behaviors. They were also the most likely to maintain that distinctiveness over time.

Alternately, a generational consciousness might never develop, yet generational differences might be crucial to the emergence of race, class, or sex consciousness. Sigel and Reynolds (1979–80), for example, found significant differences between generations in their acceptance of feminism, with women in college during 1975–76 generally more supportive of feminist issue positions than their parents (who were college graduates of the same institution). In sum, generational self-awareness, like that based on other important divisions in society, does not cause the development of group divisions, but develops because such divisions already exist.

The Role of Social, Cultural, Historical, Economic, and Political Forces

As with the relationship between generations and consciousness, the relationship between generations and social, cultural, historical, economic, and political forces is well established but not always fully established. For example, while most theorists acknowledge that an interaction of historical and personal forces is at work, there is a good deal of disagreement concerning whether the mainspring of generations is social processes (Mannheim 1972; Dilthey 1875; Inglehart 1977, intellectual thought (Mentre, 1920; Ortega y Gasset, 1961, 1962), cultural developments (Dickstein 1977), political events (Heberle 1951; Eisenstadt 1956, 1963; Rinalta 1979), or psychological processes (Feuer, 1969). Rather than seeing it as an either-or situation, it is better to consider the generational process as dependent on all of these forces. The "personality" of any particular generation depends on the unique combination of forces that exists as the members of that generation mature. At different times and for different generations, the dominant force and therefore the dominant impact might come from very different parts of the complex environment in which we live. The difficulty in generalizing about this process is made clearest by noting the numerous discontinuities in it: While every thirty years or so the potential for a new generation arises, generations as social and political forces do not always materialize.

More important than attempting to rank-order various elements of human existence according to their impact on generational development is understanding the specific dynamics of how this process occurs. Critical in understanding these dynamics is distinguishing between the roles of social, cultural, political, historical, and economic environments as triggering mechanisms that *develop* a distinct generation, and the role of these environments in channeling the specific way in which generational distinctiveness is *expressed*.

Consider the role of these environments in the development of a generation. As the quote from Heraclitus, used to introduce this chapter, suggests, change is a given in the human condition. Change occurs at different rates, however, both across time and across the different environments within which humans interact. The rate of change and the locus of change are the keys to understanding generational development (Braungart 1980, 1982, 1984). It is in periods of rapid change and social discontinuity that generational development is most likely to occur (Delli Carpini 1986; Gurr 1970; Smelser 1963, 1968). This rapid change can be largely political, as with the rise of youth movements in Europe in the 1800s (Braungart and Braungart 1984) and in the years following World War I (Hamilton and Wright 1975; Heberle 1951; Loewenberg 1974). Economic change can also serve as the catalyst, as with the Depression generation of the 1930s (Draper 1967; Simon 1967) and, in a very different way, with the baby-boom generation of the 1960s (Delli Carpini 1986; Jones 1980). Even technological changes can be instrumental in generational development. Nowhere is this clearer than with the impact of technologies such as nuclear power and arms, and the electronic media on the development of the 1960s generation (Braungart and Braungart 1980; Delli Carpini 1986; Gitlin 1980).

Of course while one aspect of the environment might stand out as critical to the development of a new generation, most periods of great generational conflict have involved discontinuity that cuts across the social, political, economic, and cultural environments. It is for this reason that generational change is more common and extreme in modern societies, where change is rapid and all-inclusive (Bettelheim 1963; Braungart and Braungart 1984; Eisenstadt 1963; Mannheim 1972).

The social, political, economic, and other environments are also instrumental in determining the way in which generational distinctiveness is expressed. For example, while a political event (World War I) led to the development of a distinct generation in Europe, a sizable portion of that generation expressed its views by rejecting politics (Rinalta 1979). Similarly, while much of the distinctiveness of the 1960s generation was triggered by political events, one of the most enduring characteristics of that generation is its alienation and disengagement from politics (Gilmour and Lamb 1975; Delli Car-

pini 1986). Alternately, while the 1930s generation was formed out of the ashes of an economic collapse, the particular way in which its members expressed their views was very much shaped by the outbreak of World War II (away from domestic economic grievances and towards support for the war effort). In short, the social, economic, and political environments both *create* and *channel* new generations, and these are two distinct processes. It is in the latter process (channeling) that the role of culture and intellectual thought plays its most significant role, in that it is in this sphere that blueprints for change are most clearly presented (Mentre 1920; Ortega y Gasset 1961, 1962).

The Concept of Generational Units

The complexity of the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and intellectual environments not only complicates the way in which particular generations differ one from another, but also complicates the internal development of generations. That is, since generations result from the interaction of biopsychological development and historical circumstances, and since these forces come together in different ways for different segments of society, each generation is likely to comprise distinct generational units (Mannheim 1972) or subgenerations (Delli Carpini 1986). This is even more likely in modern societies where change is more rapid and populations more heterogeneous.

Subgenerational differences result from real distinctions in each unit's "identity" and from differences in the ability and/or opportunity to express that identity. For example, while the Depression of the 1920s and 1930s was felt by almost everyone who lived in North America and Europe, the specific nature of that impact varied from class to class and from country to country. Socioeconomic forces exerted distinct pressures on different groups (certain classes and certain countries were harder hit than others). In addition, classes and nationalities internalized similar pressures in different ways. In the United States individualism and the strong Protestant work ethic made self-blame a much more likely response than system-blame, especially among the working class. Since national and class cleavages cut across generations as well, this combination of disparate pressures and disparate reactions to similar pressures leads to differences in the profiles of specific generational units.

The way in which newly formed attitudes are *expressed* also varies across social cleavages such as class and region. This is so in part because the dynamics discussed above lead to the formation of different attitudes, but also because the same attitudes lead to different opinions and behaviors, depending upon the opportunities presented by the sociopolitical, economic, and intellectual environments (Bennett 1980). To continue with the Depression example, workers in the United States vented their dissatisfaction by turning

to the relatively moderate Democratic party, while in Europe the development of radical worker, socialist, and communist parties was more common. This was so in part because of differences in the political and economic institutions of the United States and Europe, which channeled behaviors in significantly different ways (Burnham 1970; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Piven and Cloward 1977).

To take a more recent example, much of the debate concerning the rise of a "new class" in advanced industrial societies (Brint 1984; Bruce-Briggs 1979) implicitly and explicitly centers on the development of a generational unit out of the interaction of class (white-collar professionals), age (under forty), and history (the economic and social environment of the 1960s and 1970s). Whether this new class is liberal or conservative depends in part on what attitudes were originally internalized, but also depends on how those attitudes are tapped in particular circumstances. Hence, the same "new class" can be seen as liberal or conservative, depending on the issue involved or the nature of the times (Bruce-Briggs 1979).

