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What Happened To Sanders? Millennials Analyses of the 2016 Election Post-Primaries

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WHAT HAPPENED TO SANDERS? MILLENNIALS ANALYSES OF THE 2016 ELECTION POST-PRIMARIES.

by

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ABSTRACT

The Millennial generation is now the largest living generation. This generation has absorbed many labels, including the one of not being civically engaged. Many news sources focused on their lack of engagement throughout the 2016 election, stating that they were the key to a win in the election. Since Bernie Sanders was the first candidate to capture the attention of such a large amount of the Millennial generation, this research is designed to understand why, and provide an in depth analysis of the thoughts about Sanders from the largest living generation. The data was collected by conducting 15 in-depth interviews with Millennials, ages 18-34, who supported or voted for Bernie Sanders in the 2016 primaries. During the interviews, they were asked questions on their background, their views on social issues, their thoughts on Bernie Sanders, and where they see the United States political system going forward. The final analysis was conducted using a basic thematic approach, which coded for similarities throughout each interview. After analysis 7 major themes emerged which are as follow, (a) they aren't just engaged, they are passionate, (b) political engagement through technology, (c) lost cause, (d) life experiences, (e) generational differences, (f) authenticity, and (g) all lives matter. The findings indicate that this sample of the Millennial generation is far from unengaged. They are very passionate about the lives of all Americans and Sanders spoke to them at a level in which they felt they could trust him. These findings are important for future researchers who wish to understand Millennials importance in the future of our political system.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the 2016 primaries and presidential elections the world was exposed to a variety of diverse candidates, as well as, many new and unconventional ideas. There was the Jewish socialist senator constructing the political revolution, a business man wanting to reshape America's economic structure, and a woman hoping to unite the country and further diminish inequalities. Throughout the primaries, Donald Trump, the businessman, held a solid lead for the Republicans, but it was not so clear cut for the Democrats. Hillary Clinton was faced with contest from a strong underdog, Bernie Sanders. At this point in time Bernie Sanders was far from a household name, but over the course of the election he gained vast support, especially from the Millennial generation.

The Millennial generation is now the largest living generation, with about 75 million adults between the ages of 18 and 34 (Pew Research Center 2016). They are projected to continue growing over the next few years to an astonishing 81 million adults. This generation has absorbed many labels, including the one of not being civically engaged. Many news sources focused on their lack of engagement throughout the 2016 election, stating that they were the key to a win in the election. News sources like the New York Times and Washington Post explain the first time we have seen extreme engagement from this generation was for Bernie Sanders. The Washington Post (2016) proclaimed Millennials emphatic support for Sanders, by stating that in most states he saw support by over 80% of people under age 30.

In comparison, Millennials in the 2008 and 2012 elections showed their support for Barack Obama with large voting numbers. In the 2008 election, Obama saw roughly 66% support from young voters (CNN 2008), while in 2012 he saw about 60% (Galston 2016). With

that being said, in most states Bernie Sanders saw more support from Millennials than Barack Obama did.

After conducting research on Millennials overall behaviors and thoughts of the 2016 election, the political system, and social issues, this project aims to specifically focus on Millennials who supported or voted for Bernie in the primaries. Since Bernie Sanders was the first candidate to ever capture the attention of a vast majority of the Millennial generation, this research hopes to understand why, and provide an in depth analysis of the thoughts about Sanders from the largest living generation. The data was collected by conducting 15 in-depth interviews with Millennials, ages 18-34, who supported or voted for Bernie Sanders in the 2016 primaries. The participants were recruited using a convenience snowball method. During the interviews, they were asked questions on their background, their views on social issues, their thoughts on Bernie Sanders and behaviors throughout the 2016 election cycle, and where they see the United States political system going forward. After all of the data was collected and transcribed, a inductive approach was used to analyze data, looking for similarities, differences, and themes consistent throughout the responses.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Generational Cohort Theory. When examining similarities across generations, Karl Mannheim's Theory of Generations explains how historical and social events sculpt a generation on a national or international scale. Mannheim believed that individuals within the same cohort or generation share many of the same experiences, thoughts, and values through a shared socially constructed reality because these ideas, scripts, and norms are situated within a specific historical epoch with conditions that shape generational beliefs. For instance, The Greatest Generation experienced the Great Depression and World War II, The Silent Generation experienced World War II as well and the economic and technological changes that occurred after, and Baby Boomers grew up with many cultural changes occurring, like the Civil Rights Movement and vast technological advancements. With that being said, Millennials have been shaped by the growing effects of globalization, the 2008 Housing Market Crash, and the increasing cost of college (Pew Research Center 2014).

The Millennial generation. The Millennial generation began with those born in 1981 and continues to grow as each year passes, with the youngest of Millennials being 18 years old (Pew Research Center 2016). Although this generation spans over a long period of time, there are many common stereotypes associated with them. Milkman (2017) mentions, this generation is commonly associated with "the popular stereotypes of being selfish, narcissistic, and politically disengaged." Furthermore, Milkman (2017) states, "Millennials have more progressive attitudes and beliefs than do older generations on a wide range of issues, from the rights of sexual minorities to capitalism itself." Milkman's description of progressive Millennials coincides with the fact that about 50% of Millennials are registered as Independents (Pew Research Center

2014). Despite their politically independent identity, Pew Research Center (2014) goes on to discuss that this generation tends to vote Democratically in the election process, which corresponds with Milkman's notation of their liberalism.

