

# RESEARCH You May Have Missed

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**RESEARCH YOU MAY HAVE MISSED** . . . provides brief summaries of recent research relevant to youth development practice. It is designed to help youth development professionals keep up-to-date with contemporary research.

- Arnett Jensen, L. (2008).  
**Immigrants' cultural identities as sources of civic engagement.**  
*Applied Developmental Science*, 12(2), 74-83.

As the numbers of immigrants to the United States have increased, researchers have begun to examine the commitment to and engagement in the civic life immigrants have of their new country. The aim of the present research was to examine immigrants' political and community engagement or lack thereof, focusing on four questions: (a) To what extent are immigrants civically engaged? (b) To what extent is their engagement focused on cultural or immigrant issues? (c) To what extent are motives pertaining to one's cultural or immigrant sense of self linked to the presence or absence of engagement? And (d) What is the specific nature of the cultural motives for engagement and nonengagement? The participants were 80 immigrants from India (n=40) and El Salvador (n=40). Within each immigrant group there were 20 adolescents between 14 and 18 years old, and 20 parents. Immigrants from these two countries arrive in the United States generally under very different circumstances and with access to different resources. Including them in the study was considered a way to gather valuable information on cultural identity and forms of civic engagement from two very different groups. Participants were interviewed one-on-one, in their preferred language. Participants were asked 8 or 10 questions about civic engagement, including politics

and community service. The specific nature of their engagement, motives for being (or not being) engaged, and views on the importance of engagement were the focus of the follow-up questions. Results indicated that all participants considered it important for people to be civically engaged at the community level; almost all held this view for political activities. Of the participants, 81% were actively engaged at the community level and 30% were engaged at the political level. Of those engaged in politics 25% reported being engaged in culturally focused activities. Engaged immigrants were often motivated by traditions of service, a desire to improve their own communities and appreciation of American democratic rights and responsibilities. For participants whose civic engagement was focused on cultural or immigrant issues, often the reason for their participation was based on a bicultural consciousness and experience, such as sending money back to their country of origin, and often grounded in their cultural or immigrant sense of self. For immigrants who were not engaged, often the reasons included being too stretched for time, having feelings of ethnic exclusion, or because of not having citizenship. The results indicate that while a cultural identity can add to one's civic engagement, the immigrants in this study regarded some form of civic engagement as important for all people. -RC

- Bennett, W.L. (2008).

**Changing citizenship in the digital age.**

*Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth.* The John D. and Catherine T. Macarthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1-24.

Trends suggest that youth have become increasingly disengaged from and dissatisfied with electoral politics. While interest in politics as well as confidence in government and interpersonal trust has been declining, community engagement has increased in areas such as volunteering, consumer activism, and involvement in social causes. Civic education in schools does not for the most part facilitate young people's civic participation; in most cases it is largely textbook-based, according to a large international survey of youth. The internet has the ability to help facilitate civic engagement for youth through online communities or increasing awareness of political or social concerns. Increasingly, youth, particularly young males, have had a decline in their television watching and an

increase in video gaming and in spending time online. The online experiences and networks of younger people have been little studied, but have great importance for the possibility of creating generational identity and solidarity. Online communities have been involved in youth political engagement, such as through MySpace in assisting in the enabling of immigrant protests about legislation in 2006, and meetups for Howard Dean in 2004. The author recommends greater engagement among politicians with young people in terms of their preferences around communication and citizenship. Civic education programs should take into account generational preferences and include digital media. News organizations, governmental agencies and NGOs should develop online formats that appeal to youth. **-KH**

- Brennan, M.A., Barnett, R.V., & Lesmeister, M.K. (2008).

**Enhancing local capacity and youth involvement in the community development process.**

*Community Development: Journal of the Community Development Society*, 38(4), 13-27.

Youth are being called upon to play increasingly important roles in the development of their communities as non-profits, volunteer groups and nongovernmental organizations take on greater responsibilities in providing for local well-being. The youth representation provides information about the diverse needs and wants of a community and youth participation allows for the development of mastery in social competence, problem solving, autonomy and a sense of purpose. The present study focused on two questions, a) what are the key factors associated with youth involvement in community development activities, and b) what are the relative importance of those factors. The study was based in Florida, as communities throughout the state face extensive growth pressures, significant sociodemographic changes, and a growing youth population. Twelve key informant interviews were held with youth, 4-H program development agents, and adults involved with youth and community development activities. The data from these interviews helped to inform the development of the youth survey, which focused on the relationships between youth attitudes and

