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Community Service and Political Identity Development in Adolescence

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This article addresses the interconnection of political socialization and identity development. We begin with Erikson's work, which identified the development of political commitment in adolescence as a key aspect of identity formation. We then seek to shed light on the social processes through which youth become engaged in political activities and issues. We discuss the influences of family and peers as well as participation in community service and other civic activities. The development of social responsibility and agency, and an understanding of the complexity of social issues are considered as important facets of political commitment. Data from a case study of Black urban adolescents who participated in a year-long service learning program are used to illustrate our perspective. We conclude that social-historical context, instantiated in social relationships and actions, plays a pivotal role in the process and shape of political socialization and identity formation.

Erikson (1968) described the development of political commitment as a key aspect of identity formation in adolescence. The prominence that he gave political engagement and understanding derived from his depiction of identity formation as an outward-looking process in which youth anticipate their lives as adults and struggle to understand who they are within a social and historical framework. As part of this effort, youth reflect on the values, ideologies, and traditions of their communities and the possible roles they will undertake in adulthood. Influenced by Erikson's

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theory, this article seeks to elucidate the social processes through which both political commitments and an understanding of one's identity emerge.

Our approach integrates the recommendations of current researchers in the field of political development. First, it broadens the definition of *political* to account for the range of civic activities in which youth participate (Bhavnani, 1991; Flanagan & Gallay, 1995; Haste & Torney-Purta, 1992). Second, it examines political development in terms of youths' actions and understanding of these actions. It thus represents a shift away from the focus on attitudes, level of factual knowledge, and thinking hypothetically that has dominated political research over the last few decades (Adams, 1985; Rosenberg, 1988). Third, it places an emphasis on illuminating the social processes through which political understandings emerge (Gamson, 1992). This emphasis is different from the internalization model of political socialization, which has tended to focus on the unidirectional influence of environmental conditions on individuals' belief systems (Rosenberg). Rather, we present youth as reflective agents growing up within specific social and historical contexts and interpreting the options, opportunities, and restraints that they encounter.

This article draws upon empirical work on youths' civic and community activities in order to show how political development is played out in the everyday lives of adolescents. First, we identify several studies bearing on the connection between youth civic and extracurricular activities and sense of political identity in adulthood. These studies suggest that civic experiences in youth can become reference points that aid in the formation of political understandings and engagement. Next, we focus on illuminating the social and reflective processes through which civic participation may influence identity by reporting findings from a multimethodological study of a service learning program. We consider the role of social and historical context in the emergence of political awareness by offering examples from case study data that illuminate the interconnections of service experience, political understanding, and ethnic identity. Finally, we present suggestive evidence on the long-term impact of this program. Data from alumni of this program indicate that participants believed that their community service experience played a key role in helping them define their political stances in adulthood.

Research on Youth Activism and Political Engagement in Adulthood

A cumulation of studies on activities ranging from 4-H and YMCA membership to participation in the U.S. civil rights movement suggest that these types of experiences in youth may be related to a heightened sense of self-understanding, social integration, and political awareness in adulthood (Yates & Youniss, 1996b). In turn, these three aspects of the experience may feed into the formation of political identity. For example, large-scale evaluations of service programs indicate moderate increases in personal competence and self-esteem (Conrad & Hedin, 1982; Newmann & Rutter, 1983). In other work, Hart and Fegley (1995) found that 15- to

17-year-old adolescents who engaged in sustained service to their inner-city community articulated a close connection between their activism and their sense of self-understanding. They tended to identify strongly with the moral actions of family members and to define themselves in terms of their own moral actions.

Continuity between youthful participation in community service and other community activities suggests that service may also promote social integration. For example, Hanks and Eckland (1978) reported that the effect of organizational membership in youth persisted over a 15-year period. They found that the best predictor of adult membership in community organizations at age 30 was membership at age 15 (see also Otto, 1976). In another study, Ladewig and Thomas (1987) reported similar findings on continuity of membership in the 4-H and other youth organizations. They found that alumni were twice as likely to be currently active in organizations as were adults who did not belong to youth groups and that alumni were also more likely to be in leadership positions. Moreover, they reported that alumni were more likely to have children who belonged to youth groups. These studies suggest that early engagement in social organizations is associated with long-term engagement in social activities. This connection has been hypothesized to result from several interconnected factors including having the opportunity to participate, belonging to a social group of family and peers who value service, and developing one's own sense of commitment to continue service (Hart & Yates, 1997).