Similarly, we see David and Jack Cahn (2016) discuss Millennials progressive behaviors in their work as well. While Milkman (2017) discusses their growingly leftist ideas, Cahn and Cahn (2016) discuss their political independence. Their independence exemplifies their movement away from the two-party system, and their growing belief to fix social issues. Cahn (2016) discusses the term "radical realism" and how many Millennials use this in the political realm today. "Radical realism" is defined as a way of thinking throughout the Millennial generation in regards to their views of crucial social issues. Instead of them "picking a side," they tend to find more centrist ideas to solve these issues, rather following the ideologies of a specific political party. In sum, Millennials are described as independently leaning democrats, who are educated, tolerant, and less religious than previous generations.

Shaping the Millennial generation. As mentioned above, Mannheim's Generational Cohort Theory allows the assumption that different historical and social events shape generations on a national or global scale. With that being said, the Millennial generation is far more different than any of their predecessors. While they are more politically independent, they also have less religious ties, which is shaped from their diversity, tolerance, and economic hardships.

Religiosity, or lack thereof. Since the early 80's religiosity has been on the decline (Grant 2014). Pew Research Center (2014) shows that about three in ten Millennials do not affiliate with a religion. In 2007, the Religious Landscape Survey was conducted both in 2007 and 2014, with a sample of 35,000 United States adults questioning their overall religious practices and

religiosity (Pew Research Center 2015). Overall, the survey showed a general decline throughout the American public in religious practice. With that being said, there is a stronger detachment from religion amongst the Millennial generation. Pew Research Center (2015) mentions "that only 50% of Millennials say they believe in God, compared to 70% in the Silent Generation and Baby Boomer cohort." "In addition, 27% of the youngest Millennials say they attend religious services on a weekly basis, compared to 51% in the Silent Generation" (Pew Research 2015). When comparing the initial Religious Landscape Survey in 2007 to the results in 2014, the trend of religious decline was prominent. Pew Research Center (2015) goes on to state the relationship between those unaffiliated with religion and political party. While three in ten Democrats say they do not affiliate with a religion, only 14% of Republicans say they do not affiliate with a religion. While there was a decline in Republican religiosity, it is far slower than the Democratic decline (Pew Research Center 2015). With that being said, the relationship between Democrats and Millennials being less religious is noted in their views of social issues. The lack of religiosity amongst Millennials can be ascribed to their diversity, tolerance, and economic hardships. In turn, their diversity, tolerance, and economic hardships have shaped their ideas of marriage, education, and children, which have also changed drastically over the last 30 years. These characteristics have been shaped by their different life experiences, and are now shaping many different social institutions across the nation.

Diversity. Millennials are by far the most diverse generation to date. Pew Research Center (2014) states that about 43% of Millennials are non-white. NBC (2014) notes that this increase in diversity can be contributed to the "large wave of Latino and Asian immigration over the few decades. Furthermore, Frey (2016) describes how the numbers of non-White adults are

continuing to grow. Frey (2016) continues by stating, since 1973, the White population has decreased by 20%, and still continues to decline as a percentage of the total American population. Millennials diversity contributes to their tolerance in regards to issues like racial and religious conflict and the acceptance of the LGBTQ community.

Economic Hardships. The 2008 Housing Market Crash disrupted the lives of Millennials all across the United States (Pew Research Center 2014). The market crash, which caused a recession has culminated many different hardships for Millennials, in which are still shaping them today. In 2008, the oldest Millennials were 27 years old. As many of them were just graduating college, searching for jobs, starting families, and buying homes this was extremely difficult. Upon graduating with large amount of debt, they either could not find a job or could not buy a house. This has significantly influenced their ideas on getting married and having a family. As children and young adults, Millennials saw many of their families lose their homes and jobs at the time of the crash. This too has changed their views on the appropriate time to get married, have children, as well as their levels of education (Pew Research Center 2014).

Education. Millennials are the most educated generation thus far (Pew Research Center 2014) . Many find it increasingly important to continue with higher education, in order to meet the competitive environment of the work force. About two-thirds of Millennials are leaving college with an average of $27,000 in debt (Pew Research Center 2014). When we compare this to past generations, there is at least a $10,000 increase. Despite their higher levels of education, they are finding it harder to find jobs out of college, with extraordinary amounts of debt. Thus, we see these adults waiting longer to get married and having more children out of wedlock.

Marriage and Children. Millennial men get married on average at age 29, and women at 27 (Pew Research Center 2014). Pew Research Center continues by saying this is the oldest we have seen adults getting married throughout American history. Although Millennials are waiting longer to get married Pew Research Center (2014) states that about 69% of Millennials want to get married at some point in their lifetime, preferably when they are economically stable. With that being said, this generation has the highest number of children out of wedlock. Pew Research Center (2012) stated that approximately 47% of births are out of wedlock. Altogether these experiences, including, higher education, more debt, getting married later, having children out of wedlock, and ethnic and racial diversity shape Millennials to be more politically independent and to have less religious ties than previous generations.