behaviors to youth community development. The survey was administered at four different 4-H events to 679 youth between the ages of 12-18. There were 418 completed surveys which were considered for analysis. Results indicated that community attachment was found to be the greatest predictor of community involvement. Youth are more likely to be aware of local needs, opportunities for participation and more dedicated to improving conditions when they are attached to and have an interest in their community. Increasing community involvement was positively related to length of residence, household income, interaction with others through clubs, motivation and beliefs, and interest in the community. Community involvement decreased with youth lack of voting powers, lack of time increase, increase in community size (youth from rural areas indicated more active involvement) and feelings of intimidation by others. This study supports earlier research that recognizes youth as an often untapped resource for community development efforts. The authors suggest that the findings from this study can be used to better assess the process, issues, attitudes, and contributions of youth toward community involvement. **-RC**

- Kahne, J., & Middaugh, E. (2008).

**High quality civic education: What is it and who gets it?**

*Social Education*, 72(1), 34-39.

Civic education in American schools today typically involves one semester of American government with little focus on the role of the citizen. Civic instruction is often viewed as relatively unimportant when compared with other subjects such as math, science, and reading. Meanwhile, civic participation is on the decline by many measures. Voting participation declined from 52 percent in 1972 to 37 percent in 2000. In 2000, just 5 percent of young people reported following public affairs most of the time. This article discusses a model of high quality civic education as well as research supporting this model, and examines the extent to which the model is available in California schools. A sense of agency and responsibility for addressing social problems are a part of development in later adolescence. Service learning is one way that has been shown to facilitate this component of development. However, research has not demonstrated whether the association between school programs and greater civic commitments among youth is causal or whether students already interested in civic participation seek out these programs deliberately.

The authors did a large longitudinal study controlling for students' prior civic commitments and found that to promote civic participation among high school students, programs should focus on civic role models, societal problems and how to improve one's community, service-learning, current events, classroom discussions engaging all students, and studying topics students care about. One-third of the 2,366 California high school students the authors surveyed reported never being part of a service-learning project in high school, and 36% said they had no influence on how their school was run. However, most students did learn about how government works, discussed current events, and discussed a wide range of student views in their classrooms. White students were more likely than students of other backgrounds to report having civic education courses and open discussions in their classrooms. The authors note that high school is a particularly important time for civic education and participation programs, since it is the last time when free education is available to students and is at a time when students are making important decisions about their futures. **-KH**

- Lopez, M.H., & Marcelo, B.H. (2008).

**The civic engagement of immigrant youth: New evidence from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey.**

*Applied Developmental Science*, 12(2), 66-73.

This article shares evidence on the civic engagement of immigrant youth and on the children of immigrant parents in comparison with natives or U.S born youth of U.S. born parents, utilizing the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey conducted by the CIRCLE foundation. Over 1700 young people ages 15 to 25 were interviewed along with 550 adults in early 2006 through telephone and internet sampling. A key feature of the survey is that the measures are grouped into three categories of engagement: civic activities, electoral activities, and political voice activities. Results indicated that there were differences in the phone and internet samples, with the phone samples showing greater differences among the three groups. Young immigrants in the phone sample were less engaged than U.S. born youth. In contrast, some of the highest levels of civic engagement are reported by children of immigrant parents (43.6% volunteered

compared to 36.8% of the U.S. born and 12.1% of the immigrant youth). The difference between immigrant and non-immigrant was much smaller in the internet sample, indicating that many of the statistical differences in civic engagement between immigrant youth, the children of immigrant youth and natives, in the phone sample are explained by demographic factors. Controlling for these factors, differences were eliminated on measures such as protesting while there were still some small differences in volunteering, voting and boycotting. Implications are that many of the differences in immigrant and U.S born youth as well as children of immigrants are explained by socio-economic background, not necessarily nativity status. Differences found, such as in being a regular voter, could be attributed to structural barriers to engagement. In both samples however children of immigrants were the most engaged, suggesting a generational shift in immigrant families towards greater civic engagement. **-AS**

- Pasek, J., Feldman, L., Romer, D., & Jamieson, K.H. (2008).

**Schools as incubators of democratic participation: Building long-term political efficacy with civic education.**

*Applied Developmental Science*, 12(1), 26-37.

