YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOLS: AGENCY AND

WELLNESS ACROSS ECOLOGICAL LEVELS

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This project was undertaken with the general goal of improving the wellness of disadvantaged young people. Low-income, urban youth face a variety of ecological barriers to their positive development. These young people also have the capacity to reshape their environments in a manner more conducive to wellness. In this dissertation, I use a mixed method approach to explore how the civic engagement of urban middle-school students is associated with wellness both at the individual level and at the school-setting level. A quantitative analysis of middle-school student survey and administrative data from an urban district shows that students who are more regularly engaged in activities to help improve their schools and neighborhoods enjoy better educational outcomes, in terms of achievement, attendance, and discipline referrals. A second analysis of these data show that an aggregate of civically engaged students in a school setting is associated with more positive school-climate and educational outcomes for all students, on average, in that setting. Finally, a case-study analysis of a student voice program in an urban middle school elaborates the mechanisms through which civically engaged youth can alter the culture and climate of their school. In sum, this project offers

evidence that encouraging civic engagement on the part of urban youth holds much promise for improving their overall wellness. Youth civic engagement may be a strategy for simultaneously addressing multiple levels of ecology that influence youth development.

To my parents, Mark and Jane, who crafted a context of love and wellness for me.

You didn't always know what I was doing, but I couldn't have done it without you.

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CHAPTER I

TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE ECOLOGICAL THEORY OF YOUTH
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PSYCHOLOGY

The reciprocal influence of environment on person is one of the defining

contributions of community psychology. Early work by Rappaport (1977), Kelley (1968),

and Bronfenbrenner (1979) established this dynamic version of ecological theory at the

heart of the field. As an interdisciplinary field with the goal of understanding and

improving the settings in which people live and grow, ecological theory has helped

community psychology to organize thinking about how different dimensions of people's

environments affect their development and well-being (Maton, Perkins, & Saegert, 2006)

. It also offers a framework for how people are able to, in turn, affect their environments,

and the reciprocal nature of this relationship between person and environment is central

to ecological theory.

Youth occupy an important position in community psychology research and

practice, and ecological theory has gone far to help community psychologists develop a

comprehensive picture of how young people are affected by their environments. The last

two decades have brought a proliferation of empirical work demonstrating how

neighborhoods, schools, families, and other ecological spheres influence youth outcomes.

In Bronfenbrenner's terms, community psychology has helped to shed light on how

microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems impact youth development.

Ecological effects research has, so to speak, found a home in community psychology.

The record of community psychological research on youth and their environments, however, has been somewhat one-sided. The preponderance of research has illustrated how settings affect youth. Youth, however, may also affect their settings, as suggested by the person-environment reciprocity inherent to ecological theory. Community psychology, of course, is no stranger to the idea of people effecting change in their environments, having pioneered thought and inquiry on empowerment (e.g., Rappaport, 1981), community organizing (e.g., Berkowitz, 2000), and participatory action research (e.g., Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin, & Lord, 1998), among other forms of human agency. Somewhat surprisingly then, youth agency and, more specifically, youth civic engagement have not assumed a central place in the field.

There is a vibrant empirical and theoretical discourse on youth civic engagement, found mostly in the fields of developmental psychology and political science. Developmentalists have spent many pages elucidating the factors that predict youth civic engagement and the outcomes of it (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). Due in part to developmental psychology's individualistic focus, most of its commentary on the effects of youth civic engagement is confined to the effects on individual youth who engage. Also from an effects standpoint, political scientists have largely tried to understand the implications of youth political development on macro-political phenomena such as national identity and the culture and structure of the political system (Sears & Levy, 2003; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). From an ecological perspective, one could say that the majority of research on youth civic engagement has sought to understand how youth engagement affects change at the individual (developmental psychology) level and the macro (political science) level.