Millennials on Social Issues. As previously stated, Cahn (2016) states that Millennials have inherited a thought process which evokes them to focus on resolving social issues with less affiliation to a political party. In addition, Milkman (2017) states that on a Pew Poll (2011) shows 47% of Millennials express negative thoughts toward capitalism, while 49% expressed positive thoughts towards socialism. These shift towards socialism explains their difference in views on social issues when compared to older generations.

After conducting research on Millennials and the 2016 election, their ranking of social issues showed that affordable education and healthcare were two of the most important issues the respondents. Furthermore, a Pew Trends Poll (2014) examined Millennials views on a vast number of social issues including same-sex marriage, legalization of marijuana, immigration, abortion, gun control, and governmental help. The poll found that 68% are in favor of gay marriage, 69% are in favor of legalization of marijuana, and 55% believe that illegal immigrants

should be allowed to apply for citizenship. In addition, 56% are in favor of legalizing abortion and 49% believe it is more important to control guns than to protect American rights to own a gun. Lastly, 53% of Millennials believe that our government provided more services, 54% believe it is the government's responsibility to provide healthcare coverage to all, and 61% of Millennials believe Social Security benefits should not be reduced.

Politically Independent, Democratic Voters. In both 2008 and 2012 Obama received a majority of support from young voters when compared to his Republican counterpart. In 2008, Obama received 66% of the vote from voters between the ages of 18 and 29 over Republican candidate John McCain (Pew Research Center 2008). In 2012, he received 60% of the young vote over Republican nominee Mitt Romney (Pew Research Center 2012). In addition, Obama drew record breaking crowds during his campaign, seeing up to 24,000 people at a rally in New York City (Jilani 2015). In comparison, Sanders broke Obama's records with more than 28,000 people showing up to his Vermont rally with many of them being Millennials (Landers 2016). In 2016, after Bernie Sanders lost the in the primaries to Hillary Clinton, it was hard for her to obtain the young vote despite Sanders and Obama's endorsement. Clinton received 55% of the vote from those voters aged 18-29 (NPR 2016), but there was an increase of votes for third party candidates from 3% in 2012 to 8% in 2016 (Green 2016).

Why Bernie. As stated previously, Bernie Sanders received extraordinary support from the Millennials generation over the course of the 2016 elections and even still today. Goyal (2016) states that this is solely because Millennials are fed up with the current system, and Bernie Sanders presents to the a democratic socialism which addresses most of the issues that are important to them. Goyal (2016) continues on by saying that Bernie is the only candidate to

represent the oppressed time after time throughout his entire political career. So, it is not a shock why this generation expresses such strong support for him. Bernie supports single-payer healthcare, free public education, to take down big pharma, racial equality, a raised minimum wage, and environmental justice. Furthermore, he has not taken any donation from Wall Street and fights for economic justice as well. Goyal (2016) expresses that this young generation sees him as one of them, coming from the bottom and an advocate for a political revolution.

All in all this "confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat, open to change, more ethnically and racially diverse, less religious, less likely to have served in the military, and on track to becoming the most educated generation in American history" generation is fueling America's political revolution. After conducting previous research on Millennials overall behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs from the 2016 as a whole many of the responses exhibited Millennial distrust for and pull from the two-party political system. This project aims to learn why Bernie Sanders received so much support from Millennials, how this ties into the socializing agents that shaped Millennials, and where Millennials see the political system going in the future.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Data. The current study uses qualitative data that was collected through face-to-face interviews, the researcher also utilized phone calls for those participants who cannot meet in person. To acquire participants, convenience and snowball sampling was used. The data includes information on the self-administered demographic questionnaire, the audio recording of the interview, and transcriptions of the audio recordings. Paper based data was entered into the researcher's personal computer, and all audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Upon transcription, the information was analyzed using a systematic thematic coding approach.

Method of Research. A total of 15 Millennials who voted or supported Bernie Sanders in the 2016 election cycle were recruited. Although Millennials are a heterogeneous group, Mannheim's Generational Cohort Theory leads us to believe that there are many shared experiences, beliefs, and values between a generation due to shared experiences and historical events. By following the same political figure, it can be assumed that this self-volunteering sample would share similar beliefs and values based on Mannheim's Generational Cohort Theory. In addition, theoretical saturation, "*the phase of qualitative data analysis in which the researcher has continued sampling and analyzing data until no new data appear and all concepts in the theory are well-developed*" (SAGE 2004: 392), occurs in as few as 12 interviews or as many as 40. Although a sample of 15 Millennials, who supported the same candidate would was on the low side of the spectrum, theoretical saturation was achieved and it was clear that any further interviews were unlikely to add new information.

The recruitment of the 15 Millennials involved using a convenience and snowball sampling approach. Convenience sampling is defined as a "sample that is easy to reach" (Stat

Trek 2017), while snowball sampling is "where the research participants recruit other participants for a study" (Statistics How To 2017). The first recruitment strategy included the researcher requesting participation through personal networks including, e-mails, Facebook, Instagram, and word-of-mouth. Through Facebook messages were sent to personal contacts, as well as, Facebook groups like Progressive Action at UCF and UCF College of Democrats. The second recruitment strategy, snowball sampling, began after the researcher recruited a small convenience sample (as mentioned above). The researcher asked the initial sample of Millennials who supported or voted for Bernie Sanders to reach out to their group of friends or acquaintances for participants and invite them to participate in this study. If interested, acquaintances then contacted the researcher. The potential participants were screened, and if they meet the inclusion criteria, an interview was scheduled. Since the inclusion criteria was included when searching for participants, the researcher did not have to turn anyone away who was interested in participating.

