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'People Try to Put Us Down …': Participatory Citizenship of 'Generation X'

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This article evaluates the participatory citizenship of Australian young people. Its argument is that in the utilisation of empirical research 'contemporary citizenship needs to recognise what people actually do' (R. Prokhovnik, *Feminist Review* 60(2) 1998: 95). For this research, an alternative approach to the exploration of participation has been developed which questions the traditional, institutionalised measures of political participation and/or notions of civic engagement that do not look at a broad range of individual and organisational experiences. The article is based on a survey of 18–34-year-old Australians conducted via telephone, by Newspoll Market Research, in early 2001. The article shows that rather than 'Generation X' having homogeneous (or even negligible) participatory experiences, four distinct participatory typologies emerge. These four typologies are labelled as Activist, Communitarian, Party and Individualistic to reflect the clustered modes of participation. The article also explores the relationships between participation and the discussion of political and social issues.

If you had to stereotype Gen Xers as political beings you could say: they want more power and influence than any generation before them; they get frustrated when they can't control their future the way they'd like to; they are pragmatic; they want a government that's workable and gets points on the board; they are not overly satisfied with major political parties; they are attracted to 'symbolic' issues such as reconciliation, the republic and the environment; and they are very sceptical. (Hill 2001)

X-ers have an extremely personal and individualistic view of politics. They came of age in an era that celebrated personal goods and private initiative over shared public concerns. Unlike boomers, who were once engaged, X-ers have never made the connection to politics, so they emphasise the personal and private over the public and collective. (Putnam 2000, 259)

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Introduction

Much of the existing literature on Australian young people's engagement with politics can be criticised for its lack of relevance in accounting for how young people actually practise participation. Newspaper reports are full of clichés about the individualism, the materialism, the apathy and the cynicism that drives the political and social values held by 'Generation X', as seen in the Hill quote above. Generational warfare is emphasised regularly in newspaper debates. When, early in 2002, the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran a week's worth of features on the 'Baby Boomer' generation, the heated responses from 'Generation X' members were based on the need for reclamation and reformation of Australia's political, social and cultural landscape (see Heath 2002; Moore 2002; Robertson 2002). This is not a peculiarly Australian debate: Robert Putnam's (2000) *Bowling Alone* thesis on the decline of civic engagement and participation in the United States also uses generational comparisons and accusations.

In the more institutionalised arena, Australian policy makers regularly announce the need for younger generations to be included in Australia's political culture by enshrining new public policy practices, such as compulsory civics education. For example, David Kemp, then federal Education Minister, declared that Australian students definitely need to know more about civics and citizenship because Australia performed poorly in an international, comparative study of the civic knowledge and engagement of 14 year olds (Kemp 2001). Correspondingly, the federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, has publicly stressed the merits in volunteering and development of a shared notion of 'community':

> This is something outside Government. We have to celebrate individuals, individuals doing something they want to, which together creates community, practical hands-on, on the ground, community. This is the way to recover a little of what we feel might be lacking:—people who are friendly, neighbours who know each other, individuals that share experience together. (Costello 2001)

What we see through these two examples is the dual valorisation of civics education and voluntarism in the creation of the virtuous, knowledgeable, active citizen. However, in public debate there is simultaneously an 'othering' of alternative forms of participation, principally activism, as not being acceptable citizenship activity. This has been seen particularly with the recent reportage of anti-globalisation and anti-corporate globalisation protest activity (eg Wood 2001). What needs to be pointed out and unpacked is that the prescriptive visions provided by the Howard government (as an example) provide limited scope for either the recognition of existing means of participation and engagement, or the opening up of public debate on how active, public involvement by young people ought to be facilitated.

This article approaches this quandary from an alternative angle by enumerating the reality of young people's participation through asking them broadly about their everyday political experiences and commitments, rather than relying on the measurement of whether they fit into predetermined expectations of what a politically active citizen is. I am interested in reflecting the diversity of participatory experiences young people have rather than being the moral arbiter of prioritised and publicly acceptable citizenship practices.

Another facet of this research approach is the attempt to recognise the agency young Australians have in shaping both their own lives and their interaction with

social and political institutions. Ruth Lister (1997, 36) has pointed out that when we construe citizenship as participation it 'represents an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents'. The recognition of individual agency is therefore integral to the recognition of the variety of participatory experiences that individuals can and do have. However, the concept of citizenship used here is dependent on a connection between *status*, relating to individual rights and socio-economic position, and *practice*, which refers to the participation undertaken to achieve those rights for the benefit of broader society (Lister 1997, 36–41). This understanding of citizenship places political participation, the lives and agency of political participants, and the structures within which participants operate, as the interdependent points of analysis.

It is through the knowledge of current practice that we can both realise a new understanding of how young people practise participation *and* implement policy which facilitates active participation in areas of relevance to the lives of young people. The broader contribution could be to existing debates on conceptualising the role of the active citizen in the policy-making process and to our understanding of current Australian civil society processes.

Existing Literature

There are two major criticisms to be made of the existing literature on the political behaviour and political participation of Australian young people, and both relate to a narrow conceptualisation of the political views and experiences of young people.

First, it is common for Australian political behaviour research to reiterate 'findings' that young people are apathetic, disinterested in and not very knowledgeable about formal political processes. This has been seen in three federal government reports in the last 10–15 years (Civics Expert Group 1993; SSCEET 1988, 1991) and in academic research (Lean 1996; McAllister 1998; Vromen 1995). For many researchers, these sorts of findings lead to a view that young people have not been successfully socialised into Australia's political culture and thus they need to learn more about politics. As a result, there have been proposals for the institutionalisation of compulsory political, civic or citizenship education into the secondary school curriculum (see, for example, Civics Expert Group 1993; Bereson and McDonald 1997; Krinks 1998).

