

**Cultivated Participation:**

**The political pathways and cultural models of young Canadians**

by

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## **Abstract**

Traditional forms of political engagement, such as voting, have been on the decline in many western nations over the last number of decades, and researchers point to younger generations as driving these changes. This dissertation seeks to deepen our understanding of the relationship young Canadians have to political participation and engage with some of the questions raised by these trends. I do so through capturing the cultural models young people use to relate to political participation, and by identifying the common trajectories and experiences of people who do and do not engage with politics. I give particular attention to the role of higher education in these trajectories, as education has long been identified as strongly related to political participation. Yet the steady rise of education attainment along with stagnating or declining participation rates, has prompted closer examination of this relationship. Cultural models that young people use to think about politics and participation, and particularly the potential role of individualist orientations that some researchers have identified as driving changing relationships to participation, are also explored in this research.

This study draws from 63 semi-structured interviews with young Canadians who went to high school in low, mid, and high SES areas of Vancouver. I suggest that political engagement is primarily fostered through social contexts where such engagement is produced as natural and desirable. The family appears to play the most important role in creating such contexts, but social networks, as well as schools and workplaces, also play a role in people's trajectories of participation. I argue that people in higher SES backgrounds are more likely to experience overlapping contexts that promote political participation, and that the impacts of higher education are mediated by previous political experiences. Finally, by outlining the common cultural models of participation, I point to the role of individualist models in producing contingent and specialized relationships to participation. I argue that one prominent model participants use to think about participation, a 'model of interest,' tends to help further produce politics as a specialization for those with the existing dispositions and experiences with politics.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Erica McCollum. The interviews reported in this dissertations were covered by the UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board certificate number H12-03527

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## **List of Abbreviations**

SES            Socio-economic Status

LHC           Life-history Calendar

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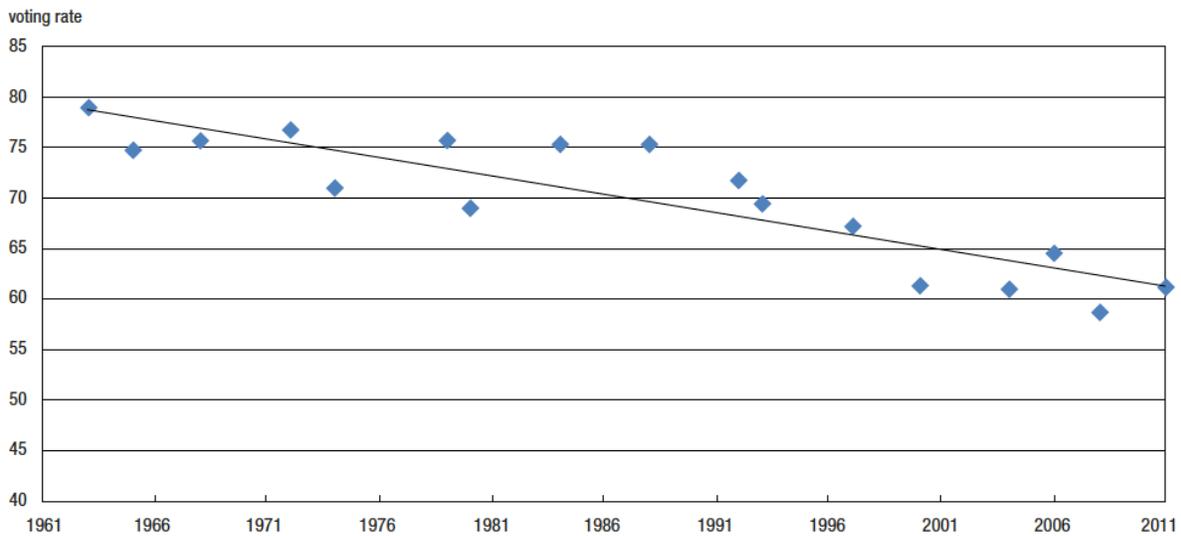
Last but not least, I am forever and continually thankful for the friends and family I have in my life that provided encouragement as well as times of joy and relief throughout this process. I am thankful to my parents for being the wonderful supportive people that they are and for being there in all the ups and the downs of the thesis. I am also thankful to Jill for being my thesis comrade and all of the thesis conversations that went along with this, and for giving her feedback and time even in her own busiest times. I would like to thank Erin, Caitlin, and Lindsay for listening to my troubles and cheering me on. I am thankful to Chino for his mental health support. Finally, I am very grateful to Tom for his feedback on my thesis and for sitting through my presentations and for all his encouragement and patience. I dedicate this thesis to Tom, and

all the ways I am thankful for him, one of which is for the endless support and encouragement he provided in so many aspects of my thesis process.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Democracy is a core value and practice of western nations, yet many citizens do not participate in the main activities, such as voting, that underpin democracy. As citizen participation is one of the key foundations, and challenges, of democracy, participation rates and the influences behind these rates have been a focus of extensive research. In recent decades these concerns have become particularly pertinent as many democracies, including Canada, have seen weakening engagement in the main avenues of participation, such as voting (Blais, Gidengil, and Nevitte 2004, Franklin 2004; Howe 2010; Milner 2010; Putnam 2000; Zukin et al. 2006). In Canada this downward trend in voting rates has been evident for the past 50 years, with voting levels reaching a low in the 2008 election (see figure 1.1; the 2015 election, which does not appear in this figure, saw an encouraging rebound in voter participation and youth voting, but it is too soon to say if this signals a change in trends). Additionally, levels of participation are unequal across social groups. Research highlights notable inequalities in levels of participation between people from different socio-economic classes; inequalities that may be growing (Lijphart 1997; Howe 2010; Thomas and Putnam 2010; Wray-Lake and Hart: 2012). These two issues - that of inequality of participation of socio-economic groups, and that of decreasing engagement - strike at the core of fundamental democratic tenets: vibrant engagement and (somewhat) equal representation of various groups of citizens. In this context of low and unequal political participation, investigating the individual, social, and cultural factors that might encourage or discourage political participation, and how these factors might interact with SES backgrounds, are pertinent questions and ones this research aims to elucidate.

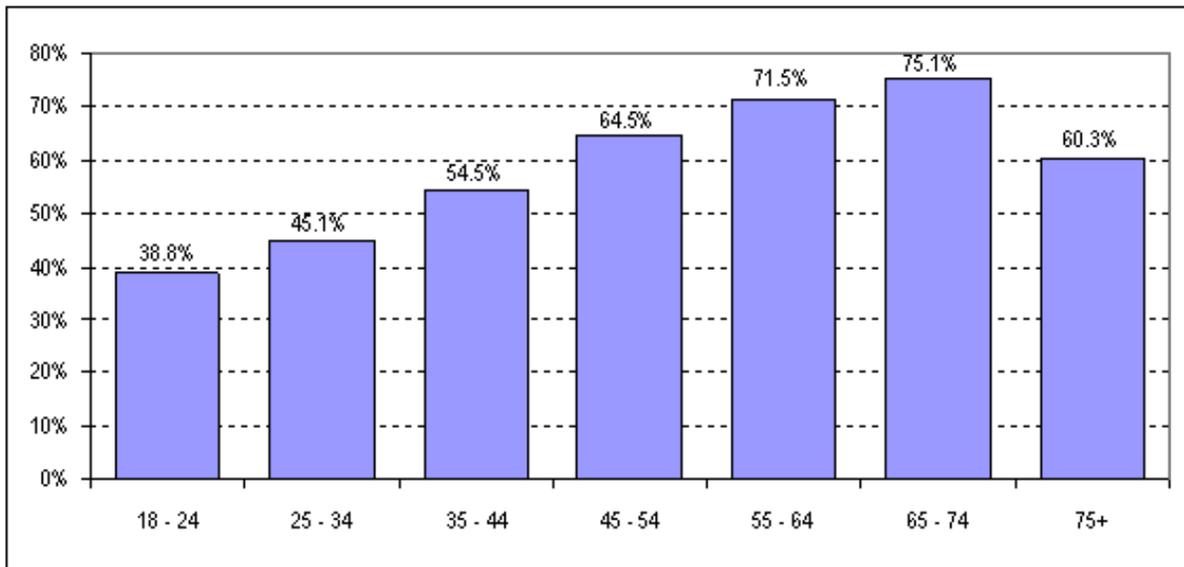
**Official voter turnout in federal elections, 1963 to 2011**



**Figure 1.1 Voter Turnout in Canadian Federal Elections, 1963-2011**

**Source:** Turcotte, 2015a

Researchers tend to focus on the low levels of engagement of younger generations as driving the stagnant or declining trends of political participation (Blais, Gidengil, Nevitte 2004; Howe 2010; Milner 2010; Turcotte 2015b). Younger generations in many Western nations such as Britain, Canada, Germany and the U.S.A know less about politics than past generations, engage less in the electoral and party systems of democracy, and have less of a sense of civic duty around participating in politics than earlier generations (cohorts who started to vote before the 1970s), (Blais, Gidengil, Nevitte 2004; Howe 2010; Milner 2010; Zukin 2006). At the same time, they are more educated than ever; a factor that is highly correlated with political engagement (Brody 1978; Nie et al. 1996). Evidence of the low political participation of young people in Canada can be seen in the 2011 federal election, where voter turnout for age groups ranging from 18-34 was less than 45 percent and more than 25 percentage points lower than the turnout for the age group ranging from 55-74 (see figure 1.2).

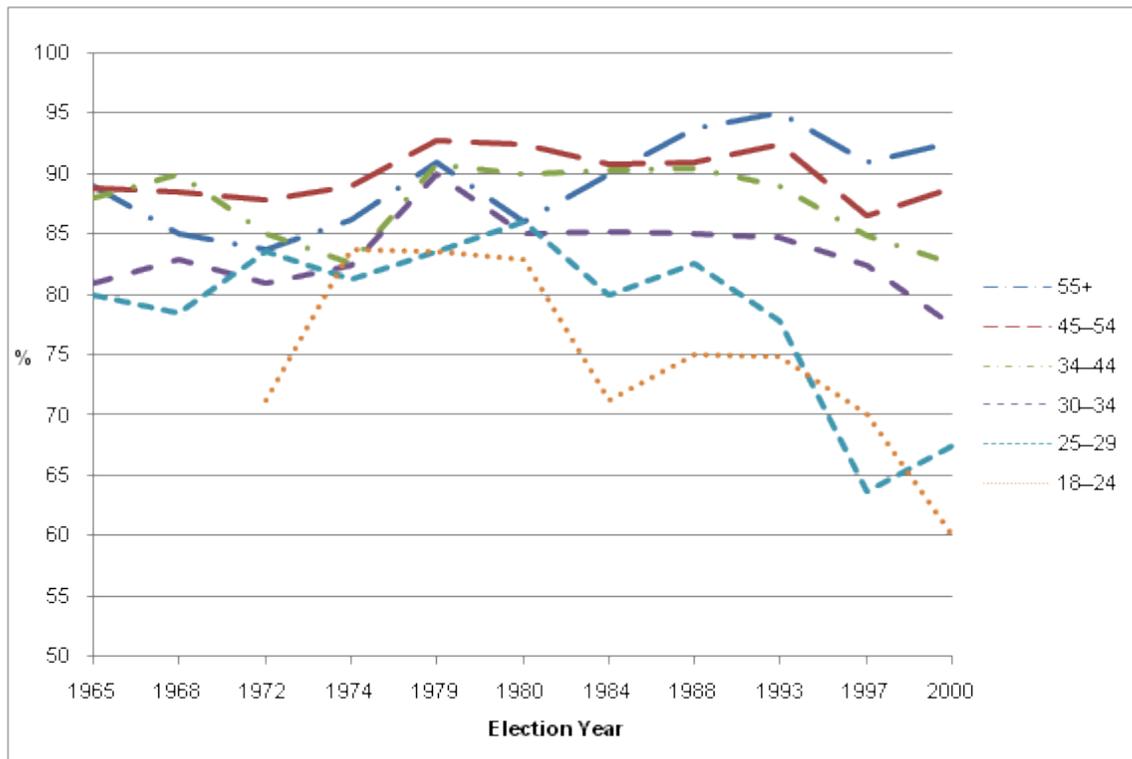


**Figure 1. 2 Estimates of Voter Turnout by Age Group, 2011 Federal General Election**

**Source:** Elections Canada N.d.a.

Although there are important lifecycle effects that impact activities such as voting – i.e. people tend to vote less at a young age and increase their voting as they reach middle age –these different participation rates between younger cohorts and older cohorts are commonly presented as the result of generational change (in addition to life-cycle effects). One piece of evidence for this assertion is the younger cohorts that started with low participation rates in the 80s and 90s have not substantially increased their voting rates overtime to enable them to reach the voting levels of previous generations with historically higher voting rates (Barnes and Virgint 2013; Howe 2010; Pammett and LeDuc 2003). In Canada, the most drastic cohort declines in voting appear to have occurred in the 1980s to the early 2000s. As you can see in figure 1.3, voting across age groups prior to 1980 was much less differentiated than in the following decades. In the more recent elections from 2004 to 2015 the increasing distance between new generations of

voters from older generations appears to have leveled out, with voting rates for ages 18-24 reaching 38.8 percent in 2011 and an encouraging 57.1 % in 2015 after lows of 37% in the 2004 and 2008 elections (Elections Canada N.d.a). Still, with the exception of the most recent election, which provides a reason for some optimism as we look forward to future elections, these youngest voters continue to participate in low rates, particularly in comparison to generations born before 1970.



**Figure 1.3 Voter turnout in Canadian Elections by age group from 1965-2000**

**Source:** Barnes and Virgint 2013, Library of Parliament (adapted from Adsett 2003)

**Note:** Data in this figure was based on post-election surveys from the Canadian Election Study. These self reported surveys tend to produce inflated turnout rates. Elections Canada did not collect age sample estimates on voter turnout until 2004, which is why the voting estimates in this figure are notably higher in comparison to figure 1.1 and 1.2.

Although researchers widely point to the low engagement of youth as behind declines in traditional forms of political participation, some contest the claim that youth are disengaged, and

argue instead that younger generations have a different relationship to political participation. These researchers point to the higher rates of participation of youth in non-traditional political activity and argue that younger generations have simply changed their political engagement to more non-traditional or “elite challenging” modes of participation (Dalton 2008; Martin 2012; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Sloam 2014). In Canada, a recent report by Statistics Canada on youth engagement outlines that while young people are less likely to vote than older voters, they are more likely to engage in activities such as demonstrating than are their older counterparts (Turcotte 2015b). Turcotte (2015b) shows that people between the ages of 15-24 are twice as likely to participate in a demonstration than people between the ages of 45-54 (with the likelihood of ages 15-24 at about 8.5% and the likelihood of ages 45-54 at 4%). Turcotte (2015b) also highlights that young people in this 15-24 age range are more likely to engage in signing petitions or wearing a t-shirt or badge to support a social cause than older cohorts, but these differences are less pronounced than those seen in demonstrating. On the other hand, people aged 45-54 are more likely to express their views by contacting a newspaper or politician or attending a public meeting. This is a common finding across countries that although levels of traditional forms of political participation are higher for older age groups, levels of non-traditional forms of political activity, such as demonstrating, are higher for younger age groups (Norris, Walgrave and Van Aelst 2005; Martin 2012; Sloam 2014).

Researchers who suggest that declines in voting represent a change in focus more than a decline in participation argue that young people are taking up these non-traditional activities because they are rejecting the bureaucratic, structured, and top down forms of electoral politics for more bottom up, issue based, elite challenging forms of participation (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Martin 2012; Turcotte 2015b; Sloam 2014). Still, although this is a common argument,

research on who participates in protests does not provide strong support for the contention that these forms of participation represent a change in focus instead of a decline in political participation for younger generations (Blais and Loewen 2011; Caren, Ghoshal and Ribas 2011; Howe 2010; McViegh and Smith 1999). Caren, Ghoshal and Ribas (2011) highlight how, although protesting is an activity that is usually initiated at a younger age, younger cohorts actually are less likely to report that they *ever* participated in demonstrations than cohorts born in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In this way although people tend to protest at a younger age (a lifecycle effect across generations), the cohort that seems to have engaged the most in demonstrations is the baby boom generation. Research also does not point to large differences in the individual predictors of those who protest and sign petitions as compared to those that vote or participate in more institutionalized politics (Blais and Loewen 2011; McViegh and Smith 1999; Norris et al. 2005). Some of the key predictors for non-traditional forms of participation, such as demonstrating and signing petitions, are also key predictors for voting. These include level of education, political knowledge, and interest in politics (Caren et al 2011; McViegh and Smith 1999; Fisher 2012; Marien et al. 2010; Martin 2012; Sloam 2014). Additionally, people who demonstrate and engage in non-institutionalized forms of participation are, more often than not, also active in the more traditional institutional forms of politics (Blais 2010; Blais and Loewen 2011; Schussman and Soule 2005; Teorell, Torcal, and Montero 2006). These predictors of non-institutionalized forms of engagement suggest there is likely a fair amount of overlap between those who vote and participate in more institutionalized forms of politics and those who engage in less institutionalized or non-traditional forms of participation.

Interestingly, some academics are starting to call for a closer look at how movement participation and institutional forms of participation overlap. For example, Fisher (2012)

highlights how in part due to the savvy use of the web, institutional campaign politics is starting to overlap in character with movement politics. She points to the 2008 Obama election as an example of both a groundswell of youth engagement in electoral politics and a campaign that used movement tactics to bring in youth political participation. These findings suggest that non-traditional political activities such as demonstrating have an important role to play in providing forms of political participation outside of institutional participation, but also as avenues to bring young people into more formal institutional politics. At the same time, the above works suggest that these forms of participation are unlikely to represent a replacement for the declines in electoral participation and that much of those who participate in non-traditional forms of participation are likely also the people who are highly engaged in other forms of traditional politics.

Indeed, although demonstrating does provide an important example of the ways in which young generations are politically more represented than their older counterparts, rates of engagement in activities such as protesting are much lower than rates of voting even for the youngest cohort. For example, in the Statistics Canada article cited above (Turcotte 2015b), only 10 percent of people ages 20-24 (the age group that is the most likely to protest and one of the least likely to vote) reported participating in a demonstration in the previous year, on the other hand, 61 percent of those eligible to vote in this age group reported voting in the last federal election, much higher than their rate of protesting. Therefore, it is doubtful that these alternative modes of participation represent a replacement for the declines in electoral participation or a shift in the way new generations participate. Evidence from Turcotte's report supports this contention as although there are higher rates of involvement of youth in alternative forms of engagement (such as protesting and signing petitions) as compared to other age groups, the largest proportion

of people who do not participate in any political activity are from these same age groups, with inactive citizens comprising 26 percent of participants between 20-24 years compared to 12 percent of those aged 65 to 74 years (Turcotte 2015b).

Finally, while researchers highlight the importance of alternative engagement for younger generations, this trend may represent an increase in participation inequality. Non-traditional forms of participation have a stronger correlation with education levels than activities such as voting (Martin 2012; Sloam 2014). Although the story of participation levels of younger Canadians might not be one of complete disengagement, it does appear to be one of weakening engagement. This is especially concerning because of the potential for a further deepening of participatory inequalities. It also highlights the need to explore the changing relationship that young people have with politics compared to past generations – a relationship that may be detrimental to or substantially modify our democratic process.

This changing nature of the political engagement of younger Canadians not only highlights the need for attention to this topic, but also has spurred questions and debates in the political engagement literature. This thesis engages with some of these debates. In terms of individual level factors and life experiences that might impact participation, researchers have long presumed that education encourages political participation due to the strong individual level correlation between educational attainment and participation. Yet these assumptions have been questioned as education levels have risen, while at the same time participation levels have stagnated or dropped in many western nations. Although trends on the national level do not refute the relationship between increased individual education levels and political participation, the aggregate-level disconnect between higher educational levels and decreased participation highlights the value of further investigation into this relationship. Indeed, many researchers have

revisited this relationship in light of these trends, and this has resulted in much debate around whether education does, in fact, impact political engagement. Some researchers suggest this relationship may be caused by pre-adult factors that encourage both engagement and educational attainment (Kam and Palmer 2008; Persson 2014), whereas others argue for the continuing importance of higher education in impacting political engagement (Mayer 2011; Hillygus 2005).

Additionally, the changing ways that young people are engaging in politics compared to past generations highlights the role of culture in participation and democracy. Although the role of culture in supporting democratic institutions has not been amongst the top issues of focus in political science, it has long been incorporated into explanations of democracy and citizen engagement, and has been raised as a key issue by some notable political scientists and sociologists. Classic work such as de Tocqueville ([1835] 2000) and seminal works by Almond and Verba (1963) and Putnam (1993) have brought the role of culture into periodic focus in political science. Researchers in political science and sociology have pointed to the ways in which particular cultures can provide the resources to support democratic institutions (Putnam 1993; Somers 1993; Mondak and Gearing 1998), and can support democracies by fostering the right kind of orientations and norms of the citizenry (Almond and Verba 1963; De Tocqueville [1835] 2000; Campbell 2006; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Putnam 1993). Often research does not explicitly focus on political culture, but will still incorporate cultural assumptions when exploring the factors that impact political engagement. One primary example of this is research and theory on the relationship between socio-economic status and political participation, and specifically the relationship between higher education and political participation. Work that attempts to explain the relationships between these factors often assumes that one of the primary avenues in which education and SES might increase participation is through the shaping of civic

and participatory orientations (Straughn and Andriot 2011; Verba and Nie 1972; Kam and Palmer 2008; Beck and Jennings 1982).

The changing relationship of youth to political engagement brings culture yet again into the spotlight of political engagement research. Academics highlight the growing individualist tendencies in the cultural orientations of young people, and point to this growing trend of individualism, or decline in deference and duty, as a key explanation for their disengagement with traditional forms of politics (Blais, Gidengil, Nevitte 2004; Howe 2010; Twenge 2006). Political theorists and researchers have long pointed to the dangers of individualism for democracy and the role of civic orientations, such as civic duty or norms of participation, in supporting political participation. The weakening relationship of youth to political participation provides, to some extent, a possible example of the way in which individualism impacts participation. Still, this relationship between an individually orientated young generation and weakening of traditional political participation has produced debates in the political engagement literature. Some researchers do not see individualism as a threat to democracy, but instead argue that these more individualist, expressive orientations of young people can support strong democracies and alternative modes of participation (Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

The changing political behaviors and cultural orientations of young people raise important questions about the relationship young people have with political engagement and what factors support and discourage their engagement. This research addresses these questions by looking at what kinds of influences impact the participation of young Canadians, with a particular focus on the role of higher education. Additionally, it investigates what kind of cultural understandings young people use to think about politics and political participation, with a close look at the role of individualist orientations within these cultural perspectives. Through engaging

with these two topics of inquiry this thesis provides a deeper understanding of the cultural, institutional, and social influences that can support or weaken political participation, and contributes to key debates raised by the changing relation of young people with political participation. We can discuss the points of focus of the thesis in terms of three independent variables that the research investigates in relation to political participation. First, in terms of life influences that might encourage participation, I look at the role of education, particularly higher education and its potential impacts on participation. I take a closer look at the following question: what role does education level and experience in post-secondary institutions play in people's trajectories of political participation? Second, I look at the role of socio-economic status on political engagement. Socio-economic status overlaps with education level, and as education is often understood to be the primary avenue through which socio-economic status impacts participation, these two variables are often treated as interchangeable in work on political participation. In this study socio-economic status is seen as playing a potential independent role from education. Socio-economic status here is understood in terms of a trajectory, this not only includes the educational status one achieves as an adult but the socio-economic background one started within that shapes family experiences, friendship groups, school experiences, and the kinds of capital one develops. Therefore, in addition to education as an independent variable this research looks at socio-economic status as a trajectory from the status of one's family to the track one is heading towards in adulthood and how this might matter for political participation. Finally, the third key independent variable is culture and how different cultural models might impact political participation. The role of culture in participation is analyzed both on a more macro level, or how shared cultural representations and languages might impact the relation that young people have to participation, and also on the individual level, how certain cultural models

that people hold might impact who is, and who is not, participating. This thesis is comprised of two main sections exploring the different dimensions and debates related to political participation. These chapters also focus on different independent variables, with the first section (chapter 2) focusing on the role of education and socio-economic status, and the second section (chapter 3) focusing primarily on the role of culture.

Chapter 2 analyses the influences that might encourage political participation and engages with a key debate within this area of interest: the ways in which higher education might matter in paths to political participation. As the role of higher education in impacting political participation has been questioned, this chapter seeks to take a closer look at how higher education is integrated into paths of participation. It also looks at the larger role of SES trajectories to help contextualize the impacts of higher education. The broad research questions that guides this chapter are as follows: *What are the common experiences in pathways of political engagement, and what is the role of higher education and socio-economic status in these pathways?* In relation to this question, chapter 2 includes: a literature review on the relevant research related to political participation and specifically on the relationship between education and participation; an outline of the methodology used in answering this question; and finally a presentation and discussion of the findings. I argue that political socialization tends to start before people's entry into higher education, usually in the family, and that education builds upon pre-existing orientations to politics more than independently fosters political participation. I suggest high SES trajectories increase the likelihood that people will experience overlapping social influences of participation. Higher education is one such influence but does not appear to be the most important influence. This chapter contributes to debates on the relationship of education to political participation, and more broadly, identifies key ways in which political

participation is facilitated in people's life course. It also adds to the discussion on how we conceptualize socialization processes, outlining political socialization as both involving the impact of the environment on shaping the individual but also the individual's evaluation and interpretation of the socializing agents.

The second section (chapter 3) is directed towards understanding how young people relate to and think about politics and political engagement. The declining rates of political participation has prompted discussions about the potential role of cultural orientations, particularly individualism, in young people's relation to politics. Yet this discussion has taken place around broad value orientations, which can be potentially supportive or detrimental to democracy. I argue that to understand how these broad orientations matter we need to look at how they are incorporated into the reasoning that young people do around politics and political engagement. This chapter addresses this issue by taking a closer look at the cultural models that young people use to think about political participation and politics. Cultural models are shared mental structures (schemas), that produce often taken-for-granted associations and representations, that not only label and describe the world but can also contain goals and desires (Strauss 1992). In other words, they are shared interpretative frameworks (shared by a few or many people) that help us make sense of and act in our shared social worlds. These models can include evaluations, emotions, representations, categorizations, heuristics and causal relations. They are a way to discuss how cultural meaning is internalized and enacted through the interaction of extra-personal world structures and mental schemas (Strauss and Quinn 1997). Therefore, they provide a framework for us to think about the relations between the shared culture we experience as part of a group, and the individual ways this culture is reflected through or used differently by the people within a shared culture or society. A focus on cultural models

provides a more nuanced understanding of the role of individualism in political participation while simultaneously addressing the participant's representations of the political world.

The questions that guide Chapter 3 are the following: *what are the common cultural models young people use to think about political participation, and what are the ways in which these models might mediate their engagement with the political system?* This chapter looks specifically at the role of individualism in these cultural models of participation. Chapter 3, similar to chapter 2, includes a literature review that relates to the topic of culture, individualism, and participation. The chapter reviews the methods used to address the questions specific to this section, and presents and discusses the findings on political cultural models. I present three common ways in which my participants represent the political world and three cultural models that participants use to make sense of political participation. I outline how individualism is incorporated into some of these models of participation and suggest one of these individualistic cultural models of participation helps to further produce political participation as the realm of higher SES trajectories.

Together, these two chapters illuminate the relationship between socio-economic status and political participation. Chapter 2 does so by highlighting the role of SES trajectories in impacting participation. It outlines how SES trajectories provide more opportunities over the life course to experience the contexts and social relationships that support political participation. Although not focusing on SES as an independent variable, Chapter 3 outlines how strong individualist cultural models help to further advantage higher SES trajectories, potentially increasing the relationship between political participation and SES status.

The final chapter explores the significance of the findings in chapter 2 and 3, potential areas of future research, and limitations of the present thesis. The concluding portion seeks to tie

together these two sections to discuss how they both help us better understand the political participation of young Canadians and the social and culture influences that mediate this relationship.

## **Chapter 2: Pathways to Participation and the Role of Higher Education and Socio-economic Backgrounds**

What leads some people to participate in democratic electoral systems while others do not? As citizen participation is a core premise of our political system, this is a question that has long been the focus of much research in political science and, to a lesser extent, sociology. Additionally, as the legitimacy of western democracies is in part based on the idea that various interests of diverse groups are represented in our democracy, the ways in which some groups and their interests come to be more represented through voting or other forms of participation, while others do not, is an important issue.

The role of education often arises in research that seeks to understand these issues of political participation and representation, as education levels have long been identified as one of the strongest correlates of political participation. Due to this relation, a common assumption in the political participation literature is that political engagement is fostered through gaining high levels of education (Brady et al. 1995; Brand 2010; Converse 1972; Straughn and Andriot 2011; Hillygus 2005). Yet recent research has questioned whether education does in fact increase participation or whether there are underlying factors that both help increase political engagement and the likelihood that people will go onto higher education (Berinsky and Lenz 2010; Highton 2009; Kam and Palmer 2008; Persson 2014). Still, this debate is far from resolved, as the issue of selection effects related to university and political participation make it hard to untangle the correlates of attendance in higher education and political participation.

The challenge to this widely accepted role of education in political participation raises the need to more closely look at the influences and life trajectories behind political participation and the way in which education relates to these trajectories. The following study contributes to this discussion by providing a detailed look at these trajectories of participation. Through qualitative research that captures the accounts of participants in relation to political participation and non-participation, I provide an in-depth understanding of the influences in people's path to participation and the mechanisms through which education is linked to these paths. I will first provide background on research related to the influences and correlates of political engagement before reviewing the key proposed roles of education and socio-economic status in political participation. I will then provide a discussion of the conceptual framework that guides this research before presenting the findings. These findings suggest a subtler role for higher education in paths to participation than is often depicted by political participation research, and a larger role for socialization within social contexts of participation, particularly that of the family.

## 2.1 PREDICTORS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION

There are many factors that have been identified as being correlated with political participation and theorized as causing participation. Some correlates of participation are described in terms of contextual factors, while others are theorized in regards to the individual characteristics of participants. In terms of context, there are a number of community and country characteristics that relate to the extent to which people participate in politics, including a democratic history (Sapiro 2004); levels of social capital and a civic culture (Almond and Verba 1963; Campbell 2006; Putnam et al. 1994); the extent of power sharing institutions (Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2010); and levels of inequality (Solt 2008; Grönlund and Milner 2006).

Alternatively, individual characteristics such as age, income, education, personality, organizational membership, and occupation have also been shown to relate to a person's propensity to participate (Andolina et al. 2003; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Mondak et al. 2010; Nie et al. 1996). Context and individual characteristics often intertwine. For example, people's experiences in specific contexts such as school, family, and organizations can relate to the development of individual political skills and attitudes. Conversely, a person's individual characteristics, such as socio-economic status (SES), can influence what sorts of environments they live in, from communities with certain levels of social capital, to school and work contexts thought to foster participatory skills and orientations. Contexts can also mediate the relationship between individual level factors and participation, such as the association of SES with participation levels (Cho, Gimpel, and Wu 2006; Almond and Verba 1963; Huckfeldt 1979; Grönlund and Milner 2006).

These contextual and individual factors that have been demonstrated to relate to participation are important not only with respect to who participates, but also what experiences, resources, and contexts might encourage some to participate more than others. Of the individual characteristics noted above that relate to citizen engagement, education is a key factor in discussions of the differentially distributed experiences and resources that might help to determine who engages and who does not.

Within the extensive research on political participation, education consistently has the strongest association with political participation, over and above any other individual level variable, including income level, job status, gender, and race (Converse 1972; Nie et al. 1996; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; Verba et al. 1995; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Education, therefore, is claimed by some to be the "most important explanatory variable in analyses of

individual level political behavior” (Nie et al. 1996: 97). This critical variable is presumed to directly provide people with the cognitive sophistication, skills, and democratic values to enable political and civic engagement (Brady et al. 1995; Brand 2010; Jennings and Stoker 2008; Nie et al. 1996; Straughn and Andriot 2011; Sunshine Hillygus 2005; Verba and Nie 1972).

Additionally, it is thought to increase social status, thereby putting people in the jobs, organizations, and social networks that enable political recruitment and allowing for the further development of the skills and orientations that reduce the costs of participation (Nie et al., 1996; Verba, Brady & Schlozman 1995). The three main mechanisms through which education is thought to encourage participation are: through increasing cognitive capacity and political skills; shaping values, orientations, and attitudes related to participation and democracy; and shaping social networks that put people closer to the levers of power and in groups where political participation is the norm.

These explanations of the relationship between education and political participation often assume the benefits of education are equally available for all who attend university. Through attending university, people accrue skills and orientations that those who do not attend are less likely to accrue through other means. Therefore, the more education a person has, the more politically engaged they will be (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1995; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Converse (1972: 324), in an often-cited quote, represents this long accepted view of education:

Education is everywhere the universal solvent, and the relationship is always in the same direction. The higher the education, the greater the “good” values of the variable. The educated citizen is attentive, knowledgeable and participatory, and the uneducated citizen is not.

That education encourages participation through instilling participatory and civic values,

and by providing skills that decrease the cost of participation, has been commonly accepted in the social science literature. One issue with this popular construct, however, is that in the last fifty years education has increased while political participation, such as voting, has stagnated or decreased (Brody 1978; Nie et al. 1996). This in turn has spurred research and theory that either modifies, or challenges altogether, the long held assumptions about the relationship between education and participation.

To address these perplexing trends in education and participation levels, Nie et al. (1996) theorize the potential impacts that education has on participation in a slightly different way than earlier works. They describe the relation of higher education to citizen engagement in terms of two separate paths; one of political engagement based on status, and one of democratic enlightenment based on cognitive sophistication and civic values. In this model, education influences political participation not necessarily through developing the skills and orientations to engage, but through raising the status of the people who attend. Nie et al. (1996) explain that education puts one closer to political figures and the levers of power, through influencing one's social status, one's entry into associational life, and one's job status. This, in turn, facilitates higher status people to get their voices heard by those in power, thereby lowering the costs and increasing the benefits of participation. They argue that status is a zero sum situation, so that as education levels rise, the number of people who engage due to higher status advantages stays the same. Alternatively, Nie et al. (1996) argue that education increases democratic enlightenment by increasing verbal and cognitive proficiency. Democratic enlightenment represents democratic orientations such as tolerance and knowledge of the principles of democracy. Nie et al. (1996) argue that whereas democratic engagement based on status is a zero sum equation, democratic enlightenment is not, and so, the more educated a populace is, the more democratically

enlightened they will be, while not necessarily being more politically active.

Although Nie et al. (1996) continue to argue for the role of education through a modified framework of its influence on political engagement, other researchers have begun to challenge the effects of education on participation altogether. Instead, these researchers posit that education is a proxy for pre-adult factors rather than a causal force in increasing participation (Berinsky and Lenz 2010; Highton 2009; Jennings and Stoker 2008; Kam and Palmer 2008; Persson 2014). Longitudinal studies on socialization and participation have enabled researchers to better analyze the causal relation that university might have with political participation, which has led some to question this long assumed relationship. Kam and Palmer (2008), one of the main proponents of the education as proxy model, used data from Jennings and Niemi's Political Socialization Panel Study to demonstrate their notion that university is a proxy for pre-existing propensities to participate. They matched respondents by propensity scores (the likelihood people would attend college based on a number of key characteristics that predicted college attendance) in an attempt to create a control and experimental group in order to test the effects of the treatment of education on political participation. Kam and Palmer (2008) demonstrated that when participants were matched on their propensity to attend college, higher education did not seem to have a significant effect on political participation. Similarly, Persson (2014) tested the causal effects of education using data from the British Cohort Study, which had information on a wide range of potentially relevant pre-adult factors related to participation, including cognitive sophistication, parental practices, and parent's education. Through utilizing a genetic matching statistical technique, Perrson (2014) demonstrated that education appeared to be a proxy for pre-adult factors.

Highton (2009) examined four waves of the Youth-Parent Socialization Study and

highlighted that the differences in political sophistication between those who would attend college and those who would not existed before students entered university. He found that pre-adult factors such as cognitive sophistication, parental characteristics, and youth engagement were more important explanatory variables than college. Finally, Jennings and Stoker (2008), utilizing the data from the Political Socialization Panel Study, compared political engagement and tolerance levels before and after the age of college attendance. They found no significant change over time in the relationship between the participation rates of those who would and would not attend college. The differences already existed between those who would attend college and those who would not, before any of the respondents entered college. Interestingly, though, in a second test of the data using the propensity score technique outlined by Kam and Palmer (2008), Jennings and Stoker (2008) did find that education affected political participation and tolerance. They conclude that education may still have an important effect on participation, but not to the extent that has long been assumed.

Although these studies raise questions about the role of education in relation to participation, they have not precluded altogether the potential effects that education might have in relation to participation. There have been a number of responses to the challenges leveled against the traditional role of education. Some have criticized the statistical methods that Kam and Palmer (2008) used, arguing the statistics do not get beyond the issue of self selection effects (Henderson and Chatfield 2011; Mayer 2011). Henderson and Chatfield (2011) argue that the propensity score technique utilized by Kam and Palmer (2008) does not eliminate the imbalance in the characteristics that likely affect self selection into college, and so the methods used still produce biased estimates. They also demonstrate that the method used by Kam and Palmer is sensitive to changes in modeling choices. Using a genetic matching technique instead of a

propensity score matching technique, Henderson and Chatfield (2011) demonstrate that they could decrease the bias in the covariates found in Kam and Palmer's study and in turn show that education does correlate with participation. Still, Henderson and Chatfield (2011) conclude that this does not demonstrate a causal relationship because "selection may be so problematic as to make it almost impossible to recover unbiased estimates using even the most sophisticated matching methods as yet available" (647). Alternatively, Sondheimer and Green (2010) sought to overcome the self-selection effects of education by analyzing the political participation of students who were randomly selected to participate in programs that increased the likelihood of completing high school. Sondheimer and Green (2010) compared the political participation of students that participated in the program to control groups and found high school education did correlate with increased participation (Sondheimer and Green 2010).

In response to the mixed results surrounding the relationship between education and participation, Henderson and Chatfield (2011) and Jennings and Stoker (2008) highlight the need for a closer look at how education might affect the propensity to politically participate. Researchers that prescribe this closer view call for the development of more nuanced conceptions of this relationship through approaches such as, analyzing the pre-adult experiences and dispositions that might account for some of the presumed effects of education; independently testing the theorized effects of education on participation; and analyzing how some aspects of university, such as the social sciences compared to the sciences, might differentially relate to participation and cultural orientations (Henderson and Chatfield 2011; Jennings and Stoker 2008; Hillygus 2005).

Qualitative research can contribute to this call for a closer and more nuanced conception of this relationship because it has different strengths and weaknesses than does quantitative

research and so can give us a different viewpoint to gain purchase on this puzzle. One key strength of qualitative work is that it captures the details of cases instead of the generalities of groups and this allows for the understanding of complexity, context, and contingency to a greater extent than quantitative methods. In this way, qualitative research can provide insight into this established relationship through looking closer at individual paths to participation and the role that education appears to play in these paths. Also, as qualitative research focuses on understanding outcomes through detailed study of individual cases, it is not dependent on identifying net effects and associations through calculations of probability, and so is not impacted in the same way by issues of self-selection and spuriousness that has proved troublesome for the quantitative research on this issue.

I take the perspective that qualitative and quantitative research can complement each other. Quantitative research is useful for identifying regular and symmetric relationships (Ragin 2008), whereas qualitative methods can provide insight into the mechanisms behind the relationship and the ways in which contingency and combinations matter in these relationships. Although qualitative research cannot by itself resolve the debate on the impacts of education and political participation it can provide deeper insight into the mechanisms behind this relationship that can not only give us a better understanding of the role of education in political participation but also potentially help guide future quantitative research on this issue.

## 2.2 HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

Research on the more general role of higher education has a similar challenge in understanding its impacts and outcomes. It also provides some examples of the way in which qualitative research can contribute to debates about the outcomes related to higher education.

