

CHAPTER THREE



# Civic Engagement as an Expression of Positive Youth Development

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In the preceding chapter Peter Benson described the positive youth development (PYD) model of applied research and its implications for action. The PYD has two central ideas: (1) development is promoted by developmental assets, both internal and external; and (2) individuals, communities, and societies vary in the qualities that promote the development of these assets. This approach offers direct guidance for both research and action. One goal of research is to identify individual, community, and society assets, and one goal of policy then is to promote the development of community and society resources that promote the development of assets. Research indicates that the more internal and external assets that youth possess, the healthier and more successful is their development into adulthood (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Yet research also indicates that young people have only 16.5–21.6 assets on average of 40 identified, and youth in New York have only 5% of the optimal number of assets (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 2000). The PYD approach is valuable because it (1) allows an assessment of youth’s well-being and of the conditions that contribute to it and (2) provides a tool for monitoring the success of our young people and the extent to which the contexts in which they grow up promote their development, thereby serving as an important social indicator. This information then becomes critical for designing youth policies in countries across the globe.

This PYD approach is also attractive for several theoretical reasons. First, its focus on positive development instead of risks or deficiencies is its overarching contribution. This view reasons that all young people have needs; youth differ not in individual qualities such as resiliency but in the extent to which their needs are met by the resources in their environment. The research and policy focus is shifted from solely focusing on individual qualities and from preventing negative behaviors to focusing on deficiencies in the environment and to promoting positive outcomes. It also tends toward universal policies, as the target is all youth, not just “those at risk.” Second, this approach focuses on the whole individual, viewing socioemotional

development as equal in importance to cognitive development. This holistic view is best reflected in the five C's: competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring; a sixth C, contribution, has also been identified as resulting from the first five (Lerner, 2004). These guide policy and research in a much more comprehensive approach than has ever been true previously—to both assessment of well-being and to its promotion. Third, attention to the multiple influences on development, as described by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1998), promotes a diversity of approaches to research and policy. There is not one policy solution needed to promote youth development. The PYD approach emphasizes how comprehensive our approach must be; it is not sufficient to attend just to families, school, or neighborhoods. Fourth, it conceives of the individual as a dynamic organism that acts and is influenced by those actions. It emphasizes the bidirectional interaction between organism and environments. In this way, the individual becomes a producer of their own development. This indicates the importance of early and lasting interventions to create contexts in which children and youth thrive. Fifth, a focus on multiple influences indicates the need for a multidisciplinary approach. This is particularly attractive for research but it also means that anthropologists and psychologists are as important to policy making as economists and sociologists. Finally, the PYD approach also emphasizes the importance of cultural and transnational comparisons. Globalization and media access open up new worlds to youth all over the world (Arnett, 2001). Both research and policy must attend to this expansion of the context for youth development.

The first half of this chapter offers some reflections on the PYD approach. The second and longer half examines youth civic engagement as an expression of positive youth development. Civic engagement in youth is an understudied topic that merits research, but it also offers an attractive topic for research because of its usefulness in pursuing a PYD approach. This chapter examines how assets, both internal and external, contribute to the development of civic engagement in young people and how youth's civic participation contributes to building assets in communities and societies. The chapter concludes by considering what social policies and programs are needed to promote the development of civic engagement as an expression of positive youth development.

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### **Fine-Tuning the PYD Approach**

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Peter Benson is one founder of PYD, and his chapter does an outstanding job at describing the approach. I do not here attempt to repeat that. Instead I would just like to highlight a few issues that merit further attention for the approach to have it maximum benefit to the field and to helping young people. One issue is the conceptualization and measurement of assets. A second is their accumulation or interaction to produce developmental outcomes. These comments are intended to suggest further fine-tuning of the approach rather than advocating for any major changes.

### Defining and measuring assets

The multilevel nature of the approach, attending equally to individuals, communities, and societies, combined with the fact that assets can exist at all three levels, presents a few issues about the definition of assets that merit attention. The goal here is to pose issues, not necessarily offer solutions for each.