One goal of public education is to prepare young people for engagement in the public square. However, some authors have questioned the effectiveness of civic education in recent years because of a decline in political engagement among youth. Electoral participation among youth declined between 1972 and 2000, although 1992 and 2004 saw increases in voting. This study evaluates the impact of a program, “Student Voices,” which was intended to increase political involvement among high school students in 26 Philadelphia high schools during 2002-03. Student Voices combined service learning with a political system focus; students learn how problems in their community are influenced by political actors in local and state government. Students themselves discover the problems needing attention in their community, which can help generate self-efficacy. Teachers help guide the students to understanding political issues that pertain to their concerns. Students use computers to engage with local policy makers and access current news coverage. An earlier evaluation of this program found immediate gains in political interest, efficacy

and governmental knowledge. This study was a longer term evaluation, measured approximately two years after the end of the program. The authors hypothesized that even after the elapsed time, program participants would continue to have higher levels than nonparticipants of internal efficacy, political attentiveness, knowledge of candidate positions, and voting in 2004, and that effects would be directly related to length of participation in the program. This study used telephone surveys to follow up the students, with a response rate of 77 percent. Results indicated that exposure to Student Voices increased internal political efficacy and political attentiveness. Students who participated for two semesters had higher levels of attentiveness than those who participated for just one semester. The authors note that the Student Voices program showed a strong ability to engender political efficacy, which led to attentiveness and the acquisition of political knowledge. Young people who felt efficacious and paid attention to current events had higher levels of voting. Programs that allow youth to link community issues with local politics may also achieve higher levels of civic awareness and engagement among the participants. **-KH**

- Raynes-Goldie, K., & Walker, L. (2008).

**Our Space: Online Civic Engagement Tools For Youth**

*Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 161-188.

Currently, there is not established methodology for evaluating the effectiveness of online civic engagement sites for youth and other populations. Starting from the premise that the role of online tools for civic engagement is to enhance and empower action in the real-world, the authors assert that such tools provide opportunities for civic engagement where youth already spend their time. Online civic engagement sites facilitate offline activity by connecting youth with their peers and providing them with information to engage young people to volunteer, raise awareness, educate others, and start their own organizations. The authors conducted an exploratory survey of visitors to TakingITGlobal.org and other sites. They received 769 responses. Respondents used the tools on that website for three purposes: support and motivation; networking and information; mobilizing and organizing real-world action. The authors also examined six other civic engagement sites based on the three purposes above.

They drew comparisons with websites popular with youth such as MySpace. Their methodology examined variation between sites in the size of site membership, diversity of users, and languages spoken by its membership. The authors also looked at differences in technology and design issues including what tools were used and how, ease of site use, level of interactivity and level of maintenance. Results indicated that most sites had maintenance, design and/or usability issues, which made them less accessible and appealing to youth. All but one of the sites were run by nonprofit or NGOs, and relied primarily on donations, volunteers, or sponsorships for funding. Generally, most sites lacked robust and sophisticated collaboration tools. There was a diversity of purposes, policy and members, which in turn affects ability to attain the overarching goal of engaging and empowering youth by providing them with information and opportunities to network with peers. Very few sites are offered in multiple languages. Membership levels varied widely depending on the site. Raynes-Goldie and Walker conclude by confirming that



just as the field of online civic engagement is very young, so are the research and feedback mechanisms for evaluation of this area. In particular, the authors

recommend more detailed investigation into the use and potential improvements to online civic engagement sites.  
-PD

- Vieno, A., Nation, M., Perkins, D.D., & Santinello, M. (2007).

**Civic participation and the development of adolescent behavior problems.**

*Journal of Community Psychology*, 35(6), 761-777.

Civic engagement may contribute to positive development through providing structured environments that may foster healthy relationships with adults and peers. Through civic engagement, youth may feel a sense of belonging in their community while learning to help others, and realize how fortunate they are. The purpose of this study was to learn whether or not civic engagement acts as a buffer or helps to compensate for risk behaviors, including physical fights and bullying behavior, in youth with detached family relationships. Participants were chosen through a two-stage cluster sampling method in the Veneto region of northeastern Italy. Data were collected through a self-report questionnaire from 7,097 11-, 13-, and 15-year-old students. Only data related to civic participation, family detachment, problem behavior, and social economic status were analyzed. A series of multivariate analyses of variance were conducted using civic participation, parent/family detachment, and their interaction as the independent variables; along with age, gender, and parents' education as covariates. Bullying behavior, physical fighting, and alcohol and tobacco were

dependent variables. Civic engagement and problem behavior showed a U-shape relationship that suggests youth who participate less than once a week or more than four times per week engage in the most bullying, fighting, and alcohol and tobacco use. For 15-year-old girls, the predicted buffering effect of greater civic participation was found; girls who participated more than four days per week engaged in less bullying, and less alcohol and tobacco use. The findings of this study indicated mixed support for the first two hypotheses that parent/family detachment is related to youth problem behavior and that civic participation is inversely related to problem behavior. Parent/family detachment was related to problem behaviors, especially tobacco and alcohol use. The third hypothesized buffering effect of adolescent civic participation on the relationship between parent/family detachment and problem behaviors was found for girls only when doing group comparison within sex comparison, suggesting that civic engagement may play a role in a comprehensive approach to health promotion among youth but special attention should be given to sex and age differences, and frequency of civic engagement.  
- TN

- Zaff, J.F., Malanchuk, O., & Eccles, J.S. (2008).