After the first few interviews, the researcher adjusted the interview guide to exclude questions that were redundant or that were unclear to the participant. These adjustments included removal of the following questions: describe any hardship their family went through as a child, any social issues they felt could be placed on the back burner, and where they saw the political system going forward within the next decade. In addition, multiple questions were added which included, their opinion on any childhood experiences that may have shaped their progressive views, how much time they spent reading political commentary, and where they received their news from, and what their thoughts were on the electoral college, two party system, and closed primaries.

After the data were collected an inductive approach was used for analyzation, in which assumptions are "grounded" in the data. This allowed the researcher to group the data together and compare the similarities throughout the transcriptions. The interview guideline was broken down into categories which helped analyze similarities by category. After initial analyzation, seven themes emerged, which included, 'authenticity', 'trustworthiness', 'diversity', 'media influence', 'lost cause', 'all lives matter', and 'generational differences'. After further analysis, the theme 'trustworthiness' was grouped with 'authenticity' due to the similarity in how participants used these concepts. For example, when participants were asked why they felt Sanders was a better candidate then Clinton, the often described Hillary as not honest or untrustworthy, whereas the described Sanders as real and authentic. After further analysis the themes were revised to better capture the overall concepts the participants were describing, and they now include 'authenticity', 'life experiences, 'political engagement through technology', 'all lives matter', 'lost cause', 'generational differences', and 'they are not just engaged, they are passionate'.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This study sought to understand how Bernie Sanders drew so much support from the Millennial generation, despite literature suggesting them to be politically unengaged. Seven themes emerged that explained Millennial engagement in politics and how Sanders received so much support. Those themes include, (a)life experiences, (b)engagement through technology (c)generational differences, (d)lost cause, (e)authenticity, (f)all lives matter, and (g) they are not just engaged, they are passionate.

Life Experiences. The thematic area of life experience was defined by any personal experience that occurred throughout the respondents' lifetime that they feel has shaped their progressive views. The term progressive views was defined differently by each participant, but overall it was represented as views that are further left then a traditional democrat. Most participants described Sanders as progressive when discussing his views on social issues, like universal healthcare or free public college. While everyone has life experiences, this area is important because it shapes each individuals views differently. In terms of this research, the participants' life experiences have influenced their support for Bernie Sanders. All responses were unique to the individual, but certain themes stood out. For instance, being a child of immigrants, watching their parents struggle during the recession, or struggling with student loan debt themselves. In addition, eight of 15 participants were raised by a single mother. Those examples represent a hardship they or their family faced, it represents a time in their lives where they may have been a part of a marginalized group in society. Those difficulties have in turn shaped them to be more tolerant and understanding to the difficulties others may face. Some other examples include, Katie's description of her mother's struggles while she was growing up, "…She doesn't

have amazing paying jobs… she has debt, she has student loans she has to payback, no matter what she had she was still able to put food on the table for us and provide for us." Tara discusses having an Aunt who was always openly lesbian, which has shaped her views on equality. Similarly, Steven opens up to having an openly bi-sexual family member as well, which opened his eyes to the discrimination against same-sex couples. In addition, three respondents shared their experiences having a parent as a teacher, and how they would discuss the inequalities in the education system. Jared and Jamie talk about being in lower class families, and getting hit by the multiple hurricanes in 2007 and the housing market crash of 2008. They watched their parents struggle to make ends meet. Steven also talks about working at Taco Bell as a high school student, making minimum wage, and finding out how much the CEO of his company was making. He states,

> "The thing that really lead to my political awakening, as far as when I was young I was 16 or 17 working at a Taco Bell. I was making minimum wage $7.25, I might have gotten my raise to $7.35 at that point and one of the shift leads showed me this Facebook meme talking about how much the CEO's of fast food companies made and Taco Bells' CEO made something like $20 million in a year. I was like that can't be right, that's insane. I'm making minimum wage and this person is making like $20 million a year. So I did some research and I looked into it and I was like holy crap that's right and I did a little math and I found out in order to make as much money as my CEO made in 1 year, I would have to work full time for like 1,400 years."

Whether it be, a parent who was ill, like Linda's dad, or who did not have any education, like Tara's mom and grandma, every respondent has had hardships that shaped their views to be more tolerant and understanding of social injustices. Their tolerance and understanding align with Sanders platform as a progressive candidate, which made him more relatable to these voters.

Engagement through technology. When discussing technology and media, the participants described it in two ways, first off was their actual media consumption on politics through technology and second was the influence that had on their views, or even their families' views. They describe their consumption as instant accessibility to political commentary through social media or news apps on their cell phones and how influential those posts become in shaping their views on each candidate or even on the political system as a whole. With that being said, a majority of the sample watched or read some type of political commentary at least once a day (n=10). In addition, they discuss being able to see the opinions of anyone who uses social media as a platform to voice their opinions, like President Trump. Although sharing Facebook or Twitter posts is not seen as a traditional form of engagement, it is a form of Millennials awareness and participation in politics. Jamie explained,

> "Yeah, I read political commentary everyday usually from social media. I am guilty of being a person of my kind. So, I'll go on Twitter, and hey you know when our President is always putting such great political commentary on Twitter, that is his main platform, I'd feel like I'd be missing out if I didn't check Twitter or social media. A lot of social media, which then then leads me to posts from the Times or Washington Post, but I'd say probably an hour or two and definitely more so during election times because you just can't escape it. It's on all the time."