In the preceding chapter Benson defined assets as “the range of environmental and interpersonal strengths that enhance education and health outcomes.” Tables 2.1 and 2.2 list external and internal assets. However, the assets are not equivalent in nature. For example, one category of internal assets is “commitment to learning,” a good category, but it includes achievement motivation and school engagement as well as doing homework and reading for pleasure. The latter are fairly straightforward behaviors, whereas the first two are more subjective phenomena. The same applies to external assets. The category of empowerment includes the community giving youth useful roles, as well as whether the young person feels safe in the neighborhood. In science we think of independent and dependent variables, factors that affect outcomes and actual outcomes. Assets are conceptualized to be both. Hence, an asset such as school engagement can lead to another asset such as doing homework. Could doing homework, however, lead to school engagement? The definitions of both external and internal assets and the articulation of their taxonomy need to attend to their diversity and its implication for their effects.

The conceptualization of development as a bidirectional process makes this a less serious issue than might otherwise be the case. The bidirectional nature of development does indeed allow that assets can be both independent and dependent variables. However, it may be that some are more likely to be one versus the other. One would expect, for example, that the different assets could operate to produce developmental outcomes in a somewhat different manner, that the processes through which they impact outcomes differ. In developmental psychology we have typically been interested in the processes by which development occurs, not just in the relationships between variables. More attention to process is needed in examining how assets function to produce development.

The diversity of assets also influences their measurement; the ease with which one can measure these different assets reliably and validly varies. The sole reliance to date on self-report to measure outcomes needs to be abandoned. There are easy objective measures for some assets and good psychometrically sound instruments for others. Youth’s perception of the assets they hold and of those in their environment is quite important. However, we also need to be able to verify these perceptions, at least in some cases.

In summary, the list of assets needs to be reexamined from whether they are likely to be independent variables or outcomes, to the processes that relate them to outcome, and to their measurement. A good initial step is represented in a study by Theokas et al. (2005). Using the same sample, they reanalyzed responses to the 92 items on the PSL-AB used to generate the initial 40 internal and external assets listed in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 of Benson’s chapter. An initial factor analysis generated 14 factors: social

conscience; personal values; interpersonal values; risk avoidance; activity participation; rules and boundaries; school engagement; connection to family; positive identity; community connection; parent involvement; school connection; contextual safety; and adult mentors. A second-order factor analyses split this set into the first 7 representing individual assets and the second 7 ecological assets. These authors then ask how these assets predict 7 indicators of “thriving:” success in school; values diversity; exhibits leadership; delays gratification; overcomes adversity; maintains physical health; and helps others. The best-fit model entered ecological assets first, followed by individual assets, which added significantly to prediction of the thriving indicators; the interaction of the two sets of assets did not contribute significantly to the prediction. Overall the model accounted for 28% of the variance in outcomes. More such research is needed that examines the nature of assets and how they predict outcomes.

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#### Accumulation and interaction of assets

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The PYD approach is clear that the greater the number of assets possessed by the individual, the better the outcomes for the young person. This idea makes sense and there is empirical support provided by Benson in his chapter. However, it is quite unusual for variables such as assets to simply add up in a linear fashion in their impact on development. Often, for example, having 10 assets would be more or less than doubly better than having 5. Also whether the assets available to youth fall within or across categories might make a difference to how they accumulate to produce outcomes. That is, would one expect that having one asset in each of the four categories listed by Benson to be different than having four all in a single category? Whether the available assets are all subjective versus objective variables might influence how they accumulate to generate outcomes. Assets, individual as well as community and society, vary across a number of dimensions. We now need to ask whether these differences influence how they accumulate to produce developmental outcomes.

One study begins to address some of these questions (Theokas & Lerner, 2006). They examine four dimensions of “assets” (human, physical/institutional, collective activity, and accessibility) in three contexts (family, school, and neighborhood), asking how each dimension in each context predict the 6 C’s of PYD. A main finding is that assets functioned differently in predicting outcomes in different settings. That is, one cannot assume that all assets function similarly in all contexts for all youth. Individual assets need to be aligned with ecological ones in particular contexts for the most positive developmental outcomes to be realized. Also, individual variability across a range of variables needs to be examined for how assets work to produce development.

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#### Civic Engagement in Youth

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My continuing mantra is that citizenship is as important in adulthood as working or raising a family yet it has been the subject of much less research and policy attention.

