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What We Know About Engendering Civic Identity

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Taking the position that there is a developmental process in the formation of citizenship, the authors reviewed studies that reported a link between youth's participation in organized activities and civic behaviors 15 or more years later in adulthood. Data uniformly showed that students who participated in high school government or community service projects, meant in the broad sense, are more likely to vote and to join community organizations than are adults who were nonparticipants during high school. Results support the authors' view that participation during the youth era can be seminal in the construction of civic identity that includes a sense of agency and social responsibility in sustaining the community's well-being.

This article brings a developmental perspective to the ongoing discussion of the erosion of civil society in the United States. Instead of asking which social structural factors account for the slow disappearance of civil society (Putnam, 1995, 1996), we focus on the question of how individuals become adults whose civic engagement helps to sustain, reform, or transform civil society. We will show the usefulness of framing the problem in terms of the construction of civic identity, which entails the establishment of individual and collective senses of social agency, responsibility for society, and political-moral awareness (Yates & Youniss, 1996; Youniss & Yates, 1997).

We begin with a review of studies that document a linkage between certain kinds of social participation during adolescence or youth and civic engagement by these same persons later in adulthood. We then show how the concept of civic identity may account for the developmental linkage. Finally, we review another set of studies that elaborates on the process by which youth's participatory actions specifically shape political-moral aspects of a critically oriented civic identity.

Our developmental approach may be seen as an attempt to explain how some, more than other, individuals within any cohort or generation become committed

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to civil society. Most commentators on contemporary culture overlook the issue of development and focus instead on contrasting the fragility of present civil society with earlier eras in American history. The contrast is abetted by the detective story plot that centers on a search for the social-structural changes that made the difference. Probable suspects include changes in demands of work, family dissolution, isolating effects of television, and the like. An advantage of our developmental approach is that it directly addresses the question of how civil society may be engendered in any era and how individuals come to differ in their civic engagement in any era. Thus, instead of positing civil society as a given from which we have recently deviated, we attempt to explain how civil society is constructed in the first place by individuals who are constructing their civic identities.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND ADULT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In the absence of a developmental perspective, Putnam's (1995, 1996) essays offer a top-down approach to civic engagement. He has shown that voting, joining groups, and trusting others have declined across generations during this century. He attributes the generation-by-generation unraveling of the civic fabric to changes in the macrosocial structure. Our alternative proposes that civic engagement emanates from individuals whose developmental backgrounds make them more or less able and committed to partake in the renewal and continual reform of civil society. The adolescence-youth era is particularly opportune for shaping the development of identity with its civic component. The studies we will review demonstrate that participation in organized norm-bearing groups during adolescence or youth differentiates civic engagement in adults several years later. In contrast to the search for structural causes of "social capital's strange disappearance" (Putnam, 1996), we focus on what is already known about engendering civic engagement in individuals and generations of youth.

Table 1 synthesizes data reported by Ladewig and Thomas's (1987) retrospective study of former members of 4-H. In 1985, adults (mean age around 43 years) listed their current membership and leadership in local civic, service, church, and professional groups. They also recalled their membership in youth organizations roughly 25 years previously. The sample was purposely composed of adults who had likely been former 4-H members, but it also included adults who belonged to other youth groups (e.g., Boy Scouts, YMCA) or to no youth groups.

The left two columns present odds ratios for the likelihood of current membership in voluntary groups of former 4-H members compared to adults who belonged to no youth groups. Ratios in the first column demonstrate that former 4-Hers, compared with former nonmembers, are more likely to be members in each type of group under consideration. Former 4-Hers are 1.99 times more likely to belong to civic groups, 1.81 times more likely to belong to business groups, and so on. The next column reports ratios for currently being an officer

TABLE 1: Likelihood of Adult Participation in Voluntary Organizations as a Function of Participation During Youth