In addition, Steven elaborated on his media consumption stating, "I do get a lot of my news from social media posts my friends are liking…I have my notifications turned on for like ABC, FOX, Politico, a lot of news apps on my phone I get notifications from." Since Millennials were raised in the height of technological boom, their instant accessibility to communications around the world has strongly influenced their political engagement. Linda states, "I liked a bunch of the major news

networks on Facebook, like CNN, probably everyone but FOX. Just cause it's so much easier to scroll through Facebook and stay up to date. I liked Bernie's page too…" So, despite the fact Millennials are notoriously labeled as being politically unengaged and tethered to their cell phones, these Millennials are using the connection with technology for political awareness and engagement.

Media Influence. The prominence of technology in the everyday lives of these participants makes media influence unavoidable. In order to determine the influence of the media on each participants views they were directly asked if they believe the media influenced their thoughts on the 2016 election. All of them acknowledged the prevalence of the media on the perceptions of each candidate or the political system. They also used similar terms in describing the candidates, for example many called Hillary "crooked," which Donald Trump was and still is notorious for calling Clinton to this day. Many participants, like Jamie, also mention the continuous coverage of the "e-mail scandal," and how that affected peoples' perceptions of Clinton. Tara directly mentions how she feels the media impacted views on Clinton by stating, "I think that people either didn't like her originally and then grew to hate her or they didn't really have an opinion on her and then kind of grew to distrust her and dislike her because of the media."

While most participants described Hillary as crooked or untrustworthy, they were also consistent with the way they described Sanders. Linda, Jamie, and Steven note him as being principled and consistent. In doing so, they all mention the photo of Sanders during the Civil Rights movement, and how that relates to Sanders authenticity. While this hints to the idea that they all support authenticity, it also shows the prevalence of the media, how connected it keeps everyone, and how it shapes their views. While Sanders may not have meant for that photo to surface, it does

show that he has been fighting for the same causes for the last 40 years, and that is the way it came across to these participants. In sum, the participants each mentioned how impactful the media is on the perceptions of the candidates, like Steven who states, "the media is so pervasive in the country that it has some sort influence on most people." He then goes on to describe a study that looked at TV coverage of the candidates before the primaries where he learned that Trump received the most coverage, then Clinton, then Bernie. He stated, "…but the complete car wreck that was Donald Trump and the Republican party took so much of the spotlight away…"

Generational Differences. The participants noted differences between their views and the views their parents hold on issues, candidates, and even political afflation. Katie talks about her mom saying that she is "a lot more open minded then other people her age." While her mom was liberal, she was one of the 11 participants to have at least one parent who had conservative beliefs. Many of these participants had conversations with their parents during the election time to try and understand how they can support a candidate like Donald Trump, which was far from a suitable candidate for them. For example when Brad was asked what kind of conversations he had with his parents during the 2016 election he bluntly stated, "…if FOX news said it, my parents would say it." Patricia discussed having conversations with her conservative father about why she thought Sanders was a good candidate. She really liked his stances on education and healthcare, but she believes that it was harder for her father to understand why universal education and healthcare is important because he doesn't face the same reality as her with massive debt and the inability to afford decent healthcare.

Even those who had liberal parents, expressed that their parents were not Progressive enough to support or vote for Sander. When describing his parents Jared states, "I wouldn't call

them Progressive, well I mean not what we call Progressive as far as the new generation. They are pretty in the middle." Even those participants with parents who support the Democratic party did not believe that they would support Sanders. They talked about Sanders as if he was too far left and idealistic. For instance, Nick shared, "They were all democratic and they were all going to vote for Hillary, and the way Bernie was portrayed as an extreme left was a little too much for them." He discussed his extremely democratic family, and his mother who he feels is progressive, but she still did not vote for Bernie. He continues on stating that he tried to understand what issues his mother didn't see eye to eye with Bernie, but he could not find any. She just seemed to think he was "a little too much," despite believing in his platform. In sum, only 3 participants had a family member who also supported Sanders. The participants try to explain this divide by stating the lack of understanding of his stances or that it is too much of a change from the systems we have in place now.

Lost Cause. The participants seemed to describe a lost cause in multiple ways. First, was Bernie Sanders being a lost cause. They called him too idealistic, or mentioned that even though they knew he was not going to win they voted for him anyway. Second, is how they described the 2016 election as a lost cause. The described the election as a lost cause stating that after Bernie lost they had to choose between the lesser of two evils, or that there was no good option so they voted third party, wrote in Bernie's name, or didn't vote at all. Third, many of them felt like the American political system is a lost cause. When discussing their views on the electoral college, the two party system, the closed primaries, and even economic corruption in the system, the participants seemed to have a grim perspective.