Generational units often develop out of more traditional cleavages in a society, such as sex, race, and class. For example, studies of the generation raised in the United States in the 1960s suggest that young women are more feminist and more liberal than older women (Sigel and Reynolds 1979–80). There is also some evidence to suggest that differences in political involvement, information, and participation between men and women is much less pronounced in the more recent generation, though the extent of these changes is debatable (Jennings and Niemi 1981). Differences between blacks and whites in levels of political involvement, efficacy, information, and participation also seem much less pronounced in "the sixties generation" than in preceding ones (Jennings and Niemi 1981), though racial differences do still exist. In addition, differences between blacks and whites on policy stands and partisan preference remain strong, and in some cases are even stronger within the new generation, with blacks generally more liberal and more Democratic (Jennings and Niemi 1981). Abramson (1975, 1983), however, does not attribute the recent increases in Democratic leanings among blacks to generational replacement, seeing it instead as a more general period effect.

Perhaps the greatest evidence for a generational unit is found among the college-educated within the sixties generation. The college-educated members of this generation stand out, both from older individuals of similar education and from their less-educated peers, as more politically and socially liberal, politically involved, and participatory (Brint 1984; Kasschau et al. 1974; Ladd 1984; Lipset and Ladd 1972; Roberts and Lang 1985). These differences persist over time as well. The extent to which this distinctiveness is specifically the result of the college experience; is the result of a person having been a student during a unique political period; or is some more subtle

self-selection process that is detectable before a person enters college is unclear (Jennings and Niemi 1981), though undoubtedly all of these processes are involved. Additionally, the differences may be as attributable to class as to educational differences (Brint 1984; Delli Carpini 1986; Kasschau et al. 1974; Simon et al. 1969).

Even more specific generational units can be identified, often by combining the larger categories of sex, race, education, and class. College-educated women (Sigel and Reynolds 1979–80), or “working women” (Andersen and Cook 1985; Blydenburgh and Sigel 1983), both much more prevalent in recent generations, are quite distinctive in their political involvement, their liberalism, and their opinions on “women’s issues.” Young urban professionals (yuppies) also display distinctive political opinions and behaviors (Markus and Jennings 1985), though whether this distinctiveness can be characterized as more liberal or more conservative, or whether it is even all that unique is a matter of some debate (Delli Carpini and Sigelman 1986). Recent examinations of “the new class” of professionals often include generational components, though again the extent to which this new class is more liberal, more conservative, or a little of both is very unclear (Brint 1984; Bruce-Briggs 1979).

Some generational units are based upon nontraditional cleavages that are unique to the historical circumstances involved in a particular generational process. Inglehart’s new breed of liberal—the post-materialist—is essentially a generational unit whose common bond is having reached the Maslovian stage of “self-actualization.” Evidence that activists or protestors of the 1960s are still politically distinct from others in their generation and from members of prior generations can also be interpreted as the discovery of an important generational unit (Jennings 1987; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Roberts and Lang 1985). Even the “new class” and “yuppie” theses described above might be characterized in these nontraditional terms.

Slight differences in age can also lead to important subgenerational distinctions. Again, this results from the importance of age and history in the process of generational development, and from the dynamic quality of both. More specifically, there are at least two types of socialization experiences that need to be distinguished: direct and indirect. Direct socialization refers to the learning and imprinting that occurs by being in the age cohort centrally involved in the events under consideration (being of working age during the Depression, or of high school or college age during the sixties, for example). This is not to say that only those who actually experience particular events (lose a job, go to war, participate in a sit-in), can be part of a generation. Rather it is to distinguish cohorts, many of whose members had such direct experiences, from those that, due to their collective age at a certain historical point, were less likely to have such “opportunities.” Indirect socialization

refers to a more passive process of learning (being a child during the Depression or during the 1960s). This process is much closer to the traditional view of socialization found in the political science literature, but is often ignored in generational studies. Both types of socialization have important ramifications for the development of each generation's profile, but the dynamics of that impact are different (Delli Carpini 1986; Rinalta 1979). Again, these differences can result from either the *formation* or the *expression* of generational distinctiveness.

The 1960s, for example, clearly affected individuals who were in their teens and individuals who were in their preteens. The differences in age undoubtedly led to the development of somewhat different attitudes and opinions, inasmuch as the cognitive, psychological, and moral development of teens and preteens is quite different. To the extent that similar worldviews did develop out of the experience of the sixties, however, the opportunity to express those views in particular ways was quite different for the cohort reaching young adulthood in 1968–73 and that reaching adulthood in 1976–81 (Delli Carpini 1986). Jennings and Niemi (1981) find significant differences in political involvement, trust, efficacy, policy stands, and participation between age cohorts who directly experienced the sixties (high school seniors in 1965) and those who were indirectly socialized by it (high school seniors in 1973). The latter cohort was less efficacious and trusting of the system, less politically engaged, and more conservative than the former. In my own research I also found differences between those who were between thirteen and twenty-four in the sixties and those who were slightly older or younger. My finding, paralleling those of Jennings and Niemi, was that the youngest cohorts were the least supportive of the political system, and the least politically involved, while the “experienced” cohorts were the most likely to have liberal political leanings and an alternative political agenda. Unlike Jennings and Niemi, however, I found even the experienced cohorts to be relatively disengaged from the political system, when compared to prior generations.

The acknowledgment of distinct subgenerations does not come at the expense of a more holistic view of generational development. Rather, subgenerations are often the particular manifestations of forces that are affecting the entire generation. The particular way in which different segments of the generation internalize those forces, or the particular way in which they externalize them often differ. Such intra-age variability (Braungart and Braungart 1984) indicates an interaction between generation and social status, but does not preclude the existence of an independent main effect as well. All four of the acknowledged periods of heightened generational activity demonstrate intragenerational divisions. The Young Europe generation of the early to mid-1800s pitted the progressive “Germania Burschenschaften” against the conservative “Arminia Burschenschaften” (Braungart 1984; Braungart and

Braungart 1984). The intragenerational conflicts of the early 1900s set communists and socialists against more traditional and even reactionary forces in Europe and the Soviet Union. Similar splits, this time among a new generation of communists, socialists, and fascists, were common in Europe and the United States during and after the Great Depression. Religious and nationalist generational units were common at this time as well. And in the 1960s, youth-dominated movements on the left and right, fueled by ideology, issues of national liberation, and religious conviction, were a worldwide occurrence (Braungart 1984; Braungart and Braungart 1984).