This way of conceptualising young people's political understanding and practice makes a particular assumption: that is, it is good for citizens to know more about Australia's formal system of government and that this knowledge would probably be a counter to young citizens' feelings of apathy, cynicism and so on. There have been fewer explorations in Australian research of the qualitative foundations of cynicism towards institutional politics, or even how to stimulate interest in politics and participation. Instead, there is the assumption that if individuals are provided with more information then they are then guaranteed to become more enthusiastic about politics and will want to participate and become 'good', 'active' citizens.

There has been, however, research that has demonstrated that young people *are* interested in particular political issues, such as reconciliation, the republic and the environment (Beresford and Phillips 1997). Research on political participation ought to be inclusive of participation undertaken around the issues that we already know young people to be interested in. This reconsideration of how political

activity is conceptualised could lead to the inclusion of the community, campaigning and protest activities which often occur beyond formal and electoral politics (see, for example, Roker, Player and Coleman 1999; Storrie 1997). This would also offset Australian political science's reluctance to move beyond formal political institutions in the empirical exploration of political participation (Bean 1989; McAllister 1992, 1997). Internationally, mainstream political behaviour research has been criticised for its lack of engagement with political involvement in community-based or protest movements, and its unchanging reliance on institutional measures of participation (Dunleavy 1996, 290). Australian political science has been especially criticised for not looking at the 'third sector' as a potential arena for political action or individual political participation (Lyons 2001, 205).

Second, there is little research in Australia that has looked at young people as citizens and chosen to move beyond the 'good citizen' rhetoric seen particularly in the Civics Expert Group (1993) report. When citizenship practice is examined, there is a tendency to rely on the value of volunteering, and associated processes involved in the generating of social capital, as preferable participatory and/or community-based activities (see Smart, Sanson, da Silva and Toumbourou 2000). Some UK-based research has started to look at how young people's status as citizens is structurally determined and how, within this, they exhibit agency and work to create new practices and, in some cases, new political identities (France 1998). In this instance, research is attempting to start from the premise of young people's everyday lives—their actual experiences—to formulate understandings of participatory citizenship. The challenge being formulated is that participation need not only be recognised when young people conform to society's expectations. In this approach, it is necessary to stress a version of 'active citizenship' which is inclusive of the interdependence in social and political participation experiences, and not restricted to activity that maintains the institutionalised status quo.

My research engages with a discussion on the reconstruction of the active citizen, and young people's civic identity in particular, that is under way in other nations (see Yates and Younnis 1999). There are two main arguments being made in international research about political participation that can be usefully applied to the Australian context. These are, first, that there is a potential for the activities and processes that appeal to new generations of political actors to be unrecognised in mainstream research. Hackett (1997) has argued for the recognition of 'new arenas' of political participation by young people, chiefly through observation of their active involvement in the community sector and in voluntary work. Others have chosen to explore attitudes towards citizenship practice (Jonsson and Flanagan 2000; Smart, Sanson, da Silva and Toumbourou 2000) and active involvement in community and campaigning/protest activities (Roker, Player and Coleman 1999) in the attempt to reconceptualise young people's political practice. Second, there is existing research that argues that a changed social and economic climate inevitably affects the activities of this new generation of political actors. This also broadly links with arguments about trust and/or disregard for existing institutional forms (Kimberlee 2002; Wallace 2001; Wilkinson and Mulgan 1995). These studies are all broader in their approach to political participation by young people than the existing Australian political participation literature, and thus have been an important basis for my research.

In summary, participation need not be bifurcated into acts that are labelled 'political' and those that are not; rather, participation can be seen broadly as acts

that can occur, either individually or collectively, that are intrinsically concerned with shaping the society that we want to live in. This kind of approach necessarily sees political institutions, and actions aimed at shaping those institutions, as embedded in broader societal processes.

Method

Much consideration was given to the methodological approach to be utilised in this research. Epistemologically, I see this work contributing to a post-positivist paradigm shift (Crotty 1998, 5, 29–41) in political behaviour research, as advocated by Patrick Dunleavy (1996). Dunleavy (1996) argues that methodological pluralism, disaggregation of data and an experiential approach need to be included in research undertaken on political behaviour. Most Australian research on political behaviour generally, and on participation in particular, has been reluctant to move beyond the application of standardised questionnaires. There exists very little work that integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches in reaching an understanding of political behaviour. Some researchers make epistemological claims in justification of their quantitative approach and thus present quantitative and qualitative research approaches as oppositional binaries. For example, Murray Goot (2002, 11–12), in his recent work on political trust, dismissed work based on in-depth interviews and group discussion because of its lack of generalisability to a broader population. In constructing this research, I did make a choice in favour of quantitative, generalisable breadth over qualitative depth of analysis, so as to be able to locate patterns apparent in the population. However, we cannot achieve a complex and well-rounded understanding of participation without *also* looking at the qualitative and contextual dimensions to participatory practice[1] (see Bryman 1998). In the conclusion to this article I explore possibilities for extending this research, with the intent of developing a multifaceted understanding of the participatory citizenship of young Australians.

While I have not adopted Dunleavy's (1996) call for methodological pluralism, I have addressed his request for disaggregation by looking for divergent patterns, within the age group being studied, rather than stressing homogeneous patterns of participation. I have also adopted an experiential approach to participation rather than focusing on the standard, institutionalised measures of participation. My post-positivist position is apparent primarily in my reluctance to apply commonly used, complex statistical tests that ought to be reserved for fully numeric data. I have instead relied mainly on cross-tabulation, measures of association and simple comparisons of averages.

