

POLITICS IN/ACTION: A COMMUNICATION ANALYSIS OF FACTORS WHICH  
CULTIVATE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG YOUTH

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*None of us got where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We got here because somebody - a parent, a teacher, an Ivy League crony or a few nuns - bent down and helped us pick up our boots. Thurgood Marshall, American Jurist and Lawyer 1908-1993*

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore the factors which promote and/or dissuade America's youth (thirteen to nineteen) from becoming civically engaged. This is particularly important because currently these young people are one of the fastest growing demographics in America. Like generations before it, this demographic stands to inherit the social and political tasks of the current day as well as those that will unfold over their lifetime. But, because research suggests a large proportion of this group are apathetic to this process we need to know what can be done to cultivate civic mindedness among this demographic so that stakeholders can effectively appeal to this demographic's sense of civic duty. There are many ways to figure out the communication processes which promote engagement among youth. Yet, probably the best way to accomplish this task is to actually talk with young people about their own experiences and ask them to identify factors, which have promoted and/or dissuaded them from becoming civically engaged. Therefore, this thesis does exactly that. It asks the questions and explores the answers that the youth themselves give regarding their own experiences with civic engagement and the factors that promoted or dissuaded them from becoming engaged. It is also important to note that civic engagement is defined in many ways, but rather than having a priori definition, this study allows the definition to emerge from the data. Finally, the following is a review of the literature pertaining to the factors which tend to promote civic engagement among youth as well as what is absent in promoting or fostering civic mindedness among this demographic.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Civic engagement has become a hot topic among youth (Andolina et al., 2003). While the literature on public participation rarely explores the role of youth in “transformative learning and action,” Gurstein, Lovato, and Ross (2003) state the necessity of garnering support and engagement of community stakeholders with a vision of inclusion, cautioning, “we cannot afford to disenfranchise youth, our newest leadership, for the challenges we now face” (p. 1). Others conclude that as a result of the growing representation of this group in the United States, an enormous amount of time, resources and money is being spent by competing institutions within the private and public sectors with the intention of increasing civic engagement interest amongst this group:

Candidates have created websites promoting youth understanding of political issues. State governments have established volunteer requirements for high school graduation. Activist organizations have targeted young adults for voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives. Others have asked youth to sign e-mail petitions or participate in boycotts. While many of these efforts are designed to engage young people today, much of this work is undertaken in the hope that these early experiences will lead individuals to a richer political life in adulthood (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003, p. 1).

The hope, Andolina et al. (2003) assert is that exposure to such activities will lead to prolonged civic engagement, spanning a life time and “there is much to support this hope. Their studies of youth socialization provide evidence that families, schools, peers and religious institutions lay the groundwork for civic and political habits that persist into adulthood” (Andolina et al., 2003, p. 1).



Researchers Gimpel, Lay and Schuknecht (2003) insist a need for current research addressing adolescent socialization is crucial. Claiming the current work is outdated and fresh research is needed which explores the “attitudes and behavior of later generations, including the one that came of age in the late 1990s and early 2000s” (p. 6). In addition, it was noted, that some attention should be given to the message construction and delivery of the message because these are powerful tools, since “People are politically socialized by the information they receive” (p. 7). Further, Gimpel et al. emphasizes the need to explore the multiple contextual factors, which influence the delivery and receipt of the message (i.e., time, space, age, families, peers, and coworkers). While other researchers’ reason, communities and their constituents hold the power to organize and manage the flow of information in distinct ways. For example, within a particular age cohort, socializing messages will be received differently, with greater impact on some than others depending on the attributes of the individual themselves and characteristics of the places where they live (Gimpel et al., 2003).

Gurstein et al. (2003) note, that while there is a push to appeal to this population, youth remain marginalized and unseen. Despite current involvement within the community, youth are seldom consulted when programs are designed to assist their causes. While planning and community development professionals increasingly recognize the importance of effective participation as a critical component in successful planning outcomes, there has been very little investigation into the participatory approaches taken with youth. According to Gurstein et al. (2003), strides toward

improving the current situation require a major responsibility on the part of policy makers and community leaders to ensure “that youth have opportunities for involvement in community development (p. 1). Therefore, findings conclude that communities that incorporate youth into its initiatives significantly affect youth and community development in positive ways through the process of inclusion.

So far the literature has emphasized the importance of transformative learning, the association between exposure to civic engagement and long-term engagement, the role of socialization via message construction and thus, the influence, information gatekeepers have in constructing the messages youth receive within the communities they reside. What is not covered is why these findings are important, what impact youth engagement has on the individual and consequently, society. Following is a review of the literature which asserts that this demographics civic participation will considerably shape society and the lack of such involvement by one of the fastest growing groups will be detrimental as our current population ages.

Researchers have found that civic engagement holds the potential to positively impact youth on multiple levels. Claiming engagement empowers youth to influence the development of the culture and society, in which they reside. Stating the byproduct of such involvement leads to positive psychosocial health resulting in increased, “open-mindedness, personal responsibility, civic competence, moral development, and a sense of self-esteem and efficacy” (Gurstein et al., 2003, p. 1). Among these positive gains youth develop further cognitively and consider controversial issues from multiple

perspectives. As a result, participation in civic activities, according to the existing literature, leads to a greater understanding of citizenship and the youth develop roles for themselves as part of a democratic society, which subsequently promotes a conscious sense of responsibility and stewardship to the community (Gurstein et al. 2003).

While the literature outlines some individual and collective benefits associated with youth becoming civically minded and engaged it stops short of highlighting what appeals to this group enough to engage substantial numbers. Little is known in regard to what promotes youth to become civically minded or what messages are enticing enough to really compete for this group's time, energy and commitment to a cause. This is particularly troublesome. While this demographic is growing substantially in size, one cannot help but postulate how the continued disengagement of this group will handicap it as they inherit the many societal and legislative issues of the recent past, present and future.

According to Delgado (2002), the United States Census Bureau estimates the number of youth between ten and twenty-four years of age will rise to 65 million by 2020 and could reach as high as 80 million in 2050. At that point, youth will make up 20.8 percent of the United States population, making them a significant group to consider. Additionally, Delgado (2002) states, that the "United. States Census Bureau estimated that in one decade, 2000-2010, the number of youths thirteen to nineteen years of age will double in size, at a rate of two times that of the overall population, peaking between 2006 and 2010 at 30.8 million" (p. 24). The Kellogg Foundation (1998) reports "school-aged

youth (five to seventeen years) will increase by 10 percent by 2006 and by 2020, youths (ten to nineteen years) will increase from 34 million in 1992 to 43 million” (p. 12). The growing size of this diverse population coupled with the benefits of civic participation underscore the importance of identifying which factors promote civic mindfulness among this age group. While this age group stands to gain something from becoming civically involved, researchers Bryan, Tsagarousianou and Tambini (1998) state “voter apathy has been rising steadily...there are substantial rates of citizen abstention from elections and increasing citizen detachment from politics show a steady decline of representation” (p. 3). In 2004, Ascribe Newswire published a story which sought to illustrate the power of youth to swing the vote in 2004 election. The article acknowledged, “For years, the 30 million Americans aged 18 to 24 have had the lowest voting rate of any age group” (p. 1). While a proportionate amount of the literature affirm voter turnout representing all age groups to be declining (Weiner and Reith, 2003, or Klein, 2005) voters between 18 and 24 remain substantially important to political candidates. According to Brogan (2006), “Within the next 10 years, the youth vote will account for 25 percent of the electorate” (p. 2). Wall Street journalist, Zaslow (2005) also reports, the youth vote has been labeled and identified as the swing group. This group, if their attention is captured and their vote is secured, pundits believe will decide the next presidential election.

In lieu of the fact, this group is steadily growing in numbers, better understanding of what can be done to engage and sustain the involvement of this group civically, is

critical. Additionally, it is also important to understand the cultural factors which may influence the communication processes amongst youth participating in group activities.

*Fostering Civic Engagement: A Communication Perspective*

The growing size, power and influence this demographic group represents and wields necessitate that researchers explore the factors which promote civic engagement as a value amongst youth. Identifying these factors equip stakeholders with the necessary knowledge needed to select the most appropriate communication medium, enabling stakeholders to diversify their message and diversify the distribution of their message so that multiple audiences are reached simultaneously. Obtaining such knowledge is likely to increase the probability that stakeholders can effectively compete for this target audience's time, passion, vision and resources. Capturing the attention of this group, increases the probability that greater numbers of youth will develop into civically minded individuals and become motivated to participate in and sustain civic engagement behavior. One communication perspective, which can be used to broaden our understanding of how civic engagement can be cultivated as a value amongst youth is that of Mason's (2006) "value convergence" theory.

Consider the enormous amount of research that has been conducted over the last several decades regarding the convergence of peoples' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors within group settings (Asch, 1951; Festinger, Schachter, & Black, 1950; Sherif, 1936). While much of the research conducted targeted adults within organizational settings in an effort to measure performance, conflict, satisfaction, and prosocial behavior

(e.g., Barsade, Ward, Turner, & Sonnenfeld, 2000; Krebs, 1975) some has measured attitudes, affect, beliefs and perceptions at the group level (George, 1990; Mason & Griffin, 2003b; Totterdell, Kellett, Teuchmann, & Briner, 1998). The convergence of attitudes, beliefs, values, and perceptions are of equal importance when considering the factors that influence youth to become civically engaged. Youth spend an enormous amount of time within groups inside various institutional settings such as their families, churches, schools, and communities. Therefore, exploring the role of value convergence from a communication perspective is necessary and may provide valuable insight into how stakeholders may be able to compete for this audience's time, passion, vision and resources while cultivating civic mindedness.

Mason (2006) summarizes three alternative models of value convergence: shared experiences, the attraction-selection-attrition model and social influence processes. Shared experiences is best understood as being part of a group, meaning, a person is likely to share the same environmental conditions i.e., work conditions, classroom conditions, and therefore be recipients of the same kinds of messages. Mason (2006) states,

...events such as the announcement of a salary bonus, receipt of positive feedback about group performance, the departure of a group's supervisor, or a computer network failure illustrates how shared experiences occurring in the workplace could lead group members to experience similar attitudes, affect, beliefs, and perceptions (p. 237).

Therefore, including shared experiences in this study will assist the researcher in further understanding whether or not institutional memberships held by youth, in fact, leads to a

value convergence regarding their in/action civically. Attraction selection-attrition model is tailored more for understanding the employment practices and culture within a business. For example, Schneider (1987) argues that organizations tend to attract, select, and retain similar personalities, and that these similar personalities will tend to react homogeneously. While exploring the dynamic interplay culture and/or sub-cultures have on youth with regard to the cultivation of civic engagement is important to this study, it is non-the-less different than the cultures within businesses. Therefore, the attraction selection-attrition model is not suitable for this study. Finally, social influence is comprised of four areas of research: social information processing, group norms, social identity theory and emotional contagion. Mason (2006) states, “What is common to this research is the proposition that individuals tend to influence one another’s perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. 239). This is particularly noteworthy, considering at the heart of this discussion is youth, civic engagement, and politics in/action. Given that social influence examines the interplay of these four areas of research on individuals and groups, understanding the degree of influence these elements have on the behavior, values, beliefs, and perceptions of individuals and groups, is necessary. Therefore social influence must be included in this study.

Utilizing these alternative value convergence models allows the researcher to explore the communication processes through which value convergence occurs amongst and between groups of youth who choose to become, or not become, civically engaged. From this communication perspective the factors which cultivate civic engagement

among youth may be gleaned. Like Mason's (2006) conclusions, one can postulate that interactions between and amongst the individual youth and membership group will afford certain tendencies to come to fruition, given the contextual factors which influence the individual and group processes. Whether or not this significantly influences the cultivation of civic mindfulness and civic engagement or not, among youth, must be determined.

According to Mason (2006), group work necessitates the presence of others and the social influence processes that are likely to operate in the group context and which, therefore, may be responsible for value convergence and within-group homogeneity. Understanding these social influence processes entails exploring the following group communication processes: group norms, social identity, and emotional contagion. Exploring group norms which "represent another form of social influence associated with groups" and are used to regulate "the attitudes, affects, beliefs, and perceptions of group members" (p. 238) may be helpful in determining if group membership plays a significant role in whether or not youth become civically engaged. According to Mason (2006), "an individual's self-concept consists of a personal identity and various social identities that derive from his or her membership in various social categories" (p. 239), therefore, understanding how social identities are constructed among youth could clarify how value convergence's relation to civic mindedness occurs among youth. Finally, social influence/emotional contagion may illuminate the influence of group membership on youth with regards to civic engagement. Human beings are known to catch emotions



from one another through behavioral mimicry; this process has been labeled emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) argued that organizational groups are especially vulnerable to emotional contagion because of the interdependency, proximity, and shared identity associated with working in groups. Since, “emotional contagion is specifically concerned with the transfer of emotions between individuals” exploring the function of emotional contagion is particularly interesting, given the number of factors the literature identifies as the means by which youth are socialized in our society (Mason, 2006, p. 240).

Since the literature identifies families, communities and schools as vehicles through which civic mindedness and civic engagement values can be cultivated, one might assume that the degree of excitement for and concern for projects within these institutions serves a unique role. For example, families, communities, churches and schools all seek to promote civic mindedness among youth, but it will be useful to learn more about how and if these institutions actually create a culture which fosters “emotional contagion” that in turn leads to value convergence among young people. Following is an in-depth look at what role families, schools, communities and emerging technologies actually have in fostering and/or dissuading youth from becoming civically engaged.

### *Role of Families*

Andolina et al. (2003) noted that for many youth, knowledge about civic engagement originates in the home. The literature suggests that open and regular political discussions amongst family members lead to developing political ideals within youth at an early age. Additionally, youth reared in households where volunteerism is encouraged are more likely to sustain volunteerism into adulthood. These authors further state:

Young adults who grow up amid regular political discussions are much more involved in a host of activities. For example, among young people who are eligible to vote, 38 percent of those from homes with frequent political discussions say they always vote, compared to 20 percent of those without such dialogue. Similarly, more than one-third (35 percent) of those who often heard political talk while growing up are regular volunteers, compared to just 13 percent of those raised in homes where political talk never occurred. By talking about politics, families teach their children that it is important to pay attention to the world around them as is taking action politically (Andolina et al, 2003, p. 2).

With regard to volunteerism, these authors also note that modeling volunteerism behavior significantly impacts youth because this exposure models a value in the community. Andolina et al. (2003) state:

Young people who were raised in homes where someone volunteered (43 percent of all youth) are highly involved themselves--joining groups and associations, volunteering, wearing buttons, or displaying bumper stickers at rates higher than those who did not grow up with such examples. Youth with engaged role models are also more attentive to news of politics and government and are more likely to participate in boycotts or buycotts. Both of these influences continue to be significant even when demographic and other factors are taken into account (p. 2).