Despite these subgenerational divisions, however, all four periods still demonstrate strong intergenerational splits that allow for characterizations to be made about the successor generation. These commonalities seem to be at the level of deep-seated attitudes or values (Braungart, 1982; Braungart and Braungart 1984; Delli Carpini, 1986; Inglehart 1977; Knutson 1972; Mannheim 1972; Renshon 1974). Just as one can talk about cultures without denying the existence and importance of subcultures, one can also talk about both generations and subgenerations as legitimate social phenomena. My own research on the sixties generation (1986) demonstrates that, despite the existence of important subgenerational differences, there is a clear and consistent profile that distinguishes that generation from preceding ones: more liberal, more likely to have an alternative political agenda, less supportive of the political system, less likely to be involved in mainstream politics, more Democratic in its vote, but less Democratic in its long-term party allegiance. Similarly, Yankelovich (1974, 1984), while noting subgenerational differences, can speak of a generation raised in the 1960s and early 1970s that is identifiable in its liberalism on social issues and its rejection of many traditional norms, values, and institutions.

The Asymmetrical Nature of Generations

Throughout this chapter a fine line has been walked between biological and historical forces. Generations are clearly children of both. While at the level of general theory the *periodic* interaction of age and history resulting in generations seems reasonable, the *dynamic* nature of both processes as they operate in reality complicates matters. At the individual level, daughters and sons do come of age and "replace" their parents in thirty-or forty-year cycles. At the aggregate level, however, this replacement is spread out, with births and deaths, hirings and retirements, and so on, constantly occurring. Similarly, as discussed earlier, many of the economic, political, and technological developments that are relevant to generational change occur gradually and without much reflection. This fact helps to explain why generational distinctiveness at the level of, for example, the 1960s generation, is not a regular

occurrence. It also suggests that the process of generational change, like social and political change of any kind, has an evolutionary side to it as well (Delli Carpini 1986). When birthrates either increase for a short period of time or rise and fall with a certain regularity, the potential for generational distinctiveness is increased. Similarly, when historical events or changes occur rapidly, marking distinct shifts in the sociopolitical environment, the potential for generational distinctiveness is increased. When both these elements are present, the possibility of dramatic generational differences is greatest. The 1960s and 1970s were years of tremendous generational conflict precisely because they brought together an unusually large cohort that was born in a rather short period of time and a historical period that was filled with unprecedented political, social, cultural, and economic change (Jones 1980; Delli Carpini 1986).

When historical and life-cycle forces are not packed into relatively small units of time, the process of generational replacement becomes less visible. While change associated with such replacement is undoubtedly less dramatic and more difficult to detect, it would be wrong to assume that it is either nonexistent or irrelevant. The research of Inglehart (1971, 1977, 1981, 1984) and of Nie et al. (1979) clearly demonstrates that generational change has important political and social implications even when it occurs in evolutionary fashion.

What does all this suggest for the empirical study of generations? Fundamentally, it suggests that one cannot look at a population at a particular point in time, neatly divide it into equal age groups, and call each a generation. Generational analysis requires either starting with a particular age group and considering the key forces that act as direct and indirect socializing agents in the development of its unique personality, or starting with a particular set of events or a period (what Ortega calls a "zone of dates") and examining the way in which it directly or indirectly affects the personality of different generations. In addition, it suggests that the problem of overlap makes a definitive analysis of multiple generations in a single study extremely difficult in the best of circumstances and impossible in many situations. One can do such analysis with biological age cohorts but not with generations.

Life-Cycle, Period, and Interaction Effects

As if the specific components of generational change were not complicated enough, one must also contend with individual change beyond that attributable to a generation. In particular, one must consider the effects of age that are not due to its interaction with historical and societal forces but that are more directly associated with the aging process and change related to the passage of time. Many changes take place within an individual as he or she

grows older. Many of these changes are not likely to affect how one views the social and political world, but some will. In particular, processes such as cognitive development, the routinization of attitudes and behaviors through repetition, and the continuous refinement of those attitudes and behaviors through personal life-experiences and contact with the social and political world, can clearly lead to changes over time (Abramson 1983; Campbell et al. 1960; Hudson and Binstock 1976; Hudson and Strate 1985; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Milbrath and Goel 1977; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Nie et al. 1974). One's attitude about the effectiveness of elections for choosing political leaders, for example, is determined in part by the capacity of an individual to grasp the theory underlying the electoral process, in part by the gathering of specific information about the actual mechanics of the process, and in part by one's repeated experience with the process over time. All of these elements are related to the life cycle.

The specific way in which the life cycle affects the development of attitudes, opinions, and behaviors depends on the particular attitudes, opinions, and behaviors involved. Even so, several general observations can be made about how this process is conceptualized. The greatest area of disagreement centers on the rate at which the life cycle affects learning and socialization. Logically, almost any pattern can be defended, from a straight linear model (Delli Carpini 1986; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), to step-function models that emphasize critical stages of development (Erikson 1968; Kohlberg 1968; Piaget 1967), to curvilinear models that suggest changing rates of learning. Such curvilinear models usually suggest that the rate of learning slows with advancing age, though the point at which this slowing begins ranges from childhood (Davies 1977; Knutson 1974; Renshon 1975) to old age (Campbell et al. 1960; Verba and Nie 1972), depending on the substantive issue and the theoretical perspective involved. Some curvilinear models even allow for the possibility of "forgetting" or "unlearning," as in the case of the rise and fall in political participation with age (Campbell et al. 1960; Verba and Nie 1972).

Inasmuch as all of the above models (as well as more complex hybrids) can be defended on logical and theoretical grounds, it would seem that the decision as to which is the more appropriate should be settled empirically. Unfortunately this is not possible, since the same empirical finding can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Consider, for example, that one finds that the probability of voting is relatively low between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, increases between the ages of twenty-six and forty-four, remains about the same from forty-five to fifty-five, and begins to decline thereafter. Even if one can establish that these findings are not the result of generational differences (no easy task in and of itself, as shall be discussed below), it is still possible that the changing rates of "learning" are not due to

the life cycle. It is possible, for example, that the youth culture of the period in question disdains voting as evidence of "selling out," and so young people are less likely to vote. Alternately, it is possible that the issues of the day do not address the concerns of the elderly, and so they do not vote. It is even possible that the accelerated participation in middle age reflects the coincidental fact that young adults and middle-aged people benefit most from the political institutions of advanced industrial societies. In short, deciding upon the structure of life-cycle effects is primarily a conceptual task. It depends upon what one is willing to include as part of the life-cycle process. Much of what one might consider "natural" life-cycle stages of development are, upon reflection, class-, culture-, and time-bound (consider recent evidence that voting is less likely to decrease after the age of fifty-five than was once the case). Jennings and Niemi (1981) distinguish such class-, cultural-, and time-bound effects from generational and life-cycle ones, calling the former "contextual effects." Many life-cycle and generational theorists are not so sensitive to such issues, however. Even the psychological, cognitive, and moral stages of theorists such as Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg are highly susceptible to criticisms of cultural and class ethnocentrism.