This paper is based on a survey of a broadly representative sample of 287 18–34-year-old Australians[2] conducted via telephone by Newspoll Market Research in April 2001. Respondents were selected by the application of a stratified random sample process which included: a quota set for each Australian capital city and non-capital city area, a quota for each telephone area code within each of these

[1] I also undertook a more in-depth, small-scale study with young environmental activists, using the same questionnaire with the addition of open-ended questions, but reporting on this is beyond the scope of this article.

[2] This age group was selected as the closest approximation to 'Generation X'; furthermore, there were ethical dilemmas in interviewing young people under 18.

Table 1. Demographics of the sample

Measure	%
Sex	
Male	52
Female	48
Individual work status	
Full-time	55
Part-time	21
No work	24
Household occupation status	
White-collar	53
Blue-collar	47
Household income	
< $30,000	21
$30,000– < $50,000	20
$50,000– < $70,000	18
$70,000 +	24
Refused	17
Age	
18–24	35
25–29	25
30–34	40
Education level	
Some school	24
Completed high school	25
Post-schooling	51
Location	
City	66
Region/rural	34
Language spoken at home	
English-speaking background	87
Non-English-speaking background	13

Note:
'Education level' and 'Language spoken at home' were the main additional demographic measures requested by the author. The other measures are those commonly used by Newspoll.

areas; random selection of household telephone numbers which were drawn from current telephone listings for each area code; and random selection of an individual in each household by screening questions requesting the resident individual who last had a birthday. The demographics of the sample are displayed in Table 1.

I developed the questionnaire topics so as to reflect upon an extensive and broad ranging list of participatory experiences. These included the following five different types of activities, which are examined in more detail throughout this article:

1. Standard individualised measures of participation, such as donating money and contacting officials.
2. Party and union involvements.
3. Community-based organisational involvement, including church organisations and parents' and citizens' groups.[3]

[3] These activities are often also referred to as associational involvements (see Putnam 2000, 48–64; Pusey 2000) but, as with every categorisation, the boundaries are indistinct. I prefer to use the term 'community'.

4. Collective-action involvements, such as environmental groups.
5. Frequency of discussion of a range of social and political topics.

It is important to point out here that this questionnaire did not ask individuals to estimate the amount of time that they had spent participating in any of the participatory activities or groups.[4] This was judged as too complicated and temporally dependent for a one-off interview. This kind of information can only really be collected through time-use diaries, preferably in a longitudinal panel study. I was also more interested in elaborating on the *range* of, and relationships between, participatory activities undertaken by individuals than in calculating exact time spent on different participatory acts.

Furthermore, this study sought only to measure the *behaviour* of individuals and not attitudes. Again, this decision was made due to the format of the interview, and a highly structured questionnaire was not judged an appropriate way to obtain individual attitudes towards participation. If attitudes are to be obtained accurately then a qualitative dimension needs to be added to the study, so the necessarily open-ended question of 'why?' can be responded to comprehensively.

Conceptual Participation Types

The first point to be made is that nearly all (282/284) of the research participants have engaged in at least one of the 19 participatory acts at some point in time. I recoded the 19 acts of participation into a binary yes/no response to calculate the number of participatory involvements each respondent has had. These range from 0 to 17, with a median of five acts of participation. Tables 2–5 show the proportion of the sample who have engaged in each participatory act. Also included in the tables, for comparative purposes, is the proportion of those who have ever engaged in five or fewer participatory acts, from here on labelled 'low participants', along with those who have participated in 6–17 participatory acts, henceforth labelled as 'high participants'. These categorisations have been used in an introductory way to be able to obtain an understanding of the range and number of participatory acts individuals have chosen to be involved in. That is, what this is measuring is the number of acts an individual has felt comfortable participating in at some time. However, it is not a primary interest of this paper to answer 'how much' participation individuals engage in; rather, I am more interested in the patterns of participation, or combinations of participatory acts that are apparent in this sample.

The main patterns of note in Table 2 are that a majority of respondents have at some point undertaken the most individualised and least institutionalised of the participatory acts: donating, volunteering and boycotting. As the acts become more institutionalised (contacting officials) or more collectively oriented (rallies), the proportion of the sample who have ever participated in these acts drops to less than a quarter. In terms of the differences between the high and low participants, the largest difference (48%) is in choosing to boycott products. This finding on boycotting has not been similarly reported in previous Australian research, though Roker, Player and Coleman (1999, 188) report a similar result with young people

[4] For estimation of hours spent by Australians on volunteer work, using Australian Bureau of Statistics data, see Ironmonger (2000) and Wilkinson and Bittman (2002).

Table 2. Individualised political participation choices (%)

	Several times	Once or twice	Never
Made a donation	71 [64, 79]	25 [28, 21]	4 [8, 0]
Volunteered time	36 [28, 48]	31 [25, 38]	33 [47, 14]
Boycotted products	30 [16, 45]	27 [18, 37]	43 [66, 18]
Contacted an elected official	7 [2, 12]	18 [9, 29]	75 [89, 59]
Attended rally or march	4 [1, 8]	15 [4, 28]	81 [95, 64]

Note:
The first figure in each column is the result for the sample overall. It is followed in square brackets by the result for 'low participants' and 'high participants', respectively.

in the United Kingdom. It is possible that the willingness to use consumer power, such as through boycotts, may be both particular to the current political and economic climate, and/or to this particular generation of political actors.