Retrospective studies indicate that activist experiences in youth can serve as landmark events or turning points that help define a sense of social responsibility and investment. Two pertinent studies were conducted on participants in the U.S. civil rights movement. This research also helps to illuminate the role of historical and generational context in identity formation. Although it should be noted that this kind of research may potentially be affected by self-selection bias, the investigators in these two studies strengthened their findings by comparing participants with non-participants matched on key demographic characteristics and experiences.

In one study, McAdam (1988) surveyed and interviewed applicants to Freedom Summer. He compared participants who spent the summer of 1964 in Mississippi engaging in service activities such as teaching in schools, building houses, and helping people register to vote with applicants who, for various reasons, could not participate. He found that participants were more active politically 25 years later than no-shows. They expressed ongoing commitment to such causes as peace, women's rights, the environment, and local politics. The interviews, in particular, shed light on the formation of this commitment. Participants, who were college students in the 1960s, described the centrality of the experience in shaping their sense of identity. They came to perceive themselves as having agency to alter the course of history. They began to view themselves as being committed to improve social conditions for everyone. And they eventually saw themselves and their generation as helping shape the political and moral directions of the nation.

In a second study, Fendrich (1993) reported on Black and White alumni of Florida A & M University who participated in public protests against racial segregation from the mid-1950s to 1963. Data were gathered from student activists and from a comparison group of nonprotesters who participated in student government. Surveying alumni 10 and 25 years later, he found differences between protesters and nonprotesters, Black and White students, and alumni from the two year groups as delineated below.

Both 10 and 25 years later, White protesters differed from White nonprotesters. For instance, protesters had sought more advanced degrees and were more likely to be employed in the education and helping professions. Whereas alumni in both groups voted at a high rate of 97–100%, college protesters were more likely to have participated in a protest march and to have attended a protest meeting in the years after college.

Results for the Black cohort differed 10 and 25 years later. Ten years after college, Black protesters had become ideal democratic citizens. Compared with nonprotesters, activists sought more advanced degrees, had higher incomes, and belonged to more civic organizations. The two groups did not differ in political attitudes and behavior. Both groups were politically active; for instance, within the prior two years, 97% had voted, 60% had taken part in political campaigns, and 40% had voted in a public demonstration.

The findings from 25 years later showed that Black protesters and nonprotesters were similarly ideal citizens. Sixty-three percent had obtained graduate degrees, and many held high-status occupations. Twenty percent were employed by government, and 46% were employed in the education sector. Eighty-two percent kept informed on politics, 49% belonged to a political party, 31% were active in political campaigns, and 93% voted regularly. Moreover, there was a clear absence of cynicism or alienation, as no more than 19% expressed distrust of policy, congressmen, and local officials. Black protesters differed from nonprotesters in being more militant about such issues as making African history a part of school curricula and working for peaceful change in race relations.

Fendrich attributed the similarity in the civic involvement of Black protesters and nonprotesters 25 years later to the fact that both groups were part of a generation of college-educated Black adults who had risen economically and educationally as a cohort. Both groups experienced gains from having been the first generation of Black college graduates to benefit from the enactment of civil rights laws. However, it is important to note that the later civic activities of Black students who were protesters in their youth were more focused on the agenda of political and social reform than were the activities of Blacks who were not protesters in youth.

Summary. These studies indicate that participants often interpret service in youth as having a profound and ongoing influence that helped define their sense of identity. Erikson's position on identity provides a way of understanding how service

can make a long-term impact on youth participants. When youth are given opportunities to use social skills to redress social problems, they can experience themselves as having agency and as being responsible for society's well-being. When they participate as a cohort and when participation is encouraged by respected adults, youth begin to reflect on the political and moral ideologies used to understand society. Indeed the participants interviewed by McAdam (1988) and Fendrich (1993) as well as Rosenhan (1970) emphasized the importance of debriefing on their experiences with their peers and the emotional support of family and community leaders. Hart and Fegley (1995) have reported similar findings on the role of family in supporting sustained community service among urban adolescents.

