

## The Virtue In Youth Civic Participation

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### **Abstract**

This paper provides a summary of our past and recent work on the questions of whether and how involvement in community service promotes civic and political development in youth. We focus not on the psychological attributes adolescents bring to service, but on the conditions which make the service experience an opportunity for discovering one's relationship to ongoing value traditions toward society, its problems, and well-being. Our most recent work was centered on four specific issues. Using a quasi-experimental longitudinal design, we found that (1) school-based required service does not dampen enthusiasm in students who already favor service, whereas it generates interest in civic life in students with no prior service experience. Using a path model covering a 2-year period, we found also that (2) participation in challenging service led to a process in which contributions to a sponsoring organization eventuated in changes in the self, increased helpfulness, and ultimately to civic engagement. (3) We found further that adolescents with a clear sense of their identity chose to do challenging service which, in turn, sustained their clarity of self over a 2-year period. (4) Using a nationally representative sample of youth, we found that young adults of age 26 were more likely to have voted and to have done volunteer service when they did do service when they were in high school 8 years previously. It made no difference whether their service during high school was required or voluntary, thus, complementing the results of the first study. Our conclusion is that policy makers should not shy away from having youth participate in civic and political processes. The experience helps to frame civic identities which have lasting positive consequences.

*Keywords.* Youth, community service, political socialization, civic identity

### **Zusammenfassung**

Dieser Beitrag bietet einen Überblick über unsere bisherige Forschung zur Frage, ob und wie gemeinnützige Tätigkeit bürgerschaftliches und politisches Engagement bei Jugendlichen fördert. Dabei werden weniger die psychischen Dispositionen betrachtet, die Jugendliche dazu motivieren, gemeinnützige Tätigkeit aufzunehmen. Vielmehr stehen die Bedingungen im Vordergrund, unter denen gemeinnützige Tätigkeit dazu beitragen kann, dass Jugendliche ihre Eingebundenheit in gesellschaftliche Prozesse entdecken. Unsere jüngere Forschung hat dabei vier Aspekte in den Mittelpunkt gerückt: (1.) Verpflichtende gemeinnützige Tätigkeit im Rahmen der High School-Zeit mindert nicht die Bereitschaft und Begeisterung Jugendlicher, sich freiwillig zu engagieren. Sie erzeugt vielmehr politisches Interesse bei Jugendlichen, die vor dem verpflichtenden Service nicht gemeinnützig tätig waren. In einer Längsschnittstudie fanden wir mittels Strukturgleichungsmodellen (2.), dass gemeinnützige Tätigkeit in direkter Interaktion mit

bedürftigen Menschen in karitativen Organisationen zu einem veränderten Selbstbild, erhöhter Hilfsbereitschaft und zu politischer Sensibilisierung führt. Wir fanden (3.), dass Jugendliche mit einem konturierten Selbstbild eher herausfordernde gemeinnützige Tätigkeiten wählten, was ihrer Identitätsentwicklung nochmals förderlich war. (4.) An einem für die USA repräsentativen Jugend-Survey konnten wir zeigen, dass junge Erwachsene im Alter von 26 Jahren eher wählen gehen, wenn sie als Jugendliche gemeinnützig aktiv waren. Dies unabhängig davon, ob es sich dabei um verpflichtenden oder freiwilligen Service handelte. Unsere Schlussfolgerung ist, dass politische Entscheidungsträger gemeinnützige Tätigkeit Jugendlicher fördern sollten, weil Heranwachsenden die dabei gemachten Erfahrungen helfen, eine bürgerschaftliche Identität mit lang anhaltenden, positiven Wirkungen für die Demokratie zu entwickeln.

*Schlagworte.* Jugend, gemeinnützige Tätigkeit, politische Sozialisation, politische Identität.

For the past two decades, much of our research has been focused on the relationship between community service and youth's civic, moral, and political development. We have been less concerned with the psychological dispositions which lead individuals to service, than with the consequences and the conditions which make service effective developmentally. The practical reason for this focus is that much of the service we studied was required by schools. All students had to participate in a certain number of hours to qualify for graduation. Thus, if psychological characteristics made a difference, they would have to be found in the consequences of, rather than the forerunners to, service.