This suggests that a truly parsimonious and "pure" definition of the life cycle would be divorced (as much as possible) from cultural and other kinds of idiosyncracies. The effects of culture, class, generations, historical circumstances, and the like could then be examined as separate forces or as forces that *interact* with the life cycle at different points and in different ways. Looked at from this perspective, let me offer the following general characteristics of the life cycle.

First, there does not appear to be any theoretical or empirical reason to assume that one ever stops the iterative process of learning and reevaluating (Gergen and Ullman 1977; Searing et al. 1976). Second, when the entire life cycle from birth to death is considered, the rate of learning and changing appears to slow (Dennis 1973; Dawson et al. 1977). However, when only adulthood is considered, the rate of change directly attributable to the effects of the life cycle are *essentially* linear. That is, once the rapid psychological, moral, cognitive, and educational developments associated with childhood and adolescence have occurred, there are no solid biological or experiential arguments to suggest that there is less change and development in one's forties than in one's thirties, or in one's sixties than in one's fifties, and so on (short of the physical and mental infirmities that can be associated with very old age). Third, the pattern of change associated with the life cycle should be relatively constant from one generation to another, when other factors are controlled for. The concept of the life cycle assumes a process that is similar for all groups and for all age cohorts over time. While members of one generation may hold attitudes different from those of members of another one, the independent effects of aging on those attitudes should be the same.

In addition to the effects of the life cycle, there is one other independent effect on the development of attitudes, opinions, and behaviors to consider: period effects. By period effects is meant social, political, cultural, and economic events that affect all generations and all age cohorts in a similar manner. Watergate had some important generational and life-cycle effects that impressed children in one way, new participants in the electoral process in a different way, and long-time participants in yet a third way; but it also had a more general effect that operated in a constant manner across all generations and all age groups. This would be considered a period effect. The effect of mass-media campaigns on the loosening of partisan ties for all cohorts in a society, or the increased participation across the board that results from a particularly important or interesting election are also examples of period effects. Such effects can be short-lived (as with the increased participation due to the dynamics of a particular election) or long-lasting (as with the loosening of partisan attachments), but the defining characteristic is its uniform impact on all members of the polity.

A final type of effect to consider is that resulting from the *interaction* of generation, life-cycle, and period effects. While each of the three former concepts are theoretically and methodologically distinct, it is possible for additional effects on political attitudes, opinions, and behaviors to result from the interaction of two (or more) of them. For example, a man who is twenty-five years old in 1984 holds certain attitudes towards civil rights that are in part determined by his age, in part determined by his generation, and in part determined by the political atmosphere of the period. His attitudes will also be determined, however, by the unique interaction of his age and generation, or his age and the period. Such interactions are important to a more complete understanding of the effects of generation, the life cycle, and distinct periods on political orientations. For example, my research (1986) suggests that the *interaction* of life cycle with generation (that is, being a member of the sixties generation) has the effect of "pulling" one back into the political mainstream over time. This effect is *in addition* to the separate "main effects" of aging and of generational differences. Beck and Jennings (1979) demonstrate that the belief that conservatives participate at greater rates than liberals is the result of the interaction of ideology and political periods, and not something inherent in a particular ideology per se. And Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) show that the decline in voting among the elderly is not a life-cycle effect but results instead from the interaction of age and generational differences in education and income.

Generalizability, Levels of Analysis, and the Selection of Data

Translating the theoretical and conceptual issues discussed above into models that allow for empirical testing is not an easy task. In addition to deciding

which of the numerous variations on the generational theme is most appropriate, the researcher must also specify the model in a way that does justice to the theory, while allowing for a decomposition of intra- and inter-generational forces, as well as period, life-cycle, and interaction effects. And all this must be done in a way that is sensitive to the strengths and weaknesses of the data that are available.

The information used to test or illuminate generational theory runs the gamut from qualitative impressions to highly quantified data, and from system-level to individual-level evidence of change. As with all research, the selection of data involves tradeoffs. In generational research, the major tradeoffs center around the issues of generalizability and the level of analysis.

The issue of generalizability is a thorny one. While there is not a logical distinction between the level of generalization and the amount and quality of detail, there is often a practical one. In-depth interviews with a limited number of political activists from the 1960s can provide incredibly rich detail concerning generational development, period effects, and changes that occur with age, but the question remains as to the applicability of these findings to other activists from the same generation; to activists from other generations, or to the 1960s generation as a whole (Bellah et al. 1985; Boyte 1980; Broder 1981; Gilmour and Lamb 1975; Peck 1985; Whalen and Flacks 1984). Alternately, studies that emphasize generalizability to an entire population (Delli Carpini 1986) can suffer from a lack of detail concerning things such as intra-generational distinctions, the specific impact of particular elements of the sociopolitical environment, the richness of the generational profile, and so on. Research that is generalizable at one level usually fails at another. Even when comparisons are made to the generation being replaced, studies of a single generation (Braungart and Braungart 1980; Delli Carpini 1986; Draper 1967; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Loewenberg 1974; Wohl 1979) can only be impressionistically related to the generational process as a whole. They are essentially case studies, no matter what the ability to generalize to members of the cohort in question. Studies of student movements (Altbach 1967; Altbach and Laufer 1972; Altbach and Peterson 1972; Lipset and Altbach 1969; Lipset and Ladd 1972; Meyer and Rubinson 1972; Weinberg and Walker 1969) often cut across several generations, but the data are usually limited to a few periods (most often the 1930s and the 1960s) and of course the findings can be applied only to the generational unit of students and not to the 1930s and 1960s generations per se. Studies that focus on one aspect of change can not generalize to others. My own study of the 1960s generation (1986) is limited to political orientations, while Yankelovich's work focuses on social values (1972, 1974, 1984).

All this is not to criticize these studies or to suggest that completely generalizable studies are even possible. Rather it is to suggest that the complexity

of the concept of generation, its interaction with historical, socioeconomic, and biological processes, and the limitations of available data make definitive studies of generational theory next to impossible. One must therefore select data that allow for the most acceptable mix of generalizability and qualitative depth on the theoretical dimensions of generational theory that are most central to one's research. One should also be explicitly aware of what these trade-offs are and how they affect the interpretations of findings. What level of generalization is reasonable? To what population? Under what historical circumstances? Can the effects of generation, periods, and/or the life cycle be distinguished with any confidence?