Less is known about how youth may effect change at intermediate levels—settings and local institutions—via civic engagement. Given the preeminence of settings and local institutions ("mediating structures" in Rappaport's terms or the micro-, exo-, and mesosystems in Bronfenbrenner's) in community psychology, youth civic engagement research at this level adds much to the discipline. A growing body of literature on youth participation, youth organizing, and youth participatory action research, both in and outside of community psychology, offers insight into how young people may effect change at these levels. These lines of research, combined with insights from developmental psychology and political science, make youth civic engagement a valuable vehicle for explicating the reciprocity of the ecological model. Youth are affected by their environments, and youth affect their environments. Youth civic engagement can give community psychologists the theoretical and empirical substance to bring this latter point to life.

I argue that youth civic engagement should be a constitutive body of research within ecological theory and community psychology. The value of youth civic engagement as a conceptual tool is of particular salience to community psychology in exploring change in settings and local institutions, an underdeveloped area of research in youth civic engagement but one with considerable promise for growth. I examine herein the various ways in which youth impact their ecologies through civic engagement using several extant typologies. Of special interest is the distinction between youth civic engagement that works within existing institutions versus that which operates in opposition to existing institutions. The distinction is not Manichean; however, within it there are important theoretical and practical considerations. These considerations are

addressed in a concluding agenda for youth civic engagement research and action in community psychology. Throughout, several propositions are clearly stated to summarize a preceding argument.

In short, settings and local institutions affect young people in important ways, in negative ways for many youth. But young people can do something about it. Youth civic engagement theory and research can help us understand how.

The Ecology of Youth Development

The idea that people's environments influence their well-being and development was established well before Bronfenbrenner (1979) formalized his ecological theory of human development. The structure versus agency debate has long been central in the social sciences, from Marx (2009) to Dewey (1988) to Bourdieu (1977). Is human behavior more a function of people's environments—structure—or of their autonomous choices—agency? Indeed, the relationship between person and environment has been at the core of community psychology since its origins (Barker, 1968; Kelley, 1968). Bronfenbrenner's theory gave a framework for the structure-agency conversation and organized thinking around how people experience different elements of the social environment. Bronfenbrenner grouped these elements into four general categories—the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem—radiating outward in concentric circles around the individual person at the center (see Figure 1). The microsystem is the pattern of activities, interpersonal relationships, and physical features that characterize a particular setting (e.g., a young person's school); the mesosystem refers to the interrelations between settings (e.g., the young person's school and her neighborhood); the exosystem comprises settings not directly frequented by an individual but that nonetheless affecting

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what happens in directly experienced settings (e.g., local school district office); and the macrosystem refers to the underlying culture and ideology of a system (e.g., the societal norm that youth should go to college).
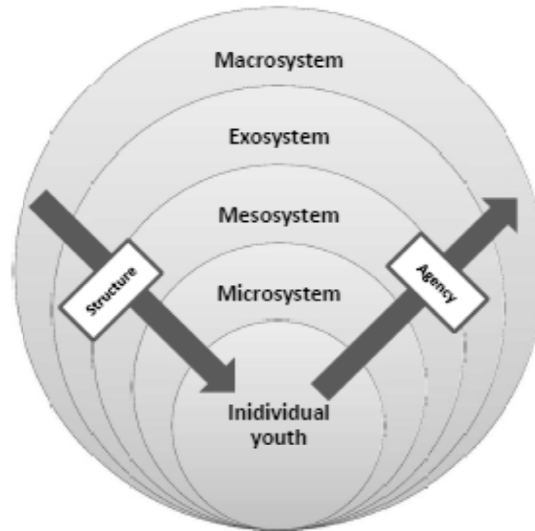
Figure 1. Structure and agency and the ecology of youth development

Each layer of ecology influences human development, and the individual capacities resultant of human development offer the potential for ecological change. While ecology theory is most commonly used as a heuristic for understanding how the environment affects individual development, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) definition of development gives primacy to the idea of human agency and its potential for changing settings. He writes: "Development is defined as the person's evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his relation to it, as well as the person's growing capacity to discover, sustain, or *alter its properties*" (p. 9, emphasis added). He later speaks specifically to the potential for youth to engage in this process, from early childhood even:

> Gradually [the young child] becomes capable of adapting his imagination to the constraints of objective reality and even of refashioning the environment so that it is more compatible with his abilities, needs, and desires. It is this growing capacity to remold reality in accordance with human requirements and aspirations that, from an ecological perspective, represents the highest expression of development (p. 10).