There is a theoretical rationale for our perspective, as well. Of the many approaches to service, we favor the stance taken by social movement theorists and some political scientists who subjugate personality traits or motives to the availability of resources which mobilize individuals to action. In turn, action is seen as a form of socialization which provides political skills, engages youth in politics, and helps form identity. In this regard, service can be a resource which mobilizes youth to become involved in addressing social problems through collective action. The consequences of service, then, depend on the kinds of resources which structure the service experience. These might include the guiding ideology of the organization which sponsored service, the problems which service addressed, how these problems were framed politically or morally, challenges which the youth had to confront, and other things.

We have reviewed this work in several places in order to highlight key findings and conclusions. For example, in Yates/Youniss's (1996) review of 46 studies, three general themes were identified. Certain forms of service (1) affect youth's views of the self, for example, bring to light the self's political agency; (2) alter youth's views of their relationships to society, for example, promote a sense of responsibility to others; and (3) bring about political-moral awareness, for instance, discerning the political and moral dimensions of social problems.

We have also reviewed evidence that certain kinds of youth service and youth activism have long term effects which persist well into adulthood (Hart/Atkins/Donnelly 2006; Youniss/Hart 2002; Youniss/McLellan/Yates 1997). The findings which are consistent across several studies, suggest that the youth era, roughly between 16 and 24, is seminal for setting individuals on a life path of civic engagement, for example, joining voluntary groups, and political involvement, for instance, voting.

We have further discussed the idea that youth service and activism are opportune for forming identities which take into account civic and political dimensions. Because service is frequently done under the sponsorship of organizations which aim to improve society, youth who participate in their work, have opportunities to envision themselves performing activities which represent their ideologies. This experience gives the identity process, which is prominent during youth, a kind of nourishment that connects youth to history, giving them a virtual past with which to identify, and an ideal future toward which to work (Hart/Fegley 1995; Youniss/Yates 1997).

More recently we focused on the ways in which our work on service has brought us to consider modifications of developmental theory which follow from these findings and can be applied to civic and political development (Youniss/Hart 2002, 2005). Civic and political development have not been high priority topics in developmental studies (Torney-Purta 2002). Instead, developmental researchers have relied on *cognitive processes* to address these domains (Haste/Torney-Purta 1992). Emphasis is given to reasoning and ways that youth, in contrast to younger children, come to understand the complexities of political structures and events. We believe that this approach is too limited to capture the core of political and civic life which involves much more than private, in-the-head, reasoning.

Democratic societies would never come about if individuals, even millions of them, simultaneously imagined democratic action and the concepts which support it. Democratic behavior is needed (Giddens 1993). Political behavior, in contrast to reasoning or private reflection, is public and expresses interests. Insofar as it is a public expression of point of view, it necessarily comes into contact with other views which represent different and, likely, competing interests. This leads to resolving differences through agreed upon practices within a democratic framework; for instance, debate, negotiation, compromise, and the like. Finally and perhaps overarchingly, citizens assent to the democratic system of which they are simultaneously partaking and making real via their participation. This last piece involves identity, or willing inclusion of self in the collective democratic process which is equivalent to what Flanagan/Faison (2001) have called a new form of "social contract."

**Political behavior is public and expressed interest**

Our view, then, is that developmental theories need to be modified if they are to address civic and political development adequately. It is not sufficient to say that cognitive development or emotional maturity underlie, much less account for, development in these domains. This is because the civic and politically attuned individual is able to articulate an interest, as opposed to just being cognitively able knows how to make that interest public, not just maintain a private stance on it grasps the fact that there are multiple interests, rather than honing in on the correct position follows rules of democratic negotiation, instead of merely asserting one's correctness and respects the system enough to abide by it in collaboration with others.

Anything short of this may look like political behavior, but does not meet the basic criteria for what is generally accepted as mature democratic political behavior (Youniss/Hart 2005).

## 1. Grounded in Action

In his recent review of the long-term consequences of youth activism, Jennings (2002) looks carefully at generational issues. Many of the studies which show longitudinal persistence in political activism involved individuals who were youth during the 1960s, a period known for its political and cultural upheavals. For example, several of the studies were focused on youth who participated in civil rights, anti-war, and campus organization protests. In Jennings's own sample, the group which remained most active well into their adulthood, was comprised of college students who actively participated in anti-war demonstrations. Noting the historical slant toward the 1960s in the data, Jennings nonetheless suggests that other forms of activism ought to be considered as valuable. Not every generation has the opportunity to participate in a civil rights struggle, challenge government militarism, or reform movements on campus. But Jennings proposes, there are proto-activist experiences such as service which can introduce youth into the civic sphere as participating agents. Since we can control such experiences, they can be utilized as strategies for political socialization.