Strength of association tests were run between the dependent variables of the five individualised acts of participation and the eight independent demographic variables listed in Table 1. Those with post-school education are more likely to have boycotted a product over a political issue; and those who have not completed high school are significantly less likely to have participated in rallies and demonstrations. Participation in rallies and demonstrations is also significantly affected by where people live, with city dwellers much more likely than their counterparts in regional or rural Australia to have attended one. These relationships between level of education and geographical location are not surprising, as other researchers have long tended to see protest activity as the preserve of the urban, educated sections of the population (Offe 1985, 856–9).

Table 3 looks at institutionalised forms of participation associated with political parties and unions. The table shows that participation based around political parties is undertaken by very few younger Australians. When demographic variables are examined, age is significant, with the older respondents (ie those aged 30–34) most likely to be union members. Increased levels of education also prove to have a significant effect on likelihood of union membership.

Table 4 is the first of two tables to examine group-based participation, rather than the more individualised choice-driven forms of participation that have been examined to this point. A broad range of community involvements were examined, most more often associated with a notion of civic engagement rather than direct political engagement (see Putnam 2000). However, it is a central tenet of this

Table 3. Union/party involvements (%)

	Yes	No
Union membership	37 [27, 50]	63 [73, 50]
Party membership	3 [1, 5]	97 [99, 95]
Campaign work	5 [1, 9]	95 [99, 91]

Note:
The first figure in each column is the result for the sample overall. It is followed in square brackets by the result for 'low participants' and 'high participants', respectively.

Table 4. Community group involvements (%)

	< 2 years	2–5 years	5 years	Never
Sporting/recreation group	46 [36, 58]	10 [6, 12]	14 [14, 15]	30 [44, 15]
School/university group	17 [10, 26]	9 [1, 18]	11 [4, 19]	63 [85, 37]
Church group	12 [5, 21]	4 [1, 7]	11 [6, 16]	73 [88, 56]
Youth club	4 [1, 8]	4 [2, 7]	17 [8, 27]	75 [89, 58]
Ethnicity-based group	5 [1, 8]	2 [1, 4]	2 [1, 4]	91 [97, 84]
Parents' and citizens' group	6 [2, 10]	− [−, 1]	1 [1, 1]	93 [97, 88]

Note:
The first figure in each column is the result for the sample overall. It is followed in square brackets by the result for 'low participants' and 'high participants', respectively.

article that an understanding of participatory citizenship is predicated on a broad range of public-sphere experiences, particularly those that incorporate elements from understandings of the formation of an individual's social and political citizenship status (Lister 1997).

Table 4 shows that 70% of this sample of Australian young people have been involved in a 'sporting or recreation' group and that this is the only type of community group in which a majority of respondents have had an involvement, at some stage or another. This is a very high proportion of the sample, particularly as compared to similar studies on the general population (Smith 2001, 41), but is easily accounted for by the age of the respondents here, as it would be expected that younger people would be more likely than older Australians to have the time and energy to have an active participation in sport and recreation. It may also suggest that sporting groups provide for a distinct understanding of participation, and of civic engagement in particular. Individuals involved in sporting and recreational groups do, however, have differences that the other group activities do not share. Those who have full-time paid work are more likely to have had involvements in a sporting group than those who work part-time or not at all; a higher household income is also positively related to involvement in sporting groups; respondents from an English-speaking background and those who live in regional or rural Australia are also more likely to have sporting involvements than their non-English-speaking-background or city-dwelling counterparts.

Paid work has a relationship with several of the community group involvements. One example, probably unsurprising, is that part-time workers are more likely to be involved in their local school's Parents and Citizens (P&C) group than other workers, and that those involved with the P&C group are also more likely to be women and aged 30–34. Part-time workers are also more likely to have, or have had, an involvement with a school or university group. This may be due to the age of the respondents in that some will still be involved with university study and are simultaneously in part-time work. Paid work has also been measured in terms of occupational status within households with the respondents being divided into the broad categories of white- and blue-collar occupations based on the main income earner in the household.[5] Those individuals living in white-collar households are much more likely to have had an involvement with school or university groups;

[5] I have reservations about the 'white-collar/blue-collar' categorisation due to its gendered basis solely on the occupation of the main income earner in the household. However, this is a standard market-research

they were also more involved with youth groups than those in blue-collar households. The only significant demographic determinant of involvement in a church group is occupational status, with those from white-collar households being more likely to be involved. The result is similar for involvement in an ethnicity-based group.

In fact, occupational status—the participatory determinant being white-collar households—has a strong relationship with most of the community group activities (the others being youth groups and university or school groups, respectively), the main exceptions being sporting groups and P&C groups. Exploring this finding further, I would have expected that education would also have had a similarly significant relationship with all of the community group activities, as education, household income and occupation status are often intertwined. However, education is related significantly only to two of the six community activities. First, those involved with an ethnicity-based group are more likely to have a post-school qualification; second, completely unsurprisingly, those who did not complete high school are significantly less likely to have been involved in a school- or university-based group. In a similar vein, those who speak a language other than English at home are more likely to have been involved in an ethnicity-based community group. Whilst this examination of community groups is incomplete, it does suggest that a broad range of groups is creating citizenship practices amongst people with different social and political citizenship status.