It has been argued that we face a crisis in the United States in regard to low levels of civic participation, especially in youth (Putnam, 1996, 2000). Benson discussed Putnam's argument for a decline in social capital as an indicator of the need to attend to promoting positive youth development. The topic of civic engagement in youth provides a model for pursuing the PYD approach to both research and policy. It emphasizes the important role that youth can and should play as participants and as agents of change in building the asset-promoting qualities of communities and societies. It emphasizes the reciprocal interactions between building individual, community, and societal assets. Civic engagement relates to all five C's of PYD. It is, however, most directly relevant to the sixth C, contribution.

Civic engagement from a PYD perspective highlights the dynamic and bidirectional nature of development nicely. This chapter first explores how assets contribute to the development of civic engagement in youth and how youth's civic involvement contributes to the development of assets. Early socialization correlates of later civic engagement are examined in order to demonstrate how assets contribute to the expression of civic engagement in youth. The role of political knowledge in promoting behaviors such as voting and in protecting youth from fearfulness following disasters such as the World Trade Center's destruction in the United States is used to investigate how civic engagement promotes the development of assets. Research on community service is used to consider how asset-building communities promote youth participation and how youth's participation in turn contributes to the building of community assets. Research on youth's ideas about or conceptions of citizenship is used to explore how societies with assets promote civic engagement.

#### Definition of civic engagement

The definition of civic engagement, especially in youth before they are old enough to participate fully, is controversial. Flanagan and Faison (2001) distinguish civic, from the Latin "civis," from political, from the Greek "polites." Although the two terms have different historical roots, they each denote a member of the polity. However, Flanagan and Faison (2001) argue that political has come to relate mainly to the state or the government. Civic has the broader meaning associated with being a member of the polity so they prefer it. They differentiate civic literacy as knowledge of community affairs and political issues, civic skills as competencies in achieving group goals, and civic attachment, as a feeling or belief that you matter. They argue and present evidence that social relations, opportunities for practice, and the values and behaviors communicated by adults and social institutions determine youth's civic development in these three areas.

We find that youth's view of the responsibilities of citizenship supports their differentiation of polity and civic dimensions of civic engagement. Youth see responsibilities in terms of polity-oriented ones such as patriotism and civic-oriented responsibilities involving giving back to one's community. However, other allegiances influence their specific views. That is, youth also often show loyalties to their family,

their school, or their community, as well perhaps to their race and religion, which may be analogous to their commitment to their country. These other allegiances relate to how youth view citizenship, either in terms of polity-oriented or civic-oriented responsibilities, but the relationships vary across ethnicity, immigrant status, social class, and gender (Bogard & Sherrod, 2007) Is participation in civic or community organizations and volunteering or service explicit forms of civic engagement or are they precursors to it or substitutes for it?

Approaching the definition of civic engagement from the perspective of the five C's offers an organizing framework. Contribution as the sixth C overlaps the most with civic engagement. Youth vote, do community service, and participate in their communities and societies. Indeed democracies can survive only if their people contribute in these ways. The other five C's are, however, important to whether youth can and do contribute. Youth must feel a connection in order to want to contribute. Character is important because civic participation always relates to and involves values. Hence the individual's character often determines the nature of their civic engagement. Caring should be an important aspect. While we want citizens who obey laws and contribute generally to the public good, we also want citizens who care enough to recognize social injustices and take actions to correct them (Sherrod, Flanagan, Kassimir, & Syvertsen, 2005). Competence and confidence allow participation. Individuals must have the competence to contribute to their society and the confidence that their actions are worthwhile. Hence, the six C's provide a useful framework for approaching the conceptualization of civic engagement that avoids the issue of how it relates to other allegiances. To some extent they form the components of civic engagement.

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#### Assets and the development of civic engagement

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A number of variables of earlier experience have been shown to correlate to later civic engagement. One might view these correlates of civic engagement as either individual or ecological assets. These include education—civics education of course (Torney-Purta, 2002) but also teacher behavior and instructional style (Flanagan & Tucker, 1999); participation in school activities (Barber & Eccles, 1997; Niemi & Junn, 2000) and in other youth programs (Larsen, 2000); doing community service (Walker, 2002; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997); and a variety of family variables, including their interest and involvement in politics (Jennings & Niemi, 1974).

