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Age and Life Stage as Relevant Factors in the Voting Decision of the Elderly

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Age and Life Stage as Relevant Factors in the Voting Decision of the Elderly

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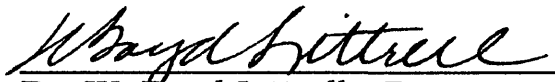

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Introduction to Study

Older people vote more frequently than do younger people (Campbell, 1971; Crittenden, 1963). Although chronological age can tell us quite a bit about how a person will choose to behave it is by no means a complete guide. Perhaps more important to the mystery of why people behave as they do is in the specific set of roles that they occupy at a particular age. What factors are important to the decision to vote? What is the particular nature of the reasons given for deciding to vote? Are role and status engagement important to the understanding of the decision to vote? How are role and status engagement related to political interest? The problem of this thesis is to understand how age, life stage, role and status engagement and political involvement are interrelated and how each acts to affect the reasons for deciding to vote in older people.

Review of Literature

In reviewing the literature on social theory of aging and political participation, two major approaches appear, the generational perspective and the life cycle perspective. Here, I focus on the life cycle approach as applied to political participation. In this chapter, the life cycle theory will be explained and its components defined. The major hypotheses of the study as they relate to representative articles on life cycle and political participation will also be presented in this chapter.

Life cycle theorists seek to discover and explain changes in personality, behavior and social relations that occur as people age and progress through the life cycle. Life cycle can be defined as the period of time through which all individuals pass in which a regular series of events and changes take place (Atchley, 1977).

Persons go through many life stages in the course of a life cycle. Each life stage corresponds to a particular chronological age range; although no rigid and simple characteristics of a life stage can be made. For example, there is commonly known in our society an "age to marry," an "age to start a family" and an "age to retire." However, no singular age can be given when these events must occur.

A life stage is a section of the life cycle in which a unique and particular set of priorities, activities and events usually occurs. In other words, each life stage contains unique and particular roles and statuses (Atchley, 1977). In a later life stage, individuals typically

focus on such things as ending a work career, maintaining health and adjusting to a new kind of family network.

The differences in behavior noted across the age groups can be explained in terms of these life stages.

It would appear, then, that differences in political behavior among age groups can, also, be explained by life cycle theories (Campbell, 1971:112). In this study, I examine role and status engagement and the reasons for deciding to vote to discern differences among ages. If similarities in roles/statuses and reasons exist within age groups, these roles/statuses and reasons can define characteristics of a life stage. The various life stages can, then, be used to more simply explain political behavior. The purpose of this study is to test life cycle theory's explanation of the differences in political participation among age groups.

Reviewed here are The Voter Decides, Michigan Survey and Research Center (1954); "Aging, Voting and Political Interest," Glenn and Grimes (1968); and "Politics through the Life Cycle," Campbell (1971). These studies all point to the fact that each life stage in the life cycle has characteristics which lead to specific conclusions about individual political behavior.

One of the first thorough studies was the Michigan Survey and Research Center's study in 1954, The Voter Decides. Campbell, Gurin and Miller set out to identify voters and non-voters within four geographic areas, to look at SES, candidate preference, issue orientation, and party affiliation of voters and non-voters, to compare

groups and to trace the resolution to vote, especially the process of undecided and changing voters, in order to understand the correlates of political participation. These researchers presumed that the significant factors in the voting decision were party identification, candidate orientation and issue orientation.

Campbell et al. concluded that a voter/non-voter is influenced by various factors in different ways at different times depending on the amount of conflict the individual experiences among party identification, candidate and issue orientation. They further uncovered that psychological perceptions of and attitudes toward these political factors are tied up in the individual's social setting. Individuals take account of their position in terms of roles and life stage in order to make voting decisions.

This study began to relate life cycle theories to political behavior. What Campbell et al. pointed out was that the decision to vote did not depend solely on political issues, but included other factors as well, such as an individual's memberships in church, work or family groups. As people advance into later life stages their memberships change. Political behavior being dependent on memberships and memberships being dependent on life stage, it follows that political behavior depends on life stage. In essence, this study showed that a person's particular life stage was ultimately important in predicting voting behavior. This study laid the groundwork for other studies to further investigate the influence of life stage on political participation.

Glenn and Grimes (1968) analyzed data from 23 Gallup polls to

investigate white voter turnout in presidential elections from 1944 to 1964 using the life cycle explanation. They hypothesized "that political interest and participation sometimes result from a lack of other interesting activities to absorb attention" (Glenn and Grimes, 1968:564). Political interest and participation tend to increase when other meaningful role activities are lost or become less critical to the personality. Using data on five ten year cohorts, Glenn and Grimes show convincingly that political interest does increase from young adulthood to old age even when education, sex and race are controlled (Glenn and Grimes, 1968:567).

Glenn and Grimes (1968:574) thus argue that "the primary explanation" for the difference in the level of political interest across age groups "is the difference at various stages of the life cycle in distracting influences and the need [of older persons] to compensate for lack of other interesting activities" that comes with the role of old age. Political roles/statuses could function as such compensatory mechanisms for older persons (1).