Case Study: Interpreting the Political Meaning of Service Experiences

In the next section of this article, we present a case study that exemplifies the private and public reflective processes through which identity formation may be encouraged. We present three findings. First, we show how participation in a service learning program encouraged reflections on personal agency and government responsibility. Second, we illustrate how conversations with peers about service developed into discussions that explicitly addressed the meaning of being a Black American in the 1990s. Third, we address the long-term impact of this program by presenting data from alumni 3, 5, and 10 years after participation. Taken together, these findings shed light on the process through which service activities in youth may shape political identity.

The data come from an investigation of a year-long service learning program. Students were enrolled in a mandatory junior-year religion course on social justice at a Catholic high school, "St. Francis." As part of this course, they served four times (minimum 20 hours) at the same downtown soup kitchen for the homeless. The investigation included 160 students currently enrolled in the program as well as 121 alumni. (See Youniss & Yates, 1997, for more details about the methodology and findings.)

Study Participants and Data

The 1993–1994 juniors came from middle- and lower-middle-class families. The student population was 95% Black, 1% White, and 4% other minority. Students were 54% female and 46% male, with the majority of students (71%) aged 16 at the beginning of the study. The most frequently represented religious backgrounds were Catholic (35%) and Baptist (35%); 50% attended religious services on a weekly basis and 26% never attended. Forty-five percent of the students had participated in service before the beginning of the junior year. Of those students with prior service experience, most said that they had participated less than a year (45%) or one

to two years (21%) and only 17% indicated that they were currently performing service outside of school.

An array of information-gathering methods were implemented over the school year. First, questionnaires were completed during the first week of class and at the final exam. The questionnaires took 10–15 minutes to complete and included items on community service, religious background, and extracurricular activities. Second, essays were written and collected after each quarterly visit to the soup kitchen. Students used a standard one-page form and were asked to describe their most recent service experience at the soup kitchen. The essays had been a part of the course curriculum for several years. Third, the first author ran quarterly discussion sessions ($N = 42$) in which groups of 10–15 students exchanged ideas about their experiences at the kitchen. Fourth, participant observations by the first author were made in the classroom (40 hours) and at the soup kitchen (104 hours).

Private and Public Reflections on Service and Society

Previous analyses of the data from this study have reported on how students' reflections touched upon issues of agency, social relatedness, and moral-political awareness. In particular, analyses of the essays and discussion groups indicated not only that service stimulated students to reflect on societal problems and their own sense of responsibility, but also that these reflections became more complex and encompassing over the course of the year. Furthermore, it was found that students who expressed emotional engagement in their service in the forms of sadness, feeling good about helping, and anger were more likely to make more encompassing reflections and to express a commitment to continued community service after the end of the program (Yates & Youniss, 1996a; Youniss & Yates, 1997). For example, a student who described feeling angry about seeing a child in line for food was more likely to discuss the connection between the soup kitchen and the affordable housing in a subsequent essay than a student who did not express anger in an essay.

Our present purpose is to address the degree to which some students understood their service in political terms. In reporting these findings, we believe that the influence of the service activity, class time, and peer discussions cannot be separated. We treat these experiences interactionally, with a particular focus on how events at the kitchen provided opportunities to apply and test notions about self, others, and society. We found that when they wrote about their service or met in the discussion groups, they initiated reflections on the meaning of their experience in terms of civic and political issues such as governmental organization and decision making. Moreover, in bringing up these issues, they considered their own civic participation. Content analysis of the essays and group discussions indicated that students reflected on their role in enacting social change and touched upon politically related questions regarding the impact of personal initiative, government spending, and government responsibility. We found that 22% of the students ($n = 36$) included reflections on

civic responsibility and government policies. We also found that at least three group sessions with different students initiated these themes in the discussion. (See Yates, 1998, and Youniss & Yates, 1997, for more detail on coding procedures.)

Personal role in enacting social change. For some students, specific experiences at the soup kitchen provoked reflection on government policy and the role of individuals in enacting change. Consider a student whose fourth essay described the kitchen's running out of bread and her having to go to a well-known shelter for emergency replacements. While there, she encountered a group of visitors who had come to see how a shelter operates. She wrote the following: "There was a field trip going on while I was there. It funked my head. I mean, why would anyone want to take a trip to see how badly the world has treated people and how disfunctional the government is? How could anyone want to take a trip to see that unless they wanted to make things different? We already have enough people lookin and talkin with little action. . . . It's my personal responsibility to change it."