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#### Education

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It is critical that citizens understand the nature of their governments, how they can participate, and the importance of their informed participation (Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002). The typical vehicle for youth to acquire such information is civic class. Civics education should be of the same national priority as math and science education (Sherrod, 2002); math and science achievement may make important

contributions to the economies of countries and to innovation and development, especially in technology. However, such matters are of little consequence if the nation itself is not healthy. Unfortunately, civics education does not receive the same attention as math and science education, and youth's knowledge of civics and government is low. A large cross-national study of civics education in 14 year olds in 28 countries indicated that civic knowledge is low across nations worldwide (Torney-Purta, 2002; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001). The study undertaken by the International Education Association (IEA) makes a very valuable contribution to our knowledge about civics education in adolescents and indicates the need for national attention worldwide.

However, the IEA study, as well as other research, shows that the way civics education is taught is as important as its content. Open dialogue is important, for example, allowing youth to discuss issues (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Teacher behavior and school climate are also important. If teachers treat students fairly they in turn behave fairly to others (Flanagan & Tucker, 1999). Hence the "how" of education, including civics education, is as important as the "what."

We need national assessments of civic education as we have for achievement in most other areas such as math and science. Such assessments should then be used as social indicators of national health, as are indices of science and math achievement, as well as percentage of poverty or infant mortality. Assessments of civic knowledge should also be used to review and evaluate how civics is taught in schools. We already have information that should be used in designing the civic education curriculum; for example, having open discussion makes an important contribution (Flanagan & Tucker, 1999; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Nations such as the United States need to take a careful look at their civics education in order to ask if it is doing the necessary job.

Education is an ecological asset important to many outcomes and civic engagement is no exception, but we need far more attention to its role.

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#### School activities

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It is clear that involvement in youth activities relates to later civic engagement—from extracurricular school activities including sports to involvement in youth serving organizations such as 4-H and Boys/Girls clubs (Barber & Eccles, 1997; Jennings & Niemi, 1974; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). These are the vehicles available to youth allowing them to participate and contribute. Hence, it is not surprising that youth who participate in those programs and activities as young people also contribute in other appropriate ways as adults, for example, by voting. What is not known is whether early participation leads to later participation or youth who tend to participate also become adults who participate. Participation in youth organizations promotes positive youth development (Larsen, 2000; Roach, Sullivan, & Wheeler, 1999) so there is likely an interaction between the individual assets that promote participation and the assets youth gain through participation, but this needs further exploration.

It is clear that participation in youth activities and young people's loyalty to clubs and organizations constitute one avenue to civic engagement as an example of positive youth development. Further research is, however, needed. I have previously made the point that we need research that relates specific early experiences to specific later forms of civic engagement (Sherrod, 2003). For example, adolescent girls and boys show different political attitudes and they also participate in different school activities. Girls are more prosocial in attitudes and more likely to do activities such as newspaper or yearbook; boys are more likely to participate in sports and show more traditional political views (Sherrod & Baskir, 2006). With correlational research it is of course not possible to say that different activities lead to different political views, but clearly there are different developmental paths. Longitudinal research is needed that ties specific forms of participation to specific later forms of civic engagement, such as staying informed or voting. The PYD approach offers some guidelines for such research. It may be, for example, that different experiences relate to different of the *C*'s; one might expect education, for example, to relate to competence or confidence, whereas participation in clubs and activities may reflect connection. A PYD approach may also offer an alternative hypothesis. It might propose that it is the total number of early experiences as assets that contributes to later civic engagement. The specific forms of activity are less important than the number experienced in regard to level and type of later civic engagement. This is an empirical research question that could be examined with longitudinal studies.

It is clear, however, that having the opportunity to participate or contribute as a teen through school activities or other programs is an asset that is important to the development of civic engagement.

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### Community service

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Volunteering and community service is one clear example of youth participation, and it has been found to relate to later civic engagement (Youniss et al., 1997). It is in fact the closest behavior to adult civic engagement possible for youth and can continue through the full life span.