A related issue in the selection of data is the level of analysis. While most studies, by the very nature of generational development, consider both systemic and individual change, inevitably a choice between the two must be made. Is one centrally interested in the generational process as it manifests itself at the level of parent-child transmission (Bengston and Black 1973; Cutler 1977; Flacks 1967; Jennings and Niemi 1974, 1981; Stacey 1977; Tedin 1974)? Such "lineage effects" (Bengston and Cutler 1976; Braungart and Braungart 1984) are best studied using individual-level data that generally include parent-child interviews and preferably also include some aspect of a panel design (Jennings and Niemi 1981; Newcomb et al. 1967). If one is interested in aggregate levels of generational change (but still concerned with attitudinal change), then cross-sectional surveys repeated over time are appropriate (Abramson, 1975, 1979, 1983; Abramson and Inglehart 1986; Claggett 1981; Converse 1976; Cutler 1969-70; Delli Carpini 1986; Glenn 1972, 1977; Glenn and Hefner 1972; Inglehart 1977), though panel studies can be utilized at this level as well (Jennings and Niemi 1981). Sigel and Brookes' study of how events can change children's support for the political system (1974) uses both cross-sectional and panel surveys in its research design.

Theories or interests that apply to specific subgenerations (such as students, activists, the middle class, women) need panels or cross-sectional surveys that provide enough interviews with the desired category of people to allow for meaningful generalizations. Often such subgroups are too small to be drawn from more general surveys and so require specially designed samples. Such surveys are quite rare, especially ones that have been conducted over time. The classic example of such a survey is the Bennington College study (Newcomb 1943; Newcomb et al. 1967). Sigel and Reynolds' study of two generations of college-educated women (1979-80), and Roberts and Lang's analysis of Princeton graduate students (1985) are also examples of the utilization of specialized data sets.

Occasionally studies of individual people are used to illuminate the larger process of generational change (Crosby 1984; Kearney 1984; Post 1984; Ri-

nalta 1984). Most often these are biographical studies of prominent or exceptional individuals and serve as case studies of particular generational units (such as political elites) rather than of entire generations. Rinalta's examination of Vera Brittain's *Testament* (1984) is probably an exception to this, however, with Brittain's personal experiences providing insights into her generation as a whole.

Generational change can go beyond questions of individual and aggregated opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. More systemic levels of analysis include changes in the economic, political, cultural, social, and intellectual environments that both cause and result from generational change. Such analyses are the most difficult to conduct systematically, and yet in many ways understanding change at this level is the goal of all generational research. The most common approach for this kind of research is historical and institutional (Mannheim 1972; Draper 1967; Eisenstadt 1956; Esler 1974; Heberle 1951; Tilly et al. 1975). Naturally, as emphasis on historical processes increases, the level of specificity concerning attitudinal and behavioral change decreases. This results from limits in the ability to deal with all the diverse aspects of generational change in a single study and from the lack of detailed, systematic attitudinal data prior to the late 1930s. Often demographic and behavioral data (census figures on occupation and income, statistics on migration patterns, aggregate voting, and so on) serve as the link between sociohistorical and individual/cohort processes of generational change (Jones 1980; Klein 1984).

Since most contemporary behavioral studies of political generations depend on some form of survey research (usually multiple cross-sectional surveys), let me spend a little more time dealing with some of the issues that are of particular relevance to this kind of data. In my own study of the 1960s generation, I relied upon the series of National Election Studies (NES) designed and carried out by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan from 1952 to 1980. The choice of the NES was relatively easy, once the criteria for this study were established. First, it was necessary to find a set of surveys that provide national samples. Second, it was necessary that these surveys include a wide array of both political and social variables, as well as demographic characteristics. Third, the questions asked at various times had to be comparable. Fourth, the surveys had to span a period that began prior to the sixties, and to the entry of individuals who were part of the sixties generation into the electorate, and that continued beyond the years designated as the sixties. Only the NES surveys met all these requirements.

The choice of these surveys was not without drawbacks, however. In many cases the survey questions available do not address the attitudes or actions that most distinguish the sixties generation and the 1960s from what preceded

them. This is especially true in the area of antisystem or untraditional behavior. While this always poses a difficulty for the secondary analysis of data, it is a particular problem when the goal of the research is to uncover change. Surveys, especially surveys repeated over time, are designed within the context of a particular system and a particular period. In addition, they are designed by individuals who are themselves part of that environment. As a result, the surveys themselves are bounded by that dominant perspective; for it to be any different would require a prescience that is unlikely. This means, however, that while one can hint at the outer bounds of opinions and behaviors of the new generation, one must be content to show how this generation differed from preceding ones relative to the political structure that already existed. For example, while I could show that the new generation was less likely to vote than prior generations, I could only speculate whether this represented a movement away from participation in politics, or a shifting of political modes from voting to, for instance, involvement in grass-roots organizations. Where possible, one can supplement the central analysis with additional data, but the nature of the conclusions drawn from such less systematic analyses must necessarily be more tentative. As a result, research on generations often focuses more on deviations from past norms and less on the specific development of new norms.

Methodological Issues

Political change arising from generational replacement, the life cycle, and/or period effects has been studied empirically in many different ways. Again, the biggest distinction in methodology is between studies that emphasize individual and cohort change and those that emphasize the larger historical process. Concerning the former, methods of analysis have ranged from straightforward comparisons of attitudes and behaviors across time and groups (Cutler and Bengston 1974; Cutler 1977; Glenn and Hefner 1972; Glenn 1977; Jennings and Niemi 1981) to more complex multivariate designs based upon linear regression (Abramson 1979; Claggett 1981; Converse 1976; Delli Carpini 1986), categorical regression (Kritzer 1983), and dynamic modelling (Markus 1983). In the choice of a method of analysis each researcher attempts both to document time- and age-related change and to reduce it to its causal components, doing so in a way that introduces the greatest fit between the assumptions underlying the methodological and substantive theories involved.

Central to this notion of fit is the "identification problem." This problem is encountered when one has more unknowns to explain than can be independently estimated from the data. In the particular case of change believed to be caused by some combination of life-cycle, period, and generational ef-

fects, this means that knowing an individual's (or group's) location on two of these characteristics fully determines his or her location on the third, making an independent estimate of the latter's impact impossible. For example, if we know that an individual is thirty years old, and that the data were collected in 1972, then we know with certainty of which generation that individual is a member. Similarly, if we know the generation and year, we must know the age group, or if we know the generation and age, we must know what year the data were collected in. This problem is made more complicated when interaction effects are included, since the number of unknowns is increased without increasing the ability of the data to provide information.

While the identification problem is most often referred to and dealt with in the use of statistical models, in fact it is a conceptual problem that has relevance to any study of generations, no matter what the mode of inquiry. Distinguishing among the "contributions" of age, generation, historical circumstances, and their interactions is as important in a biographical examination of Gladstone as it is in a historical examination of student protestors in the 1960s or in a statistical analysis of the opinions of the youth of the 1980s. The specific language used in these various approaches may differ. Some of the "terms" may be implicit rather than explicit in research that is more qualitative. The consequences of ignoring certain effects may be more obvious in statistical research. And yet the importance of distinguishing these forces to the best of one's ability remains across all methods of inquiry. Since statistical analysis lays out the different variables and their interrelationships in relatively precise ways, in the following discussion I will discuss the identification problem and its various solutions in statistical terms. The relevance of the issues raised to research on generations that does not employ statistics should be kept in mind, however.