There is a solid literature on the importance of participation in political socialization. By participation, we mean direct action in the political and civic spheres in contrast to, say, acquiring political knowledge or attitudes. For example, Barber (1984) has distinguished two forms of democracy. In its "thin" form, individuals take relatively passive stances toward government and civic life. For example, they vote but do not get engaged in electoral campaigns or join in public demonstrations. In contrast, "strong" democracy requires participation in which citizens take charge of their lives by engaging in politics at the local level where events can be influenced by collective action. In strong democracy, citizenship is taken less as a right and more as a result of action and involvement. In Barber's view, participation is the entry into politics from which all else follows. Dispositions and knowledge do not precede involvement but follow from it. Once people get engaged, they will want to know how the system works so that they are better able to control it and manage government for their own and the public good.

Other political philosophers preceded Barber in emphasizing the seminal role of participation. For example, John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century said the following: "We do not learn to read or write, to ride or swim, by being merely told how to do it, but by doing it, so it is only by practicing popular government on a limited scale, that the people will ever learn how to exercise it [...]" (cited in Alperovitz 2005, S. 44). Alexis de Tocqueville, the French philosopher who visited the United States in the first part of the nineteenth century, made a similar observation:

"An American should never be led to speak of Europe, for he will then probably display much presumption and very foolish pride. He will take up with those crude and vague notions which are so useful to the ignorant all over the world. But if you ask him respecting his own country, the cloud that dimmed his intelligence will immediately disperse; his language will become as clear and precise as his thoughts. He will inform you what his rights are and by

what means he exercises them; he will be able to point out the customs which obtain in the political world. You will find that he is well acquainted with the rules of administration, and that he is familiar with the mechanisms of the laws. The citizen of the United States does not acquire his practical science and his positive notions from books; the instruction he has acquired may have prepared him for receiving those ideas but did not furnish them. The American learns to know the laws by participating in the act of legislation; and he takes a lesson in the forms of government from governing. The great work of society is ever going on before his eyes and, as it were, under his hands" (Tocqueville 2004).

Much has changed in American politics in recent years, one of the major changes being its reliance on technical professionals and its filtering through the media. These shifts have diminished opportunities for youth to be involved in everyday political processes. One consequence of this fact has been documented by Shea (2004) who found that county-level officials of the both major political parties put little effort into mobilizing youth participation. For example, campaigns to enlist voters are directed much more to the elderly than to youth. With little role to play and seen as unlikely to vote, youth have become ignored by the political system.

Bringing these points together, one can see new relevance for community service. If strong democracy depends on citizen participation, beyond voting, and if there are lessened opportunities for youth to participate in ongoing political processes, then service stands out as a potential antidote. Insofar as service brings young people into contact with organizations that have political purpose, say, to protect the environment or address the causes and effects of poverty, it provides opportunities for young people to participate in meaningful ways in reshaping society. Since learning democratic citizenship is accomplished by doing it, service is more than charity insofar as it provides participation alongside adults in ongoing organizations which are part of the larger ongoing political process.

## 2. Recent Research on Service

Four of our recent studies address questions which are important to the service literature and reinforce our theoretical framework. We will now describe these studies and spell out their significance for youth's political socialization. The first study used a quasi-experimental design in which two groups of students were tracked over time as one group proceeded through high school without a service requirement, while another group in that same school, followed them one year later, but with a service requirement. The key findings were that the requirement stimulated political engagement in students who had shown no prior interest in service, and simultaneously, it did not dampen enthusiasm for service in students' who were already favorable toward service.

The second study tracked students in two different schools for two years as they performed their community service requirement. Using a structural equation model, we were able to show that students who did challenging kinds of service in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year of high school, believed at the end of their 4<sup>th</sup> year that they were more likely to vote and to do service in the future. The intervening process

followed a path in which challenging service led students to say that they felt as if they had made a contribution to the organization which sponsored their service. This in turn, led them to an enhanced sense of self-agency. This led to actual behaviors of helping other people who were strangers, and this step eventuated in a greater likelihood of voting and volunteering in the future.