**Predicting positive citizenship from adolescence to young adulthood: The effects of a civic context.**

*Applied Developmental Science*, 12(1), 38-53.

Existing literature suggests that civic behavior results from the contributing effects parents, peers, culture and society have on individuals, forming a civic context in which youth develop. A civic context includes higher parental education, parent participation in civic activities, youth participation in religious activities, positive characteristics of peers, and social support from adults in school. The authors examined the causal processes involved in promoting civic engagement by following approximately 1,000 youth from 7th grade into early adulthood (three years post high school). In the present study, the authors modified a previously developed civic context model to include predictors of positive friendships, participation in extracurricular activities, and the

potential influence of ethnicity on the development of civic engagement. Data were collected through the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study (MADICS), which was begun in 1991. The 8th grade, 11th grade, and one year post-high school waves were used for the present study. The sample is 51% males and 61% African American. Overall, results supported the authors' hypothesis that a civic context in early adolescence for both African American and European American youth predicts civic engagement in late adolescence. Positive associations were found between youth's religiosity and 11th grade civic participation, and between youth's religiosity and family involvement in ethnicity-related activities in 11th grade. Support from adults in eighth grade is associated with having peers with

positive characteristics and with family involvement in ethnicity-related activities in 11th grade. Results suggest that ethnic socialization can facilitate group-based youth civic engagement. However, more research is needed to explore the connection between racial socialization, ethnic pride, or participation in

ethnic-specific activities and civic behaviors. The authors suggest that programs to promote civic engagement begin by focusing on social relationships in youths' lives with parents and peers and the environment in which they live, as well as on promoting civic values. **-RC**

#### ■ 4-H Research Database Available

-- by Jan Scholl, Ph.D., CFCS, Department of Agriculture and Extension Education, 4-H Family and Consumer Science Programs, Pennsylvania State University.

The Penn State University-National Ag Library Youth Development Web-site contains two 4-H research databases: one to locate graduate thesis studies and another to find state, national and agricultural experiment station studies. The purpose of the databases is to inform practitioners, graduate students, professors, administrators, legislators and others of the vast number of 4-H research studies—in the U.S. and other countries-- that have been completed since 1911. Authors' name, date of publication, college or university, title of study, the type of degree received and some abstracts are provided. Two books,

outlining the graduate studies, titled, "Making the Best Better..." were published in 2003 and 2004. In 2006, information about the thesis studies were made available and searchable on the web-site and, in 2007, the state, national and other studies were placed on-line. Users can search and organize output information by: year, author's last name and by keyword. The web-site is up-to-date and includes studies completed in 2008. Work is underway to collect additional titles and to add abstracts of the studies where needed. Those accessing the site can suggest titles and provide additional information.

The URL is: <http://apps.libraries.psu.edu/agnic/>

**Book Reviews** . . . on topics relevant to youth development will be periodically published. We encourage submissions for future editions. Reviews may be sent to Ramona Carlos ([rmcarlos@ucdavis.edu](mailto:rmcarlos@ucdavis.edu)).

The capsule reviews were written by

- Academic Coordinator Ramona Carlos, M.S. (RC)
- Staff Research Associate Pascale Dennerly, M.S. (PD)
- Specialist in AES Katherine Heck, MPH (KH)
- Junior Specialist Thi Nguyen, B.A. (TN)
- Assistant Project Scientist Aarti Subramaniam, Ph.D. (AS)

Guest review written by

- Jan Scholl, Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University

Reprints of articles reviewed may be obtained by contacting the 4-H Center for Youth Development at (530) 754-8433.



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- James Grieshop, Ph.D., Director
- Richard Ponzio, Ph.D., Associate Director
- Ramona Carlos, Editor
- Carrie Matthews, Publications Coordinator

4-H Center for Youth Development  
Dept. of Human and Community Development  
University of California  
One Shields Avenue/3325 Hart Hall  
Davis, CA 95616-8523

Phone (530) 754-8433  
Fax (530) 754-8440  
<http://fourhcyd.ucdavis.edu>