If political interest rises in part due to role losses in later life a primary goal for any attempt to understand older adults' political behavior should be to examine their role and status engagement. Political interest, activity and participation have been combined in this study into one variable called politicization. Politicization refers to an individual's intensity of involvement in politics. In this study, I relate role and status engagement to age and to the level of politicization.

A corollary to the above hypothesis is that political interest is

inversely related to the degree of involvement with personal problems, ambitions and interests (Glenn and Grimes, 1968). Campbell claims that for the most part age differences in the way people respond to politics derive from their life circumstances. He suggests that the number and kinds of concerns of individuals change through the life cycle in such a way as to produce a contraction of role/status engagement. It is this contraction to personal concerns that affect motivation toward or away from political activity (Campbell, 1971).

In the study of political interest, Campbell found that older people are more likely to participate in most forms of political activity than younger people and a little less likely to participate than the middle aged. Campbell suggests and this thesis argues that these age differences found in political participation can be explained not only by age but by the particular concerns present in unique life stages.

Campbell asks, "How much of the difference we see in the political characteristics of people at successive stages of the life cycle can be attributed to age itself and how much to circumstances associated with age?" Noting from his studies that young people are less likely to participate than older people, he answers, "It is not that their youth makes them incapable of participating; they are as competent to perform as citizens as their elders. But being young, they are subject to many personal crises and much moving about, both geographical and psychological; conditions which distract them from the world of politics." Campbell is saying that young people are involved in self-defining activities at this time in life not political

activities. For example, young people may be occupied by establishing a career or a family and, therefore, are not involved in participating in politics to any great extent.

For older adults, the distractions of earlier adulthood are absent. Older people, according to Glenn and Grimes, must search for role and status activity. Compared to younger adults, who have the advantages of health, vigor and standard, well-established role structures, older persons have few alternatives. Therefore, Glenn and Grimes (1968:573) conclude that for older adults "attention to politics becomes a functional substitute for the activities and concerns that absorbed so much time and energy in the earlier years."

One way of testing this theory is to ask people, "What criteria do you use in deciding about political behavior?" If older persons are less distracted by or more removed from the occurence of mundane everyday events and more interested in larger political issues they should tend to give reasons for deciding to vote that reflect a wider perspective and broader vision. However, if older persons are not distracted by or removed from everyday activity and less interested in larger political issues they should tend to give reasons for deciding to vote that reflect a more narrow perspective and myopic vision.

Thus for the purposes of this study, I distinguish "macro-reasons" from "micro-reasons." Micro-reasons are narrow in social scope and pertain to such things as personal beliefs, personal loyalties to small groups, personal interest in party, candidate, issue or personal welfare. Macro-reasons for deciding to vote, on the other hand,

concern broad values and experiences such as interest in the life of our democratic society or in underlying political theory.

If the assumption is correct that old age is related to a lower number of roles and statuses, which in turn allows older people to focus more attention on politics, then it should also hold true that older people would give macro-reasons for deciding to vote. In other words, the main reason given for deciding to vote should encompass a view of politics for its own sake. If, however, older people give micro-reasons for deciding to vote, it may be that the involvement in political participation is not simply a matter of substituting political activity for other lost activity of youth, but rather is part of a more general sort of disengagement from all roles and statuses.

This study will examine the reasons for deciding to vote as they relate to politicization and to life stage, which involves both the consideration of age and role and status engagement, in an effort to understand the factors relevant to older persons voting decision.

Hypotheses

Based on the preceding, I derive several hypotheses reviewed above and tested here:

1. Age is negatively related to the number of roles and statuses.

2. Level of politicization is negatively related to number of roles and statuses.

3. Age is positively related to politicization.

4. The older the person, the more likely macro-reasons will be given for deciding to vote.

5. The higher the level of politicization, the more likely macro-reasons will be given.

Methods

Concept Definition and Measure

The following section will list the major concepts used in this study (age, role and status engagement, politicization and reasons given for deciding to vote), define them and show how they were measured.

Age is defined as the respondent's chronological age to the nearest whole year (Question #1 of the questionnaire in Appendix B). The variables were collapsed to assure an adequate number of cases within each cell of the crosstabulation. The ages of the respondents were grouped into three categories: "young-old," age 50-65; "old," age 65-75; and "old-old," age 75 and older (see Table 1). These three categories are based on previously established divisions (Neugarten, 1974).

TABLE 1: Age Distribution of the Sample

Age Category	Frequency	Percent
Young-Old (50 - 65)	22	18.3%
Old (65 - 74)	57	47.5%
Old-old (75+)	41	34.2%
TOTAL	120	100.0%

Role and Status Engagement is defined as the respondent's social roles and statuses related to specific personal interaction with others

that make up the definition of respondent's self. The variable is intended to characterize the respondent as minimally, marginally or maximally involved in social activity. The concept of role and status engagement was measured with a shortened version of Havighurst and Albrecht's (1952) "Role Activities in Later Maturity." Each of the original items, except for the item asking about home responsibilities, became one item in a checklist for this study, Question #7 in Appendix B. The variable was scored by summing the number of statements checked by the respondent. Cronbach's alpha is 0.68 for the role/status engagement index (2).