Organization type	Youth 4-H		Youth Other Organizations	
	Member	Officer	Member	Officer
Civic	1.99 ^a	2.89	2.13	3.02
Business	1.81	1.61	1.52	1.00
Community	1.97	2.33	1.64	1.83
Agriculture	4.26	7.17	2.63	3.83
Political	3.79	3.20	3.96	2.20
Church	1.84	1.89	1.50	1.55

NOTE: Ratios compare youth participants to nonparticipants.

a. To be read as follows: Adults who belonged to 4-H during their youth are 1.99 times more likely to be members of civic organizations today than are adults who were not 4-H members of organizations during their youth.

in these voluntary groups. Former 4-H members are considerably more likely than former nonmembers to hold leadership positions; for instance, they are 2.89 times more likely to be officers in civic groups, 1.61 times more likely to be officers in business groups, and so on.

The right-hand columns report odds ratios comparing adults who had belonged to youth organizations other than 4-H with adults who had not belonged to any youth groups. The results are nearly identical to those for 4-H members. Having belonged to Scouts, the YMCA, and the like during youth significantly increased the likelihood of membership and office holding in voluntary groups for adults in 1985.

Beane, Turner, Jones, and Lipka (1981) studied adults in 1979 who, as high school seniors between 1945 and 1949 in northwestern Pennsylvania, participated in a community-based planning project. For 4 consecutive years, a particular teacher's senior class in civics education assisted the local town government in planning for anticipated urban growth. Each class collected and analyzed data under the teacher's supervision and in coordination with town officials. Other seniors in the same school did not work on this project and served as a comparison group in this study. Thirty years later, Beane et al. located the school's alumni, and 28% returned a questionnaire. Responses were received from 26 participants and 56 nonparticipants. Participants in the planning project were four times more likely than nonparticipants to have been members of informal voluntary groups over the past 30 years. Participants also were two times more likely than nonparticipants to have been officers in formal civic or service organizations over the past 30 years.

Hanks and Eckland (1978) reported data from 1,827 adults who had been high school sophomores in 1955 and were part of a national sample of 97 high schools surveyed by the Educational Testing Service. The longitudinal sample was composed of adults who attended 42 of these schools and who were

contacted by mail 15 years later. It was found that participation in extracurricular activities in high school predicted adult voluntary associations, independent of socioeconomic status, academic aptitude, and grade point average. Further, membership in voluntary associations in 1970 was significantly associated with voting and trust in political processes in 1970. Because participation in extracurricular activities was the point of linkage to adult behavior, we note that it included school publications; debate-political clubs; social service groups; drama, music, or science clubs; and student government.

In a fourth study, Otto (1976) looked at males who were born in 1940, initially sampled as 17-year-old high school students in Michigan in 1957, and followed up as adults in 1972. Of the original 442 students, 327 were located in 1972 and sent questionnaires about their current political behavior, among other things. As with Hanks and Eckland (1978), the high school students listed their extracurricular activities, and adults listed their current membership in voluntary associations (e.g., PTA, labor union, church clubs, political groups) and described their current civic engagement (e.g., voting, donating money to political candidates, contacting elected officials, writing to local newspapers about issues). Otto found that participation in extracurricular activities during high school significantly predicted adults' 1972 participation in voluntary associations and political involvement. Moreover, participation in extracurricular activities was the strongest predictor of adult membership in associations and adult political behavior when socioeconomic status and educational achievement were controlled. A fifth study by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) reported on a more current sample of adults. The authors contacted 15,053 adults by telephone in 1989 and did a follow-up interview in 1990 with a subsample of 2,517 individuals. Respondents were asked about current political activities (e.g., voting, working on campaigns, contributing money to campaigns, protesting, and belonging to political organizations). Results showed that 71% of the sample had recently voted, 6% had participated in protests, and 17% had taken part in local community activities. Further, 79% of the sample reported current involvement in one or more voluntary associations (e.g., religious, ethnic, senior citizens, charitable, political, business, cultural).