Researchers depict the role and impact of higher education in various ways. This includes portraying higher education as both a place of socialization of skills and orientations that can facilitate social mobility and/or a venue of sorting and accreditation that further helps to stratify and legitimate social classes (Stevens, Armstrong and Arum 2008). In turn, there is differing evidence on the extent to which higher education has the outcomes attributed to it (Arum and Roksa 2011; Hout 2012; Stevens, Armstrong and Arum 2008). In regards to higher education as a site of socialization, recent work in sociology and education raises concerns about whether the current contexts of higher education are substantially fostering student development and change, social and political awareness; and social mobility (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Arum and Roksa 2011; Clydesdale 2007; Nathan 2005). These works suggest that higher education does not necessarily have as its primary focus undergraduate education and growth. In turn, they point to students, professors, and the institutions themselves as implicated in the lack of emphasis that student academic development receives over other concerns (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Arum and Roksa 2011; Pocklington and Tupper 2002).

Work that examines student trajectories and experiences as they move through higher education presents some of the more concerning evidence regarding the limitations of post-secondary institutions for student development (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Arum and Roksa 2011; Clydesdale 2007; Nathan 2005). This work suggests the contexts of American universities are often oriented more towards social and extracurricular activities than intellectual and academic concern and that student outcomes often do not match expectations. Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) in their study of undergraduate trajectories through an American flagship university, known for its party atmosphere, find the outcomes of many students are disappointing and result in a reproduction of social class. They frame the possible impacts of colleges in terms

of the available pathways that these universities appear to facilitate for their students. Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) find within their university of study, the party pathway is the most prominent and helps to reproduce class advantages, and on the other hand, the pathway that would facilitate social mobility is weak. Arum and Roksa (2011; 2014) provide a similar picture of the class based outcomes of higher education, where a minority of students, often coming from high SES backgrounds, are seeing some of the desirable outcomes of higher education both in terms of learning, work, and political engagement, whereas the majority of students do not demonstrate substantial learning outcomes from post secondary, and in turn, often experience disappointing returns on the job market. These works suggest the outcomes of higher education are mixed and are dependent on the characteristics and orientations with which students enter higher education, characteristics that are tied to socio-economic backgrounds.

In direct relation to political socialization, similar studies that take a close look at the undergraduate experience, suggest a weak context of intellectual, political, and academic concern amongst many American students (Arum and Roksa 2014; Clydesdale 2007; Nathan 2005). For example, Clydesdale follows students through their last year of high school and first year of college and suggests there was not substantial intellectual and political socialization for many of his participants within their first year of college. He suggests this is the case because individual and social exploration is not a salient feature or important aspect of their college experience. Nathan (2005) similarly outlines in an ethnography of the freshman year in an American university that academic discussion and debate on social or political issues was limited in classrooms and non-existent in the social settings she witnessed in the larger university. Additionally, she notes student's lives were directed more towards elective networks and commitments than wider community orientations and obligations. These researchers claim that

most of their participants did not experience college as a context for reflecting upon individual identities, world, and social issues. Instead college experiences were a means to an ends in the job market, and marked by a focus on time management and everyday priorities, which includes balancing social concerns with playing the game of succeeding academically with the least amount of effort (Arum and Roksa 2014; Clydesdale 2007; Nathan 2005).

These studies provide reason to temper or challenge some of the long held assumptions of higher education as necessarily contexts of social and individual exploration and incubators for citizenship. While there are not the equivalent rich qualitative studies on the undergraduate experiences in Canadian universities, some of the institutional trends can be found in Canada that these studies point to as behind a weakened focus on student development. For example, in terms of student experiences, aspects of the sorority system depicted in works such as “Paying for the Party” can be found in Canada. Additionally, some of the institutional pressures that orient faculty and administration towards status, fiscal, and increasingly business-centered concerns, potentially over student development, have been documented in Canada (Metcalf 2010; Pocklington and Tupper 2002; Quirke and Davies 2002). On the other hand, the Canadian system of higher education is different in important ways, for example, there is less stratification amongst universities, and tuition fees are substantially lower (Davies and Hammack 2005).

Although this work suggests that some of the lofty assumptions of the impacts of higher education may be tempered, there is still much evidence to support important social, cognitive, political and community outcomes related to higher education (Brand 2010; Hout 2012). Also within these studies outlined above, there are some notable stories of mobility and development, as well as evidence of student engagement and desire for intellectual challenge (Armstrong and Hamilton 2003; Arum and Roksa 2014; Clydesdale 2007; Nathan 2005). The important issue for

the purposes of this research is not so much that the institution of higher education is declining (although this concern is raised in these studies), but that we need to take a closer look at the ways in which education does and does not serve as sites of socialization and how this interacts with student's characteristics as they arrive at post secondary institutions. These studies have relevance for both the American and Canadian contexts in that they highlight how we cannot simply assume that political and intellectual socialization automatically happens when students move through higher education. Instead, it is an important question how and when socialization of skills, knowledge, and orientations occur. Student outcomes are tempered by the way higher education is integrated into people's larger trajectories: the kinds of cultural, social, and education capital they begin with (Armstrong and Hamilton 2003; Arum and Roksa 2011; Bourdieu 1984; Clydesdale 2007; Davies and Guppy 1997), as well as the social, cultural and institutional contexts they experience during and after post-secondary (Binder and Wood 2013). The impacts of higher education are then very much integrated in larger socio-economic backgrounds and future trajectories.

Both the possibilities of pre-adult experiences impacting the relation between education and political participation and the framework of this study are tied to issues of socio-economic status and pre-adult political socialization. Therefore, I will first contextualize the role of education within SES and socialization research, and then outline the study.

### 2.3 SES AND PRE-ADULT FACTORS IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Socio-economic status (SES) can matter for participation both in terms of the impacts of a person's own adult socio-economic status and the differential experiences and socialization that might occur based on the SES of a person's family or neighbourhood. SES is often based on a

person's income, education level, and occupational status. Research around the impacts of education on participation levels is generally incorporated into or used interchangeably with discussions on the relation of socio-economic status and participation. High socio-economic status is thought to help foster the following: civic skills; orientations such as interest, efficacy, and civic norms; the social networks that put people closer to the levers of power; and the probability that one will be mobilized to participate (Lewis-Beck 2008; Milbrath and Goel; Nie et al. 1996; Verba et al. 1995; Verba and Nie 1972; Zipp, Landerman and Luebke 1998). These explanations around how SES relates to political participation predominantly focus on the ways in which adult social status impacts participation, and the key factor through which high SES is understood to produce participation is through one's education. Still, some work in this tradition does highlight the role of pre-adult characteristics, such as the SES of one's parents and family political practices, but the primary way in which the SES of one's parents is understood to impact a person's political participation is through impacting their educational attainment (Brady et al. 1995; Verba, Burns and Schlozman 2003; Verba Schlozman and Burns 2005).

As noted above, there are now challenges to the notion that education is the primary mechanism through which SES increases political participation. In light of these challenges, some are advocating for a closer examination of the role of pre-adult factors in relation to SES and political participation (Jennings and Stoker 2008; Kam and Palmer 2008).

## 2.4 CHILDHOOD POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION AND SES

Research into the role pre-adult socialization can play in shaping political participation, both in adolescence and in adulthood, highlights a number of forums for socialization, from the family, to high school, to workplaces, to organizations. Youth can experience institutions and

environments that potentially instill civic and participatory norms, political interest, and provide civic skills and knowledge and these experiences can be differentially available to different SES backgrounds (Beck and Jennings 1982; Campbell 2008; Jennings and Stoker 2008; McFarland and Thomas 2006; Niemi and Sobieszek 1977; Sapiro 2004; Verba et al. 1995). Additionally, the SES of ones parents provides different opportunities for social networks, and future educational achievement (Bourdieu 1984; Brady; Schlozman and Verba 2015; Beck and Jennings 1982; Verba et al. 1995).

In an analysis of the pre-adult paths to participation, Beck and Jennings (1982) identify four paths of political participation: parent SES, parent orientations such as interest and efficacy, parent political participation, and high school activities of the youth. Although not discounting the role that adult status and education have in political socialization, Beck and Jennings (1982) argue for the recognition of these four factors in shaping eventual political activities long before adult SES status is solidified. They provide evidence that pre-adult socialization through these paths influences both political orientations and activities into young adulthood. They criticize the traditional SES model of Verba and Nie (1972) with this conclusion, arguing that the roots of both civic orientation and adult SES:

... lie in parent socioeconomic status and the economic, social, psychological, and political resources for later life that it provides... political orientations develop prior to the attainment of adult socioeconomic status...this fact raises serious questions about the impact of the respondents own status (Beck and Jennings 1982: 98).

Although their model of the four paths to participation highlights the advantages that parental SES status provides, Beck and Jennings (1982) also note that the additional paths to participation can either counteract status advantages or exacerbate them. They explain that parental political

orientations and parent political activities can shape youth activities into adulthood, as can engagement in high school activities. These activities correlate with engagement independently of parental SES, but as they are related to SES, they also often likely contribute to differences between the political participation of SES backgrounds.

This highlights the role that family socialization can play both in reproducing SES advantages in adulthood and independently providing political socialization (Brady, Schlozman and Verba 2015; Verba et al. 2005). Research suggests that political practices in the home can have important impacts on political participation. A number of studies note that children who discuss politics at home with their parents are more likely to be political engaged as adults (Andolina 2003; Dinas 2014; Verba et al. 2005). Additionally, Almond and Verba (1963) provide some evidence that participatory norms in families, such as including children in decision-making, can foster participatory citizenship in adulthood. Families can also be sites where political participation and interest are modeled. For example, a parents' political participation, interest, efficacy and knowledge have all been demonstrated to significantly correlate with the child's (Beck and Jennings 1982; Highton 2009; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009; Verba et al. 1995). Moreover, Jennings et al. (2009) provided evidence for family socialization over genetics in her study on political interest, knowledge and behaviors, as the likelihood that a child would share these attributes with their parents increased the more consistently the behavior was modeled. Finally, Lauglo (2011) demonstrates in Norway that political discussions in the home correlates not only with academic performance in schools but also with one's ambitions for higher education net of the student's academic performance or parent's education level. Their work suggests political socialization practices in the home can produce orientations that underlie political duty and participation, as well as a propensity to gain

higher education levels. Still, work on the ways in which family practices can facilitate political participation has not been given the attention that factors such as education have received in the literature. Also, much of the work on political socialization highlights the ways in which political attitudes are transmitted more than political practices.

## 2.5 THEORIES OF SOCIALIZATION

To conceptualize the accounts of family practices and pre-adult socialization, I draw from theories of Bourdieu (1984; 1990) and Strauss and Quinn (1997). These theories provide a useful framework because they highlight the more cognitive, interpretative, and generative aspects of socialization. This understanding of socialization allows a discussion of the powerful impacts of social modeling and experience on practices, while recognizing how socialization does not determine action or necessarily produce a reflection of what is learned. Also, Bourdieu points to the ways in which capitals of the family, such as cultural, economic and educational capital, facilitates different practices and experiences, providing an additional framework to think about the class-based nature of socialization and cultural and educational mastery.

Bourdieu's notion of the habitus highlights how our experiences and practices, particularly in early life, shape our habitus, which means our mental structures or our conscious and unconscious dispositions of perception and action (1984; 1990). People are exposed to different experiences and practices based on their location in social space (their social class or status), which is determined by a person's cultural and economic capital. Dispositions for action are therefore shaped by the practical action or mastery that is developed through acting and experiencing in one's family and social milieu, environments largely shaped by one's social location or socio-economic background (Bourdieu 1984; 1990).

The practices and dispositions that are developed based on the experiences within one's social location provide the cultural capital (i.e. skills and tastes) to act adeptly in some circumstances and not others, and in turn to have a taste for some activities and not others. It produces the "subjective aspirations" about what activity is and is not for the "likes of us", not based in conscious calculations of success or failure but in the more subconscious "dispositions" shaped by the possibilities and impossibilities grounded in the conditions in which the habitus was shaped and in the objective conditions in which it must act (Bourdieu 1990: 54-55). The experiences that shape the habitus in early life thus have the strongest impact and in turn mediate the experiences and social relations one enters into. At the same time, it is not determinative, and rather interacts and changes with the contexts people are exposed to throughout their trajectories.

This framework depicting the ways in which cultural and educational capital are differentially experienced and acquired through one's social location allow us to think about how education level and propensities to participate in politics might be intertwined. The social locations of the higher and more educated SES families, or upwardly mobile lower SES families, can provide both the milieu of political and cultural capital to make political participation natural and to one's taste, and also allow one to have educational advantages not only through grade school, but also through university. Bourdieu's concept of the habitus and cultural and economic capital allows us to think about reproductions of class advantage and the role of early socialization in political participation. The concept of the habitus helps us incorporate the role of socialization, resources and the "calculations" that might impact participation.

Strauss and Quinn (1997) build on a similar notion of socialized mental structures that help shape both automatic and conscious thought. Yet Strauss and Quinn (1997) give further attention to how these existing structures shape how people perceive new experiences. By

incorporating cognitive and developmental psychology, Strauss and Quinn (1997) provide a framework to conceptualize socialization as an interactive experience, which depends as much on the acting, interpreting self as on the context. They outline how our early experiences of associations and reinforcements shape the self concepts and structures of perception that in turn impact what information people find to be salient or motivating in future contexts (Strauss & Quinn, 1997). In this way, experiences of socialization can be interpreted differently depending on one's existing self-concept and structures of perception. For example, events can have more motivational force or produce stronger associations if they relate to one's identity, have a strong emotional association, or are experienced repeatedly. This concept of socialization fits well with the accounts of respondents, where pre-existing political experiences and identities appear to impact how people relate to the potential political influences of education. Also, Strauss and Quinn's notion of how socialized mental structures or schemas include evaluative and motivational associations allows a framework to understand the ways in which family modeling of political practice can be experienced or socialized differently. For example, if associations of desirability or trustworthiness are attached to the modeling of political practices versus untrustworthiness or negativity, people will produce different motivational attachments to their schemas around politics and political participation.

Dinas (2014), in his analysis of political socialization related to partisanship, partly demonstrates this contingent approach to thinking about socialization. He argues that strong political socialization in the home does not produce a reflection of parent's political opinions, but rather helps to produce higher interest, knowledge, and attention in children, thereby making political trends and messages more salient. Therefore, if political contexts represent messages contradicting parental political ideologies, children from political families are more likely to be

impacted by this context, and change their political stance, than children from non-political families. Through this process, political socialization practices in the home interact with political contexts that can help produce the opposite ideology of parents. This work not only provides evidence for the impacts that political socialization in the family can have on political participation, but also provides an example of socialization not as a mere reflection of practices in the family, but as fostering political salience or predispositions that interact with changing contexts. Dinas (2014) also notes that the flexibility of these dispositions wane after young adulthood.

## 2.6 SOCIALIZATION POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LIFECOURSE ANALYSIS

The framework of socialization used in this study – one that highlights the interaction of mental structures with social structures and one’s life experiences – also integrates well with the approach of life course analysis, as it highlights how early experience interacts with experiences throughout the life course. A focus on trajectories, pathways, and the life course in understanding particular behaviors or social outcomes highlights the complexity and intersections of social and institutional processes and how events and behaviors build and unfold through time in patterned ways. Life course analysis is premised on the importance of the timing and interrelation of life events and experiences. This approach often uncovers multiple pathways to a particular outcome and additionally highlights how the outcome itself can often be better understood not as a discrete conclusion but as continuing trajectories – either stable or changing – through the lifespan (Corrigall-Brown 2012; Sampson and Laub 2003; George 2009). For example, Corrigall-Brown (2012) demonstrates the utility of looking beyond whether or not one participates in protest to the trajectories that activism then takes, which can involve different

patterns of participation or eventual disengagement. Similarly, Sampson and Laub (2003) suggest crime and eventual desistance are not discrete acts but are best understood as trajectories where early experiences interact with subsequent adult experiences to support continued criminal behavior or continued distance from criminal behavior.

Life course analysis often emphasizes the ways in which people are differentially embedded in social networks and various overlapping institutions. A key focus is how institutions, such as family, school, work, and the government, interact to structure lives, defining both the “normative pathways of social roles, including key transitions” and the trajectories of people moving through them (Bengtson, Elder and Putney 2005: 493). Through a focus on how lives are linked and embedded in social networks and institutions, the family arises as an important institution that helps shape social location and intergenerational paths of socialization within larger historical and cultural trends (Bengtson, Elder and Putney 2005). The timing, patterning and sequencing of life events shapes people’s life trajectories, cultural understandings, and identities in distinct ways (Alwin and McCammon 2003; George 2009).

Finally, the life course approach also highlights agency within macro institutional or historical constraints. People strategically adapt and act both within historical, institutional, and cultural structures, but also in the context of their own family background, stage in the life course, and social and economic status (Giele and Elder 2009; Bengtson, Elder and Putney 2005; Gecas 2003; Mortimer, Staff, Oesterle 2003). For example, Mortimer, Staff and Oesterle (2003) outline how the patterns of work life that people engage in during adolescence are shaped both by socio-economic backgrounds and young people exercising agency in their own construction of their work pathways. Additionally, qualitatively oriented variants of life course analysis focus on how people make meaning and construct identities from the experiences of the life course and

the larger social and cultural contexts they are embedded within (Clausen 1998; Cohler and Hostetler 2003).

This study attempts to capture the impacts and interactions of the multiple correlates of participation through analyzing the life course accounts of young Canadians. The participation trends in Canada represents the trends of interest that are found in many Western democracies. That is: low voting rates that can be largely attributed to lower participation rates of younger generations; a strong correlation between political engagement and education levels; and the perplexing trend of rising education levels, while voting rates drop (Blais et al. 2004; Howe 2010; Martin 2012). The qualitative approach to this research allows insight into this debate by illuminating the stories, processes, and meanings behind these long standing relationships. Although qualitative research cannot provide the kind of evidence of association that quantitative research provides, it allows for the illumination of the mechanisms involved in these established relationships. A qualitative focus can better capture contingent, contextual, asymmetric outcomes and how processes unfold through time, allowing the illumination of different aspects of this relationship than does quantitative research (Maxwell 2004; Ragin 2008). This focus of qualitative research on mechanisms and processes unfolding through time represents a notion of causality not based on identifying law like relationships but on detailing the processes behind outcomes (Maxwell 2004). In this way this research seeks to better illuminate some of the processes and combinations of experiences that can help lead to political participation for these participants and the role that education plays in these accounts of participation.

Through this research, I find a subtler role for higher education, one that is much more mediated or dependent on prior experiences than is often presented in the political participation literature. I find that for most, political socialization begins before university, often in the family,

and interacts with experiences in university. Educational institutions do appear to be one of a number of venues where political socialization can occur, through two key mechanisms: 1) the production of political participation and discussion as desirable, exciting, and natural and 2) the development of the background skills and knowledge that facilitate political participation. Yet for the strongest participators, these same key mechanisms through which participation is supported can be found before university, most often in the family context. Family and social contexts of desirability such as friendship networks and workplace settings are pointed to more often as the primary sources of these influences than is the university setting. Instead, higher education appears to produce most of its effect through encouraging interest in politics and the practice of paying attention to news, but less so in initiating political activity. Finally, higher education does not appear to be a “universal solvent” or have good effects on all that attend, as Converse (1972) supposed, but rather has the most perceived effects for those that had prior political influences or practices that may have made them more perceptive of, or motivated to seek out, the aspects of university that could enhance their participation

## 2.7 METHODOLOGY

I gathered information on the participation levels and political stories of Vancouver youth to gain insight into the influences behind various paths of political participation. I used Vancouver as the site of study, as it has demographics and participation levels that are relatively representative of Canadian cities, where the majority of the Canadian population resides. Vancouver is a mid size city that has a median family income level of \$64,007 (according to the 2006 census, which is the most current mandatory census of this data), similar to the Canadian median, and voting levels relatively equivalent to Canadian voter turnout, with ridings ranging

from 54 percent-62 percent turnout in the 2011 federal election (Elections Canada N.d.a.; Statistics Canada 2010a). Vancouver has a population that is higher than the Canadian average in terms of educational credentials and a high level of immigration. Almost 40 percent of the population of Vancouver from 25 years to 64 years has a university degree, and 46 percent of the population are immigrants (Statistics Canada 2010b; 2009). In terms of the education levels of the age group in my study, the 2006 census data showed that 47 percent of the people between the ages of 25-34 had a bachelors degree or higher in Vancouver (Statistics Canada 2014). While Vancouver is higher than the Canadian average in these respects, this arguably represents a common trend in Canada, and in many other western nations, of increasing immigration and education credentials. Additionally, higher-than-average education and immigration levels are common characteristics of urban centers.

While the discussion above notes that Vancouver, the chosen site, is intended to be representative of other areas of Canada, any extrapolation beyond Vancouver and from the participant sample must be undertaken with care. Contextual differences between cities would be relevant to the results of this study. For example, contextual factors are known to relate to specific levels of participation, and one can imagine how differences between rural and urban environments, education levels, income levels and inequality, and levels of diversity might affect both political participation and cultural conceptions around participation. Also, in terms of the participants who were part of the research sample, the sample was limited in age and over-representative in education and participation levels, which should be used as a caution in interpreting and extending these results to other groups. However, the accounts and findings in this study provide important insight into potential influences behind participation that can inform our understanding of larger trends and relationships in political participation research.

The participants included in this study were Canadian citizens who were approximately 27 years old and went to high school in Vancouver. The sample was homogeneous in terms of age because age has effects on participation, both in terms of cohort effects (different generations have different voting practices), and in terms of life cycle effects (people become more politically active in midlife) (Howe 2010; Martin 2012). Therefore, I focused on a specific age instead of a range of ages to avoid additional variability in participation outside of the role of education and SES backgrounds. Also, focusing on a particular cohort allowed some stories to overlap in terms of the experiences of high school and somewhat facilitated recruitment, as at times the participants would still be in contact with other people on my list of potential participants.

I focused on the high school cohort that was on track to graduate high school in 2004, thus they were 27 year old at the time of the study. I chose this age because those who complete university usually have done so by this age, and many have joined the job market. Yet, 27 year olds will still have a reasonable amount of recall of high school and university experiences. A younger cohort is also of interest because much of the decline in voter turnout is attributed to the lower participation of the younger age cohorts (generations x and y) (Blais, Gidengil, and Nevitte 2004; Howe 2010; Zukin et al. 2006).

To identify potential participants, I used a stratified multi-stage cluster sampling method. This method was undertaken both to allow me to obtain an age-specific sample, and to help ensure that the sample included an adequate representation of both low and high SES groups. To obtain the sample I divided Vancouver into high, low, and mid SES areas identified through income and education data from the 2001 Canadian Census. I then randomly sampled one school from the public high schools in the mid, and high SES areas, and two from the low SES areas.

The decision to sample two low SES schools instead of one was guided by two considerations. First, I was concerned that it might be harder to recruit people from the lower SES school than the higher SES schools, as people from low SES backgrounds tend to engage in civic and political activities less than people in high SES categories. Therefore, to ensure I had a good representation of people from lower SES neighbourhoods, I sampled two low SES schools. Second, I wanted to make sure I had a good contrast between high SES and low SES neighbourhoods and the mid SES school that I ended up sampling was on the higher range of the middle SES category in terms of education and income. This being the case, I wanted to ensure I had a large enough sample of low SES participants to enable a contrast between mid SES and high SES versus lower SES schools.

Once I had sampled one high school from each of the high SES and the mid SES areas and two high schools from low SES areas, I tracked down the 2001 yearbooks from these schools. I then randomly sampled about half the students from the grade nine class of each yearbook (approximately 130 students) using a random number generator. I sought yearbooks where the age group of interest would be in grade nine, in the hopes of including anyone who might have dropped out of the later years of high school.

I then attempted to track down the randomly sampled students through the internet, focusing particularly on social media sites. I also contacted participants through a modified snowball method, whereby study participants were shown a list of their randomly sampled classmates and asked to send on a recruitment letter to anyone with whom they were still in contact. Around 15 students from each of the four high schools were interviewed, with slightly more than 15 interviewed from the high SES school, and slightly less than 15 interviewed from one of the low SES schools. Approximately 35 percent of students from the original random

samples were living outside of the country, deceased, or not possible to find or contact through the internet or social networks. From the students that were contacted there was approximately a 20 percent response rate. At the same time, estimates of the response rate could range from 20-40 percent, this is because the method of sending out recruitment letters through the internet and through snowball methods meant that I could not always determine whether the intended recipient received the recruitment letter or if it went into a spam mailbox. In this way, the 20 percent response rate is a conservative estimate and when recruitment letters were sent through methods or sites where I was confident the participants received the letter the response rate was approximately 40 percent. I offered a \$50 honorarium for the interview in the hopes of encouraging those not interested in politics to participate in the study. Still, the lower response rate presents some issues of selection, as it appears that both people with lower education levels and those with low participation levels were less likely to participate in the study. At the same time, limited response rates are an issue that face many current polls and academic studies. Howe (2010) asserts that political polls receive a response rate often in the realm of 10 percent and academic research projects with considerable resources generally receiving a response rate of 50 percent and these numbers are even lower for younger populations.

Of the 63 participants that were interviewed, 29 participants were female and 34 were male. There were 19 participants from the high SES school, 16 participants from the mid SES school and 28 participants from the two low SES schools combined. These small differences in response rates are due to the level of difficulty I had obtaining responses from lower SES schools versus higher SES schools. Most of the participants had a bachelor degree or higher (63 percent of the participants), 30 percent had more than a high school diploma but less than a university degree and 6 percent had a high school diploma or less. 28 of the participants identified as

Chinese, 22 as white, 4 as South Asian, and 10 were from mixed and varying backgrounds. 19 of the 63 participants were from homes where English was not the primary language spoken in the home. The majority of participants did not attend church regularly.

I conducted 63 semi-structured interviews, which incorporated both open-ended questions, a life history calendar, and a short survey. The interviews were usually about 1.5-2 hours in length but could range from 1-4 hours. The interviews were conducted with people living across Canada, predominantly in person and on occasion through Skype (6 of the 63 interviews were conducted through Skype). I did not seek out interviews with people living abroad as this posed an extra barrier to political participation that was not relevant to the study. Most participants interviewed (54 of the 63) were living in the greater Vancouver area (including Burnaby and Richmond). The Skype interviews were comparable in detail, and length to the in-person interview, although it was sometimes harder to develop rapport.

The semi-structured questions provided an opportunity for the participant to give their own open narrative and conceptions of politics and participation. Additionally, I asked explicit questions around particular political activities and influences, which allowed for the gathering of more systematic information on factors pointed to by political research as potentially important. I also asked about a range of kinds of political participation and provided an open question prompting the participant to add in any additional ways they might have politically participated that were not asked about directly. I used the life history calendar to enhance recall around specific biographical events, such as when people began to pay attention, or vote (Freedman et al. 1988).

The Life History Calendar is a methodological tool used to collect retrospective data on life course trajectories and transitions (Caspi et al. 1996). The Life History Calendar (LHC)

provides a grid that includes a timeline on one axis and different life themes on another (See appendix C). Respondents fill in the timelines starting with larger memorable themes such as places of residence, and then move to more specific themes. The large memorable events can act as anchors to enable participants to remember the timing and details of the more specific or less memorable themes. Respondents report on streams of events instead of isolated events and record sequences, timing, and duration (Caspi et al. 1996). Belli (1998) suggests that by eliciting thematic and sequential events the calendar compliments the way autobiographical memory works. Finally, the visual aspect of the calendar allows respondents and interviewees to note inconsistencies and to use the recorded patterns of life events to recall the timing and details of subsequent events more accurately (Freedman 1988).

Studies suggest that the calendar enables the collection of high quality data. Freedman (1988) and Caspi et al. (1996) incorporated the use of Life History Calendars within longitudinal studies. This enabled them to compare retrospective accounts collected with the Life-History Calendar (LHC) with the same activities reported as current information years earlier. Freedman (1988) compared retrospective data on activities reported in the panel data five years prior and found 87 percent of respondents provided identical answers on the panel and the LHC for topics such as school attendance and timing of marriage. Similarly, Caspi et al. (1996) found in their study, which compared LHC data on events reported three years prior that 90 percent of the data for each of the content domains were reported in the exact month on both occasions. They compared a number of domains, including when people were in full or part time schooling and the statuses and levels of employment across time. Caspi et al. (1996) suggests this is particularly encouraging because adolescent to young adulthood is characterized by dense transitions, which should make recall more difficult.

Although this study uses a qualitative instead of the (predominant) quantitative approach to political participation research, the approach used in this study is appropriate for a number of reasons. Qualitative and quantitative research methods provide different strengths for understanding relationships between variables and the social mechanisms that help produce these relationships (Gross 2009; Small and Feldman 2012). Although quantitative methods are well suited for identifying relationships between variables, they can be less effective at explaining the mechanisms behind these relationships, particularly when there are problems with selection bias or when the outcomes of one variable on another changes depending on context, or depending on the combinations of factors with which the variable interacts (Ragin 2008; Small and Feldman 2012). In these cases, qualitative research can provide important exploratory research, or on the other hand, help to explain existing relations between variables when the proposed mechanisms are unclear or extensive (Gross 2009; Small and Feldman 2012). The relationship between education and political participation is such an example, where there are multiple possible mechanisms, selection effects are known to be highly problematic, and researchers have pointed to the potential heterogeneity of the impacts of education (Berinsky and Lenz 2010; Hillygus 2005; Nie et al 1996). The interview, life history, and case based focus of this research allows for insight into the mechanism behind the relationship between education and political participation because it allows for the close examination of accounts and trajectories related to participation and how education fits into these trajectories. Case based and life-history research is particularly useful for capturing the ways in which a variable such as class or education might have different outcomes depending on the ways in which these characteristics interact across conditions, individual characteristics, and through time (Ragin 2008; Small 2005). Drawing from the life history accounts allows for detailed case based descriptions of the paths to and away

from politics that incorporates the role of multiple variables in their paths to participation. Qualitative methods such as interviews, also help to illuminate the background perspectives, assumptions, and self-concepts of participants that lie behind social practices of political participation, enabling an in-depth understanding of the wider situational factors shaping social outcomes (Gross 2009; Lamont and Swidler 2014).

Through utilizing systematic questions, I look closely at the different life experiences that have been theorized to impact participation, while at the same time capture participants' own accounts of their path to participation. Through gathering life histories and accounts of pathways to participation that span from childhood to participants' late twenties, I work to understand both the potential ways in which higher education might impact a person's path, but also how experiences before high school graduation might have an effect on these pathways. Additionally, I outline how various institutional and social impacts can interact or impact people differently throughout the life course.

To analyze different life paths around participation, I categorized participants first by political engagement levels and then in terms of whether their pathways of participation increased, stayed the same, or decreased across time (no participant notably decreased their participation). I categorized participants into high, middle, and low engagement levels based on A) political participation levels, determined by either level of voting or protesting, and B) cognitive engagement (Zukin et al. 2006), based on regular attention to Canadian news (see appendix for detailed criteria of these categorizations). To be classified in the high engagement category, participants had to have both a high level of cognitive engagement and a high level of participation. Participants that were classified in the intermittent category could have a number of participation combinations, such as intermittent participation and paying attention, low

participation and high paying attention, or low paying attention but high participation. Finally, participants in the low category were low in both participation and paying attention or low on one and intermittent on the other.

I focus upon voting as one of the key forms of participation in this study because it represents one of the most common and accessible political activities that citizens engage in and also has shown some of the most substantial decline in the last 50 years. At the same time, there are other ways to politically participate and young people are known to engage at higher levels in non-traditional forms of participation. This is why I chose to also include protesting in the categorization scheme of participation, as this allows my participation measure to both include traditional forms of participation and non-traditional forms of participation. Still, it is worth noting that those who voted tended to be the same people who protested, and the inclusion of protesting in the categorization scheme only impacted the categorization of one participant. Also, although I only focus on two modes of participation to keep my categorization scheme manageable, I asked participants about a range of participation activities in the interview. Finally, I included level of attention to current events as the other dimension to my categorization scheme, as arguably an aspect of political participation is attempting to have some background on the political issues or candidates that relates to one's participation.

Finally, as noted, participants were put into different pathways of participation according to the trends in their participation over two time periods (2004-2008; 2009-2014). The first time period spans from when participants would be 18 years old (this would for many be their final year of high school and the earliest age they could vote), to when they were approximately 22 years old. The second period spans from 23 years old (when those who went straight into university would have been towards the end of their degree) to the time when the interview

occurred. I set these two time periods in such a way to attempt to capture whether people's participation levels were consistent from the outset of voting or changed through the time where many would have been in post secondary. I also attempted to divide the time periods so that they both included a number of elections. According to participation levels in these two time periods, participants were classified as in a high to high participation pathway (they were in the high political engagement category for both time periods), middle to high, low to high, middle to middle, low to middle, and low to low participation pathway. This paper describes four of the six pathways in detail. These four pathways represent the trends in stories of participation found in the six pathways, yet provide some of the most illustrative stories in terms of the role of family, social relationships, and education. They also depict the ways in which higher pathways of participation could contrast with lower pathways of participation in terms of experiences and influences of participation.

Once participants were categorized into the various pathways, I looked for common experiences and combinations of influences throughout the lives of the participants within and between the categories. I did this by first focusing on case analysis, outlining each participation story within similar pathways of participation, to capture both the complexity of each case and the common influences across cases. Second, I used qualitative software to capture common themes across stories and within categories of participation. Finally, I conducted basic cross tabulations in order to reaffirm the trends found in the accounts, as well as some descriptive statistics on the demographics of the sample.

## 2.8 LIMITATIONS

There are a number of limitations to this study. As previously discussed, this sample is more educated relative to the population of Canada or Vancouver (63% of my sample has a bachelor degree or higher whereas the 2006 census indicated 47% of people 25-34 have a bachelor degree or higher in Vancouver) (Statistics Canada 2014). On the one hand, I am interested in the impacts of higher education, particularly of a bachelor degree or higher, and so having an overrepresentation of these participants is somewhat justified as it is a common strategy in qualitative research to focus on cases that represent the phenomena of most interest. On the other hand, while it is useful to focus on cases that involve paths of higher education so that I can capture the different trajectories involved, it is important to not simply include cases that represent one conclusion and leave out the cases that might provide a different conclusion. Although this study is high in terms of education level, it includes representations of people across a range of participation levels, with and without a post-secondary degree. This sample provides accounts of people who are highly educated but do not participate, and those who are highly educated and do participate in politics. In addition, the study does contain a range across education levels, as there are 23 participants with less than a university degree, and 40 with a university degree or higher. This allows some comparison between the stories of those who have obtained at least a bachelor degree with those who have attended less school.

At the same time, the underrepresentation of those with lower education and participation levels does appear to produce less diversity in the pathways related to education, as the different categories of participation do not demonstrate the relationship between education and participation level that we would expect. Instead, the education level is relatively similar in each participation category and in fact, the highest participation category has a lower proportion of

participants with a university degree or higher, at 61 percent, than the low group of participants, at 67 percent. This is likely due to a small sample size, but may also be related to selection bias, in that those that had a high school degree or less, and those that did not participate in politics, were less likely to respond to recruitment. Although this might have the potential to exaggerate the role of the family, as we have a higher representation of those who did not attend university in the high participation category than in the low participation category, those without a university degree appeared no more likely to point to family influences than those who went to university. Additionally, although there was an underrepresentation of people without a university degree relative to the population, again those with a university degree, noted political participation starting in the family more often than in higher education. There is no reason to assume that the inclusion of more low educated non-participants in this study would change the findings of the role of the family and social contexts of desirability. Instead, we can surmise from other SES and political research that we would likely find less social and family contexts in the accounts of the underrepresented population in this study – in other words, we know that people who are less educated and do not participate in politics are less likely to come from families who participate (Beck and Jennings 1982; Verba 2005; Lauglo 2011). Still, the underrepresentation of this group is a limitation of this study, and future work would contribute to these findings by ensuring those with lower education levels are better represented along with those in the lower participation categories.

Another potential limitation is the use of self-reports and accounts to understand influences related to participation. Retrospective accounts and self-reports can result in inaccuracies both due to the fallibility of our memories and the different ways in which people construct and perceive reality based on their own identities and cultural interpretations. The

study addresses some of the problems with self-reports by utilizing the life history calendar, which assists with event recall. Additionally, I not only look at the emphasis a participant puts on a life event, but also how often similar political influences arose across accounts, regardless of the importance attributed by the participant. Finally, the ways in which different participants interpret and represent their paths to and away from participation are not simply drawbacks of self-reports but provide important background into the identities and understanding of participants that give us insight into their relations with politics and participation.

A related drawback to self-reports is that those who are most politically interested might notice the social political influences in their life, such as family, while others might not identify those influences through self-reflection. Although it is likely the case that participants who are more politically engaged might be more likely to note and emphasize these sources than the non-political, it is unlikely that it would produce the kinds of differences in reports between the high and low participators found in this study. Also, a number of participants that expressed very little interest in participation, or that actively distanced themselves from politics, could still name and discuss a number of political social influences in their lives, such as family and friends. Finally, there are examples of social impacts potentially having temporary effects on those in the low participation category, which provides some additional support for the role of social influence in not only the accounts of high participators but also lower participators.

Finally, there is the potential issue that people could be self-selecting into politically active groups, rather than politically active groups impacting their participation. This paper argues that this is, in fact the case: people do self-select into political contexts that they perceive as desirable, and individual identities and contexts likely do interact and reinforce one another. Still, a number of accounts of the role of social influence on political participation involves

social contexts that people did not self-select into, such as workplaces. These accounts provide evidence that social contexts can impact participation levels whether or not people are seeking out these influences.

## 2.9 OVERVIEW OF PATHWAYS

These stories below are presented within categories of participation levels to illuminate the common experiences and accounts that help put people in one category of participation as compared to another. Categories that incorporate changes in participation levels across time were meant to highlight whether different patterns of participation (such as starting to participate later in adulthood instead of from early adulthood) would highlight the role of different influences or experiences (such as higher education).

The factors that underlie stories of political participation tend to relate to family practices, background skills and knowledge, and social desirability. Political participation is encouraged both by taken for granted practices in the family and the learned desirability of voting and paying attention that is produced in social contexts, including but not limited to the family. The family and social contexts that appear to be most influential are ones that produce a milieu of political participation. This milieu makes obvious that people participate in politics and think participation is important.

The family plays an important role in many paths to participation as it can help produce the dispositions, skills and habits that directly supports political participation or makes messages of political participation more likely to resonate later in life. Table 2.1 provides an overview of the level of family socialization in each pathway.

**Table 2.1 Number of Participants in each pathway of participation who were exposed to various levels of political socialization in the home.**

Family Political Socialization	Pathway Low both	Pathway Mid from low	Pathway Mid both	Pathway High from low	Pathway High from mid	Pathway High both	<b>Total</b>
0 Parents don't vote/not political	1		3		1	1	<b>6</b>
1 Parents don't vote but have discussed or paid attention to politics	4	2	2			1	<b>9</b>
2 Vote but nothing else	1		3		1		<b>5</b>
3 Vote and also does one of: discuss/encourage/media in house	1	6	7	1	4	4	<b>23</b>
4 vote and does more than one of: discuss/encourage/media	2	1	2		3	12	<b>20</b>
Total	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>63</b>

*Note: Family political socialization was measured by whether parents voted or not, as well as the extent to which activities of participation were modeled and encourage around the home. This includes, having news media around the house, parents actively encouraging their children to vote, and parents talking about politics with or around their children. The bold line represents the distinction between parents that did not vote and those that did.*

The accounts of family contexts of participation provide examples of how qualitative accounts provide the kind of information that purely counting would not capture (in other words, the stories behind some of these numbers explain how some of the people in the lower categories who had parents that voted and encouraged them to vote, still had less convincing models of participation). The family context seems to be the most impactful or effective when it is a positive and trustworthy source. People who started and ended their pathways in high participation categories often describe their families as informed and as modeling the practice of paying attention or “having an opinion,” whereas people in the mid participation category and low participation category who have families that vote, were more likely to talk about how their family members discussed politics in a negative way, pressured them to vote a certain way instead of helping them have their own opinion, or who do not know a lot about politics themselves but vote anyways. Additionally, social contexts that help encourage participation

appear to be most effective when participation is seen as the general practice in a context or social group. For example, when people enter into environments where “everyone” seems to be voting or discussing politics, this can impact their own participation habits. Finally, people in high participation categories often experience reinforcing environments of participation. Accounts of political experiences in the high participation category often include multiple contexts, social groups and experiences, almost always starting with the family, that encouraged their participation. On the other hand, the people who do not participate at all were less often from homes where political engagement was part of the family environment. Also, people in the lower participation category rarely reported having overlapping contexts of participation. In other words, if their parents were politically active, they generally did not have friends or a professional context where knowing about politics was expected and desirable, and vice versa. The following sections focus on describing the common characteristics of political trajectories within each participation pathway.