Respondents' scores were collapsed into three categories because insufficient numbers were present in the individual numerical categories to make statistically significant variation within levels of role/status engagement. Without collapsing, cell frequencies in crosstabulations with other independent variables were too small. Therefore, scores were equally divided into low role and status engagement (0 - 3), medium role and status engagement (4 - 7), and high role and status engagement (8 - 11).

Politicization is defined as the extent to which respondents are involved in politics and the degree to which politics are an important interest in their lives. This measure involves political behavior as well as attitudes. It was measured by asking the respondent about political activity, specifically discussing politics in relation to other activity and by asking about the importance of politics in the respondent's life (see Questions #9 and #10 in the questionnaire in Appendix B).

Because Question #9 asks about discussing politics as a means of measuring political activity and because this is an admittedly weak measure (3), a matrix was developed to combine the measure of political activity and importance of politics. A stronger composite measure of politicization was produced.

The matrix combines two specific, related items into one general item, in this case, the frequency of the respondent's discussing politics and the importance of politics to the respondent into politicization. Classifying respondent's politicization as low, medium or high based on the fact that they never discuss politics may give a distorted vision of their true engagement in politics, as may looking just at the importance of politics to the respondent. A more accurate way of measuring a respondent's politicization is to combine the variables of discussing politics and importance of politics into a matrix. The politicization variable is formed by dividing the matrix into four equal blocks and labeling the right top corner low politicization, the left bottom corner high politicization and the middle squares medium politicization (see Appendix C for matrix).

Reason is defined as the primary reason the respondent gives for deciding to vote or not to vote. This was measured using an open-ended question (Question #16) which asked respondents to list the three most important things that influenced their decision to vote or not to vote. Responses to this question varied widely among respondents. No two respondents gave the exact same answer to this open-ended question and many respondents listed only one reason.

Therefore, the first answer in each case was taken to be the primary reason for deciding to vote. In reviewing the answers given, I saw a pattern in which answers seemed to fall into one of two categories, macro-reasons or micro-reasons. The variable was grouped into these two categories for analysis. Support for this division of micro- and macro-reasons can be found in Parsons' (1951:346) discussion of the pattern variables of self-orientation versus the collectivity-orientation (4).

As previously discussed, micro-reasons are those that involve the respondent in thinking about the decision to vote in terms of self-interested reactions to personal relationships with a small group of people (e.g. the family). Micro-reasons are relatively egocentric. These reasons are characterized by concern about the individual rather than the society, reflecting a value orientation centered on the individual. Micro-reasons suggest an outlook involving one's own activities and needs.

Macro-reasons involve thinking about the decision to vote in terms of interacting with the larger society. Macro-reasons tend to be utilitarian reasons for participating in the political system (5). The respondents giving macro-reasons, for example, might say that their engagement in politicis is because they "feel a deep sense of duty as an American citizen to vote in every election." Or they may comment, "I am interested in preserving the democratic system for all to enjoy." Thcsc reasons show concern for society over concerns about individual problems. The utilitarianism in these reasons for deciding to vote is

seen in the resolve to act in a way that results in the balance of pleasure over pain for the greatest number of people. These reasons emphasize action oriented toward the good for society as a whole and de-emphasize action oriented toward the concerns of the individual.

The Sample

The sample in this study was selected from a list of all organizations, clubs, associations and churches (without regard to age) from the Omaha City Directory and the Omaha Area Telephone Directory listings in the Fall of 1985. By choosing every fifth organization from the alphabetized list, twenty-four organizations were selected for the study. Each of these organizations received a letter of introduction to the researcher and the purpose and content of the study (see Appendix A). Several weeks after the mailing, a follow-up telephone call was made to each organization. Again, the researcher introduced herself and the study. At this time solicitation was made for the organization's participation in the study.

Five of the organizations could not be reached through either mail or telephone calls. Twelve of the organizations contacted refused to participate for one of the following reasons: the group did not have time to participate, the members of the group did not vote for religious reasons (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses) or because they were not yet eighteen (e.g. Boy Scouts or Camp Fire Girls), the members of the group did not participate in research as a matter of policy, the group's

procedures for approving participation in research were too lengthy and complicated to satisfy the limits of the study.

Seven of the organizations agreed to participate. Four groups were church-related, one was a fraternal organization, one a business organization and one was a retirement community organization.

Each organization was visited during a regular meeting. An oral introduction was given and volunteers were asked to complete a seventeen-question questionnaire (see Appendix B). From the sample of organizations, a sub-sample of 207 respondents volunteered to complete the questionnaire. One hundred thirty-five questionnaires were returned. Fifteen returned questionnaires were not included in the statistical analysis because they were incomplete in one of the vital questions concerning age, political participation, role/status engagement or reason for deciding to vote. Four cases were dropped to make the sample homogeneous on race (6). A total of one hundred twenty cases in all were deemed complete and useful for statistical analysis. It was noted that these respondents may have introduced a possible sample bias to the study because of the predisposal of these respondents to participate and volunteer (see discussion below on sample bias).