The third study looked at the role that service played in clarifying students' identities as they progressed from 2<sup>nd</sup> through the 4<sup>th</sup> year in the above two schools. We found several patterns of identity clarity during these 3 years with students starting at either high or low levels and with students either maintaining their initial levels or showing increased or decreased clarity. Our major finding was that maintenance of high clarity was associated with students having selected to do more challenging, as opposed to, less challenging service. Apparently, students with a strong sense of who they are and where they are headed in life, have the confidence to choose to service which is challenging. The doing of challenging service, then helps to reinforce their self-perceptions so that these students maintain high clarity throughout high school.

The fourth study addressed two major questions that have been asked repeatedly regarding service: Does service during high school predict political involvement later in life or are effects short-term? And if long-term effects can be shown, is voluntary service more efficacious than school-based required service, given concerns expressed about making service mandatory? We found that the doing of service during high school, vs. not doing service, significantly increased the likelihood of voting 8 years later, at ages 25-26. Eight years is not a life time, but it is long-term and within the age range when relatively few youth vote. The answer to the second question is that required service had the same positive impact on voting 8 years later as did voluntary service during high school. This result addresses the concern that has been voiced about the possible contradiction inherent in demanding that youth do service instead of having service emerge voluntarily.

**Does service during high school predict political involvement later in life**

### Required service in a public high school (Metz/Youniss 2005)

In 1998, we began observing students in a public high school which was about to introduce a requirement that all students had to do 48 hours of service sometime before graduation. Students already in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year who were to graduate in 2000, were exempt from the requirement. But the requirement applied to students in subsequent classes who would graduate in 2001 or 2002. We tracked both groups of students as they proceeded through school with the aim of answering the question of whether having a service requirement would be of benefit or harm. Measures were taken yearly of political and civic interest, the former by likelihood of voting in the future and the latter by likelihood of doing volunteer service in the future.

We found that we could divide each of the experimental groups, the one with and the other without a requirement, into subgroups. The division was based on the fact that some students in each group were already highly engaged in

voluntary service irrespective of the school's requirement. These students were favorably inclined toward service before we began our observations. This fact allowed us to address a question which others have raised regarding the importance of autonomy: Are youth who favor service, affected negatively when they are given an additional service requirement which they may see as thwarting their autonomy? We were able to answer the question clearly. Students who were already doing voluntary service on a regular basis, scored near ceiling at the start of their 3<sup>rd</sup> year on our measures of voting and volunteering in the future, and their scores remained near ceiling through the end of their 4<sup>th</sup> year. Clearly, the required 48 hours of service was not perceived as an imposition or threat to the students' autonomy as scores remained high through the study even as students did both voluntary and required service.

Another result confirmed this conclusion. Some of these students completed the 48-hr requirement by the end of their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year in high school. We found that these students not only said they were likely to do volunteer service in the future, but that they did volunteer service after completing their requirement. Once the requirement was met, 80 percent or more of these students continued to do voluntary service the following year. Thus, it seems clear that having to meet a service requirement does not dampen enthusiasm for service in students who are already favorably inclined toward service. Claims about the importance of autonomy were not confirmed by our results and support our view that focus is better placed on service as a resource than on the personological factors which may initiate service.

We turn now to the subgroups of students who were not favorably inclined toward service. They were defined in this way because they had not done voluntary service previously and neither had members of their families done voluntary service. As noted, one of these subgroups proceeded through school without a service requirement; this was the class which graduated in 2000. The other subgroup which had to do 48 hours of required service, belonged to the 2001 or 2002 graduation classes. In this subgroup, students had three years in which to complete the requirement, but the majority waited until their 4<sup>th</sup> year to complete it. This fact supported our definition of disinclination as the students showed no enthusiasm for doing service. On measures of likelihood of voting and likelihood of volunteering in the future, both subgroups scored very low and differed significantly from the favorably inclined groups in their 3<sup>rd</sup> high school year. However, at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> year, after the required group had done its mandated 48 hours of service, a large difference arose on both measures. After meeting their service requirement, students scored significantly higher on future voting and volunteering than their counterparts who were not required to do service and had no service experience.