The respondents were also asked about their involvements with four particular and one general activist political group. Some of these figures that measure activist involvement are quite high, as Table 5 shows that up to 22% of the sample have been involved with an activist group at some stage. These figures are probably high because a broad notion of 'involvement' has been enquired about here. Involvement does not mean simply formal membership; instead, involvement was explained to the respondent to mean doing work for the organisation, or actively seeking out and following their activities, or making a donation. This is a broad approach to involvement with activist organisations intended to measure the general appeal of the ideological position that activist organisations and movements offer and the subsequent relationship with active participation. For example, an individual could identify with the Australian environmental movement, donate money through Earthshare and attend ad hoc events organised by groups as diverse as Friends of the Earth, the Greens Party and a State-based Nature and Conservation Council without being a formal, paid-up member of any particular group. This is a common occurrence for participants in new social movements such as the Green movement (Doyle 2000). One early 1990s study found that, whilst 4.5% of the Australian population claimed membership of an environmental organisation, another 19% professed that they were not a member but would consider joining (Crook and Pakulski 1995, 50), suggesting that this extra 19% were politically engaged without being formal members. Thus the way this question has been asked here provides respondents with more latitude in expressing their active allegiance to this political form and its organised activities, rather than relying on a limited

Footnote continued

measure of socio-economic status, and the results that it produces cannot be explained by other factors such as household income or work status.

Table 5. Activist group involvements (%)

	< 2 years	2–5 years	5 years	Never
Environmental organisation	14 [4, 25]	4 [2, 8]	4 [3, 5]	78 [91, 62]
Human rights organisation	13 [2, 26]	4 [2, 6]	3 [−, 5]	80 [95, 63]
Heritage/conservation organisation	9 [3, 15]	4 [−, 8]	1 [−, 3]	86 [97, 74]
Women's organisation	6 [2, 11]	2 [1, 3]	1 [−, 2]	91 [97, 84]
Other political/activist organisation	7 [3, 11]	1 [−, 2]	1 [−, 2]	91 [97, 85]

Note:
The first figure in each column is the result for the sample overall. It is followed in square brackets by the result for 'low participants' and 'high participants', respectively.

measure of permanent membership, as is commonly used for member-driven organisations like trade unions.

In Table 5, it can be seen that environmental and human rights groups have had a particular appeal to the 18–34-year-old Australians interviewed for this study. Organisations or groups concerned with women's issues have had less of a broad-based appeal, but have also presented the only organisational type that has drawn on identifiable cleavages in the population, as seen in Table 6. Obviously, women are much more likely than men to have an involvement with a women's organisation. This is also somewhat related to paid work status, with those not working more likely to have been involved in a women's organisation. This also suggests that women not working who may well have children are involved in a mothers' group, and then, as mentioned above, move on to part-time work, and maintain a participatory involvement which is directed at organisations such as the local school's P&C group. This is reinforced by findings related to age: that is, women aged 25–29, covering the average child-bearing age of 27 (ABS 2000), have the highest rates of involvement with women's organisations, and this decreases in the next age group, 30–34. Those involved in women's organisations are also more likely to be located in white-collar-work households.

What is interesting here is that demographic variables are not significantly associated with any of the other activist involvements, particularly not the two types of environment groups. Other studies (Pakulski 1991; Sherkat and Blocker 1994) tend to suggest that it is the highly educated who are more likely to be involved in new social movement activities. This is explored later in the article.

In summary, a large majority of young Australians—as represented in this sample—have had involvements in groups of some kind at some stage. It was found that 89%[6] have been involved in at least one group activity. This finding would suggest that the participatory nature of 'Generation X' has been previously underestimated. When sporting and recreation groups are removed from this calculation, as they are arguably the type of group least recognisably involved in social and political change, the total reduces to 69% of this sample of Australians aged 18–34 having had a group involvement. On the other hand, this could also emphasise the potential importance that sporting and recreation groups could have for community-based mobilisation.

[6] This does not include party or union and professional association membership. When they are added, the total increases to 93%.

Table 6. Strength of association with demographics

Act	Demographic	Measure
Ethnicity group	NESB/ESB	Phi = 0.39**
Union membership	Age group	Cramer's V = 0.30**
Sporting group	Income level	Cramer's V = 0.29**
Boycotts	Education level	Cramer's V = 0.27**
Women's group	Sex	Phi = 0.26**
School/Uni group	Blue-/white-collar	Phi = 0.21**
Ethnicity group	Education level	Cramer's V = 0.21*
P&C	Work: FT/PT/none	Cramer's V = 0.21*
School/Uni group	Education level	Cramer's V = 0.20*
Youth Group	Blue-/white-collar	Phi = 0.19**
Volunteering	Work: FT/PT/none	Phi = 0.18*
P&C	Age group	Cramer's V = 0.17*
Women's group	Work: FT/PT/none	Cramer's V = 0.17*
Union membership	Education level	Cramer's V = 0.17*
Church group	Blue-/white-collar	Phi = 0.16*
Rally	City/non-city	Phi = 0.16*
School/Uni group	Work: FT/PT/none	Cramer's V = 0.16*
Volunteering	Sex	Phi = 0.15*
Women's group	Age group	Cramer's V = 0.15*
Rally	Education level	Cramer's V = 0.15*
Sport group	Work: FT/PT/none	Cramer's V = 0.15*
Sport group	NESB/ESB	Phi = 0.15*
Sport group	City/non-city	Phi = 0.15*
P&C	Sex	Phi = 0.14*
Ethnicity group	Blue-/white-collar	Phi = 0.14*
Women's group	Blue-/white-collar	Phi = 0.13*

Note:
** Significant at or above the 0.001 level; * significant at or above the 0.05 level.

Counting Acts

A high number of acts (between 6 and 17) of participation that an 18–34-year-old Australian has ever been involved in is the most consistent factor in determining involvements in individual participatory activities. Further, a low number of participatory acts is not associated with particular acts, as all 19 participatory acts have been undertaken by at least one of those who have been categorised here as 'low participants'.