The notion of being actors in the political world and the relationship between discussion and action was brought out also in discussion sessions. For example, in one group discussion, a female student began by asking the question, "We're sitting here talking about issues, but what are we really doing? That's the question I have for all of you." A second female answered, "We are taking one step; we are discussing it. Discussing it, that's taking the first step." A third female joined in, "We ourselves, 16-, 17-year-olds, we don't necessarily have to do something right now because we don't have power. If we get enough teenagers together, adults will listen to us but if it's like five of us, adults are not going to listen. . . ." The first female responded, "I'm not saying you go to an adult. . . . I'm saying that it's just like that man sitting on the corner. It doesn't kill me to take a dollar out of my pocket and hand it to him, does it? That doesn't kill me. . . ." The third female said, " I'm not saying that. . . ," to which the first replied, "I have power at 16. I'm sorry, I do!"

Limits on individual initiative. Agency introduces obvious questions about the effectiveness of individuals' actions in a large and complex society and the value of incremental change. Students raised this issue by assessing the potential effects and limits of individual political action. One example occurred in a group discussion in which students focused on racial segregation and poverty in Washington, DC. A female began with the optimistic statement, "We have the power to change [the world], but we don't do it. . . . And if y'all sit here and say it's gonna end up bad. . . ." A male student interrupted, "No one wants to step up!" A second female answered, "I am. I am. I am." The first female then responded, "You're only one person, but the world is real big." The second female retorted, "Martin Luther King—he came in and he changed something forever. . . ." A third female then said, "Well, I mean he changed segregation legally, but if you look out at the schools now, they're still kind of segregated."

Spending public funds. The above statements show awareness of differences between individual and governmental action. This theme was developed further when students addressed the question brought up by a student in the preceding sequence: How can we get the government to do what we think is right? In another group discussion, this question was played out as follows. A female started with the assertion, "It's the government's responsibility to take care of people here." A male picked this up by adding, "Instead of Somalia and all the other types of countries, they should keep the money here first." A second male said, "And you will hear people argue that forever. Like defense first, number one!" A second female then said, "We have enough weapons." A third male then said, "There's four or five buildings on 14th Street—destroyed during the riots. They can fix those buildings up and just make that a big shelter, like a hotel. . . ." The first male then concluded, "Alright, we have 28 B2s or whatever. . . . Those things are so expensive. . . . You could dismantle one and take the money. . . . You could do so much [with the] money. You could start the ball rolling."

Government and responsibility. On confronting homelessness face to face, many students reflected on finding fault or responsibility. A few groups in particular drew out this theme by considering the several alternative causes of poverty and homelessness. For example, in one group discussion, the students brought up this theme when a male said, "I don't see how some people can be rich like that when other people who have absolutely nothing are laying out in the streets. . . . I mean, talking about America and the American Dream. The American Dream is that everybody gets a piece of the pie." A second male said, "Yeah, but everybody should do that for themselves." The first male responded, "I think this country should be more a socialism government sort of thing." The second male interrupted, "You're thinking of communism. . . ." The first continued, "Because there's such a pole between the rich and the poor now. . . . I mean, you can get out of [being poor], but . . . it takes a very strong person. And, of course, people need help. . . . If you have resources to help someone like that, you should try to everything you can do." A third male said, "I disagree. . . . If everybody's got to get a piece of the pie, that makes it seem like, that you wouldn't have to work tonight. You'd wait for a person to give me a piece of the pie." A fourth male added, "You're right." But a fifth said, "There's a difference between being helped and not being helped." A sixth male said, "You can't help those who won't help themselves." This led to a discussion of minimum wages, caps on income, and the gap between rich and poor people.

A version of this same problem appeared in one student's fourth essay: "I learned that there are still many questions unanswered, unfinished. In the United States there are about 7 to 9 million homeless. This is ridiculous. I know that I am still young and unaware to see the many other problems of the world. But I know that there shouldn't be homelessness and there shouldn't be poverty. Something should be done. Everyone needs to help."

Summary. The results indicate that both students' essays and group discussions touched on politically related issues. Although some of the statements suggested idealism and naiveté, their importance derives from the students' engagement with these issues—their willingness to struggle with complexities and their desire to share and develop ideas with their peers. The students' intensity seemed to come from the fact that they were struggling with real and urgent problems with which they had come face to face and had been given legitimate opportunities to address. The students' ongoing reflections offer a window into their emerging understanding of politics and their own political stance.

