CIVIC TRAINING GROUNDS:
THE ROLE OF ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES IN PROMOTING CIVIC DEVELOPMENT

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Overview

— What do we already know?

— How do organized activities prepare young people for civic life?

— Do these experiences differ for youth based on financial security? Race-ethnicity?

— Now what?
What do we already know?
Organized Activities

- **Build community**
  (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003)

- **Increase responsibility**
  (Larson & Rusk, 2011; Salusky et al., in press; Wood et al., 2009)

- **Develop initiative and agency**
  (Larson & Angus, 2011; Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011; Shernoff, 2013)

- **Explore identity**
  (Youniss & Yates, 1997)
Organized Activities

- Longitudinal empirical links to:
  - Volunteering (Gardner et al., 2008; Hart et al., 2007; Obradović & Masten, 2007)
  - Political behavior (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Glanville, 1999)
  - Civic values and attitudes (Denault & Poulin, 2009)
“We need to open the black box to explain the processes accounting for how activities impact youth development. Moreover, we should consider what outcomes each activity feature and experience should predict as well as what outcomes they should not be predict.” (Simpkins, 2015; p. 124)
How do organized activities prepare young people for civic life?
Sample

- $n = 1,377; 13$ to $20$ ($M = 15.8$, $SD = 1.3$)
Sample

- 56% female
- Racially-ethnically diverse
  - 43% White
  - 37% Hispanic or Latino/a
  - 9% Black or African American
  - 8% Asian or Pacific Islander
  - 4% Other race-ethnicity
- Financial security
  - 8% Hard time buying things we need
  - 35% Just enough money for things we need
  - 49% No problem buying things we need
  - 9% Enough money to buy almost anything
ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES

Measures

• Each activity may offer unique developmental opportunities
  (Hart et al., 2007; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006)

• Activity Type (0 = Don’t Participate; 1 = Participate)
  – Sports
  – School Clubs
  – Community Clubs
  – Arts
  – Religious
Measures

- **Intrinsic Engagement** (3 items; $a = .79$)
  E.g., Learning about yourself and what you find important

- **Psychological Needs Support** (6 items; $a = .92$)
  E.g., Adults accept me as I am.

- **Sociopolitical Discussions** (3 items; $a = .80$)
  E.g., In my extracurriculars, we talk about problems facing our community.
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Measures

- Social Responsibility (4 items; α = .83)
- Civic Skills (6 items; α = .90)
- Standard Political Behaviors (2 items)
- Higher-Order Political Behaviors (4 items; α = .84)
- Critical Consciousness (3 items; α = .82)
- Volunteering (1 item)
- Civic Efficacy (3 items; α = .84)

CFA: χ²(255) = 650.60, p < .001, RMSEA = .04, CFI = .95, SRMR = .05
Activity Type Model

- Intrinsic Engagement
  - Social Responsibility
  - Civic Skills
  - Standard Political Bx
  - Higher-Order Political Bx
- Psychological Needs Support
  - Critical Consciousness
  - Volunteering
  - Civic Efficacy
- Sociopolitical Discussions

Sports
School Clubs
Community Clubs
Arts
Religious

CFA: $\chi^2(927) = 1921.26$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .03, SRMR = .04, CFI = .93
## Activity Type Model: Direct Effects

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# Intrinsic: Indirect Effects

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Intrinsically motivated engagement is a powerful developmental experience, more than half of the activity-CE paths operated through this experience.
### Needs Support: Indirect Effects

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Psychological needs support linked most consistently to civic efficacy and skills.
Discuss Politics: Indirect Effects

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For some activities, sociopolitical discussions are an important pathway to civic skill development and political behavior.
Do these experiences differ for youth based on financial security? Race-ethnicity?
Activity Type Model

- Intrinsic Engagement
  - Psychological Needs Support
    - Sociopolitical Discussions

- Financial Security
  - Sports
  - School Clubs
  - Community Clubs
  - Arts
  - Religious

- Social Responsibility
- Civic Skills
- Standard Political Bx
- Higher-Order Political Bx
- Critical Consciousness
- Volunteering
- Civic Efficacy
Activity Type Model

- Race-Ethnicity
  - Sports
  - School Clubs
  - Community Clubs
  - Arts
  - Religious

- Intrinsic Engagement
- Psychological Needs Support
- Sociopolitical Discussions

- Social Responsibility
- Civic Skills
- Standard Political Bx
- Higher-Order Political Bx
- Critical Consciousness
- Volunteering
- Civic Efficacy
The Takeaway

Disparities in civic engagement originate, in part, from disparities in organized activities and related developmental experiences for youth from financially insure families.

This does not hold for racial and ethnic minority youth.
Now what?
Implications for Practice

— Value and social imperative of ensuring all youth access to high quality programs

— Intrinsic learning, needs-supporting relationships, and sociopolitical discussions promote civic engagement

— Developmental experiences can be intentionally cultivated
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- Jennifer Williams
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School Districts and Participating Schools

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civicroots.org