Verba et al. (1995) then explored the factors that predicted adult political and associational engagement in their communities. They performed regression analyses, using factors such as educational level and occupation type to predict the outcome measures. The two strongest predictors of adult involvement were respondents' participation in high school government and high school membership in clubs or interest groups, excluding athletics.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC IDENTITY

Our thesis is that participation in organized groups during the adolescence-youth era has a lasting impact for two reasons. First, on a practical level, it introduces youth to the basic roles and processes (i.e., organizational practices)

required for adult civic engagement. Second, on a personal level, it helps youth incorporate civic involvement into their identity during an opportune moment in its formative stages. Participation promotes the inclusion of a civic character into the construction of identity that, in turn, persists and mediates civic engagement into adulthood. The formation of civic identity, then, is the hypothesized developmental link across time and the factor that differentiates adults in the degree of their civic engagement.

Verba et al. (1995) propose that organized activities in "American high schools [provide] hands-on training for future [civic] participation." Activities in organized groups "give opportunities to practice democratic governance" (p. 425). Participating in school government, producing a yearbook, being involved in community service projects, and the like teach youth that their individual and collective actions make a difference by producing effects that have an impact on the high school and wider local community. Verba et al. further propose that participation introduces youth to forms of political discourse and role taking in the broad sense of seeking mutual understanding among people with alternative perspectives.

A discipline to the protocols followed by organized groups provides unique training in civic practices. For example, participation on teams or in dramatic productions teaches youth how to coordinate their individual actions and balance respective roles to achieve collective results that are greater than what any individual alone could achieve. In tasks such as producing a yearbook or weekly newspaper, youth experience the virtues of coordinating a distribution of talents that are focused on a shared goal. When editors, reporters, photographers, layout artists, and salespeople execute their respective roles, the result is clearly greater than the individual parts. Moreover, although these coordinated actions enhance one another, they also produce a benefit for the audience and larger community.

Putnam and others have not specified the detailed practices required to sustain civil society. When one asks why adults join groups, which social practices they must use, or what they hope to accomplish thereby, an answer may be found in the developmental picture that emerges from an analysis of youth organizations. The experiences that participation provides allow youth to see that actions are interdependent, that group discipline serves a common purpose, that differences among participants can be negotiated, and that multiple perspectives can be coordinated. In addition to these elemental practices of organizational behavior, youth also experience the direct effects of cooperative effort, which enhance the self's actions and benefit other persons.

Civic identity. It is noteworthy that, beyond offering practice with group processes, many youth organizations typically provide direct exposure to explicit ideological orientations or worldviews. For instance, in 4-H and church groups, explicit ideologies inform practices by justifying service projects as contributing to the common good. The 4-H pledge illustrates such ideological positioning: "I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty,

my hands to greater service, and my health to better living . . . for my club, my community, my country, and my world.”

As Erikson (1968) observed, ideological clarification is important for youth who are in the midst of constructing their identity. In our pluralistic society that has also targeted youth as a commercial market, youth need assistance in differentiating alternative interpretations and purposes of daily events. Ideological positions help youth sort through a vast array of options and facilitate the task of finding meaning that has transcendent value. As youth seek meaning that has historical legitimacy, established groups provide opportunities for exploring options. Membership in groups allows youth to test ideological positions that can then be rejected or built into their developing ideologies. The ideological component of groups, of course, remains important for adults as they decide whether and which groups to join and support (Zald, 1996).