Sanders as a Lost Cause. When talking about Sanders many participants described him as being too far left or too idealistic, even if it was not their opinion it was the opinions of their friends, family or even the media. In addition, a majority of the participants mentioned that they knew he wouldn't win, or that people didn't expect him to get as far as he did. Samantha stated, "My family was not as supportive for Bernie because he was not a popular choice even though they felt that he meant well." Katie talks about the media portrayal of Sanders and how that also impacted her families views of him, "They made him seem crazy, like he was an old man losing his marbles…I don't know sometimes it seemed like they liked his ideas, but sometimes they made it seem like they though he was losing his marbles." Nick stated that "he saw it coming" when asked about his feelings after Bernie lost the primaries. He continued stating, "maybe if I had been a little more optimistic that he was actually going to have a chance in the primaries I would have been bummed, but I knew it was going to happen."

Election as a Lost Cause. When asking the participants their feelings after Sanders lost the primaries, they all described feelings of disappointment or anger. They stated it was the lesser of two evils, or "…it felt like we were screwed either way, but we were less screwed with Hillary." When talking about her feelings after Sanders lost the primaries Tara states, "I felt pretty hopeless… that was the beginning of the end." She goes on to state that she, her mother, and grandmother all thought the election was a "joke," but they were still terrified because they were aware Trump was going to win, despite the fact they voted for Clinton. Similarly, Patricia proclaims,

> "I would say it's like really disappointing to see that people would rather let a man with no experience who on TV basically just ruined his own image, and yet people are willing to side with

him just because he talked about building a wall and speaking to the poor white American, he was elected. While there is this woman who has worked they couldn't even give her a chance. So it was a really disappointing because it was a slap in the face to every little girl who are working so hard and who are struggling.

American Political System as a Lost Cause. In the last section of the interview the participants were asked about their thoughts on the American political system going forward, which included the electoral college system, two party system, and the closed primaries. Nick states, "I feel like there is a great weakening of our country's checks and balance system, just from the things I've seen Trump do already…" Furthermore, Tara discusses the lost cause of the two party system, "For one if there ever is a third party candidate that is good enough to potentially be president I don't think a lot of people would vote for them because they don't think they would ever get elected. I feel like it limits peoples' options." Lastly, Steven discusses the lost cause of the closed primaries in states like Florida. He states that "I think they are exclusionary, I think that you can make an argument that they are unconstitutional…" Similarly, Jamie states "Yeah, I think it's very dangerous system to have. You know again it completely discourages a third party candidate and undermines those without huge campaigns and super PACS and it makes them basically inept at doing their job so I think it's very damaging and undermines democracy." She also expressed the same attitude towards the electoral college system saying, "it's not representative at all..." and "it might have been that way when it was written and we were a fresh, ripe democracy, but we've taken it and made a fool of ourselves in a lot of ways." All in all, each participant felt like our political system needed improvements in some form or fashion. Many of them referred to our system as outdated and repressive to the citizens that it is supposed to represent.

Authenticity. Similarly to the theme lost cause, authenticity was also used to describe the candidates and the political system. When discussing the candidates they espouse honesty and consistency from the candidates. Also, a few participants discuss their desires for the candidates to stop taking money from private entities; this is one way they describe distrust. When discussing the political system the participants describe authenticity as being more transparent and equal.

Authenticity of the candidates. Almost every participant described a distrust for Hillary Clinton, which made it hard for them to support her despite eagerly wanting a woman President. Jamie even describes the distrust from her mother stating, "She liked Hillary, but she also had a distrust for Hillary because she's been following politics so closely for her whole life. So, she watched Hillary play both sides of the field on both sides of the issues… She's also done research into the Clinton Foundation and followed that money trail, and it's just a little dirtier and she's always loved Senator Bernie Sanders with the work he has put through Congress and Senator Elizabeth Warren. We're big fans." She continued to talk about her own feelings of Clinton, by saying how she recently just flip-flopped on the gay marriage topic in 2013. Thirteen participants mentioned that they would like to see a woman run for office, even though they didn't fully trust Hillary Clinton. Many of them mentioned that they thought Elizabeth Warren, Tulsi Gabbard, Michelle Obama, or Kamala Harris would be suitable candidates for President.

When discussing the 2016 election they did not only use authenticity to gauge their feelings towards Hillary, but to Sanders and Trump as well. Brad discusses his expectations from a politician in comparison to Clinton, "If I couldn't shake hands with Hillary in real life I don't think I could vote for her. That's mainly what I look for someone I could feel like I can talk to." Linda talks about her feelings of politicians stating,

> "So, I hate liking a politician because I don't want to trust any of them, 'cause like they want to be re-elected. So it's hard to take what they say with any sincerity, but Bernie kind of swayed me from that a bit."

Whether it be Clinton or Sanders, it was important for these participants to feel a sense of trust in the candidate. They want to feel like the candidate cares about the people they are serving.

To this sample Sanders was the epitome of authentic, which seemed to be a huge factor in their decision to support him. When the participants were asked what they felt other candidates should learn from Sanders the answers ranged from authenticity, understanding the average American, caring about the people, or even just to be real. Nick's response was, "authenticity, just actually being themselves and representing what they themselves think." In addition, Steven mentions,

> "I understand as a politician that there are always things you're going to have to shift on to stay in office, but I think they could learn from him to try and have a set of well-defined principles and sticking to them for the most part."