Volunteerism is now at an all time high, at least in the United States. In studies of community service in one sample of college-aged youth in the northeast, we found extraordinarily high levels of service and of commitment to service. In a sample of about 150 students 18–21 years of age, all had done service. Ninety percent were doing it now. Close to half did it weekly, and close to half had done it for more than 5 years. Ninety percent rated the importance of service as a 4 or a 5 on a 5 point scale. Close to half thought service should be a national requirement like a draft (Sherrod & Baskir, 2007; Sherrod, Quinones, & Brabeck, 2002).

However, doing service does not necessarily mean it will develop assets. Previous research has shown that the most positive benefits occur when service is voluntary, includes an opportunity for reflection with a mentor, and involves real service with individuals different from oneself (Youniss et al., 1997). We also know that youth do



service for quite different reasons, self-serving ones as well as prosocial ones (Sherrod & Baskir, 2007). Thus, it is probably youth with assets who choose to do service, and for these youth it carries positive benefits in terms of promoting continuing contribution as well as contribution in other forms. The issue for research is how to structure service programs for youth who not have the assets that lead them to volunteer so they obtain the same benefits. Simply mandating service is not sufficient.

### Family contributions

There are numerous aspects of families that contribute to youth's later civic engagement. Most directly, parents influence their children's behavior through guidance and socialization; children also model parents' behavior. Thus, parents who are politically interested and active also have children who become civically engaged. Parents do not, however, seem to shape their children's specific political views (Niemi & Junn, 2000), but they do encourage or discourage particular types of political behaviors (Jankowski, 1992).

There are several variables other than parental behavior that at least operate through families to influence young people's civic engagement. Loyalty or strength of connection to the family is one variable that can influence civic engagement. Certain cultures, particularly Hispanic and Asian groups, tend to promote particular loyalty to the family (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). Asian and Latino high school youth show stronger values and greater expectations regarding their duty to assist, respect, and support their families than youth of European backgrounds. Allegiances such as those to families influence at least teens' political views (Bogard & Sherrod, 2007).

Social economic class is another variable that influences the development of civic engagement. Parents promote or try to inhibit various types of political behaviors, but the specific influences vary by socioeconomic status. Middle class parents discourage activities that might interfere with success, whereas lower class parents warn youth against activities that might lead to harm (Jankowski, 2002). Some youth, perhaps particularly ones from affluent families, may develop allegiance mainly to the pursuit of success and wealth (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Middle class parents emphasize academic orientation and how it leads to material success in their advice about political beliefs and behaviors (Jankowski, 1992, 2002). Lower class youth frequently have unrealistic ideas about opportunities for success (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). In a capitalist world dominated by the pursuit of material possessions, youth's orientation to occupational and material success must be an important ingredient in the development of their allegiances and political ideas. Youth differ in the extent to which they receive socialization experiences that promote the pursuit of wealth and success versus goals related to prosocial concerns or to citizenship. There is some evidence that the circumstances of poor youth may, under certain circumstances, orient them to the goals of wealth and success (Kasser & Ryan, 1993).

Religion or religiosity is another childhood experience, typically transmitted through families, that contributes to the affiliations youth develop, which may in turn

relate to their civic involvement. Conservative religious groups such as Orthodox Jews or the Amish indoctrinate their young into their religion. However, other religious training may promote a concern for one's fellow man rather than allegiance to a particular set of beliefs; the Jesuit tradition of Catholicism, for example, follows this course. Fordham University's motto is "men and women for others." While the Catholic Church, like all organized religions, has a particular dogma to promote, advocating allegiance to the church, the Jesuit version promotes more of a generalized concern for others. Quakers also promote both a particular type of group loyalty and a concern for others. In recent years this approach to religion has been studied as spirituality (King & Boyatzis, 2004). Most religions would advocate for a primary allegiance to the set of values represented in that religion. Concern for others might be part of that value system, but loyalty to nation (and, for example, willingness to fight in wars) is not always an aspect of religious training, so that the person must decide, for example, what their religion would teach about fighting for their country or for whom they should vote. The current moral majority in the United States is an example of religious beliefs influencing political behaviors and views.