While these authors outline the significant role that families have in whether or not children develop an inclination toward civic engagement, Gimpel et al. (2003) in turn highlight similar findings while expounding on others. For example, Gimpel et al. argue that the “parent’s most important role in political socialization is that of material and moral provider” (p. 36), further noting that the socioeconomic status or religious beliefs of the parents can not be overlooked either because these factors influence the socialization process which takes place between the parent and the child. According to Gimpel et al. (2003):

The socioeconomic status of individuals influences their sense of control over the larger environment because others infer from their status the worth of their contributions to the political system. Uneven evaluations of political efficacy across a population, then, are rooted in social and economic inequality (p. 37).

Gimpel et al. further discuss the impact of the family structure on this process, suggesting that it is related to key socialization variables such as self-efficacy and self-esteem. According to the literature, children residing in one parent households are significantly disadvantaged as compared to their peers who reside in two-parent households. They are more likely to experience lower feelings of efficacy and be disadvantaged in a “myriad of ways that reduce their educational achievement and probability of economic success” (Gimpel et al., 2003, p. 37). Gimpel et al. claim that as a result of these compounding factors, children from single-parent households are more likely to develop less confidence in their capacity to influence the political system than their peers raised in two-parent households. According to Gimpel et al., children from

two parent households are advantaged in a multitude of ways, which predispose them to cultivate civic mindedness. For example, Gimpel et al. (2003) note:

Political efficacy is simply an attitudinal subset of a larger sense of self-efficacy formed by parental and other environmental influences. Since self-efficacy is developed through the experience of accomplishing one's goals or attaining mastery of a subject or skill, parents' support and encouragement, along with demands for achievement, are significant. Inasmuch as political discussion in the home is instrument for building efficacy, the two-parent household has a distinct advantage over the single parent household. In two parent households, a child is likely to hear more adult discussion on a large number of topics, politics included (p. 37).

While a review of the literature emphasizes the role of family in youth development, there is still much to explore on this topic. According to Delgado (2002), the American family has changed significantly over the last fifty years, resulting in changes to the typical (nuclear) family so that it now includes "households headed by single females; gay/lesbian households; families headed by grandparents, siblings, etc" (p. 102). Such changes bring to the forefront societal complexities which challenge youth, community leaders, and numerous stakeholders in a variety of ways.

### *Role of Schools*

While a sound argument can be made that families play a key role in shaping the political ideals of children and modeling a set of values which promote civic engagement in youth, a review of the literature also highlights the fact that schools hold the potential to be just as influential. Youth spend an enormous amount of their lives within educational institutions. Gimpel et al. (2003) state, "schools are one of the critical links

between education and citizenship” (p. 145). The mission of educational institutions according to researchers Kahne and Westheimer (2003) is to “prepare democratic citizens” (p. 1). The literature highlights efforts and progress made by educational institutions toward implementing youth development programs which promote community service or engagement. However, Kahne and Westheimer conclude that these programs do little toward empowering youth with the necessary knowledge and skill set to properly address issues which directly affect them and the communities in which they live.

According to Andolina et al. (2003), “Civic instruction is commonplace at the high school level, though it varies from current events requirements in classes to mandated service work in the community” (p. 2). While many schools “offer opportunities for open discussions and create avenues for service work” (Andolina, 2003, p. 2), Kahne and Westheimer (2003) argue these opportunities are simply not enough and represent “a vision of citizenship devoid of politics” (p. 3). Further, these researchers found that while education is important, there is an ever widening gap between education and its social relevance (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003). Additionally, Kahne and Westheimer note that school-based programs may promote service and build the character of students, but ultimately distract educators and students alike from “economic and political obstacles to remedying social ills” (p. 3). Further insisting that educational institutions must return to the mission of educating and nurturing informed democratic

citizens, Kahn and Westheimer note that becoming informed and taking action is crucial, stating:

While lobbyists are spending hundreds of millions of dollars, many ordinary citizens are passive and apathetic when it comes to major issues that affect their lives. If policies regarding the environment, taxes, military spending, and health care -- to name just a few -- are to reflect public sentiments rather than the interests of well-financed lobbyists, they require the attention of ordinary citizens (Kahn & Westheimer, 2003, p. 1).

In contrast, Andolina et al. (2003) and Hahn (2001) take a less pessimistic view about the impact of schools emphasizing different approaches. Although they do not directly address political action in their research, the authors agree that teachers directly influence the ideals that youth form through classroom discussions amongst their peers. In a ten year study spanning five countries and including 4,000 adolescents ages 14 to 19, Hahn (2001) concludes:

When students frequently discuss controversial issues in their classes, when they perceive that several sides of issues are presented and discussed, and when they feel comfortable expressing their views, they are more likely to develop attitudes that foster later civic participation than do students without such experiences (p. 1).

While Andolina et al. (2003) note that students must be taught civic skills, Hahn (2001) suggests that the cultivation of civic mindfulness and later civic engagement is best achieved through the discussing of controversial issues and perceiving several sides to an argument. However, Andolina et al. emphasize, it is more important that students are afforded opportunities which lead to learning how to debate an issue persuasively,

present topics to peers through public speaking, and master the art of writing. Further stating:

Teachers can have a greater impact on engagement when they require students to develop specific civic skills, but not all students are being taught such skills. Eight out of ten high school students have given a speech or oral report, but only half (51 percent) have taken part in a debate or discussion in which they had to persuade someone about something, and just 38 percent have written a letter to someone they do not know.

Students who have been taught these skills, especially letter writing and debating, are much more likely than those lacking such education to be involved in a range of participatory acts inside and outside the school environment, even when other factors are taken into account (Andolina et al., 2003, p. 2).

Additionally, Andolina et al. claim, affording students with opportunities to volunteer increases the likelihood that students will continue this behavior outside of the classroom requirement. Stating

When schools mandate this behavior some 45 percent of students at high schools that arrange service work volunteered, compared to 33 percent of students who attend schools that don't provide such assistance. Fully 59 percent of students, whose high school required volunteer work actually volunteered last year, compared to 38 percent of students without such requirements...Student volunteers who are encouraged to talk about their volunteer work in class are much more likely to stick with it. Fully 63 percent of high school students and 58 percent of college students who volunteered within the last year had an opportunity to talk about their service work in the classroom. This group is twice as likely to volunteer regularly as those who don't get the chance to talk about their services (64 percent vs. 30 percent respectively). They are also much more likely than those without such discussions to work with others on a community problem (47 percent vs. 32 percent), to participate in a run, walk, or bike ride for charity (27 percent vs. 15 percent), or to influence someone's vote (50 percent vs. 34 percent). These findings remain valid even when a host of other factors are taken into consideration (Andolina et al., 2003, p. 2).

Although Andolina et al. (2003) and Hahn (2001) outline a variety of ways in which educational institutions and those employed by schools influence the civic mindedness of youth, Delgado (2002) stress other key findings regarding the role of educational institutions in developing students cognitively and morally. Consider research by Linn (1998) Weissberg and Greenberg (1997) which contend that the role of schools in preparing youth for life---their lives now as well their future adult lives---is well accepted in this society but according to Delgado (2002), success in preparing today's youth hinges on grounding their educational experiences in local community customs and characteristics. Further, preparing youth for tomorrow's democracy requires educators and parents alike to demand "locally grown standards that reflect communities and celebrate differences" and there must be an "increased national effort at standardizing education" (Delgado, 2002, p. 108). Kahne and Westheimer (2003) concur with this perspective, arguing:

Young people need to be taught to make democracy work, to engage civically, socially, and politically. Improving society requires making democracy work. And making democracy work requires that schools take this goal seriously: to educate and nurture engaged and informed democratic citizens (p. 2).

Kahne and Westheimer suggest that developing more informed and engaged students requires the empowerment of the youth themselves. Accordingly, such empowerment can only be achieved by properly equipping youth with the necessary skill set. They state:



If democracy is to be effective at improving society, people need to exert power over issues that affect their lives. A democratic citizen's effectiveness is buttressed by the skills needed for civic engagement (e.g., how to work in a group, speak in public, forge coalitions among varied interests, and protest or petition for change). Opportunities to connect academic knowledge to analysis of social issues are also essential for informed decision making. In addition, knowledge of democratic processes, of particular issues, and of how to attain and analyze information is crucial (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003, p. 4).

While the literature clearly outlines the potential role educational institutions play in cultivating civic engagement among youth, Delgado (2002) noted there are limitations imposed upon youth development programs, which he identifies as the primary vehicles for promoting civic engagement among youth. These research findings highlight the limitations of school programs which are symptomatic of the bureaucratic environment in which these programs reside. For example, while it is accepted that development is important and viable in youth lives, "it cannot get a significant foothold in schools" resulting in numerous factors, which limit the growth and implementation of youth development programs (Delgado 2002, p. 4). The factors identified include organizational structure and standards of procedures associated with (1) gaining access to students within the school during times set aside for academic instruction, (2) "general suspicion of outsiders (3) fear of change; and (4) disagreement with the basic tenets of youth development, particularly with regard to youth playing active decision-making roles" (Delgado, 2002, p. 110). Additional research findings support Delgado's position, that schools can be the primary vehicle through which cultivating civic engagement among youth can be achieved. Consider research by Lagerloaf (2000); Way (1998), and

Walberg (1997a) which assert that when programs are instituted, such as, “those that reinforces academic achievements (awards, incentives, and public recognition) are combined with placing value on (or creating a culture of) student participation, increase student learning and motivation” is achieved (Delgado 2002, p. 111). Although, youth-development programs “acknowledge the toxicity of schools and encourage youth to develop problem-solving skills in helping them to negotiate this domain” these programs still do not meet the needs of the students (p. 110). According to the research, these programs are often adopted by schools narrowly through “peer-to-peer mentoring or experiential learning through projects” and all too often designated to be activities during after-school programs (Delgado, 2002, p. 110).

In summary, while a fair amount of the literature note academic institutions can and in some cases do influence youth toward becoming more civically engaged, these institutions fall short of truly preparing a majority of students toward becoming democratic citizens. Due to a number of reasons (i.e., the bureaucratic environment, different educational teaching styles, and limited access to children), when evaluated, schools fail to truly prepare youth toward becoming civically and politically engaged, well informed or equipped with the necessary tools to influence decision-makers regarding issues which directly impact them.

### *Role of Community*

In addition to schools, communities also play a significant role in cultivating a spirit of civic engagement. A review of the literature highlights a number of approaches taken to understand the role of community. While much of the literature focuses on civic engagement from a macro perspective, offering general assessments of civic engagement, the assessments are devoid of the role that community plays in influencing youth participation. Some literature explains the use of metaphors by communities to engage citizens while a minuscule proportion of the literature specifically address how communities can assist youth toward becoming civically engaged. Fully understanding the role of community in cultivating civic mindfulness in youth is important. Further, it is important to examine the methods communities employ to influence civic engagement among youth.

According to Norris (2001) there is a formidable movement under way which is right under our noses and he goes on to note that it is a movement coded in metaphors, the most widely utilized being that of “health.” What is this movement? Norris (2001) states it is a community movement. Despite the lack of national recognition, this movement is cloaking itself in a metaphor which invokes powerful images of what is desired and sought after in most communities nationwide. Using collaboration as a tool, the community movement is being courted by civic power brokers who are “intrigued by the prospect of forming partnerships with resourceful grassroots leaders who understand how to tap local assets, and demonstrate that new ways of working together are essential

to addressing complex issues facing their communities” (Norris, 2001, p. 1). According to Norris, this movement understands being healthy is not just a medical condition but rather that “health is a common denominator that cuts powerfully across lines of race, class, culture, and sector” (p. 2). Therefore it is understood that the use of health as a metaphor allows this movement to make considerable strides toward building stronger communities by taking a much broader approach.

This approach embraces the typical citizen, institutional and elected partners of each community as the movement attempts to tackle community challenges which include: “public safety and crime, youth development, quality jobs that pay a livable wage, mobility, and access, ecosystem protection, affordable and well designed housing, strengthening families and redesigning local systems of care” (Norris, 2001, p. 1). By engaging people meaningfully in the issues which directly impact their communities, the community movement creates an opportunity for each engaged citizen to “experience success and see tangible results” (Norris, 2001, p. 2). It is “Only through this kind of meaningful engagement communities fully mobilize the willingness and capacity of citizens to create positive change” (Norris, 2001, p. 2). But what is a community? How does the community movement galvanize participants and who is it more likely to reach? What obligation does this community movement have toward educating and equipping youth with a social and political skill set?

Delgado’s (2002) work specifically addresses the role community has in relation to youth development. Emphasizing the needed collaboration among a diverse network

of institutions, organizations and individuals, his work stresses the importance of recognizing the “interconnectedness between youth development and community development” (p. 119). Along with Delgado (2002), Kurtz (1997) notes that communities significantly influence youth development or the lack of it and have a role, as well as a responsibility, to promote activities which foster pro-social behavior in youth. However, fostering pro-social behavior can be an uphill battle if the target audience feels disempowered.

According to Kurtz (1997), institutions, organizations and individuals within the community who possess specialty training (i.e., social workers, teachers and program coordinators) work daily with disempowered youth in an attempt to turn back the tide which alienates, fosters helplessness and hopelessness amongst this growing population.

Further noting:

Youth development is a community responsibility, and community factors can enhance or deter development; the community has the responsibility to provide conditions conducive to healthy development; youth are a key part of the community, and there is a reciprocal influence between their development and the roles they play in creating healthy community conditions; and youths must be involved as full partners in the design, delivery, governance, monitoring, and evaluation of youth programs (Kurtz, 1997, p. 215).

At the heart of this participatory approach “is the belief that people are resources” and those people possess the ability to critically think for themselves and are capable of developing into empowered civically engaged individuals (Kurtz, 1997, p. 211). Still, according to the literature, if the process remains devoid of interagency and

intergenerational components then little is gained. However, according to Norris (2001), a shift is occurring slowly across the nation. Drawing upon the principle of interconnectedness, Norris (2001) suggests that the only way to diminish the growing gulf between heartfelt conversations around the kitchen tables of America and the formal decision-making processes in the communities of America is to invoke the spirit of Aristotle by redefining citizenship. Norris (2001) states:

Aristotle defined a citizen as one who participates in power—the power to shape civic purposes and act in alignment with values. Acting upon a shared vision for the future is the foundation upon which a healthier community is built (p. 4).

This slowly occurring shift among and between American communities recognizes this shared vision. While much of the literature recognizes the lack of participatory approaches being undertaken, Norris's work acknowledges that communities and community leaders are beginning to tap into the resources by developing youth through new participatory programs which emphasize collaboration of all ages and all industries. This new approach builds community through “activities, practices, and policies that support and foster positive connections among individuals, groups, organizations, neighborhoods, and geographic and functional communities” (Norris, 2001, p. 120).