All things considered, the participants felt that these candidates are civil servants, voted in by the people, and that is what they need to represent.

Authenticity in All Things: Business. Another aspect of candidate authenticity that the participants discussed was the overlap between business and politics. They stated their distaste for politicians who take money from private entities, super PACs, and other sources of large donor money. Britney stated, "Other politicians have got to stop taking money from large donors. You just can't be unbiased in how you vote and writing legislation when you have a $100,000 paycheck on the line." Mary's response to what other politicians need to learn from Sanders was, "stand up for the people, don't take money bribes just to gain power." Similarly, Brad's response was,

"…you don't need a billion lobbyists, you don't need to make millions of dollars. Your job is to the people, you are voted in by the people…" When discussing the overlap of business and candidate authenticity, their main concerns were with politicians taking money that would bias their stances on issues, or bills that they pass. Since a huge factor for this sample is the candidate being honest and caring about the citizens they represent, politicians who take money from large donors lack the authenticity these Millennials seek.

Authenticity in the Political System. They also talked about the lack of authenticity in the system in regards to a brokenness, and lack of trust. Nick talks about the electoral college system and the fact that Hillary won the popular vote by millions of votes, and still lost the election. He questioned how representational the system really is along with Mary. When asked about the electoral college system Steven stated,

> "…I think it's a little funny because the entire idea when it was proposed was in case the American people vote for some nut-job, the electoral college can step in, and be like actually we aren't going to do that because that would be terrible, but we literally have the opposite happen where most Americans didn't vote for the nut-job, but the electoral college was like wait hold on were going to elect the nut job…"

Steven also question the authenticity of the closed primaries arguing that it can be viewed as unconstitutional due to suppressing NPA voters. Furthermore, Nick questioned the authenticity of the two party system, and how it prevents people from considering other candidates outside their party. He questioned the authenticity of the parties, trying to understand the difference in standards between what Obama was held to and what Trump is held to. He states, "… if Obama would have done one of those things they would have gone crazy, called for his impeachment, and Trump does

all these things, like one a day and they don't say anything, and actually go along with it." He talked about the Republican party in particular calling them hypocrites.

In short, there is one statement for Steven that sums up how the participants felt about authenticity in the political system overall,

> "I think it showed how disconnected the American people feel from what politicians have been doing for the last couple of decades, and I think it's a sign that we are at a crossroads and frustration for the system, and feelings of resentment people have need to be channeled in the right direction as soon as possible because if they continue to be channeled in the wrong direction, we are going down a very dangerous path."

All lives matter. The participants concern for all lives was first exhibited when discussing candidate authenticity. By them stating that they want a candidate who stands up for the people and not large donors, they are saying that the citizens are important, all lives are important. Furthermore, equality and life preservation were significantly important to this generation based on their responses to what social issues were important to them. They discussed these ideas when talking about the importance of making efforts to stop climate change, and to end other social injustices like racial, gender, and religious inequalities. Many discussed the topic of sustainability; being able to sustain the planet for future generations. For example, Britney's top three social issues that she would work on include, overturning Citizens United, Medicare for all, and strong pro-environmental legislation. She states, "I guess sustaining would be the big connecting factor between the three, sustaining people's Health, sustaining the planet, and sustaining the democracy." Others talked about the importance of universal healthcare, equality, and equal education opportunities. Similarly to Britney, Jared believes in forward movement in terms of the quality of living for future generation, his top three issues were, education, healthcare, and climate

change. For Linda it was important to legislate on healthcare, income equality, and gender and racial equality. Jamie talks directly about systematic racial inequalities stating,

> "This is something that has been in the literature, that has been in the media, that has been talked about, and that has breached most circles of conversation except those elite white 1% who still seem to see people of color advancing at the stake of their success, instead of in accordance to…"

In addition, a majority of the participants indirectly mentioned the importance of equality by putting down the current President and what they did not like about his campaign. When asked to describe his feelings on Donald Trump, Nick stated,

> "I can't stand the guy. I think he is one of the biggest hypocrites to ever be in American political office. I think he's a racist, a bigot, a sexist, a homophobe, anti-immigrant, anti-Semite, all of the above, and I base those views off of action, off of things he's said and how he's represented himself, so in my view he's done it all for himself."

Similarly, Mary said that Trump "doesn't even care about the people." That was important for them, they wanted their future leader to care about everyone, not any single group that represented something more close to their beliefs.

They are not just engaged they are passionate. All of the participants were truly passionate about people, politics, making a change, or even just Bernie Sanders himself. Jamie talks about her passion for the environment and how she started raising money for environmental conservation groups as a child. Multiple participants expressed fear that if we do not address climate change, what will be left of the world. Jamie also expressed strong feelings for Sanders. When discussing why she favored Sanders she stated, 'Oh my G-d I am about to get emotional about how much I love Bernie Sanders." Britney expressed her passion for Sanders, saying, "I mean we had worked

so hard, I had never worked that hard for anything." She worked on his campaign through the Knights for Bernie organization at the University of Central Florida.