Flanagan et al. (1997) proposed that organized groups that provide youth with experience in service to the community connect them “to the broader polity and, in that process [help them] develop an understanding of themselves as civic actors” (p. 3). We have argued similarly on the basis of our studies of high school students who proceeded through a year of community service at a soup kitchen for the homeless (Yates & Youniss, 1996; Youniss & Yates, 1997). As the year progressed, students started to view the people they served no longer stereotypically as “the homeless” but as individuals with various problems and complicated life histories. Students also started to assess themselves consciously, focusing not only on their fortunate positions relative to homeless persons but equally often as potential actors in the reforms needed to redress poverty and homelessness. The students also began to raise questions about the political system that allowed homelessness to expand and the choices that pertained to providing accessible housing, job training, and welfare reform. Finally, youth also addressed the moral and ethical aspects of homelessness, including who had responsibility to attend to this social problem and what justice would demand regarding income inequality in America.

We propose that raising these questions at this moment in development illustrates how participatory action can contribute to the formation of civic identity. Service allows youth to see society as a construction of human actors with political and moral goals rather than as a distant, preformed object. Instead of viewing themselves as too young to have power, youth observe that their actions have effects both in helping individuals who are homeless and in comprehending the forces that pertain to poverty and its consequences. Instead of thinking of society as determined by impersonal forces, youth recognize that their agency gives them responsibility for the way society is and for the well-being of its members.

It seems reasonable to propose that as youth raise these questions and reach these insights, they are reflecting on their relations to the broader polity and making choices about their roles in it (Flanagan et al., 1997). Participation in the remediation of social problems stimulates the civic aspect of identity just when youth are beginning to articulate the extent of their agency, their social

responsibility to others, their part in political processes, and their commitment to moral principles.

Insofar as youth's emergent identities are grounded in civic practices (Verba et al., 1995), youth with experience in these practices may take a differential direction in their identity development from youth who, for whatever reasons, lack this participatory experience. Erikson (1968) argues that organized involvement in society provides youth with a sense of cultural consolidation, which stems from acting jointly and successfully. Participation adds social meaning to identity by providing specific information about being a civic actor along with like-minded others in the building of society. Individuals thus construct society by their practices, and, in the process, become an essential part of it (Giddens, 1983). In this regard, the individual and society are not separate entities but complementary parts of a single relationship.

EXAMPLES OF THE MAKING OF CIVIC IDENTITIES

Thus far we have characterized the utility of youth organizational experience in fostering adult participation in terms of learning organizational practices and identifying oneself as a participant in an ongoing society. We will now review a second set of studies that provides evidence for three aspects of civic identity that are not so evident in the studies reviewed earlier. One is the collective component, which is essential to the concept of civic identity. Another is awareness of the political and moral dimensions of society. The third is that civic identity can be critical and supportive of existing society. The studies to be considered involve the same cohort of youth as the studies mentioned earlier but focus the definition of participation on active attempts to reform society. A select portion of the cohort who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s was engaged in a collective political effort to achieve social justice and civil rights through concerted public actions. In contrast to school-based participation in extracurricular activities, these actions were patently political, consciously critical, and grounded in ideological and moral justifications.

Much has been written about the activists of this generation who participated in social movements to secure civil rights and racial equality in the American South; to reform governance on the nation's college campuses, beginning with the "free speech" movement at Berkeley; and to sway public opinion for or against the United States' military involvement in Vietnam. We propose now to make use of what these studies illustrate about aspects of the processes by which lasting political and moral components are incorporated into youth's forming civic identities. Inspection of these movements gives a magnified view of the formative processes when political involvement and moral commitment are heightened.

DeMartini (1983) reviewed seven studies that examined documented participants, compared them to nonactivists, and followed them 3 to 11 years later. It was consistently reported that participants who held radical or liberal political views

in their youth became less radical but retained their left-of-center outlooks absolutely and in comparison with nonactivists over time. This was true of civil rights activists (two studies), Berkeley Free Speech participants (three studies), and antiwar protesters (two studies). DeMartini concluded that participants had not "blended into a political mainstream and [became] indistinguishable from age cohort members with comparable educational background who were non-activists" (p. 199)—the radical-turned-stockbroker Jerry Rubin notwithstanding.