The total number of acts of participation that an individual had ever been involved in was also examined to determine whether there were relationships with the demographic variables. Five variables of age, location, language spoken at home, household income and work status were not found to be related to the total number of participatory acts. Level of education completed was associated with the total number of acts, in that the post-school-educated had a higher mean number of acts ($t = 10.597$, $sig = 0.000$). Whether the respondent was classified as being in a blue- or white-collar household was also significantly related to the total number of acts, with white-collar workers having a higher mean ($t = 3.821$, $sig = 0.000$). However, the demographic findings here should not be exaggerated as there is, as would be expected, a strong relationship between socio-economic grouping and level of education completed, in that white-collar workers are more likely to have a post-school education (Cramer's $V = 0.32$, $sig = 0.000$]. However, this may

suggest that this blue-collar/white-collar household classification is measuring a distinct tendency in terms of participation that is difficult to fully unpack here. This is particularly the case when it is seen that income level is not significantly associated with high or low acts of participation, as may well have been predicted because income level is positively related to education level, occupational classification and work status.

The other demographic variable that is significant is potentially one of the more interesting findings in terms of both this approach to participation and to our understanding of 'Generation X'. This is that there is a gender difference in total number of participatory acts, with women having a higher mean than men ($t = 2.255$, $sig = 0.000$). Most mainstream Australian research on political participation usually presents the finding that men are more participatory than women (McAllister 1997, 246–7) or that there is now convergence between men and women's participation (Smith 2001, 211–12). This research is starting to suggest that, when a broader definition of participation is applied empirically, particularly one that is inclusive of community-based activity, women's participation becomes more apparent. This gender distinction could also be mitigated by another factor, in that socio-economic grouping is related to gender but education level is not. That is, women are slightly more like to have been labelled as members of white-collar than blue-collar households ($phi = 0.12$, $sig = 0.05$), and this may have more to do with women's part-time work being more likely to occur in white-collar occupations with their partners similarly having white-collar work.[7]

Whilst it can be deduced that some strong associations between individual acts and overall participation exist, it is not yet possible to provide a picture of the patterns of participation undertaken by individuals. That is, we can only consider acts that seem to be determined by demographic factors and deduce that they may well co-exist in an individual's life with other particular participatory acts, but these can only be assumptions. What is needed is more analysis of how participatory acts factor together with other acts.

Participatory Factors

The 19 questions on participatory practice were reverse coded and then, using SPSS, subjected to a principle components analysis to discern whether, statistically, there were any strong associations between the various types of participation. Principle components analysis revealed the presence of four components with eigenvalues above 1, explaining 12.4%, 10.5%, 9.5% and 7% of the variance, respectively. The resulting four scales are related to, though not a replication of, the conceptual types of participation discussed in the previous section, and are listed in Table 7. Whilst this type of factor analysis goes only a small way in accounting for relationships existing in participatory practice, it does suggest that there are some discernible patterns whereby there are co-existing but distinctly separate participatory types. I computed four scales of participation and then calculated both means and significance tests for these scales along the eight demographic variables.

[7] This gendered trajectory, however, is beyond the scope of this article and will be taken up in later research with these data.

Table 7. Four scales of participatory practice items

Activist (seven items)	
Human rights organisation	Environmental organisation
Women's organization	Heritage/conservation organisation
Attended rally or march	Boycotted products
Other activist organisation	
Communitarian (six items)	
Church group	Youth club
Volunteered time	School/university group
Contacted MP	Ethnicity group
Party (five items)	
Campaign work	Party member
Union member	Contacted MP
Sporting/recreation group	
Individualistic (four items)	
Volunteered time	Made donations
Boycotted products	Sporting/recreation group

Activist Scale

In an examination of the activist scale, it was found that four of the demographic variables had significantly different means on this scale of participation. Women had a higher mean number of activist acts than men (sig = 0.023);[8] those in white-collar households had a higher mean number of activist acts than blue-collar households (sig = 0.026); those living in city areas had a much higher mean than those living in rural and regional areas (sig = 0.004); and, those who had not completed high school had a much lower mean of activist acts than both those who had completed high school and those with post-high-school qualifications (sig = 0.001).

Non-English-speaking-background (NESB) respondents had a slightly higher mean for activist acts than English-speaking-background (ESB) respondents but the difference is not significant; 25–29 year olds had the highest mean for number of activist acts, but the difference from the other two age groups was not significant; the respondents in full-time work had a lower mean for activist acts than those in part-time work or not working, but this difference was not significant; corresponding to this finding about work status, those with a household income of less than $30,000 a year before tax had the highest mean on the activist scale. This suggests that available time probably has an important relationship with activist acts but needs further exploration.

Communitarian Scale

When looking at the communitarian scale, several of the results are similar to the activist scale. That is, women (sig = 0.009) and those in white-collar households (sig = 0.000) have a significantly higher mean number of communitarian acts, and those not completing high school (sig = 0.001) have a significantly lower mean

[8] However, this significant difference can be partly attributed to the inclusion of women's organisations in this scale. When 'women's organisation' is removed, women still have a higher mean number of activist acts but the difference from men is no longer significant.

number of communitarian acts. This finding of women having a higher commitment to communitarian-type acts is not new (Onyx and Leonard 2000); however, when coupled with the finding of women being more likely to have activist involvements, it suggests that gender has an important relationship with a notion of participatory citizenship and needs further, more detailed exploration to judge life-course effects on choices to participate.