During the administration of the surveys, informal conversations were held with participants. Those results were not quantitatively analyzed, but were recorded immediately following each meeting in a notebook and reviewed for supporting material throughout the process of statistical analysis.

Of the 120 cases, two-thirds were female; all were white, 50 percent had completed high school, 11% had some college experience and 39% had completed college. The age of the respondents ranged from fifty-one to ninety-one years old, with an average of seventy-three.

A Possible Sample Bias

Voluntary association participation was measured by Questions #5 and #6 in the questionnaire. The questions were originally developed by Cutler and Cutler (Mangen, 1982). Both questions have been found valid and reliable for use in older populations. These questions measure both intensity of participation and number of associations.

The respondents in this study tended to be highly motivated, active participants in voluntary associations. According to data collected by the Center for Political Studies, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan (Mangen, 1982), 74.9% of their sample of adults aged 60 and over belonged to at least one voluntary organization. In this study, 93% of all respondents belong to at least one voluntary association. The average number of voluntary association memberships held by respondents in this study is three. Of those holding memberships in at least one group, 49% hold one office in that group. This sample inherently overrepresents the section of the population likely to participate in public affairs.

Voluntary associations can be political. If this sample is more highly involved in social type voluntary associations, then it follows

that they will also be more highly involved in political participation.

In this study 91.5% of the respondents reported that they voted in almost every election from the time they were eligible. Of the total sample only 1.7% claimed to have voted in only a few elections and 6.8% reported voting in several elections since eligibility. Table 2 shows the distribution of participation in election by age.

Because little variation exists in the vote/not vote variable it is invalid for further use in the study of how age and role/status engagement effect politicization and reason for deciding to vote.

TABLE 2: Degree of Participation in Election by Age

Voted in:	Young-old	Old	Old-old
a few	0	0	1
several	1	3	3
almost every	21 (95.5%)	54 (94.7%)	37 (90.2%)
TOTAL	22	57	41

Data Analysis

Role/Status Engagement and Age

The old-old are 11% more likely than the old and 100% more likely than the young-old to have low role/status engagement. The old and old-old are equally likely to have medium role/status engagement, 61.4% and 63.4% respectively. But, the old and old-old are 25% more likely than the young-old to have medium role/status engagement. The young-old are most likely to have high role/status engagement (see Table 3).

The Kendall's tau b value is -0.17577 ($p < 0.025$). There is a weak negative relationship between role/status engagement and age.

TABLE 3: ROLE by AGE

		AGE			
		Young-old	Old	Old-old	Totals
ROLE	Low	0 0.0%	5 8.8%	4 9.8%	9 7.5%
	Medium	10 45.5%	35 61.4%	26 63.4%	71 59.2%
	High	12 54.5%	17 29.8%	11 26.8%	40 33.3%
	Totals	22	57	41	120

tau b = -0.17577 significance < 0.025

Politicization and Role/Status Engagement

Those with low and medium role/status engagement are equally likely to have low politicization. Forty-four percent of those with low role/status engagement have medium politicization, while only 28.2% and 22.5% of those with medium and high role engagement, respectively, have medium politicization. Those with high role/status engagement are 20% more likely than those with medium role/status engagement and 40% more likely than those with low role/status engagement to have high politicization (see Table 4).

The Kendall's tau b is +0.17867 ($p < 0.025$). There is a weak positive relationship between politicization and role/status engagement.

TABLE 4: POLITZ by ROLE

		ROLE			
		Low	Medium	High	Totals
POLITZ	Low	1 11.1%	8 11.3%	1 2.5%	10 8.3%
	Medium	4 44.4%	20 28.2%	9 22.5%	33 27.5%
	High	4 44.4%	43 60.6%	30 75.0%	77 64.2%
	Totals	9	71	40	120
	tau b = +0.17867		significance < 0.025		

Politicization and Age

Respondents in all age categories have high levels of politicization (see Table 5). The Kendall's tau b value is +0.00148 ($p > 0.05$). There appears to be no linear relationship between age and politicization (7).

TABLE 5: POLITZ by AGE

		AGE			
		Young-old	Old	Old-old	Totals
POLITZ	Low	1 4.5%	4 7.0%	5 12.2%	10 8.3%
	Medium	6 27.3%	19 33.3%	8 19.5%	33 27.5%
	High	15 68.2%	34 59.6%	28 68.3%	77 64.2%
	Totals	22	57	41	120
	tau b = +0.00148		significance > 0.05		

Reason for Deciding to Vote and Age

Respondents in all age categories predominantly cite micro-reasons for deciding to vote (see Table 6). The Kendall's tau c value is -0.00211 ($p > 0.05$). Age and reason for deciding to vote have no linear relationship.