In summary, the communities of America must recognize youth as a resource and draw upon youth through the spirit of inclusion. While heavily relying upon intergenerational collaboration, such participatory approaches lend themselves to cultivating the younger generation's strengths. Such collaboration assists in the

identification of resources which can be used to address their needs and concerns while cultivating a spirit of community connectedness. Like adults, when youth are equipped with the necessary resources and practices they will develop the ability to become citizens capable of wielding the necessary power that Aristotle identified as “the power to shape civic purposes and act in alignment with values” (Norris, 2001, p. 4).

### *Role of Emerging Technologies*

There is little doubt the digital revolution is here. While the Baby Boomer generation matured during a time of innovation by the television and radio industries, it would be their offspring and their grandchildren who would create the technological wonders of today. This review of the literature would be remiss if it did not examine the use and impact of emerging technologies upon and among Generation X and Generation Y, particularly as they relate to the development of civic-mindedness. While researchers understand that youth use multiple technologies which connect them to the communities of the world. Little is known with regard to how these technological advances can be used to capture or focus the power and creativity of these generations toward participating in long term civic engagement.

With regard to impact on the lives of youth, a proportionate amount of the literature concludes that the media messages and media used by youth do in fact influence their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Roberts, 2003). However, much of the research does not explore how and in what ways such exposure influences the beliefs,

attitudes or behaviors of youth as it pertains to civic mindedness and civic engagement. Regardless, the research is clear if children receive repeated media messages then some degree of influence is achieved.

This is particularly evident in marketing research which targets the younger consumer. Marketing firms have certainly conducted an enormous amount of research on how to sell to this group. Research shows that “marketing firms identify this group as \$105 billion-a-year market” (Delgado, 2002, p. 5). Understanding the target audience and what products they will likely buy is advantageous for many, if not for all of the industries seeking to capture the attention and spending power of this young audience (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

While this demographic is growing in representation and spending power, the current research is considerably void of information which explains the factors which influence or motivate this group to vote, volunteer, or participate in anything outside of spending money on a variety of products which include today’s emerging technological wonders. However, spending power is not the only thing this target audience has going for it. According to the literature, this demographic is capable of influencing multiple industries including the socioeconomic status of generations to come. Growing in number, this group not only has voting power but pundits suggest, “Today’s youth will have a significant role in bringing about changes in technology, demography, economy, and politics” (Boyle, 2000d, p. 41). However, despite the advantageous power of this group, efforts made by presidential candidates and various other stakeholders to entice



this group toward becoming civically engaged, has resulted in the ubiquitous absence of youth (Halstead, 1999 or Hampson, 2004). To fully understand the role of media in promoting civic mindedness among youth, it is important to understand the consumption patterns of media among youth.

According to Delgado (2002), there is a growing representation of technology in every industry, community, school, and household within the United States. For example, the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs Administrator, Economics and Statistics Administration, Shapiro and Rohde Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information Administrator, National Telecommunications and Information Administration (2000) state:

The number of households in the United States that were on the Internet increased from 26.2 percent in December 1998 to 41.5 percent in August 2000; 51 percent of homes had computers in August of 2000, up from 42.1 percent in December 1998; approximately 116.5 million Americans were able to go on-line at some location in August 2000, compared with 31.9 million in January 1999 (p. XV).

According to Ritchie (1995) this phenomenon, comprised of purchasing home computers and Internet access, became increasingly apparent in the 1990's. Ritchie (1995) points out that Generation X is sophisticated, cynical and surfing the multitude of media at their finger tips. Born at the beginning of the 1960's, Xers grew up during a time of media and medium innovation. Ritchie claims, "Just as earlier generations took cars and trucks apart to dissect their engines and learn their secrets, Generation X examines commercials,

cartoons and prime-time movies” (p. 8). Consequently, this demographic became selective in their viewing pleasures. Ritchie suggests:

They are capable of processing information from multiple channels simultaneously. Yes, they can watch television, talk on the phone, and do their homework all at the same time...Xers use technology to personalize and humanize everything they touch...they are the first generation to realize the potential marriage between television and the computer. They are already immersed in communication through computer networks, they understand being wired and because of Xers, interactive television is just around the corner (Ritchie, 1995, p. 10).

This tendency to discriminate using multiple electronic mediums is explored further by Shapiro and Rhode’s (2000) who quantify their findings. They demonstrate an increase in media use across the board, regardless of gender, age, race, income or education. For the purposes of this discourse, it is especially important to note Internet use among youth between the ages of 9 and 17 years of age increased. The national average of this age group grew “from 43% in December 1998 to 53% in August 2000 a 24% growth in the use rate” (p. 42). These researchers further state:

Individuals age 18 to 24 also saw Internet use rates for both December 1998 (44.3%) and August 2000 (56.8%) that were above the national averages. In this group, women (59.6%) had higher Internet use rates than men (54.1%) in 2000 (Shapiro & Rode, 2000, p. 42).

However, while Shapiro and Rhode’s (2000) findings illustrate an increase in Internet use, there remains a disconnection between online activities and youth participation in such activities which cultivate civic mindedness and participation. Their findings measure the increase usage of electronic mediums across all socioeconomic factors,

providing needed information pertaining to how it is used (i.e., email is the most frequent online activity among Internet users as of August 2000, 46% go online to check news, weather, or sports, and 59% use the Internet to search for information. The information provided, glaringly illustrates a disconnection between media used for recreational purposes and the cultivation of civic mindedness among this demographic. While the literature illustrates that Generation X and Generation Y are avid technology consumers it still falls short of explaining how these emerging technologies can be effectively used to foster a value of civic mindedness or civic participation among youth from the youth perspective.

In summary, the literature provides little insight into what youth themselves think in regards to what is persuasive enough to capture their time, energy or passions as it pertains to civic engagement. However, the literature does provide some insight toward understanding that certain institutions can serve as a vehicle through which civic mindedness can be cultivated and then turned into actions effecting local and global communities but the literature still leaves many questions unanswered. For example, communities collaborating with youth on projects, families sitting around the dinner table talking about politics and schools providing students with opportunities to do more service learning projects, are all ways, in which the literature suggest that civic mindedness could become cultivated but these suggestions are often outdated and reflect little or no information from a youth's perspective on the matter. Therefore the general research question this thesis explores is as follows:

**RQ1:** What factors lead to value convergence as it relates to civic engagement?

This general research question addresses three specific areas: the role of institutions, the role of small group communication, and the role of emerging technologies.

While the literature illustrates the role of families, schools, and communities as vehicles through which civic engagement can be cultivated within the individual, it falls short of providing a youth perspective regarding the effectiveness of these institutions. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the following research question:

**RQ1a:** According to the youth, do families, schools and communities play a significant role in cultivating the values of civic mindfulness and engagement? If so, how and to what degree, do these institutions promote sustained civic mindfulness and engagement participation among youth?

Additionally, youth spend an enormous amount of their time within groups, among their peers, inside the schools they attend and communities they reside. The literature does little to illuminate the influence of small group communication as it relates to the value convergence of civic mindfulness and civic participation among youth. Therefore, this study will also attempt to answer the following research question:

**RQ1b:** According to youth, what are the small group communication processes which lead to value convergence as it relates to civic mindfulness and civic engagement?

Finally, the literature demonstrates that youth are connected to their communities and the world in ways previous generations were not, through the use of technology. Yet, it does little to demonstrate how stakeholders can harness these mediums and in short,

capture the attention of these avid users, so that greater numbers of this demographic might choose to become civically engaged as a result of these mediums. Therefore, due to the emerging technologies ubiquitous nature and the vital importance it has in the lives of youth, it is important to explore one final question:

**RQ1c:** According to youth, what role do emerging technologies play in cultivating value convergence as it relates to civic mindfulness and civic engagement?

## METHODS

At the heart of this study is an interest in what youth identify as factors that influence them toward cultivating a civic mindfulness value and choosing to participate in civic engagement activities. Understanding such influences must be actively sought after from the youth themselves. Given the focus of this study and the complications that can arise in data collection from youth between 13 and 18 years of age, focus group interviews were deemed to be the most effective means by which to procure such insights. Berelson's Thematic Content Analysis and a modification of Burke's Pentadic Criticism were utilized to analyze the narratives told by the participants and the themes which emerged from the responses given by the participants during the interview process.

### *Recruitment and Interview Procedures*

Participants for this study were recruited from a number of places. Approximately twenty different Indiana nonprofit organizations were contacted to participate in this study. The organizations selected served youth and their families in a variety of ways. The organizations must have provided opportunities for the youth and/or their families to participate in any or all of the following initiatives: education, community or social services. Some of the youth participants were recruited from the 2007 Youth Convening Conference held at IUPUI and sponsored by The Center on Philanthropy. George Washington Community School (GWCS) students were present at this event and were invited to participate. Additional youth participants were recruited as a result of their association with Pathway to the Future Learning Center (CDT), an

agency that served youth and their families by providing them with social and educational opportunities. Two additional groups of youth participants were recruited from the Decatur Township Alternative School (DEC1 and DEC2) program, these participants were awarded school credit by their teachers for their participation.

The youth interviewed represent a demographically diverse sample consisting of a nearly equal number of male and female youth who have and have not been civically engaged. Therefore the responses of these youth are a good representation of the larger population. Twenty five students ranging between eleven and eighteen years of age participated in four focus group interviews, each involving five to eight youth. The average age of the participants was 16.2. Two of focus groups consisted entirely of minority members and two of the focus groups were made up primarily of non-minorities (6 women and 6 men). A total of thirteen minorities (8 women and 5 men) were interviewed. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. Of the four groups, the two non-minority groups were interviewed at DEC, located in a suburb of Indianapolis, Indiana. Students participating in the DEC interviews were former students of Decatur Central High School. The first minority group interviewed consisted entirely of female youth. Participants were members of a Church Dance Troop (CDT). The interview took place at a church site located on the near Eastside of Indianapolis, Indiana. The second minority group interviewed consisted of GWCS students. GWCS is part of the Indianapolis Public School system and is located in an Indianapolis urban area.

Additionally, it is important to note that the demographic "split" represented by the near equal numbers of minority and non-minority participants in this study, was an unintentional by-product achieved through the recruitment process. This occurrence, afforded the researcher the opportunity to analyze the data in terms of racial differences within the responses given by the participants.

Participants were all members of educational institutions, community building and/or teen focused programs. All participants were identified as "at risk." To understand what "at risk" means, Morris's (2000) definition of "at risk" was adopted.

Morris states:

The popular definition that students who are at risk are those who are probably not going to graduate from high school takes into account a few risk factors. Those risk factors are low achievement, retention in grade, behavior problems, poor attendance, low socioeconomic status, and attendance at schools with large numbers of poor students (p. 4).

A number of questions were used to guide the discussion which took place among the participants in each focus group interview (see Appendix A). Each youth participant and his or her parent and/or guardian filled out and signed consent forms. Students eighteen years of age and not residing with parents or guardians were not required to seek parental consent. Pseudonyms have been used in this study to protect the identity of each participant and acronyms are used to identify each agency.



## DATA ANALYSIS

Berelson's (1971) *Content Analysis: In Communication Research* guided the data analysis which examines the themes that emerged as young people discussed the following five topics:

- What constitutes Civic Engagement?
- What factors promote a sense of civic engagement among youth? What constitutes Community? How does the understanding of an individual's responsibilities to his/her community become constructed?
- What role does small group communication have on whether or not youth develop a value convergence relating to civic mindfulness and civic engagement?
- What role do emerging technologies play in cultivating value convergence as it relates to civic mindfulness and civic engagement?

Berelson (1971) states:

Qualitative analysis usually contains a higher ratio of non-content to content statements than quantitative analysis...in qualitative analysis the interpretations (i.e., inferences about intent or effect) are more often made as part of the analytic process whereas in quantitative analysis the interpretations are more likely to follow the analytic procedure (p. 122).

Given the small sample size and the array of responses to each of the five categories, Berelson's Thematic Content Analysis allows the findings of this study to be placed in less formalized categories than that of quantitative analysis, thus allowing for an examination of vague areas which likely exist within and between the content responses

each young person provided. Further, utilizing this method allows the findings of this study to be placed into a bigger picture. According to Berelson, qualitative analysis utilizes more complex themes than quantitative analysis rather than examining the content from a micro perspective like that of quantitative analysis, which breaks down components into reliably measurable categories. Berelson (1971) states, “Qualitative analysis is more likely to take them in the large on the assumption that meanings preside in the totality of impression, the Gestalt, and not the atomistic combination of measurable units” (126). Therefore, the use of content analysis allowed for the identification of themes and the supposition of meaning as the themes were clustered together. However, greater understanding of what civic engagement means to young people and how this information can be used to foster a civic mindset within youth might best be achieved through the application of Burke’s Pentadic Criticism.

Burke’s traditional pentad includes five categories: Act - what took place in thought or deed, Scene - the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred, Agent - person or kind of person, Agency – means or instruments used and Purpose – why. However, Burke (1972) stated that “on later occasions I have regretted that I have not turned the pentad into a Hexad, with attitude as the sixth term” (p. 23). Therefore, Burke’s traditional pentad has been adapted so that Attitude is included as part of the analysis of the narratives. Burke defined Attitude as the manner in which particular means are employed or rather the state of mind of the Agent as they performed the Act . The mindset of youth can be of particular importance when examining why or why not

youth participate in civic activities and/or whether youth will ever participate in a civic activity.

## RESULTS

### *What Constitutes Civic Engagement?*

The first topic addressed in this study had to do with how youth defined civic engagement. The initial response given by the interviewees, across all groups to the question, “What is civic engagement?” was “I don’t know.” This response was often followed by puzzled looks and what appeared to be genuine confusion. Examples of civic engagement acts were then provided to all four groups by the focus group facilitator to assist the interviewees in defining civic engagement. Three out of the four groups were then able to come to a consensus and eventually define civic engagement. One group, GWCS never formally defined civic engagement but rather provided multiple examples of civic engagement “acts” in which they participated. Therefore a definition was extrapolated from the examples provided by the interviewees. A more in-depth analysis of how the focus group participants conceptualize civic engagement reveals several noteworthy themes. First, two of the four groups, defined civic engagement as something their parents did, not something they did themselves. Second, although the definitions given by the four groups varied in construction, all of them included some or all of the following components: *community service, coming together and helping others*. The following definitions were reached through consensus building and represent the agreed upon idea of what civic engagement is to each group. The definitions of Civic Engagement are represented in TABLE 1.