Interconnections of Political Understanding and Ethnic Identity

Students' understanding of the meaning of being Black Americans was also a central issue directly addressed in the essays and discussion groups. These discussions were almost always overtly political. As students considered the societal distribution of power and government policies toward minority groups, they reflected on their own political status in society and their ability to alter that status. Discussions sometimes took the form of examining negative societal images of Blacks, particularly Black youth. At other times, discussions focused on the past experiences of family members and students' ideas about their own generational identity. Examples from these discussions show how students' reflected on the historical framework of their Black identity.

Negative societal images of Blacks. Over the year, students often talked about negative societal images of Blacks. In an extended debate during the first meeting of one discussion group, students began talking about welfare in relation to the homeless at the soup kitchen. They proceeded to argue heatedly with a student who used the term "turning Black" to describe the behavior of welfare recipients at the post office when they fail to receive their monthly check. She stated, "People come in there and they start turning Black on everybody and just going off on the whole post office." A male student interrupted her, "What do you mean 'turning Black'?... Do you mean Black like ignorant now?... What is 'acting Black'? What is it? I have to act like a hoodlum?" A second female student interjected, "And then when Black folk act intelligent, they ..." "Oh, you're acting White," the male student said to complete her comment. Another male student then stated, "If you're Black, you don't need to *act* Black."

Experiences of family members. Trying to understand issues of social justice afforded the opportunity for students to bring up family members' experiences of both hardship and success. Students were aware of their family history as it connected to key moments in U.S. history such as the civil rights movement and Vietnam. For example, in one group discussion, students talked about government

decision making and whether federal funds should be spent on memorials. A female student supported the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC, by saying, "It was for poor people. They had no choice. I mean not everybody can afford to go to Canada. Not everybody can afford for their rich parents to support them. They had no choice, people were drafted. . . . My mother's fiancé was drafted. He was poor and Black and they sent him over there and he had no choice in the matter. So yes, you should honor him."

Generational awareness. Excerpts from discussions of both racial images and experiences of family members include interpretations of negative aspects of students' experience as a generation of Black Americans. This series of exchanges from a group discussion at the end of the year was initiated when a student mentioned that he disliked the civil rights videos depicting racial violence which the Social Justice teacher, who was White, showed in class. The male student said, "I don't really like it when he [shows] us racist videos about White people beating up Black people. . . . I already told him one day that we already know about struggle and we don't need to be watching this and that. And he got an attitude or something, like he struggled too in all of this. I ain't never known a White person who struggled through with all of this." A female student interjected, "And he shows the videos like it's gonna be a big surprise for us. But our parents and our grandparents are the ones who had to live through that so it's not gonna be like 'Oh wow' to us, because we already know about it." Another female student continued, "It can't compare to what our parents and what our grandparents went through, but we got our own struggle now growing up now. I mean I think right now [is] a worse time to be a teenager, you can't hardly do nothing because . . . it's just taking our childhood away. . . ."

Summary. We offer these examples because a critical step in the development of Black consciousness is a realistic assessment of the current condition of Blacks in the United States. Supporting this point, West (1993) argued that although a sense of nihilism seems to pervade the social and political lives of many Black Americans in the 1990s, both conservative and liberal analysts have failed to acknowledge and confront this nihilistic threat. He contends that without such acknowledgment, only superficial progress can be made. Despite their privileged educational status, the students were not naive about racism, poverty, and violence nor were they paralyzed by the challenges that they face. Rather, many expressed a sense of agency and responsibility to be politically involved and to become forces for social change.

Long-Term Impact of Service Experience

At the end of the service program, we found that reflectivity expressed in the students' essays was related to willingness to volunteer in the future. Obviously, this measure of projected behavior is weakened by its unknown relationship to actual

behavior in the future. To address the possible long-term impact of service, we turned to data from alumni of the program. These data offer suggestive evidence regarding the relationship between service in high school and civic and political participation in adulthood. They also allowed us to consider the importance of service by family members and peers. Statements written by alumni revealed continuity of concern and involvement with pressing social problems. They also emphasized the formative influences of the Social Justice course, service at the soup kitchen, and family members who valued service.

Alumni participants and data. During 1993–1994, we collected alumni surveys by mail ($n = 51$) and phone ($n = 70$) from the classes of 1992, 1990, and 1985 at St. Francis. The survey included questions on demographic background, community service, and past and current political participation. Our sample represented 50%, 36%, and 43%, respectively, of the alumni for whom we had addresses and phone numbers in the three classes. Note also that in the findings that we report here, the sample size sometimes totals 119 or 120 because of incomplete information.