Thus the framework is laid for a theory that explains how settings affect youth and youth, in turn, affect settings. This former effect will be referred to herein as the "inward arrow" and the latter as the "outward arrow," in accordance with the arrows representing the forces of structure and agency in Figure 1. The following sections examine specific mechanisms through which these effects occur. Throughout, I summarize the main propositions that I put forth at the conclusion of each section. These propositions are rooted in extant theory and empirical work but increasingly reflect original thought as the paper progresses.

> Proposition 1: People's, including youth's, environments influence their well-being and development.

> Proposition 2: People, including youth, influence the character of their environments.

Youth are Affected by Their Environments: The "Inward Arrow"

While Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory posited a bidirectional relationship between individual youth and their environments, as depicted in Figure 1, the vast majority of theory and empirical work using Bronfenbrenner's framework has elaborated the one-way effects of environment on youth outcomes. Research in this tradition has coalesced around the various dimensions of ecology that are salient to youth development, namely neighborhoods, schools, families, and peer groups. Even when controlling for characteristics of individual youth (e.g., motivation, resiliency,

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intelligence) these environmental factors influence the way young people learn and grow. Neighborhoods and schools, two of the most relevant setting-level dimensions of youths' ecology, are examined here in greater detail. Environmental effects can be alternatively good or bad for youth, and the distribution of positive versus negative settings is not at random. I conclude this section with a discussion of the systematic means through which certain subgroups experience environments less conducive to their well-being.

Neighborhood Effects

Research that examines how neighborhoods influence youth outcomes has been termed "neighborhood effects." Its origins are in sociology and can be traced to the work of Shaw and McKay (1942), which sought to identify the characteristics of neighborhoods that predict juvenile delinquency. Wilson's (1987) study on social transformation focused attention on the role of neighborhoods in understanding individual outcomes. In the intervening years, neighborhood effects research has proliferated in the social sciences, including community psychology (e.g., Wandersman & Nation, 1998).

Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) reviewed this line of inquiry and found that early research on neighborhood effects showed how neighborhood structural characteristics—such as concentrated income, residential mobility, and housing density—impact youth, from academic achievement to behavioral and emotional outcomes. The assertion that neighborhoods affect youth may sound mundane and self-evident; however, it has important practical implications. Reductionist explanations for poverty based on personal deficiency or family dysfunction lose force if we subscribe to the reality of neighborhood effects. Indeed, neighborhood effects are additive with the characteristics

of an individual youth and her family (Shinn & Toohey, 2003). For example, if a family is poor, its children may suffer deprivation that influences their learning and growth; however, living in a poor neighborhood has negative effects on youth outcomes despite and in addition to those brought on by her unique familial situation. This demands that attention be paid to neighborhoods and their structural conditions.

More recent theories of neighborhood effect have sought to understand *how* structural characteristics affect youth outcomes. Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) outlined several mechanisms: (a) institutional resources (e.g., parks, child-care center, libraries), (b) relationships, and (c) collective efficacy are three potential pathways that mediate the relationship between neighborhood income and youth outcomes, collective efficacy referring to the degree to which neighborhood residents have the ability and will to intervene to remediate negative behaviors and promote positive ones. Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley (2002) later added "routine activities" to this list to suggest that how space is organized and used in a neighborhood has bearing above and beyond institutional resources, *per se*. These findings imply that social organization may be a more important transmitter of neighborhood effects than concentrated income, a conclusion supported by Ranking and Quane (2002) in their research on Chicago neighborhoods. Other studies have further showed that a broad offering of youth-targeted extracurricular activities may help to mitigate the negative effects of poor social organization (Fauth, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Urban, Lewin-Bizan, & Lerner, 2009).