TABLE 1: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DEFINED

GROUPS	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DEFINED
CDT	Civic engagement is community service, giving back by helping others
GWCS	It's doing things to help others, coming together with a group of people and "doing good" in the community [ <i>sic</i> ] Note: this definition was extrapolated from the examples provided by the interviewees-no formal definition was achieved
DEC1	Coming together to "do something good" in your community
DEC2	Helping others by doing things but it doesn't benefit you

Finally, while the groups were able to reach a consensus about what civic engagement is, some responses given by individual interviewees during the initial attempt to define civic engagement that may not be representative are worth noting. One CDT interviewee stated, "I don't know, maybe it's when someone talks about problems and you listen." While one GWCS interviewee stated,

It's something from all student's perspective, you have to do your part, have your full attention and know what you want to do, it's like a sports team, if one person isn't doing what their supposed to do than nobody's doing what their supposed to be. [*sic*]

Further, a DEC2 interviewee stated, "It's how white people and black people interact with one another." Finally, the entire DEC1 group agreed with what one participant who stated, "So it's like community service, you know? When the court makes you do it." These responses are evidence of just how hard it was for youth to initially define civic engagement. The interviewees were more likely to identify typical acts of civic

engagement (when initially provided with examples of civic engagement acts) rather than actually providing a ready definition. The following is a review of the “acts” provided by the interviewees and what factors promote a sense of civic engagement among youth.

### *Acts of Engagement*

Among the four groups, the idea of what constitutes a civic engagement act is as eclectic as how each group defined civic engagement (See Table 2). While many of the acts identified by the youth are typically defined as civic engagement acts, the youth also provided examples of civic engagement which may be considered atypical. A typical response given by some participants included volunteering in various activities in church or within their communities. An example of what might be considered an atypical response was given by one youth participant who stated that he helped a guy whose car was on fire, “...I did my best to help him with what objects I had at hand...It’s not donating money...but it’s still helping, I almost caught myself on fire.” [*sic*] The acts the participants identified are listed on the following page in TABLE 2.

TABLE 2: ACTS OF ENGAGEMENT

ACTS OF ENGAGEMENT	GWCS	CDT	DEC1	DEC2
School Required 10 hours or more (credit)	X	X		
Color Guard	X	X		
ROTC				
Student Council				
National Honor Society				
Sunday School	X	X	X	
Missions Trip/Build Houses				
Clean up Disaster Area				
Cooked Breakfast**				
Vacation Bible School				
Dance Ministry		X		
Community and Park Clean	X	X	X	
Park programs for kids			credit	
Julian Center*				
Homeless Shelter***				
Community Mentor				
For Community Activities	X			
For School Activities				
Court-ordered Community Service*			X	X
Help out Uncle			X	X
Clean Church for grandmother				
Insured Friends Car				
Cleaned Aunt's House**				
Mowed Neighbors Yard**				
Am Vets			X	X
Salvation Army				
Goodwill				
Collected Yoplait Tabs				
Collected Tabs-Ronald McDonalds House				
Donated Toys for children				
Can Food Drive		X	X***	X
Fundraiser/Car Wash***				
Helped stranger with burning car				
*Forced to do the "Act" ** Performed the "Act" but will never do it again *** The only minority in the non-minority groups-answers reflect that of his minority peers				

Another point that becomes apparent in analyzing the acts youth define as civic engagement is the role of institutional membership and how that membership may assist youth in identifying what “acts” are considered civic engagement. For example, two of the groups interviewed identified the acts they performed during their required 10 hours of community service instituted by their schools as civic engagement. In these particular situations, youth choose from a variety of available activities which included, spending part of a day cleaning up parks, planting trees, or working in day care like settings - reading books to kindergartners and first graders. While these youth received school credit for their 10 hours of participation, these groups were also more likely to identify similar acts they have participated in without being required to do so by this particular institution. For example, these particular groups identified grant writing as a way to ensure that youth programs were maintained during afterschool or created within their communities so that young people “don’t get in trouble or go to jail, do drugs or be places their not supposed to be, act out and do things their not supposed to do.”

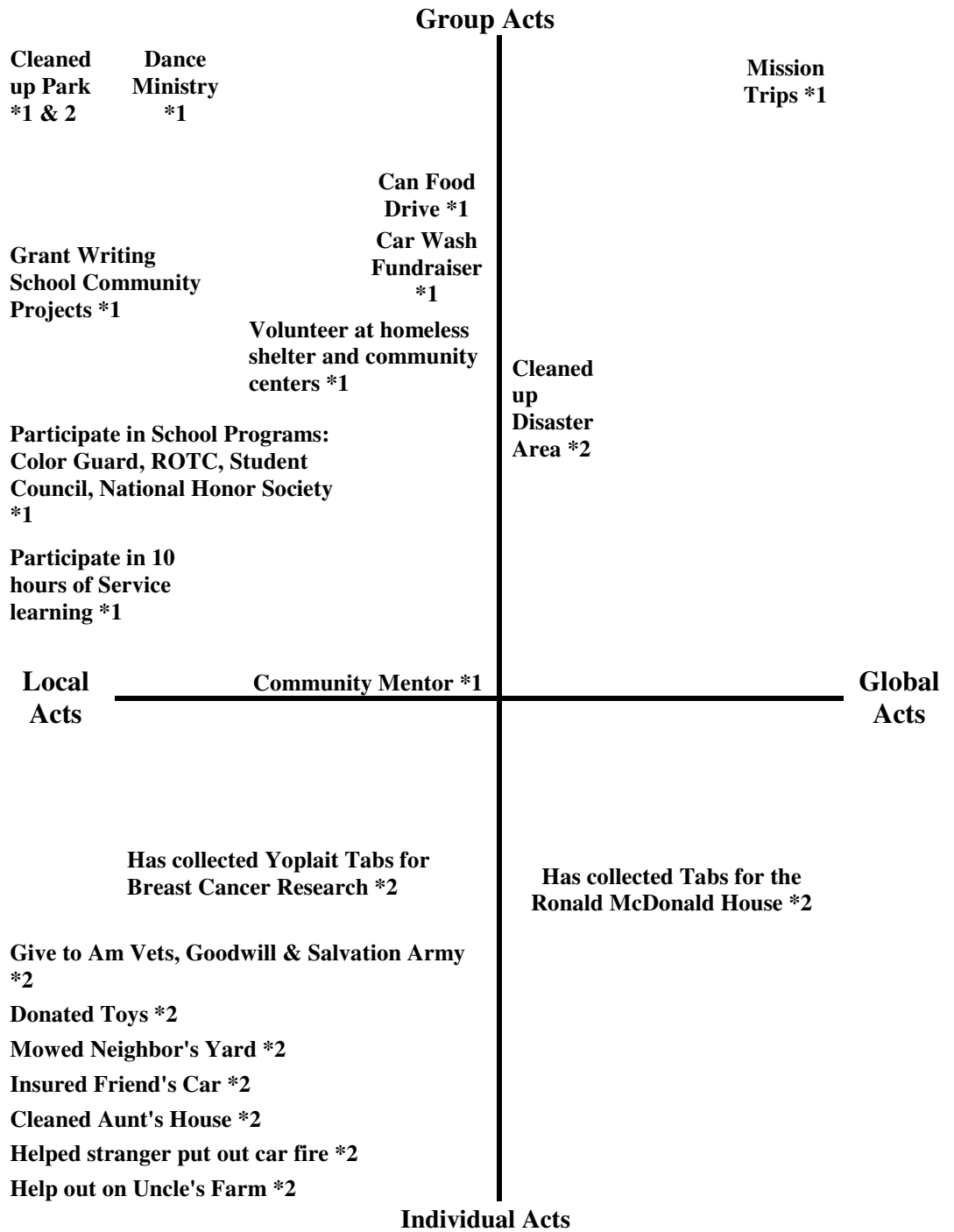
Another example of how influential institutional membership can be among youth can be seen in what else they define as civic engagement as a result of their church membership. For example, the two minority groups interviewed identified participation in Vacation Bible School, mission trips to other countries and cleaning up disaster areas with their churches as examples of civic engagement. Without this particular institutional membership, these specific and unique opportunities identified by youth would likely not have been present at all in their responses. Additionally, culture and co-culture may also



influence what youth identify as civic engagement as well as play a role in helping youth determine their role and responsibility toward in/action.

Finally, the acts defined as civic engagement can be categorized according to three themes: group versus individual participation, local versus global and voluntary versus involuntary. See FIGURE 1 below, it plots the acts along the three dimensions.

FIGURE 1



One way to understand the effect culture may have on how youth define acts of civic engagement is through Hofstede's (2001) Cultural Dimensions which include: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity and Long-term versus Short-term orientation to time. Lustig and Koester (2003) note that "recent evidence suggests that Hofstede's work provides an excellent summary of the relationships between cultural values and social behaviors" (p. 115). While Hofstede's work examines adult behavior within institutions and the influences of culture on those behaviors it does not specifically address the effect culture might have toward fostering youth participation in civic engagement events. This demographic represents a co-culture comprised of individual members participating in an even greater eclectic number of co-cultures within the main stream society as a whole.

Hofstede's (2001) notion of "...acquiring a greater understanding of the mental programs of a group of people leads to predicting more reliably the behavior of those people..." can be applied to the importance of understanding how the culture and institutional membership held by youth may influence their understanding of, or participation in civic engagement events or even in how civic mindedness is cultivated as a value held by youth (p. 2). Hofstede (2001) states, "The more accurately we know a person's mental programming and the situation, the more sure our predications will be" (p. 2). For the purposes of this study, Power Distance and Individual versus Collectivism are used to analyze the influence of culture and institutional membership held by the participants of this study. Hofstede defines Power Distance as "the extent to which the

less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally” (Lustig, 2003, p. 116). While Individual versus Collectivism are defined as “individualism on the one side versus its opposite, collectivism is the degree to which individuals are supposed to look after themselves or remain integrated into groups, usually around the family (Lustig, 2003, p. 116).

Upon review of TABLE 2 (see above) and FIGURE 1 (see above) three themes are apparent when analyzing the acts defined by the study participants as civic engagement. The first emerging theme illustrates that depending on the culture and institutional membership, civic engagement may require group (collective) versus individual participation. For example, when an institutional framework was present (i.e., school, church, family, community organization) which promoted institutionally embedded opportunities for civic engagement, the motivations behind why the individuals gave of their time and resources was very different than when an institutional structure providing these opportunities was not present. For example, the minority groups conveyed a collective obligation to their communities which is evidenced by some of their responses explaining why they wrote grants, or why they mentored, or why that they picked up the trash in parks. The responses given not only reflect a collective mindset but also reflect the influence of the power structures they navigate within the various institutions in which they reside. For example, from a collective orientation an individual would likely state my responsibility is to my community. Now if the individual resided within a high power structure than the individual would likely state, I

volunteer because my pastor or my dance coach or my parent tell me to volunteer but in a low power structure there are more interesting results. For example, while all of the minority individuals interviewed were members of collectively orientated power structures they illustrated a desire to participate in acts of engagement not necessarily because a superior would have expected them to do so but rather they demonstrated the desire to be engaged with or without superiors present. This is shown repeatedly in the responses they gave when asked, “What factors influence you to take on some of the projects that you do?” The GWCS students stated,

this is our environment...so I am going to pick it up...kids are our future so I am going to be a mentor or write a grant...so I ask, what can I do for the programs that are not going to be funded this year because IPS says they can't afford it ...of course I am going to write them a grant especially if it keeps or gets kids engaged. [sic]

For the minority groups interviewed institutional membership is influential providing a structure and framework for youth to reference but the power held by these institutions is a low power distance, not a high power distance. In some cases, the institutional membership held by these individuals afforded them opportunities which exposed them to other cultures nationally and internationally which they would likely never have had as a teenager but again the power held by these institution did not appear to be the driving force behind why these particular youth remain engaged. However in the absence of institutional structures which promotes civically embedded opportunities the motivations behind why the non-minority group individuals participated in their defined acts of engagement were very different.

As stated previously, the non-minority members approached civic engagement from an individualistic not a collective mindset. The motivations for why they performed the acts they defined included the following: “20 hours, it’s court-ordered,” “it’s a tax write off,” “I’m on the call list, your going to throw them away,” “we get extra credit,” and “I feel good about myself.” The non-minority groups can be characterized by strong individualism and almost all of the individuals have a high power distance in one institutional context. For example while they are likely to state, my responsibility is to my self, they are also likely to say, but I have to do what my power structure (court system) tells me to do, so if the judge tells me to volunteer than I have to volunteer (court ordered community service), again this is motivated very differently than a collective orientation which states my responsibility is to my community. For these individuals the consequence of not doing what is expected of them results in what one individual stated, “You do it or you pay a fine and do more time...and you either get to choose to work inside or outside....” [*sic*]

Further, in the absence of institutional structures which promote institutionally embedded opportunities one of the differences between the minority and non-minority groups is, how acts of engagement are defined and then how the act is performed. From a individualistic orientation with low power distance, what is likely to be labeled as civic engagement are individual acts which do not typically represent the altruism often associated with engagement. For these individuals acts of engagement are loosely linked to the community at large, but are still motivated by an individual orientation. For

example, collecting Yoplait tabs for breast cancer research, collecting tabs for the Ronald McDonald House and giving clothes to Am Vets are all linked to a sense of community but are performed individually and are not performed as a result of a strong sense of collective community obligation. In fact, if these individuals were not on the Am Vets call list, they would likely not donate the clothes at all and they do so only because they are on the call list, they were going to throw the clothes away, they feel good about themselves and because it is a tax write off.

Another point worthy of nothing is the link between how institutional membership and what constitutes community. For example, the responses given by the two minority groups are again representative of a collective orientation crossed primarily by a low power distance which then directly impacts the local and global recipients of the deeds performed. These examples suggest that institutions such as friends, family, schools, community, and churches do play a role in cultivating civic mindedness resulting in the participants choosing to own some responsibility for the quality of life within their communities. These examples also suggest that the idea of community, locally and/or globally is cultivated as a result of holding institutional memberships comprised of individuals who hold a collective orientation regarding civic engagement.

The examples given by the two minority groups identify local and global recipients of the collective acts performed. This is evidenced by two CDT members who identified civic engagement events as a “priority” when asked “What degree of influence

does your friends, families, communities or churches have on whether or not you will go and participate in a civic engagement event?” The CDT participants said,

I don't know and it depends, I will probably go and do something with my family or with my church...it depends on the situation, if it is really important, something that we know we should do or that it is a priority... than we are going to do it. [sic]

When asked, “how do you decide it is a priority?” the response given by the CDT group is as follows:

it depends on your opinions for example, our choir go to nursing homes and my grandma lives there-if she tells me that there is no one to minister to them than I think this is a priority because my grandma is telling me that there's not been anyone to minister to the nursing home. [sic]

Another example of how the collective orientation coupled with low power distance was illustrated by the CDT was when the group was asked the following question, “What degree of influence does your family, friends, churches or schools have on you regarding whether or not you will participate in a civic engagement activity?” members of the group agreed that they really did not care if their friends were doing it or not, “if it were donating clothes to people in New Orleans” or if we were given the opportunity, we would go to New Orleans and help out with the recovery effort even if our friends were not going to do it because “it's the right thing to do.” This collective orientation therefore does hold the potential to directly impact the local and global community. Finally, one other example showed the lengths to which these particular youth would go in order to contribute to the quality of life within their communities.