The characteristics of the 121 alumni were as follows: 76% were male and 24% were female; this ratio is explainable by the fact that the school began to admit females only in 1989. There were no females in the 1985 sample, 5 females came from the class of 1990, and 24 females came from the class of 1992. Eighty-nine percent of the alumni were Black and 11% were not. Eighty-five percent of the alumni had either graduated from or presently were enrolled in college. Of the 36 alumni not currently enrolled in school, 78% worked full-time, 6% worked part-time, 10% did not work, and 6% did not provide employment information. Regarding religious affiliation, 85% of alumni said they were currently affiliated with a religious denomination; 48% were Catholic, 26% were Baptist, 13% were other Protestant, and 13% specified other or no religious affiliation. Fifty-five percent of the alumni attended religious services on a weekly or monthly basis. With the exception of gender, the alumni characteristics correspond roughly to the school's current composition. We were not surprised to find that the 1993–94 class has a slightly higher percentage of Black, non-Catholic students because educational researchers have reported this trend in the composition of inner-city parochial schools (e.g., Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993).

Ongoing civic participation. Our first interest was determining whether alumni had performed service on a volunteer basis during high school or at any time after high school graduation, or were performing service at present. Forty-four percent said they had done service voluntarily while they were in high school; this service was beyond that required of their junior-year religion course. Forty-five percent also said they had volunteered at some time after high school graduation, and 32% said they were currently volunteering.

We next looked at whether having done service voluntarily while in high school was predictive of having done volunteer service after high school graduation. Of the 67 alumni who had not done volunteer service during high school, 30% had volunteered after high school and of the 50 alumni who volunteered during high school, 68% had volunteered after graduation, χ^2 (1, 117) = 16.77, p < .005.

Next, we examined the relationship between having volunteered during high school and doing volunteer service at the time of the survey. Of the 67 alumni who had not volunteered during high school, 24% were volunteering at survey and of the 50 alumni who said they had volunteered during high school, 42% were doing volunteer service at survey, χ^2 (1, 117) = 4.35, p < .05. The relation between high school and volunteering at survey was dampened by the most recent (1992) graduates of whom only 15 of 61 volunteered at survey. As will be discussed in more detail below, many 1992 alumni reported that they were struggling with personal problems and the chore of completing their college education. Many felt they should be performing service and hoped that after graduation they would be able to devote time to this endeavor. Although it is obvious that performing service in high school is only partially predictive of volunteer service after graduation, the relations just described indicate continuity across time.

A related question pertained to the process that might help mediate continued service. We therefore assessed whether having family members or friends who did volunteer service was related to continued service. Of the 80 alumni who did not volunteer at survey, 33% had family members who were volunteering, and of the 37 alumni who were at the time volunteering, 65% did have other family members who were also then volunteering, χ^2 (1, 117) = 9.96, p < .001. An even more striking result was obtained for the relationship between volunteering at survey and having friends who volunteered. Of the 80 alumni who were not volunteering at survey, 10% had friends who then volunteered, and of the 37 who were volunteering at survey, 49% had friends who also were then volunteering, χ^2 (1, 117) = 21.86, p < .001.

These results help to specify at least part of the process that mediates continued service. One's close communities of families and friends help create an ethos that supports service and provides opportunities for service. This was found in our 1993–94 sample with respect to projected volunteering (Youniss & Yates, 1997) and has been reported for a national sample of high school students (Independent Sector, 1997), who said they learned about service opportunities from family and friends. Previous research on civil rights activists, crisis center volunteers, and inner-city adolescents engaged in extensive service activities also support the conclusion that family relationships can play an important role in encouraging service participation (Clary & Miller, 1986; Hart & Fegley, 1995; Rosenhan, 1970). Complementary research on the role of peers was not found in the literature, indicating a neglected area of study.