Whilst NESB respondents, those living in regional or rural Australia and part-time workers have a higher mean number of communitarian acts, these differences are not statistically significant. Age is less predictable in that 25–29 year olds have the highest number of communitarian acts and the next age group, 30–34 year olds, have the lowest mean of communitarian acts, but again these differences are not statistically significant. What is becoming apparent, however, is that involvement in communitarian-type acts may be related to life-course events, such as having children, rather than being an act that becomes more attractive to people as they get older. Household income does not really differentiate participation in communitarian-based activities, as the means on the scale are similar; however, those with household incomes of $50,000–$70,000 have the highest mean.

Party Scale

The results using the party scale are quite different from the activist and communitarian scales and this starts to suggest that this participatory form attracts a different sort of individual to the other two types. Those with a significantly higher mean number of party acts are likely to be older, with 18–24 year olds having a much lower mean (sig = 0.013); those working full-time (sig = 0.035) and those with a post-high-school qualification (sig = 0.01) have much higher means on this scale. Furthermore, the more money earned in the household, the higher the mean on the party-based scale, and this is the only one of the four participatory scales where there is a clear rise in mean over the four income groups (sig = 0.000).[9]

Males have a higher mean than females on this scale but the difference is not significant; this finding is the same for white-collar over blue-collar households and ESB over NESB; interestingly, those living in regional or rural Australia have a higher mean number of party acts than those living in Australian cities.

Individualist Scale

The fourth scale differs significantly along only one demographic variable—education—with those who have not completed high school much less likely to participate in individualist acts (sig = 0.000). The other groups with higher means on this scale—women, white-collar workers, ESB respondents, regional/rural Australia dwellers, and part-time workers—are not significantly different from their counterparts. The three different age groups all have more or less the same mean number of individualist acts of participation, as do the respondents in the four household income levels.

[9] The party scale includes involvement in a sporting group which has an association with household income. The test was run with the scale minus sporting group and the significance of the relationship remained the same.

Table 8. Discussion of political issues (%)

	At least once a week	At least once a month	Less often	Never
Workplace issues and unions	33 [29, 39]	20 [20, 21]	22 [18, 25]	25 [33, 15]
Equality of men and women	31 [29, 33]	26 [24, 29]	26 [25, 26]	17 [22, 12]
Federal/State politics	26 [17, 36]	22 [19, 25]	28 [32, 23]	24 [32, 16]
Local/community issues	22 [14, 32]	27 [22, 32]	27 [32, 22]	24 [32, 14]
Local environmental issues	21 [16, 27]	28 [20, 37]	34 [41, 26]	17 [23, 10]
Broad environmental issues	14 [9, 19]	23 [20, 28]	37 [37, 38]	26 [34, 15]
Aboriginal issues	12 [10, 15]	28 [21, 35]	35 [37, 34]	25 [32, 16]

Note:
The first figure in each column is the result for the sample overall. It is followed in square brackets by the result for 'low participants' and 'high participants', respectively.

Discussion of Political Issues

In the study, I also included discussion of topical community and political issues as a form of participation because discussion of political issues is often considered in measurements of political engagement (see Goot 2002). The respondents were asked how often they discussed seven different issues with their family and friends. Table 8 shows the order of the most popular to the least popular areas of discussion, by frequency of discussion. In general the results reveal that a consistently high proportion, ranging from 74% to 83%, of the sample speaks about each issue at some stage. It is not relevant whether this discussion is constructively related to subsequent action taken, as discussion is being examined as a participatory experience in itself.

The two issues most likely to be spoken about reasonably often—that is once a week, or at the very least once a month—are 'workplace issues or unions', and 'equality of men and women in the home or in society generally'. These are the two socio-political issues that are more likely to be part of the everyday lives of the respondents and therefore it is possibly not a surprise that people talk more often about work and gender equality than they do about institutionalised politics or broad environmental issues such as logging of forests. Further, it is more likely to be the *frequency* with which the issue is discussed that alters amongst the different issues. That is, for example, while 83% of the sample have spoken about local environmental issues such as pollution, recycling or waste disposal at some stage, only 21% do so every week, compared with a third of the sample who speak about workplace issues every week.

I examined the differences between high and low participants along each discussion issue. The differences between the two groups, with higher total number of participatory acts being associated with frequent discussion of issues, are significant for six of the seven issues, with 'equality of men and women' not producing differences along this variable (as listed in Table 9).

Frequency of discussion of issues was also examined to determine whether demographic factors were influenced by differences amongst the sample. Table 9 includes the seven findings where the differences amongst the sample were statistically significant. First, men were significantly less likely than women ever to discuss 'equality of men and women' and Aboriginal issues; similarly, women were much more likely to frequently discuss local/community or local environmental

Table 9. Discussion of issues and strength of association

Issue	Measure
Local/community issues w. high/low participants	Gamma = 0.44**
Local environmental issues w. high/low participants	Gamma = 0.39**
Federal/state politics w. high/low participants	Gamma = 0.38**
Broad environmental issues w. high/low participants	Gamma = 0.37**
Aboriginal issues w. high/low participants	Gamma = 0.32**
Workplace issues and unions w. high/low participants	Gamma = 0.25**
Equality of men and women w. sex	Cramer's V = 0.26**
Local environmental issues w. sex	Cramer's V = 0.24*
Local/community issues w. sex	Cramer's V = 0.21*
Workplace issues and unions w. work status	Cramer's V = 0.20*
Local environmental issues w. occupational status	Cramer's V = 0.17*
Aboriginal issues w. sex	Cramer's V = 0.17*

Note:
** Significant at or above the 0.001 level; * significant at or above the 0.05 level.

issues such as pollution, recycling or waste disposal. This starts to suggest a pattern whereby women are more likely to discuss localist socio-political issues and/or issues that are predicated on issues of inequality such as gender or Aboriginal issues. When it comes to the discussion of broader political issues, such as federal and State politics or broad, and often more geographically distant, environmental issues such as logging of forests and wildlife destruction, then the differences between men and women disappear.