The members of this group were all in agreement that they would also participate in other community events which would in effect have a local impact on the community if the event included helping to lower the crime rate. This example fell under one of their explanations as to how they defined events as priorities. One participant spoke for the group while others added to the following response:

Since there is a high crime rate and if there was an event that we could go and minister so that this event helped take guns and weapons out of the community, probably everyone in here has lost someone to gun violence so that would be a priority too me I would want to be involved with this event. [*sic*]

Finally, in the absence of institutional membership what constitutes community is defined very differently. With exception, all but one individual (the only minority member of these groups interviewed) provided responses that reflected individual responsibility to self, family and friends with regard to what civic engagement is, how civic engagement is likely to be carried out and what constitutes community. The non-minority groups targeted local recipients as their idea of community. This of course meant that acts were performed locally but it also means that the acts performed defined community as friends, family and self. For example, one individual spent time on his uncle's farm and thought volunteering time on his farm was a form of civic engagement because he was helping out his uncle who is unable to lift and bale hay, plant trees or work because he had shoulder surgeries. Another individual considered mowing his neighbor's yard civic engagement and stated, "I will never do it again, the old man never thanked me." while another individual spent some time at her aunt's house cleaning it up,

during a time when her aunt was ill, she also stated that she would never do it again because all her aunt did was complain.

*What Factors Promote a Sense of Civic Engagement Among Youth?*

The disparity reported among the four groups regarding what institutions promote civic engagement among youth was great. When the minority groups were asked “Who or what influences you to do or become involved with various civic engagement activities?” the participants had similar responses. Included among the first responses given by these groups was family, school/teachers and church. The various activities within each of these institutions in which youth felt encouraged to participate included: grant writing, school programs, dance ministry and cleaning up the community. Youth also reported that technology influenced their individual participation. Participants identified the following institutions and institutional relationships (see TABLE 3 below) as vehicles through which a sense of civic engagement is cultivated among them.

TABLE 3: INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERSHIPS-CDT

INSTITUTIONS	CDT RESPONSES
Family	It starts at home (family period). If my family is going to do it, I probably go and do something with them
Teachers	Want you to do something better in life. They want to see you do something outside of school-be more active in something positive. To be, I think more encouraging so they encourage us more
School Opportunities	Required to complete 10 hours of community service (i.e., Fieldtrip to help the not so fortunate, every Friday project groups: plant trees, read k-12, daycare, clean up storm drains)
Dance Troop/Leader	She grabs us all the time takes us to do things in the community

The responses given by the GWCS group were slightly different and included more information than that of the CDT. The youth responses provide more insight into what the various institutions say to youth to create youth investment in the various activities in which they chose to become engaged. In general, the minority youth responses reflect that they are given more civic engagement opportunities, are exposed to more programs and more people. This is reflected in one GWCS respondents reply who stated, “People we are with, we have learned from, has influenced me personally, so that I want to go out into the community and clean up a park to make a difference.” For a closer look at the GWCS responses see TABLE 4 below.

TABLE 4: INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERSHIPS-GWCS

INSTITUTIONS	GWCS RESPONSES
Family	It starts at home. My grandfather and my uncle are involved in stuff. It's how you're raised. My dads in the military we have done community service in lots of places. Brother and Sister, "as long as your doing what is right than why not clean it up?"
School/Teachers	Teacher helps students write grants
School Programs	AmeriCorps Volunteer: Group T/TR people in college involves us in community projects so we meet more older people in the community and so I choose to more like them Student Council National Honor Society Color Guard ROTC Sports allow us to do more things and require higher grades
Church	Pastor, I want to be like him, I want his job. Vacation Bible School
Friends	Friends influence me not older people
Community	"The community needs us, we are role models too"

The contrast provided by the non-minority groups responses to the question, "What factors promote civic engagement amongst youth?" may suggest that it really does matter who and what youth are exposed to. The responses clearly indicate that if youth

are not provided with opportunities to become civically engaged and are not encouraged in ways that foster youth investment within their communities they will not self-initiate these acts because they do not have the template necessary to do so. Additional insight may also be gleaned from the responses given by the non-minority participants who appeared individually versus collectively motivated and defined acts of civic engagement as self motivated, focused on their friends, family and self versus acts that are group oriented, focused on the local community and/or the community at large. See TABLE 5 and TABLE 6 below for a closer look at how these groups responded to the question, “What factors promote civic engagement amongst youth?”

TABLE 5: INDIVIDUALISTIC GAIN

INSTITUTIONS	DEC1 RESPONSES
Family	<p>Mother raised me to help others (only minority in both DEC Groups i.e., wash cars, pick up trash downtown, helped at homeless shelter)                      Grandma and I fixed breakfast for Sunday School...but I don't do it anymore because I got lazy and like to sleep in"                      I have to do it, I still clean the church, I do it to help my grandma she gets paid for it being done</p>
Friends	<p>You do it because they're your friends, they're like family.</p>
Self	<p>Makes you feel good about yourself. Stay out of jail.</p>
Am Vets Salvation Army	<p>On the call list                      Tax write off                      Feel Good about yourself                      Your throwing things away might as well give them away</p>
School	<p>School Credit</p>
Judicial System	<p>Avoid the consequences of not doing it-Court ordered Community Service</p>

TABLE 6: INDIVIDUALLY MOTIVATED

INSTITUTIONS	DEC2 RESPONSES
Community	Mom made me do it i.e., chop wood and clean bunks at Julian Center
School	Middle School opportunity at a nursing home student received Extra Credit
Church	Church is one of the major places people get involved in their communities. I've been kicked out of 3 churches. I went to church for the social event
Individual Activities	<p>I give money at Christmas because I know how hard it is to get presents at Christmas time when you have kids. I am single parent, teenager, working and going to school</p> <p>Donated toys-helped little kids</p> <p>Saved tabs for Ronald McDonald House</p> <p>Given money to Salvation Army</p> <p>Collected Yoplait Lids for Breast Cancer</p> <p>Cut a neighbors grass-but will never do it again because student did not receive a thank you</p> <p>Cleaned aunt's house who was sick and aunt complained because student missed a table will never do it again</p>
Judicial System	You got to do it or you have to pay a fine and do more time

So far, there have been stark contrasts between how the minority groups and the non-minority groups respond to the question: What factors promote a sense of civic engagement among youth? One way to explore these differences in-depth is to look at examples provided by both groups regarding how they define acts of civic engagement, community, as well as examine how they decide what their role and responsibilities are to



their communities. Understanding what factors influence youth to become engaged or remain disengaged has provided the framework necessary to explore the rest of the story youth tell as they discuss civic engagement. Applying Burke's Pentad (*modified*) to some of the narratives provided by the participants of each group may provide additional insight into what strategies stakeholders may need to adopt as they compete for this demographics time, passion and resources. Burke's Pentad (*modified*) includes the following categories: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose and Attitude. In this section, the following questions are examined in-depth:

- What constitutes Community? How does the understanding of an individual's responsibilities to his/her community become constructed?
- What role does small group communication have on whether or not youth develop a value convergence relating to civic mindfulness and civic engagement?

#### *Pentadic Criticism (Modified) Applied*

Following is a review of four separate examples identified as civic engagement by the participants. The first two examples originate from the two minority groups interviewed and are labeled as 1A and 1B. The second set of examples originated from the non-minority groups interviewed and are labeled as 2A and 2B.

The first two examples 1A and 1B were chosen because they are examples of dissonance. In each example, the individual had to decide whether or not they would participate in the civic engagement act. Yet, the differences lie in how they rhetorically

work through the decision making process and in both examples the youth arrive at their decision to perform the act of engagement very differently.

The final two examples, 2A and 2B, were chosen because each example also illustrates something very different. In example 2A, the individual had an opportunity to perform an institutionally sponsored act which parallels the example provided in 1A. However, in example 2A, the motivations to complete the act are very different than the motivations to complete the act in example 1A. Further, the example in 2A illustrates the individualistic versus collective mindset in a more in-depth manner. Finally, example 2B was chosen because it further illustrates the need for youth to be afforded frequent and diverse institutionally embedded civic engagement opportunities so that a greater number of youth grow in their understanding of what constitutes civic engagement.

#### *Example 1A*

One student provided the following example, when asked the question, “Has there been a time when you chose not to do something?” She stated, at my school we started a can food drive, I don’t know why I didn’t do it but I think why I didn’t want to do it was because at the time I wasn’t educated about giving people things or if you don’t receive anything back from giving people things its ok you choose to help somebody but we were in class and my classmates helped me understand it would be helpful to give away the cans we are not using to people who need them so they talked me into it. [*sic*]

**Act:** Student reconsidered her position on not becoming involved in a can food drive sponsored by her school, “I just wasn’t going to do it...”

**Scene:** Students were asked by their teachers to bring in can foods from their homes to donate. "...we were in class and my classmates helped me understand, it would be helpful to give away the cans 'we are not using' to people who need them, to people who are hungry, so they talked me into it"

**Agents:** Female, minority, teenager and fellow classmates

**Agency:** Peer-to-peer discussion

**Purpose:** To influence the behavior of another peer and in doing so the group donates more can foods "to people who need them, to people who are hungry".

**Attitude:** We were in class and we were talking and they said, "It was a good chance to give back or whatever give to others who need the cans...so after talking, so yal, I decided it was a good thing." [sic]

At the time of this interview, this participant was in fourth grade. While initially this student did not share the same value of giving back to the community, it was through the peer-to-peer discussions that this act became meaningful to this participant. Therefore, through the group communication process, an act of civic engagement and the values associated with this act actually became cultivated within this individual's value system. This is just one example of how culture and/or co-culture and small group communication assist youth in defining civic engagement, assist them in determining their role within their communities and also assist them in determining their level of responsibility within their communities. In this case, the individual was influenced by the group communication process which ultimately cultivated civic mindedness and the individual's commitment to perform the civic act of collecting cans of food.

*Example 1B*

There are five kids in my family and we have family meetings every week. We talk about what we can do to make the community better. I was against picking up trash in the community. Why should we clean up someone else's mess when they are just going to throw trash back on the ground? But my older brothers and sisters they got me into doing what is right. They said, as long as you are doing right than why not clean it up? They might not actually be able to pick it up, they might not be able to bend over, but you can.

**Act:** Reconsideration of participant's position—"why should we clean up someone else's mess when they are just going to throw trash back on the ground?" participant initially felt it was not her responsibility to pick up after other people in the park.

**Scene:** Family meeting discussions regarding what the family members can do to make the community better lead to a more in-depth discussion regarding picking up the park and why the family members felt it was the right thing to do even if the individuals in their family did not leave trash in the park.

**Agents:** Student participant and her siblings

**Agency:** Through family group communication the older siblings assisted their younger sibling to include picking up the trash in the neighborhood park as part of their family's commitment to their community. The youth identified this discussion as one of the factors which influence her toward defining civic engagement acts.

**Purpose:** To broaden the definition of what civic engagement is and why this family feels it is their responsibility

**Attitude:** It's the right thing to do, so I am going to do it.

This particular individual when asked later to think about “a time, in which she had an opportunity to do a civic event, did you choose to do it or not and why?” responded in the following manner, stating:

Not really because when I’m given an opportunity to be civically engaged I take it. Even when I am hanging out with friends I actually do community service. I remember a time my cousin and I went to the park and there was trash everywhere so we just went around on our own and um cleaned up the trash. And if there were little kids there without their parents we like play with them and make sure they don’t get hurt. If I’m given the opportunity I’m going to take it, not turn it down. [*sic*]

This example illustrates just how powerful the family institution can be toward defining and cultivating civic mindedness. This individual shared that she has held reservations regarding what her role and civic responsibilities were in her community. Yet, through the family group communication process, this individual now feels like she is doing community service even when she goes to the park to hang out with friends or her cousin. She has even recruited her cousin to join in picking trash up in the park. Another interesting point is the notion of responsibility to others, i.e., looking after the safety of younger children playing in the park without an adult present. This suggests that this individual’s notion of community far exceeds a responsibility to family, friends or self but rather includes the collective community at large.

These examples provide evidence of just how powerful culture and/or co-culture can be in how youth determine their role and responsibilities toward in/action but these examples also provide a powerful contrast, suggesting, that it really does matter who and

what, youth are exposed to when it comes to cultivating civic mindedness. Following is a review of the two examples provided by non-minority groups interviewed.

*Example 2A*

This example was provided by a young woman when asked the following question: “Can you remember a time when you had the opportunity to participate in a civic engagement event? Did you participate or not?” she stated:

In middle school every Wednesday you could choose to go to the nursing home or not to go, I think I went five or six times, seriously, I think I went maybe seven times but I still went. I went because we got extra credit for it and I was way behind then because I was pregnant and I could hardly even go to school but back then I had a heart and cared about old people and wanted to go. I guess it just satisfied me, I had nothing else better to do. [*sic*]

**Act:** Volunteered at nursing home spent time with “old people.”

**Scene:** Student chose to participate in a school sponsored activity which took place at a nursing home every Wednesday for extra credit.

**Agents:** *Pregnant student volunteer*

**Agency:** Opportunity provided by the school

**Purpose:** To earn extra credit

**Attitude:** “...back then I had a heart and cared about old people and wanted to go, I guess it just satisfied me, I had nothing else better to do.”

Present in this individual’s example is an apathetically complex response. Also present within this example is a dichotomy. On one hand this student stated, “I went because we got extra credit for it and I was way behind then because I was pregnant and I could hardly even go to school” and then the student stated, “but back then I had a heart

and cared about old people and wanted to go” but then the student stated, “I guess it just satisfied me, I had nothing else better to do.” While this act is an example of an institutionally embedded opportunity with an award of extra credit if individuals chose to participate in this act, the effects of this co-culture provides a contrasting experience compared to previously mentioned examples. What becomes clear in this student’s response is a very different motivation for participation. Unlike the previous examples, there is little or no evidence of a collective/group/individual obligation to community in the completion of this act. Perhaps the complexity of this student’s response is confounded by her early pregnancy in middle school, what is particularly noteworthy is the cynicism held by this teenage student/mother. While institutions (school, family, community, church etc.) have been identified as factors which can facilitate the cultivation of civic mindedness among youth and was evidence by previous examples, this teenage participant identified herself as someone who used to have a heart and used to care about old people and “who had nothing else better to do”. These statements suggest that this student would never volunteer to do this act again, because it was “back then” that she had a heart and cared about old people, not now, not present day.

This example is just one of many provided to the interviewer by the non-minority groups interviewed. Following is a review of another example illustrating the effect of culture and co-culture has on how youth define civic engagement and their role and responsibility toward in/action.

