

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In Adolescents and Emerging Adults

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PRESENTATION GOALS

- ❖ Elucidate citizenship and civic engagement among adolescents and emerging adults.
- ❖ Uncover the role families play in predicting effective citizenship.
- ❖ Provide suggestions for further research.

WHY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

- ❖ Sixth “C” of positive youth development
 - ❖ 1: character
 - ❖ 2: competence
 - ❖ 3: caring
 - ❖ 4: confidence
 - ❖ 5: connections
 - ❖ 6: contribution
- ❖ Expression of adolescents’ successful and healthy development.

(Bebiroglu, Geldhof, Pinderhughes, Phelps, & Lerner, 2013)

Civic engagement amongst youth and emerging adults has been the subject of social science research over the last several decades. This is especially true as a result of the inclusion of civic engagement as a higher-order latent construct resulting from successful development of adolescents and their transition into adulthood (Bebiroglu, Geldhof, Pinderhughes, Phelps, & Lerner, 2013). Youth development literature outlines “contribution” as a sixth “C” of positive youth development, and arguably emerges out of the other five aspects (Lerner et al., 2005; Sherrod et al., 2010; as cited in Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012). The other five aspects of positive youth development are character, competence, caring, confidence, and connections. Contribution can be measured by the degree to which individuals engage in civic activities, since such actions benefit the greater good of society. According to Sherrod, Flanagan, and Youniss (2002), “in a democracy, a citizen should be informed about, interested, and involved in local and national affairs” (p. 264). Without focus on equipping emerging adults (individuals aged 18-24 years old) with skills, motivations, and practices for participating in such a democratic society, the very fabric of that society can begin to unravel. It is with this knowledge, that I am interested in civic engagement among adolescents and emerging adults.

DEFINITIONS

- ❖ Citizenship: the fact or status of being a citizen of a particular place; the qualities that a person is expected to have as a responsible member of a community.
(Merriam-Webster.com)
- ❖ Civic Engagement: prosocial behaviors exhibited by active involvement in electoral voting, political activism, community-based and voluntary organizations, school or non-school-related sports, arts, and literary groups. (Balsano, 2005)

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Debate exists over the definitions of citizenship and civic engagement, and its measurable and observable components. This debate is in part due to the varied disciplines in which the concepts have grounding, such as the political, the developmental, and the social sciences (Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002). Some consider *citizenship* an overarching concept within which civic engagement is carried out; others even consider civic engagement too broad of a concept so they measure components of civic *involvement*. Most agree that being clear with definitions when carrying out research is imperative, and definitions can have broad or narrow concepts.

Citizenship: the fact or status of being a citizen of a particular place; the qualities that a person is expected to have as a responsible member of a community.
(Merriam-Webster.com)

Most definitions of civic engagement and involvement include prosocial behaviors exhibited by active involvement in electoral voting, political activism, community-based and voluntary organizations, school or non-school-related sports, arts, and literary groups (Balsano, 2005). Given this broad topic definition, and the focus of the course, the role of families in civic engagement and citizenship cannot be overlooked.

For the purposes of this presentation, citizenship will be the overarching context in which civic engagement and contributing factors are analyzed.

WHAT IS CITIZENSHIP?

- ❖ Expressing some concern for others.
- ❖ Exercising good judgment to either maintain or challenge status quo.
- ❖ Sense of connectedness to a group other than oneself.
- ❖ Tolerance of others who have different experiences and opinions; and knowing how to compromise amongst these differences.
- ❖ Understanding of the rights and responsibilities of a citizen within a democracy.

(Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002)

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PREDICTORS TO ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

- ❖ Parenting Styles
- ❖ Family and School Social Capital
- ❖ Immigrant Youth
- ❖ Adolescents at the Table
- ❖ Diverse Leadership and Social Justice

In order to achieve the desired outcome of adults who contribute to the social and political fabric of society, researchers analyze various characteristics of individual, family, school, and community social capital, as well as family relationship dynamics. Various conditions are easily recognized as predictors of civic engagement; such as parents serving as role models for how to vote, and having access to resources and experiences within the community to practice civic activities. However, other critical pieces of are not as obvious and benefit from a closer look through in-depth studies. Furthermore, even though some factors may be obvious, communities and national policies still have a lot of work to go in closing the gap between civic knowledge, access, opportunities, and participation. The following is a summary of the various audiences, contributing factors, and identified predictors of civic engagement, the embodiment of citizenship.

PARENTING STYLES

- ❖ High reports of perceived **parental warmth** (love, acceptance, nurturance, support) was a predictor of civic engagement for females.
- ❖ High reports of perceived **parental monitoring** (awareness of children's whereabouts and knowledge of activities) was a predictor of civic engagement among males.