In keeping with findings reported by McAdam (1988) and Fendrich (1993), we wanted to determine next whether service at the time of the survey was part of a

larger syndrome that included other signs of civic involvement. For this purpose we asked alumni whether they had voted in the most recent national or local elections at the time, those of 1992. We were unable to perform a statistical test because almost all the alumni from 1990 and 1985 had voted, leaving insufficient variation in the sample. Of the 60 alumni from the 1990 and 1985 classes, 87% said they had voted in the national and 77% said they had voted in the local 1992 elections. These high rates correspond to those reported by Fendrich (1993) for his college-educated Black sample, which he termed "ideal citizens." These rates of voting are higher than one finds in the general population or among Black citizens at large. In the 1992 presidential election, 39% of 18- to 20-year-olds and 46% of 21- to 24-year-olds reported voting. Among the Black voting age population, 54% reported voting in that election (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1994).

Six political themes in alumni essays. Of the 51 surveys that were returned by mail, 46 contained essays in which alumni responded to the probe: "Now that your time at high school and the soup kitchen are some years distant, please take a few moments to write a short essay reflecting upon the relationship between the values and ideas which you learned in junior religion, and the person you are today. Was a measurable, lasting impact made upon you in class and at the kitchen? In what ways? Or have the values and experience faded?" Twenty-two essays were written by the 1992 graduates, most of whom were now in college, 12 essays were received from 1990 graduates, and 12 essays were received from the 1985 graduates, who were now 11 years beyond their junior-year religion course.

Here we present six themes that touch upon the role of the service experience in the political development of the alumni. Each of these themes appeared in at least three essays, and some essays articulated more than one theme. In presenting examples of these themes, we note how they fit with our model of the identity process. Alumni described how their junior experience encouraged awareness and concern about societal problems. In adulthood, they indicated that their junior-year experience offered a key reference point in terms of their political stance. Importantly, this stance, defined both in terms of ideology and participation, varied somewhat across alumni. Some alumni continued to be involved in political and civic activities and shared similar values to those of the Social Justice teacher. Others felt that they were not as involved as they would like to be.

First, some alumni said that the program had awakened them to problems in society and opened their eyes to the plight of people such as the homeless. For example, one former student wrote, "I am glad I did go to the soup kitchen in my junior year in school. . . . It made me realize [what] life really is. One day you can be the richest person and then one day you can lose it all." Another former student said, "Social Justice class definitely changed me for the better. I used to argue constantly with [the teacher] about issues such as homelessness, gun control, defense spending, etc. Those arguments served to give me a new sense of responsibility and

awareness. That class changed me from a 'smart kid with a future' to a 'smart kid with a future who gave a damn.'"

Second, about an equal number of alumni said that this course and its service component brought them into contact with people who were different, people they might otherwise not have known about. The specific descriptions fit the formal concept of discovery of the "other," denoting the realization that persons known through stereotypes become, on contact, more individualized and human (Jahoda, 1992). For instance, one alumnus wrote, "I really got to see how the other half lives—the unfortunate ones. When I used to see a person on the street panhandling, I would ignore them. Now I see that even poverty stricken, they are people too." In another example, an alumna wrote, "Working at [the soup kitchen] taught me there are people who are less fortunate than me. Before going there, I always thought of homeless people as being dumb, uneducated, dirty individuals. After meeting with some of them, I realized that most of them did not want to be homeless or come to a soup kitchen. Most of them I talked with were college graduates, young mothers, and everyday people just like everybody else."

Third, several alumni said that the course had been valuable in conveying their responsibility to help others less fortunate than they, but that at present, they were too busy and immersed in personal problems to serve others. This perspective was particularly common among alumni enrolled in school. For instance, an alumna wrote, "The values and ideas I learned in Junior religion class are still in me, but I do not have the time for a lot of extra activity. I am in school trying to help myself and I cannot help others if I cannot help myself. I am too busy to be worrying about other people and things. I am worried about myself because if I don't, I may be homeless one day. Once I finish my plans for the future, I would not mind helping others." An alumnus wrote, "I was politically active in college on issues ranging from Central America, South Africa, the CIA, a multicultural society, etc. [The service] class opened my eyes on the plight of the homeless along with many other issues. These values remain, although submerged under the pressures of daily life."

Fourth, some alumni said they had retained liberal Catholic ideology that was explicitly taught in the course. One alumna wrote, "I am currently working (volunteer) to help the homeless find jobs and homes. My life-long aspiration is to be able to start a program where all homeless can be helped in some way. My expectation is that if this program can catch on and a bill—like the health bill—is passed, we can eliminate this plague." An alumnus wrote, "Right now I have the world in my hand. I am three months from a Harvard degree. I will be attending either Harvard or Yale Law school in fall. I am almost guaranteed more money, success, and material goods than any Black kid from northeast DC could ever imagine. However, I plan to educate myself to creating the same opportunities for other kids in the inner city that I had. Social Justice class did this. The impact of that class was immeasurable."