Clearly family is an important institution for youth in regard to their socialization; families are an important asset contributing to positive development. However, the influence of family variables can, like religion, vary as to where it directs the young person's allegiance. Hence, they may promote positive outcomes but not necessarily always in the form of civic engagement. That is, the relationship of family to political development is not clear from available research. Families clearly have an influence but when, how, and under what conditions are not clear.

These various variables or developmental experiences—education, participation in organizations and activities, participation in community service, and a number of family variables—represent assets or lack of assets in some cases. As a result, one might summarize this research on the socialization of citizenship to conclude that youth with assets are more likely to show civic engagement.

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#### Civic participation as representing assets

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Assets promote the expression of civic engagement, but political or politically related involvement also contributes to the building of assets. We examined the political reactions of youth to the destruction of the New York City World Trade Centers on September 11, 2001. These results show how aspects of civic engagement serve as assets. Youth's political views served as a filter through which they responded. Youth with traditional political views were concerned with retaliation and continuing terrorism. Youth with prosocial views were concerned about impact on prejudice to Arab-Americans, for example. Furthermore, political knowledge seemed to protect youth from fearfulness; youth with more political knowledge scored lower on a post-traumatic stress disorder scale (Sherrod, Quinones, & Davila, 2004). Hence, political views and knowledge as expressions of civic engagement served as assets influencing youth's response to this major political event.

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••• Civic Engagement as an Expression of Positive Youth Development •••

Research on civic engagement demonstrates how developmental assets contribute to the expression of civic engagement and how youth's political involvement contributes to the developing assets in communities. This reciprocal interaction between individual and context, while hard to study, is articulated explicitly by the PYD approach, and the topic of civic engagement provides a perfect example.

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**Asset building communities facilitate participation**

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Communities that provide youth with the opportunity to participate facilitate the development of assets. By participating, youth in turn contribute to the assets in the community. Community service is one example where youth are given the opportunity to participate and in so doing contribute to the improvement of community. Most research attention, however, has focused on service as an asset that leads to positive outcomes in youth. There has been little research examining the impact that service has on those being served. Hence, it is difficult to say if by doing service youth contribute to the building of community assets. That is, however, the assumption underlying the spread of community service programs in the United States.

Communities can use their assets to promote the participation of their young people. In doing so, they build assets that are critical to the expression of civic engagement. Providing youth with structured opportunities to assist their communities is one important vehicle for building community assets, but more research is needed on how and under what conditions youth's participation builds assets in communities.

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**Societies with assets promote civic engagement**

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One means of examining societies' assets in regard to promoting civic engagement is to ask youth people about their perception of citizenship. What do they see as their future roles as citizens?

When asked about their self-concept as a citizen, most teenagers report seeing themselves as an average citizen, with views similar to their parents. They report being somewhat patriotic and do not see their political views as fully formed. About two-thirds report that September 11, 2001 affected their sense of citizenship (Sherrod, 2005).

Youth also see citizenship as consisting of certain rights and responsibilities. Factor analyses of teens' ranking of various rights and responsibilities of citizenship reveal two factors for each. Rights consist of entitlements (interestingly, health care is at the top of the list) and freedom (such as freedom of speech and to be gay). Responsibilities consist of civic ones, such as giving back to the community, and polity-oriented or traditional ones, such as respect for the flag (Bogard & Sherrod, 2007; Sherrod, 2005). Youth with stronger allegiances to family or community are more likely to hold prosocial views of citizenship responsibilities (Bogard & Sherrod, 2007). One might

interpret this result to imply that youth who see their families or communities as having assets are more likely to want to give back to their family or community.

If you simply ask teens “what is a good citizen?” they will typically offer one or two qualities with “obey laws” at the top of the list (Sherrod, 2003). While we want citizens who obey laws, we also want citizens with an activist orientation, who notice injustices and attempt to correct them (Sherrod et al., 2005). Yet teens never offer this as a quality of citizenship, and even when activist items are listed for students to rank, these items never appear as important to any factors. Activism represents the highest level of assets; it certainly requires all five C’s—competence, confidence, character, caring, and connection—and it represents the sixth, contribution. It is not clear how we might promote a more activist orientation to citizenship. One empirical question is whether it is in the particular combination of individual, community, and society assets.