The discussion of one other issue was significantly related to the work status of respondents. Those working full-time were much more likely to discuss 'workplace issues and unions' more frequently than those who work part time or not at all. This suggests that those working full-time are faced more immediately and constantly with workplace issues and thus they are a recurring theme of discussion. The last finding of significance here is that individuals from white-collar households are more likely than blue-collar individuals to discuss local environmental issues. As pointed out early in the article, there was a higher concentration of women in the white-collar category and this is probably influencing this result, particularly because it is the only discussion issue which is differentiated by the white-/blue-collar distinction. If there were other significant differences around occupational status, or even educational differences, there could be alternative reasons for this type of localist environmental discussion. However, there were no differences amongst frequency and discussion of issues and level of education attained, location, household income, age or language spoken.

Recognising the Participatory Citizenship of 'Generation X'

This article has shown that it is possible to develop a notion of participatory citizenship with everyday political experiences at the core. This has principally been achieved by treating participatory acts as the product of individual agency. That is, I have not argued for a hierarchy of participatory types but instead have chosen to elaborate on the diversity of participatory experiences that Australians

aged 18–34 have had. There have been a number of notable patterns that have arisen from the exploration of this data set.

First, the importance of gender: women were found to be more participatory on two of the four scales; and women having a significantly higher average than men on both the activist and communitarian scales is probably distinctive for this generation of political actors. This finding is reinforced by women having a significantly higher average number of total participatory acts than men, which tends to suggest that women are more open to a range of political acts, depending on the cause or issue. Men were not more likely than women to participate in any act or discuss any political issue.

The second important pattern is that level of education is associated with participation, and this serves to reinforce existing research findings (eg Hogan and Owen 2000, 98). A higher level of education was significantly related to all four scales of participation, so while education was strongly associated with only five of the participatory acts, the effect accumulated to become an important one.

The third pattern is the question of the appeal of individualised or collective forms of participation. Overall, a majority of young Australians aged 18–34 have participated in acts that are more likely to be individualised examples of goodwill, especially through donating money or volunteering time (albeit volunteering ought to be recognised as a more time-consuming, and potentially more collective, form of participation than donating money). However, one other important finding was the evident willingness of the majority to participate in boycotts. This could have important implications for both understanding the level of politicisation of this generation and also for potential mobilisation by new movements.

In terms of looking at 'Generation X's' group-based, collective activities, there was only one category in which a majority had been involved: sporting or recreation groups. But it has also been demonstrated that other activist and other community groups have had a sizeable and, probably in some cases, growing, appeal to young Australians as up to 93% of the sample have had an involvement in, or membership of, a group of some kind. This demonstrates that we need not accept claims that there is a 'crisis' in the political and civic engagement of young Australians. Instead, we see that the traditional ways of seeing participation can be broadened to be more inclusive of this generation of political actors. Furthermore, the two issues of discussion that are most likely to be discussed often are also most related to the everyday experiences of young Australians. This suggests that a conceptualisation of the 'common good' may well arise out of politicising more personal issues, and this ought to be viewed as a potential strength in bringing everyday experience into the shaping, and our understanding, of the political world.

Despite the broad patterns revealed in this article, there is still much that we do not yet know or understand about the participatory citizenship of Australians. First, this study is able to point out only broad quantifiable patterns of participation, and these need to be expanded on with additional, more detailed analysis. For example, it is inadequate to recognise gender differences without also looking for differences amongst women and amongst men (Chapman 1995, 112); this can be done by exploring the relationships between differential caring responsibilities, class and educational experiences. As I also collected information on conceptualisations of time constraints and caring responsibilities, I will explore this issue comprehensively in further work.

Second, complementary studies that provide qualitative depth are needed and this

would include more interpretive accounts of the meanings that participants attribute to their participatory experiences. Analyses of political behaviour are justifiably criticised for decontextualising information through aggregation of data obtained from individuals (Dunleavy 1996; Sanders 1995); thus future research ought to include accounts of the context in which participation occurs. There are several case studies that could be undertaken to elaborate upon the patterns discussed here. Three of the four participatory types (activist, communitarian, and party) provide bases for further work, as it is not possible to ascertain from these data whether new and different political processes are being created by political actors in these spheres or whether they are replicating long-established processes. For example, there are now activist groups which are led by young people (eg AidWatch, NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby) acting in both paid and unpaid roles, yet there has been little research that has sought to document the experiences and motivations of individuals in these groups. Some research does suggest that recent use of the media and new technologies, such as seen in anti-corporate globalisation protests, is illustrative of new forms of political action (Scalmer 2002; Greenacre 2000), yet these issues have not been fully explored as exclusive terrain for 'Generation X'.

Further research is also needed on current advocacy and policy frameworks which facilitate young people's agency. This would assist in the development of an understanding of current relationships between structure and participation. For example, there are relatively new organisational forms that federal and State governments are sponsoring that represent young people, eg the NSW Youth Advisory Council and the National Youth Roundtable. There are also new, independent youth-focused organisations, such as the Foundation for Young Australians and the Inspire Foundation, that do not rely on government funding and which are actively shaping public constructions of youth. While more established government-funded advocacy organisations—such as the NSW Youth Action and Policy Association—have changed focus, others—such as the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition—have been de-funded. Policy concerns about funding, advocacy and government interpretations of participation are often overlooked by political-participation researchers because their focus is primarily on individual involvements. Future research needs to examine the complex interplay between structure and agency in the construction of young citizens in Australia today.

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