In statistical research the solution to the identification problem, assuming one is working with cross-sectional data gathered over a number of years, depends upon the nature of the substantive issue under consideration and the theoretical assumptions one is willing to make in order to provide information that otherwise cannot be obtained directly. The most common approach to avoiding the identification problem is to provide additional information (side information) that allows the researcher to assume that one or more of the hypothesized effects (life-cycle, period, generational, or the interaction effects) to be either zero or of some independently estimable magnitude. If one assumes an effect to be zero, then that term can be eliminated from the model, making the remaining terms identifiable. Suppose, for example, that we are interested in the changing racial composition of the United States. Such a change could be due to generational differences (different birth rates could lead to one generation having a larger or smaller percentage of blacks for instance), or to period differences (blacks might immigrate to the United

States during a particular period at unusual rates because of changing immigration laws or because of conditions abroad). It is a safe assumption, however, that changes are not due to the life cycle. One does not change race with age. Thus, one can use cross-sectional data over time to estimate the effects of generational replacement and period differences without encountering the identification problem.

Research on generations (including nonstatistical research) that ignores the effects of aging, historical periods, or interactions is implicitly "solving" the identification problem by setting these terms to zero. Problems arise, however, when these unstated assumptions prove overly simplistic. For example, ignoring the effects of specific periods led most political observers to first underestimate the importance of issues in the vote choice of the American public, and then to overestimate their importance (Campbell et al. 1960; Nie et al. 1976, 1979; Pomper 1975).

If it is unrealistic to assume away one of the effects, it is still possible to avoid the identification problem by using side information. With this approach, one attempts to estimate one or more of the effects independently, and then uses this estimate in a more complicated model, utilizing other data. Claggett (1981), for example, estimated generational effects on partisanship for the period from 1952 to 1964, and then used this estimate in a more complicated model for the 1964 to 1976 period. In short, this approach involves changing one of the unknowns to a known, and then estimating the model with this information included.

Kritzer (1983) suggests a way of estimating multiple effects that is not based upon assumptions concerning the *impact* of some of those effects but upon assumptions concerning the *structure* of such impacts. He argues that the identification problem arises only when the independent variables involved are linear combinations of each other. If only one of the variables is assumed to be linear, while the others are assumed to be categorical (or dummy variables), the model is identified. In his example concerning partisanship, Kritzer argues that the life-cycle effect is largely linear, while generational and period effects are categorical, leading to an identified model.

Consider the example involving age, generation, and period used above to introduce the identification problem, and the solutions offered to get around such a problem. What Kritzer's approach suggests is that the use of dummy variables in the model combines the simplifying notions underlying (1) setting certain effects to zero and (2) providing independent estimates of those effects. That is, either an effect is zero (someone is not a member of a particular generation, or the year is not 1972), or the effect is constant for all members of the category. Put another way, data set up in this fashion do not determine with certainty in which generation or period all individuals or responses should be placed. Instead the data determine only those in which

they should not be placed. One knows, for example, that an individual is not part of a particular generation if his score is zero, but this information cannot be combined with the age variable to determine the time period. Nor can it be combined with the period variable to determine the respondent's age. This element of independence, when considered in the data as a whole, results in an identified model.

The research described above concerning solutions to the identification problem equates generations with equal-sized age cohorts. The earlier discussion of the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of generations suggests that this may be an unrealistic approach. A more theoretically developed conceptualization of generational change allows one to borrow from these methodological approaches but also suggests the need to modify or adapt them. Consider that you are interested in studying the political impact of the sixties generation (and its subgenerations) on the distribution of political attitudes, opinions, and behaviors in a political system. Suppose also that you are trying to remain consistent with some of the subtleties of the process discussed earlier in this chapter. In some ways you are at an advantage, in that, unlike the attempts to examine generational change discussed above, your concern is only with the impact of a single generation, and a particular period. This allows you not only to simplify parts of the model but also to use information about the population prior to the 1960s as side information. However, a more theoretically rigorous definition of generations and an expectation of not only all three main effects but also interaction effects make your particular methodological needs unique.

For example, it was suggested above that the way in which the world imprints different generations is unique and that, as a result, any examination that attempts to uncover generational differences must be sensitive to such idiosyncratic configurations. Does this mean that in order to understand the 1960s and the generation that grew up in that decade one must first document the distinct impact of all prior generations and all prior periods? While such documentation may in fact be desirable, it would be a task of overwhelming proportions. The usual solution is to assume away much of the uniqueness of what one might call "generational crystallization" and to use equally proportioned age cohorts as surrogates for the more complex notion of generation. While in many cases this may be acceptable, given the arguments presented above, such a solution would be inappropriate for this analysis. How then does one simplify the reality of political change in a way that is consistent with this notion of generational change?

One possible solution (Delli Carpini 1986) is based loosely on Kritzer's observation concerning linear and nonlinear change. Consistent with earlier discussion, political change brought about by the life cycle is assumed to be essentially linear. That is, the process of aging, and the incremental experi-

encing and learning about the world that is a part of the process, is conceptualized as affecting one's political orientations at a relatively constant rate. This does not imply that the life cycle must affect all political orientations, nor that it must be the same for different types of attitudes and actions. It only says that such an effect, when it does exist and when separated from other sociological, cultural, historical, and biological effects, is essentially linear.

The effects of the generation one is born into and the period one reacts to are, on the other hand, nonlinear. Knowing the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of one generation need not tell us much about the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of earlier or subsequent generations, once the effects of the life cycle have been accounted for. This is due to the fact that each generation develops its identity from a unique combination of historical, cultural, social, economic, political, and even biological circumstances. Similarly, periodic events and the reaction to those events by different generations are discrete and nonlinear (Ryder 1965).

How does distinguishing linear from nonlinear effects help to overcome the problem of developing a context for the introduction of a new generation? The answer lies in the essentially random nature of period and generational effects when considered on a wide array of people and events. While the characteristics of each generation, each event or period, and the reaction of generations to events are clearly not random, there is no reason to expect a consistent, linear pattern of characteristics, events, or reactions to be developed across a number of generations (Ryder 1965). For example, while there are clear reasons to expect those socialized in the Depression to develop a unique political character that is attributable (in part) to that experience, nothing about the development of that generation allows one to say much about the character of preceding or following generations. This is especially true when one considers not two or three generations but many.

Similarly, while one can offer explanations for the reaction of individuals and groups to specific periods, the events of a particular period provide little to predict the details of the next. It is difficult to argue a linear progression in the Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan years, and even more difficult to argue for such a progression in the specific events that constitute the substance of those periods. What is the linear link between the Depression of the 1930s and JFK's assassination? Between World War II and Watergate?