### ***2.9.2 Pathway To Participation: High to High***

The people in this category (people who started to pay attention and participate in politics from at least their early 20s and continued this behavior into their mid twenties) almost all came from families where political participation was part of the family context. Of the 18 people in this category, all but one noted that their parents voted or promoted political engagement in some form. Most of these participants not only had parents that voted, but also had parents who either discussed politics around them, had news media in the household, or who explicitly encouraged them to vote. For some participants, this is how they directly described their pathways to

political engagement, while others brought up the activities in their family only when prompted by specific questions.

The story for the majority of these participants was one where they grew up in a family that valued and often role modeled political participation. For many, as they entered into university and the job market, voting and paying attention was reinforced through social settings and networks where politics was discussed and voting was promoted as a desirable thing to do. For people in this category, family context and social desirability along with self-concepts of being caring, intellectual or responsible people appear to mutually reinforce each other. For many, the habit or desirability of political participation was strong enough in the family that it seemed to set the stage for political participation regardless of subsequent experiences. Others started in a family that politically participated and were then receptive to and potentially had the base of knowledge and practices when trustworthy or desirable social influences encouraged further political participation. This high participation category is also tied to socio-economic background, in that more of the participants in this category are from the high or mid SES high schools (10 of the 18 participants in this category were from the high SES school, compared to only comprising 1 out of the 9 participants in the lowest participation category). Also, people who end up in university or higher SES jobs more often report their education/employment social contexts as ones where everyone discusses or participates in politics. Finally, some of the desirable traits that are associated with paying attention are at times associated with educated or middle class worlds, such as being intellectual or being concerned with “the bigger picture”.

Many of the participants in this group hold a university degree (11 of the 18 participants had at least a university degree and 5 of these 11 held a graduate degree) but they often point to times before university as the seeds of their political engagement. This was almost always in the

context of their families, where there was news on the TV, newspapers in the house, or their parents talked politics and encouraged them to vote. For some, although there are multiple political influences in their adult life, they point to the family as the primary source of their high engagement. Jared is one such example of this path to participation that starts with a strong influence in the family, which is reinforced and encouraged throughout his life. Jared is from a high SES school, has a parent with a graduate degree, and has a bachelor's degree himself. Jared has extensive knowledge of the political system and current events related to politics.

Throughout the interview Jared made intellectual and political jokes and went back and forth between suggesting he found politics to be entertaining and important, or on the other hand distasteful. To give me an idea of how political his family was, he also mentioned that his dad's idol was Pierre Trudeau. When asked to tell his general story of political participation, he jokes:

I'm a lot less interested now that Michelle Jean is not Governor General anymore (laughs). No, well I guess it all started when I was a little boy and my mother would read the newspaper in bed for hours and hours and I would sneak in and take the sports section, and slowly I grew to the other sections such as comics, then the front page, and then business, ... my family's always plugged into the CBC and the Globe and Mail, although I don't think we have a subscription anymore to the Globe and Mail. Both my parents, my mom reads the newspaper more, I guess that's how I got into it, hearing them talk about it, or hearing it on the radio. So it would always sort of be around me, so you know, you always mimic your parents, or you rebel.

Jared not only picked up the newspaper but watched political shows and news with his mom when he was a kid. As Jared went into high school and university he also made friends with people who were quite politically engaged, as members of political parties or with roles in local government. Although Jared is very knowledgeable about politics and regularly participates, he also distances himself from politics in some ways, noting how negative politics can be and how

he resists attempts by family and friends to get him to join political parties. Yet even at the times when he might question voting, he has both family and friends who reinforce his participation:

I am always told to go vote every time by my parents even though I'm going to do it anyway. Although one time I wasn't going to vote, I was very disenfranchised.... I got there with 30 minutes before it was about to close. I mean, you have to vote in my family, family pressure!

Although Jared experienced reinforcing influences around political participation in his school and friend network, he identifies the reinforcement from his family as the primary foundation to his own participation.

Donald is another participant in this category whose keen political engagement starts from a very young age and seems to be firmly based in family influence. Donald, a white male from the mid SES school, is also very informed about politics, and started but did not finish a university degree. Although he did not finish a university degree, Donald was also a very high performing high school student, receiving top marks in his classes. Donald was also a very involved student, taking on numerous leadership and voluntary roles in high schools, a practice that continues through his life. Yet his strong habits of participation and paying attention are squarely rooted in his family, where similar to a number of the following accounts, he experienced both the milieu of participation when he grew up, as well as explicit messages about the importance of participation. Donald highlights the political nature of his family environment when explaining his path to participation:

As long as I can [remember]... It's been talked about in my dad's house, between my brother, once I had the mental awareness of what it was... and once I started to understand, I think it was the fast ferries, Glenn Clark thing, that really was like, huh... I just remember on the news and that's when I think I became aware... I started to ask more questions and become more aware of

what it was everyone was always talking about... because it was an outrage, right. Everybody was talking about it all the time.

Donald appears to have a lot of admiration or respect for his dad and brings up the role of his dad in his participation a number of times. He describes how his dad not only produced a context of participation where it seemed as though “everybody was talking about it” but also explicitly encouraged the importance of participating:

...my dad was always involved, and always talking about whether he agreed with other people. He just tried to make sure that we were always informed so that we would go out and be a role model for it. He would make sure he told us, your grandfather fought a war so that you would have the right to vote. From a very young age, I was told that and every Remembrance Day when they come to your school and they would have that assembly and he would be like, these were the people that fought so you could have the right to go and vote...

Fae, who is from the same mid SES high school as Donald, has a similar story of participation that revolves around her family and includes both an environment of political discussion and participation, as well as explicit messages around the importance of voting and “being aware” or “having an opinion”. In Fae’s case, messages around the importance of participation were not only explicitly communicated in her family but told through family stories. Fae is a university-educated female who is very informed about the details of the political workings in Canada, and one of only two participants who is a member of a political party. Fae repeatedly describes throughout the interview how her parents set the stage for her, both to vote and to see “being aware” as a key part of being a citizen. In terms of voting, when asked about how she became interested in politics, she responds:

To me, a Canadian citizen means you have to vote, that is the biggest thing to me, I am a daughter of an immigrant... because my dad he left communist China, our family lost everything in China, when communism took over, his family was very wealthy, so we lost everything to communism on that side of the family... there is a lot that my family believes in democracy, you have to do your part because freedom isn't always given, ever. You have to fight and make sure that you always have it because at any time it can be taken away and everything can be taken away,

Not only does Fae discuss her values around voting in terms of “we” or what “us as a family” believe, but similar to the previous participants, she notes a number of times the way political engagement was encouraged in their household. When asked why she chose to watch the public-affairs show *20/20* as a child, she explains,

Hearing my parents talk about it, my parents were always very aware, and my dad always watched the 6:00 news, that is what we did, so they got the paper in the morning and the 6:00 news and they would talk and they would ask us what we would think too, and they would be like ‘well, why do you think that’, and they would challenge, it was like a debate every night at my house...

In the accounts of Jared, Donald and Fae, although we do see friend networks and education levels that might reinforce participation, their practices of participation appear to be almost entirely based in the family. These political contexts in the family not only produce politics as desirable, but often give these participants the background language for knowing and talking about politics, as well as the early practices of paying attention. We see later in the lower participation categories that some see university as a time where it is too late to gain the political concepts and language needed to pay attention.

Other stories in this category still involve a large role for the family, but instead of the family taking centre stage in their accounts, additional social and education influences build on

messages and practices that start in the family. These participants point to a number of life experiences that helped to make politics more interesting, important, or real, but the basic practices of participation started with a political milieu in the home.

For example, Keira, a university educated white female from the high SES school, describes a path to participation with multiple influences that seem to reinforce engagement and interest in politics, but her story starts with political practices and messages in the family. Keira had a number of influences that might have led her to be one of the more politically active participants interviewed. She is involved with campaigns, protests, and advocacy, she regularly votes, and she stays highly informed on political issues. Although her family is not the only, or necessarily the most important, influence to her participation that she identifies, over the interview she notes a number of ways that her political engagement started in her family.

The family influences for Keira, similar to Fae, not only involved providing the practice and skills for participation but also the messages of the importance of participation embedded in family stories. The messages were also similar in that Keira was not only encouraged to participate but to “have an opinion”. Keira first relays how the importance of politics was embedded within family stories:

... my Croatian grandma would always talk about how the communist officials would read her mail and all the corruption that would happen with government... my family was very strongly persecuted in Croatia because anyone that had a lot of capital would have it all taken away... So those were early lessons that, now that I think about it, my friends parents would have not even talked about at all.

Later she explains that her dad had similar stories around the restriction of democracy in Croatia. She accounts how he used these stories to reinforce the importance of being informed about politics,

He introduced the idea that voting is a responsibility, that you should ensure that you are always maintaining a certain level of awareness so that when election time comes you do have an opinion, and you have a vote to put in, and you have a reason why you are voting for this person and not the other person. I think especially because he did come from that communist background in Croatia, I mean he was not a communist but he was raised in a country where there was a communist party in power so that you couldn't vote. So that was really the source of his sense of value in political engagement, which he did introduce to us.

Interestingly, on a survey question, Keira reported that her parents did not regularly vote because her dad, who was the political influence, was not living with them by the time she was voting age (and therefore is categorized in figure 2.1 as someone who comes from a family of lower political socialization). Although she notes that the parents she was living with were not regular voters, she describes how her early teenage years were marked by family members not only conveying stories of the importance of engagement, but fostering it as a family practice:

Early on, I have to say my father was someone that was really quite persuasive, or he would suggest to my sisters and I when we were pretty young, to write a letter to the Prime Minister, or in the summers we would go to different parts of BC... and we would see national parks that they were thinking of giving [sections of] back to the crown... so we would come back and be so amazed by this beautiful place that we had seen that we would write a letter. And my family would write it out in Word and we would all sign it and just send it to, like to the Honorable Stephen Harper, and there is an address and for what it's worth we would all sign it and send it. Which is kind of cool, very early days. So that would have been maybe early high school, so we would kind of discuss it, not very much, we would just send our little letter.

Later in the interview when asked how she specifically started paying attention to politics, Keira explains that she learned to wade through the daunting amount of political information by focusing on an issue she cared about, specifically party policies on the environment. And yet although the desirability and importance of voting and “having an opinion” seems to have been introduced in her family, Keira, like many other participants, discusses overlapping influences of participation, where family, friends, coworkers and people whom she respected conveyed the importance of politics, or modeled the practice of political participation.

While a number of people in this category attribute their participation almost entirely to a strong political family environment, despite multiple political influences (for example, Fae, Jared, and Donald), others have paths similar to Keira, where some political activities such as voting are fostered in the home but participants also emphasize additional social environments that helped to strengthen participation. In this way, practices and messages in the home seem to set the context or the dispositions to be more attentive to messages in adolescence and adulthood about the importance of the political. Arguably the processes are similar, in that participation is encouraged by milieus of political participation that provide the practices, desirability and the political terminology that support participation. Yet, instead of the family acting as the primary source of these processes, they are reinforced by other social influences and contexts. For example, Keira attributes much of her political interest and participation to the environment in university, yet even before university she notes that early in high school she had a brief experience of going to a school where everyone knew and discussed politics. Once at university, both through specific classes and through social networks, she was further introduced to political issues and practices. Of all the participants, Keira most explicitly connected university with

feelings of increased civic duty, which, as noted earlier, is a role that academics often attribute to higher education. Keira explains,

I would feel almost hypocritical to go to a good university and not vote, like I would feel if I am educating myself, if I am going to be part of this academic environment and commit myself to being aware of the issues that were happening, why would I not go in to vote. It just seemed like such a basic thing, if I was starting academics and going off on that course that that is something that comes along with it.

Kiera notes that the idea of duty was already fostered in her family, and so she seems to enter into university with a conception of it as a place where one steps up and takes on a more participatory role in society, which was not a common conception expressed by participants. For Keira, there were repeated exposures to various contexts, beginning well before university, that reinforced the idea that “being informed” and participating in politics was an important part of who she was. Keira would later go into volunteer and professional settings that would further politicize her. She seems to give more weight to her university experiences than her family experiences, but her family seems to have set the foundation in terms of practices, skills, and values related to political participation upon which university experiences build.

Andrew and Deana provide similar stories of multiple reinforcing messages around participation: both went to the high SES school and grew up in families where politics were discussed and where political media was around the house. They attribute some of their interest in politics and voting to their families, but they also highlight the role of the same high school teacher in instilling practices around voting and paying attention.

Deana is a white female from the high SES school. She did not go on to university, but she had a college diploma. Deana’s connection with politics goes back to her parents in a number

of ways, but she doesn't entirely attribute her political engagement to her parents. She notes that her interest in politics started through volunteering in the Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, something she did because her mom was heavily involved in volunteering in the community. These experiences volunteering highlighted to Deana the way politics can affect things 'on the ground', and both activities seemed to connect to an identity of being a responsible, caring community member. Deanna volunteered in part through the influence of her mom, and had also been exposed to politics much of her life in her family. As she was growing up, political news and discussions were constantly around the house and Deanna participated in them with her parents. Yet in terms of the act of voting, she attributes this in part to her parents setting the example, as well as to social influences that she respected discussing the importance or desirability of voting and paying attention:

My parents always voted, so I would always see them going to the polls. I would literally watch them out the window. So that was when I was younger. And then my boyfriend's parents, they are always involved in rioting and stuff... but back in college and high school it was my teachers telling me that the only way you can affect change is to vote.

When later asked about influences from school, she brings up her high school teacher again, and how he made voting seem like an important thing to do:

...that class in particular, he really wanted us to vote. To all go and vote he wanted us to read up on information about the candidates, like instead of just voting the way your parents are voting for, to actually make an informed decision.

She later continued

...But when he told us to go out and read up on the political things, he just said it was really serious, like it was really important to know who you're voting for, and explained to us that there is a booklet and you can go online and I thought that was really smart of him, because he didn't make it uncomfortable, he made it more like, oh my God, I really need to do this. It wasn't like homework, it was like this is for life, you gotta do this.

Although modeling and practices of voting and paying attention to politics started in the family, Deanna sees her participation supported by a number of influences, including a teacher whom she respected that presented a message she found desirable.

Andrew, a Chinese male from the high SES school, has a similar story. Andrew also did not go to university but had a college diploma and a successful career in the Arts. He understands his habit of paying attention as initiated by the influence of the same teacher. Andrew had highly educated parents and his parents and siblings were informed about and discussed politics. In his own account, this laid the foundation for his own participation. When asked about how he might have come to form an interest in politics, he explains:

I have always had some degree of interest in politics and it is mostly because of my upbringing, I wouldn't say my parents are super politically minded people, but they were people that watched the news every night, and they would talk about it at the dinner table...

He continues to discuss how his parents not only created a political environment, but helped to shape his basic political knowledge:

But I think I have always had, that has always been on my conscience or at least on my radar, that politics was a thing growing up, and that I always knew who the political leaders were of each party, and who was in power and who wasn't...

Yet when Andrew discusses how he came to regularly pay attention to the news, he is adamant that it was the influence of his teacher more than his parents that was at least the initial impetus to start this habit:

But really in my final last two years there was a teacher who taught history and he essentially encouraged us to start reading the newspaper every day, and spend a portion of the class just discussing headlines, and not in depth 20 minutes but just 5 minutes, like what is happening, where are these things, and it really opened my eyes to how much is going on now... but I read the newspaper every day as a result of that class and that teacher. And it was really important, and it didn't improve any of our marks necessarily on the history final because none of that, none of the last weeks news was on it, but it encouraged us to think about the world that we lived in very differently, and so I mean if I would have had my way I would have made the class 95 percent about that and 5 percent about history.

Interestingly, this was not very common amongst the participants to point to a teacher or class that initiated their participation. Although a few participants across the categories of participation describe the influential role of a teacher in getting them to think about paying attention to politics and voting, the students that report this all came from families where this behavior was first modeled in the family, again perhaps making it more likely for them to attune to the messages from their teachers.

Along with the desirability of participation, which is often experienced first in the family and then in different social contexts, are desirable worlds or self-concepts that participants seem to associate with political participation. Participants understood political participation to be the practice of intellectual, or reflective people and often had these identities themselves. These ideas were also often (but not always) integrated with ideas of middle class or educated worlds. This connection of political participation with education and reflection can be seen in some of the quotes above, where participants describe those that were influential on them as “informed”

or teaching them “to have an opinion” or to justify and defend one’s opinions. It can also be found in the direct associations that people made about those who vote. For example, when discussing how her teacher’s messages about political participation were motivating, Deanna connects this to the intelligence of him and her classmates, explaining: “he was a very bright guy and there were a lot of bright kids in the class who were definite voters so it was quite impactful.”

These associations were tied up with some of the participant’s own identities and practices. Fae, introduced earlier as a participant who attributes her participation to her family, also notes that one way her parents cultivated the kind of person who pays attention to politics was by putting her in a school in a good neighborhood with an International Baccalaureate program (IB). When asked about any other people in her life that might participate in politics, she replies:

Yes, that is what IB gave me, ever since then I have always had friends that are always more engaged and aware, I would hate to say that that sounds elitist...but IB does bring in children that are more aware of the world around them, they apply themselves, so they want to know more, they want to... to be in that program you have to complete that current affairs program, so from that class you are always more aware ...my dad made me go to IB, like the school with IB, so it was one of those things I guess I was sort of forced into, including that friend group of children who are, like that is what cultivates that idea and this sort of mentality at that school, where you, at least if you are engaged in that program you do think more about the world around you...

She continues a bit later:

I remember my mom laughing... because I remember being in grade 11 and my friends and I were discussing Noam Chomsky’s latest something, I forget what it was, and she just looked at me and said, that is why I made you come to Vancouver, because she wanted us to be intelligent, she wanted us to be

aware and have discussions... she wanted us to be in an environment that had that sort of discussion.

Another participant in this category, Nikki, relayed a similar idea of the kind of people that pay attention in relation to her own experiences of moving into a more educated workplace. Nikki was the one participant in this high participation category who did not come from a family that voted or did anything political, and she also did not have a university education. Nikki is a South Asian woman from a lower SES school; she has a college diploma but entered into a professional job environment. When discussing political participation she describes the difference between the more educated and travelled politically engaged people she works with and her non-political friends from high school in terms of one group having a broader view:

...half of our workplace, if not more, are transplants from all around the world. And they work hard to get Canadian citizenship and they talk about where they came from, and how great it is here, and politically as well, they are super passionate about their views, versus where I grew up. I find a lot of my friends who I still have from school could kind of care less. They live in this little bubble, and they don't think about things on more of a worldview scale.

Later in the interview Nikki explains why the young people in her workplace are more politically engaged than in a former workplace:

They are young and they're far more educated... I definitely have two social groups. The group that I grew up with through Vancouver and also the group that I just kind of ended up [with], through chasing different goals, the career path that I have now been exposed to, definitely people that I am still friends with from my past never really left Vancouver, they might have some postsecondary education but... it's just that they are very different.

She subsequently relates this to her own path,

All of my siblings took a different path, and... I always wanted more I guess, I mean I never wanted to forget where I came from, but I didn't want to let struggles that happened in my family to hold me back, like seeing things in a bigger picture. I think I've always tried to see things from a bigger picture.

For Nikki, moving into a more professional educated world where people thought more about the bigger picture (which includes politics) did not lead her to participate, but educated professional worlds and political participation are tied in some way. Her concept of herself as a caring, passionate person that likes to see the “bigger picture” often arose in her own explanations of how she came to engage in politics.

A number of participants in this category tied political participation to conceptions of being educated, intelligent, philosophical, or reflecting on broader issues and seemed to have related identities themselves. These identities are not limited to middle class worlds; in fact, some participants understood these identities and conceptions of the political world in relation to more activist cultures like the more alternative East side of Vancouver or hip hop culture, but at the same time the contexts that encourage this self-concept are arguably more available in middle class worlds where the kids from middle and upper class schools reported friend groups and family backgrounds where debate and paying attention to the wider world was promoted.

The stories of participation in this pathway suggest that higher education has a subtler and less distinct role than often attribute to it, one that interacts with previous life experiences, skills, and self-concepts. Although many people in this pathway of participation had a university degree or higher, university was for most, not the first or primary place where participation was fostered. Instead, participants most commonly pointed to the family as a place where practices and orientations towards participation began to develop. University experiences had a role for some, but this was in addition to or interacted with previous experience in the family.

### ***2.9.3 Pathway To Participation: Middle To High***

People in this category had mid level participation in their early twenties and then increased their participation to a high level by their mid twenties. This category looks much like the high to high category, in that there are a lot of examples of overlapping or reinforcing influences of political participation, and participation predominately starts in the family. The increase in levels of participation in this category was, for most participants, the result of an increase in paying attention to politics. The participants started off voting, and not paying regular attention to the media, and then increased their engagement with the news as they got older.

Similar to the high to high participation category, the majority of the people in this group reported that their parents not only voted, but also engaged in additional political activities around them, such as consuming political media or discussing politics (7 of the 9 participants). Conversely, only one participant came from a family that did not vote, and in this case the family was somewhat politically engaged in their home country, but did not engage in Canadian politics. The participants in this category primarily came from the mid SES school (5 out of the 9 participants). The majority had a university degree or higher (6 out of the 9 participants).

Most participants in this category started voting as soon as they could, and in their early twenties these participants began to pay more attention to politics on their own initiative. Many participants noted that their increase in paying attention was related to entering into environments where politics were discussed and political engagement was promoted as desirable and exciting. In these contexts, some noted they felt left out not having the level of knowledge as others. This category is where we see the most potential impact from university. The impact of university here is not so much in terms of increasing political participation, such as voting, but

more in terms of increasing one's propensity to pay attention to politics and the news. Still these participants do not always attribute their increase in attention to the news directly to university. This feeling for some seemed to be grounded in part in the social and educational context of university and for others simply understood as part of the transition from a more self-focused adolescence to a mature adulthood.

University appeared to have an affect on some participants in this category by providing an environment where paying attention to the news and politics was desirable, or by putting people into professional work environments where this was also the case. Additionally, in a few accounts, some noted that university and specific social science classes, helped directly increase their knowledge and interest in politics.

Many participants in this group paid attention to the news at home with their parents and started voting when they could, and then in their young adulthood took on the consumption of the news on their own initiative. For some, the time they start paying attention seems to be a part of their understanding of getting older, that part of a gradual move into adulthood is to take up the habit of paying attention to current events or politics. Tyson is one such example of this account of a gradual maturation related to political participation. He also provides an example of someone who does not have overlapping influences of participation, which is a rare case in this group; instead, political influence seems to be almost entirely based in the family. Tyson is one of the few participants in this category that did not attend university, but he has a college diploma. He also does not have a notable friend group that talks about politics, but notes he talks politics with his brother. Also, Tyson's dad votes, pays close attention to, and talks about politics in the home. Tyson explains his own path to voting in terms of both an independent interest and a feeling of duty. He also notes his dad pressures him to vote. When asked what made him vote

the first time he points to an interest in a particular outcome. Yet when asked how he knew what outcome he was interested in, he points to his dad,

Well I know that, just through my dad, like I said he is really into politics, so I kind of know what every party is about from what he said, obviously I did some more research myself around the 2009/2008 area but I had a general sense before that. .... my dad is really pretty heavily into politics and he, I guess I kind of listen to the stuff he says like every once in awhile so I know a little bit but I wouldn't say that there is any defining moment where I would say oh I am really into politics you know... so it was kind of gradual...

Tyson's explanation of how he knew who to vote for points to the role of the family in producing the background knowledge that facilitates participation.

Jane is another participant who grew up in a political family and understands her increase in paying attention as a gradual process of maturation. On the other hand, for Jane, this process of maturation includes multiple overlapping influences of participation from her own desire to "make a positive change", to a family environment where news was always around, to university and graduate school where she grew more engaged with politics.

Like many participants in this category, Jane does not necessarily point to her family as the primary source of her participation, but describes them as one of multiple influences that led to a gradual increase in participation. Jane understands this path as partly directed by her own convictions and partly through messages from people she respected. In her attempt to outline when she started to pay attention to politics, Jane points to her family as the first step in a meandering path to regularly paying attention to politics, noting, "back home we would get the newspaper and my parents would always watch the news". In this way she was "kind of always exposed to it." Yet when she went off to university there was not the same access to newspapers

or TV so Jane had a lull in paying attention before she took it up independently during her undergraduate degree. She explains later,

So I was always kind of aware of things but I never really saw them as in my life I guess, and I mean that is part of growing older when you are a teenager you are so caught up in your own world but as I got older and started taking these classes and got involved in volunteering you realize okay this does impact me and I should pay attention to the news. It was kind of co-constituted in that way.

These are not the only political influences in Jane's path to participation. She also describes a role model in the form of a band she idolized that got her politically engaged and introduced her to the "idea of being an activist and making positive change." Inspired by this message, Jane engaged in letter writing campaigns and volunteering in her high school years. She also notes that messages from her high school teachers imploring, "you should vote" had some impact on her. In this way, Jane notes early political influences of her family and role models in her adolescence that combined with her own growing interest and self-image as someone that works at "positive change". This behavior and interest is refined as she gets older, particularly through her university years as she takes classes and goes into a university major that connects to social concerns. In explaining this reinforcing path of participation, she explains that politics is:

an important part of what I have been learning in school and it was always something that I should do, and had to do, and a tangible way for me to change the world I guess, or have my voice heard.

Although Jane asserts that she did not start to pay regular attention to the news independently from her parents until her undergraduate degree, her path to participation started

much earlier and increased as part of “growing older”. Again, similar to Kiera, her sense of civic responsibility or desire to make a positive change, at least in her own accounts, arises much before university. This gradual process of maturation can be seen in both Jane and Tyson’s increase in paying attention. For Jane this was in part connected to her time in university and for Tyson, who did not get a university degree, paying more attention was simply a gradual part of becoming an adult, an assumption expressed by a number of participants, particularly from those who grew up in homes where following the news was a common practice.

Whereas Jane and Tyson point to a gradual political path that increases in their early twenties, others point to more specific experiences or turning points where their engagement increased. Yet the influences are quite similar; political influence starts in the family and is reinforced by social environments that encourage participation. The family seems to play a role in almost all of the political accounts shared in this section, but the stories of the next few participants place more emphasis on entering specific social environments that encouraged their participation. Social influences primarily have an impact by making political participation seem desirable, and to a lesser extent by providing information sources that enable participation. Political participation is produced as desirable both through modelling, so that seeing others passionate, excited, and concerned about politics make a person care about politics, and also by feeling left out or not able to participate if one does not pay attention.

Tanya’s story provides an example where social contexts can both provide information sources, and produce engagement as desirable. Tanya had a similar story to participation as Jane in that her family was politically engaged and then she experienced multiple influences that increased her participation. Yet instead of a gradual process, Tanya points to specific contexts that pushed her to pay attention to politics on her own terms. These specific contexts were social

networks and environments where everyone was paying attention. Tanya was a Caucasian woman from the mid SES school who immigrated to Canada at a young age. Tanya had a love for education and travel and talked extensively about her political experiences, which involved a lot of different political social influences from friends, to family, to coworkers, to classmates. Tanya discussed various ways that she had been exposed to the political, through working in a restaurant, travelling and in university. In justifying whether she voted in particular elections she responds: “My parents are very much like go go go... If I was in Vancouver I'm sure they would've taken me [to vote].” When asked what compelled her to vote the first time she continues, “Parents definitely, they are like, ‘we moved to a democracy, we’re voting.” Yet in terms of starting to pay regular attention to current events, Tanya points to the experience of entering a social context where people discussed current events. Similar to many participants in this category, she makes a distinction between passively getting the news from one’s parents and taking the initiative to do it on one’s own. She distinguishes: “I didn't actually engage with the news, prior to this... because prior to that it was my father kind of feeding me information, so sure I might have known things but I wasn't personally motivated to go and read about them.” Also, in terms of knowing about Canada, the news that she was exposed to was “Eurocentric” and so her “Canadian political background was zip to none”. She explains earlier in the interview how she started to pay attention to the news on her own initiative when she moved abroad for a year at the age of 21:

I became friends with a couple, and she was a stay-at-home housewife and her husband was an executive from somewhere... We lived around the corner from each other and so we were buddies in the sense of a North American connection... The more that I started spending time with them and meeting their friends, or they would have some sort of client’s child from some university coming to Paris to say learn French for three months, and all of the

dinner conversation, or a lot of them whenever we would go out, would certainly center around current events and that's when the big shock kind of came, how much I don't know, because I was sitting there silently. Prior to that, my father is extremely involved in current events. He reads all sorts of different sources, and he really tries to get a very balanced opinion, and so before I never really felt like I had to read anything, because every day he would kind of fill me in a little bit on what's going on in the world, and then all of a sudden that was gone, and I didn't realize how important it was to be caught up in what's going on, so that was the big push, I felt alienated in these conversations, where I would like to know what's going on. So that's when I started following.

As Tanya came back to Canada she had a friend group that was also quite politically informed, and she would use them as a resource to ask “what do you guys read” and to give her a “background as to what [she] should look for” to get various perspectives on the news. Although it does not affect her categorization in terms of political participation, Tanya also points to her university experience as a place where she further learned the importance of participation and increased her interest in politics. Tanya started sociology at Carleton University not long after returning from Europe. She indicates that her interest and engagement during that period increased as a result of the specific political context of the university, her classes, and her peers; it was here she saw “how passionate people can be.” She notes this political atmosphere was not only related to the university but to the city itself, and it was easy to get caught up in it,

There are so many protests or whatever, and a lot of the people I knew, were very involved in a lot of issues, and would go to these events and find us visitors to join in and you know learn about these things... people seem to be more informed and that kind of passes on to others that moved to that city and its kind of like a snowballing phenomenon or something I don't know, but at least it felt that way.

In this way Tanya came from a political background that helped to set the stage for political participation both in terms of voting and paying attention but Tanya points to specific social influences that made paying attention both desirable and a social necessity. Tanya then outlines how additional social experiences - the social context and courses in university - further highlighted for her the desirability and importance of political participation. Tanya feels pressure, but she also has a desire to be both politically involved and informed, which carries on in part because of the social world she is embedded in. Tanya expresses how she “normally likes to spend 30 to 40 minutes a day just kind of catching up on what’s going on in the world”, and she explains how she feels guilty if she falls behind because “a lot of [her] friends are news junkies” and “very politically involved” so she feels “out of the loop” and like she “can’t participate” if she does not spend this time staying informed.

Jia’s story of participation also points to social influences as the largest impetus that increased her regular attention to current events. Yet again, the political influence started in the family, and then a particular social context helped to increase her engagement. These social contexts provided Jia with information that made her feel more confident about her own participation as well as increased the social desirability around paying attention to politics. Jia, a Chinese woman from a lower SES school with a university degree, explains how she started voting as soon as she was old enough. She attributes this in part to thinking “it’s sort of a civil responsibility, to voice your opinion” and that if you want to complain you have to vote, a message she tells me she heard from both her family and friends. She also notes that her mom “votes every single time.” When asked whether she is ever encouraged to vote by anyone, she notes, “my mom would ask me to vote”. Still, at the same time that she notes she voted as soon

as she could, she discounts her earlier voting, and in part her mom's voting as problematic because it was not sufficiently informed:

.... I wasn't really aware of what's going on, so I don't think it really counts. I wonder how relevant it is, given the fact that I didn't have enough information. I could have easily made the wrong decision.

Jia points to social influences during and after university that increased her knowledge so that her vote could 'really count'. Her discussion and knowledge of politics started to increase in a debate club she joined in university, and then her own regular consumption of news grew as she entered into the workforce.

Although voting started young for Jia, before she entered university her political knowledge and attention was produced socially, in contexts somewhat related to university. When asked whether she took any classes in university that helped her understand or be interested in politics, she replies, "That's very funny because most of the time I learned politics from interacting with my colleagues or people that are in a political science major." Although part of her increase in political knowledge was gained in university through social interaction, particularly in a debate club, she explains that her own habits of regularly paying attention started when she entered a workplace where the topic was a regular discussion,

I changed jobs and in my new work environment there were more people that liked to talk about politics, so I wanted to be able to join in the conversation. I had a long commute so at some point I changed from the radio station I listened to the CBC. And then moved to their podcasts from there.

Still she notes that for her learning more about politics has not made her more enthusiastic. Instead she explains that learning more about it makes her feel like: “my vote for a certain party doesn’t matter” or that things really don’t change.

Also, although university appears to encourage her participation by putting her into the professional social networks that supports paying attention, she also suggests university was a time that at least temporarily pulled her away from the civic concerns that she noted having before university, she explains,

I started voting then but after I got into university it seems like school pulled me back a bit and I'm not so interested because I'm so overwhelmed with school work... It's a very embarrassing period of time because you're probably more self absorbed with the courses you're taking than with what's going on around the world, because you trying to equip yourself.

Finally, the one participant in this category whose family did not pay attention to politics, Ana, still provides an account of her participation that has many similarities to Jane, Jia, and Maya, in that there are overlapping and primarily social influences. For Ana, university does seem to reinforce her participation, but at the same time does not appear to be the initial impetus. Although Ana’s parents do not vote, there were some strong political influences in her early memories, as her family immigrated after some volatility in her home country. She explains, “my earliest memory of a lot of political discussion was when I was about five years old and the war in the former Yugoslavia broke out.” There was a lot of talk and listening to the news because her “parents were excessively worried about family back home.” She continues, “there was constant discussions about you know the social situation and US involvement, Western involvement in the war and from what I can remember that has always been a discussion.” When explaining her parent’s lack of involvement once they were in Canada she notes, “I think

my parents were quite apathetic by the time they came here, whether or not it was from exhaustion.” She explains shortly after, “honestly I think they are kind of tired of caring.” In this way, although Ana is the one participant in this category whose parents do not vote or engage in Canadian politics, there was some political exposure and discussion in early life. Yet she points to her own participation in Canada as encouraged through specific social contexts. She explains,

political involvement really began when I signed up to work for the elections one year, as... one of the people sitting in front of the ballot. And really it was a very self serving thing because it was a great way to earn a couple hundred bucks in a day, so I... saw how kind of genuinely excited a lot of people were to show up that day and there was an energy and an enthusiasm around it.

When asked how she started to work for Elections Canada, she notes that her mom’s friend suggested she would be great at the job. So Ana explains,

I did that once, figured it was great, and did it again and then... I felt pretty bad sitting there that first time because I had seriously no idea who the parties even were, and I was definitely well into the age of where I was able to vote, I was 19 and I just felt really awkward and almost dubious, you know, like it was a ruse. I was like sitting there and didn’t really know anything so I decided to read up on it.

When asked about any social influences that specifically encouraged her to participate, she again explains that in her own eyes, the influences behind her participation were entering into contexts where it mattered to people,

I don't think anyone ever encouraged me to participate in a protest or to participate in politics so much as it was through discussion and through realizing how important issues were to other people. And I sort of felt that maybe I needed to have some issues of my own to be concerned with, you know. I think the contrast between seeing someone so concerned and involved makes your apathetic approach look a little uninformed and feeble in comparison...

This social influence continued through university, as she notes that, in her classes, political discussions would sometimes arise. Also, due to her profession, she has joined “a political party, again as a way of networking (laughs sheepishly). Not because I have any sort of loyalty to the party... just because everybody and their stock broker is part of the party.”

In this pathway from mid participation to high participation, we again see an important role of the family, as either a strong initial influence that helps participants take up these practices as they mature, or that helps to set the stage upon which further social-political influences reinforces and strengthens political participation. This pathway also demonstrates the strong role that social influences can have when the family is given less weight. These social influences seem to be the strongest not as specific messages, or particular social connections, but as environments people enter into where everyone is “excited” and “passionate” about politics, or on the other hand, where politics are a regular part of discussion so people feel left out or uninformed if they do not pay attention themselves. University plays a role, in that it is one way that people can be put into these kinds of environments. The role of the university also appears dependent on what kind of political context the university provides (i.e. whether it is a political university) and the kinds of contexts, friend groups, and majors that people enter into. University does have an effect, but mainly on people who had some pre-existing affinity to political networks and messages, or who self-selected into programs or clubs that encourage political knowledge. The effects that it has also seem to be in terms of paying attention to politics and increasing one’s interest and feelings of legitimacy as a knowledgeable voter more than directly impacting political participation. This pathway shows the most evidence for the impact of university but this is again tempered or mediated by previous experiences in the family, in

friendship networks, and the development of often pre-existing identities of dutiful, caring, socially aware people.

The stories in the High and Middle to High participation pathways also demonstrate a role for immigration experiences and stories in the trajectories of participants. Many participants were first or second-generation immigrants, and stories and experiences around immigration appeared to be part of some people's motivations towards participation. As the stories above attest, immigration stories could provide a family and personal narrative to motivate voting. Family stories of immigrating from a less democratic country could highlight the value of participation and the need to appreciate and protect one's freedoms. Some suggested that the experience of immigrating to a country makes more salient the privilege of citizenship, helping to make voting a more exciting or important venture.

Although it is often assumed that immigrants have a lower participation rate than country born citizens, research in Canada has shown that the rate of political participation of immigrants is not significantly different than people born in Canada, particularly when researchers control for socio-economic variables (Black 2011; Chui et al. 1991). Some research has found that second generation immigrants even have a higher level of participation than both immigrants and people who have parents who have lived in Canada for generations (Chui et al. 1991). The stories of the above participants provide possible insight into these findings, as while immigration could produce challenges to political participation, it could also provide motivating stories that not only impacted those who immigrated but Canadian born children of immigrant parents.

Jensen's (2008) research on the impact of immigrant identities on civic engagement similarly found that an immigrant identity could motivate civic engagement through a number of

avenues. One of these avenues Jensen identified in her interviewee's accounts was that participants used their story of immigrating to a democratic country as a reason to value the freedoms available – such as political participation.

This narrative around freedom, immigration, and voting connected particularly well with some of these young voters as it combined ideas of valuing freedom with ideas of duty and privilege. As we will see in the second chapter this is a particularly motivating cultural logic for young voters. Where on the other hand, people who had parents who framed voting in terms of pure duty, appeared to find the message from their parents less motivating, perhaps because it fits less with the more individual cultural orientations of young people.

#### ***2.9.4 Pathway To Participation: Middle To Middle***

This category was the most diverse in terms of the ways people could have participated. It covers a number of different combinations of engagement; for example, people that engaged in a high level of voting but a low level of paying attention, or a high level of paying attention and an intermittent or low level of voting. Despite the different combinations, there seem to be common trends within this category, in that there is a continued role of the family and social influence. Yet, often in contrast to the high category of participation, family and social influences were less strongly political, and therefore appear to produce weaker or delayed political activity in participants.

In this medium participation category we still see the role of the family, but less family influence in terms of providing a strong environment of socialization. This is represented in terms of the lower number of families in this category that do more than vote (56 percent of the families compared to 89 percent in the high/high category). The smaller role of the family in

impacting participation is also represented in participant accounts, where people often present their family as less of a strong role model for participation than the people in the high participation category. Still, although the family milieu is not as strong, we continue to see a fair amount of congruence between family engagement and participant engagement. One difference is that many of the participants in this category appear to participate slightly less than their family members. However, there are a few participants that demonstrate higher levels of participation than they report in their families. Additionally, 11 out of the 16 people in this category had a university degree or higher. University did not factor much into the participants' own accounts, although it did seem to have a slight role to play in encouraging people to pay attention to the news and in facilitating networks of participation.

We see more reservations from participants in this category about their own political adeptness than in the higher participation categories. In this mid to mid participation pathway many participants raise concerns about their level of knowledge, and in turn, the appropriateness of their participation. This would often amount to either intermittent voting, or to less enthusiasm and more distance from the voting process. This was for some connected to the family, in that when participants did not see their parents as a reliable source of information or learning related to politics, they did not feel they themselves gained the language or background knowledge to really understand or engage in political participation. By their own accounts, the cost of tooling themselves to be able to know enough about politics was then too high when taking into account the small impact one has as a voter. The lower influence of the family in this context appears to work in conjunction with social contexts, where there is not only weaker political practices in the family, but also weaker political influences. For example, people in this category would often have singular or more removed social influences, and less often the social milieus of group

discussion and encouragement around politics that appeared to motivate the engagement of the participants in the middle to high participation category.