TABLE 6: REASON by AGE

		AGE			
		Young-old	Old	Old-old	Totals
REASON	Micro-	17 77.3%	45 78.9%	32 78.0%	94 78.3%
	Macro-	5 22.7%	12 21.1%	9 22.0%	26 21.6%
	Totals	22	57	41	120
	tau c = -0.00211		significance > 0.05		

Reason for Deciding to Vote and Politicization

Regardless of level of politicization, respondents are more likely to give micro-reasons for deciding to vote (see Table 7). Respondents with low politicization are only slightly more likely than those with medium or high politicization to give micro-reasons for deciding to vote (0.05% and 0.01%, respectively). The Kendall's tau c value is -0.01889 ($p > 0.05$). There is no linear relationship between politicization and reason for deciding to vote.

TABLE 7: REASON BY POLITZ

		POLITZ			
		Low	Medium	High	Totals
REASON	Micro-	8 80.0%	25 75.8%	61 79.2%	94 78.3%
	Macro-	2 20.0%	8 24.3%	16 20.8%	26 21.6%
	Totals	10	33	77	120
	tau c = -0.01889		significance > 0.05		

Reason for Deciding to Vote and Role/Status Engagement

Respondents in all categories of role/status engagement are most likely to give micro-reasons for deciding to vote (see Table 8). The Kendall's tau c value is -0.01306 (p = 0.049). There is no linear relationship between reason for deciding to vote and role/status engagement.

TABLE 8: REASON by ROLE

		ROLE			
		Low	Medium	High	Totals
REASON	Micro-	6 66.7%	57 80.3%	31 77.5%	94 78.3%
	Macro-	3 33.3%	14 19.7%	9 22.5%	26 21.6%
	Totals	10	71	40	120
	tau c = -0.01306		significance = 0.49		

Interaction of Role/Status Engagement with Politicization and Reason for Deciding to Vote

Noting that no linear relationships exist between a majority of the variables at the zero order level, I decided to check the possibility that relationships were being masked by a third interacting or intervening variable. Based on theoretical arguments found earlier in this study, role/status engagement was chosen as the possible interacting or intervening variable.

At the zero-order level there is no linear relationship between reason for deciding to vote and politicization (Table 7).

In the subtable for low role/status engagement, the Kendall's tau c value is -0.04938 ($p > 0.05$). The relationship between politicization and reason for deciding to vote when controlling for role/status engagement shows no linear relationship as in the zero-order table (see Table 9).

In the subtable for medium role/status engagement, the Kendall's tau c value is +0.01666 ($p = 0.42$). When controlling for role/status engagement the relationship between politicization and reason for deciding to vote shows no linear relationship of significance.

In the subtable for high role/status engagement, the Kendall's tau c value is -0.06750 ($p > 0.05$). Again, there is no relationship in the partial order table.

Based on this test for a linear interaction or intervention of the variable role/status engagement with the relationship between politicization and reason, there appears to be no relationship between

any of the variables.

Table 9: REASON by POLITZ by ROLE

LOW ROLE/STATUS ENGAGEMENT .

		POLITZ			
		Low	Medium	High	Totals
	Micro-	1	2	3	6
		100.0%	50.0%	75.0%	66.7%
REASON	Macro-	0	2	1	3
		0.0%	50.0%	25.0%	33.3%
	Totals	1	4	4	9
		11.1%	44.4%	44.4%	

tau c = -0.04938 significance > 0.05

MEDIUM ROLE/STATUS ENGAGEMENT

		Low	Medium	High	Totals
	Micro-	6	17	34	57
		75.0%	85.0%	79.1%	80.3%
REASON	Macro-	2	3	9	14
		25.0%	15.0%	20.9%	19.7%
	Totals	8	20	43	71
		11.3%	28.2%	60.6%	

tau c = 0.01666 significance = 0.042

HIGH ROLE/STATUS ENGAGEMENT

		Low	Medium	High	Totals
	Micro-	1	6	24	31
		100.0%	66.7%	80.0%	77.5%
REASON	Macro-	0	3	6	9
		0.0%	33.3%	20.0%	22.5%
	Totals	1	9	30	40
		2.5%	22.5%	75.0%	

tau c= -0.06750 significance > 0.05

Interaction of Age with Politicization and Reason for Deciding to Vote

This study is primarily interested in what reason people give for deciding to vote. It has been hypothesized level of politicization and age are related to each other as well as to reason given for deciding to vote, although not born out in zero order tables. During the data analysis, I began to wonder if conditions of age might somehow interfere with the relationship between politicization and reason for deciding to vote causing the variables to appear non-related. Therefore, I decided to do a comparison of politicization and reason for deciding to vote while controlling the conditions of age (see Table 10).

The zero-order table (Table 7) for politicization and reason for deciding to vote shows no linear relationship between the two variables (tau c = -0.01889, $p > 0.05$).

In the subtable for young-old, the Kendall's tau c value is -0.11570 ($p > 0.05$). There appears to be no relationship between politicization and reason when controlling for age in the young-old category. This relationship does not differ from the zero-order table relationship.

In the subtable for old, the Kendall's tau c value is -0.01477 ($p > 0.05$). There is no relationship between politicization and reason for deciding to vote when controlling for age in the old category. The relationship in this partial table does not differ from that in the zero order table.