If one accepts that the effects of generation and period are nonlinear, especially across individuals who represent several different generations and who have experienced the events of many different periods, then it can be assumed that the linear relationship that does exist between age and political orientations in the population that grew up before the 1960s is due primarily to the life cycle. While this assumption is of little use if one is interested in

determining the political effects of generations and periods prior to the 1960s, it is invaluable for studying the effects of a new generation and particular periods.

The strength of the measure is that it distinguishes life-cycle effects from those of generation and period without introducing unacceptably artificial definitions of the latter two concepts. In addition, it allows one to estimate a more realistic model of the effects of a particular period and a particular generation by allowing one to include a greater number of hypothesized effects without encountering the identification problem. In any event, the point of this discussion is less to demonstrate the utility of this particular operationalization of the life-cycle effect than again to point out that generational research, like generational theory, is a matter of making reasoned tradeoffs that allow for a more detailed examination of one aspect of generational change at the expense of a detailed examination of some other aspect. One is always forced to simplify assumptions, ignore possible sources of change, limit the scope of analysis, and so on. The key then becomes doing so in a way that involves the fewest costs for the aspects of generational change that are most central to one's theory and research. A diversity of methodological approaches should not be viewed as evidence of incoherence in the study of generations, but as evidence of the complexity of the endeavor.

A Summary and Synthesis

I would like to end this chapter by synthesizing some of the issues raised in the previous pages. While this synthesis falls short of a theory of generations, it contains the elements upon which such a theory might be based. I shall begin with a brief summary of the key concepts discussed in this chapter. An "age cohort" is a collection of all individuals born within an indeterminate but continuous set of years. This set of years is usually narrow (between one and ten years), but the limits are determined by the purpose of the research and by the nature of the historical environment. A "period" is a finite set of years that can be distinguished from the years immediately preceding and following it along one or more dimensions of human existence. These dimensions include the social, political, economic, cultural, intellectual, technological, and natural environments of particular systems but are not logically limited to them. "History" is a summary term for the combination of the social, political, economic, cultural, intellectual, technological, and natural environments of particular systems over time. A "generation" is an age cohort whose values, attitudes, opinions, and/or behaviors have been shaped in relatively stable and unique ways by history. Generations react to specific historical circumstances in unique ways because different age cohorts tend to experience different aspects of that history, and because different age cohorts, due

to their relative location in the life cycle, tend to interpret the same historical experiences in different ways.

While part of the definition of a generation focuses on its unique reaction to specific historical periods, this is not the same as saying that the attitudes of a generation need to differ from those of preceding or succeeding generations. Imagine that a particular age cohort reacts to a political scandal by becoming engaged in politics at a much greater rate than it would have otherwise. Imagine as well that the preceding generation was unaffected by the scandal but was already unusually engaged in politics as a result of the particular historical circumstances of its past. Alternately, imagine that this older generation was affected by the scandal by becoming less engaged in politics, but that this merely lowered their level of political engagement to that of the new generation. In both of these scenarios it is possible that the old generation and the young one would be indistinguishable in terms of their level of political involvement. And yet it would be inaccurate to suggest that the process of generational development had not occurred. In short, distinct worldviews are a possible outcome of the process of generational replacement, but not a necessary outcome. Viewed in this way, the issue becomes one of identifying the elements that make generational distinctiveness more likely.

One of these elements is the *rate* of population replacement. When members of an older generation die and/or when members of a new generation are born at unusually rapid rates, the potential for distinct generations increases. This is due in part to the presence of a "critical mass," which increases the likelihood that an age-based subculture will develop. Related to this issue of the rate of population replacement is the *variability* of population replacement. Short periods of very distinct birth rates are more likely to lead to generational distinctiveness than less clearly defined or more extended ones. This is so because it *concentrates* the biological and life-cycle elements of the generational process.

The rate and variability of historical developments are also critical to generational distinctiveness. During periods of rapid change the likelihood that an age cohort will have experiences that are different from those of prior generations (as well as different from those that prior generations had when they were at the same point in the life cycle as the new cohort) increases. During times of variable rates of change, when critical events are concentrated in relatively short, distinct periods, this likelihood is increased further.

Since history is a summary of several more specific dimensions of human experience, one can talk about historical concentration not only across time but also across dimensions. The probability of generational distinctiveness increases when change is occurring in the social, political, economic, and other environments simultaneously.

Members of a generation can be conscious of their unique situation in the same way that other important groups and classes are, but this is not a necessary element of generational development. It is likely, however, that the circumstances described above, which increase the probability of generational distinctiveness, also increase the probability of generational self-consciousness. Such self-consciousness, in turn, changes the substance of generational distinctiveness.

The development of a generational profile and the specific opportunity to express it are two related but fundamentally distinct processes. Historical change is still central to the latter process, though in a slightly different way than in the former. In periods of rapid, concentrated historical change, the environment that is critical for the shaping of a generation's common worldview may be very different from the environment that exists when members of the generation become significant actors in the social, economic, political, and other systems. Also, the dimension of the historical environment that is most influential in shaping the worldview of a generation need not be the same dimension that is central in expressing this new worldview. In fact, since a rejection of some aspect of a previous generation's worldview is often an important part of generational development, it is likely that the successor generation will select a new avenue in which to pursue its goals. A new generation might develop a distinct profile as a result of the political and technological environments (the threat of nuclear annihilation, perhaps) but express that uniqueness not politically or technologically but through a cultural statement (the "Punk" movement). The specifics of this process are unclear but should be conceptualized as the opportunities for the focusing of generational energies provided by a system at a particular historical point. These circumstantial and structural "stress points" result from the interaction of the nature of the generational profile, the nature of the particular system, and the generation's sociopolitical location in that system (which is in part determined by biological age). Generational self-consciousness probably increases the likelihood of a generation expressing itself in some unique way. The specific details of a generation's self-image undoubtedly affect the particular way in which it expresses itself.

Just as the process of generational development can be incremental or radical, the expression of it can result in either evolutionary or revolutionary changes in the system within which it takes place. This again depends upon both the nature of the generational profile and on the specific opportunities presented to express that distinctiveness. The legacy of generational replacement might be a gradual decrease in participation or a dramatic political revolt. Whether such change is dramatic or incremental depends in part on whether the generation, due to earlier birth rates, enters the adult population relatively quickly or more slowly over time. It also depends upon the oppor-

tunities that are available for political participation. A generation that, from its early development, appears sure to have a dramatic impact as adults, might never actually materialize as a sociopolitical force, while a generation that is less remarkable in its youth may, under the right circumstances, be the catalyst for more dramatic change later in life. Again, the point is that processes of development and of expression are separate.