Figure 1. Mean scores out of 5 on Intended Future Voting by cohorts and service groups over time

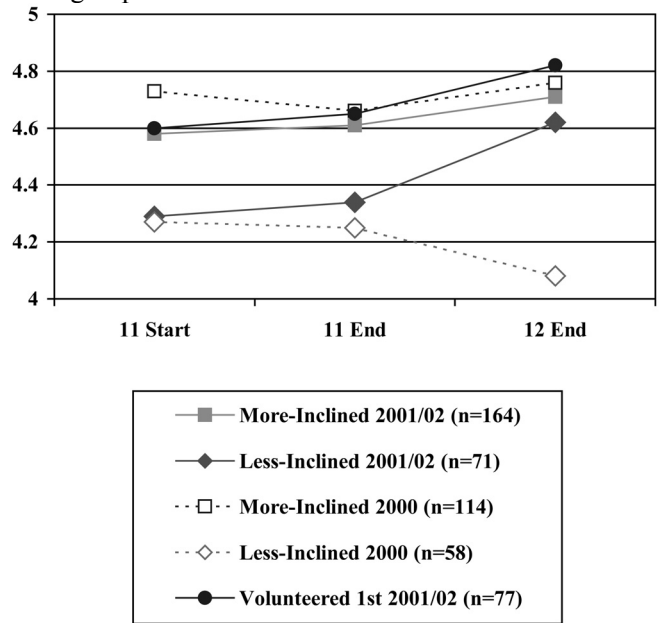
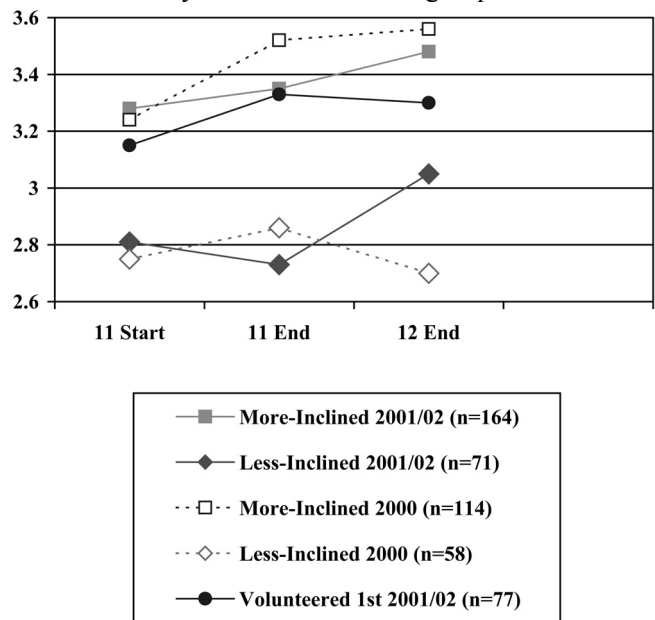


Figure 2. Mean scores out of 5 on Intended Future Conventional Civic Involvement by cohorts and service groups over time



Figures 1 and 2 display the main group differences for the four groups over time. There can be little doubt that school-based required service does not dimi-



nish interest in service in students who are already favorably inclined toward it. Of the favorably inclined students, the group which was required to do service, scored at the same high level as the group without a requirement. It is equally clear that for students who started high school disinclined toward service, completion of the requirement was beneficial to their civic and political development. Both groups of disinclined students scored low at the start of high school, but after the students with a requirement completed their 48 hours, their scores increased markedly and became significantly higher than their counterparts who had no requirement and lacked service experience.

### **A developmental process from challenging service to civic-political development (Reinders/Youniss 2006)**

The data for this study come from students in two Catholic high schools similar in demographic make up to the students in the public high school just described. The study took place from 1995 to 1999 with the aim of determining which types of service were most beneficial to civic and moral development. Both schools had a requirement that students do 12 or more hours of service every year, but students could choose the kinds of service they wanted to do. For instance, they might raise money for causes, tutor classmates, or work at soup kitchens feeding the homeless. On the basis of previous findings, we classified kinds of service according to a scheme which represented how challenging service would be. For purposes of this study, we used a two-fold classification. Challenging service was defined when students did service that (a) put them into direct interactive contact (b) with people in serious need of assistance. All other kinds of service which had only one or neither of these features, were considered less challenging in this study.

Examples of challenging service included serving food to homeless people at a soup kitchen, tutoring inner city minority children, or helping a handicapped adult do physical therapy. We have reported other data which show that more, as opposed to less, challenging service leads to higher scores on measures of civic development (Metz/McLellan/Youniss 2003). We speculate that coming into contact with people in serious need is stimulating because it forces students to reflect on their own and the other person's condition and encourages them to rise to the occasion. This is especially true when the recipient of service forces students to confront inequalities in talents, wealth, or other dimensions. As noted above, this is apt to occur with homeless people or with a blind adult who could not possibly navigate physical exercises without assistance from a seeing helper.