In the subtable for old-old, the Kendall's tau c value is +0.02142

($p = 0.031$). Of the old-old 100% of those with low politicization give micro-reasons, while 62.5% of those with medium and 78.6% of those with high politicization give micro-reasons. There is a weak positive relationship found between politicization and reason for deciding to vote when controlling for age in the old-old category.

When controlling for age the relationship between politicization and reason for deciding to vote changes from that found when no control is done. There appears to be no relationship between politicization and reason for deciding to vote in the zero-order table, however, when controlling for age, the young-old and old subtables remain the same as the zero order table showing no relationship, and the old-old table produces only a small change to a weak positive relationship between politicization and reason for deciding to vote. Although these changes in the relationship between politicization and reason for deciding to vote under the specific conditions of age are small, it leads me to the conclusion that age has a peculiar interacting effect on the relationship between politicization and reason for deciding to vote. Because the relation seems to change only under conditions of old-old age, it appears that the nature of the relationship between age, politicization and reason for deciding to vote may not be linear. Perhaps, the unique phenomenon of living into old-old age produces relationships between politicization and reason for deciding to vote not able to be discovered with these linear statistics.

TABLE 10: REASON by POLITZ by AGE

YOUNG-OLD

		POLITZ Low	Medium	High	Totals
REASON	Micro-	0 0.0%	5 83.3%	12 80.0%	17 77.3%
	Macro-	1 100.0%	3 16.7%	3 20.0%	5 22.7%
	Totals	1 4.5%	6 27.3%	15 68.2%	22

tau c = -0.11570 significance > 0.05

OLD

		POLITZ Low	Medium	High	Totals
REASON	Micro-	3 75.0%	15 78.9%	27 79.4%	45 78.9%
	Macro-	1 25.0%	4 15.8%	7 20.6%	11 19.3%
	Totals	4 7.0%	19 33.3%	34 59.6%	57

tau c = -0.01477 significance > 0.05

OLD-OLD

		POLITZ Low	Medium	High	Totals
REASON	Micro-	5 100.0%	22 62.5%	5 78.6%	32 78.0%
	Macro-	0 0.0%	3 37.5%	6 21.4%	9 22.0%
	Totals	5 12.2%	8 19.5%	28 68.3%	41

tau c = +0.02142 significance = 0.031

Conclusions

Life cycle theorists focus primarily on the role and status changes that come with age. Rather than treating age as a causal factor itself, their point is that it is the life stage changes that come with age that cause people to behave differently in old age. By defining the roles and statuses which a person occupies in particular age ranges (the life cycle theorists call these life stages), the theorists claim behavior can accurately be predicted. The main purpose of this thesis is to understand how reason for deciding to vote can be explained using the life cycle perspective. The relationships between age, role and status engagement, politicization and reason for deciding to vote are examined to test several hypotheses that develop from a life cycle explanation of voting behavior among the elderly.

This study weakly supported the hypothesis that the older the person, the lower the number of roles and statuses; and showed only weak evidence that the lower the number of roles and statuses the lower the politicization. This study found no evidence for linear relationship between age, role/status engagement, politicization and reason for deciding to vote. However, this thesis does support the need for further study of age and life stage in an exploration of political behavior using non-linear statistical analysis.

Age imposes its influence on the roles and statuses that are available to a person throughout life. It would appear that as a person ages there is a decrease in the number of roles and statuses. The loss

of work and family related roles and statuses in later life makes it hard for these persons to maintain a high level of role/status engagement. The social norms of retirement at a particular age and the norms which dictate whether attention is paid primarily to family of orientation or to family of reproduction at different ages are ways that limit the choice of "self" defining roles and statuses. Social norms requiring wisdom and experience of age in government seem to tailor political roles and statuses for participation by older people.

Roles/status engagement thus narrowed, political roles and statuses do not appear to become more the focal point than family or work for those in a later life stage. Contrary to what Glenn and Grimes (1968) state, an older person's role/status engagement in politics does not appear to be different than any of the other role/status engagements. Political roles and statuses do not appear to take the place of other lost roles and statuses. Instead, it appears that all role/status engagements decrease, including political ones.

An alternative way of thinking about the dynamics between role/status engagement, politicization and reason for deciding to vote may be to consider old age as a transitory time when the older person is trying to resolve the past and plan for the future (Butler, 1968, 1971; Curtin, 1972). As roles and statuses are lost, voting as part of the system of political role/status engagements becomes the remaining viable interest and activity (8). Becoming involved in the decision-making process of the society may be seen as one way to efficiently untangle some of the conflicts. The voting decision may

reflect a variety of personal concerns the individual has because of his/her other remaining limited associations, memberships and responsibilities. Therefore, when the older person is asked about the reasons for deciding to vote, those reasons reflect the process of life review and are consequently micro-reasons.

In this study's attempt to find the relevant factors in the older person's decision to vote and to support a life cycle theory of political participation, it still appears that age and life stage are key to understanding the dynamics of the relationships between politicization and reason given for deciding to vote. Most significantly this study points to the fact that the relationships between age, role and status engagement, politicization and reason for deciding to vote although not related in a linear fashion, may be related in some non-linear way. A future study may explore the possible non-linear relationships between these variables.