(Bebiroglu, Geldhof, Pinderhughes, Phelps, & Lerner, 2013)

SOCIAL CAPITAL

❖ **Family Social Capital**

- ❖ reports of parent-child bond,
- ❖ frequency of shared family activities, and
- ❖ overall family cohesion

❖ **School Social Capital**

- ❖ feelings of closeness to people at school
- ❖ feeling part of school, and
- ❖ feeling happy and safe at school

(Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012)

SOCIAL CAPITAL INFLUENCE

- ❖ Positive predictions of civic engagement:
 - ❖ High and increasing levels of **parent-child bonds** and **shared family activities** during adolescence
 - ❖ High and increasing levels of **school social capital** during adolescence
- ❖ However, parental education and access to resources may be more directly connected to civic engagement than these changes in social capital.

(Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012)

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF IMMIGRANT YOUTH

- ❖ Children of immigrants are in many ways more engaged in civic behaviors than their native or immigrant counterparts.
- ❖ This may be in response to unjust practices or experiences in their new nation. (Lopez & Marcelo, 2008)
- ❖ Immigrant youth whose parents are actively engaged in civic organizing are more likely to also be or become involved.
- ❖ Intergenerational participation common among immigrant groups in the U.S. Southwest because “someone always has to feed the kids” (p. 59). (Hosang, 2006)

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In 2006, nearly 20% of all youth in the United States were immigrant youth (Marcelo & Lopez, 2006; as cited in Lopez & Marcelo, 2008). This represents a unique audience to study in terms of civic engagement, and one that has been primarily overlooked as a unique audience sector. The authors Lopez and Marcelo (2008) define “natives” as U.S.-born residents born only to U.S.-born parents; “children of immigrants” as U.S.-born residents born to one or two foreign-born parents, and “immigrants” as foreign-born residents born only to foreign-born parents (p. 67).

According to their research, children of immigrants are in many ways more engaged in civic behaviors than their counterparts of natives or immigrant youth (p. 72). Civic behaviors include a range of activities such as being an active member of a group, raising money for charity, voting or persuading others to vote, contacting various media, protesting, signing petitions, canvassing, and boycotting, among others. One of the main limitations of this study is that it occurred after the 2006 rallies in support of immigration reform, of which the study did detect the propensity for striking among immigrant youth and children of immigrants. This is a limitation since it may have temporarily skewed the overall trend among immigrants and immigrant youth. Another limitation is their small sample size of the targeted population; only 235 immigrants and 259 children of immigrants, compared to 1,084 natives (see Table 1a and 1b, Lopez & Marcelo, 2008, p. 68).

Hosang (2006) provides numerous examples of immigrant families participating in civic issues, and suggests that young people engaging civically is in part due to their parent’s role in organizing. In the Southwest, where Hosang’s examples take place, intergenerational organizing is common on topics such as farmworkers rights and other social justice issues, that aren’t specifically related to but do have implications for the adolescent population. Intergenerational organizing stems from the role elders of society play within cultural contexts as well as family and kinship structures that keep children and older generations participating together. In one example, the author highlighted how organizers provided avenues for children to participate in campaign work because “someone always has to feed the kids” (Hosang, 2006, p. 59).

ADOLESCENTS AT THE TABLE

- ❖ Teens are more likely to contribute and be active civically when adults invite teens to be partners at the table resolving community issues.
- ❖ Don't relegate teens to service-learning or youth commissions with no significant leadership role.
- ❖ Acting upon their own values motivates some teens to participate more fully in civic activities.

(Wheeler & Edlebeck, 2006)

YOUTH IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

- ❖ Ginwright and James suggest utilizing Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD) instead of just PYD.
- ❖ SJYD aims to build a more equitable society through the engagement of critically conscious citizens through several principles:
 - ❖ Analyzing power within social relationships
 - ❖ Making identity central
 - ❖ Promoting systemic change
 - ❖ Encouraging collective action
 - ❖ Embracing youth culture (pp. 35-37)

(Ginwright & James, 2002)

Ginwright and James (2002) also give many examples where adolescents take leadership roles in social movements fighting for democracy and justice, specifically amongst people of color and in low-income communities. Examples of youth community work include San Francisco Bay Area student walk-outs in response to a new police station across from a dilapidated school, Philadelphia youth rallying against the privatization of public schools, and New York City youth rallying en masse against budget cuts to education, among other stories across the globe. In this article, Ginwright and James (2002) highlight an emerging prevalence of youth development organizations and professionals utilizing social justice issues to develop youth into healthy, active, and successful citizens. In fact, they state “reaching healthy adulthood is not the only goal of SJYD [Social Justice Youth Development]; rather, it is to build a more equitable society through the engagement of critically conscious citizens through several principles:

- Analyzing power within social relationships
- Making identity central
- Promoting systemic change
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FUTURE WORK

- ❖ Clarity on definitions of civic engagement and citizenship.
- ❖ Standardized tools and measurements used to assess engagement.
- ❖ Further research and analysis of Mahatmya and Lohman's proposed model through which neighborhood, family, and school social capital influence civic engagement (2012).
- ❖ Young field of study so continued research is needed.

CONCLUSION

- ❖ When individuals, families, schools, and neighborhoods have enough personal or collective access to resources, education, time, and opportunities for engagement, each component and level of the ecological system can thrive.
- ❖ This access to resources, to opportunities, and to role models influences a young person's future behaviors as a citizen.

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