*Example 2B*

I got one for you, this happened on Friday before I was heading down to Bloomington. My buddies girlfriend, she just got her drivers permit so I let her drive my buddies car to take her and the baby home, but she wrecked the car in the driveway and her brother called the cops on her, what brother would do something like that? But huh my buddy didn't have insurance so I went inside and went online and put insurance on the car before the cops got there and it cost me \$2000 dollars. When asked, "Why did you do that?" he stated, "I didn't want her to go to jail and they have helped me out before, I don't have no money right now [*sic*] but he can drive." [*sic*]

**Act:** Individual paid for car insurance for buddy's car.

**Scene:** Individual and buddy's girlfriend and baby were hanging out at the girlfriend's brother's home on a Friday night. The girl had just gotten her drivers permit and wanted to drive the truck but she wrecked the car in the driveway and her brother called the cops on her.

**Agents:** Individual, buddies girlfriend and baby, girlfriend's brother

**Agency:** Individual used a computer to access an insurance company online and paid for the car to be insured with his own financial resources.

**Purpose:** It was his buddy's girl and his baby, he didn't want to go to jail and he didn't want her and the baby to go to jail

**Attitude:** They've help me out before.

This individual also provided another example which parallels the example above demonstrating that the individual's family and friends are what he defines as community and the acts he performs on their behalf then constitutes civic engagement. This altruism



is demonstrated differently from that of the examples provided by the minority groups which focused on altruistic acts outside of friends, family and self. In the second example he stated, “I go volunteer at my uncle’s farm, planting trees and baling hay. Working helps him out he had shoulder surgery and can’t do a lot of things he used to do.” [sic]

In summary, the worldview held by each participant interviewed for this study is inevitably shaped by the institutional memberships held or the lack thereof. Whether acts are individually driven or collectively driven has even greater implications. For the minority groups, the idea of what constitutes civic engagement “starts at home” but what is evidenced throughout the examples provided by the minority groups is the influence of multiple institutional memberships. For example, it is likely that these youth heard messages at home, also heard messages among their peers while attending afterschool programs and also heard messages at church or within community organizations which then continually reinforce the collective orientation of all of these institutions combined. Throughout this process is the opportunity to define and redefine the meaning of civic engagement, community, roles and responsibilities and depending on which group an individual is in, at any given time, is likely then to determine how value convergence is achieved, (i.e., peer-to-peer discussions, mentoring, and even through older siblings talking to younger siblings about what it means to do the right thing).

What is evident in this analysis is that culture and/or co-culture are powerful forces which shape the participant’s understanding of what civic engagement is, as well

as shape their understanding of what their roles and responsibilities are toward becoming active or remaining inactive within their own communities. But what is even more evident in this analysis, is what happens when institutional embedded opportunities are not present. For example, in the absence of institutional embedded opportunities sponsored by different cultures and co-cultures, how youth then define civic engagement changes dramatically. Further, in the absence of institutional embedded opportunities sponsored by different cultures and co-cultures, what youth then identify as factors which foster civic engagement is dramatically different, than when these structures are present. Additionally, in the absence of institutional embedded opportunities sponsored by different cultures and co-cultures, how youth then proceed to perform acts of engagement (collectively or individualistically) is also dramatically different. Finally, in the absence of institutional embedded opportunities sponsored by different cultures and co-cultures, youth are then likely to have little or no frame of reference by which an individual could properly assess what their role and civic responsibilities are within their community.

*What Role does Emerging Technologies Play in Cultivating Value Convergence, as it Relates to Civic Mindfulness and Civic Engagement?*

Throughout this study there have been many contrasting examples provided by the youth that demonstrate clear differences between the responses given by the minority and non-minority groups interviewed and this topic is no exception. However, there are also similarities among and between each of the groups interviewed for this study regarding how they are influenced by the technologies they use. For example, three out of the four groups interviewed stated that their use of various technologies (i.e., television, newsprint, the Internet, cell phones & pagers) to access information regarding local community events, local and national news has had a negative impact on their desires to become civically and/or politically engaged. Individuals from the remaining group (DEC2) noted that they watched the local news but did not indicate that their use of various technologies had any impact on their desire to become engaged civically and/or politically. Following is a review of the role emerging technologies play in the lives of these participants and the effects emerging technologies actually have on their lives. Included in this discussion, is a review of the technologies used by all of the four groups, including the similarities and the differences in the types of information they receive while using these technologies. Finally, this review examines the shared sentiment three of the four groups have regarding the messages that they have heard or seen while using these various technologies, which has ultimately lead to these particular individuals feeling somewhat powerless civically and/or politically. See TABLE 7 and TABLE 8

below for an in-depth look at what youth identify as the technologies which influence their understanding of the world around them.

TABLE 7: MINORITY GROUP RESPONSES

TECHNOLOGIES USED	GWCS	CDT
Computer Write books & Write Stories	A	
Internet Research all kinds of things (bus routes and topics of interest to me) (A) Online Newspaper (B) Online Television (C) Facebook & MySpace (D) Blogs-Political (E)	B, C, D & E	A
Television Watch local and National News (A) Commercials (B)	A	A&B
Print Indianapolis Star (A) Magazines (B)	A & B	
Cell Phones Text Messages (A) Chain Letters (B) Internet Access (T.V., Email, I.M.) (C)	A & C	A&B
Pagers (A) Peer-to-peer communication across school communities (i.e., school fight, rumors, rape)	A	

While there are similar responses given by the two minority groups interviewed, there are also more differences between the group responses than previously illustrated. For example, the use of cell phones and text messages is similar but the kind of information shared via text messaging was very different between the two groups. Additionally, while both groups noted that cell phones were used to connect individuals to their communities what the GWCS group identified as community was also different than what the CDT group identified as community.

With regard to the types of messages shared, the GWCS individuals discussed information shared amongst and between different school communities. For example, the entire group agreed with the following statements made by one of their peers, who stated:

if an incident that happens here it could be spread all the way to the North Central schools because kids have cell phones and pagers...in a short period of time...so stuff just doesn't stay in this community but is spread to other communities all the way to Carmel or Carmel to here because kids have cell phones and pagers. [*sic*]

The incidents identified as information important enough to pass from one school community to another included, rumors, school fights and whether or not a girl was raped. For the CDT group, the text messages sent out often address concerns within their community at large and/or likely alerted recipients of upcoming community events, which they might or might not like to participate in. For example, one student stated, and the students all agreed, that they often received text messages and chain letters which do the following:

Well like sometimes people will send um text messages that are chain letters and a lot of times it informs you on different stuff that is happening

or like if something is going wrong in the community than we like can try to help stop what's going on or help out soldiers or something like that. [sic]

Unlike the CDT, the GWCS participant's use of cell phones and pagers do not demonstrate within this context, that these technologies foster any type of civic mindedness or actions toward becoming civically engaged within their communities. Another key difference in the answers provided by these two groups is their use of the Internet to access information. For example, the CDT group used the Internet for the function of exploring topics or looking up bus routes. Within their responses there was no mention of the use of the Internet to access emails, blogs, online television, online news, or online social networking sites. However, the GWCS group did all of these things. In fact, one student stated that when he misses the local news in the morning, "then I take my laptop to school and watch it online." While there are initial differences in the use of some technologies, what defines community and what information is passed via these technologies, there are also clear similarities between these two groups. For example, both groups acknowledge that the use of different technologies does in fact influence their perceptions and their motivations. However, the CDT group did a better job of explaining just how they believe the use of (cell phones and Television) have influenced their perceptions and motivations toward becoming civically engaged. For example, all of the CDT members agreed with one individual's statement:

I think when you don't know what's going on, when you don't have information, when you do hear it on the television your like oh wow it influences you to either do something or say oh well I don't want to go but most of the time it's I want to help, so I really think it influences. [sic]

As previously stated the GWCS group members also shared the belief that technology influences them and agreed with one member's statement, "of course" technology influences us. But what was lacking in the GWCS group's response was a connection between receiving that information via (the local or national news, or on cell phones and pagers, or on the Internet (email, IM, or MySpace)) and civic engagement. Unlike the CDT group, this group did not provide examples of how their use of these various technologies, lead to them being informed about upcoming community events thus providing them with additional opportunities to become involved. However, this group did share the same sentiment as the CDT group regarding the bias nature of the messages they have seen or heard. As a result, both groups admitted that the bias nature of the media has affected them personally, consequently dissuading them from taking on roles and responsibilities within their communities at other times. Surprisingly, each group separately discussed how they believe the media focuses on the bad and that this has a degree of influence on their actions. For example, the CDT group members stated,

...like as far as the news goes the first thing people notice is that it is about something bad and somebody has done something bad and it's like nobody knows that anything else is good. I mean they are putting the bad stuff out there first, they don't talk about the good, it's like they pinpoint one person or a group instead of the whole community...the whole youth, it makes it hard to concentrate on the good things when they put so much inference on bad things that have happened in our community. [*sic*]

For the GWCS students their examples were often specific to what it is like to be an IPS student sharing examples which illustrated their ideas of how the media is biased

and thus has an influence on them as students. For example, one student's statements regarding the influence of technology included the following example:

News let's take the News, the newspaper put us with all of those kids with D's and F's and it shut us down, that's why our school hates to take field trips, kids steal from the zoo, kids jump fences, they can't watch their language in front of adults, they give a bad impression of our school. The newsprint, the Indianapolis Star on the 6 o'clock news all you see is, there goes IPS their on the news again but if you look at the news and see all those townships and all you see is how good they are, all sports stuff and then they be talking about IPS and it's always negative...the media makes it a bigger deal than it is. [*sic*]

While there are differences between the two minority groups interviewed it is clear that emerging technologies are being used by youth in different and overlapping ways. It is also clear that the manner in which the Media delivers its message to youth whether in print, on the television or on the Internet can be positive but overwhelmingly for these youth the messages and images they hear about themselves and their communities is often perceived as negative. Upon consideration, this could have far reaching consequences when considering the statement given by the youth above who stated, "...it shut us down." Within this discussion with youth regarding the use of technology was also a discussion regarding the question, "Do you feel rejected by Media and your Community?" This compound question lead to greater insight regarding the degree of influence the media and the community messages had upon these youth participants and also revealed the impact those messages then had on youth as they sought to identify their role and responsibilities to their communities.



*Do Youth Feel Rejected by the Media and their Communities?*

When the GWCS group members were asked, “Do you feel rejected by Media? Do you feel rejected by your community?” the participants resoundingly said, “YES.”

One GWCS female participant stated:

...because of what society says we are, they use language, they stereotype us...example, the IPS incident where people's things were found on the Internet what the Indianapolis Star did was propaganda o.k. everybody in IPS is having this problem so that means ALL the kids are having problems...when our school closed down they gave up on me, what am I trying to go to college for? The school gave up on me, so college will give up on me and it has an even bigger domino effect because our community shut down the businesses and shops nothing was open. [sic]

Another GWCS student stated:

The teachers, the community they see the Mexicans they say they dress like gangsters when they go to the store they look at them like they're in gangs or they just come to steal something and YOU'RE NOT EVEN LIKE THAT! And that is one of the things I think a stereotype racist stereotypes discourage me from getting involved. [sic]

While yet another GWCS student stated:

...A lot of stereotypes in school...sometimes we have meetings with Eugene White and he makes us feel like we are stupid. For example, he will say the black males will never make it to college, they will go to jail, he is always putting us down, putting down the black people and he is a BLACK MAN!. [sic]

Finally one GWCS student summed it up by stating:

...they say IPS kids aren't going to be anything, they can't do it, can't go to college but I bet 90% of kids here want to be engaged but they don't have a say so or the say so they do put in doesn't matter because the decision has already been made...kids need to have a voice that matters, their opinions count. [sic]

Within this discussion there is overwhelming evidence that the GWCS participants feel that the messages that they see and hear, as a result of their use of a variety of technologies and also their membership exposure to three primary institutions (e.g., Community, School, and the Media) significantly impact their perceptions of self and community. Consequently, the evidence also suggests that these messages thus impact their motivations toward improving their selves and their communities. Similar responses were given by the CDT group members. Following is a review of CDT responses.

When asked the questions “Do you feel rejected by the Media? Do you feel rejected by your community?” one member of the CDT group stated, “no.” However, when a subsequent question was asked, “Do you think the Media or your Communities have any Misconceptions of youth?” the respondents resoundingly said, “yes” and gave limited but similar responses to those given by the GWCS group. For example, one student inferred that the Media and the Communities misconceptions of youth include:

...we don't want to help our community, we don't think we should be involved, but we do, I think we do, they're not focused on the good we are doing in the community but focus on what one person had done wrong and stereotype us all as lazy and bad. [*sic*]

Another student stated:

When it comes to youth programming like they want to do things for us but they don't trust what we have to say or they don't think it will work because we are young and they don't think we know what we are talking about but we do. I mean why am I here? If you don't have any say so we might as well go home, their making us do something we don't want to do. [*sic*]

Yet another student stated:

I'm thinking, why grown ups think you have to be older than eighteen to have a say so in our future like who our president might be or who is in our government or something like that? Most of the time, I think everybody our age would like a say in that but nobody really gives us a chance to say anything about it and when we do say something about it, it's like o their young they don't know what's going on. [sic]

Finally one student summed it up for the group by stating:

Most of the time the reason we don't do stuff is because the older people they think were all bad and lazy so they don't encourage us or include us in anything. The polls during the election time we don't have a say in it, so I mean so once your used to not doing something it hard to jump on the bandwagon and start doing stuff, nobody's encouraged you to do it before then it's like why should I start doing it now? Didn't nobody think it was important for me to do it before so why start now? [sic]

Similar to the GWCS findings, the CDT findings also overwhelming illustrate the power of message construction and institutional membership. Whether seen or heard, the examples provided by the participants illustrate that the CDT participants feel that the messages they continually receive, as a result of their use of a variety of technologies and also their membership exposure to three primary institutions e.g., Family, Community, and the Media) significantly impact their perceptions of self, community, and politics.

Consequently, the evidence also suggests that these messages thus impact their motivations to assert themselves within the current institution of family. Additionally the evidence suggests that these messages also impact their current and/both future participation within the institution of community. Finally, the evidence suggests that these messages also impact their current and/both future participation within the

institution, politics. Therefore, as evidenced by what CDT youth themselves have said, these youth are even now forming opinions regarding what their civic role and responsibilities are and are even now determining their immediate and/both future community and political in/action. Following is a review of the technologies used by the non-minority groups, see TABLE 8 below.