**Challenging service leads to higher scores on civic development**

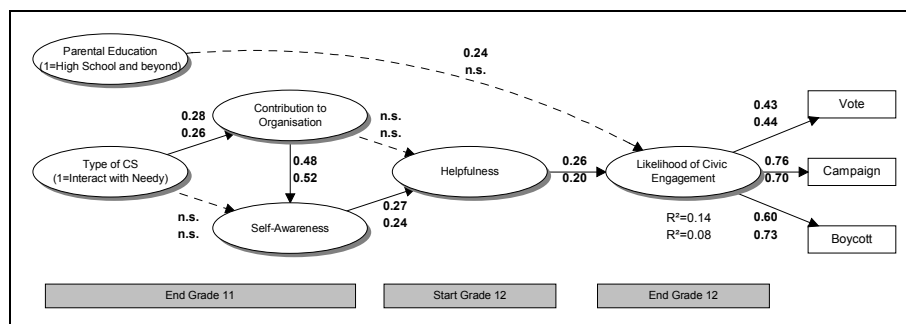
Students rated their experiences of service on items designed to determine how challenging the service was. Using a 1-5 scale, they rated items such as: "I felt I made a contribution to the organization" [through which I did service]; "I discovered things about myself I never knew I could do"; and the like. We used a path model to assess the relationship between service and these ratings and

found that more challenging service led to a belief that students had foremost made a contribution to the sponsoring organizations with which they did service. This path then led to high scores on items which referred to insights about the self, most notably the self's new discovery of previously unknown capacities and fresh ways of seeing "reality".

These data refer to service that was done during the students' 3<sup>rd</sup> high school year on an assessment that was done at the end of the school year in May. Four months later when students returned to begin their 4<sup>th</sup> and final year of high school, they were given another survey which included self-reported altruistic behaviors. Students were asked about helping strangers cross streets, holding doors open for strangers, giving directions to strangers, and the like. We found that these items defined a continuation of the path from challenging service, to helping the sponsor, to self-realization.

At the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> year, students responded to another survey which assessed civic and political intentional behavior as in the foregoing study. They were asked how likely they would be to volunteer in the future and to vote when they were eligible. Scores on both items followed from the previous nodes on the path, thus indicating that challenging service could, 12 or more months later, lead to an increase in the intention to partake in civic and political behavior. It is important to note that the sample was randomly divided in halves so that the path model was replicated, indicating reliability. It is noted also that we tested directionality in the path and found that the direction just described produced stronger results than did the reverse direction; for example, the path from contributing to an organization to self-realization was stronger than the reverse, and the path from self-realization to altruism was stronger than the reverse. The path is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Empirical Models to predict the Likelihood fo Civic Engagement at the end of grade 12



Sample A (Upper Coefficient): Chi<sup>2</sup>=19.14; df=17; p=0.32; RMSEA=0.014; GFI=0.98; AGFI=0.95; SRMR=0.042

Sample B (Bottom Coefficient): Chi<sup>2</sup>=17.35; df=17; p=0.43; RMSEA=0.011; GFI=0.98; AGFI=0.95; SRMR=0.039

All coefficients are significant at the 5%-level. n.s. - Not significant

This model describes a developmental process that has been suggested by Penner (2002) and by Piliavin/Grube/Callero (2002). They propose that doing ser-

vice is an event with identity-forming potential. The doing is turned into being as service becomes a marker for the self such as in "I am a person who contributes to the betterment of others." Penner et al. came to this conclusion when studying adults. Our data on adolescents adds credibility to the model insofar as adolescence is known as a time when identity is of special developmental significance. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the path from doing service to seeing oneself as a civic and political actor is operative. We do not claim that the path we described is unique. There must be several ways to form a civic-political identity. However, it is not by chance that service which puts youth in challenging positions and allows them to work alongside adults in an organization functions to shape the self into civic-political actor.

**There must be several ways to form a civic-political identity**

### **Identity clarity and doing challenging service (Youniss/Reis 2001)**

Students from the foregoing two schools were simultaneously assessed yearly on a scale which measured the degree to which they were clear about their identities (Rosenthal/Gurney/Moore 1981). Using a cluster procedure, we were able to classify students into four groups which depicted patterns of identity development over three years in high school. Some students started school with clear identities whereas others started with greater confusion. Further some students maintained their initial levels of clarity throughout high school whereas other students became either more or less clear about themselves and their future.