Fifth, an equal number of alumni repeated these ideas but then said that they now thought differently and disagreed with their junior-year views. An alumna

wrote, "I am not the same person now that I was before the junior year and I don't think anyone leaves [the] class unchanged. While I don't agree with a lot of [the teacher's] views and beliefs, I am a lot more aware and educated about many social ills which plague our society." A second former student wrote, "Politics and current events remain my main intellectual hobbies. While still a 'leftist,' I believe my essays of 1984 reflect a 'liberal bigotry' that I tell myself I can't feel today. My main value in this area at present seems to be that informed choice on which stance to take on social or political issues is the key—not some blind adherence to one ideology or another. . . . With the cold war over, however, I am much less a dove. [The teacher] and I would probably disagree about such issues as Bosnia, etc. today."

Sixth, a further distinction was made by some alumni who pointed out that the Social Justice course had taught them how to think critically and that this formed the basis for their current ability to reflect on society and judge it politically and morally. An alumnus wrote, "Our most vivid memories were of that class and the soup kitchen. Of course we didn't like getting up early and oftentimes we made fun of the people who came there. But, in retrospect, I can think of few things that stick in my mind more than that soup kitchen. My family has always been very liberal so Social Justice wasn't really a shock to my system. But I learned to look at the world in a completely different light. Always question authority. [A guest speaker] taught us to question the status quo." Another former student wrote, "[The] class and the associated community service was fundamental in building the base on which my current views now rest. I attended a Quaker college and ended up doing two years in the Peace Corps. I'd say that St. Francis and the intellectual climate it produced were instrumental in guiding me in those decisions." As a third example, an alumnus wrote, "Visiting the soup kitchen and going through [the] class represent a phase in my life in which I made a transformation. I was on the brink of becoming one of those hoodlums the world so fears. This class was one of the major factors in choosing the right path. I saw people in the soup kitchen. I talked with them. They were regular people who had been spit out by society. I wanted to know what led to these conditions. Being a Black man, I was concerned first by the plight of Black people. [The] class and the soup kitchen experience started my search for these deeper truths."

Summary. These excerpts illustrate the overarching point that even as individuals move beyond adolescence into adult life, they maintain continuity with their past. Our data, of course, are biased to produce continuity because alumni were told to focus explicitly on their junior-year experience in Social Justice. However, we are not arguing that continuity is a manifested internalization of the material acquired in the junior year. Instead, we propose that what lasted from this course was a clear landmark from which further reflection on society, confrontation of ideological understandings of society, and plans for active support of these outlooks could be judged.

When asked to connect their present stances back to the Social Justice experience, all of the alumni were able to come up with examples. For those too busy to think directly about service, reference to the course prodded recall of how it made them aware of social ills by confronting them with the reality of homelessness. For others, who still perform service, the course brought out capacities they might otherwise not have known they possessed. For still other alumni, the course was vivid, but they have deviated from it by adopting different views on society and ways to address its problems. This diversity makes sense, because alumni have left the uniform experiences of the high school and taken individual paths toward adulthood. Despite these changes, alumni were able to connect their current positions coherently with their past experience so that their current self-perceptions were linked to this landmark experience in the junior year.

Conclusions

The data from this case study illustrate the interconnections between political development and identity formation. Our investigation indicated that the year-long service program encouraged youth to think about not only the political implications of their experiences, but also their own political role in society. For these students, politics and government were not distant abstractions that were too complex to fathom and concerned other people. Rather, students believed that government policies and actions had a tangible impact on their lives, and they debated these policies with concern and confidence.

Our data suggest that the service program helped encourage this sense of engagement. As we have detailed, the intensity of going to the soup kitchen, talking with people in crisis, and being able to address some needs was most probably associated with this engagement. We must note that several characteristics of the study's design, including the program's mandatory nature, lack of control group, and tight connection between the service experience and course curriculum, limit its conclusiveness. Still, the intensity and variation of the students' reflections and the importance that both the students and alumni attributed to the their time in the program and at the soup kitchen strengthen our conclusion that this experience helped to define the students' emerging sense of participatory identity. The findings support our view that these kinds of civic experiences in youth are a valuable resource for understanding processes of political development.

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