Participants also remained distinct from nonparticipants on measures of political-civic activism. For example, White adults who as students had participated in civil rights demonstrations in Florida were 10 times more likely 11 years later to have participated in political demonstrations and 1.49 times more likely to have participated in conventional political activities, such as working on electoral campaigns. In addition, although free speech participants had become less radical in their outlooks over the years, they belonged to more voluntary associations as adults than did the nonparticipants. Finally, the antiwar protesters were more likely than nonparticipants to have given money to a political candidate, attended a political rally, contacted a public official, and attempted to influence other people's voting choices.

Two more recent reports have focused closely on former participants in the Southern civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Both studies had comparison groups of nonparticipants, and both reported findings that support the youth-to-adult identity linkage. McAdam (1988) studied participants in the 1964 Freedom Summer project in which students, mainly from elite colleges in the North, spent the summer in Mississippi registering Black voters and educating unschooled Black children. McAdam described the collective nature of this experience, which included recruitment procedures, group training, the shared tragedy of having three fellow workers killed 10 days into the project, and tensions from police harassment, beatings, and jailings.

Twenty-five years later, McAdam (1988) surveyed the participants and a comparison group that had been selected to participate but was unable to do so. He also interviewed subsamples from both groups. The majority of former participants were still distinguishable from nonparticipants in political outlooks, political behavior, voluntary joining of civic groups, and career choices. Participants, compared with nonparticipants, held more liberal views, were more active in conventional and unconventional political behaviors, belonged to more voluntary groups, and had more often chosen careers in the education-service sector. The participants' adult political focus did not remain restricted to civil rights causes but followed various courses from that seminal event to, for example, free speech movements, protests against the war, and movements promoting feminism or protecting the environment.

McAdam (1988) concluded that the Mississippi experience had engendered skills of political action along with a sense of generational potency for social change. As one interviewee said, you realized you belonged "to something larger than" yourself (p. 137). "You felt like you were part of a . . . historic movement. . . . You were . . . making a kind of history and that you were . . . utterly selfless

and yet found yourself" (p. 138). This is precisely what other observers of participants in the civil rights struggle found. For example, one participant studied by Coles and Brenner (1965) said, "When I go near a voting registrar in Mississippi I feel I'm dueling with the whole history of my race and the white race. It gets you just like that, in your bones. You're not just a person who is scared. You're doing something for the books; for history, too" (p. 910).

In a parallel study, Fendrich (1993) reported on the lives of Black college student participants in the civil rights movement at Florida A & M University, where more than 60% of the student body during the 1950s and 1960s participated in sit-ins and other demonstrations. Fendrich estimated that 1 in 6 demonstrators suffered arrests, 1 in 20 was jailed, and 1 in 10 was beaten by police authorities. Activities started with a bus boycott in Tallahassee in May 1956 and continued through the 1960s. Hence several generations of students maintained the activist tradition almost as a rite of passage in what Fendrich called a baptism of political protest.

Fendrich (1993) tracked several students for 10 years (one of the studies is cited by DeMartini, 1983) and then 25 years after college, assessing their political and civic behavior. The title of his book, *Ideal Citizens*, conveys his major findings. Twenty-five years later, 63% of the participants had earned graduate degrees, 93% voted regularly, 49% had joined a political party, 31% took active roles in political campaigns, 30% had worked in groups devoted to solving local problems, and 11% had attended protest meetings. Each of these statistics exceeds that found in the general population, but it was not the case that each differentiated Fendrich's participants from nonparticipants. Fendrich attributes the similarities to the fact that Black college graduates in this era were participants to some degree in a generational experience that shaped the trajectory of their life course. This generation was offered novel opportunities to further its education, enter careers previously closed to Blacks, and achieve financial rewards well beyond what was available to their parents' generation. Thus they were not only baptized into protest but were confirmed in a new ethos of opportunity and advancement that led to ideal citizenship.