For the present, we are interested in the group of students who started school with high clarity and maintained it throughout. When we looked at the kind of service this group chose to do, we found that they had selected to do more challenging, as opposed to less challenging, kinds of service. This was true more for this group than for the other three groups. Our interpretation of this finding is that students who enter school with articulated ideas of who they are and who they want to become, are able to choose to do service which forces them to rise to the occasion. Once they do such service, they find that they can accomplish it well, so they do more of it. Thus, in a mechanism suggesting self-fulfilling prophecy, these students maintain clear identities by seeking and accepting challenges to the self. Since they do this by working in the world outside of school with strangers who have problems, their sense of self is reinforced through real accomplishments in the face of difficulty.

### **Long-term civic consequences of service (Hart/Donnelly/Youniss/Atkins 2006).**

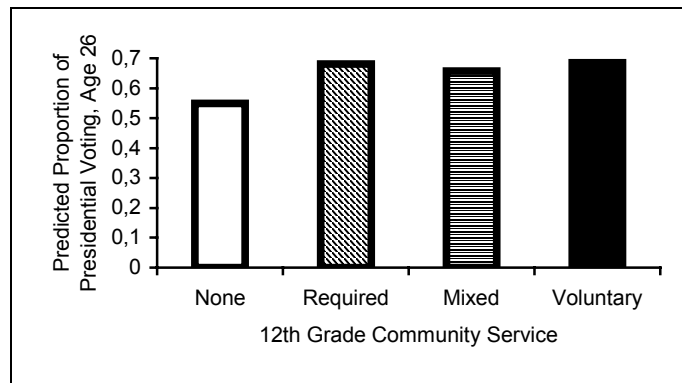
The youth in this study came from a nationally representative sample of 25,000 students who were in high school from 1989-1992. During the high school, several measures of educational and psychological functioning were obtained. In addition, assessment was made of whether and how frequently students did service, either service required by their schools or voluntary service outside of

school. An effort was made to track the individuals after they completed high school. The present sample consists in 12,144 youth were surveyed in 2000, 8 years after they had graduated from high school.

In 2000, the youth, approximately 26 years old, were asked multiple questions, two of which are pertinent to the present report. One was whether or not they had voted in any election during the prior two years, 1998-2000. The other was whether they had done civic or voluntary service during the previous 12 months. We examined several factors which might predict either voting or volunteering, while controlling for demographic and other variables which might influence these behaviors. First, 46 percent of the sample said they had voted during the previous two years. This figure is higher than the rate for the general population of that cohort of youth. Second, 24 percent of the youth said that they had done civic or voluntary service during the previous 12 months. This figure is in keeping with national statistics, although data are imprecise for this age level.

Logistic regressions were then run to determine whether having done service during high school predicted voting or volunteering 8 years later. Regarding voting, service during high school, whether required or voluntary, significantly predicted voting in 2000, the year of a presidential election in which 62 percent of the sample said they had voted. Youth had done voluntary service were 44 percent more likely to vote in 2000 than their peers who had not done service during high school. Youth who had done required service were 45 percent more likely to vote than their peers who had not done service during high school. Figure 4 shows these results when required or voluntary service are compared with no service during high school.

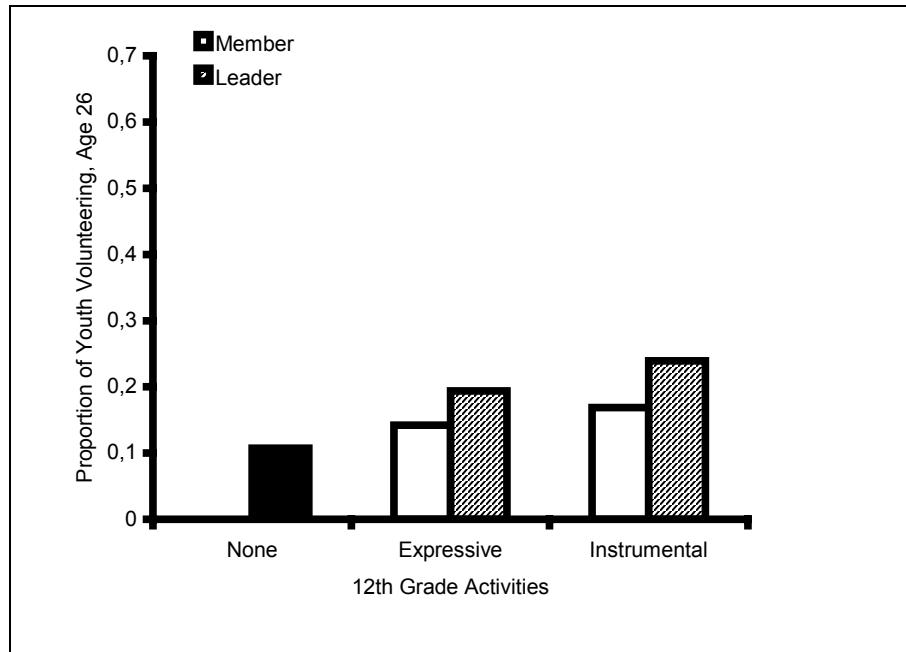
Figure 4. Voting in the presidential election according to High School service