Theresa is one of the participants in this category that expressed reservations about not only her own political knowledge, but also her parent's knowledge. She is also less embedded in strong social contexts and networks related to politics than are many of the participants in the high participation category. She could not name any contexts or friend groups where political participation was the norm. Theresa was a Chinese woman from a low SES school, who grew up in Vancouver and had close friends and family in the city. Like many people from Vancouver, she expressed a passion for exercise, the outdoors, and spending time with her friends and family. Theresa put off university, but had in the past couple of years started an undergraduate degree, after years of working in hairdressing. She expressed some reservations about attending school and was juggling a very busy schedule, managing a salon while at the same time attending business classes.

Theresa was an intermittent voter that paid attention to the news, which at times would include politics. Yet even before she came to the interview, she expressed some concern about whether she knew enough or participated enough to take the interview. She downplayed her knowledge and participation at the beginning of the interview and it was not until sometime into the interview that it became clear that she did in fact intermittently vote. Theresa's family provided a context that counted as a high level of socialization, because they encouraged her to vote and watched the news around her. Yet Theresa seemed to not think they were entirely convincing models for participation, because of her view of their lack of political knowledge. While she attributes her voting to her parents, she expresses a slightly critical evaluation of their voting that emulates her own reservations related to political participation:

I have voted. I have voted many times, because my parents have made me vote. And I am like, 'who are you voting for'? [And they say], 'Oh, I don't know, this guy looks really nice so let's vote for him' like, really? Or based on what their coworkers, or what their friends would tell them, they would tell them to vote for so and so, so let's vote for so and so, like that's how we voted.

Theresa continues to say that how her parents vote is through the "influence of others", which is a method of voting that participants often deem as dubious because it is not seen as independent thought or action. Still, Theresa describes her voting behavior as reliant on her family. When explaining her voting behavior she offers: "My parents or my sisters would be like... hey let's go vote, so we would go vote together. I would always go with someone, I wouldn't go alone."

In this way, although Theresa votes less than her parents, her political behavior is somewhat patterned on that of her parents. Her lower propensity to vote compared to her parents seems to be based on her evaluation of her own lack of knowledge and therefore qualification to vote. When asked if she learned anything in high school about politics, she gives an answer that was very common amongst participants: that she "learned about history" but can't remember learning "much about Canadian politics." Often participants who did not know much about politics would combine the issue of interest and knowledge together in their explanations of their distance from politics. They didn't know much because they just were not interested, or they were not interested because they really didn't know enough. Theresa gives the same logic about her relation to politics in high school and her adult life: "well, I remember not ever being interested in politics, like even now, it kind of just goes in and out. Well, yeah maybe it's because I don't really know too much about it so I don't really care to dig deeper." Later, when she is discussing her own relationship to, or avoidance of politics, she explains:

I think it's just because I don't get it, like maybe if I understood it then I would be more interested in it right, but because when I watch the news and they are talking about whatever they are talking about and they are using terms that I don't get, and then I just block it out, I don't even try to understand it because I already don't know what they are talking about, so I feel like it's too much work for me to go and do the research, so I don't bother.

Theresa does have another social connection to politics beyond her family, she explains sheepishly that her boyfriend in fact is very much informed and interested in politics. But again, her perceived lack of political knowledge makes this a topic she tends to avoid with him. When asked if he tries to talk to her about it, she explains: "Yeah he does and I don't know what he is talking... I don't know what he is saying sometimes because he is talking in a different language, I feel really dumb, like oh my gosh, I don't know what you are talking about, so let's talk about something else." Yet, although Theresa really highlights her distance and low knowledge related to politics, as noted, she still does vote and she reads the news. This is occasionally because her boyfriend sends her articles from The Globe and Mail, and sometimes on her own initiative. As a result of her partner, Theresa does have some political social facilitation, in that he encourages her awareness of news and politics. Still, Theresa claims that this is the extent of her political influence:

Honestly none of my friends are into politics. My sisters are not, maybe they are but they don't really express it, maybe they are really passionate about it, but I don't really hear it from them. And my parents are... they are influenced by their friends and their peers, so occasionally I hear them talk about Steven Harper, but they don't really know too much about politics...

Theresa's tepid relation to politics seems to be supported by the encouragement of her family members, yet is at the same time tenuous, because of her evaluation of her family members and

herself as not highly informed or interested in politics. For Theresa, although politics are part of the family atmosphere, they do not appear to be as strong or motivating as some of the family influences we see in the higher participation categories. Additionally, Theresa does not have the strong social contexts of participation, which we often see in the mid to high participation category, that might provide impetus to move beyond a perceived lack of political astuteness.

One finds other similar examples in this group, where participants have some – but not many - social contexts of political discussion or desirability, or who have parents that vote but do not provide highly trustworthy or informative contexts of participation. Lena, a university educated Chinese woman from a lower SES school, also had a tepid relationship with political engagement. She sometimes voted and semi-regularly paid attention to the news. She noted politics was not an interest of hers and distanced herself from it because it was ‘full of bad behavior’. Still, she felt voting was in part a duty and notes, when she gets “a notice in [her] mailbox” she tries her “best to go”. Again, her own behavior is modeled much on her parent’s behavior, as she explains “my parents, they try to vote, and so I try to vote too”. Yet although Lena models her participation after her parents she also expresses some trepidation about her parents as an information source:

sometimes I ask them how do you know who to vote for, and they just vote for someone that is either... they vote for the party or they vote for someone of our own ethnicity or similar, but do we know anything about them really? Not so much, but at least we feel like our needs are represented by someone that is from a similar background. And when I go to the voting booth, like I have tried to go to a website and actually look up their profiles to see who these people are, but I don’t know very much about them and I have never heard them speak, but I see a paragraph of something, and it is like you are interviewing someone based on their resume and then you just check yes or no, I am like, I know nothing about these people.

Lena not only had parents that demonstrated some political behavior, but she also had one additional social relationship that supported her participation. Lena had a boyfriend who was interested in paying attention to politics, and this seemed to mildly impact her own habits, as she occasionally watched the news with her partner. This helped to put her in the middle instead of the low participation category. Lena and Theresa both represent stories of participation that are similar to a number in this category; in other words, a family that is a less strong or trustworthy model of participation, with less overlapping social influences.

While Lena and Theresa had reservations about the depth of their own knowledge and their parents depth of knowledge, others in this pathway also had parents that voted but indicated that their parents did not present politics in a way they found motivating. One description of these participants was that their parents pushed them to vote a specific way instead of explaining politics to them. Other participants suggested although their parents voted they did not present political participation as desirable or important. Josh was one example of a participant whose parents pressured him to vote a certain way. He is a Chinese man from a low SES school. He has a college diploma but was not that keen on college, noting if he could have gotten a good job without it, he would not have gone. Similar to Theresa, Josh underplayed the level of participation that he engaged in. Josh has some political influences, mainly in that his parents vote and encourage him to vote. He also has a few friends who talk about politics around him. Again, these social influences are not the strength or quality that we see in the high participation category, in that these are singular relationships instead of social contexts or networks where politics is discussed and promoted as desirable. Also, his friends who seem interested in politics are interested primarily in American politics. This appears to have an affect on him as, similar to

his friends, he sees American politics as more interesting than Canadian. In describing American politics, he explains that:

It is more on a world level, because my friend is really big on American politics, because it is actually interesting, Canadian is really boring, it doesn't really... on the world scale it doesn't matter.

Beyond a couple friends who are mostly focused on American politics, Josh could not think of any other political influences or environments he was exposed to. Political conversations do not happen in his home, or from his co-workers. Josh does not regularly pay attention to politics, but he does vote. He explains that his voting is almost entirely due to the influence of his parents, to the point where he almost sees his voting behavior as his parents voting through him. He explains,

when I vote it's my parents pressing me to vote and because I don't do any research I don't have... I am not using my own mind, I am sort of a pawn so, I vote when my parents want, so they basically raised a child just for one more vote.

He explains that his parents do not tell him about the political system but just "tell me what party" to vote for, suggesting that "this is not an opinion but what you should do". Josh explains if he "were to vote" he would "do some research" but he explains, "I feel the impact, a lot of people feel this I am sure, the impact is so low, because you have to do so much work." This notion is a common point made by participants in this category; that it is not the work it takes to go out and vote but rather to know what one is voting for, something that makes a person a legitimate voter. The family was not a place where Josh felt he learned a background in politics, and so doing the research that he feels would be needed to vote is too much work. The social

contexts of participation that helped to produce politics as desirable and provide the political background information for people in the higher participation pathways were not as prevalent in the stories of participants in this category. These more motivating political contexts could potentially help to reduce the cost of participation or might provide be the impetus to put energy into learning what is, in Josh's calculation, a low return for high effort.

Chris provides a similar story. He was also a Chinese man from a low SES school and had a similar relation to political participation. He had a university degree and, like many participants, primarily viewed university in terms of a key step to the job market. Chris was thinking about his career options in high school, which motivated him to start volunteering in jobs related to his prospective field. Yet Chris's options in university were constrained to the kinds of programs that would allow him to work and pay his way through university while taking courses. When asked if he had taken any courses in university that helped interest him in politics, Chris explains, "No, because you have to pay for tuition and I didn't think learning about politics was going to help me pay for my rent and stuff." Chris describes his participation as "minimal at best" because he does not vote every time, but rather every second time. Chris also intermittently pays attention to the news, but when he votes he generally will "just go with what my parents vote." Josh doesn't discuss politics and when asked if there is anyone in his life that has ever discussed politics around him or has shown interest in politics, he cannot name anyone. He explains his parents only talk politics "when it's voting time" and in this case "they just [tell] me to vote for whoever and I just do." He explains that they let him know that the party "is more beneficial to them". We can contrast Chris and Josh's experience of family politics to those in the high participation category, where participants describe parents as "informed" and encouraging them to "have an opinion", while watching and discussing politics with or around

them. This appears to provide a more trustworthy source of information for the high participators as well as allow them to feel more legitimate and excited about their political participation.

Finally, a few participants in this category came from families where politics was discussed but the message was negative. Kalum was a Japanese male from the high SES school who was an artist and passionate about outdoor activities and the environment. He engaged in some political activity but also actively distanced himself from the world of politics. Kalum was university educated and grew up in a family where politics was discussed all the time, yet his memories of politics were not positive. He notes he did have a political environment in his house but this was based in conflict and “useless debate”. He explains,

my dad was quite open about talking about that kind of stuff, and that was actually one of the main points of tension, well my parents divorced in 2001 so going up to that stage most of the arguments revolved around politics, so it was quite politicized at home.

And later continues, in the context of experiencing political debate between his parents and between his dad and his friends as “beating each other up” over each other’s opinions. Kalum does not regularly vote, but he votes occasionally and engages in some protests but does not follow Canadian news. He explains, “I don’t follow politics closely, I have sort of long given up on the whole world of it”. Yet, although he did not follow politics, he could talk fairly in-depth about politics in Canada, particularly related to his own areas of interest. And in fact he does read political books and magazines such as Noam Chomsky and the New Left Review. He explains how he and his friends spend “our time reading books or journal articles that are a bit bigger picture.” He continues that for himself and his friend group, politics “just seems as if it is not a priority in any of our lives really.” This was in part because politics seemed like a “petty”

world. It is worthwhile to note that a couple of participants that started in low participation categories and ended in higher participation categories noted similar conflict ridden and therefore negative environments regarding participation. They also, avoided politics for the first part of their voting years but by their understanding, began engaging in politics when they were encouraged by social influences to participate.

Although often the ways in which a strong family political environment appeared to temper participation was in terms of negative associations with politics, for some it was simply about priorities. Darwish, a South Asian man from a low SES school with a Master's degree, noted that he came from a very political and educated family. His father was involved in politics, and news and political discussion was very much a part of his family life. Yet Darwish notes that his father suggested to him in high school that he shouldn't "worry about this stuff right now" and to "just worry about your education, worry about going to college and all that stuff, don't worry about this politics stuff." Darwish later explains his own lack of interest in politics through a similar perspective:

It doesn't affect me. I think it's... because I was so dwelled in my education and my education was taking such a priority, and there were other things in my life that were taking such a priority, I can't deal with this right now, it clearly has no benefit for me right now, it may have a more macro benefit in the future but...

Now that he has finished his schooling, Darwish did go with his sister to vote in the last election. He explains this was in part due to the pressure of his sisters and in part because he felt ready to vote:

I was more capable at this time... I was more capable to understand what was going on, I was more aware of my surroundings, I knew what things affected

me, what things didn't... but again I was at the ledge and my sisters pushed me over.

Yet although Darwish only voted in the last election, he is in the middle participation category because he has regularly followed the news, something that was around while growing up and that was also reinforced in his workplace. Darwish started paying regular attention to the news in university, taking it on as part of entering into adulthood: "The moment I entered, it was sort of, okay I am an adult, I am 18, I have to join the rest of the adults at the breakfast table, let's see what the rest of the people do, okay they read newspapers." Darwish is careful to correct me when I ask if this desire to read newspapers was related to college; instead, this was just something Darwish was exposed to throughout his life, a sense that that is what adults do, read the newspaper. This was likely formed in the home, as Darwish explains: "political conversations with my father always existed; if there was a morning that happened, there was a newspaper on the table". Once newspaper reading became a habit Darwish found "how much of a benefit it was and a conversation starter." Yet one would need to be in the right circles for this to be a conversation starter and Darwish notes that all of his friends that he was close with through high school and then in university became professionals, most with extensive post-secondary schooling. Also, although Darwish does not connect university with the impetus to start reading the newspaper, he does note how the professional job he obtained out of university reinforced this habit:

when I got to the professional world,... when I was in corporate offices and I saw what people did at their break, people talked about it, how things affected us and how things didn't affect us, like wages and taxes and sports headlines, all that kind of stuff, what's going on in... whose our next prime minister, what is Steven Harper doing right now, all that kind of stuff, it became more prevalent, when I entered the professional world, because you would come in

suit and tie, and you would go to the top floor and sit down and they would be drinking their coffee and reading the newspaper and talking about what is going on.

Once again, Darwish's account highlights the role of family influence and social contexts. Darwish's political behavior appears to be very much influenced by his family, but also reinforced by university, in that university further helps to place him in contexts where discussing and knowing about politics and current events is "what people did". University may have also helped give Darwish the sense that he was now "capable" enough to vote. Yet these influences of university tend to build on already existing influences of political engagement. Darwish's account, along with all of the other accounts in this section, reflect the ways in which the family context and social context interact to impact political practices. Early experiences of political activity appear to make one more receptive to political resources or opportunities. These stories also appear to demonstrate that the characteristics of socialization agents matter, in terms of how convincing or desirable these models of participation appear to the participants.

Finally, Tiffany provides the rare example from this category where there was no family political participation at all. Her case highlights the impact that social desirability within social networks can have, particularly when the foundation of knowledge and modeling is lacking in the family. Tiffany was a friendly and unassuming Chinese woman from a lower SES school. She was a very diligent student in high school and university, not only in terms of taking her classes seriously, but also in terms of volunteering and working outside of school through both high school and university. This diligence continued on in her work life, as she worked extensive hours at her job, which was relatively low paying but a labour of love. Tiffany regularly votes but intermittently pays attention to politics. She voted in her first election, in 2004, prior to

entering university. In explaining what led her to vote in her first election, she relays the excitement that her high school friends had around voting: “everyone was talking about it.” Tiffany describes how, for herself and her friends, voting was seen as a new possibility “so everyone was doing it.” She continues,

Basically, we were at the age of voting. Everyone is excited, we can finally vote, we are old enough to vote now, well at first I really didn't get the point of voting but, [I thought] yeah sure go for it, because my best friend was talking about it a lot.

Tiffany also notes she had a high school class that taught her the very basics so that she could have a bit of a sense of what she was voting for, particularly in the absence of parents that could provide that information: “It helped me understand a little bit more of it” she explains. “I would try to ask my parents” but they were “not very active” and their “English was not that good either.” For Tiffany, her friends seemed to provide the excitement around voting, and she cobbled together resources from her class and her parents to support her desire to vote. She explains that she would have been “clueless” if her class had not introduced her to the topic, and that her dad helped. She explained that even though her dad did not know a lot, he “still understands it better than me so he would say, ‘take your ID, don't forget your ID,’ it helped a little bit and my friends.” The social encouragement and excitement that appears to have helped support Tiffany to vote the first time also continues in a slightly different form throughout her life. She explains that, during university, she continued to vote and that her friend's social pressure helped in this regard. She notes her “politically active” friends would lecture, “if you don't vote, you can't blame anyone for failure because you didn't vote yourself” and upon the arrival of the election Tiffany describes the interaction between her and her friends: “It's coming

up, you better vote, you better vote. I am like ‘okay, stop the nagging, I am going to vote today’.” Tiffany reflects on this, “so it actually really helps.” This push to participate that Tiffany describes then seems to translate into greater attention to the political information and campaigns that might allow her to make a better vote:

then sometimes, when you are too busy to be knowing what is going on, sort of like last minute, okay, I am going to do my research now, okay take a look at the news, look around me, and you start to see all these... when it is really voting time, you can see all these campaigns... and I will really listen to them a little bit more, and that might help me vote a little bit more.

This kind of social pressure and reminding continues in her job, as some of her clients “are very keen about voting” and “will remind [her] the week before.” Tiffany explains that, for one of her clients, “I know she will be asking me who I will vote for and why, so I better be prepared to answer that question.” Social desirability and support, in the form of friend and professional networks, appears to encourage participation for Tiffany, who did not have strong information sources and encouragement from the family.

This pathway again presents a primary role for influences of the family and the role of social context in producing pressure and encouragement to participate in politics. Yet, along with a weaker relation to political participation, we see more mixed messages and generally weaker and less overlapping social and family influences. Similar to the high participation pathway, the majority of the people in this category have a university degree. Still university does not appear to play the primary role in people’s pathways to participation but a mediating role, in that it helps to put people into the social contexts where participation is encouraged. Also, as many in this category describe the necessity to do one’s “research” to be able to vote, university may help to support the self-concept and skills to enable one to be willing to do pre-voting research. Still, this

potential role of university again interacts with existing social influences and practices that begin before university and continue after.

### ***2.9.5 Pathway To Participation: Low To Low***

This pathway demonstrates fewer social influences in terms of family, friends, and social contexts. Parents of the participants in this group were much less likely to vote, talk about politics, or encourage their children to vote than were parents in the high participation category. Four out of the nine participants did not think that their parents regularly voted, and on the other hand, only three out of the nine participants had parents who did more than vote. This is in contrast with the high/high participation category. In the low/low participation category only 33 percent of the respondents reported that their parents did more than vote, whereas 89 percent of the participants in the high/high category reported that their parents did more than vote (i.e., watched the news, encouraged them to vote, or discussed politics around them). Additionally, a number of these participants reported that they had no one in their lives that were interested in politics or encouraged them to participate in politics. If people did have a political influence, such as parents or friends who voted, they usually had a singular influence, not the multiple influences or contexts that supported higher participation levels. Six out of the nine participants in this category had at least a university education.

When asked if they ever in their life had people around that were interested in politics, six out of the nine participants either answered no or noted a singular or loose political connection. An example of someone having an existing but very loose political connection was Charlotte, a Taiwanese immigrant from the high SES school with a Master's degree in engineering. Her

parents did not vote and “were very strict about not talking politics” because it can get “into a very heated discussion.” Additionally, she notes her “close friends are not very politically involved” but she can name a political influence in the form of her “friends of friends” who have pressured her to vote. To this pressure, Charlotte indicates that she typically “nods and smiles” to end the conversation. Charlotte has arguably lower attachment to Canada than many of the other participants, as she immigrated to Canada later in high school, most of her friends are still from Taiwan, and she herself is not sure if she will end up here or working in another country in the future.

Cyrus is a participant with equally low political social influence. He is an Iranian man from the low SES school. Cyrus is a successful salesman and had a very carefree joking attitude when talking about his own life and the topic of politics. He has a university degree and a successful job but highlights, both in school and in his career, that he did not take things too seriously. Cyrus reports on a survey that his parents do not regularly vote, but in the interview notes his mom sometimes votes because, “she is worried about her job,” and based on this concern she might ask him to vote for the party that will ensure her job security “but that is the rare occasion that she will talk about politics”. Cyrus also cannot report any other close relationships in terms of friends or family interested in politics. When asked if there was anyone around him when he was young that talked about or showed interest in politics, he responds “No, no way”. Cyrus seems to think that this is the general attitude that people have about politics:

I think in general, every time you mention politics it’s like ah, it’s kind of one of those things, I don’t know man. It’s just, they don’t really care. I don’t know why. It just seems like people, like I don’t ever really have conversations about politics.

Cyrus not only cannot name any major social influences who care about politics, but he also subtly presents himself in contrast to the kind of people who would be political. He portrays himself as joking around and fun-loving in contrast to the kind of people who have “strong views” or like to yell and get angry about politics. He repeatedly calls himself “lazy” in comparison to the kind of people who care and want to put in the effort to vote or inform themselves. Finally, Cyrus makes sense of his participation in terms of age, that maybe he will care when he is older, instead of young and carefree.

A few of these participants have similar characteristics to Cyrus: not only do they have few social influences, but they also distance themselves in terms of identity, or contrast their own self-concept to their conception of politics. Whereas Cyrus presents himself as carefree and a joker in contrast to the seriousness of politics, Charlotte introduced above, partially explains her lack of participation in terms of being a “very neutral person” that doesn’t “disagree or agree with parties when they are against each other.”

Jody, who is a Chinese women from the low SES school, has similar low political social influence and distances herself in terms of value and identity to the political. In a similar vein to Charlotte and Cyrus, Jody removes herself from the opinionated world of politics. She highlights her values of acceptance of diversity and individual freedom, which means people should not be pushed to vote, something she sees as “preachy”. For Jody, ‘preachy’ is something she tends to distance herself from as opposite to values of individual freedom and diversity, which arise in many of Jody’s discussions. When discussing politics, she points to the only acquaintance (a Facebook friend) she has that shows any interest in Canadian politics. She complains that he always posts about politics and attempts to get people to vote, a behavior she finds unattractive. She explains, “I’m all about expressing yourself, but I feel like that’s a little preachy. And the

more someone preaches the more adverse I become towards doing that thing.” Finally, in explaining her views on protesting she describes it as “just preaching” which is something that “people will go against”. Again, Jody not only has values that are almost in contrast to her conception of the political, but more importantly she also has very little social connection to politics. Although her dad votes, when asked, Jody cannot name anyone in her life that has discussed politics or has shown any interest in Canadian politics around her.

Jody’s relation to politics also provides some evidence of the impacts that social influence and desirability can potentially have on those “not interested” in politics. Although Jody distanced herself from politics, she gave a couple of examples of brushes with political behavior. One of these examples suggests that when people see political attention as something exciting, or what everyone is doing, it can become more motivating, particularly when it is the behavior of people they are connected to or respect. Interestingly, a few people that noted very little social influence mentioned their interest being piqued in foreign political news when it was discussed by their friends. For instance, Jody followed the 2008 election when Obama was elected. When asked why she followed this election, she explains, “everyone was following.” This is akin to a sensibility that we see from people in the higher participation category, where it feels like “everyone is excited to vote” or talk about politics. Jody continues to explain her attention to the Obama election: “Because I wanted to see him... in power. Well, it is precedent-setting, and it was interesting because everyone was talking about it.” Again, we can contrast this to the observation of Cyrus above that politics is a topic that no one seems to “really care” about or want to discuss.

Stewart is another example of someone who does not engage in politics at all, but he also found himself becoming slightly more interested in politics when it was discussed around him.

Similar to many people with lower participation levels, Stewart distances himself from politics because of his perceived lack of knowledge. Stewart is a Chinese male from the mid SES school who has a Master's degree. Similar to most of the participants in this category, he reported relatively low social influences around politics, at least in the sense that he reported that his friends and family members did not talk about politics around him. At the same time, he comes from a family that is classified as a high environment of political socialization, because his parents voted and paid attention to the news. Still, Stewart describes his family environment as not very political: "they watched the news and that kind of stuff, but it wasn't like a dinner conversation or anything". When asked if his parents ever encouraged him to vote, he responds:

No never... they didn't, it wasn't like a big deal, I just remember leading up to it that ... they'd say, we have to vote soon, but that's about it, maybe they talked about it behind closed doors...

Later in the interview he gives his own account of what he thinks it takes to foster participation in people. He explains you have to have it:

ingrained in you. That's what I meant, it's kind of like hockey, when you're a kid, as a kid that's almost like your most important years to figure out the technical aspects of the sport, when you get to high school it is again, but when you get to college, it's almost like it's too late to do all of that, at that time you're focusing on other things, you know what I mean? So by like 10, it's gotta be ingrained in you when you're a kid so that it can last you the rest of your life. So I feel, well for me anyways, I don't know about other people, growing up, I just never followed politics as a kid, and it didn't help that our teachers at school kind of sucked.

This explanation of how people come to participate in politics mirrors a number of low and medium participators accounts of their own participation. Stewart felt that political participation and the associated skills and interests were not ingrained in his youth, and so it was too much of

a cost to catch up. The way this cost appeared to be alleviated for some was entering into social contexts or networks where politics was a common or desirable practice. It also seems possible that university could alleviate this cost by providing people with some of the tools and habits that makes researching politics more accessible. However, this was not the case for a few lower participators who went to university and still expressed a lack of confidence and knowledge around politics.

On the other hand, Stewart did note that his time at graduate school in the United States exposed him to a different approach to political engagement. He notes of his own political participation that “unless you're following, it gets kind of confusing” and it is best not to participate if you are not knowledgeable. He contrasts this to his time in the United States, where it was hard not to get drawn into political discussions:

Whereas like when I was living in the States, when I first moved to the States that was when Obama got elected, in his first time ... everyone follows there, it's almost like following the Stanley Cup finals. You know, when it's down to two teams, there's like two guys and everyone follows. What I mean by everyone, is like kids, high school kids, college kids everybody, whereas growing up here all my friends never paid attention to politics.

He continues to explain, “It's cool to talk about it down there.” In fact, the U.S. is not known for having higher political engagement than Canada. Stewart's perception of such high engagement may be that he was exposed to the kinds of circles where political discussion and knowledge were higher because he was there to do a prestigious Master's program. This would have presumably exposed him to people from higher SES backgrounds, who are known for their higher political participation. This might account for Stewart's observation that: “my friends in the States, they would talk about politics with their parents a lot”. It may also be due to the

particular Obama election, which did garner noticeably higher engagement. It was an election that a number of Canadian participants seemed to view with awe and excitement, deeming it more worthy of attention than the ‘bland’ politics of Canada. It is instructive, however, that the perception of excitement around politics, whether it is because “everyone is talking about it” in your social circle or because the political event itself is considered exciting, appears to be a way that young Canadians can be drawn into political engagement.

## 2.10 UNIVERSITY, SES, AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The accounts and reports of the participants give us both an insight into the extent of the role of university in political participation, as well as the mechanisms through which university might impact participation. The stories of the participants suggest that although education plays a role in facilitating participation, family and social influence plays a more substantial role, and these factors often mutually reinforce one another. Of the 40 interviewees that completed at least a university degree, 11 pointed to aspects of their time in university that increased their participation. Within these stories, university generally combined with multiple factors to impact participation. Also, for a number of these participants, university did not increase their level of participation as measured in this study, but in their own assessment, their time in university increased their interest or comfort related to politics. On the other hand, beyond self-reported influences of university, there are a number of participants that did not necessarily point to university as impacting their participation, but within their accounts we can see a potential role for university in putting these people in settings where political discussion and participation was the norm, or in providing the skills and identities that facilitate participation. Still, there are as many participants whose participation levels did not appear to be impacted by university, either

because they were already interested and engaged with politics upon entering university, or because their lower participation levels did not change through or after university.

The main role that education appears to have on participation is not so much through directly changing people's voting behaviors, but in increasing their interest or engagement with politics and current events. There are two key ways that university appears to do this. First, it facilitates entry into the contexts where political participation is discussed and encouraged, both within university and in the professional jobs that people acquire after university. Secondly, and very much related, university appears to foster skills and related self-concepts that encourage or reinforce participation, in that participants feel they have the knowledge, research abilities, and interest to participate. This second aspect of university is likely intertwined with SES backgrounds, family practices, and pre-university self-preparation and socialization. In other words, students in high school that intend to go on to university are likely already building these skills and self-concepts before university. And this was evident in that some of the higher participators from higher SES backgrounds noted their practices of reading newspapers such as the "Globe and Mail" and Noam Chomsky books – materials that are directed towards a fairly advanced readership – started before university.

It is interesting to note that the people who most directly pointed to university as a time of political awakening were participants that were already cued to politics. For example, many were already voting themselves and came from families that encouraged their political participation. Tanya, who we were introduced to earlier in the mid to high participation pathway, is one such example. She is one of the participants who pointed most directly to the key role that university played in her participation. Tanya highlighted a number of aspects of university that positively impacted her engagement, yet her participation level was already in the high category

at the time that she reports these influences of university occurring. The role she did see for university was creating a deeper interest and knowledge around politics, not necessarily providing the initial impetus to vote or pay attention. She distinguishes between the experience that initiated her regular attention to the news and the experiences of university:

I mean in France, when I started to read the news that was more about social ineptitude, in order to participate... but in Carleton University it was more the realization of how important it is for me to know those things...in Ottawa I really started to see that when people organize around an issue they can make a difference. And the more informed you were, the better.

For Tanya this was as much the political city and context of the particular university she attended than any aspect of the university itself. When reflecting on the impacts of living in a political city and having a political friend group that went along with her experiences at Carleton, Tanya explains: “it’s just people seem to be more informed [in Ottawa], and that kind of passes on to others that move to that city.” University in this regard seems to produce similar effect as that of the family and other social influences, in that it can help to make participation feel desirable and natural first by putting people in a context where it feels like everyone is “informed” or engaging in politics and a sense that you *should* be informed as well. University would be a natural context for this to occur, yet one also has to enter into the kinds of networks, courses and schools where this sense that ‘everyone is participating’ is produced. This appears to be partially self-motivated, so that people who are primed to notice or care about politics experience an increase in participation, and tend to take courses where they might be further exposed to political talk and information.

Tanya’s account not only reflects the way that university can help produce being informed about politics as socially desirable and personally important, but also how specific

classes can give a person the knowledge, interest and confidence that supports participation. Upon reflecting about her own path to participation, Tanya notes, “luckily I have had friends who have been extremely politically motivated, but I think it was mainly my education that really played a crucial role in my understanding of why my friends were so vocal and were so involved.” Tanya’s reflection on her participation represents what we see in other accounts of the influences of university: some pre-existing influence or engagement with politics combining with skills, knowledge or desirability produced in university. The role of education for Tanya was to reinforce her pre-existing participation by providing a context that strengthened the message that knowing and caring about politics was important. This paired with her sociology class, which gave her the “understanding” of why politics was important or why people would want to be “so involved”. She explains how before taking her sociology classes, politics seemed “overwhelming” and something she would “tune out” but her classes helped to highlight how specific issues are impacted directly by political decision-making, and that you do not need to know everything to discuss and participate in politics. In this way, university can help reinforce or produce excitement and interest in politics, both because people are put into contexts where politics are promoted as worthwhile to engage in, and also because people can further develop the tools, whether it is research skills or specific knowledge, that provides confidence or feelings of legitimacy in participating and discussing politics. For some, this feeling of legitimacy is simply knowing that one doesn’t need to know everything to participate or talk about politics. Tanya was in a political friend group before entering university, and then entered a university that was known for its political environment. Others, who went into engineering or the natural sciences and did not have any exposure to politics through their social networks, did not relate this strong political role to university.

Others that discuss the role of university provide similar accounts; some were focused more on social contexts, while others discussed the knowledge and skills that specific classes provided, which worked to produce a feeling of increased engagement or knowledge around politics. This in turn can encourage feelings of greater legitimacy, confidence or motivation around political engagement. For example, Sheryl, who is in the middle participation pathway group, voted before she entered university, but she points to university as a time that helped her become more informed and therefore feel better about her vote. This was both through an acquaintance she met in university and through specific social work courses that she attended. Sheryl explains when she took social work classes for the first time that she “started to pay more attention” and figured out where she “really stood on the issues.” Yet Sheryl was regularly voting before these experiences and still does not regularly pay attention to the news, but instead reports she has more confidence in her knowledge and stance related to politics.

Both participants above did not change in terms of their measured level of participation when they went to university, but still point to a subjective increase in confidence and sense of knowledge and engagement around politics. Other accounts that relate university experiences directly to times when they report changes in measured levels of participation still suggest a similar effect of university, that of social influences or the development of specific knowledge, reading and research skills that support participation. For example, Robyn, who started and ended in a high participation category and came from a family where she watched political shows with her parents, still points to university as the time of her life where her political engagement increased. She explains her interest in politics in university increased because, “...in university, you meet a lot of people and you are given certain tools to talk about that kind of stuff”. Yet, although Robyn points to social and educational tools that can increase participation,

she also has a hard time untangling this with the events of her lifecycle. She adds: “But also I guess, maybe then I was old enough, that’s the point where you’re able to vote too, so then that becomes much more relevant to you”.

Jane also has a hard time untangling lifecycle changes with university impacts, as university similarly coincided with her first opportunity to vote. For Jane the impacts of university were mostly based in the role that specific classes played in producing her enthusiasm for voting. She notes, when explaining what led her to vote, “I think I was just really excited that I could for the first time” and later connects this to specific classes, saying it was “all related to my own school classes, talking about political topics. By that time I had already taken that poli-sci class and international studies class, so yeah, I was really excited to get my voice in there.” As with other participants, university provided Jane with further knowledge and interest, which reinforced, her participation but these impacts are tied up in a range of other influences. She notes earlier that: “I have always seen it as important, even at... I can remember in grade 12 geography, again, our teacher was talking about oh you guys are going to be voting age soon and you should start”. She also engaged in campaign activities and writing letters to politicians before entering university and, as noted earlier, reflects on some of the impacts of university as tied up in a process of maturation. These accounts suggest that university can support participation, particularly through social contexts and specific classes, but these impacts are most likely experienced by those already interested and influenced towards participation.

Does this mean that the political benefits of university are only for those that are predisposed to political participation? Not necessarily, but it appears that this is the population that is much more likely to accrue benefits from university, because they will be cued to seek out or be receptive when exposed to political influences and resources in both high school and

university. Finally, as we see that a large part of the role of university appears to be increasing interest and confidence around politics, it is likely that as participants such as Tanya have children, they can provide the context of participation in the home that is both informed and desirable, and in turn more motivational for her children.

## 2.11 DISCUSSION

The paths to participation recounted by the participants in this study highlight the role of socialization and social context in encouraging political engagement. There are two key ways in which social influence and socialization processes appear to underlie the pathways to political participation: 1) through social norms and desirability – or the production of political discussion and participation as a common, desirable, or taken for granted activity, and 2) through the development of background knowledge, skills and self-concepts that support participation. The family appears to be the primary social setting where these socialization processes occur, but social networks, such as friendship groups or social settings such as workplaces or universities, can provide the same role.

This research contributes to the debate about the relationship of higher education to political engagement. Whereas higher education has been long presumed to be a key factor in facilitating political participation, this study suggests instead that the family and strong social contexts of participation are more important factors in initiating political participation. Still, education does appear to play a supporting role in enhancing interest, background knowledge, and attention to politics, particularly for those with additional supports or influences of participation. It also can facilitate the entrance of people into social contexts, such as professional work places, that encourage participation.

High levels of education are thought to increase political participation through a number of mechanisms, such as: developing political sophistication and skills, producing civic orientations, and fostering social networks and increased status (Lewis-Beck et al 2008; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba and Nie 1996; Verba et al. 1995). This study suggests a more minor role for higher education in the extent to which it impacts participation, and varying support for the ways in which education facilitates participation. For some, university appears to help to provide political sophistication, skills, and knowledge that enable confidence and the feeling that one's participation is legitimate. There is also a role for more broad based or background skills, such as comfort with technical language and research, that potentially can make the world of politics feel like it is more easily accessible. Yet much of these potential benefits likely start prior to higher education as part of the pre-emptive socialization and accumulation of educational capital that happens in households, as well as in high school (Bourdieu 1984; Lauglo 2011; Walpole 2003). Also, these benefits appear to be most felt by those who self-select into particular social science courses (Hillygus 2005), or have pre-existing interests and propensities towards political participation. Research that looks at the impacts of university on those who attend, highlights a similar relation of university to learning and educational outcomes (Arum and Roska 2011; Armstrong 2013). For example, Armstrong (2013) outlines how job and class outcomes are not increased for all who attend university but are dependent on the existing resources and orientations that students enter the university with and how these interact with the educational and social contexts of the university.

While it appears that people's orientations can be impacted by university, this seems to be specifically in terms of interest, enthusiasm, and confidence around politics and current events. In some accounts, university is a time where interest and propensity to pay attention

increases, both through exposure to topics in social science classes and the feeling that paying attention to current events is what one does. Also, an increase in political sophistication or capital through one's classes and social networks appears to also allow a person to feel more interested and, as noted, more legitimate in their political participation. At the same time, some of these reported effects surrounding interest are hard to disentangle with timing in the life cycle of these young Canadians, as coming of age to vote, and entering university, are often experienced at similar times.

The study did not find substantial evidence for an increase in civic orientations that has often been attributed to education (Brand 2010; Lewis-Beck et al 2008; Straughn and Andriot 2011; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Although some participants that went to university demonstrated civic orientations and practices, these practices usually started before university. For those participants that noted a sense of duty in relation to politics, most made reference to a pre-existing sense of duty around participation before entering university, such as always feeling that they should vote, or always wanting to "make positive change". Also, the majority of participants saw university predominantly in terms of an inevitable step to the job market. This conception sometimes contrasted university with civic duty, as university was experienced by some as a time of self-focus, competition, and being in a "student bubble" that conflicted with concerns about the larger world.

Finally, it appears the social networks that university facilitates can encourage political participation. Yet in contrast to Nie et al. (1996), who suggests these impacts are more exclusive to those in the highest status networks, this research suggests it is simply the networks and social contexts where political discussion and participation are produced as desirable. As higher educated people are more likely to participate and have an interest in politics, university and the

professional jobs after university, are more likely to produce social contexts where people know and care about politics. These networks could be found in university classes, campuses, and office jobs that people entered into after university, but by no means were they the highest status social, and occupational networks. Accounts of the impact of political contexts and networks could also be found from those who did not attend higher education. Similarly, although there was a role for specific recruitment requests in encouraging participation, the role of social networks and contexts seemed to be most powerful when it was a homogeneous social context in terms of political participation, which made people feel as though “everyone” votes and cares about politics. Additionally, in discussing the role of high status social networks on participation, Nie et al. (1996) suggest that these networks bring people closer to political actors and power structures, thereby increasing the impact and therefore the motivation for participation. High status social networks did appear to include more connections to political and government actors, but social networks appeared to have the most impact by producing the social norms, desirability, and information related to politics, and not by connection to political actors and structures (although this aspect of social networks arguably could be more important for other forms of political participation beyond voting and protesting). These findings lend further support to calls for increased attention to the role of social interaction, norms and context in impacting political activities to supplement the more individualized and rational actor perspectives underlying much of the political science literature (Campbell 2013; Sinclair 2012; Zuckerman 2005).

These political practices and orientations that are supported by family, social and educational contexts also highlight the role for political and cultural capital that starts in the family and is reinforced through one’s education. In multiple venues (that are often related to

pre-adult and adult SES), people can develop the language, concepts and dispositions that underlie political participation. This allows some to feel more “interested” and legitimate in having political opinions and participating in politics (Bourdieu 1984). Much of this cultural and political capital as well as a “taste” for politics often starts first in the home, in one’s younger social milieu, and in the social circles in which one belongs or feels connected, which then interacts with the social contexts and structures a person enters into later in life. If this cultural and political capital is more connected to middle class or educated trajectories, participation can then be encouraged through socialization in families that helps produce skills and identities that might support both educated and political trajectories and it can also be promoted by motivating practices, or desirable social worlds for those identifying with, or heading towards middle class or educated trajectories (Bourdieu 1984; Beck and Jennings 1982; Lauglo 2011). Bourdieu’s notions on the accumulation of capital and practice that starts from a young age would add a useful perspective to the rational actor and status models (Brady et al. 2015; Nie et al. 1996) that have underpinned explanations around the relation between SES, education, and political participation. At the same time, it is important to not over-represent the extent to which practices and orientations are segmented within particular classes, as some of these practices of discussion and enthusiasm around politics, around politically reflective and informed identities, and around expectations for higher education are found across various SES backgrounds.