These studies clarify the processes already outlined by focusing on participation that includes conscious involvement in collective action against established norms. By definition, this form implies a sense of collective agency and acceptance of social responsibility. These actions were clearly entered into the political arena in a conscious effort to challenge and overturn the prevailing system. Further, these actions were frequently justified with an articulated moral-ethical position espousing universal rights and principles of social justice.

In the studies mentioned earlier, it is obvious that the practices that defined youth participation are not identical with the actions that subsequently defined adults' civic engagement. Our interpretation is that participation served to establish civic engagement as a basic element in youth's forming identities. For example, being involved in a sit-in at a lunch counter and suffering police harassment in itself cannot explain voting or working on a political campaign 25 years later. But students who participated in sit-ins and were arrested may

have learned that their individual and collective actions gave them effective agency and that their having taken responsibility encouraged others to take responsibility also. Having acted with a clear sense of the political processes sustaining segregation and the ones needed to undo it may have engendered lasting trust in these processes. And because these studies deal with positions taken in opposition to the standing majority, ideological conviction and moral justification have special relevance. Although adults do not necessarily hold the same ideological positions they had as protesting youth, they have remained committed to viewpoints that propel them to act 25 years later, for instance, to protect the environment or seek social justice for the homeless. In sum, the concept of civic identity is useful for understanding continuity in civic orientation in the face of distinctly different behaviors over time.

CONCLUSION

The top-down analysis of civil society, moving from a macrosocial structure down to civic behaviors, leaves us with the sense that great social forces have altered the course of America's civil orientation. The search for causes puts us in a state of rumination and brooding. If macroforces have led us to become a nation of individualists or materialists (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Etzioni, 1995), what options are we left with to confront this unsatisfactory situation? Even if the causes could be identified, we would know little about the processes by which civil society is formed and could be reconstituted.

We propose that a developmental analysis is more useful. We have cited studies that show how individuals acquire practices that are constitutive of civic identities. Participation in organizations and movements provides experience with normative civic practices and ideologies, and shapes youth's emerging identities in a long-lasting form. Participating in high school government and partaking in social-political reform share in starting youth on a developmental path toward constructive citizenship.

These findings allow us to set aside the rhetorical question of how civil society disappeared for the more generative inquiry of how we can enhance youth's opportunities for active participation in the reform and renewal of contemporary society. Numerous models are available, including mandatory military service, as in Israel or Turkey, and voluntary service directed to community problems. By offering youth meaningful participatory experiences, we allow them to discover their potency, assess their responsibility, acquire a sense of political processes, and commit to a moral-ethical ideology.

Toren (1993) argues that it is each generation's task to make sense of the conditions in which they find society. This is true for youth and for adults. Each generation must take up the burden of renewing society and making history. Flacks (1988) has bemoaned the fact that contemporary youth seem to have shirked their generational obligation. Rather than work at making history, this

generation seems content to take the rewards that prior generations have earned, leaving the future in the hands of the few leaders. Clearly, there is a tendency to blame contemporary youth, even to demonize them (Giroux, 1996) for the state of civil society. We believe that a more productive approach recognizes the older generation's duty to attend to youth's quest for identity. Youth seek transcendent meaning, which entails locating themselves in history by adopting ideological traditions that older generations have sustained and still merit respect. Contrary to popular psychology's image of identity as a private existential struggle, youth make identities by joining with others in respectable causes. Adults' duty in this process is to offer participatory experiences so that youth can join them in renewing civil society.

Identity is not given but must be constructed. In our pluralistic society, this entails making sense of contradictory options and resolving difficult tensions (Calhoun, 1994). We recognize that a civic identity may orient individuals toward sustaining society as it is, or it may encourage challenges to the status quo in the spirit of reform (Foley & Edwards, 1996). Our goal was not to assess which kinds of experiences lead to which of these outcomes. Rather, it was to outline a developmental process in which the construction of individuality and society are complementary so that citizenship is built into the self's very definition.

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