TABLE 8: NON-MINORITY GROUP RESPONSES

TECHNOLOGIES USED	DEC1	DEC2
Computer Games (A)		A
Internet Look up information (A) Play online games (B) MySpace (C) Pirate Movies (D)	A & C	B, C & D
Television Watch Local News (A) Watch Presidential Candidate Debates (B) * Watched Mayoral Debate (C)*	A, B & C	A
Cell Phone Text Message (A) Internet Access (B)	A	
The * indicates that only one student interviewed actually performed these two separate acts		

There are some clear differences in how the participants answered the question regarding the influence of technology on their lives. For DEC1 the group, members noted that the television and the Internet can provide additional information on a topic.

For example, one student noted that she learned something about Africa, she stated, “on T.V. I saw a show on Africa and on the Internet you can look up stuff” this example, while not as insightful as the examples given previously by the minority groups interviewed does parallel a response given by the CDT group.

The use of the cell phone is also very different for these groups. Neither group mentioned chain letters or text messages which offered community alerts or community opportunities. Instead, DEC2 members stated, “text messaging is for nerds” and DEC1 group members only indicated that they actually did text message on their phones.

As for the role of Television in the lives of these youth, a majority of the DEC1 and DEC2 members stated that they watched the local news but the resulting influence upon the two groups was starkly different. For example, the DEC1 members stated that they watched the local news and that the stories covering Hillary Clinton influenced their understanding of why they wanted Hillary Clinton to be the next president. For example, one student said, “I just know Hillary Clinton will be better, because her husband was president, she’s been office for years....” But when asked, “How do you know?” She stated, “Because the news says so.” Two students stated that they did not know anything about politics while another student said, “I just do what my grandma says, she don’t like Bart Peterson or George Bush but she does like Bill Clinton.” [*sic*] Other students then chimed in and one stated, “Clinton got us out of debt,” another student stated, “I want Obama” and another student stated, “but I want Hillary.” The sentiments expressed by these students reflect opinions formed not as a result of diligent research on the

candidates websites, or time spent reading newspapers or even time spent watching and listening to presidential debates but rather reflect something far less. Nonetheless, by their own account, the local media coverage of the presidential candidates has helped shape some of the opinions held by these youth while at least one youth reported that their relationship with a family member has contributed to the formation of their opinion. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that the majority of these youth would feel compelled to go step further and actually pick up a newspaper or watch a debate to gain additional insight into why their candidate is the right candidate.

Interestingly enough, only one DEC1 member actually admitted to watching several of the presidential debates and even the mayoral debates. Unlike his peers, this student stated that he actually “read articles, watched the debates and heard things on the radio” which helped him form his opinions of who should be the next president. While the views held by this individual were in the minority among his non-minority peers, his views and methodology taken to achieve a greater understanding of politics parallel those taken by members of the GWCS and CDT groups.

Further discussions among the members of the DEC1 groups provided insight into their overall distrust for what they do hear in the news. For example, when the group members were asked, “How many of you are going to vote?” the group members stated, “He’s the only one old enough to vote” indicating the one student who had just admitted to watching the debates. This discussion lead to the participants reflecting on when they would each turn 18 years of age and four of them realized that they would be eligible to

vote in the November 2008 election. Upon realization, the researcher then asked the following question, “What is stopping all of you from voting in the November election?” one student then stated, I just feel like everyone else is going to do the right thing and I won’t have to do any thing.” Around the table, three members of the group nodded their heads in agreement and one of them then followed up the reply with the following statement:

...but we don’t know who are the right ones, we don’t know if their lying because it can always be some bullshit and I would be up to voting if we elected them and if they didn’t do what they said they’d do we could kick them out, that’s like false advertisement it’s like buying something that’s supposed to do something and it doesn’t you can take it back but we are stuck with them for four years maybe even eight years. [*sic*]

Interestingly enough, the one minority member interviewed among the DEC groups, was a member of the DEC1 group. When he was asked by the researcher if he was going to vote, he stated, “No.” When asked, “Why not?” because he was going to be of age by the November 2008 election he stated, “Because I just don’t see the point.”

Unlike the DEC1 group, the DEC2 discussed the influence of media and technology very differently which did not include a discussion of any presidential candidates. Rather, one individual expressed fear when discussing the influence of Media on her life. She stated, “I don’t have cable, don’t get on the computer but I do watch the local news and it makes me want to stay inside my house and not go out.” Finally the members of the DEC2 group were asked, “Have any of you watched any of the presidential debates whether on the television or the Internet? The members said

“no” and one student then said, “Why would you even watch a debate on the Internet? I don’t do those kind of things, I play games, get on MySpace and Pirate Movies.” This expressed sentiment was shared by all the DEC2 group members. Further absent from this group’s responses was the connection between their use of various technologies and its influence on their ideas regarding civic engagement. In fact, the use of technologies did not appear to cultivate their understanding of community or National issues. Rather, the use of various mediums was used primarily for self gratification. Reiterating what previously was stated, these groups are motivated by individualistic gains not collective/community enrichment and/or action.



## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, again and again, have shown clear and defining differences between how the minority and non-minority participants experience and define their civic responsibilities. These contrasts were not expected and again for the purposes of this study, the researcher did not purposefully seek out minority and non-minority participants. Rather, recruitment of participants was random and so, as these contrasting responses have emerged from the data, every effort has been made, to make sense of why there would be such contrasts present among these participants' responses.

While identifying those motivating factors which propelled or dissuaded these youth from becoming engaged has proven to be insightful, there remains a need to further discuss the definition of civic engagement. From the beginning, there was an interest in how youth, would define civic engagement. The hope was that the definitions gleaned from the youth responses, would somehow provide additional insight into how stakeholders could then construct effective messages about civic engagement by utilizing the verbiage youth themselves use. Unfortunately, what was gleaned from these student responses is as wide-ranging as those definitions found on various university, institutional and community agency websites across this country. In reality, the ways in which their institutions define civic engagement, are so diverse, that some definitions include everything as civic engagement, while other definitions exclude what other definitions include. Since there appears to be no formal definition for what civic engagement may or

may not be, it makes sense as to why these particular youth found themselves grappling with the question: “How do you define civic engagement?”

Consider a few institutional definitions for civic engagement. The IUPUI Center for Service and Learning (2008) website defines civic engagement as the following:

Civic engagement is defined as active collaboration that builds on the resources, skills, expertise, and knowledge of the campus and community to improve the quality of life in communities in a manner consistent with the campus mission.

The Action for Change (2008) website, on the other hand, provided this definition:

Adding one’s voice to community conversations. Advocacy on behalf of others. Participation in public life. Encouraging other people to participate in public life. Joining in common work that promotes the well being of everyone (p. 1).

Yet, The Community Challenge (2008) website defines engagement as:

Civic engagement is comprised of individual and collective efforts or processes designed to identify and address community needs and issues of public concern. In a democracy, all segments of the community – businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and individual residents can and should be involved in civic engagement activities.

Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual volunteerism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It may involve individual action or group processes that result in positive community change and decision making that is more reflective of community needs and desires.

Taking responsibility for one’s own actions within the community and working to build an awareness of systematic positive change through activities such as directly addressing an issue, working with others in a community to identify and solve problems, interacting with and

influencing public and private decision makers, and developing skills through training and workshops that foster strong leadership are all examples of how one can become more civically engaged (p. 1).

Finally, the American Psychological Association (2008) website defines civic engagement as:

Service-learning and civic engagement are not the same thing in the sense that not all service-learning has a civic dimension and not all civic engagement is service-learning. For definition's sake, civic engagement is the broader motif, encompassing service-learning but not limited to it. ***One useful definition of civic engagement is the following: individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern.*** Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association, writing a letter to an elected official or voting. Indeed, an underlying principal of our approach is that an engaged citizen should have the ability, agency and opportunity to move comfortably among these various types of civic acts (p. 1).

Now re-consider what the youth themselves finally defined civic engagement to be through consensus building: The (CDT) group defined Civic engagement as “community service, giving back by helping others” while the (GWCS) group stated, “It’s doing things to help others, coming together with a group of people” and then the (DEC1) participants stated civic engagement is, “Coming together to do something good” in your community” and finally the (DEC2) stated civic engagement is “Helping others by doing things but it doesn’t benefit you.” The youth responses are far simpler in their explanation of what civic engagement is, than the previously mentioned institutional definitions. Could it be that civic engagement while encompassing many “things,” i.e.,

locally and/or nationally focused, institutionally and/or grassroots driven, socially and/or politically contextualized, individually and/or group performed, could simply be defined as “*Acts focused on achieving the common good for all groups within our communities?*” While the youth responses to defining civic engagement hint at achieving the *common good*, those definitions do not clearly define acts performed for the sake of all, and so, a clear distinction must be drawn. True civic engagement helps everybody and not just those closest to it. True civic engagement means that achieving the common good for all members of a community results in ultimately achieving the common good for the nation itself. Perhaps stakeholders can learn something from the simplistic intent of these youth responses thus amending their definitions to something far simpler and also far reaching: *Civic engagement is the sole intention of achieving the common good for all groups of people within our communities through the performance of civic acts.*

The findings of this study undeniably show that institutional membership, culture and co-cultures are influential in cultivating civic mindfulness, whether performed collectively or individually. Specifically, this research demonstrates that these factors assist youth in determining how they identify acts of engagement. Further, culture and co-culture as well as institutional memberships have been shown to provide a framework for youth to contextualize their role, form of engagement and level of civic responsibility. Finally, without these factors present in the lives of youth, this study finds that youth are likely to remain incapable of understanding the magnificent role and responsibilities required of them civically and thus remain disengaged. This study has afforded youth

themselves the opportunity to provide additional insight into how the institutions of family, school, community, church, and emerging technologies influence their civic participation. Additionally, insight has been gained regarding the effect of life circumstances on the individual and collective youth demographic. Given all that we now know about these groups, it is imperative that stakeholders meet youth where they are, which requires that message construction and the delivery of the message be different for the minority and non-minority groups. Therefore, tailoring the messages to target these specific audiences will likely increase the probability that stakeholders can effectively compete for this target audience's time, passion, vision and resources. For example, if an institution such as the United Way, was sponsoring a can food and clothing drive for those affected by the flooding in Nebraska, Missouri and Indiana, the messages constructed, would have to be different for these groups and would have to emphasize different things. For example, the minority groups would likely respond to messages which tap into the collective power of community. Messages like these, tap into the value that helping at the community level. This then engages families, schools, churches within the community at large, to perform acts that help neighbors in neighboring states. However, the non-minority groups interviewed would likely not be affected the same way because of the lack of institutional memberships and therefore, agencies like Am Vets, Salvation Army and Goodwill would need to contact these individuals at their homes, explaining the purpose of the call and that donating would not cost them anything, after all, they probably have baby clothes or other clothes at home

that they were going to throw away. In fact, these agencies would increase the likelihood of reaching these individuals if they could pick up the items at their homes.

While these suggestions are relevant and necessary, further insight can be gained by examining what three of the four groups stated in response to the question: “what can be done to ensure kids become civically engaged and what obstacles do youth face?” The following is a review of the student’s final responses to these questions and what they suggest in terms of promoting civic engagement. While all four groups identified transportation as an obstacle that deterred them from participation, the similarities between the two groups’ responses end there. Greater similarities were found between the minority groups. Once again, there remains a stark contrast between the remaining responses given by the minority groups and those given by the non-minority groups. TABLE 9 below, provides a review of these youths’ responses to the questions, “What can be done to ensure kids become civically engaged and what obstacles do they face?”

TABLE 9: MINORITY GROUPS-WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

WHAT YOUTH WOULD LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN	GWCS	CDT
We need to be able to give our input and be taken seriously “have a say so,” “...voice that matters, their opinions count...”	X	X
No more lecturing... “We need Hands on Experience.”		X
Group Discussions with adults-- Have functions where we can ask questions-we need time to ask questions		X
Collaborate –“...the reason we don’t do things is the older people don’t include us.”	X	X
We need parent involvement	X	
Have an administrator invested in our school	X	
We need more people who mentor other students-Be Involved, Be a Leader, Be a better Role Model	X	
Students need to Step up- do it	X	

Both minority groups, GWCS and CDT, felt that youth need to be able to express themselves, provide input and be taken serious. For example, the reoccurring theme shared by these groups centered around, “...having a say so...” this clearly demonstrates their desire to collaborate with each other and also adults. Unfortunately, these youth feel there is few, if any, real opportunities to collaborate with adults and was a point of

contention for both groups. For example, when on GWCS student answered this question he stated,

I bet 90% of the kids here want to be engaged but they don't have a say so or the say so the do put in doesn't matter because the decision has already been made. Kids need to have a voice that matters, their opinions count, we need more people who mentor other students, we need parent involvement, and we need an administrator who is invested in our school. [sic]

While the youth identify having a "say so" as being important to them, they are also saying that they really want their ideas to be seriously considered and for that to happen youth must be listened to. In addition, while both groups identify collaboration as important, one CDT member also added a qualifier. Not only do they need to have a say so, but, collaborative action needs to take place. The CDT participant stated,

...we are telling what we need but you don't want to see it...there was a program designed for youth and we was like well can we do a fundraiser or something to have them be entertained and be educated and they like said no... Most of the time its like if were just going to sit here and you lecture us all the time than most of us are going to be sleep...**it's like there needs to be more hands on and not just be sitting there the whole time and be lectured to...but we need hands on experience so we really know what's going on.** [sic]

Inherent in these student responses is an understanding of what civic engagement is, the importance of being active in one's own community and a sincere desire to increase their community involvement. Further, the youth themselves are corroborating what the literature has already concluded, Gurstein et al., (2003) state the necessity of garnering support and engagement of community stakeholders with a vision of inclusion



and have cautioned, “we cannot afford to disenfranchise youth, our newest leadership, for the challenges we now face” (p. 1).

While these two groups have access to a number of programs, which repeatedly grant them access to institutionally embedded civic engagement opportunities, they are saying it is not enough. These youth are clearly indicating that there must be more discussion between themselves and adults about what youth programs are instituted on their behalf in order to truly address their unique needs. Therefore, the minority groups are imploring the institutional leaders within their communities, schools, churches and families to afford them the opportunities to work beside them. These youth are requesting that institutional leaders share with them, the civic responsibility of creating programs which target youth and community needs. Additionally, while these members are knowledgeable about community issues, they are also stating that they would like to have open discussions with their community leaders about local and national political issues versus being dismissed because of their age and lack of life experience. Finally, a shift must occur in the individual and collective minds throughout our local and national communities. This shift must recognize that across the spectrum, youth feel disenfranchised because of targeted racism and stereotyping, as evidenced, by the telling of their own stories. This shift must elevate youth to their rightful place, recognizing them as powerful, intellectually engaged and willing to do more in their communities if only they were provided with more opportunities to do so and were not continually labeled as lazy, uninterested, gang members, thieves and just generally bad. The negative

images and messages these youths see and hear about themselves, on a daily basis, have far reaching consequences. We must consider the ethical obligations we have to this demographic as they access their communities and the world through a sundry of technologies. Greater consideration must be given to message construction, because, they themselves pointed out, they read about their communities in newspapers and watch the local and national news coverage online and on their televisions. These youth are telling us, that they perceive a habitual negative focus by the media, on their communities and on their demographic. As a result, these perceived messages have been, and are,(by their own account) detrimental to them psychologically and emotionally. Further, the lack of inclusion, the continuous dismissal of their ideas, the racism, stereotyping and habitual negative coverage has at times, “shut them down” and lead to their non-participation. This is by all accounts, according to the literature, precisely what we do not want to happen. Gurstein et al., (2003), said it best: “engagement empowers youth to influence the development of the culture and society in which they reside” (p. 1). Emphasizing such involvement leads to positive psychosocial health which results in increased open-mindedness, personal responsibility, civic competence, moral development, and a sense of self-esteem and efficacy. Participation in civic activities also leads to a greater understanding of citizenship and allows the youth to develop roles for themselves as part of a democratic society, which subsequently promotes a conscious sense of responsibility and stewardship to the community.