These social experiences that facilitate political participation are best understood in terms of increasing or decreasing likelihoods, both of which can be related to SES backgrounds and university education. People from various backgrounds and education levels can be exposed to the experiences that facilitate political participation, yet at the same time, people that are from high SES backgrounds, and who go onto higher education, particularly in the social sciences, are

more likely to have multiple opportunities to be exposed to the knowledge, practices and social experiences that reinforce participation. The earlier in life, and the more times people are exposed to the tools and contexts that make participation desirable, the more likely they are to take note of, or seek out these resources, social influences, and practices (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1990; Strauss and Quinn 1997). We can also think how these social settings interact with individual personalities and self-concepts, making political resources, influences and contexts more impactful or attractive to those predisposed to them (Gross 2013; Strauss and Quinn 1997; Stets and Carter 2012). Additionally, the tools that university or a knowledgeable family environment might provide can act as latent resources that could be drawn upon or interact with influences later in life (Cho, Gimpel and Wu 2006). For example, for those that attended university, if they are later in life exposed to social influences that promote participation, they can feel they have the disposition to “research” and catch up on political information or the confidence to talk about politics, and so be more likely to respond to those social influences than someone who does not have the same background. Similarly, someone who came from a political family that did not initially begin to participate might have the basic political capital to engage later in life if they entered into contexts where caring about politics became more desirable or motivational.

Along with highlighting the importance of multiple reinforcing social influences and supports for participation, this study argues for a stronger focus on the role of social context or milieu’s to understand the relation between SES backgrounds and education with political participation levels. It suggests political participation is encouraged through social worlds that create the sense that participating in and caring about politics is what everyone does and thus also part of who you are if you connect as a member of this group. Gallego (2015) gives some

evidence to this effect in her research on the contextual factors across countries that impact voter turnout and possibly work against unequal political participation. Gallego (2015) suggests that although union membership increases voter turnout it tends to only have large impacts on reducing the gap between higher educated and less educated groups when less educated people report both being a union member and living with one. She notes this suggests that a family milieu of union membership appears to have the most effect on increasing the likelihood of voting for those that do not have an education. Again we can think about how for more educated and high SES groups milieus of participation are more common but not inevitably so.

These findings on the strong role of social influences in fostering political activity are supported by recent and past work. Research highlights the role that social context such as neighborhoods and group similarities can have on political participation levels and individual choices to participate (Campbell 2006; Huckfeldt 1979). Additionally, research points to the ways in which social networks and interaction can encourage participation, not only through recruitment but through contagion, norms and social desirability (Bond et al. 2012; Kenny et al. 1992; Sinclair 2012). This work reinforces calls by social scientists for a larger focus on the ways in which social influence and context help underpin practices of participation, and how context and individual characteristics interact to produce trends in participation (Campbell 2013; Sinclair 2012; Zuckerman 2005). This study gives us insight not only into the ways that some might come to participate while others do not, but also how we might encourage political participation by making political talk and concern a larger part of everyday social contexts.

### **Chapter 3: The Cultural Models of Politics and Participation**

Culture is an important piece in the project to understand the changing relations that young people have to political participation in western democracies. Along with changing trends in participation, some social scientists have noted changes in the orientations of citizens, such as a decrease in a sense of duty and social norms around voting, or a rise in more individualistic self-expressive values (Dalton 2008; Howe 2010; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Putnam 2000). While not all researchers think that these changes in values necessarily means people will engage less in politics (broadly defined), (Dalton 2008; Inglehart and Welzel 2005), some point to the potential role of individualism in negatively impacting political participation (Bellah et al. 1985/2008; Howe 2010; Putnam 2000), and others point to the possibility that these changes in the orientations and practices of youth could lead to unequal engagement (Martin 2012; Sloam 2014). These trends suggest the need to look more closely into the role of culture and its relation to political participation.

At the same time, with the exception of some recent work in sociology that will be reviewed below, political participation research has been limited in the attention it gives to culture. The most common approach to culture is to focus on the predominantly psychological orientations that can be captured in closed choice surveys, such as questions around duty, efficacy, trust in government and interest in politics, or that capture more broadly-based value orientations such as collectivism versus individualism. Although these aspects are associated with participation, they give us limited insight into the ways people use culture to think about politics and participation and what this might mean for how they participate. This study provides an in-depth look at the cultural understandings and assumptions that younger Canadians hold around politics and participation, using in-depth semi-structured interviews.

In the research that looks at political culture and how it relates to participation, one key focus is on the extent to which there exists a civic culture, which is marked by citizens orienting themselves towards the public and collective sphere and having a sense of obligation to participate within it (Almond and Verba 1963; Eliasoph 1998; Putnam 1994; Perrin 2014; de Tocqueville 1835/2000). This is often contrasted to individualism and parochialism, which is distinguished by a concern with more limited or personal interests and affairs (Almond and Verba 1963; Bellah et al. 1985/2008; Putnam 1994). While the existence of self-interest, individualism, and tendencies of parochialism is a part of any democracy, many argue that if these aspects are too strong they can undermine civic cultures and well-functioning democracies. In recent decades, researchers have suggested that the prominence of individualism, particularly in the United States, has increased to potentially worrying levels (Bellah et al. 1985/2008; Twenge 2006). Researchers have captured the dominance of this discourse in America through conducting rich cultural analysis of the languages Americans use to make sense of various aspects of life (Bellah et al. 1985/2008) and more specifically to political participation, outlining how discourses of individual self-interest and apathy displace public-spirited talk in the public realm (Eliasoph 1998). In Canada, political scientists have pointed to a decline in notions of duty around political participation within the younger population (Blais et al. 2004; Howe 2010).

Although this contrast between individualism and more civic orientations and cultures has received attention, social scientists have given less attention to what individualism means for how people currently think and act in relation to politics. If individualism is a potentially rising tide within the cultural orientations of western youth, it is pertinent that we better understand what this means for the ways young people think and relate to politics. In fact, some political scientists argue that individualist values can support democracies or expand practices of political

participation (Dalton 2008; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). What role do individualist and civic discourses have in the thinking around political participation of younger, more individually oriented generations, and how might it matter for who participates and who does not? To really answer these questions, we also need to know what other cultural representations are used to make meaning around politics and participation beyond or in relation to civic and individualist discourses. In fact, the ways in which people represent and think about the political world in relation to political participation has also not received extensive focus in sociological or political research literature.

Still, the sociology of political participation and culture is not limited to discourses of individualism. One key area of focus is how local contexts or micro-cultures can encourage or discourage political participation, or encourage some political logics over others. Sociologists have provided evidence of the ways in which actors can produce different meanings in local contexts that create certain civic cultures, which impact the way people talk about and relate to the political world within these spaces (Eliasoph 1998; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Perrin 2005). Yet repeated experiences within these local cultures arguably help form models of and for participation that impact the way people think and relate to politics in their everyday lives (Strauss 2014).

Work that touches on the question of how people think about and relate to politics and political participation more generally, highlight the symbolic representations and codes that people use to act in the political world. Perrin (2014) suggests that political participation is in fact a cultural or ritual act that people engage in as members of publics and larger imagined communities. He argues that political participation is one way we reaffirm our membership within these larger communities.

Focusing on symbolic codes in the political realm, Alexander and Smith (1993) outline how people use democratic and undemocratic codes to frame some aspects of the political world as desirable or undesirable. Bennett et al. (2013) and Baiocchi et al. (2014) build on this notion of cultural codes to discuss political participation. Upon conducting ethnographies of a number of civic groups, they discuss the ways in which people across these different groups and settings symbolically distance or disavow themselves from the world of politics, which is understood to be unsavory or contaminated. At the same time, they suggest that this disavowal does not mean people remove themselves from politics, but that they instead use symbolic distinctions or codes to contrast their political imaginary or the ideal political world that they are working towards, with the unsavory world of politics that they distance themselves from while working within (Bennett et al. 2013). Although this work provides some representations of the political world, it is limited to one key code, one of the contaminated political world that the civically involved distance themselves from and on the other hand, the ideal political imaginary. It is also limited to capturing the representations of the already civically involved, which raises the question of how the less engaged represent the political world and how these representations might matter for participation.

In this study, I expand upon the models and representations that people use to think about political participation. I then take a closer look at how these representations of politics might interact with the civic and individualistic discourses that are outlined in sociological and political science literature to produce models for political participation. I take a perspective on culture that highlights the way larger cultural orientations can matter in different ways depending on their relation to social objects and contexts. This helps to provide a more nuanced view on the role of individualist languages and values in relation to political participation. I argue that by capturing

the cultural models that people use to represent the political world, we can better understand the ways in which languages of individualism or civic duty matter for participation, and for who might participate and who might not.

I find a number of individualist assumptions and values integrated into the reasoning used by participants around politics and participation. I argue that individualist and civic languages take on a specific significance in relation to common representations of politics that help form dominant cultural models these young Canadians use to think about political participation. In other words, within participant's cultural models of political participation, *models for* participation are also grounded in common *models of* politics. The common ways participants represent the political world are: as complex and time consuming; negative and conflictual; and distant from everyday reality (which meant that, for some, politics was seen as low-stakes). Primarily individualist orientations combined with the above representations of politics tend to produce weak or optional models of political participation. Conversely, the more civic republican model of politics encourages participation in spite of these common representations of politics, and by drawing from more positive representations of political participation and the political world.

Through outlining these models of political participation and how participants integrate individualist and civic republican languages with representations of politics, I provide a more in depth understanding of the way that individualism matters for political participation. I suggest that because of the common ways that the political world is represented, purely individualist discourses tend to provide weak models for participation that likely weaken participation and advantage higher SES voters. Models that integrate languages of responsibility around participation provide a model for participation regardless of the more negative representations of

politics but at the same time they are not devoid of aspects of individualism but draw on ideas and representations such as rights and voice to make sense of public responsibility.

To provide a background on the concept and the role of individualism in relation to political participation I will first review the literature on individualism and then outline the concept of culture that guides this research before outlining in detail these political cultural models of young Canadians.

### 3.1 INDIVIDUALISM, MODERNITY AND DEMOCRACY

Individualism is a term conceptualized in a number of different ways. For example, it can include a set of attitudes that a person holds centered on self-actualization, self sufficiency, and self-interest; or a belief system based in the importance or value of the individual (Howe 2010; Bellah et al. 1985/ 2008). In broad terms, whether individualism is understood as a set of beliefs, values, attitudes or a general philosophy, individualism gives focus on the individual, often giving it primacy in relation to the collective or public realm. Therefore, in more individualistic societies or philosophies, duty, obligation, and a focus on larger social groups, structures, traditions and norms, can take a back seat to the thinking, acting, feeling, and interested, singular self.

Individualism has been reflected upon by a number of sociologists past and present, not necessarily as a problem for society, but as an aspect of modern western society that holds both important promise and dangers for individuals, democracy, and community (Durkheim 1949; De Tocqueville 1835/2000; Bellah et al. 1985/2008; Putnam 2000). For example, Durkheim (1949) suggested that a rise in individualism, in the sense of increased diversity and freedom, could lie

behind a stronger form of social solidarity based in mutual obligation and dependence, instead of solidarity based in similarity and obedience. At the same time, he also highlighted how individualism in an extreme or dysfunctional form leads to egoism (the self becoming one's primary reality and concern) and normlessness.

Bellah et al. understand individualism to be both a “belief in the inherent dignity of the individual” and a “belief that the individual has primary reality”, where society is secondary or artificial (1985/2008: 334). Again this definition of Bellah and colleagues alludes to both the value and problematic nature of individualism; on the one hand, individualism recognizes the dignity of the individual ~ a perspective that lies behind humanism, civil rights, and freedom, but on the other hand, a focus on the individual as the primary reality, with no languages for obligation and larger social realities, can lead to a weakening of public concern and social obligation (Bellah et. al 1985/2008).

Individualism is intertwined with western democracy not only in terms of rights and freedoms but also in terms of acceptance of diversity and tolerance. Yet, at the same time, social scientists have argued that individualist discourses and values can undermine democracy, which depends at least to some extent on obligation, duty, and public spirit. The most famous theorist to outline these dangers was Durkheim's predecessor, de Tocqueville. De Tocqueville (1835/2000) recognized the intertwined nature of democracy and individualism, but argued that without practices and mores that connect people to the public sphere, individualism could undermine democracy and lead to despotism. De Tocqueville defined individualism simply as a withdrawal into one's private circles in relation to the public sphere “disposing each member to sever himself from the mass of his fellow creatures; and to draw apart with his family and friends... willingly [leaving] society at large to itself.” (1835/2000: 618). De Tocqueville argues

individualism can in the end lead to a loss of liberty, because the people are not directing their collective destiny but leaving it to a higher authority. Additionally, drawn apart into their own circles, people have little possibility for collective action to defend their own interests when needed.

These notions of individualism in relation to politics have significance in two slightly different ways. One is the dichotomy between self-interested actors and on the other hand, people who are oriented towards the public good. A second is a focus on freedoms, rights and self-direction in contrast to duty, obligation and conformity. These two aspects of individualism can be seen in the discourse participants in this study use to reason about politics, and are also represented in the literature that focuses upon individualism. Two key works that highlight the role of individualism in relation to politics and incorporate these two dichotomies of individualism are Bellah et al (1985/2008) and (Howe 2010).

Bellah et al. (1985/2008) argue that modern individualism can be understood in two forms, both of which are based in the perspective that the individual is the primary reality that comes before society, social obligations, or larger value systems. The first is the more familiar variant of individualism: utilitarian individualism. This form of individualism is based in the classic view of individual economic actors focused on maximizing their self-interest and guiding action in terms of cost/benefit calculations. In this context, society exists to protect private interests, and the public good arises through individuals seeking their optimal self-interest. The second is termed “expressive individualism,” which values personal liberation, satisfaction and self-expression, and bases moral direction in personal happiness and fulfillment, not in higher moral principles of duty and obligation. It allows one to “think of commitments- from marriage and work to political and religious involvement-as enhancements of the sense of individual well-

being rather than moral imperatives” (Bellah et al. 1985/2008; 47). Bellah and his colleagues argue that these languages have overshadowed other American traditions such as republicanism, which are based in community engagement and orientation towards the public good, and religious traditions, which are based in obligation and submission to a larger moral authority than ones own. Although Bellah et al. (1985/2008) contrast these forms of individualism both to religious moral discourses and republican discourses, their notion of republicanism is particularly pertinent to this study. Republicanism is an additional cultural tradition and moral language that Bellah et al. (1985/2008) contends exists in America. The tradition of republicanism has much in common with notions of a civic culture, both stress citizen participation in the community and public affairs, along with a focus on civic virtue or the public good. This republican perspective understands liberty and freedom as intertwined with participation and responsibility to a collective. Bellah et al (1985/2008) argue that civic republicanism has become a second language in American culture, taking a back seat to the first language of individualism.

In discussions of the significance of individualism on the political participation of Canadian youth, Howe (2010) suggests that there are four dimensions of individualism: self-direction, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-regard. Howe provides evidence that there has been a substantial increase in the dimension of self-direction in Canadian youth compared to older generations, and a slight increase in self-regard, but no noticeable increase in terms of self-confidence and self-reliance. Self-direction refers to a focus on “personal autonomy and freedom from social constraint” and an increased emphasis on “choice and judgment” in many realms, from hobbies, to careers, to life choices and partners (Howe 2010: 191). Self-regard refers to “caring mainly for one’s own concerns with little regard for the interests or concerns of others”, or in other words, a focus on one’s self-interest more than obligation to others or the public good.

These dimensions of self-regard and self-direction overlap with Bellah et al.'s (1985/2008) dimensions of individualism: utilitarian versus expressive individualism. Both expressive individualism and self-direction focus on the choice, judgment and personal fulfillment of the individual over and above larger moral prescriptions and obligations. Similarly, utilitarian individualism and self-regard both focus on self-interest above collective or public interest.

These works provide an important frame to understand dimensions of individualism and a broad understanding of how a growing culture of individualism might raise issues for political participation. Yet the claims that these authors make around individualism and its potential rise as a threat to a healthy democracy is not without challengers. In political science and sociology, some argue that individualism (particularly expressive individualism) can support participation and democracy. The most adamant proponents in this regard are Inglehart and Welzel (2005) who argue against the idea that individualism is undermining political participation and democracy and instead suggest that self-expression values grounded in individualism supports democracies and simply encourages more “elite challenging” forms of political participation than traditional activities such as voting. Inglehart and Welzel directly challenge the “communitarian” arguments associated with works such as Putnam (2000) and Bellah et al. (1985/2008) that point to individualism as a problem for social and political engagement. Instead for these authors, moves towards individualism represent an emphasis on rights, freedoms, and self-direction that are values supportive of democracy. Following from this, Inglehart and Welzel argue, particularly in relation to protest activities, that: “ironically, what some communitarians recommend as the cure for civic disengagement, a shift away from self-expression values, actually would cause civic disengagement” (Inglehart and Welzel 2005:120). This argument has been picked up by a number of political scientists who frame declines in youth voting and

declines in duty towards voting, as representative of a change in form of participation, instead of indicating a decline of participation (Dalton 2008; Martin 2012). Proponents of this argument refute Putnam's assertion that increased individualism is necessarily related to a decline of social capital and political engagement (Dalton 2008; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Martin 2012).

These different interpretations of the role of individualism in relation to democracies, one that depicts individualism, particularly expressive individualism, as supporting democracy, and others that see it as undermining democracy, is in part due to the conceptualization of culture used in these arguments. The depiction of culture in these works is in terms of broad value orientations that a nation or community has, that then shapes behavior in similar ways. This is particularly the case in the way that Inglehart and Welzel (2005) use self-expression values. This concept is on the one hand loosely defined and measured, at times seeming to include a broad range of indicators and orientations, and on the other hand, assumed to have similar outcomes in the countries that measure high on this "syndrome". For example, for Inglehart and Welzel, self-expressive values are both understood to represent a focus on choice, autonomy, and freedom of the individual, but also humanist values that are in part focused beyond the self. In fact, Inglehart when describing self-expressive values claims they include an "open mind, bridging ties, independent self-conceptions, individualism and altruism" (Inglehart and Welzel 2005:143). Although it is understandable these aspects all might be related to an underlying factor, such as a distance from material need that allows one to both focus on the self and have more humanistic values, individualism and altruism are conceptually two different orientations. Inglehart and Welzel's argument highlights a tendency of much of the literature that deals with individualist discourses and values and their relation to political participation. Much of the way that individualism is discussed in the political participation literature focuses on the presence of

individualist values on national or collective levels that are understood to influence people in similar ways. Yet these broad value orientations can be incorporated into thought and action in different ways, can be combined with various value orientations, and take on different significance in relation to the cultural objects and contexts to which they are applied. It not only matters that these values exist in a community but what other values exist in a nation or collective, and how people might integrate these orientations to think about and act towards various institutions. It also matters who within a culture is most likely to use one value over another and finally, where or in relation to what, these value orientations are most often applied. To understand how a larger cultural language or value orientation might impact action in relation to a social object or practice, for example how individualism will impact volunteering, one also needs to know the common cultural representations of that object of action. For example, if volunteering is understood more often within a culture as a strategic way to a job, individualist orientations might support volunteering, whereas if it is understood as a selfless activity of those who care about their community, growing individualist orientations might undermine volunteering. Through primarily understanding the culture of individualism as a broad value orientation, researchers can find these values or cultural languages matter in different, often contradictory ways, as they can potentially be incorporated into different frames and models for action, depending on what these values are integrated with or related to.

This is not to say that identifying larger cultural trends such as individualism is not important or useful. It is indeed the case that where individual values exist people will be more likely to enter into contexts where individual behavior and thought is encouraged and are more likely to apply values of individualism in relation to a multiplicity of concerns, such as the family, politics, and private and public life. But knowing that individualist values are higher in

one community or country compared to another does not tell us the whole story, within this culture, individualist discourses and values can be enacted in one context and not another, represent strong values for some citizens and not others, and be incorporated in relation to some social objects and not others. In terms of politics, it matters how politics is represented in relation to individualist values, some cultural worldviews or ideas might present politics as attractive or desirable in expressive or utilitarian individualist terms, other representations of politics might require duty to motivate participation.

Work in cultural sociology has highlighted this nuanced understanding of culture by depicting both the structural aspects of larger cultural themes and the creative potential of actors to negotiate cultural meaning. Social movement and institutional theorists depict how existing cultural values and institutions shape possibility, action and thought, while at the same time how these cultural themes can be used to justify new social practices and substantial social change (Clemens and Cook 1991; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Polletta 1999). Similarly, Ghaziani (2008) discusses how actors within social movements have core cultural templates for action that ground and structure group practice, while at the same time negotiating many aspects of group identity and meanings. Finally, Bernstein and Armstrong (2008) and Friedland and Alford (1991) highlight the ways in which there are multiple institutions and therefore competing cultural logics within societies.

More directly related to political participation, individualism and apathy, Eliasoph highlights the ways in which apathy and self-interested talk are larger cultural themes in America and yet how they are produced or resisted in slightly different manners within group settings. Additionally, Eliasoph (1998; 1996) notes how this culture of apathy is produced more often in public settings as compared to private.

Similarly, Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003) argue that cultural representations, codes and values, such as individualism, can be incorporated within a culture in various ways. They argue that contrary to suggestions by Bellah et al. (1985/2008), expressive individualism can be integrated into cultural understandings that support participation instead of undermine participation. Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003) demonstrate this with an example of how environmental activists as members of a group called ACES, make sense of their political activism (instead of self-interest and apathy) using expressive individualist values. This expressive language, through a focus on self-empowerment, provides the cultural tools to think about their activism and encourage members to speak out on their opinions in a community setting where it feels more daring or out of place to do so. These activists use expressive individualist languages of empowerment to make sense of and drive their own participation in a small town setting that values conformity more than this kind of participation. In this context expressive individualism is used to “affirm social-responsibility and public spiritedness, rather than subordinate them to self centered expression” (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003: 748).

Eliasoph (1998) and Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003) provide evidence for the various ways in which larger cultural themes can be enacted in groups and settings. Yet they emphasize the contextual, contingent, and interpretative nature of culture, arguably at the expense of how the culture that people experience in these settings then might impact the worldviews or schemas that these people take with them outside of these settings. For example, Eliasoph points out that across group settings and contexts, people learn to distance themselves from public-spirited talk in public settings. This raises the possibility that because people learn across many contexts in America that public spirited or politically oriented talk is not compatible with public settings, they will be more likely to apply this script for action in new settings they have yet to

experience. On the other hand, the models of political participation that Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003) observe in the environmental group ACES, which motivate political action by combining expressive individualist values with values of “social responsibility and public-spiritedness” likely provides people with a model for action beyond the specific group setting. Once experienced within this setting, this model of political participation can affect the ways in which ACES members make sense of and motivate their own political participation across settings. In other words, experience and meaning making within this group likely helps to shape member’s self concepts and frameworks of understanding around political participation that impacts action and thought outside of their group setting. Experiences within particular settings, and particularly the ways in which a schema or script for action is learned across settings, can help shape more enduring models for understanding the world and acting within it.

Perrin (2005) also focuses on political culture and participation in the context of group or micro-cultures. Yet Perrin begins to provide this connection between how experiences and logics learned in specific groups might impact people’s understandings and actions related to politics outside the group context. Perrin argues that why the micro-cultures of groups might matter is because they can potentially tell us something about how these members could approach political action and discourse more generally as a product of experiencing these micro-cultures. In this regard, Perrin indeed finds that a specific group context and group type (e.g., Religious, sport team, union) appears to affect the logics that people apply when discussing political problems or scenarios. Additionally, and very pertinent for the purposes of this study, Perrin reports that what affected the kinds of logics (for example, self-interest versus moral logics) people used to discuss a political scenario more than group micro-culture were types of scenarios people were discussing. In other words, although the group context significantly impacted the logics people

applied to a scenario, the scenario itself appeared to impact the logic people applied more so than did group context. This suggests that people learn to associate some logics such as self-interest with some cultural objects, topics or frames, more than others. In this way, people appear to have learned associations of particular logics with particular scenarios or topics regardless of what group they were in, likely because there are multiple contexts in which people learn these associations. Perrin, although focusing on the impact of micro-cultures, provides evidence not only for the impacts of political micro-cultures on the use of cultural logics but how some cultural logics are associated with or elicited more by particular topics or scenarios.

These works on culture suggest that within a nation or community, larger cultural values, logics, and codes are incorporated into contexts, associated with topics, and scenarios and combined with other value orientations in multiple ways. By focusing more on how individualism matters in relation to political participation we can weigh into the debate on the significance of individualism to political participation, and the ways in which individualist values matter for democracy and participation. This paper extends this understanding of individualism by looking at the kinds of cultural models that people use to think about participation and how individualism is present within these models. The notion of cultural models allows us to both highlight how larger cultural orientations and representations can shape action in different ways and yet how models of action can have important impacts on behavior across settings. Cultural models help us further think through this relation between larger cultural orientations and people's actions and understandings related to politics. In the next section I will review the literature related to cultural models and the approach to culture of this paper.

### 3.2 CULTURE

This paper understands culture to be the broadly defined as the realm of meaning, which includes, worldviews, ethos, symbols, representations, and practices (Geertz 1957; Bourdieu 1990; Swidler 1986; Straus and Quinn 1997). Culture is not homogenous or reflected from society to the individual, but can be experienced and enacted in different ways by people who have different social locations or experiences within a larger culture (Bourdieu 1984; 1992; DiMaggio 1997; Ortner 2006; Strauss and Quinn 1997; Swidler 1986). Culture then can include common representations and shared repertoires but people within a culture have different relations to these repertoires. Bourdieu (1984), Strauss and Quinn (1997) and Vaisey (2009) within this perspective highlight that although culture can be differentially learned and used, it also has independent impacts on behavior, as people are socialized to have different values, practices, perceptions and representations that motivate action, often through automatic or unconscious cognition. Different experiences related to one's, class, gender, social group, school etc. helps to shape what kind of culture a person is exposed to and socialized by and how he or she in turn interacts with larger social institutions and structures (Bourdieu 1990; Laureau 2003; Strauss and Quinn 1997; Binder and Wood 2013). In this way, dominant cultural representations or ethos might be experienced by some more than others and in turn they may have more chances to enact these ethos or use these representations and so will find them more powerful or taken for granted than someone else from the same culture (Straus and Quinn 1997). Strauss and Quinn explain this conception of culture in terms of learned cultural models, referring to cultural models as schemas or sets of learned associations that can include not only sets of representations, but also cultural messages and values such as self sufficiency, or shared task solutions to commonly experienced problems. They suggest that once learned these models can

direct action, but people will learn these models differently, depending both on the number of times people experience a cultural model, and the different setting and amount of times a person is able to enact or put this model to use. Identity theory has a similar notion in terms of identity salience; a person has a number of identities based in past roles and experiences, those that a person has more opportunity to enact will become more salient or stronger and so more likely to be applied or enacted in the future (Stryker and Serpe 1994). At the same time, some cultural models are widely shared and so can powerfully shape the ways in which a majority of people within a culture orient to and understand the social world. Although the concept of cultural model is not a predominant one in sociological literature, a number of researchers have used the concept and terminology, often to discuss shared social models for action. Sociologists explain both how actors use cultural models to understand, act and problem solve in the social world and in turn how cultural models shape thought, action and social outcomes (Frye 2012; Harding 2007; Silva 2012; Stienman 2012).

The values, discourses and representations of participants presented in this paper are understood in relation to this cultural model framework. Although this paper focuses on the discourse of participants, and languages such as individualism, it is understood that these individualist languages do not simply inhere in the individual subjectivities, but are experienced and practiced in the objective world through institutions and practices, and are found in subjectivities because they can be found in cultural objects and traditions. In relation to this, some individuals are exposed to and have the occasion to use particular cultural understandings, such as individualist discourses, more than others. Therefore, although there were common representations of politics, these representations and discourses will be strong for some and not for others. For those that have particularly strong representations or models, they likely have

been exposed to more of these representations, and/or these representations and discourses make sense in relation to their life experiences and skills. A cultural model perspective notes that although a value or schema might be very motivating, it can also be connected to one set of experiences and not another, and so only be a strong value or representation in relation to a certain object or experience (Strauss and Quinn 1997; Strauss 2012). Contextualizing this in terms of the data, one person might learn strong individualist discourses around politics, but in turn, learn assumptions of duty and tradition in terms of family.

### 3.3 METHODOLOGY

This research is based upon 63 semi-structured qualitative interviews. I interviewed participants in a location of their choice, most often in a public space such as a coffee shop, but occasionally in an office or home. The interviews included questions on people's own paths to participation, as well as questions that elicited various explanations around political participation and politics more generally (See Appendix B). I gathered accounts of participant's own motivations and understandings of their paths to or away from participation, as well as their reasoning around why people would and would not participate in politics. Through eliciting accounts and reasoning, I sought to capture the representations and assumptions these young Canadians had around politics and political participation. The participants included in this study were Canadian citizens who were approximately 27 years old and went to high school in Vancouver. I focused on 27 year olds as they are part of a younger age cohort that is known for lower voting turnout and lower levels of duty (i.e. generations 'x' and 'y') (Blais, Gidengil, and Nevitte 2004; Howe 2010; Zukin et al. 2006), while at the same time are old enough to have had multiple opportunities to participate in elections. Additionally, this specific age group was important for

the second research goal related to this study, which was capturing pathways to participation and the role of secondary education in these trajectories.

I elicited stories and reasoning around participation and in the analysis, focused on the common propositions, assumptions, and metaphors in participant's speech, to get at the shared representations and lines of reasoning participants used around political participation. This method was informed by works of Quinn (2005) and De Andrade (2005) that outline approaches in capturing shared cultural models that people use to understand and reason about aspects of the world. Cultural models refer to common or shared and (therefore cultural) mental structures or schemas that people have and use to interpret the world and how to act within it (Strauss and Quinn 1997). Cultural models not only include representations or descriptions of the world, but also goals, evaluations, and feelings, and they can provide both a model of the world or a model for action (Holland and Quinn 1987; Strauss 1982; Quinn 2005). These cultural models are learned through experiences and practices that one gains through acting in the social world. We gain shared schemas because our social worlds are structured in a way that exposes us to many of the same cultural messages, practices, and experiences (Strauss and Quinn 1997). The research draws from the methodology of this discipline, looking for metaphors, propositions, and assumptions to capture the common cultural discourses and representations people use to understand and act in relation to shared objects, activities, and problems in society. This paper does not claim to represent all of the discourse or cultural models that people have around politics, but rather focuses on the most common models participants used in relation to political participation. The statements and representations are included in the analysis below because they arose as some of the most common assumptions and representations that participants used to talk

about political participation. At times words are underlined because they represent notable metaphors that capture shared cultural representations.

I began the analysis by closely coding the assumptions, propositions, and metaphors people used to discuss politics and participation. As common sets of representations and assumptions around politics and political participation arose, I focused on these prominent themes. For the first half of the interviews I used both word documents as well as a qualitative software program so that along with coded themes I was able to write out the specific assumptions or propositions used by participants. As common themes arose I moved to predominantly using the qualitative software program, Dedoose. I used Dedoose to identify the specific assumptions and organize these assumptions and metaphors into larger themes, such as “politics is for those that are interested” and “politics as separate from the everyday”. This program also provided counts of the number of participants that used a specific code and comparisons in terms of how sets of characteristics of the participants related to particular codes. I provide these counts of the number of participants who used each assigned code or model. These numbers are meant simply to provide some comparison as to approximately how much participants used one model as compared to another and to give some context of the extent to which a particular model was a commonly used proposition.

As participants were often explaining political behavior in general and not simply their own motivations, I took a fairly generous approach to attributing particular models to participants. I did not try to decipher which model was most important to a participant. Instead, if a participant used a model to either explain their own relation to participation or explain other people’s behavior, I recorded this instance. Therefore, certain models have a high number of participants counted as using the model. I counted a model as used by the participant if they used

an assertion or proposition without distancing themselves from it in some way, or in other words if they represented a worldview or line of reasoning as a legitimate assumption. For example, one code under the larger theme of contingent participation, represented the decision to participate in terms of cost benefit calculations, or in other words, that people would weigh how much effort or cost participation would require to how much impact they would have in the political realm. The first excerpt below was counted under this model, even though the participant was explaining someone else's relationship to participation. It was counted because it was represented as a legitimate line of reasoning around his parent's decision to not engage in politics:

Or you could just kind of try and live your life and enjoy what is around you kind of thing, so I am assuming that is what their attitude is turning into, or at least that is probably what my attitude would be if I was at that stage and not too hopeful or optimistic.

The second excerpt below, which is from the same participant, was not counted as a cost/benefit model of participation because he distances himself from this model, or makes clear this is how some people might think but not himself. Here again he explains why people might not vote; he briefly represents people basing their vote on calculation of impact, but then distances himself from this idea:

Yeah just a lot of the... what would my one vote do... I have never really understood that one really because it just seems like basic math one plus one plus one it adds up to many people voting you know? It almost just sounds like a cop out...

### 3.4 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

Participants reasoned about political participation in relation to particular representations of politics. As reviewed above, cultural orientations can matter depending on what contexts and meanings they are learned with and the topics to which they are applied. Therefore, I will first review the common representations of the political realm (or models of politics) and then discuss the related models people use to reason about political participation (models for political participation). These second models – models for participation – incorporate individualistic and civic republican logics along with the *common models of politics* to reason about political participation.

#### 3.4.1 *Common Representations and Understandings of Politics*

There were a number of ways that participants understood and represented the world of politics. These representations are presented as three *models of politics*: 1. The first model focuses on the complexity of politics and the related time and expertise needed to participate; 2. The second presents politics as distanced from everyday realities. This had two variants: The first and most common variant was understandings of politics as not concerning the everyday, in that politics was a bureaucratic world with its own logic and direction. Therefore, people could live their everyday lives and not be impacted too drastically by political decisions. In this way, politics is low stakes in relation to people's lives. In the second variant, people presented politics as separate from everyday realities or concerns but important, having long term and broad-based

effects; 3. The third representation was of politics as an undesirable or socially precarious world based in negativity, bad behavior, unchanging beliefs, and conflict.

There were more neutral or motivating representations of politics that provided a contrast to these views but they were less common. These contrasting representations are noted at the end of each section. Finally, although politics is represented as more work than fun or more negative than enjoyable, there were more positive representations of topics related to participation (as compared to politics). For example, people that paid attention to politics could be depicted by some as desirable responsible people, or of having a broader view. Also the act of political participation itself, was often depicted as a way to voice one's opinion.

#### *3.4.1.1 Complexity, time and legitimacy/expertise*

Participants often represented politics as “complicated”, involving technical language and requiring knowledge of parties and the political system, which often meant people needed substantial time or background knowledge to “keep in the loop”, “wade through” the complexity, or to really do one's “research and due diligence”. For some participants, the complexity of politics meant that to even start to pay attention, people needed to have a base of information, which put those that were not introduced to politics at a young age at a disadvantage. Caitlin who has never voted explains,

...when I pick up a paper and I read a political piece, a lot of times I find that I don't understand it, even though I read it because I don't understand the background information therefore it is very hard for me to digest, whereas when you have someone who does understand all that background information it is very easy for them to follow the news, the very slow pace news, and for them it makes sense because they can recall what happened before and why it is relevant now.

Another participant, Sarah, who recently started voting, expressed her hesitation around first starting to participate when she had not been paying attention from the beginning. She felt she did not have the kind of grasp of politics that one should have to participate,

I still feel it is very convoluted in my head. In terms of all the different parties and understanding...to how those parties have evolved to now and the history, like even when I first voted, which was last year, I wasn't sure if I should have participated just because all those years I haven't been following, I didn't know what the history was so I feel that there was a big chunk missing.

Part of this feeling of complexity, or time commitment required for politics, was related to the common notion of untrustworthy politicians and news sources that meant understanding politics involved a lot of time and research to gain knowledge of the parties and what they really represent, and whether they did what they said. For some, biased news sources also meant a person needs to pay attention to multiple sources to know about politics, or could never be sure of the real story. On the other hand, people could be opinionated, or narrow-minded and biased, so sometimes a person couldn't always trust their social relationships for information either. Additionally, politicians were generally not to be trusted, and often made promises and did not follow through, so one would have to pay careful attention to the past and the present to know what was happening in politics. As Sarah notes, you need to follow the whole story or history to really know whether "they committed to what they said and how it turned out". Kerry a non-voter, expresses this distrust of politicians and ties this to a barrier for her to vote: "I still won't feel like I should vote because I don't know enough about it. And there is too much lying involved in politics, I feel, so I don't know what to believe." Similarly, Olivia expresses this understanding of politics as including an "overwhelming" amount of information along with the

untrustworthiness of the information sources that makes understanding politics a complex and time consuming task;

There is too much information, all at once, and it is very difficult to make sort of a decision about something, like say who you are going to vote for when all the information coming out is usually one-sided, and then it is up to you to figure out the middle ground, but then if you don't know enough about the background you can't figure out the middle ground and then it can be overwhelming, with all the information that is out there...I think some people are much more pro-active about going out there and forging on and wading through all the information.

Others highlighted how politics was “technical” or “separated” from our daily lives, making it hard for your average person to connect to, or understand the language and terminology and why it's important. For some, this technicality was represented in terms of being an expert in politics, such as knowing the acts, understanding the legal terminology, and getting the background on policies and why they mattered. For others, this technical aspect of politics was simply about knowing the parties and the aspects of the way the voting system worked. For those who did not learn these details at a young age, this presented a substantial time commitment and effort to learn. Kiera represents paying attention to politics in this more technical perspective and again highlights the time commitment this approach takes. She explains how her own voting activity involves extensive research:

I think university is good for that because coming up to an election, for me, voting, there is quite a lot of work that goes into it, it's not just that you watch the mainstream news, I think you should look at what the NGO's are saying on an issue, what the economists are saying overseas, just trying to look at it from different angles and getting as much of an objective perspective as you can, read each one of their campaign proposals, so being at university, you are in the habit of researching things, looking into things and I think that's part of what you do when you vote.

This kind of extensive research into politics requires then a serious time commitment. When Kiera reasons about who might pay attention to politics, it is those that have the resources to allow for this kind of commitment,

I think that some people that I have seen get really, really engaged in current events and political issues... they do have a lot of time, some of them will work from home, some of them will have extremely wealthy parents where they don't have to actually work to pay their rent... so it is a little bit a matter of resources in a way, because let's face it, you don't really get paid to be up to speed on current events, and it is a little bit of a time commitment.

Although the representation of this kind of extensive research being required to vote is an extreme perspective, the idea that politics is a complex world that involves research and time, or existing background knowledge to “wade through” current events was common. More than a third of participants (27) represented politics as complicated, technical or hard to understand, and additionally, more than half of participants represented politicians and media sources as untrustworthy (33). At the same time, interviewees often suggested that people should be informed about politics if they go and vote, and additionally many suggested similar to Olivia and Sarah above, that you need a base of knowledge to simply pay attention to or discuss politics (more than a third, 26 participants, made this assertion). This can create a dilemma, if being knowledgeable is understood to be an important part of voting, and one is not informed, the morality of voting becomes more murky, as some suggest it is more irresponsible to vote when you don't know enough than to not vote at all. Allison provides an example of this perspective of weighing the need to be informed versus the responsibility to vote, a dilemma that a number of participants raised, particularly those that did not vote,

It's definitely not black or white. I get really frustrated when anyone tends to over-generalize any large group of people. Because there are definitely certain reasons, like should someone who is not educated on the policies of the parties, should they vote? I mean no. No they shouldn't, but is it their duty as a citizen to become educated on it, I don't know, that a lot more gray like you don't know what that person's going through.

In this way participation for many was not simply about voting but putting the time in to “wade through” the untrustworthy and complicated information, do your “research”, or spend a lot of time “staying in the loop.”