Considerations

In completing this research study several problems were discovered. The most important general issue is the consideration of using cross-sectional data to support a theory about a longitudinal research problem. The secondary problems are small sample size, a lengthy questionnaire and a lack of sophistication in statisical analysis.

There are problems in using cross-sectional data to support a theory about relationships between factors that require by their very nature a longitudinal research design. Cross-sectional data describes one specific, finite point in time, while longitudinal data describes a process that changes and develops over time.

Using cross-sectional data to demonstrate longitudinal theories requires that the researcher infer changes over time based on the single point data. These inferences are approximations of change over time (Babbie, 1973). Researchers assume the factors being studied progress logically over time.

For example, in this study, data showing young-old persons having more role/status engagement than old or old-old persons are assumed to represent an ongoing change that any one person over time will experience due to the aging process. Unfortunately, this assumes that what is true for individuals in different life stages is also true for a single person advancing through life.

It is important to bear in mind that interpretations of cross-sectional data approximate and help the researcher to infer changes over time.

The secondary issues that are important considerations in this study involve the sample size, the questionnaire and the statistical analysis.

This study used a small sample size (N=120). Although during the data collection period there seemed to be an adequate amount of data, account was not taken for incomplete questionnaires unable to be used in the final analysis. Small cell sizes in the partial analysis tables were another problem caused by the small sample size.

Another consideration is the questionnaire. A more focused questionnaire would have been better. The questionnaire covered a variety of topics including age, sex, education, membership in social clubs, role and status engagement, general social activity, political interest, the importance of politics, current voting behavior, change in voting behavior, reasons for voting, effect of others on voting decision and frequency of voting activity. This was too broad a range of questions for any to be adequately answered given the time period allotted to the respondents for completion of the questionnaire. I think the topic of the study would have been clearer to respondents, and probably more interesting to them, if the questionnaire had focused the questions to elicit the core of information desired. Respondents may have put more thought into the answers if the questionnaire had zeroed in on the topics of this study. A shorter questionnaire would not have posed such an arduous and time-consuming task. I may have gotten more consideration from the respondents with fewer questions.

Finally, the crosstabulations and multivariate contingency analysis, although thoroughly done and enlightening to the factors associated with voting decision of the elderly, are incomplete in the sophistication of statistical analysis. A better level of measurement might have been multiple regression using age, role/status engagement and politicization as interval level dependent variables and reason for deciding to vote as the interval level independent variable.

Despite these shortcomings, this research study proved a strenuous exercise in research methodology and analysis. The data analyzed and the conclusions made were helpful in beginning a sketch of the characteristics of life stage that affect the voting decision.

Footnotes

1. One component of the disengagement theory (Neugarten, 1964; Cummings and Henry, 1961) is relevant here. The authors noted the increasingly inward orientation of older people. Disengagement refers to the process by which older individuals gradually withdraw from roles they have occupied in middle age. The reduction in roles causes the person to become more involved with self and decreasingly involved with the concerns of others.

2. Cronbach's alpha calculation: alpha = kr / 1 + (k-1) r where k is the number of indicators in the index and r is the average intercorrelation among k items. For the role/status engagment index, k = 11, r = 0.1619, alpha = (11)(.1619)/ 1 + (10)(.1619) = 0.68

3. Many respondents indicated through conversations that a better measure of importance of politics was the amount of time spent reading political newspapers, magazines or bulletins, attending council meetings, writing to elected officials, meeting with public figures, working in political offices or on issues and causes, rather than discussing politics.

4. Parsons talks about the self-orientation versus the collectivity-orientation. "This alternative arises when an individual situation may be classified either as an opportunity for the gratification of ego's own relatively private utilitarian needs or as an opportunity for the gratification of the needs of a collectivity of which ego is a part" (Parsons and Shils, 1951). Micro-reasons for deciding to vote can be interpreted as self-oriented reasons while macro-reasons are collectivity-oriented reasons.

5. Utilitarian here is used to connote views relating to a philosophy in which the aim of action should be the largest possible good for the greatest number of people, although the researcher realizes that other connotations do exist.

6. It was felt that including the four cases would have made any conclusions based on difference of race insignificant and inappropriate, statistically.

7. Kendall's tau b and Kendall's tau c can be used only to predict linear relationships. The researcher notes that although these variables show no linear relationship, the variables may show another kind of relationship. The scope of non-linear testing is beyond this thesis.

8. See previous discussion on measures of politicization and see literature on Milbrath's ladder of political participation in Political Participation, Lcstcr Milbrath, 1965.

Appendix A: Letter to Sample

Gretchen E. Decker
152 North 33rd Street
Omaha, NE 68131
(402) 342-3406

Dear_____,

My name is Gretchen E. Decker. I am a graduate student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. I am working on a thesis to complete the Master's degree in Sociology. My special interest is in the field of Aging. I am particularly interested in the political views of older persons, those 55 years old and over.