Results for volunteering at age 26 were equally clear. Having done either volunteer or required service during high school proved to be a significant predictor of volunteering 8 years later. The odds of volunteering at age 26 were 1.57 times greater for the youth who done voluntary service during high school, v not having done service. The odds of volunteering at age 26 were 1.46 times greater for youth who done both voluntary and required service during high school, v not having done either kind of service. The odds of volunteering at age 26 were

only slightly higher compared with youth who had done no service in high school. Comparative data are reported in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Voluntary service as a function of high school service



The results of this study connect our work on high school students to the work of several researchers who showed that civic participation during youth is a clear predictor of continued civic participation in adulthood. As Jennings (2002) suggested, service can be a proto-activist experience which introduces young people to participation in civic life. The continuity between high school service and voting 8 years later is especially important in this regard because skeptics have failed to see connections between them. But if one couples the present findings with those of Reinders/Youniss (2006), the picture seems to become clearer. There is a developmental path and may be focused on transformations which occur in the self's relationship to civic organization and the self's changing identity as a civic actor.

The second important finding of this study is that voluntary and required service have similar positive effects. This finding concurs with the results reported by Metz and Youniss (2005) who showed equivalent effects on civic intentions for voluntary and required service. These data add to our view that service can be gainfully seen as a resource and opportunity which helps youth to see themselves as civic participants. We do not argue that personal attributes are unimportant, for instance, the civic attitudes which youth bring to high school. But we do argue that service can be an opportunity for young people to experience aspects of themselves whose potential they did not know until they were asked to participate.

## Conclusion

In highly structured technical societies such as the USA, the UK, and Germany, youth are often relegated to separate places, for instance schools and recreational settings, which keep them apart from economic and political processes. For example, in the United States, many elections are run by professionals who utilize daily polling and media presentations. One result is that youth know little about the political process first hand and must deal with political information, if at all, via filtered strategic messages. Thus, in all of these countries there is a new awareness about the need for and importance of civic education for the perpetuation of democracy. Democratic behavior does not suddenly appear at the age of voting eligibility, but it and other political skills must be acquired through doing.

Community service as we have described it seems to be one antidote for the present situation. Our view is that civic and political life is going on all around us in government and in various kinds of organizations which are focused on particular causes and ideologies. We see service as a means to connect young people to this world. It gives them an opportunity to participate, to acquire skills, to enrich their sense of self with political agency, to try out established rationales, to collaborate with adult political actors, and to begin to form identities in which civic and political dimensions have priority.

A failure to engage youth in civic and political life comes with high cost. Laqueur (1962) has made this point well in his interpretation of the history of the German youth movement which was born at the start of the twentieth century. The movement distanced youth from adults and the workings of society's economic and political structures. When the Hitler youth movement came on the scene, it immediately attracted youth as "... National Socialism offered all that a young man in his most secret and proudest imagination would desire – activity, responsibility for his fellows, and work with equally enthusiastic comrades for a greater and stronger fatherland" (p. 202). Laqueur suggests that had the youth movement been more politically oriented it might have alerted young people to other options. In this he says: "... lack of interest in public affairs is no civic virtue and an inability to think in political categories does not prevent people from getting involved in political disaster" (p. 48). Young people "ought to be educated toward [participation in public affairs] and it was in this respect that the Wandervogel ... completely failed. They did not prepare their members for active citizenship" (p. 48).

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