In keeping with Bourdieu (1984), this representation of political engagement as requiring technical expertise and research, as well as a substantial time commitment if one has not been exposed to it early, helps to produce this activity as more for those with the educational and cultural capital to engage with this topic. I will elaborate further on this issue in the discussion of the larger cultural models that incorporate this representation of politics. This representation also, suggests that individualistic orientations such as cost/benefit calculations would need to see high benefits associated with participation to justify what is proposed by many participants to be an activity of high cost in terms of time.

Alternatively, there were a few participants that challenged the idea that politics required expertise or a lot of time to participate. For some this was because they felt that reading up on the parties, or doing a bit of research right before an election was sufficient to participate or that it didn't take a large amount of time to know enough to make an informed vote. For example, Robert explains his own relation to voting,

yeah I can't say that I really spend too much time or pay too much attention outside of when an election happens but I think that people can have enough time to at least once every four years when something like that comes up to spend a little bit of time to at least to make a decision and go out and vote, like

that's a pretty minimal amount of time and I think people can find the time to do that at least...and then just make an informed choice, it doesn't take very long to do.

Yet these assertions were much less prominent with 12 participants suggesting that you don't need to have in depth knowledge to participate or that it is sufficient to get caught up on the issues right before an election. Others noted that quickly researching before an election was their own approach to political participation but then followed this up with the evaluation that this was bad or not the right way to participate. Some also noted that they depended on friends or family to inform their vote, but this was again at times paired with an evaluation of deficiency or that this was not a legitimate or right way to know who to vote for. Finally, a few participants noted one way to deal with the potential complexity of politics was to focus on a specific issue that one cared about.

#### *3.4.1.2 Politics as distanced from everyday realities*

Participants often represented politics in terms of a topic or realm that was abstract or separated from everyday realities. This meant that politics was distinct from the day-to-day choices and concerns people experienced in their life, or that it was hard to see the ways in which participating in, and paying attention to politics really mattered. At times people suggested this meant that politics was superfluous, or easily ignored. In contrast to this perspective, others understood this distanced aspect of politics in terms of the slower paced way that politics functioned, where the impacts of politics might be important but were not always obvious, or one had to pay attention to really know how it mattered. These conceptions of politics as distanced

from the everyday were often intertwined with notions of the political realm as a bureaucratic world that continued on a general track, was hard to impact, or complex to understand.

The first and more prominent way that politics was represented as separate from the everyday, was in terms of the low impact or low stakes that political decisions were depicted as having in relation to daily reality, or one's life. Many asserted that the political realm did not represent significant change, evidenced by the fact that nothing drastic happened between elections. The common assumption was that one's life would stay relatively the same regardless of the outcome of electoral politics, and therefore the stakes of participation were low. Samuel explains,

nothing really changes like if you look at, okay we had John Chretien before we had the nitwit, what's his name, Stephen Harper and you know, nothing has changed, it's the same old Canada, I don't see anything new happening, it's just the same

James similarly offers, "decisions that are made from the legislature, I think, I mean on a day to day basis, the way I live my life, I don't think it would change." Participants referred to their own everyday reality as evidence that politics was not important, but that instead people's lives continue as the workings of the state carries on without them. Logan contends,

...it doesn't matter who is in power. I found that throughout my childhood, it's always been the same. The environment has always been the same, nothing, okay in the media yes, you see a lot of things fluctuating and businesses, this happening to businesses and taxpayer's money, but personally in my own life, everything has been as monotonous as a flat line, nothing has changed, it's always been exactly the same, I am the one that's in control of my own environment.

This meant people's everyday lives were not drastically changed by politics or what party was in power. This notion was in part based on the idea that the political system was a bureaucratic system that worked with a logic of its own, keeping our everyday lives relatively stable across long periods of time, regardless of political change, or on the other hand, all of our political leaders had similar goals or values regarding the things that matter. As Minzhe explains, "most of the parties will have similar kinds of policies... the cake is the same, it is just the icing on the top." In this way participants used a cultural model that presented politics as having a general path of its own, with party politics representing more minor changes rather than large noticeable changes in people's lives.

Some represented this low stakes and bureaucratic nature of politics as neutral or positive in that the system kept on a stable path. For example, participants suggested, the wrong person might come into power and the leaders might not be perfect, but it will not change the general track of Canada and our individual realities. Darwish explains this in terms of the "first world country" we live in, which means the government works in the background and that "it can develop by itself without many political leaders: it ticks along by itself." Therefore, politics represents low stakes and tends to work itself out, either because there are not many differences between the goals of the people in power (for example, they all want what is best for the country or would keep Canada peaceful and healthcare strong) or because the system has checks and balances to carry on itself and the "good people... and the poor people working in there... balances out." Many had more mixed or negative evaluations of this unchanging view of politics, that on the one hand, our ability to go about our lives stays the same regardless of who is in power, but on the other, politics does not represent excitement or the real possibility for positive change.

Participants who had a much more cynical view of the low stakes of politics would often represent this bureaucratic system as having a set path, and would suggest that people can do little to impact this world. This would at times be paired with the suggestion that politics represents more powerful interests than them. In this way, politics was a superfluous world that was more of a “façade” than something that represented the possibility for substantial or authentic change. In relation to this, some highlighted that the political realm sounded like a “broken record” with similar issues and promises, or the “same old song and dance” occurring every election. One participant, Monique, explains,

Maybe part of why I can convince myself that it doesn't personally affect me is that each of the party's policies don't seem all that vastly different... Yeah maybe it's the idea that democracy doesn't really exist anymore because they are all the same with subtle differences. It's almost like a façade where each of them are like, we're greener than the next but really no, and again I don't know where this information is coming from... I feel like the different parties all principally aren't very different, and so we're almost being like marketed to, they got different branding but... they are all the same product. Okay if politics were cola, it would be like oh, Pepsi or RC or Coke or whatever, but it's all the same sugar water.

Almost half of participants (31) represented politics as separated from one's personal reality in terms of importance, for some this meant politics had a logic of its own and looked after our general well-being, for others this meant politics did not represent real change or involved small superfluous choices instead of substantial or authentic ones.

At the same time, other participants, and sometimes the same participants who represented politics as low stakes or a bureaucracy, would represent this distance of politics from the everyday in subtler terms, that it is important but slow moving, and works on a broader level. Therefore, some of the impacts of politics were hard to notice because it could feel like “an age”

for the policies to “trickle down” and impact local realities. In this way politics was important but you had to learn how it mattered because the impacts were not necessarily obvious. Close to a third of participants (18) depicted politics in this fashion. Although politics might be important, this depiction similar to the depictions above of politics as more superfluous, still meant that people could live their daily lives without necessarily being aware of the impacts of political actors.

Kalum represents both perspectives, he depicts politics as seemingly superfluous in relation to everyday reality similar to the participants above, and then suggests it is likely important but the changes “trickle down” which can make it hard to see how politics matters,

these laws are made, where are they made, who makes them, I have no idea, I mean I think I voted but it is this disconnect between this ballet you put in a box and doing something to help your life, it is so many steps removed that you can't trace it... to trace an apple is almost impossible these days, I know it says what country it is from but you know there is just so many steps involved and it is just so complex and so in a similar way... it's just very hard to believe that one political party that I would vote for has actually changed something that I rely on or that I am dependent on or that affects me in a dramatic way, transportation might be one thing, food and transportation are two things I can think of immediately, and yeah education, I mean all these things are so slow to take affect too, they trickle down the pipe and I don't know, longer time scale for sure, more so, did I notice when the Conservatives gained power over the Liberals, no I didn't notice any changes to my life, but I am sure that there were changes.

In this way, as with all of the other representations of politics as distanced from the everyday, people often insinuated that politics could be easily ignored or hard to connect to because it was on a broader or more distanced level than the day to day realities of individuals.

Ana explains,

I think politics is something you don't really think about on a day-to-day basis when trying to figure out what kind of cheese you want on nachos, or whatever your focus is on in the moment. So you're trying to manage all those details of your life, or your career, or your kids, or your family, or you know problems with your significant other and you're trying to... I think people get very lost in their immediate surroundings and their immediate atmosphere and politics is more of an overarching and more of a broader level of thinking that people sometimes don't even have the luxury of time to devote to thinking about that you know and others just choose not to because it's just another thing to do in your day that you don't really want to do.

Politics instead of affecting immediate reality is more “overarching” on a “broad level”, more “subtle” than “blatant” with “slow” impacts that people might notice in the future but would not be obvious in one’s day to day life. In this way, political participation is not something that connects with the everyday, necessarily in conversation or in terms of needs, but is a “luxury” or something that can take the back seat to other more pressing priorities of day to day life. The representation of politics as separate from the everyday then can overlap with the understanding of the complexity or time one has to invest to understand why it matters, Erin explains,

it is something that you do have to invest in I think, to understand certain things, yeah so, but obviously those things are important, or that certain big things do affect our everyday lives in ways that we wouldn’t really think about so... then it’s like you should care, you should care, but I guess it’s easy to be like, to let those things, to get caught up in the rest of your life

Politics then is important on the broad scale but it is less obvious how it impacts people’s everyday reality. Therefore, you have to pay attention to know why it is important, and it’s easy to ignore given other priorities in one’s life. Echoing a number of these representations of politics as important yet distanced from the everyday, as complex, and involving bureaucracy

and expertise that works without us, Donald expresses the idea that if people do not pay attention others will look after their day-to-day interests, or in other words, paying attention to politics is low stakes,

Really changes for the most part, you don't see, unless you are paying attention on a weekly or daily basis, you don't see the differences, and oh the federal budget came out, most people don't care whether the federal or provincial budget comes out, they don't really pay attention to what's in it, and partly because they don't understand what most of it means.... unless I understand why a budget deficit surplus is important, I am never going to care, and I'm never going to... Oh yeah the rest of the world is melting but I'm fine in BC, but yeah, why were you fine in BC? Why is it now that we don't have to have austerity measures like Greece? ... And people aren't seeing that they just see the.... I still get a pay check, it is still fine for me to get a job, the political party at the time didn't mean anything, but it did and it didn't, like you know, it's a lot of the policies set back in the 1950s on banking regulations and stuff like that, and loans and credit, the availability of credit, made it so that the people of today still don't have the ability to hand out way too much credit on subprime mortgages, and you know, that we're fine, and I think we're fine because we had an economics degree in power during the time so we made sure that things stayed the same...

Donald, a high participator depicts politics as a complex and bureaucratic world that takes expertise to know, and at the same time, something that will be looked after by the experts (such as people with economic degrees) for those that are not savvy enough to stay on top of the economic and political policies that reach back to the 50s.

### *3.4.1.3 Undesirable ~ Politics as negative, unauthentic, conflictual and involving entrenched positions.*

Finally, the third common way participants represented politics, was as a negative/undesirable, and conflictual world often based in touchy or strongly held personal beliefs. Politics was seen as causing raised tempers, or was simply a negative depressing world that

contrasted with commonly valued things like authenticity, acceptance, non-conflict, and positivity. Politics was described as involving narrow views and distinct sides that were at times depicted as personal beliefs that could not change and so should be left alone. This representation of politics meant for some that politics was a topic either easily avoided or socially precarious, or that was in general not enjoyable to engage in.

One way in which, people represented politics in a negative light was that it was more a “façade”, “social game”, or “smoke and shadows” to get votes than an authentic world. This notion of politics overlaps with the untrustworthy representation discussed earlier that makes politics a complex world to understand. It also overlaps with the notion of politics as low-stakes or not impacting the everyday, as politics could be viewed more as a “social game” or “façade” than involving real issues and possibilities for change. In terms of this negative view, participants often referred to politicians as “liars” or “actors” that “might say something to get your vote” but it would take some time “to see their true face”. Some in relation to the façade of politics portrayed politicians as just “faces” or “puppets” who did not necessarily mean or intend to do what they said. Others highlighted, how they felt politicians were trying to manipulate the population and had their own agenda or that they were just being “marketed to”.

Participants painted politicians as focused on gaining power and willing to deceive to get that power. Politicians in particular were associated with negative characteristics, such as, “liars”, “shady”, “corrupt”, “power hungry” and “greedy”. Kerry explains when asked to tell the interviewer what came to mind when she heard the word politician,

I always hear the bad stuff about politics, all the scandals and stuff so I feel like they are lying or overspending or using up the taxpayer’s money on over-expenses that they don’t really need to spend on. So when you talk about politicians it just gives me a bad impression.

People noted that one disappointing aspect of political participation was the negative and often undesirable choices involved in the political world. For some, making a decision about who to vote for was “more con and less pro” or the “lesser of two evils.” In terms of paying attention to the media it was often “such a negative thing”, with “people complaining and arguing”, this usually related to the idea that people might not be motivated, or might “turn a blind eye” to the depressing or less than desirable world of politics. The notion of this kind of negative or less than desirable world was contrasted by some to the positive or authentic political world that people would like to see. For example, Candice explains,

I don't know, if it's just stigmatized but after every election here in BC or in Canada, like it's always something worse happens after, it's not, something gets better, it's like oh crap now we are going to raise taxes, oh now your bus passes are going to be more expensive, oh now housing's going up, or you know, we did HST and now we don't like it, and we're going to take it back down. It's never something, being like okay great, we voted them in and they changed this and now we are happy about it, never, that never happens, at least nothing that I know of. So I think yeah, we are just chasing a dream.

This negative, unauthentic world meant that some understood the political realm as undesirable or politics as socially precarious. This meant one should either avoid or be careful with whom, and in what context, one brings such topics up. Allison who was quite keen on politics, explains how politics is not a topic that she will bring up in just any social situation because even though she herself found it to be exciting, she was distinctly aware that this was not a popular topic,

politics tend to be a very serious topic that really brings down the mood for some people. So if you are out with friends or something, unless you just happen to talk about a specific subject related to current topics then normally it wouldn't come up.

She continues,

Well I personally don't mind it, because it is a personal interest, I do care about that stuff, but when it comes to my friends, I don't want to bring down their mood, unless they are interested.

This notion of politics as socially precarious or having the potential to “bring down the mood” was related to the common conception of politics as not only a negative topic but one that involved “narrow”, “strong views” or “entrenched positions” that could risk producing social conflict and discomfort. Deanna explains,

the topics you can never speak at a kitchen table or dining room table is religion and politics right, and so I think it's like keep hush and don't talk about it and don't spread your view because it's private, and so I think a lot of that takes away from people wanting to learn more about it, for example at dinner tables even when you're young and you have a family dinner with people of different ages, if politics comes up, it's either like mad fury or everyone goes silent.

These strong views and high emotions often associated with politics meant for some that discussions of politics was not necessarily about learning but people trying to push their “private” views onto others. Many discussed this in terms of again being careful about who you talked to regarding politics because you did not want things to get “too personal” or get into “arguments” instead of “discussions”. This did not necessarily mean that people did not talk about politics, as many, particularly those already politically engaged noted they at times enjoyed talking politics, but many would note they would monitor who they were talking politics with to make sure they were not narrow minded, that it wouldn't cause conflict, or that people enjoyed the topic. More than half of the participants represented politics in negative or undesirable terms either in the way that politics and the media surrounding it were negative, or that politicians and the political world itself were fake and untrustworthy. Additionally, more

than a third of participants represented politics as involving conflict, high emotions, or as a touchy topic.

Still, in contrast to the more negative depictions of politics and the people associated with it, some presented politics as in part about bettering the world or a place for idealism. This was often in the context of the kind of citizens that participated in politics. For example, some suggested that people participate in politics out of “idealism, they are hopeful”, or they are “trying to change the country for the better”. One person described her participation in politics (primarily in relation to voting) as a “tangible way for me to make a difference.” Still these more idealistic representations of politics were much less prominent in the talk of participants than the more negative depictions.

This final common representation of politics as negative and socially undesirable reaffirms studies that look at the social practices and cultural representations of politics. Studies have found that people distance themselves from the world of the political as something undesirable or socially suspect (Bennett et al 2003; Eliasoph 1998). Bennett et al. (2013), who provides a focused discussion of people’s representations of the political world, suggest that people disavow politics on the basis that it is seen as a profane world of bad behavior and negativity, one people contrast to desirable worlds. They suggest people relate to the political world and their own participation in terms of a code that contrasts the profane world of politics with the desirable world they would like to see and are potentially working towards. We can see suggestions of this code, particularly in terms of negativity and distancing from politics in the representation above. Yet this notion of negativity and distaste as contrasted to positivity, is only one aspect of how young people depict politics and as will be discussed below, the two additional common models of politics outlined above (politics as complex and needing time and expertise; and politics as

distanced from everyday realities) are important for understanding how young people relate to politics, as these representations are incorporated into interviewee's reasoning around political engagement.

As discussed, there are different arguments in terms of how large value orientations such as individualism might matter for politics (Bellah et al. 1985/2008; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Understanding the common cultural representations that young people use to think about politics helps us better analyze how individualist orientations might impact young people's models for participation. Below I will demonstrate how these depictions of politics combined with larger individualistic value orientations provide weak or distanced models of politics. As politics is understood by participants as negative or socially precarious, involving a substantial time commitment to keep track of, or understand, and something that is distanced from everyday realities, individualistic orientations do not provide a very strong language to make sense of participation. Instead models for participation either incorporate some sense of duty or responsibility or incorporate alternative representations of politics.

### ***3.4.2 Models of Participation***

People thought about political participation in relation to these representations of politics and this reasoning can be presented as three larger cultural models of participation, comprised of related sets of assumptions used by the participants. The first two cultural models are based in logics of individualism and connect to the two dimensions of individualism that I reviewed above (expressive and utilitarian). These models are: political engagement as an interest or specialization, and political engagement as contingent on its desirability or importance. Finally,

the third cultural model is based more in a logic of civic republicanism as the assertions in this model are focused on responsibilities to participate in a democracy.

In this final republican model, in addition to specific assertions of responsibility, I also include related assumptions around political participation that do not explicitly stress responsibility but suggest the importance of participation. One reason for the addition of these sub-assertions is that I argue the first two models of political participation produce weak models for participation. Therefore, part of the role of this civic republican category is to produce a contrast to these individualistic models with models that appear to offer a stronger impetus for participation. These additional assertions grouped into the republican model provide such contrasts. These additional sub-assertions also relate to ideas of civic responsibility as they suggest the value and importance of participation in relation to a larger public even when participation does not amount to change or enjoyment. Finally, these civic republican models are not quite as prominent as the individualistic models and so I have subsumed a number of sub-models and assertions under this category of civic republicanism. Therefore, in this final category, along with models of responsibility to participate I also include another sub-category that discusses other ways in which people justified participation on the basis of the importance and desirability of people participating in politics. They are all considered part of this last category because they represent political engagement as a responsibility or an important activity.

Below I will present a three-part typology of models of political participation: 1) Contingent political participation (contingent upon possibilities of change and desirability), 2) Political participation as an interest or specialization, and 3) Civic republican models of participation. These models are not mutually exclusive, many participants drew from all three perspectives, while some relied much more heavily on one model over another. As suggested

above, these models can be understood with the framework of languages of republicanism or a civic culture (based in ideas of duty or responsibility to participate and contribute to a larger public sphere), or variants of individualism (utilitarian individualism and expressive individualism) outlined earlier. They also relate to modes of political participation as each category has a different assumption about who and when people should participate in politics, and in turn, appear to relate to different levels of political participation. People in the high participation category are twice as likely to use the model of responsibility than people in the lower participation categories. Alternatively, people in the low participation category were twice as likely to use the model of politics as an interest or specialization, than people in the higher participation categories. Finally, politics as contingent seemed to be slightly more likely to be used by people with lower participation levels but not by much. An overview of both the predominant representations of politics and the related models of participation are provided in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Cultural models of politics and political participation**

**Common Representations of Politics**

Politics as complex and time consuming

Politics as separate from the everyday

Politics as undesirable

**Models for political participation**

Name of Model	Cultural orientation or logic	Relation with common representations and modes of participation
1. Contingent Political Participation	Individualistic logic: Predominately utilitarian	Often incorporates common representations of politics as <i>undesirable</i> and <i>distanced from the everyday</i> to make sense of intermittent or non-participation
2. Political Participation as an Interest or Specialization	Individualistic logic: Predominantly expressive	Often incorporates common representations of politics as <i>complex, time-consuming</i> , and <i>distanced from the everyday</i> to depict participation as for some more than others.
3. Civic Republican Models of Participation	Civic republican logic of responsibility	Models encourages participation in spite of common representations or with alternative representations of politics and participation

3.4.2.2 *Participation as a choice ~ Languages of individualism*

The first two models of participation (political participation as contingent and political participation as an interest or specialization) are overlapping and based in assumptions of individualism. They also incorporate the predominant representations of politics previously outlined, as separate from the everyday, low stakes, complex and time consuming, and undesirable. These two interconnected models of participation draw from the two key languages

or dimensions of individualism outlined by Bellah et al. (1985/2008) and Howe (2010). I will refer to these dimensions in Bellah. et al.'s terminology of *expressive and utilitarian individualism* instead of Howe's terminology of *self-direction* and *self-regard* but the descriptions draw from both frameworks. These models of participation are based in notions of expressive individualism in that they involve assertions based in an ethic of enjoyment, self-direction, and non judgment rather than "moral imperatives" (Howe 2010; Bellah et al; 1985/2008). Also, both models include an element of utilitarian individualism as they both incorporate calculations of interest/benefit or impact versus time and effort in understanding political participation. At the same time, we can understand each of these models of political participation to be grounded in one dimension of individualism more than the other. The model of *contingent participation* arguably depends more on the cost/benefit calculations of utilitarian individualism, whereas, the *politics as an interest* model is based more on notions of "freedom from social constraint", a focus on enjoyment or self-fulfillment, and ones own self direction to guide life choices such as political participation (Bellah et al. 1985/2008; Howe 2010: 191).

#### 3.4.2.2.1 *Contingent participation*

The Contingent model of participation represents political participation as not assumed but contingent upon how motivating, high stakes, or desirable political participation is. With this perspective, participants would draw upon the common representations of politics, particularly politics as separate from the everyday and the political world as distasteful to explain non-participation. Non-participation is justified in that politics is not motivating, attractive or does not represent substantial change, and in turn people will engage when the stakes are high enough

or politics and politicians become more desirable. This model of *contingent participation* can be related to more of the utilitarian variant of individualism in that political participation is understood as not an assumed duty but instead one needs to be motivated based on cost/benefit calculations, the desirability of the world of politics, and the possibility for change, power, and impact.

There are a number of sub-perspectives or assumptions that made up this model of contingent participation. These include: first, the assumption that people weigh effort versus impact when deciding to participate, second the assertion that politics needs to be high stakes or represent significant change to motivate participation; and third that the political system and actors should be desirable to motivate participation.

This first way in which people represented political participation as contingent was that it had to be worthwhile, in that there should be a real potential impact or possibility of change to offset the cost of participation. Lena represents this cost versus impact view of participation. She first explains that being a responsible Canadian citizen entails political participation but then distances herself from this notion of citizenship because the effort is substantial while her impact is negligible,

I think to be a really responsible Canadian citizen you should take part in voting, you should probably communicate more with your MP... I don't see myself doing that...it just feels like it is easier to let it go and not make a fuss... cause we are all so busy with our lives already it feels like this is going to be an extra burden and bureaucracy takes a long time for anything to happen and I feel like I am a small potato in this whole thing so I don't really feel like I have that time and energy and power to really make a significant change.

Like Lena, a number of participants used this model of contingency that focused on the weighting of effort against how one might impact the process, or whether one's interests will

really be affected by politics. This notion that to warrant participation politics should have an impact combined with representations of large, separated, bureaucratic processes of politics meant that some using this perspective would present political participation as either futile (because they are powerless to impact a system that has its own logic) or unnecessary/not motivating (because we can live comfortable lives regardless of politics).

A key assertion in this model of contingency is that political participation is about producing change. In this way, one's participation is motivated by the desire or possibility of change and people will not be motivated if there is not the possibility for change, or if things don't need to change. Julie, a person who regularly votes and pays attention combines the assertion that one needs the possibility for noticeable change in one's own life, and calculations of cost/benefit, to explain why people don't participate,

I think that it is more that it is just not that important, I think a lot of people think that even if you vote for a radically different party and they get elected that you know, things don't change, a lot of people think, oh we will always have to pay taxes and we are always going to have unemployment like things aren't going to change too much so what is the point in me wasting a couple hours standing in line when I won't see any benefit or the benefit I will see is very minimal... And I think a lot of it too is because a lot of my friends...don't have families so they are not thinking, you know long term, how is it going to impact me in terms of my kids or my grandkids, but how is it going to affect me now and right now pretty much the only thing that I do is pay taxes and you know they are not going to change right, the taxes are not going to go down like 5 percent or whatever

Political participation is then contingent on how much one sees the political decisions really impacting one's interests and the possibility of large changes that could impact one's life. A common conception of politics is that it was slow to change, not high stakes or separate from the realities of everyday life. This often meant that, unless the stakes were raised, this contingent

model was presented as reasonable justification or explanation for opting out of politics. Dan, a person who intermittently votes, uses similar reasoning that politics needs to be high stakes or represent noticeable change for people to want to participate and contrasts this with the low stakes world of Canadian politics,

my dad... was alive during World War II, that is a very different world than we live in today, so voting is something that is really important to them...politics literally determined whether or not your country went to war with someone else, based on who you voted for and what their agenda was... whereas Harper being in government has not affected my ability to run my little business and live in a condo in Kitsilano, not really, and so therefore it doesn't really matter to me....

On the basis of this notion of politics being about change, many interviewees saw participation as motivated by unhappiness or the need for change more than by things running smoothly. For some, there should be some large stakes on the line to really motivate participation or the things people care about needed to be in “jeopardy”. Deana explains, “people want to affect change because of something serious that’s happening. So unless something is serious in their minds they’re not doing anything about it, they’re just going to maintain the status quo.” In this way participants contend politics at present is not motivating, but on the other hand, “if there is something very big in the future [people]... will be influenced to vote” or if something is “happening that is definitely going to impact” them, then “people will come together.” But again at present many suggest, “nothing will change” in one’s immediate reality whether people vote or not.

Some presented the responsibility to participate as a two-way street, that there was some responsibility on the citizens to participate but also the politicians and the political system had to work to make it accessible and attractive. Similar to Dan above, a few participants suggested that

a duty to participate is dependent on high stakes or big changes, and that for people to feel “accountable”, the government has to produce accountability by impacting the everyday or representing real change. For example, Samuel suggests that: “A duty entails that it is important that you do something, by the way things are going it feels like more of a choice, it is not a given importance...it doesn’t matter.” Most are not so contingent with their language as Samuel, but a common way that people understood why people would participate, or alternatively why they would not participate, was whether or not they felt directly impacted by politics and whether they felt there was a need and a possibility for change.

This notion of politics needing to represent large changes to motivate participation or that people need to see how their interests are really impacted to be inspired to participate was related to a similar notion that politics should be attractive, desirable and exciting to motivate participation. Dan, again explains how to really get people to participate one has to make it attractive and contrasts this to the more suspect approach of talking about duty,

I think it is your choice to vote, I would never force a friend or make it their obligation or tell them it was their patriotic obligation as a citizen to vote, that might change if there was someone worth voting for, if Obama was running in Canada, I would lobby, I would go to my friends and be like you- have-to-vote, I don’t care who you vote for but you have to go out there and vote, because this is a big deal, because big things are going to happen if the right people get in, it is not the case right now, it is not attractive, it is not sexy

Dan later suggests,

there is nothing wrong by saying that everyone should vote, and we probably should all vote...but yeah I don’t know, I think there needs to be a change in how politics is viewed before you can push the, it’s your obligation, get in here and vote, right because otherwise you are just coming off as a hippy tree hugger or a political activist that is trying to get people to do something that

they don't want to do. But it is a lot easier to get people to do something that they want to do.

Samuel who has never voted but pays attention to politics represents this similar understanding of politics and participation, that it needs to be desirable, exciting, and something a person can relate to to motivate participation,

...truthfully it is just another rich guy in a suit, honestly that is what it comes down to.... If I saw somebody that represented me, if you see what happened in the States that is what Canada kind of needs, somebody that is a little bit younger, who is just different, something fresh, just shake it all up.

People using a *contingent model of participation* suggested that to produce participation and attention, politics should be more exciting, attractive, high stakes and allow one to feel like a person can make a difference. This was often contrasted to a world of politics where “the parties are so close in terms of ideology and action”, it is negative, boring and low stakes, and politicians are unlikeable or non-genuine. Jia who regularly participates and pays attention to politics herself, combines some of this language of desirability with cost/benefit thinking to explain how her generation thinks about politics,

I think our generation is more like, shall we enjoy life before it's too late, or should we go into politics? You fight for things but it takes so long...it's still time spent and so our generation really understand this point. I don't want to be grumpy and fight for one person...Yeah if you get something done, then great but still you spend 10 or 15 years doing that and you wonder if it's worth it when you can go to yoga class or like draw flowers or just be happy. People will think you're like a sulking disliked individual if you do too much of that. Yeah Canadian society, they criticize that.

She later explains,

I found for young people if it helps them to advance then yeah, like pay attention. If your boss likes to listen to it then yeah, but if not, isn't it more practical to develop more skills while you're young because no one wants to guarantee anything in this country. Then lets not pay attention to things that have no practical benefit. We're definitely shifting from like caring or less discussion of what we can do to the city or province and slowly shifting back to lets just do our own thing.

Although Jia herself participates in politics she distances herself from politics, and presents this cost/benefit approach as a reasonable model of political participation. She also presents politics as something that is potentially socially precarious or something that goes against what people value in Canada, contrasting politics to a desirable world that involves being happy and not “grumpy” and “sulking”. Dan also discusses the ways in which politics needs to be desirable to motivate participation, and similar to Jia, he draws on the common representation that politics is the opposite of attractive and desirable things,

I don't think anything about government is attractive. I think most people steer away from it because politics has a bad wrap right, and honestly one of my conclusions I came up with in university, because we have the Young Liberals groups...and the people who would join those groups were always the slimiest people, so you are like, you're exactly who is going to run for premier in 10 years, a slimy liar, so why would I want to associate with that, I don't want to be your friend, you are not a nice person... and you are basically figuring out which is the better of two evils, which is not how anybody wants to choose a candidate right, and so once you get into it you are just like ahhh, everything is so negative, so like why, nobody wants to be around negativity right? So from a general standpoint that is why I don't... because anytime you get into politics it is never positive...And...because good people don't want to be surrounded by negativity, those that can deal with that negativity, are usually not great, do you see what I am saying? And forgive me if you were ever in a Young Liberals group.

These assertions, tied with the common notion that politics is time consuming, untrustworthy, distasteful, low stakes, or simply hard to impact, produces a common set of

justifications for opting out of political participation. These contingent models of participation were often combined in reasoning about political participation, where politics was depicted as needing to be high stakes, exciting and attractive to motivate participation and on the other hand people could reasonably opt out, or avoid politics if this was not the case.

These contingent models around participation were used by more than half the participants (41 participants). More specifically 18 participants suggested that politics has to be high stakes to motivate participation; 21 suggested politics needs to be desirable to motivate participation and 18 discussed political participation in terms of effort versus the impact or benefit of participation (and some participants were repeated in these categories to combine to a total of 41 out of 63 participants). These models of participation are largely grounded in utilitarian individualist and rational actor logics of political participation. Yet when one incorporates common representations that depict politics as high effort and not representing change or impact, as the participants above often do, these logics do not provide motivation for participation and so it is difficult to make sense of participation with these utilitarian individualistic models. At best they produce a looser relationship with political participation, where elections have to be particularly exciting or represent possibilities of big change to motivate participation. We can see evidence of this mode of participation on the rise, as some researchers argue that young people more than tuning out of politics and voting, have an increasingly intermittent relationship with voting, where they engage in some elections and not others (Martin 2012).

#### 3.4.2.2.2 *Political participation as an interest or specialization*

The second and overlapping model of participation is also based in perspectives of individualism but where the model of contingency asserts that political participation is not assumed but should be motivating (either because it represents high stakes, change, or a desirable world), this model of interest understands political engagement as an interest, pastime, or specialization for those inclined to it, instead of an expectation, norm, or duty for everyone. This model then is based in more expressive individualist perspectives that highlight one's own self-direction and enjoyment and the non-judgment of other's choices in contrast to moral prescriptions of duty. Politics for some is presented here as one of many competing priorities for time that does not necessarily take precedence over another competing time priority. Therefore, following politics is seen as something one does when one has more motivation or interest to do so. This perspective combined with the common representations outlined earlier of politics as complex, time consuming, and not high stakes, presents political participation as not a necessity or of concern for all but something that is an activity of those who are interested and informed or more qualified to participate. There are two key sub codes or sets of assumptions that comprise this model. The first understands political engagement as a pastime or hobby for those who enjoy or are opinionated about politics. The second asserts that if you are not interested in or knowledgeable about politics you can leave voting to those that care. Finally, a third assertion that is not related to enjoyment or affinity for politics but still represents politics as an interest for some, presents political participation as something for those whose interests are noticeably impacted by political decisions.

This model of *politics as an interest or specialization* arose much more in relation to paying attention and discussing politics than in relation to voting. This was in part because paying attention to politics was assumed to be more about interest and entertainment than the act of voting, particularly in the way that politics was presented by many as a “spectacle” or “theatre”. Therefore, participants could much more easily use languages of personal attraction than they necessarily would with voting. But also as noted, participants understood politics as a technical, complex and untrustworthy world that requires a substantial amount of time to pay attention. This notion of a time commitment involved in paying attention, in a world of competing activities is then often understood to need some sort of affinity, interest, or enjoyment on the part of the person paying attention, or to represent a lower cost because one has the resources to pay attention to politics. Yet this model of politics as for those with a personal interest – through entertainment or through investment in the outcome – in the end creates distance, not only from paying attention to politics, but also to voting and political participation in general, as many suggested you need to be informed about politics to participate. I will review some of the common assumptions and representations that participants use to think about political participation that help to produce it as an activity of some – those that have an interest, strong opinions about it, or enjoy it.

In relation to the time commitment and complexity around political participation, many explained political engagement in terms of interest, that to keep up with politics or to spend time paying attention one would have to be interested in it, which conversely suggested that those who were not, would not pay attention. For example, Jane is an enthusiastic follower of politics herself, in that she sees political participation as a positive way to make social change, yet she also represents this world as complex and does not want to place judgment on others that do not

pay attention and so she relates paying attention to interest. When asked why she thinks some people don't pay attention to politics she offers,

.... it's so hard to tell because again I am surrounded by people who vote and are like minded so it's just like everyone pays attention obviously, why people wouldn't doesn't really make sense to me (laughs). But you know I think it is really easy to bash people and say oh you know they don't care, I care but people out there don't care, I think everyone does just they are interested in different things to a greater or lesser extent, and again with just that frequency of information and that explosion of information you really do have to narrow it down to what you're interested in.

On the one hand this ethic of non-judgment is admirable; it represents the perspective that we should respect that people have different interests and resources, and not seek to project our judgments onto others. At the same time, this presentation of politics, as an almost impossible amount of information along with the assertion that you likely have to be interested to follow, results in a model of paying attention to politics that becomes a specialization. In this context, political attention loses its moral force. Those who are interested in keeping up will likely be those similar to Jane, who are surrounded by a network or a workplace that pays attention, and who are also from an educated or middle class background. This notion of non-judgment and specialization can be seen in a number of participant's discussions of politics and citizenship. One of the common explanations of good citizenship was that everyone would "contribute in their own way", which again highlights choice and specialization over specific obligations. For example, Nayan uses this notion to depict politics as for some more than others,

so to be a good Canadian citizen I should be following politics and be more informed about what is going on in my country, but what I am doing to be a good Canadian citizen in Canada is just being a good person, you know I am trying to create jobs, I want to have employees, I want to feed families... cause not everybody will follow politics, not everybody will be a business leader,

and not everybody will be a worker right, so everybody has their niche, and they will do that right, some people are meant for politics, some people are meant for business, some people are meant to be volunteers or be a gift to society.

Although Jane provides a subtle and accepting view of differences in political participation, and Nayan one of responsibility to contribute in your own way to a common good, many who use this model of participation present politics as much more optional and based in desirability and personal interest. Allison, who participates in politics, presents this logic, of a complex and time consuming world of politics, and brings in more obvious assumptions of desirability and interest in thinking about political participation:

I find that these days, a lot of people are able to pursue various specific hobbies and interests and they don't really have, or they probably don't want to spend too much time watching and researching into these huge issues that they probably don't completely understand. So it's like, if it isn't a personal interest they probably don't want to spend too much time on something that they're not interested in, like it might bore them or it seems like a waste of effort because there is too much to take in so...if you don't stay on top of it and you want to catch up to a topic right now then yes it's a lot to try to soak in.

Allison explains why people *don't* pay attention in terms of interest, time and entertainment, on the other hand, Caitlin explains why people *do* engage in politics in terms of interest: "I think for why people would vote, definitely interest is a big thing, if it peaks their interest they will be more inclined to obtain information about the parties, the agenda, how the whole political system works in Canada...."

When participants used languages of interest and desirability in relation to the time commitment that politics involves, paying attention transforms increasingly into a hobby for some who enjoy it, and not something that would be necessarily expected of everyone,

particularly in relation to the common representation noted earlier, of politics as something that will carry on by itself, whether people participate or not. Similarly, at the same time that paying attention to politics was understood to be a substantial time commitment, politics was also represented as involving grand-standing and untrustworthy politicians, and was the kind of spectacle that some enjoyed and others did not. Paying attention is then represented as a personal interest, hobby or passion for the kinds of people that enjoy, or are opinionated about politics. For example, Sheryl explains why some people pay attention to politics:

I think if you have a passion for it, I know my fiancé, he has a huge passion for politics, and that's just who he is and I think that is probably the same for a lot of other people, they are passionate about their country and what happens in their country and they really pay attention to it, so I think you do need to have a passion for it and really want to pay attention to it and not just do it because you feel the need to do it. So I think it is a personality thing, you enjoy it and you like it and you want to be informed and you are not fed up with it, like he doesn't, James never gets fed up with politics, he loves the political arena so, I think it just depends on the person to be honest.

Paying attention to politics then can be represented as not something everyone should do, but as a pastime for some that competes with other equally compelling responsibilities and interests in a world of little time. At the same time, paying attention involves an extensive and complex amount of information, and one has to know the background to understand what is really happening. This notion of interest and the idea that one needs a knowledge base to pay attention to politics, could mean that some, particularly those in whom the interest and knowledge around politics was cultivated from a young age, would specialize in or enjoy, and others would not, the same as any other interest, hobby, or occupation. Donald, a highly engaged male, represents this model as he explains why some people do not pay attention to politics,

It's just like why some person is interested in sports and one person isn't. It's the personal taste, its upbringing, it's like you know, I had Irish friends who all just moved back to Ireland and they were like come watch football with us. I get it, I don't find it highly exciting but they love it. And I do the same, come watch a hockey game with me, they enjoyed it, they got it but it they didn't love it the same way, to each their own taste. You can't really conclude who is going to go where, you can't really force somebody to do something that they're not going to want to do. You can talk to people about stuff, and you can try to educate, and try to inform them and try to get some engaged, but unless they really want to, the personal taste, is a personal matter... it's just a total matter of personal tastes.

Bourdieu (1984) argues that people learn different capacities and tastes depending on the experiences and practices they are exposed to as a product of their position in social space. Bourdieu asserts that gaining the right cultural capital through the socialization of skills, knowledge, and practices helps us develop both the feelings of adeptness and affinities for certain social activities and products. This helps to produce certain activities as a natural realm for some and not others. The depictions of the participants above, hold some striking similarities to Bourdieu's account of the ways in which particular activities come to be understood as a taste for those encultured into it. Participants above who reason about political engagement understand this in terms of a "personal taste", yet a taste for politics, in participants' own accounts, is seen as wrapped up in background resources and enculturation. For Bourdieu, "personal tastes" mask processes of unequal opportunities for the development of cultural capital that then helps to distinguish some groups as having the right practices from others that do not. Seen through this perspective of interest and specialization, political participation is understood to be a natural activity for those with the developed taste or innate personality for it, and in turn not an activity we can necessarily expect from all.

This model of politics that represents political engagement as an *interest or specialization*

*for some*, was used by more than half of the participants, (39 participants). Represented in terms of the different assumptions that comprised this model: 30 participants presented political engagement as an interest or hobby; and 13 suggested that if you were not interested or knowledgeable you could leave participation to those that were, again some participants were in multiple categories producing 39 people overall.