Patricia talked about the anger she felt after realizing Trump won the election. She thought that it was a joke at first but then it made her angry. Although she is a U.S citizen now, her family immigrated here from India, and it took them 16 years to become legal citizens. Other participants conveyed their passion when they were asked their thoughts on the 2016 election as a whole. They called it a horror show, train wreck, shit-show, circus, embarrassing, they called Trump Satan, a nuclear explosion, and even a paradigm shift.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This study examined why Millennials overwhelmingly supported Bernie Sanders in the 2016 primaries. While trying to get a better understanding for their support for Sanders, the study also examined their political engagement as a whole since Millennials are notoriously assumed as being politically unengaged. The trends in the data show that Millennials are in fact engaged, and they supported Sanders for a few reasons, which in sum, are their views on social issues and their views on what an ideal politician should be.

Bernie Sanders ran on a progressive platform, which represented universal healthcare, education, pro climate change legislation, and the fight for equality all around. Similarly, this group of Millennials shared the same views as Sanders on a majority of those issues. While they consider themselves progressives, like Sanders, their views have been shaped by both their life experiences and the influence of the media. While everyone experiences different events and hardships throughout their lives, these Millennials specifically discuss life events that they believe have shaped their progressive views. For instance, many of them discuss the difficulties that their families faced from the 2008 market crash, or they discussed being a part of a marginalized group in society. By facing these trials and tribulations, they have become more compassionate, understanding, and open-minded individuals, which is reflected in their views on issues in todays' society.

In addition to the hardships they faced, growing up in the height of technological advancement has also shaped their views uniquely. Generational Cohort Theory discusses the idea of social and historical events shaping generations differently based on that historical epoch. While many of the participants discussed hardships in their lives that were caused by historical

events, the interconnectedness throughout the world formed by technology has also impacted

their views. The participants discussed their media consumption throughout the election and how

they believe the media played a role in influencing perceptions of the 2016 election candidates.

Almost all of these Millennials discussed using their phones daily for political media

consumption. They talked about having apps on their phone that alert them with new

information, or being able to go on Facebook and Twitter to follow the candidates themselves.

Not only does their access to technology allow them to receive news, but it makes connecting

with everyday citizens across the globe a lot easier. For example, the people who use Facebook

to post police brutality videos, or to live feed rallies and protests. By everyday citizens having a

platform in which they can be heard by millions of people, allows for these Millennials to

understand and fight for other marginalized groups. Furthermore, by engaging in these activities

on a daily basis they have become more politically active than new sources give them credit for,

as seen by the news headlines as the 2016 election came nearing. In sum, being raised into the

generation of technology and facing distinctive hardships throughout their lives has shaped their

views to match those of Sanders platform.

While their views as a generation have been shaped differently than previous generations,

they key to their support for Sanders was his stance on issues and his authenticity. This sample

really valued integrity, honesty, authenticity, and compassion when looking for a political

candidate. So much so that despite their desires for a female president, not many of them

supported Hillary Clinton for any other reasons besides following party lines. They called her

untrustworthy, but when they were asked who they believe is suitable for office, many of them

listed off female politicians like, Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, Michelle Obama, and Tulsi

Gabbard. This trend was reaffirmed when they talked about Sanders. When they were asked what qualities other politicians should learn from Sanders they discussed his concern for the people, having integrity, seeming like a real guy and not a seasoned politician, and sticking to the issues he believes in throughout his political career. Throughout the interviews participants constantly reiterated these points, establishing their need for an honest, principled politician, who cares about all citizens. By stating this desire, they also expressed their concern for people and equality.

When this sample was asked what social issues were most important to them, the most consistent responses were climate change, education, healthcare, and equality for all. When discussing these ideas their passion really shined through. With that being said, they are not just engaged, but they are extremely passionate about these issues and equality in all aspects. The harsh rhetoric, fear, and concern when describing their feelings for Trump and the 2016 election truly portrayed a passion for caring about people. Their views on social issues exemplify their enthusiasm and concern for fighting for life and equality. Between their all lives matter stance and their need for authenticity in a candidate and the system, Bernie Sanders truly fit their ideal candidate.

So going forward it will be crucial for politicians and researchers to explore this area of politics in order to gain Millennial support. In the 2017 elections the Democratic party saw major wins across the country, by a diverse group of candidates, despite the fact that it was an off-year election. For example, the exit polls showed that 67% of voters between the ages of 18 and 24 voted for Ralph Northam, the Democratic candidate for governor in Virginia. This number increased for voters between the ages of 25 and 29, hitting 70%. Not only did Northam receive

astronomical support, but the 2017 election was also a first for electing two transgender women into office. As well as, a large number of citizens who represent other marginalized groups including women, African Americans, and even a Sikh man. These barrier-breaking results confirm Millennials need for equality and authenticity in political candidates.

Limitations. With that being said, the limitations of this study include the sample size. The sample size is small and only truly representative of itself. Furthermore, it can't be generalized to a larger population because it was a local sample, and different geographic locations may illicit different responses. Despite the size, theoretical saturation was met, and there were several consistent trends throughout the data. That being said, this research can be explored on a larger scale in order to obtain more information on Millennials voting behaviors.

All in all, the research set out to find why Millennials supported Sanders in larger numbers than any other candidate before despite being known for their lack of political engagement. The study included 15 Millennials who supported or voted for Bernie Sanders in the 2016 primaries and found that their support was driven by their views on social issues and their ideals of what genuine politician is. In conclusion, this research is valuable to the further exploration of the political engagement of the largest living generation.

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