One popular subject of study in Aging is voting behavior. Social scientists have examined various aspects of this subject including such factors as age, income, sex and education, that influence voting decisions. They have studied the party affiliations of older persons and they have looked at the changes in affiliations over the life cycle. Researchers also have examined the growing political power of the older population.

I am interested in the important factors that the individual sees as influencing their decisions to vote. My hypothesis is that one's definition of oneself and the roles that one sees as important will greatly affect the decision process in voting.

I plan to ask volunteers questions in an informal way on paper about their voting experiences. Several related topics will be included in the interview about perceptions of self in terms of roles, participation in social, business, church, friendship and kinship groups. The questionnaire is designed to take approximately thirty minutes to complete.

I would appreciate your organization's participation in this survey. I am striving for a representative sample of the Omaha area. Your active part in identifying this sample will greatly help me. The survey should, also, be interesting to the volunteers. I would be glad to share the results of the study as soon as I have finished.

I will contact you by phone within the next week to make the necessary arrangements. If you have any questions before that time please feel free to call me at school (554-2626) or at home (342-3406). Thank you for your enthusiasm and co-operation.

Sincerely,

Gretchen E. Decker

Appendix B: The Questionnaire

Gretchen E. Decker
University of Nebraska at Omaha
Department of Sociology
Phone: 554-2626

Thank you for your co-operation in filling out this questionnaire. Please answer each question to the best of your ability and as completely as possible. If you have any questions please feel free to ask me. The answers to the questionnaire will be kept in the strictest confidence and will be destroyed as soon as the data is analyzed.

1. In what year were you born?

2. ___Male ____Female

3. ____American Indian or Alaskan Native
____Asian or Pacific Islander
____Hispanic ____Black ____White
____Other

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed? Circle one.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 completed grammer school
9 10 11 12 completed high school
college 1 2 3 4 5 or more years

5. One of the things I'd like to know is how people spend their time. Are you a member of any social clubs or organizations? Yes or No If yes, how many? _____

6. Do you chair any special committees or act as an officer of any clubs or organizations? Yes or No
If yes, how many? _____

7. Another thing I am interested in is how people see themselves. Here is a list of relationships you may have in family, in groups or with individuals. Please look over the list and check any of those that apply to you and your activities.

___I am a great-grandparent.
___I am a grandparent.
___I am a parent.
___I am a spouse.
___I have brothers and sisters that are still living.
___I have cousins, nieces, nephews that are still living.
___I have friends that I spend time with.
___I am active in social clubs.
___I am active in business clubs.
___I am active in church.
___I am active within the community.

8. Have you voted in:

___every election since you were eligible?
___almost every election since you were eligible?
___several elections since you were eligible?
___only a few elections since you were eligible?
___no elections since you were eligible?

9. Please consider the following activities. Answer each one as: I do this often, I do this occasionally, I do this seldom, or I never do this.

Visit with family and friends	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Read a book	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Watch television	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Work on a craft	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Discuss politics	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Go to a social club meeting	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Go to a religious meeting	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Go to work (paid)	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never

10. Would you say that in your life today politics is:

___of no importance.
___of little importance.
___of moderate importance.
___of great importance.

11. Some people think that politics should only concern the young. How do you feel about this?

___The young should be interested in politics.
___The middle-aged should be interested in politics.
___Older people should be interested in politics.
___All people should be interested in politics.

12. It is thought that getting older can change one's voting behavior. Compare your voting behavior to what you did ten years ago. Do you vote:

__a lot less often.
__a little less often.
__about the same.
__a little more often.
__a lot more often.

13. Why do you think your voting behavior has changed?

14. Some social scientists think that people choose to vote or not to vote depending on their problems, concerns and thoughts about certain things. Answer each of the following: this is important to my voting decision, this is somewhat important to my voting decision or this is not important to my voting decision.

My duty as a citizen	important	somewhat important	not important
My responsibility to the community	important	somewhat important	not important
Family responsibility	important	somewhat important	not important
Immediate personal problems	important	somewhat important	not important
Personal beliefs about political activity	important	somewhat important	not important

15. People tend to vote or not to vote like others around them. Do you feel that others around you:

___do not influence you.
___influence you a little.
___influence you a lot.

16. I am very interested in how people arrive at a decision to vote. I wonder what influences that decision for you? Perhaps talk with family and friends is important or maybe loyalties to a small group or work ties or church affiliations cause you to vote or not to vote. Of the various relationships you have with others, please list the three that are most important to your decision to vote.

17. In looking over your list of the three most important things that help you to decide to vote or not to vote, do these things seem important in your day-to-day life? Yes or no? Why or why not?

Appendix C: Politicization Matrix*

IMMPOL	0	1	2	3
POLITICS				
0	0	0	1	1
1	0	0	1	1
2	1	1	2	2
3	1	1	2	2

IMPPOL = the importance of politics to the respondent.
POLITICS = The frequency with which the respondent discusses politics.

* The number found within the matrix cells represents the level of politicization of the respondent, coded from 0 to 2 the variable is scaled from low politicization to high politicization.

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