Additionally, another way that people discussed politics as an interest was in terms of investment, or whether people's interests were directly impacted by politics. The assumption here is that some people are directly impacted by politics whereas others are not, and so people pay attention to politics when it directly affects them and those that do not participate are not so much affected. For example, Minzhe explains why some people might pay attention while others do not, "I guess it has to do whether or not politics really affects their lives, if it really affects their lives they are going to follow, if not, they are not going to care." Similarly, Darwish when explaining that everyone should not be expected to vote suggests, "if it doesn't affect you, then why are you forced to do it, you know it's your choice." Fourteen participants suggested that people who pay attention are those that are interested, in terms of feeling specifically impacted or invested in politics. These categories compiled together, that present political engagement as an interest either in terms of enjoyment or in terms of investment, were used by 43 participants.

Although this model of politics was most often used to understand paying attention to and discussing politics, this notion of paying attention as a pastime, more than a duty, or for some people more than others, was significant to political participation not simply in terms of a normative conception of paying attention as an important part of political participation, but also in terms of participant's own assumptions around participation. Participants often asserted that you should have a base of knowledge to participate in any form of political activity, from voting

to discussing politics. Many non-participants provided this perspective as the reason why their non-participation was acceptable, and even moral, because it was more responsible to not vote than vote if you were not informed about politics. For example, Stewart suggests that he does not pay attention to politics because he does not find it interesting and finds it hard to follow. He then explains his own voting behavior as follows:

I know it does make a difference, and that's probably why I haven't been voting, because I just haven't followed... I wouldn't make an informed decision on who to vote for, or what party to vote for.

He continues

It's like a bad cycle, yeah, it takes time to follow and since I don't follow, I don't know what's going on, and I don't know enough about each side, and then it's like, you know what I mean, there is no point to just putting in a vote randomly.

In fact, some participants after noting that voting was a responsibility would then suggest it was worse to vote uninformed than to not vote at all. Therefore, some who connected their non-voting with a lack of information understood their non-participation to be more moral than voting, in that they were letting the voices of those who were opinionated and informed be heard.

Ray explains,

For me personally it is just because I know I am not informed so I don't want my uninformed vote, ... I don't want that to, I guess, affect another person's vote who actually has done their research or has a good reason to vote for one party.... If they say okay, a blue pen or a black pen, you have to vote on which one you use, but because I really don't care then like it is just no point for me to vote where if I voted...if people have a real reason behind it, it might screw their vote.

Some participants tied this view in with their notion of a democracy, which was not about everyone participating, but about everyone having a right to participate. For example, in the excerpt below Chris connects to this understanding, as he explains how voting is desirable in that it relates to something that we all value, democracy. Still, although it is important that people participate, he asserts people should leave it to those that have an opinion or are informed, which takes time and interest. He also integrates a logic of contingency. He sees voting as a duty only under certain circumstances. For him, it becomes a duty only if the overall voting numbers are too low, as this would look bad on our democracy:

Hmm, nothing is black and white... I feel like if... not enough people, like if the voting numbers are too low, I feel it is my duty to vote, but at the same time, if I don't know anything, then why would I vote...So going back to the some people don't have time to keep up, say if Canadian voting went down to 20 percent and the individual feels it is their duty to vote, but they don't have the time to do research, I feel like they still shouldn't vote, because to your capabilities, you should always make an educated decision, cause it does affect us, even if it is not like a crazy amount.

The notions of politics as for some, and not for others, and the idea of paying attention to politics as a specialization, hobby, or for those that are interested, is predicated on the representation of politics as not high stakes, or again as having a logic of its own that will in the end look after our basic interests. This is the case either because the people who do engage with politics or the politicians themselves will represent the interests of those who are not participating, or because one's everyday life does not change because of politics. In this way, politics can be left to those that are informed or opinionated.

In this regard, some participants saw politics as a realm of competing opinions and interests that in the end were not significant or that "balanced out". In relation to this perspective,

participants referred to themselves as “neutral” and not one to “take sides”, and so they suggested they could leave politics to those that were opinionated. Kerry, who does not participate in politics, reflects this perspective. She outlines a model of political participation that first presents political knowledge as time-consuming, and then reasons that if we leave voting to the people who pay attention they will look after all of our interests:

I feel like as long as the people who... hmm how should I put this. I understand how people don't want to spend too much time looking into politics, just cause it is part of their responsibilities, but as long as the people who do care about their country look into politics and they have their say, it should represent the majority of people as well.

Others highlighted how people could trust the political system and the people in it to keep things running relatively smoothly. This was the case even if the politicians themselves were untrustworthy people. For example, Jody, who did not vote or participate and actively distanced herself from the “negative and pushy” world of politics, justifies her distance from the political realm both in terms of that the kinds of people involved are not like her, and also, at the same time, the system works itself out regardless, or everyone has the same important goals in the end:

Everyone is interested in politics because they are either power-hungry – and that's the negative side, but also, the positive side is, I do believe that they want to make this country a better place in their own way, so they are power hungry, but then they do have the interests of the country in their mind, it's just they have different views or different opinions on how that can be achieved. So for me, leave it to them. Like for me, if this party holds power versus this party holding power, it's essentially the same thing because they both have the same goals.

Many participants, when reasoning about voting, present paying attention to politics as time consuming and complex, and therefore think about this task in terms of desirability, cost

benefit and as a specialization. It is viewed as an activity for some – specifically, those that have a personal interest in it. Yet, participants also feel that one should be informed to vote. This reasoning was also often based on the idea that politics affects some, more than others, and that one is either self interested, entertained, or especially caring to be engaged in politics. The perspective draws from a few different dimensions or assumptions grounded in a more individualist perspective. It holds that we have different capacities and interests, and that people can be good citizens or good people in their everyday life in different ways and therefore should not be judged or confined to political participation. Further, the perspective relates to desirability, in that politics should be interesting or attractive to pay attention to, and to cost/benefit thinking in that politics should represent an important attraction in relation to our day-to-day lives.

This idea that you had to be informed about politics to be able to participate was compounded by a notion that this research had to be independently done. Unless people already knew about politics, they generally thought that conversations involving politics was something that should be avoided. People also noted they monitored where and with whom they talked about politics, because politics is seen by some participants as a realm of strong opinions and “narrow mindedness”, negativity, or simply just a “downer” that some understand to be a socially questionable topic to raise within the context of their social circles. Some participants, particularly those that did not pay attention to politics, felt that you shouldn’t talk about politics unless you know what you are talking about, both because you don’t want other people pushing their strong opinions onto you, and also because, in general, people don’t want to talk about things they do not understand or can’t contribute to.

Yet, although this language was common in those that did not participate and in the reasoning that participators held around why others participated or did not participate, participators themselves often used more dutiful language when explaining *their own* path to participation. Although some represented paying attention to politics as entertainment, many understood politics as important to be a part of beyond its attractiveness or specific benefit or explained their own path to participation in terms of responsibility, even when they used models of individualism to explain others behavior in relation to politics.

#### 3.4.2.3 *Civic Republican models of participation*

The models of political participation are included in this category because they all in some way incorporate the assumption that political participation is a responsibility or emphasize the importance of citizens orienting attention towards a larger public sphere. This notion of a responsibility to participate in, and keep tabs on, the public and state affairs can be understood in terms of a perspective of republicanism as it focuses on the collective level or public sphere and one's potential responsibilities or duties attached to the collective more than the individual realm.

In these models of participation, political participation is less optional and contingent on individual choice and evaluation of politics, and more based in ideas of responsibility and the importance of the public realm. I will first provide the main cultural model for this category, which specifically incorporates ideas of responsibility in contrast to choice and individualism. There are two main sub-assertions in this model of responsibility. One is that it is a responsibility to participate because political participating is a right and privilege we should appreciate. The second was the idea that people had a responsibility to add their voice to the way the government

was run. Finally, I discuss a number of additional assertions around the importance of participation as part of the final overarching civic republican cultural model. These assertions do not explicitly refer to responsibility but provide a number of less prominent models that encouraged participation and suggest the responsibility or desirability of orienting to the public realm.

The assertions under this model of civic republicanism include, understandings of political participation as a responsibility to appreciate and exercise one's rights and privileges, a responsibility to voice one's opinion in the discussions of government and community direction, the assertion that everyone can/should make time to pay attention to politics, the view that political participation is about stewardship instead of necessarily about change, and the depiction of political participation as looking beyond the self. I will deal with each of these in turn in relation to representations of politics.

#### *3.4.2.3.1 Model of responsibility*

The most common ways that participants depicted political participation, particularly voting, as a responsibility was in relation to appreciating one's rights and privileges, and having a responsibility to add one's voice in a collective conversation. This understanding of political participation uses languages of responsibility or duty to make sense of participation but combines this with an understanding of political participation that emphasizes expressive individualist values – that of voice and rights.

In the first assertion, voting and to a lesser extent paying attention to politics, is a responsibility because it is a right people should show they value and deserve by exercising their

franchise. This suggests, regardless of how much a person knows, they should get out and participate in the symbolic act of voting. Participants often related this to valuing freedom and recognizing that voting is a right that not everyone is lucky enough to have. For example, Andrew who votes and pays attention to politics explains,

it is a responsibility, as someone in this country that we take a lot for granted, I take tremendous amounts of my freedom for granted, and that my participation in the process to the degree that I am, is like the minimum requirement, like the absolute minimum requirement, and being as read as you can, and to vote...because I don't care who you vote for but like just have an opinion and vote like even if it is the wrong one, you know be involved... you know, I can post a YouTube video any time I want, dancing to any song I want and I am not going to be arrested, I am not going to be arrested like those kids from Iran, that is how fundamentally different it is here, so how can I not vote?

Another participant who started to vote a bit later in life but does not pay attention to politics, also represents this model of political participation as a responsibility because of the privilege and rights it represents,

It used to be my choice to vote, but it is my duty to vote. Regardless of whether I know what party is what, but as a woman, when we couldn't before and there are still countries where you still can't vote, I think it is definitely our duty to vote.... I think it's a duty in the sense just because it's a privilege now, for just being like a woman in general, because we never had that before, and why wouldn't we capitalize on that. It's like saying your right is to drink clean drinking water in Canada but you're still going to drink mud.

Sixteen participants used this assertion, where they suggested that it is a responsibility to vote because it is a right and privilege.

A related assertion was the idea that people had a responsibility to voice their opinion into how the country is governed. Whereas the assertion that depicts political participation as a *responsibility because it is a right* was more specifically focused around voting, a *responsibility*

*to add your voice* in how things are run often implied also paying attention, so one could have an opinion and add one's voice to the collective conversation. This idea of voice also sometimes included engaging in other activities such as protesting. Kerry a person who has only voted once and does not pay attention to politics uses the model when asked what a good citizen entails,

Being a Canadian citizen is playing the part of being a Canadian so, if I am a good citizen, I should be voting, I should be playing a part in democracy, although I don't think I am doing a very good job in that sense... [It] means to know what is going on in the country and playing a part in voicing out so that every choice that the government makes has a part in everybody.

Julie who both votes and pays attention uses this model to understand her own path to participation. Similar to a number of participants she combines ideas of both voice and rights,

it has never been a question of whether I want to vote but more like I should because it is important to add your voice and just participate in that institution because not every country gets to do that, not everybody gets to do that and it's important that you have that right and that you exercise it.

Seventeen participants used the assertion of responsibility to voice your opinion in the public sphere. These two assertions could potentially be treated as two separate models but are combined into one model of responsibility for a number of reasons. One is that as seen above, people overlapped the ideas of voice and rights in ideas of responsibility, second, these categories do not map onto different theoretical logics and modes of participation in the same way as the first two individualist models do. The two assertions: responsibility to voice your opinion, and responsibility to exercise your rights, do not relate to distinct political outcomes as they both suggest all people should participate (whereas contingent models of participation suggest people participate intermittently or when it is worthwhile and models of interest suggest

some people can leave participation to others). Given these considerations, I felt that combining these assertions provides a more intuitive and useful contrast.

Combining the various ways that people asserted participation was a responsibility (combining responsibility because it is a right, responsibility to voice your opinion, and additional ways that participant's asserted political participation was a responsibility), 35 participants used a *model of responsibility* in their reasoning about political participation. These notions of exercising one's rights and adding one's voice do not so much assume the necessity of change or obvious impact for one's efforts but highlight the value of the act in itself. They also represent a different relation to the complex and time consuming world of politics and paying attention. These models are not so much impacted by the representation of politics as time consuming and complex either because the most important thing is the symbolic act of exercising one's right and so a person doesn't need to know everything to participate, or because paying attention is an integral part of voicing one's opinion or exercising freedom so it is something a person should make time for in their day. These more republican models and the participation they support can be understand in terms of Perrin's (2014) depiction of the act of voting as a ritual act to reaffirm one's membership in a larger imagined community and the related Durkheimian (2001) notion of rituals reaffirming the collective representations and values within a community. These models of political participation based in responsibility, voice, and rights and freedoms, are important not necessarily in terms of specific outcomes for action but the symbolic act of reaffirming one's membership as a citizen in a larger imagined community, and upholding and reinvigorating collective values of democracy: that of, freedom, rights, expression, and dialogue.

#### 3.4.2.3.2 *Orientation to the public sphere ~ Additional models that promote participation*

There were a number of related models of participation that did not necessarily incorporate the notion of responsibility but highlighted the value of orienting towards the public sphere regardless of change, or expertise. The assertions are represented below both because they often support ideas of participation as a responsibility and they provide a direct contrast to the models of contingency and interest. They are included in this category to provide additional examples of less prominent assertions that promote orientation to the public sphere but they do not perfectly fit into this category because they do not as explicitly emphasize responsibility (and so do not provide the same contrast to logics of individualism). Most importantly, similar to the above models of responsibility, they provide models justifying or supporting political participation. Yet instead of necessarily highlighting responsibility, they are focused more on representing politics in a different manner than the dominant representations of politics, ones that make political participation seem more accessible, necessary, or desirable.

In contrast to the notion that those people who spend time paying attention to politics are those that are interested, was the assertion that people should or can make the time to participate. Still, these models were used by far fewer interviewees than were the models of interest. Only eleven participants asserted that people can or should make the time to pay attention to politics. For example, Gerry suggests, “I think everyone should participate. I am sure everyone could find time to do a little research and vote.” Here participants suggested either it just took a small amount of time to pay attention or on the other hand, paying attention was important enough that everyone could make time for it. Another participant Tyson asserts,

I think there is always a little bit of room to do something, at least at the bare minimum go vote....and if you care about your freedoms I think you should pay attention, at least be informed about what is going on as far as politics. It is a healthier country if everyone is more aware right?

Participants also used contrasting models to the idea that political participation is about producing change. Instead some highlighted the importance of political participation in relation to a collective good or again protecting what a person currently values. Some asserted that instead of necessarily being motivated by the desire for change, political participation was about stewardship or holding the politicians to account and making sure that what people currently have is not taken away. In this way, whether ones' everyday life was fine without politics or that politics was slow moving and hard to notice, people needed to pay attention to make sure things stayed on track and to let the untrustworthy politicians know that people cared. For example, Keira uses this assertion when discussing protesting, in that she suggests if people are not active, things that they value can be taken away. When describing protesting she suggests it's,

Necessary. And I don't mean in a violent sense but I mean in some sense, like even in simple lobbying, like if we lobbied a little more they wouldn't have the control they have now and the things that happened, like after we went from being a welfare state we saw the Mulroneys and the Thatchers...and during that time-frame people failed to realize that a lot of our democracy or things that were really working for the people eroded and none of us said anything about it and coincidentally at the same time, we started getting busier and more technology and more different things happening and I think we just got lost in the mix, we really just got lost in life a little bit.

Allison, similarly represents this idea of stewardship or the notion that people have to engage to keep their rights and to show people in power that citizens care. She contrasts this to what she sees as a commonly held beliefs around politics (the contingent view of politics). Here she represents a few of these more republican models of participation including, that politics is a

voice, a right that we should exercise, and political participation as stewardship (in that it is a way to show politicians that you care and are ready to hold them accountable). In explaining why people don't vote Allison surmises,

My theory would be that they feel like voting doesn't give them the power that it is supposed to because they probably feel like no matter who they vote for there is probably some conspiracy happening. At least that's what I find a lot of people believe these days, is that the government is just another big corporation out there to get money. I am like I hope that is not the case but I see where you're coming from. For me I vote because I think if they let me vote I might as well take the opportunity to get at least, get my own opinions out there, rather than...cause I find that if I were to not vote, it's sort of telling them, I don't care at all, you can do whatever you want, which I really don't want to have them think that way, so you should just vote anyway is my belief, but a lot of people they don't feel like voting does much to help their own situations, like they feel like it lacks the power of really affecting what is going on with the government so they decide not to vote or they don't feel like putting that much effort into going there and coming down to vote.

Twelve people used this model of stewardship. This model provides a different conception of participation and its relation to the political world than does the contingent and interested models of participation. In contrast to the contingent model, it presents participation as important regardless of the need or possibilities for change, or one's impact in relation to effort, and in contrast to the *politics as an interest model*, it challenges the idea that politics is something that can be looked after by others or does not impact one's life. It also overlaps substantially with models of responsibility outlined above, as notions of stewardship and holding the government to account, even with the prospect of competing distractions or little reward, arguably incorporates logics of responsibility.

Finally, in relation to the notion of politics as superfluous and not impacting the everyday, as noted earlier, some highlighted the ways in which politics is about looking beyond

the self and has more slow moving but important impacts. This meant for some that you have to pay attention and learn how politics is important. In relation to this, participants contrasted caring about politics and having a “wider view” to people that “live in a bubble”, in terms of being caught up in their own immediate concerns or being disconnected to the wider community they are a part of. Similarly, some contrasted paying attention to politics with being distracted by superfluous entertainment or distractions. On the other hand, politics could be equated with caring, maturity, or trying to make a change for the better, and being a person who was “aware”. This contrast is less about responsibility and more about the representation of paying attention and participating in politics as a desirable activity or at least an activity of desirable people. Politics was about orienting to a world that was beyond one’s everyday concerns and not “turning a blind eye” to politics simply because it was negative or “not fun”. This contrast allows participants to connect political engagement with desirability, it is desirable because it is the activity of caring, responsible, deep, mature, intellectual people. Although participants were often careful to avoid putting judgments on others who did not participate in politics, this was where there was the most evidence of negative evaluations of those who did not participate, as they were living in a bubble or distracted by superfluous things, instead of being aware and paying attention to, and engaging in, the world around them.

Candice incorporates this contrast as she uses notions of not-caring and being distracted with one’s own world versus maturation in comparing her past self as a non-participator to when she started to vote,

I just didn't care. I was just too concerned with what was around me, and was trying to figure out what I wanted to do for school... and politics was just in the back of my head, I just didn't care. And then I grew up.

Tyson on the other hand, in describing those who do not vote depicts people as being distracted by shallow entertainment instead of taking on the hard work of bettering their country. He also refers to some of the common representations of politics identified earlier,

I think they don't because it's very... sometimes it can be really complicated, sometimes it can be... they might have some certain prejudices about it, that it is just a bunch of dirty, talking, you know it's just a bunch of people trying to get their own special interests, and they don't want any part of that, I will listen to my Justin Bieber, like I don't need any of this or whatever right. I would say that is not a good thing to think that way, like I think that is actually a big problem in the States, as well as Canada, that people are not participating in what is going on, they are not trying to change the country for the better.

Participants then contrasted engaging in politics to having a tunnel vision or a narrow focus that involved either being caught up in one's day to day needs, avoiding negativity, and instead being distracted by superfluous entertainment. Some at times equated political participation to a process of maturation, where one moves from a self-centered teenager that does not care about politics to someone who is more concerned about the wider world.

This representation of paying attention to politics as desirable implied a slightly different contrast to the contrast some participants used in the contingent model of politics. Participants in contingent models of participation at times justified distance from politics with the common representations of politics as boring, negative, full of bad behavior and conflict, which can be contrasted to positivity, enjoying oneself, and authenticity. On the other hand, in this representation, paying attention is a process of maturation, where people start caring about the wider world and being aware of the important issues around them. This can be contrasted to those people who avoid politics because they are caught up in immediate concerns, live in a bubble, or are distracted by less important but potentially more enjoyable things. Participants

could present both distinctions and then understand participation with the distinction they most connected with. For example, just above, Tyson first presents the common representation of politics as negative and then counters this with what he sees as the more important issue, of caring about the country. On the other hand, below Natalie represents the idea of people who do not pay attention to politics as living in a bubble as an evaluation she hears from others, but then counters this with the notion she most connects to, that of avoiding the negative, pushy, distanced world of politics,

No, no, if anything, I guess it is narrow minded because I haven't... it's not like an educated way of looking at it in a sense because I haven't... I don't know, part of it is that I feel like so many people talk about it but it's always such a negative thing, people are always complaining or arguing about it. Half of the reason why I don't watch the news is because that's what everybody's doing about everything and yeah I miss out on certain things and people are like, 'are you living in a bubble' and I'm like, "no I don't live in a bubble but I'd rather be concerned with the problems that I already have" ... it just seems like there's just so many problems and people get themselves worked up over problems that they can't even control and have nothing to do with them.

In this way, beyond languages of responsibility and stewardship that promote or justify political participation, people use representations of political participation as desirable contrasting it to less desirable activities of ignoring politics. Here, although participants understand the world as not necessarily positive or attractive to engage with it is desirable because it is the activity of caring people, who are oriented to the wider world and want to make their community better (representations that overlap with ideas of responsibility and stewardship). This suggests another code that people use to make sense of their political participation beyond Bennett et al.'s (2013) notion of the disavowal of politics. Along with disavowal of politics, that people use to relate to the political world while distancing themselves from it, is the code of the desirability of politics,

particularly of the people who participate in politics, as “aware” and caring versus “living in a bubble” and being distracted by superfluous entertainment.

### ***3.4.3 Languages of Individualism and Responsibility in Relation to Political Participation***

There are a number of ways that these cultural models might matter for political participation and in turn help inform our understanding around low participation levels of Canadian youth (and potentially other western youth). One is simply that there is not a singular prominent model of political participation that suggests it is a responsibility or of importance for everyone to engage in this activity. The reasoning used by these participants suggest there are a number of competing cultural models, instead of one strong salient model for participation that helps to guide or commonly shape their behavior. Prominent voluntary or individualist models relate to cultural representations of politics as complicated and time consuming, low stakes and negative, providing salient models of non-participation. In this way, although voting is generally recognized in democratic cultures as something that citizens are supposed to do, for these younger participants there are equally compelling models for why this activity is not assumed for everyone. Harding (2007; 2011) provides evidence that when there are competing cultural models (shared frames or templates for action) in a community, as compared to one predominant model for action, people in the community with more heterogeneous models for action are less likely to act in accordance with the more socially approved model, even when people themselves hold the socially approved model. This suggests that if models of interest and contingency are as easily accessible as models of responsibility, then even if the model of responsibility is the more socially approved model for action, people will feel less social pressure to uphold the model of

political participation. This would particularly be the case if one's social groups do not hold this model, or perhaps a person faces more barriers or has less incentive to uphold the model. At the same time the more individualist models are arguably stronger than the republican models of participation. Participants used more individualist assumptions to talk about participation than assumptions around duty or the importance of participation.

While having competing models of participation based in responsibility and choice might matter in terms of making participation a less strong moral imperative, it also likely matters who holds what model for participation. Many theorists of cultural models argue different cultural models and the larger cultural values people hold can guide or help to predict behavior (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Harding 2007; Miles 2015; Vaisey 2009; 2010; Beyerlein and Vaisey 2013; Strauss and Quinn 1997). Beyerlein and Vaisey (2013) for example, demonstrate that which cultural worldviews people hold matters for civic participation and public-spirited action. Similar to this study, they draw from the moral frameworks of Bellah et al. (1985/2008) to look at whether people hold stronger republican, religious, or individualist cultural models. They show that people who hold a civic republican worldview are significantly more likely to participate in publicly oriented volunteer activities than those who hold an individualist worldview or a religious worldview, suggesting that these models impact the kind of action people are willing to engage in.

Although this study does not have the kind of data that allows for strong claims in terms of the way specific models a person holds might impact action, there are trends in who used which model that provides some suggestions into how political models might matter for political participation. Participants were categorized into high, mid, and low participation groups based on whether they paid attention to and participated in politics (measures of participation included

voting and protesting, see appendix A for criteria). There were 28 people in the highest participation category (people who regularly paid attention to and participated in politics), 26 people in the mid participation category and 9 people in the lowest participation category (people who reported no or almost no attention to, or participation in, politics).

People who were in the highest participation category were more than twice as likely than lower participators to use the civic republican models that view political participation as a responsibility. 35 percent of people in the high participation category used the model: *voting as a responsibility because it is a privilege and right*, whereas 11 percent of the lowest participation category used this model and 19 percent of the people in the mid participation category. Similarly, 39 percent of the high participators used the model: *political participation as a responsibility to voice one's opinion*, whereas 11 percent of low participators used this model. Overall, 70 percent of the participants in the high participation category used a model of responsibility to discuss political participation, as compared with 22 percent in the low category who asserted political participation was a responsibility, and 46 percent of people in the mid participation category.

On the other hand, it seems people who had mid levels of participation were slightly more likely to use models of contingency than high participators but there were not substantial differences in the use of these models between people in different categories. For example, 25 percent of high participators used the model: *politics needs to represent change or high stakes to motivate participation*, whereas 34 percent of mid participators used this model and 33 percent of the low participators used this model. Similarly, 28 percent of high participators used the model: *politics needs to be desirable to motivate participation*, 42 percent of mid participators used this model and 22 percent of low participators used this model. The last contingent category

that weights impact versus cost to think about participation, appeared to be equally likely to be used across categories of participation level, with about 33 percent of each group using this model.

Finally, the model of politics as an interest was much more likely to be used by people in the lowest participation category, with the lowest participators being twice as likely as the highest participators to use this model. Eighty-eight percent of the low participators used the model of politics that represented *political engagement as an interest or hobby*, whereas 39 percent of high participators used this model and 53 percent of mid participators used this model. The second sub-model of interest: *if you are not interested in politics you can leave politics to those that are*, demonstrated a similar trend in use, 66 percent of the lowest participators used this model, whereas 10 percent of the high participators and 15 percent of the mid-participators used this model.

The other more tangentially related sub category in the set of models that depicts politics as an interest for some, was the model that portrayed political participation as for those with invested interests in politics. Interestingly, the numbers of people used this model looked similar to the contingent model. Where mid participators were much more likely to use this model (38 percent of these participants) and high and low participators were less likely at around 10 percent of the people in these groups using this model. This is notable because it is the model in this category that is more about one's specific interests being impacted (much like the contingent category) and less about people being interested in terms of enjoyment or affinity. This suggests that the models of politics that are most likely to dissuade participation is not the representation of politics as cost/benefit calculations of impact, desirability or high stakes – or in other words more in the utilitarian dimension of individualism, but when it is portrayed as an interest or

hobby for those inclined - or in other words the dimension of individualism that focuses on choice, self-direction and self fulfillment, that of expressive individualism. This suggests the expressive individualist/self-direction perspectives are the variants of individualist discourse that can pose the greatest problems for participation. Yet it is not these values on their own but the models of participation that are grounded in this perspective, models that portray participation as an interest, hobby or specialization for those predisposed.

The common use of models based in expressive individualism by non-participators appears to support the contention of Bellah et al. (1985/2008) that these models might be problematic for democratic citizenship, and appears to problematize Inglehart and Welzel's (2005) contention that expressive values related to individualism necessarily uphold democracy. That is, in a context where politics appears to be most often represented as negative, complex and time consuming, and distanced from everyday realities or low stakes, purely expressive individualist reasoning provides a strong model for people to choose to opt out of politics, focus on things that are more rewarding in a world of little time, and leave politics to those that do have the affinities.

At the same time, we can see in the models most often used to understand and potentially support participation, that of the more civic republican models of responsibility and duty, that the most common models of civic responsibility were grounded in part, in expressive individualist values. The assertion that political participation should be seen as a responsibility to uphold one's rights and freedoms, combines notions of civic responsibility (republican or collective perspective) with a focus on freedom and rights (expressive individualist values). Similarly, the other common assertion of participation as a responsibility to voice one's opinions or contribute to a collective conversation, again combines notion of collective responsibility with self

expression (in terms of the value of voice). In this regard, expressive individualism on its own appears to provide a model that can undermine strong participation, yet combined with civic republican models, expressive individualism can provide models for participation. This is not entirely in contradiction to Bellah et al.'s (1985/2008) claims, which are not that individualism inevitably undermines civic membership and political engagement, but that strong individualist languages without additionally strong moral languages that allow one to think in terms of social responsibility and interdependence can produce problems for engagement.

A very much related perspective to the *politics as an interest model* was the assertion that one needed to be informed to vote. As people who did not vote often integrated this assertion with the notion of participation as an interest or a hobby. This assertion that people needed to be knowledgeable to vote was also much more likely to be used by low participators compared to high participators. Fifty-five percent of low participators used this model while only 21 percent of high participator used this model and 41 percent of mid participators. In this way, expressive individualist models of choice, non-judgment, and enjoyment; and bureaucratic notions of expertise and specialization, present politics as a realm for those predisposed to enjoy or care about it and therefore that have the expertise to engage with it. It also suggests that distance, and indifference are the cultural attitudes most problematic for political participation in Canadian youth more so than alienation, two orientations that have been commonly suggested to dissuade voting (Leighley and Nagler 2014).

In terms of this model of politics as an interest and its use by the lowest participators, it is worthwhile highlighting the reasoning of some of these lowest participators. These participants often understand their own non-participation and the participation of others in terms of interests, hobbies, and time priorities and politics as an activity that some will choose to do and others can

leave. Melissa when explaining why the voting rates might be low for young people connects her own reasoning around participation to why others might not participate, which draws from the model of interest (and contingency) – you are not going to pay attention to politics if you are not interested, particularly in a world of equally competing time priorities – and you will not know enough to legitimately participate if you do not pay attention. Melissa explains,

...myself I am not really interested either so people can't really make informed decisions because they have no interest. Or just young people... yeah they have so many things going on they don't have time to follow what each party is really trying to push for so we just don't vote

Similarly, when explaining his own path of non-participation Ray uses the model of interest and knowledge to explain non-participation while presenting politics as a world with low stakes in relation to his everyday,

I don't have that much interest in politics. I guess I feel like right now the issues that they are talking about doesn't really affect me that much, just because I don't know enough about that and there is no interest for me to learn more, so I basically don't participate.

Later when Ray explains why participation is a choice more than a duty he justifies this notion of choice in terms of the model of interest and knowledge,

Just because if I am uninformed then I should have a right not to have an opinion on a certain subject that in the end is not an interest to me

Finally, Mark who doesn't vote but at times pay attention to the news (not so much political news) explains why he avoids discussing politics,

I don't get around it much. It's not that I stay away from it, it's just that like I said, I'm not as interested, you know I do skim and watch the news and stuff, but it doesn't really spark an interest in me...

He later explains,

It's just not for some people, I guess people have other things on their mind, like I skimmed through it, but I'm more interested in other things, like disasters around the world. I guess I'm just really not that interested, I guess I should pay more attention to it but people are just busy these days...

Finally, in explaining why he feels it is his choice to vote more than his duty he reasons, "if I was forced to vote, I just have so much on my mind, I probably wouldn't pick the right party."

This idea of interest is not new to political research. Indeed, it is a common factor that political scientists connect to political participation, those who express interest in politics are much more likely to participate than those who do not. Yet this represents a particular logic that is in contrast to one that sees political participation as a responsibility of citizens in a democracy. It assumes that political participation does not necessarily have moral authority but is one of many competing activities that take up our limited time. It also appears to be based in the assumption that either the stakes of politics are not that high; the impacts of politics are important for some and not others; or finally, those that participate have the same interests or are looking out for the interests of those who are not.

This model of participation is not only relevant because it was the one most often used by those that do not participate, but because it was used so commonly amongst all participants. This assumption that people participate in politics because they are interested was used by most participants as a taken for granted assumption at some point in their discussions of political

engagement. But what does this mean to say people who participate are those who are interested. Who is politics for if it is left to those who are interested? In the next section I will discuss the further implications of this model of participation in relation to particular representations of the world of politics. Additionally, this section connects to the findings in the first section of the dissertation, as we see how models of interest further help to produce politics as an activity for those who are immersed through family, social networks, education and potentially social class.

#### ***3.4.4 Individualism and the Desirability of Politics ~ The Politically Interested as Intellectual, Educated, or Middle Class***

The representation of political engagement as dependent on desirability, interest and expertise arguably helps to produce politics as a world for some more than others, and more likely as a world for educated, intellectual, or professional people. Participants themselves at times made this connection, as some directly tied political participation with these groups. Also, many of the ways that people did make value judgments around non-political participation or produced politics as desirable, was in understanding politics as an activity of those who are educated, intellectual and aware. In this way, politics, when it is understood as a choice or pastime, becomes an activity that would seem more natural and desirable for those from educated and middle class backgrounds, and less necessary or attractive for those from lower SES backgrounds. This is particularly the case if one assumes life will stay the same regardless of any orientation towards politics.

These representations of politics as an interest, and the associations of political participation with intellectual, educated, and middle class worlds, can then be partly understood as a social distinction, where particular social practices and tastes are understood to be the realm

of some social groups more than others (Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu outlines how people within different classes or areas in social space are socialized to develop different skills and tastes, as well as to develop the structures of perception to recognize which skills and tastes are associated with whom. The cultural, educational and economic capital that people in different classes or social spaces have at hand, helps to develop and enact some practices and not others, which over time, becomes felt as a natural taste or affinity.

In his work on social distinctions in France, Bourdieu touched on political opinion, and demonstrates how the working class are likely to not think they have the grounds to give an opinion on abstract political topics. At the same time, Bourdieu (1984) argues that we should not mistake this simply for a difference in capacity, but rather for a difference in culture and recognition related to who possesses the technical competence and legitimacy to produce political opinions and engage in politics – in other words, the experts. Bourdieu explains further that “technical competence depends fundamentally on social competence” or, in other words, being both “entitled and required” to have this capacity to know and talk politics (409). He explains that some people are “socially authorized” to talk politics and have a “sense of being entitled to be concerned with politics”, as they have the classification systems to allow them to both have distance and competence in political discussions (409). This connects, in his view, with the tendency of the more “dominated” classes to assume that the more dominant classes are naturally more adept or equipped, and therefore placed to inhabit senior positions in the social world.

To a certain extent, we can understand these participants’ own relation to paying attention and participating in politics through Bourdieu’s lens: political engagement is often cultivated early on in families, social groups, and schools, and is understood to be a world belonging to the

more educated and professional classes. This makes political participation more natural and effortless for some, which is then understood as an affinity or taste. At the same time, political participation does not map perfectly onto class, but rather appears to relate to the social environments people are embedded in, which in turn help to provide the skills, desire, or moral drive to know and care about politics. Bourdieu's theory is premised on the role of socialization; that through one's social location, one will encounter particular experiences in relation to one's families, peers, workplaces and general social milieu, that develop some skills and tastes over and above others. Similarly, for study participants that inhabit social worlds where politics is discussed and encouraged, political participation can more easily become effortless and desirable, regardless of class background or education level. At the same time, the worlds that participants inhabit, and the related skills that they acquire through these environments, are tied up in class background and education level, in that people with high SES backgrounds or trajectories will be more likely to have the families, social groups and related capital to make paying attention to politics a personal taste, and to provide the "social authorization" to know and talk about politics. We can see this somewhat in these research findings, where people from the highest SES schools commonly pointed to family, friend and school environments that encouraged political participation, but also in many studies within political science that demonstrates those in higher SES categories are much more likely to find politics interesting, discuss it with others, know about politics, and come from families who engage in politics (Almond and Verba 1963; Beck and Jennings 1982; Brady et al. 1995; Verba et al. 1995). Finally, the distinctions the participants themselves make often suggests that this activity is classified by many of the participants to be more the realm of middle class or educated worlds.

Participant's understandings of politics as an activity for those who are interested, or who think they can make a change in some way, often meant people assumed those from lower SES backgrounds would vote less, because their interests are not as impacted or as well represented in the political system, resulting in less opportunity to produce change. One participant notes that, "from my perspective, the busiest person always follows politics – the person who has the least amount of time in their life, the successful ones." Pressed to explain why that is, he suggests that it is "because their lives are heavily dependent on the policies". Another participant, Jacob explains differing levels of participation between higher and lower SES people as follows:

the more educated families tend to vote, the less educated don't vote as much, because I think the priorities are different, I think with the poor it's more about survival and work, whereas the wealthier people actually, in families they will tell you why it's really important to vote... Cause the friends I have that do vote, they are all from, they all have parents who are very educated and make quite a bit of money and who are well off, really well off.

Even more so than being connected to middle class or business worlds, paying attention to politics was connected to being educated and intellectual, in part due to the representations of the complexity and technicality of the world of politics. We can see in the previous descriptions and understandings of politics that political participation was understood to be more attractive or accessible for educated people, as they would be more likely to have the resources and motivation to "wade" through the technical world of politics, both in terms of the social motivations of "bosses", coworkers and social groups who know and talk about politics, and also the language and "research" skills to make this world seem less intimidating. Participants with and without university degrees highlighted how it is hard to be interested in politics because "the

language is boring” and “complex” and so will be avoided by your average person, if they do not have the background.

Politics was also known by participants to be connected to educated worlds. In part, this is what made it desirable; knowing and caring about politics was connected with intellectual or educated people. One participant explained, in relation to his love of political comedy shows, how the audience for these shows are known to be more educated, because you have to be intellectual to do this kind of comedy. Another, in providing an account of how she became more politicized through entering into a group of people who cared about politics, explained this group’s attention to politics by the fact that they were highly educated and had professional occupations. Others noted that not knowing about politics could be embarrassing because it is a sign of ignorance or lack of education. Natalie, who went to a high SES school and voted but did not pay attention to politics, represents paying attention to politics as being for those that are interested, but then also connects this with a particular group (those who are business people and educated):

I think there's quite a few people out there that do follow politics because I look at my dad and my dad is very business like so it makes complete sense that he would watch that. You know he would enjoy it. People like to discuss things, like a common subject... So some people may study it...it’s just another one of those things that people like to be a part of...

She continues,

And then when you think about politics it something that makes you almost appear more educated as well. If you know about hockey, it’s like congratulations, but if you know about politics, like, you paid attention! Which is why even when you first asked about the research study it made me uncomfortable because I realized, I don't know anything about it. So it’s also a comfort level some people follow it just so...[they] know what to say, instead

of being stuck in that embarrassing spot where you're like I really don't know what's going on and people are judging you based on like wow she's very uneducated, awesome. Don't spend too long with her (laughs).

Politics is then connected to educated and professional worlds, both because inhabitants of those worlds are more likely to have the language and skills to engage in world that is commonly understood to be complex, technical and boring, and because this is understood to be a social norm for educated people, or a sign of education and intellect.

The representation of *politics as an interest and specialization*, can help to produce the political world as optional for those who have the affinities, yet this world is often represented as for some more than others, for those that understand themselves as intellectual or educated, or who are embedded in contexts where knowing and caring about politics is important. Although anyone can take up these identities and orientations, people within higher SES contexts have an advantage, partly by being provided with multiple opportunities, to take on this identity. Higher SES people are more likely to experience political conversations and gain political knowledge in their families, school programs, with peers, and in the workplace. Models of *politics as an interest or specialization* then can help to produce a political world often viewed as complex, time consuming and distasteful, as an activity left for those who enjoy paying attention. This can provide models for opting out of political participation for those for which political participation is not desirable or easy, as it is not part of their everyday world, social background, or current social contexts.