The above discussion applies to generations as a whole. Just as history affects different age groups in different ways, however, it can also affect *segments* of new age cohorts in different ways. Women, poor people, blacks experience the world in a very different way than do men, rich people, whites. This is as true for the young as it is for the old, though the specific differences may change. In short, all of the processes applicable to whole generations are also occurring for different generational units, or subgenerations. A subgeneration can even be based upon finer age distinctions within larger cohorts. The same forces that increase the likelihood of generational distinctiveness and self-consciousness and that shape the way in which this distinctiveness is expressed also operate on subgenerations. Because each subgeneration brings together different mixes of biological and historical forces, and different opportunities for expression, each has the potential for developing subgenerational profiles that differ not only from other members of their age cohort, but also from older members of their particular subgroup. These distinct profiles can occur in addition to a more inclusive generational one, or, because of unique historical and biological circumstances, might occur in lieu of the more general one. The stronger the forces that lead to an overall generational profile, the less likely it is that dramatically distinct subgenerations will form. Again, a distinction must be made between the formation and the expression of, in this case, subgenerational worldviews. A generation might, for example, form a single dominant set of attitudes, but different subgenerations may express those attitudes in very different ways. Which subgenerations are important at any particular time depends upon the nature of class, race, sex, age, and other divisions that exist in the system in question. If social, political, economic, and other differences between men and women do not exist, then the juncture of age and history that results in a generational profile should not result in subgenerational profiles based upon sex.

Both aging and history are continuous processes that not only affect the development of a generation but also exert independent influence on the development and expression of attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. As a result, both need to be included in any attempt to isolate the unique impact of generations on historical change. In addition, the interactions among generations, age, and history need to be considered. For example, declining turnout among the elderly might be considered part of the life-cycle effect if inter-

actions are ignored. If they are included, this drop-off becomes better understood as the result of the interaction between age and a historical period, during which the structure of political institutions (limited access to polling places, the lack of easily available transportations, and the like), the nature of the political agenda, and the limits of medical science interact with being elderly in such a way as to decrease both the incentive and the ability to vote. Additionally, the decline might result from the interaction of age and generation. That is, a particular generation might have certain characteristics (low education, poor civic training, unusual physical ailments) that do not affect turnout during the prime of life but that, coupled with the additional burdens of old age, work to depress turnout. It is important to see that the inclusion of interaction effects is as much a conceptual as a methodological consideration, in that it defines what kinds of effects one wishes to attribute to particular sociological, political, and physiological forces. Aging is both a physiological and a cultural experience. To the extent that it is cultural, its impact on attitudes, opinions, and behaviors will vary from period to period and from generation to generation. It is this situation-based aspect of aging that is best conceptualized as an interaction effect.

The Nature and Possibilities of Generational-Based Change

One cannot talk about generational development without talking about socialization. Socialization is the process by which people learn the norms, values, and beliefs of a particular system (or subsystem), as well as how and when these norms, values, and beliefs should be expressed. The agents of socialization are the institutions of society: family, school, work, the media, and so on. These institutions are the repository of the collected history of a system, as well as the transmitters of that history. Were the environments in which the institutions of a society exist never to change, those institutions would never change, and so socialization would result in the constant replication of society and its members. It is the changing, often unpredictable environment, which both results from and leads to changes in institutions, that prevents socialization from working as a mechanical process of replication. Generational distinctiveness develops out of these cracks in the die of socialization.

Acknowledging that generations can differ does not mean that these differences are lasting or that they are fundamental. If institutions are the repository and the transmitters of a society's norms, values, and beliefs, then for generations to be critical agents of change themselves, they should have some effect on a society's institutions. Without such institutional change it is unlikely that a generation can maintain its behavioral differences, and without behavioral differences, attitudinal differences either fade away, or are re-

pressed, surfacing in idiosyncratic psychological and sociological ways. Put another way, "deauthorization" (Braungart and Braungart, 1984), or the rejection of the norms and values of older generations, may result from the cracks in the socialization process, but "authorization" of a new set of norms and values requires a restructuring of institutions. The nature of the generational process makes deauthorization of the old a much more likely development than authorization of some new set of arrangements. This is so because the rejection of old norms is most likely to happen when a generation is young and first coming to grips with a society's institutions. The development and maintenance of new norms requires some degree of institutional power and organization. But this is most likely to occur much later in the life cycle. And by this time, the socializing effects of old institutional structures are likely to have pulled the generation back to the societal norms (Delli Carpini 1986). This temporal separation of rebelliousness and power is probably the greatest obstacle to lasting generation-based change.

This is not to say that generational change is not important to the development of a society over time. Rather it is to suggest that there are at least three types of such change that need to be considered (beyond cosmetic changes in life-style). The first might be called "destructive" change, and refers to the tendency towards deauthorization described above. Such change presents the possibilities of more constructive, permanent change but can also be solely destabilizing. In and of itself it is unlikely to have a lasting impact on a system, but should be thought of as the raw material for other kinds of change.

The second kind of change is "restructuring." Restructuring change involves the institutional development and support that is required for the maintenance and transmission of alternate norms, values, and behaviors. Such change is more difficult and therefore much less likely to occur. It can occur by a new generation actually providing both the leadership and the "foot soldiers," but it more likely involves members of a new generation throwing their support behind nonmainstream movements or ideas that already exist in the environment (support among the German youth for Nazism and the Hitler Youth, for example).

The third kind of change, "adaptive" change, is one that is much less considered in the literature on generations. Since generations develop out of cracks in the wall of socialization, the real discontinuities that exist are actually between the environment and the *older* generations. That is, older generations that were socialized under a certain set of conditions find themselves in a rapidly changing environment in which old rules no longer apply. New generations develop in this changed environment, and so do not feel a discontinuity with it, but do feel one with the older generations and their no longer applicable norms. Viewed in this way, generational change is simply

a way for the institutions of society to adjust themselves to a changing environment and for the development of a population that is prepared to follow these new rules. In fact, it is the older generations that may be potentially the most revolutionary (or, more accurately, reactionary), since it is their norms that are most at odds with the realities of the society in which they live. However, the process of aging again acts as a safety valve for society, this time with the cold finality of death.

Consider the changing attitudes towards women in the workplace. Generational differences in both attitudes and behaviors suggest that a new generation has at least begun the process of deauthorizing traditional views on this topic. There is even evidence of limited structural change in institutions such as the workplace and the family. Is this restructuring originating from the new generation, or did economic decline in the United States create a condition in which families needed two incomes to maintain a standard of living that one could once provide? In the latter case, generational change is adaptive, leading to an acceptance among the young of conditions that already exist. In the former case it is restructuring. The difference for understanding the dynamics of generational change is profound. If generations are more often adaptive than restructuring, then the real value of generational research may lie in what it tells us about the de facto norms, opinions, behaviors, and institutions of the generation being replaced. When society looks at a new generation in many ways what it sees is a reflection of itself, not as it would like to be but as it really is.

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