Never has it been more important to recognize the power of institutional membership or the lack thereof, in a group, than when examining the responses given by the non-minority group participants. Following is a review of DEC1 and DEC2's responses to the questions, "What can be done to ensure kids become civically engaged and what obstacles do youth face?" When asked, "What's keeping you from being engaged?" the responses were apathetic and expected. However, two young women from the DEC1 group provided what could be considered as an expected typical response. TABLE 10 below provides a review of their responses.

TABLE 10: A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

WHAT'S KEEPING YOU FROM BECOMING ENGAGED?	DEC1	DEC2
Transportation and Money		X
Time		X
Do not want to do it		X
My child & family responsibilities	X	X
They always want more so ***** them!		X
Don't know where to go or what to do or who to go with	X	

Unlike the minority groups, the non-minority group's responses continually exhibit that their worldview is considerably smaller than that of their peers; encompassing only themselves, their families and their friends. The inherent implication within their responses is that they are just fighting to stay alive, stay in school, make money and support themselves. They are by definition, self absorbed and just trying to have fun while doing all the things expected and required of them. This is illustrated by one student who stated:

someone is always sick and it's just me at home my mom is not healthy my dad works so I have to take care of her, clean the house, cook dinner, go grocery shopping and take care of my little girl that's pretty much my life if I do have free time I spend it with my little girl.

This sentiment was shared by three girls across both groups. Because of this type of experience, it makes sense that these particular girls have little time for anything else outside of school. As a consequence, it makes even more sense in understanding why these youth perform self-motivated individualistic acts of engagement that require no group activity and in most cases, benefit themselves in the process. Given what is known about these two groups, in all likelihood changing the individualistic worldview of these particular youth, is unlikely. However, consideration must be given to how invested stakeholders can effectively attempt to cultivate a civic mindfulness framework among this demographic, which can then serve as the vehicle by which more meaningful engagement opportunities can be experienced.

Perhaps the best way stakeholders can begin to achieve this objective is to afford America's youth with more institutionally embedded opportunities during school hours. The opportunities offered cannot rely on the rhetoric, "you owe it to your community" because currently there is little or no community investment. Relying on the educational institution to institute a service learning requirement of 10 hours every semester, similar to what the CDT and the GWCS groups are required to complete before graduation, would provide the necessary foundation needed to begin institutionalizing civic engagement amongst these youth. Further building relationships with known community agencies which collaborate often with youth on projects would provide the cross over kinds of collaboration and interactions needed to help cultivate a broader sense of community obligation. Because these youth have a history of being in trouble with the law, have been placed in an alternative school setting and are in most cases teenage parents, the civic opportunities afforded them must take into account their life circumstance. Because these youth have been labeled and defined as the problem kids, they own this label with hostility, which was evident throughout the group interviews. Thus, affording them multiple collaborative opportunities which bring them in contact with unknown adults and students performing the same acts of engagement could also have a dual effect by actually raising the student's sense of self to a healthier level.

As a result of the challenges these students faced and which they will continue to navigate throughout adulthood, it is imperative that these members and members like them, who are part of the fastest growing demographic in America, be reached.

Cultivating civic mindfulness and affording them with opportunities to be engaged is no less important because these kids have been in trouble with the law, are students in an alternative school and/or are teenage parents. Rather, reaching them becomes even more important, given that statistically, these youth are likely to drop out of school and live in poverty for the rest of their lives (Rodgers, 1993; Cushing, 1999). Since the institution of school is likely the only vehicle by which stakeholders can reach these specific groups, it is imperative that this institution carefully selects community groups/agencies that have experience working with at-risk youth. Establishing partnerships with agencies such as these makes sense, because doing so will likely ensure that the institutionally embedded opportunities expose these youth to rhetoric they identify with and therefore increase the likelihood of value convergence occurring as these activities are completed. As previously mentioned, “Schools are one of the critical links between education and citizenship” (Gimpel et al., 2003, p. 145) and the role of educational institutions and those employed by the schools is to influence the civic mindedness of youth (Andolina et al., 2003; Hahn, 2001). Creating partnerships that repeatedly expose these youth to new and exciting projects that do not compete for their time after school, could begin to re-socialize these youth so that they begin to rethink or broaden their understanding of what it means to become civically responsible. See APPENDIX B for a list of partnerships to consider.

In closing, the factors, which promote or dissuade youth to become civically engaged, are deceptively simple, the reality is that they are magnificently complex.

While this work explored the institutional role of family, school, community, and emerging technology in cultivating civic mindfulness among the youth demographic, there is, no doubt, much more to consider. However, the findings of this study support the idea that collaborative learning is necessary and useful for cultivating civic mindfulness and civic engagement in America's youth. Yet, how the collaborative learning is structured will take a different form as a result of the influential nature of the culture and co-cultures present among the different participating groups. The institutional memberships held or not held by youth are also significant. This study finds that institutional memberships, or the lack thereof, are powerful forces, which contextualize the civic roles and responsibility of youth who either identify civic acts as meaningful, collective, local and global or irrelevant, individualistic and local. Finally, the obstacles challenging the minority and non-minority groups are a reflection of culturally embedded understandings, influential institutional memberships or the lack thereof, and worldviews which place a different value on what it means to be civically engaged. These layers significantly impact what youth then identify as the challenges or obstacles that keep them from becoming civically engaged and also significantly impact the value they place on the relevance of overcoming these obstacles. Therefore, it is necessary that stakeholders strongly consider the responses given by each of the groups (minority and non-minority) differently, so that valuable insight can be gained into how stakeholders can effectively compete for this demographic's time, passion, vision and resources.

### *Future Research*

The findings of this study, specifically, those insights gained from interviewing the minority groups, demonstrate a need to examine message construction in a different way. One of the questions of this study specifically addressed factors which dissuaded and/or promoted youth to become engaged. As a result of the findings of this study, it is necessary to consider the responses given by the minority groups more closely. Independent of one another, both groups perceived that they were repeatedly subjected to racist and ageist messages by members of their own communities, schools, churches, families and the media, which at times, dissuaded them from becoming engaged. This finding highlights the need for additional research, exploring the ways in which young people feel they are perceived and the impact those perceptions may have on their propensity to become civically engaged. After all, these perceptions are grounded in something, and their interpretations are influenced not only by the message itself, but also by the perceived intention of the messenger.

I believe one could argue that these students do in fact feel discriminated against and may in fact be justified in their interpretations. But what if that interpretation is not always justified and in fact, the construct by which their perceptions and interpretations have been formed is sometimes wrong? People are not only socialized by the messages they receive, but are also socialized to give meaning to the messages, before they even occur. What if youth were told that racism will occur throughout their lifetime and that they need to just expect that it will in fact happen to them? Then an argument could be



made, that every message they receive would be filtered through the construct identifying most messages received by youth, from their communities and/or from the media as inherently racist or/both inherently ageist.

Consider the messages that these youth received from Eugene White, the Indianapolis Superintendent. Instead of interpreting his messages to the student body as grounded in the solid empirical research, which finds that young black men are in fact, more likely to drop out of high school and end up in jail, these minority youth, interpreted his messages as evidence of internalized racism, feeling themselves discriminated against, by one of their own black leaders. Therefore, additional thought must be given to expanding the research on the socialization of youth, including an examination of the constructs which likely guide youth to attribute meaning to those messages, so that they perceive many of them as inherently racist. Therefore, an additional question to consider is: How do minority youth form the idea that racism is so prevalent in the media and in their communities?

One assumption to consider would be that minority youth are likely forming their impressions about racism in their communities and in the media from an early age. These impressions are likely formed primarily through discussion with members of their families, communities, schools and churches, who are then responsible for conveying to youth the definition and identification of discriminatory practices. Another, assumption to consider is that youth could simply be directly experiencing discriminatory practices and thus, this direct experience, informs their interpretation of messages about their

communities and themselves as discriminatory. Either way, it would be interesting to examine more closely the relationship between message construction and youth socialization pertaining to the perceptions held by these youth regarding the discriminatory practices of media and the community. Additionally, exploring whether or not other minority youth would even label the media and other institutional members of their communities and schools as inherently racist in their message construction, while examining the factors which dissuade youth from becoming civically engaged, would be another important finding.

Finally, another way in which this research could be expanded is to consider asking the same questions in a different format. While focus group interviews allowed the researcher to meet youth in locations that were convenient for them, this was not always the best structure or time to actually conduct the interviews. For example, these institutions allotted limited amounts of time and the interviews took place often at the end of the student's school day, when their attention span was often at its weakest. Therefore, considering a different format would likely be best.

For example, asking the same questions in a discussion forum over a semester would allow the researcher to electronically record the student responses and likely increase the probability of finding more coherent themes among the youth responses. Using an electronic discussion forum would also increase the number of participants of this study and likely produce more reliable findings which could be generalized to the broader demographic. In the event that more participant responses were recorded, one

thing to look for would be whether or not the consistent contrasts found between the minority and non-minority responses remained the same or actually diminished.

Other electronic forums to consider for testing these questions out in would be social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook. Within these sites, members can join different discussion forums (i.e., News & Politics (General, International News, International Politics, US News, US Politics), General Discussion, Campus Life (General, Grad School, High School, Undergrad). These sites allow participants to blog about any and all things related to the discussion forum topics. Therefore, choosing these sites or sites like them to test out these questions would also increase the likelihood of more reliable data, thus allowing the findings to be generalized to the larger demographic.

Finally, examining college age student responses to these questions in a discussion format via Oncourse or Blackboard over a semester would also interest this researcher. Targeting college students might produce results which further assist stakeholders in being more effective in capturing this audience's time, passion, vision and resources.

## APPENDIX A

### Focus Group Question Guide

#### Questions Relating to Perceptions Held by Youth Regarding Civic Engagement

1. What does it mean to be civic minded?
2. How do you define civic engagement?
3. Tell me of a time when you had to decide to either participate in a civic minded event. What decision did you make and what factors influenced your decision? What were the alternatives you were choosing from and what role did the messages you heard have on your decision?
4. What other institutions do you identify as vehicles which influence and/or cultivate civic mindedness and civic engagement among youth?
5. What role do emerging technologies play in socializing you to become civically minded or civically engaged?
6. What degree of influence do your peers have on whether or not you become civically engaged?
7. What degree of influence do other groups have in whether or not you cultivate a value for civic mindedness? How does the group communication process influence you to transform your thoughts about civic engagement into actions or actions not taken toward becoming civically engaged?
8. What messages do you receive which dissuade you from becoming civically engaged? From what medium do you hear these messages?
9. What obstacles do you encounter as it relates to you participating in a civic event?
10. What misconception about youth would you say is the most dissuasive with regards to whether or not you will become civically involved?
11. Do you feel rejected by your communities and/or the media? If so, in what ways do you feel rejected by these institutions?
12. In what ways do you feel youth can become involved civically? Do you think youth want to become civically minded or civically engaged?
13. What would you suggest as a way to promote the value of civic mindedness and civic engagement among youth? How would your suggestions change from age group to age group, location or medium chosen?

## APPENDIX B

### **Keep Indianapolis Beautiful (KIB)**

Keep Indianapolis Beautiful is committed to empowering youth and encouraging them to make a difference in the their world.

Project Green Schools (Formerly Partners in the Environment, PIE)  
Project Green Schools educates and empowers teachers and their students and families to beautify, revitalize, and create an outdoor classroom on the land surrounding a Marion County school. In partnership with Purdue Extension —Marion County, Project Green Schools provides 'hands on' opportunities for students in tree plantings, creating wildlife habitats and gardens, litter abatement, recycling, and other environmental projects. KIB encourages youth to explore and understand challenges in the urban and to learn how to care for and improve their community. Each year, over 7,000 students at more than 40 schools transform their school grounds through the Project Green Schools program.  
[http://www.kibi.org/programs/education\\_youth/index.htm](http://www.kibi.org/programs/education_youth/index.htm)

### **Peace Learning Center**

Peace Learning Center (PLC) is an educational institution teaching building and conflict skills to youth and adults. PLC demonstrates safe and common ways to deal with conflict and differences.

The Middle & High School Peace Education team offers single or multi-session workshops that assist groups of 30 or less in addressing the root causes of conflict through dialogue and active learning. Peacemaking skills, cooperation, communication, empathy, cross-cultural understanding and self-esteem are a sampling of the topics offered  
[www.peacelearningcenter.org](http://www.peacelearningcenter.org)

### **Youth As Resources (YARCI)**

YARCI is a program of United Way of Central Indiana which serves Boone, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Marion and Morgan counties.

**YAR** challenges youth to identify community needs and design projects that use their skills, creativity and energy to help others in the community.

**YAR** awards grants to youth volunteer groups for youth-led service projects. Grant workshops are conducted before each grant deadline to advise youth on how to apply. **YAR** is guided by Action Boards in each county. Youth and adult board members work in partnership to make all funding decisions

**Or** one annual event sponsored by the **YARCI** includes the following:

### **Youth Day of Caring**

This year, over 3,000 volunteers participated in the 14th Annual Youth Day of Caring! Each Spring, United Way of Central Indiana sets aside two days so that young people can experience the joy of giving their time to make our community better and have fun while doing so. Youth Day of Caring is held in celebration of Global Youth Service Day. Global Youth Service Day is an annual public awareness and education campaign that highlights the valuable contributions that young people make to their communities throughout the year. Youth volunteers work on important projects including painting, neighborhood beautification, reading to children, and visiting seniors! <http://www.uwci.org>

### **Kiwanis Club**

**Key Club** sponsors, promotes and advises a service club for high school students that is patterned after a traditional Kiwanis club. Currently we sponsor clubs at Arsenal Tech and Perry Meridian High Schools. <http://www.indykiwanis.org>

### **Character Education Partnership**

Nonpartisan coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to developing moral character and civic virtue in our Nation's youth as one means of creating a more compassionate and responsible society. [www.character.org](http://www.character.org)

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