So teens are developing a sense of self in regard to politics and citizenship, which seems to be affected by their own assets and those they see in society.

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— **Programs and Policies to Promote Civic Engagement and Build Assets** —

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The PYD approach is sufficiently new that it is only now beginning to influence policies and programs for youth. However, if countries are to survive as democracies, they need to attend to the development of civic engagement. Democracies are dependent on the effective participation of its citizens; democracies need citizens that are informed, interested, and committed to the health of their government. There is cross-national variability in youth’s levels of civic participation and in how explicitly societies attend to the promotion of civic engagement in youth. The United States is a country that attends less forcefully than other nations to the development of civic engagement in youth. As a result, and because I know it best, I will examine mainly U.S. policies and programs in this section of the chapter. We need research, however, that adopts a cross-national comparative approach, and we also need to attend to cross-national comparisons in formulating and evaluating policies and programs.

Many of the socialization correlates of civic engagements as assets offer opportunities for program development. School activities and youth programs and community service are two obvious examples. Here I discuss two others: youth governance and the media.

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**Youth governance**

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One problem faced by today’s youth worldwide is that they are not given anything responsible to do; they are not given sound opportunities to contribute to their societies, except in indirect ways. In fact the idea of “emerging adulthood” has been coined to denote that young people do not achieve an adult status until well into their twenties. As a result, they define adulthood in term of psychological qualities rather than having real adult responsibilities (Arnett, 2000).

Young people have a tremendous contribution to make to their families, their communities, and their societies. There is a movement in the United States to give youth a leadership role in the governance of organizations. The 4-H, for example, has put young people on its board of directors as voting members. Recognizing youth as active contributors, this trend is clearly in keeping with a PYD approach. In this case, research clearly shows that youth make an important contribution to the organization as well as developing numerous skills or assets in the process (Zeldin, Camino, & Calvert, 2003).

Youth governance is thus one important opportunity for giving youth a voice as well as representation. By doing so, we expose them to issues of social justice and promote positive youth development. We also contribute to the building of a civil society, which should be our ultimate goal (Lerner, 2004).

We need to construct more opportunities for young people to get involved in the governance of their communities and their societies. We should create incentives for other organizations to get youth involved in their governance. Schools should adopt more of a democratic orientation and give youth a real voice, not just opportunities for extracurricular activities. Young people have an important contribution to make and they should be given opportunities to undertake real responsibilities; they do not just need to be kept on hold or prepare for adulthood until their mid-twenties.

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### The media

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We know that the media play an important role in the development of civic engagement (McLeod, 2000). Certainly the amount of money spent on political campaigns is a testimony to the power of the media in influencing political behavior in the form of voting. We worry quite a bit and have considerable research about the impact of the media on aggressive behavior or on values related to sexuality, for example. Research shows that television as one form of the media can have a powerful educational impact in regard to early learning and that violent programming can influence aggressive behavior; furthermore, in the United States we have formulated national policies to monitor children's exposure to the media and to thereby influence its impact (Wartella, Caplovitz, & Lee, 2004). We need similar national attention in both research and policy on the impact of the media on knowledge about and attitudes to civic engagement in young people.

We know that the way that the media impacts public opinion is quite complex. Research has shown that people use "frames" to summarize and process information. The media are quite expert at organizing such frames to influence the opinion of consumers. The effects of media framing on public attitudes have been effectively demonstrated for racial attitudes and views of youth (Gilliam & Bales, 2001). We need research examining how media frames influence the opinions of youth; age is likely to be an important factor in the influence of media frames. Civics classes, for example, might awaken young people to the existence and influence of the media in an effort to develop media literacy in regard to civic engagement.

There are many opportunities for using the media to design programs to influence the development of civic engagement.

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### Conclusion

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In this chapter I have argued that civic development is a topic sorely in need of both research and policy attention and a topic that can effectively be used to promote a positive youth development approach to research and policy. No area represents the positive contribution of youth more than their role in building and maintaining a civil society. Civic engagement involves all six C's of the PYD approach; it builds the C's and it rests on them. We need to do this not just because it is intellectually interesting or because it promotes the positive development of our future generations, but most importantly because it is the only way for civil society to flourish (Lerner, 2004).

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