This distinction of political orientation as a world for some more than others is not inevitable, but just as politics can be produced as a specialization for some it can be produced as a practice and expectation for most. In fact, the strong relationship of education with political

participation is not a given; it only exists in some democracies, such as in America and Canada (Gallego 2015). One key aspect of countries that do not show this strong relationship between education and political participation is that they have less income inequality (Gallego 2015; Solt 2008). Although it is not clear why this is so, it is possible that lower social inequality is associated with less segregated trajectories, expectations, and communities of discourse, and therefore politics is less for a specific group and more an assumed world for everyone. On the other hand, it might be the case that as inequality increases, the interests of the wealthiest groups are given precedence in the media more than others, making politics appear for many, as a distanced world with no real stakes (Solt 2008). On the other hand, it might be the case that along with expressive individualist values, more collective or civic republican orientations exist in these countries that both support broad participation and more egalitarian social policies. It would be interesting to look at the ways in which groups in these countries think about and engage in politics, and whether politics is incorporated into everyday discourse and spaces. Furthermore, there might be different kinds or different strengths of cultural models that people use to represent and think about participation. It might be the case that the model of interest is much weaker in places such as Denmark where there are high participation levels, or on the other hand, the representations of the political world are different than ones that present it as complex, distanced from the everyday, or distasteful. An important next step in research around culture and participation would be to compare some of the cultural models of people in countries with high levels of participation with those from countries that have lower participation levels.

Social research and theory suggests that various kinds of political cultures and practices can be fostered and enacted in groups, contexts and societies that have important impacts on who, when, or how people engage with politics (Campbell 2006; Almond and Verba 1963;

Eliasoph 1998 ; Terriquez 2011; Binder and Wood 2013). At the same time, researchers also highlight the ways in which average people, and those that do not have a political opinion in certain contexts, can in fact engage in political talk and show deep concern for political issues when given the right opportunity (Eliasoph 1998; Gamson 1992). However, both cultural and historical trends in many western countries help to produce politics as a choice and specialization. Common historical and cultural distinctions between public (government and the state) and private (citizens and their rights) help to construct the political world as one distinct from the everyday and one that is set apart from the impact of average people (Somers 1999). And at the same time, discourses, institutions and practices that orient one to the private sphere are arguably much more available in North America than those that orient people towards public spirited thinking and debate, or that allow one to connect how one's own interests are related to public decision-making. People have more opportunity to act as consumers, atomized citizens, or users of complex and differentiated systems of need provision, rather than as decision-makers, deliberators and active citizens within a political community (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001; Eliasoph 1998; Gamson 1992; Fraser 1990; Somers 1999). Additionally, some argue that in modern life there are fewer opportunities for social interaction and collaboration and increasing day to day pressures that can help decrease the likelihood that people will have the capital to engage in community and political engagement (Scokpol 1997; Putnam 2000, Bellah et al. 1985/2008). Finally, political talk and deliberation is relegated out of many social settings as serious, negative, and based in private belief, a perception that was expressed in this study, as well as in other political research (Eliasoph 1998; Bellah et al. 1985/2008).

These cultural models of individualism also relate to institutional changes that are tied up with processes of modernization that produce less stable and obvious communities and

collectivities and allow more focus on freedom and notions of individual self directed biographies (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Bellah et al. 1985/2008; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). They can also be understood as a reaction to the bureaucratic, rationalized and often elite controlled political systems that leave little room for citizen efficacy. On the one hand these structural processes behind individualism are part of the reality of modern life. On the other hand, some of these models, particularly contingent models of participation, represent important critiques of the political system. It is less about ridding ourselves of individualist orientations or about orientations that are either communitarian/ survivalist or expressive individualist but that there is arguably less opportunity to develop and enact the civic orientations to supplement individual and more specifically expressive individualist orientations. In fact, as noted, some of the key civic models that participants did use around responsibilities to participate did not focus solely on duty to the collective but combined expressive individualist ideas about the value and appreciation of rights and the necessity of voicing one's opinion with notions of civic republican duty.

Theorists and researchers of participatory democracy argue that political cultures can be fostered by everyday practices that orient people towards the public sphere, and that give people the skills and dispositions to engage in political activity (Fung and Wright 2003; Pateman 1976; Somers 1993; Terriquez 2011). Their work suggests that providing more opportunities to practice deliberation, decision making, and public-spirited talk (whether it be through associations and unions, opportunities to be involved in direct decision-making that affects one's interest, or simply to practice engagement with the public sphere) might enable greater political orientation and efficacy across different groups. Another area for future research might be whether certain participatory institutions - for example, ones that encourage political discourse

and decision making as part of the everyday - impact or don't impact cultural orientations that support political engagement across different groups.

This study contributes to the discussions on the relationship between culture and political participation. It suggests that beyond focusing on the role of broad value orientations it is useful to look at how these orientations of individualism and duty relate to or support models of political participation, and in turn, how these models are used and by whom. In other words, to understand how discourses and values impact participation we need to know how they are integrated with particular *models of* politics and how they support *models for* political participation. There has been debate in political science and sociology on the role of individualist values and whether they undermine political participation. I suggest that part of this debate is the result of the presentation of these orientations in broad terms. Instead, individualist orientations can be applied to politics in different ways. The findings in this study support the contention that individualism, particularly expressive individualism, likely provides a strong model for non-participation in relation to common representations of politics. At the same time, this language can support participation, not on its own, but when expressive ideas of freedom, rights and voice are combined with civic republican orientations that highlight responsibility and duty around participation. This study, by presenting a more nuanced view of the ways in which people think about political participation, contributes to our understanding of the role of expressive individualism in political participation. Additionally, the research broadens our knowledge of the worldviews and representations that young people use to relate to the political world.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

This research contributes to our understanding of young people's political participation by looking closely at the social and cultural influences that mediate their connections to politics. Researchers have pointed to the choices of younger generations as lying behind stagnating trends in political participation in a number of western democracies (Blais, Gidengil, Nevitte 2004; Howe 2010; Milner 2010). The changes in the way that young people engage in politics have also raised debates about factors thought to influence political participation. My research helps to inform these debates and questions around political participation by using qualitative methods to both provide deeper insight into the life influences that support participation and the orientations that young people use to relate to politics and participation. I find that these social and cultural influences behind political participation help reinforce inequalities in participation. People most likely to participate are those in which the skills and affinities for politics are cultivated through experiences in social contexts, particularly families, where politics is part of everyday life and discussion. Aspects of some of the cultural models participants use to represent and act in relation to politics exacerbate these advantages by presenting politics as a specialization for those with the affinities and expertise. Together, these cultural and social tendencies help advantage high SES trajectories as people from high SES backgrounds are more likely to be immersed in the social contexts that support political participation and, in turn, they are often represented in participant's cultural understandings as the most obvious candidates to politically participate. I outline the findings and implications in more detail below.

#### 4.1 PATHS TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In Chapter 2, I analyzed young people's accounts of their paths both towards and away from politics to provide an in depth look at the life influences that might impact political participation, and the role of higher education in people's trajectories of participation. Recent debates in political science and sociology have brought the nature of the relationship between higher education and political participation into scrutiny. Although many theorists have long pointed to higher education as an important venue for encouraging political participation (Brady et al. 1995; Brand 2010; Straughn and Andriot 2011; Hillygus 2005; Verba and Nie 1972), a number of studies have challenged the strong relationship between education and political participation as spurious, arguing that higher education is likely a proxy for pre-adult experiences that encourage both university attendance and political engagement (Berinsky and Lenz 2010; Highton 2009; Kam and Palmer 2008; Persson 2014). My research contributes to this debate by using qualitative analysis to capture participant's accounts of their life paths to participation and the role of education within these paths.

As I will flesh out in detail below, this chapter makes three contributions. First I argue that higher education has a more moderate impact in these accounts of participation than suggested by much of the scholarship on political participation, and that the family political environment plays a more important role in people's paths to participation. Second, I illuminate the ways in which higher education appears to influence political participation. I argue the impacts of higher education are often dependent on pre-adult experiences and identities that interact with the opportunities of university. In this same vein, the impacts of higher education appear to be mainly in terms of increasing interest in politics more so than increasing political participation directly. Third, my research makes a larger claim in terms of what lies behind these

paths to participation. I argue that the most important factors encouraging participation in the accounts I studied are when people are immersed in, or enter into, social milieu's where political participation is natural and desirable, this is most often the family but can include social networks, school and work settings. Additionally, learning the background knowledge and familiarity with the political world also appears to facilitate participation, which again is often provided in the family.

Recent work on political socialization suggests that research should focus on specific models of socialization (for example a parent) and the accurate perception of these model's political orientations by the potential subject of socialization (i.e., the child) (Ojeda and Hatemi 2015). My findings, instead suggests that although a person's evaluation of their potential socializing models appears to play an important role in adoption, the milieus that these socializing agents produce and the practices they encourage are potentially more important than the acceptance or rejection of their specific messages around participation or politics. Thus, more attention needs to be given to both the aspects of the environment and the socializing agent that might encourage political socialization.

#### ***4.1.1 Socialization and the Family***

My findings particularly add to the research that has called into question the extent to which higher education impacts political participation (Berinsky and Lenz 2010; Highton 2009; Kam and Palmer 2008; Persson 2014). My research suggests that pre-adult experiences, particularly those in the family, play a more prominent role in people's paths to participation than experiences within higher education. This claim supports work by Beck and Jennings

(1982), Brady et al. (2015), and Verba et al. (2005), that argue for the importance of the role of SES family backgrounds and family political practices in supporting participation. Still my results arguably highlight a stronger role for the family than Brady et al. (2015) suggest. While they argue that the most important factor in the relationship between family SES backgrounds and political participation is attainment of high education levels, I suggest family plays a more substantial role than education in developing practices and orientations that support voting.

This important role for the family highlights the need to look more closely at the ways in which practices in the home encourage political behaviors. This means not only attending to whether parents vote or not, but also the kinds of discussions and contexts produced in the home and the evaluations of these contexts made by the children. Some work on the socialization of political identities and attitudes are starting to represent this more nuanced approach to understanding the process of family socialization related to politics. In explaining the development of political attitudes through socialization, Dinas (2014) highlights how this is not a one to one transfer of political attitudes. The extent to which parents encourage and model political participation interacts with the political environment to impact the kinds of political attitudes young people are likely to develop.

Ojeda and Hatemi (2015), provide another example of political socialization research that argues for a closer look at how socialization processes occur. They demonstrate that researchers should not only look at parent's values or practices but also at young people's perceptions of their parents. However, studies on political socialization are predominantly focused on socialization of specific political attitudes and orientations (i.e., party affiliation etc.), and less so on the socialization of political practice. The findings in this study suggest more focus should be

put on the socialization of political practices through the family, and the factors that make this socialization more or less likely.

The importance of the family in political socialization also raises questions about how the changing nature of family structures and practices might impact the transmission of political participation. If milieus and models of desirable participation help encourage political participation, decreasing stability of family structures, such as higher divorce rates, and single parent households, along with changing time allocation in families, might impact the likelihood that families produce compelling contexts of participation. Increasing financial and time constraints could create less room for political discussion, or on the other hand, families experiencing divorce and remarriage might not produce as desirable of political models, as divorce can be marked by strained relations and disrupted lives (Bianchi 2011; Gosselin et al. 2014). This could provide a partial explanation for changes in trends of participation. Alternatively, stepfamilies might provide more opportunity to be embedded in multiple family contexts with political practices because children would be exposed to more than one family context. Another future area of research might be to closer assess the ways in which changes in family structure might impact political socialization.

Yet there are also changing social and cultural contexts that families are embedded within that could impact the political talk and modeling in families. One example is the changing way that people consume media. The move to online media in the place of newspapers and cable would produce less opportunity for children to share in the experience of their parent's consumption of the news. Finally, a rise in individualistic cultural models might change the impacts of socialization in the family in that it could produce the requirement for more

compelling models to motivate participation, as pure notions of duty become less directive or convincing for behavior.

#### ***4.1.2 Education and Political Participation***

At the same time, my findings do not entirely support the claim that education is only a proxy for other factors. Instead higher education interacts with previous and subsequent experiences in people's life trajectories that relate to socio-economic status. People who voted or had past experiences with politics seem to feel they are most impacted by higher education. In terms of experiences after university, university helps sort people into professional contexts, which can also encourage political participation. I find the primary role that higher education appears to have on engagement is increasing interest and confidence around political knowledge (particularly for those already voting or primed to vote). Higher education seems to produce these outcomes most often through putting people into the social settings – i.e., in classes, groups, or professional settings – that promote political participation. Secondly the findings provide some evidence that education helps to produce cultural capital and political efficacy that can support political participation. Research skills and specific political knowledge gained from experiences in higher education can potentially assist people when they enter into contexts where political participation is encouraged. Additionally, the cultural model identified in chapter three that depicts political participation as a hobby and specialization, potentially helps to reinforces these political advantages through presenting participation as more likely the realm of the educated.

Still, the extent to which university increases knowledge and research skills is hard to parse out and represents a limitation of this study. It is difficult to determine from participant recollections the extent to which skills and knowledge were developed within higher education and which were developed previously. Also, Arum and Roksa (2011) demonstrate in their work on higher education and learning that university students tend to evaluate their gains from university higher than do tests that measure academic outcomes and changes. At the same time, as a *sense* of competence appears to be an important aspect in motivating people to engage in politics, the self assessment of increased knowledge and skills is arguably as important as explicitly measured outcomes.

These findings that suggest the impacts of higher education are somewhat dependent upon pre-existing experiences and identities of the student, support recent work on higher education that calls into question the strong impacts higher education has for all who attend in terms of substantial or dramatic changes in capacities, identities, and orientations (Arum and Roksa 2011; Gross 2013 Clydesdale 2007; Nathan 2005). Instead, similar to these studies, the findings highlight the interaction between pre-existing characteristics and interest of students and student paths and outcomes related to higher education. However, some participant's stories do highlight the important impacts of university that appear to relate to specific classes and contexts of university. This suggests we need to look closer at the ways in which different contexts, practices and disciplines in university, impact the possibilities of political engagement. One issue is the ways in which the broad environment, including the culture of the university, its mandate and reputation, as well as the municipal context it is embedded within might impact the kinds of students that attend university as well as the kinds of political practices and behaviors that are encouraged. Binder and Wood (2013) demonstrate the ways in which school contexts can help

foster a particular style of political engagement, it follows that some school contexts might foster participation more so than others. Future research on the impacts of higher education could look closer at the contextual aspect of universities and how they might impact the relationship between higher education and participation. For example, researchers could look at whether the number of political clubs and protests at a university, the reputation and mandates of the school, quality and focus of instruction, and the region universities are located within, matters for political socialization of students.

Additionally, this research suggests that specific social science and humanities classes and the related discussions, knowledge, and even identities that they foster can help to support participation. Both particular disciplines and schools that set expectations of social engagement and critical reflection might encourage political engagement more so than schools and programs that focus primarily on direct skill and credential development for specific occupations. This raises the issue of the differential impact of social sciences and humanities on political engagement as compared to sciences (Hillygus 2005). Additionally it calls attention to the kinds of teaching practices in classrooms that might foster this kind of learning (Arum and Roska 2011). Again, these findings on education although highlighting a subtler role for higher education does not suggest that higher education has no potential to affect the socialization and political practices of students but the context, programs and student orientations, that might enable this need to be given closer attention.

Finally, the key mechanisms that appear to lie behind the potential role of university and the family in encouraging political engagement are the extent to which these institutions put people into the social milieu where political participation is desirable and natural. A key aspect to stories of high participation was entering into contexts where political engagement was

encouraged, whether this was in the family, classrooms, social networks, or workplaces. This was additionally supported by the development of political background knowledge that helped people feel adept at, and comfortable with, participating. Political socialization research and research on the relationship between education and political participation tend to focus more on individual links, for example, individual parents (Ojeda and Hatemi 2015) or individual social connections that shape relationships to politics (Nie et al. 1996). My research shows that the kind of milieu that these agents produce appears to be a more important factor than specific relationships. In the family this means a family context where political participation is part of life or encouraged as an important practice. In general social contexts it appears to mean it is more important to feel that everyone engages in politics, and it is a social expectation and desirable activity, rather than having specific connections with a political interest or focus. These findings support calls from researchers who argue we need to pay more attention to larger contextual social factors in participation, such as the impacts of social networks and social contagion, and the role of social contexts (Campbell 2013; Sinclair 2012; Zuckerman 2005).

Another useful direction for research in this area would be a closer focus on the role of identity and people's identification or attachment to different social worlds in fostering both participation and the relationship between education and participation. A person's identity and the worlds that they see themselves a part of plays a story in people's paths to participation. Whether someone sees themselves as intellectual, social justice oriented, caring or whether they see themselves as immersed in, or heading towards intellectual or middle class worlds, appears to impact paths to participation or a person's reception to the political. Future research might look more closely at the ways in which identities that are understood to relate to the political world interact with socializing influences to facilitate participation.

## 4.2 CULTURAL MODELS

In Chapter 3, I focus upon the role of cultural orientations and models in mediating political participation. This chapter makes two contributions to the literature. First, the findings outline common cultural representations and understandings that participants use in relation to politics and participation. The cultural representations that citizens use in relating to politics have received limited attention in the sociological and political science literature and this work adds to our understanding of these representations. Second, it provides insight into how political orientations such as individualism might matter for political participation. Orientations such as individualism have long been thought to impact political participation, yet there is a debate in regards to the significance that individualist orientations have for the health of democracy. This chapter argues that the role individualist orientations have in impacting participation can be better illuminated with a closer look at how they are integrated into reasoning around participation.

This chapter adds to our understanding of culture and political participation by outlining some of the common representations used to think about politics and participation. It is a common claim in sociology and anthropology that cultural representations and meaning shape social action (Blumer 1969; Mead 1934; Geertz 1957; Sewell 1992; Strauss and Quinn 1997). Yet the cultural representations citizens use to think about and act in the political world has received limited attention. I sought to fill this gap. My work highlights three broad representations of politics commonly used by participants. These representations are: politics as a complex and time-consuming topic, separate from the everyday, and a distasteful world. Research that has focused on the cultural understandings related to participation has pointed to

the production and representation of politics as a distasteful or profane world (Bennett et al. 2013; Eliasoph 1998). I add two additional common representations used by participants: 1) a complex and time-consuming topic, and 2) a world that is separate from the everyday. I then use these representations found in participant's talk to inform discussions about the role of cultural orientations in mediating political participation. I argue that these representations of the political world as negative, not high stakes (or separate from the everyday) combine with expressive and utilitarian individualist models to produce weak models of participation. On the other hand civic republican models can encourage participation in spite of these common representations.

Democratic theorists and sociologists have pointed to cultures and orientations of individualism as holding potential problems for political participation and democracy (Bellah et al. 1985/2008; Howe 2010; Putnam 2000). At the same time, some challenge these concerns over individualism, arguing that expressive orientations – which overlap with individualist orientations – help support democracy (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). The discussions around the role of individualist orientations in democracy and the way in which individualist orientations might be used to decrease or increase participation takes place on the level of broad value orientations that are deemed to shape action in a similar way. Yet perspectives in sociology and anthropology highlight the heterogeneous ways in which a cultural value or meaning can matter in relation to different topics or within different contexts (DiMaggio 1997; Quinn 1996; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Strauss and Quinn 1997; Sewell 1999; Swidler 2001). Drawing on this perspective, I seek to contribute to this debate by examining how individualist orientations and more duty-based orientations might matter for political participation. I argue that to understand how individualist orientations matter, we need to look at how these assumptions are integrated into specific cultural models that people use to reason about political participation.

I investigated how young people integrated republican and individualist orientations into their models of political participation, and identified individualist models that drew from both expressive individualist and utilitarian individualist assumptions. The findings suggest that individualist orientations are more often integrated into models that justify distance from political participation. Additionally, models that are based most prominently in expressive individualist reasoning appear to be the most detrimental to political engagement and potentially help to encourage unequal participation. At the same time, I suggest expressive individualist ideas or values can be integrated into models that support political participation but this appears to be when they are combined with civic orientations that highlight responsibilities around political participation. This is very much in line with de Tocqueville's original conception of the cultural underpinnings of democracy: that a healthy democracy is both based in values of individualism and freedom, but also, a focus on dedication and responsibility towards a public sphere.

This work then supports that of Bellah et al. (1985/2008) and Howe (2010) in their contention that forms of individualism, which highlight self-direction and expression over responsibility to a larger community, can undermine participation. Yet my research helps to sharpen these arguments by clarifying how these individualist orientations are integrated, or not, into reasoning about non-participation and participation. I do this by extending our understanding of the cultural models people use for participation and how they might matter. Useful future directions of research would be to analyze and compare cultural models across cultures, age groups, and countries to increase our understanding of how these cultural models might be used and might matter for different groups and in different contexts of participation. Are there other prominent cultural representations around politics and participation in countries

where participation levels of young people are higher, if so, how do these prominent models differ to the ones in this study? How do older generations that tend to vote at higher rates use cultural models to reason about participation? Future studies in these areas would help to further illuminate the role of cultural models in participation.

#### 4.3 FINAL REFLECTIONS

Taken together, chapter one and chapter two contribute to our understanding of how education, SES backgrounds, and self and social perceptions impact political participation. In these chapters I argue that political participation is produced as a natural and desirable world for some more than others. This happens through life experiences that provide the habits, skills, and identities that help people engage with the world of politics and also through cultural conceptions that present the activities as more the realm of some – those with the habits and tastes for politics. Bourdieu’s concepts of the habitus and cultural capital provide a useful framework through which to understand the social and cultural processes raised in chapters one and two.

In chapter one I highlight the way political participation is produced as more natural and desirable for those immersed in the family, social, and workplace environments that provide the resources and affinities for political engagement. This creates what can be depicted as a habitus that supports participation, where the skills, habits and dispositions that facilitate political participation are fostered in overlapping social contexts a person is immersed in and seeks out throughout the life-course. These dispositions do not necessarily equate to a love of politics, but foster the convictions and practices that produce it as a worthwhile, common, and accessible activity. The different opportunities for the development of cultural capital or the affinities and capacities that support participation are more available for higher SES groups not only in

university but before they enter universities as educated parents and higher SES schools and friendship groups are more likely to provide these contexts where political participation is encouraged. At the same time, although these habits and dispositions are more likely fostered in higher SES backgrounds they are not limited to them, and the overlapping political influences, experiences, and identities that support this activity are available to people from various SES backgrounds.

Capturing the cultural understandings around participation provides insight on how this relationship can be further exacerbated by a prominent cultural model. A cultural model that depicts political participation as an interest and specialization appears to be a common frame people use to understand participation. This frame presents people that develop these dispositions for participation as those who will reasonably specialize in political participation, while others can leave participation to them. In this sense, this model of participation helps to further create the reality of a political habitus, developed by some and not others throughout the life course, and recognized as more expected from some people than others. This frame has the potential to further encourage the relationship between political participation and SES backgrounds because people in these backgrounds will more likely experience the social contexts that help produce these practices, self-concepts, and affinities related to political participation. In particular, this model could further contribute to the relationship of education to political participation, as higher education provides an important venue to become interested in politics and to build the perception that one has the confidence to engage with the complex world of politics.

In this way, cultural models of interest help to further produce politics as an activity for those with the dispositions, self-concepts and habits for participation that are more likely to be

developed in higher SES backgrounds. Additionally, practices of political participation are understood in North America to be associated with, or more expected from, people in these backgrounds. Participants themselves at times directly associated political engagement with middle class and educated worlds. Therefore, if increasing expressive individualist orientations help strengthen a politics as an interest model, it would presumably help to increase this relationship between SES, higher education, and political participation. Therefore there are potentially two countervailing forces in the impacts of higher education on participation, one where contexts of university are argued by some to be weakening venues for the kind of student learning that might encourage participation (Arum and Roska 2011; Nathan 2005) and on the other hand, individualist cultural models may be growing in strength that help to produce political participation as a more obvious activity for those that are educated. An interesting research direction would be to look at whether the strength between education or SES and political participation increases in places where expressive individualism and cultural models of interest and specialization are strong. There is evidence in Canada to suggest that the relationship between education levels and political participation is stronger for younger generations (who tend to have stronger individualist orientations) than older generations (Howe 2010; Turcotte 2015a)

Political engagement in Canada, like many other western countries is low and it is unequal in relation to age and SES. By analyzing both the life paths underlying political participation and the cultural models young people use to reason about participation, this research contributes to our understanding of the ways in which young people relate to politics, and why some groups are more likely to engage than others. One issue that this research raises is that political participation is relegated to optional areas of life, where political socialization is

largely left up to families, or elective groups and courses, and politics itself is seen as separate from the everyday. An important direction in political participation research and policy would be to think about the ways in which political skills and affinities could be produced as a part of everyday life and what impacts that might have on both who participates and the cultural models people have around political participation.

Beyond political participation, in this thesis I engage with larger discussions in arguing for a middle road, or nuanced understanding, of the role of culture and socialization in shaping behavior and thought. In my research I demonstrate the way in which socialization has important impacts on behavior and at the same time, how individuals engage differently with some of these political social influences, depending on past experiences, their own identities, and evaluations related to the context. This highlights how we can think of socialization processes as both acting on people, and in turn, how individuals act on the socialization processes. It emphasizes that although contexts can matter in important ways, a context does not simply act on a person but the impacts of a context are dependent on existing orientations and identities with which that person enters the context. In this way, my research complements perspectives that focus on the two-way interaction between individual and socialization and how past experiences interact with new contexts (Strauss and Quinn 1997; Ojeda and Hatemi 2016). Similarly, in my depiction of the role of culture in political participation, I demonstrate the value or productivity of taking a perspective that incorporates the view that culture both can impact the way we see and act in the world across contexts, and how culture can matter in different ways depending on the associations it has been learned with (which can be contexts or topics). Through attempting to capture the interaction of individual and context, larger cultural orientations and how they might

combine with more specific associations to impact action, I hope to contribute to discussions of culture that try to better understand both its contextual and internalized aspects.

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## Appendix A: Categories of Participation

### Levels of paying attention:

**High paying attention:** Paying attention to political news at least once a week for more than half of the defined time period. Protested three times or more

**Intermittent paying attention:** Paying attention to news on politics only around election time, very sporadically or not of ones own choice; or regularly paying attention to political news for 2 years or less of the time period.

**Low paying attention:** Participants report that they do not pay any attention to political news.

### Voting

**High** – Voted in three or more elections in one time period (If they were out of country for one or more elections per time period and they indicate they were voting at this time, I lower the criteria for the high voting category by one, i.e. if they voted in two elections during this time period I count them as in the high voting category.)

**Intermittent**– Voted in one or two elections in one time period

**Low** – None

### Protesting

**High** – Participated in 3 or more protests in the time period

**Intermittent**- Participated in 2 protests in the time period

**Low** – Participated in one or less protests in the time period

### Categories of Engagement

**High Engagement:** High voting/ High paying attention

**Mid Engagement:** High voting/No paying attention; No voting/ High paying attention; Intermittent voting/ Intermittent paying attention; High voting intermittent paying attention; High paying attention/intermittent voting

**Low Engagement:** Intermittent participation/no paying attention; Intermittent paying attention/no participation; No participation/ No paying attention.

### **Elections in each time period**

#### Time Period 1: 2004-2008

2004- 1 federal – only some were old enough to vote

2005- 1 provincial, 1 municipal

2006- 1 federal

2008 –1 federal, 1 municipal

#### Time Period 2 2009-2014

2009- 1 Provincial

2011- 1 Municipal, 1 Federal

2013- 1 Provincial

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

*Interviewer ~ I would like to start off by hearing a bit about you.*

1. Can you tell me a bit about the things in your life that you enjoy doing?
2. And the things that you feel you need to spend time doing?

*I: OK, thanks. Well, as I said when I set up this interview, my main focus today is politics, which I know that some people are into, and other people aren't. I want to start off by asking you a couple general questions about politics and citizenship.*

3. All in all, do you think things in Canada are generally headed in the right direction, or do you feel that things are off on the wrong track? Why?
4. When we talk about democracy and the rights and responsibilities of a Canadian, the word citizenship often comes up. Can you tell me what being a Canadian citizen means to you? What makes a good Citizen?

*Interviewer ~ OK, terrific. Now for the next phase of the interview I'd like to ask questions about some of your life experiences and activities. To help you remember the timing and details of some of your experiences we are going to use this calendar. You will see at the bottom of the calendar a timeline of events that have happened in North America. These might provide additional help in remembering particular timing of events in your own life. To begin, can you mark on the calendar the different places you have lived since 2000? Please put an x under the time that you first lived in a City with a line spanning the time until you left*

**The next section is conducted with the life history calendar. These are semi-structured questions attempting to elicit narratives and explanations around life experiences that people identify on the calendar.**

### **\*TIMELINE AND NARRATIVE OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

#### **City/Town of Residence**

#### **School**

Next, can I ask you to mark on the calendar what schools that you have attended and when, starting from grade 7.

Can you tell me a bit about your high school experience and whether you enjoyed it? What were your main interests in high school? Did you get good grades or were you not that interested in school? Did you take any courses that required community or volunteer work in high school? Did you take any courses in high school where you learned about politics or current events? Did you consider continuing on to university?

(If continued after high school) What was the program, certificate or degree? Why did you go into that? Do you feel that attending university had any impacts on you? What if any, are the most important things you learned there? Did you ever take any Social Science courses in university?

Can you remember any classes in high school that helped interest you in politics or made it easier to understand politics? Can you mark this course on the timeline? Can you remember any class in university/college that helped interest you in politics or made it easier to understand politics?

## **Work**

Can you mark down on the calendar any jobs that you have had for longer than 6 months or any jobs that had a significant impact on you? Were you ever part of a union or professional group as part of your employment?

## **Organizational activity**

What about any organizations that you have actively participated in, for example clubs that you joined or organizations you volunteered with? Can you mark on the calendar any organization you have participated in and the times you were involved in the organizations. What was your main role or activity in the organization? Was there any particular organizational experience that had a big impact on you? *\*Interviewer, ask why and how they became involved in the first one or two organizations.*

## **Political Engagement**

I: Now I would like to ask you about your own political experiences and activities. Before I ask about some specific political activities I am wondering if you can tell me a bit about your own story related to politics. Did you ever start paying attention to politics or were you never really that interested?

*Probe for people that engage*– When did you start to engage in politics? Why do you think you started? Was there a time in life where your engagement really increased or something that really drew you to pay attention to politics?

*Probe for people not interested* – Can you explain at all why you think you were just never that into politics? Can you think of a memory of a political event that you might have good or bad such as an election, revolution, a politician dying or a political scandal?

*Pointing to Life History Calendar:* Below are a number of politically related activities, some people will have done a number of these activities and others will have not done any. Can you tell me whether you have done any of the following things?

*Interviewer, if participant reports doing an activity then ask them to mark on the calendar when they started doing this activity and when if ever they stopped doing this activity? Also ask: “could you say something about what you did specifically?” “What led you to get into that?”.*

Read, watched or listened to news on politics or public affairs more than once a week.  
Discussed what was happening in politics and public affairs  
Voted in an election (if ever voted ask about details of voting in each federal election)  
Contacted a politician or local government official  
Participated in a protest  
Joined a political party  
Donated to a political campaign  
Participated in political campaigns on the internet (posting political information on Facebook or twitter)  
Any other political activities that you engaged in

## **Relationships connected to engagement**

*I: What about your family and friends? In any time throughout your life were you aware of family members, friends, coworkers or anyone else important in your life voting or engaging in politics? How about your parents did they ever talk about politics or current events or anything like that? How about your friends, were any of your friends, interested in politics when you were growing up, did they ever talk politics around you? What are some things your friends were more likely to talk about?*

*I: Can you remember any times in life where a friend, family member, teacher or anyone else encouraged you to participate in any political activity such as voting, campaigning or writing a letter?*

I have asked you some fairly specific question about some of your background is there anything we did not touch on in terms of your life experiences or interests that is an important part of who you are or way that you think of yourself?

### **\*\*End of life history calendar**

*I: Now I would like to ask you a few questions on your own interests and priorities in life*

9. When you think about a good or fulfilling life what is important to you personally?

10. Do you think politics affects the things you care about? Why or why not?

10B. Do you think whether a particular party is in power affects the things you care about? Why, or why not?

### ***People who do not seem to be that engaged in politics***

*I: I really appreciate what you are telling me, and that you are not that interested in politics and I think many people share the same views as you. So for the next few questions I just want to get your own perspective on the people who do participate and the people who do not.*

### ***People who do seem engaged***

*I: It seems that you are fairly engaged in politics and so for the next few questions I just would like to hear your perspective on why people might or might not participate.*

11. If you look at reported levels of voting, the rates of voting in Canada are just not that high. What do you think explains this?

11B. Why do you think some people vote?

12. Some people like to follow politics and current events others are not that interested. Why do you think some people like to follow politics and current affairs?

12. Why do you think some are not that interested?

13. Some people think that everyone should participate and pay attention to politics, others argue that there are a lot of demands on our time so it is not realistic for everyone to participate. What do you think?

14. For the next question I want you to take this piece of paper and jot down all the things that come to mind when I say a word. There are no right or wrong responses to these words, I simply want to hear what comes to your own mind when hearing these words:

Politics

Politicians

Democracy

Protesting

*Interviewer, ask respondent to explain words that they jotted down.*

15. I am going to read some statements and I want you to tell me which one you agree with most and why?

A. I avoid getting into political discussions OR  
I enjoy discussing politics

B. I trust the government to do what is right most of the time OR  
I rarely trust the government to do what is right?

C. It is my choice to vote OR  
It is my duty to vote

D. If I am concerned about a government action there are things I can do to have my concerns heard OR  
If I am concerned about a government action there is not much I can do about it.

16. What makes a good democracy in your mind?

# Appendix C: Life History Calendar

Life History Calendar

Age	Childhood	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Year	NA	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
City/ Town	When	NA														
	Where	NA														
School	When	NA														
	Where	NA														
	Course	NA														
	Learn	NA														
Work	When	NA														
	Occupation															
Organization Club	When															
	What															
Volunteer	News															
	Discuss															
Political Engagement	Vote															
	Contact															
	Protest															
	Join party															
	Donate															
	Internet															
	Other															
	Other															
People/ recruitment Timeline	When															
	Who/what															
		1999 WTO Seattle Protest	2001 9/11 attack			2004 Fed. election Liberals (Paul Martin) won minority; conservatives (Steven Harper) in opposition		2006 Fed. election Conservatives won minority; Liberals- (Paul Martin) in opposition		2008 Fed. Election Conservatives won minority; Liberals- (Steven Dion) in opposition			2011 Fed. Election Conservatives won a majority; NDP (Jack Layton) in opposition			

Interview code number \_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Survey

**1. Are you presently married, living with a partner, divorced, separated, widowed, or have you never been married?**

- 1. Married
- 2. Living with a partner
- 3. Divorced
- 4. Separated
- 5. Widowed
- 6. Never married

**2. Do you have any children?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

**3. Was English or French the primary language around the house when you were a child?**

- 1. Yes (English or French was the primary language)
- 2. No

**4. People in Canada come from many racial or cultural groups. You may belong to more than one group on the following list. Are you...**

- 1. White?
- 2. Chinese?
- 3. South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)?
- 4. First Nation
- 5. Black?
- 6. Filipino?
- 7. Latin American?
- 8. Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Malaysian, Laotian, etc.)?
- 9. West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.)?
- 10. Korean
- 11. Japanese?
- 12. Another group? (specify)

**5. What, if any, is your religion?**

- 0. No religion (Agnostic, Atheist)
- 1. Roman Catholic
- 2. Ukrainian Catholic
- 3. United Church
- 4. Anglican
- 5. Baptist
- 6. Lutheran
- 7. Pentecostal
- 8. Presbyterian
- 8. Presbyterian
- 9. Mennonite
- 10. Jehovah's Witness
- 11. Greek Orthodox
- 12. Jewish
- 13. Islam (Muslim)
- 14. Buddhist
- 15. Hindu
- 16. Sikh
- 17. Other— Specify \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Not counting events such as weddings or funerals, during the past 12 months, how often did you participate in religious activities or attend religious services or meetings?**

- 1. At least once a week
- 2. At least once a month
- 3. At least 3 times a year
- 4. Once or twice a year
- 5. Not at all

**7. In an average week about how many hours do you work for pay or in self-employment?**

Hours per week \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Think about the provincial elections since you were old enough to vote. In how many provincial elections did you vote?**

- 1. None (Never)
- 2. One election (Occasionally)
- 3. Two elections (Almost always)
- 4. Three elections (Always)

**9. Think about municipal elections since you were old enough to vote. In how many municipal elections did you vote?**

- 1. None (Never)
- 2. One election (Occasionally)
- 3. Two elections (Almost Always)
- 4. Three elections (Always)

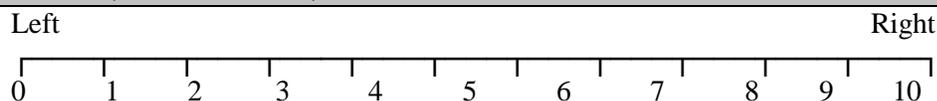
**10. How often would you say you discuss politics and current affairs? Would you say....**

- 1. Every day
- 2. Several times a week
- 3. Once a week
- 4. Several times a month
- 5. Once a month
- 6. Less often
- 7. Never

**11. Can you tell me which party has the SECOND largest number of seats in the House of Commons?**

- 1. The Conservatives
- 2. The Liberals
- 3. The Bloc Quebecois
- 4. The NDP
- 5. Don't Know

**12. In politics, people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on the scale below? (circle a number)**



**13. Below are a number of statements about politics and your community. For each one, please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement. Circle the number that is most appropriate.**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country	1	2	3	4	5
2. Sometime politics is so complicated I can't understand what is going on	1	2	3	4	5
3. Government officials don't care much what people like me think	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have a strong sense of belonging to my community	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have a strong sense of belonging to my country	1	2	3	4	5

**14. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?**

- 1. Most people can be trusted
- 2. You can't be too careful when dealing with people

**15. As far as you know do your parents regularly vote?**

- 1. Yes they regularly vote
- 2. No, they do not regularly vote
- 3. Don't know

**16. When you were sixteen, how active were the parents you lived with in politics or in the affairs of the community?**

- 1 Very active
- 2. Somewhat active
- 3. Not at all active
- 4. Don't Know/ Don't Remember

**17. When you were growing up, let's say when you were around sixteen, how much influence do you remember having in family decisions affecting you? Did you have a lot of influence, some influence, or none at all?**

- 1. A lot of influence
- 2. Some influence
- 3. None at all

**18. Would you say that when you were growing up, your family was...**

- 1. Financially well off?
- 2. Fairly well off?
- 3. Neither well off nor had financial difficulties?
- 4. Had some financial difficulties?
- 5. Had a lot of financial difficulties?

**19. What were the main occupations of the parents you lived with growing up?**

Parent 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent 4: \_\_\_\_\_

**20. What is the highest level of education that your mother has attained? By mother, we mean the woman who mostly raised you.**

- 1. No high school
- 2. Some high school
- 3. High school
- 4. Some college, trade, or technical school
- 5. Some university
- 6. Diploma or certificate from college, trade, or technical school
- 7. Bachelor or undergraduate degree, law degree, or teacher's college (B.A., B.Sc., L.L.B., B.Ed)
- 8. Degree in Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine, or Optometry (M.D., D.D.S., D.M.D., D.V.M., O.D.)
- 9. Masters degree
- 10. Doctorate

**21. What was the highest level of education your father has attained? By father we mean the man who raised you.**

- 1. No high school
- 2. Some high school
- 3. High school
- 4. Some college, trade, or technical school
- 5. Some university
- 6. Diploma or certificate from college, trade, or technical school
- 7. Bachelor or undergraduate degree, or law degree, or teacher's college (B.A., B.Sc., L.L.B., B.Ed)
- 8. Degree in Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine, or Optometry (M.D., D.D.S., D.M.D., D.V.M., O.D.)
- 9. Masters degree
- 10. Doctorate

**22. Did you have any siblings growing up?**

- Yes (Go to (22B))  No (Skip to 23)

**22B. If you have siblings older than 21, using the categories from the above question, what is the level of education your siblings attained?**

Sibling 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**23. What is your best estimate of your total income from all sources of income before taxes and deductions, during the year ending in December, 31, 2013?**

- |                                             |                                                |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. 0- 9, 999       | <input type="checkbox"/> 7. 60, 000-69, 999    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. 10, 000-19,999  | <input type="checkbox"/> 8. 70,000-79,999      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. 20, 000-29,999  | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. 80, 000-89,999     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. 30, 000- 39,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. 90,000-99,999     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. 40,000- 49,9999 | <input type="checkbox"/> 11. 100,000-149,999   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. 50,000 -59,999  | <input type="checkbox"/> 12. 150,000 and above |

**Thank you for your participation and your time!**

**24. Are you willing to be contacted again if the researcher needs to ask a few follow up questions?**

1. Yes  2. No