This line of research has triggered a heightened attention to neighborhoods among youth development practitioners, illustrated most grandly by the federal government's Promise Neighborhood initiative that seeks to build up the neighborhood assets around

schools as a means for improving youth development and academic achievement

(Shelton, 2011).

Proposition 3: Characteristics of neighborhoods—namely institutional resources, relationships, and collective efficacy—have a unique influence on youths' behavioral and emotional outcomes, including academic achievement.

School Effects

Along with neighborhoods, the schools that youth attend constitute a primary

setting in which they spend their time. Early school effects research typically focused on

the relationship between structural characteristics of schools—such as school size, per

pupil expenditure, and teacher qualifications—and student outcomes (Fuller & Clarke,

1994). Just as the neighborhood effects literature transitioned from structural

explanations to more nuanced mediation models, the school-effects literature has

elaborated similar intermediary environmental factors. Bryk and colleagues (Bryk,

Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010), based on a long running project with

the Chicago Public Schools, concluded that there are several important characteristics of

school environments for student engagement and achievement, including teacher

instructional practice and competency, administrative leadership, parent-school ties, and a

student-centered climate. School environment is referred to as "school climate" by

Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009), which they suggest to have four

component parts: (a) safety, (b) relationships, (c) teaching and learning, and (d) physical

environment.

School climate was a topic of early interest to community psychology, most

notably with Trickett and Moos' (1973, 1974) pioneering research and instrumentation.

In the intervening years, it has become a more mainstream concept in the education

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world. Using the above definition of school climate, Cohen and colleagues (2009) have found that climate is positively predictive of a school's ability to ensure academic achievement, violence prevention, and healthy youth development. Recent research exploring school climate has provided additional evidence that it is an important predictor of student achievement, attendance, and behavior (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Gregory & Weinstein, 2004; Voight, Nixon, & Nation, 2011; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). The National School Climate Center (2007) defines school climate as a pattern of experiences in school that "reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structure" (p. 5). As such, it may be a mediator of the effect of school structure and resources on student outcomes in much the same way that neighborhood social organization has been posited as the explanatory link between SES and youth development. Both the neighborhood and school effects literatures provide strong evidence that settings matter in youth development.

Proposition 4: Characteristics of schools—namely safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and physical environment—have a unique influence on youths' behavioral and emotional outcomes, including academic achievement.

Neighborhoods and Schools are Not Created Equal: Theories of Oppression

Most ecological thinkers would not be satisfied with ending the conversation at the level of neighborhoods and schools. To do so treats these effects as exogenous and implies that the onus for improving youth development should be put on local settings and the people within them. Local settings, however, do not exist in sociopolitical vacuums. Some types of neighborhoods and schools have systematically lower levels of things like institutional resources, collective efficacy, and relational climate. Within neighborhoods and schools, some individuals experience less desirable outcomes than

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others, oftentimes based on their group identity (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, income, sexual orientation). These types of systematic inequalities, both between and within settings, are referred to as "oppression" (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). Oppression is a familiar concept to community psychology and is an important lens to bring to bear on any discussion of ecological development with youth who may suffer from systematic disadvantage. For example, urban youth consistently evince lower levels of educational attainment (Dillon, 2009) and higher levels of incarceration (Hawkins, 2011) than their suburban peers. Ecological theory helps redirect attention to factors beyond the individual in understanding these disparities; theories of oppression offer a critical framework for illustrating sociopolitical pathways through which these extraindividual forces operate.

Oppression is elusively operationalized. Young (2007) helps by breaking the concept down into five subtypes: (a) exploitation, (b) marginalization, (c) powerlessness, (d) cultural dominance, and (e) violence. The first three types are primarily economic and are rooted in a Marxist critique of capitalism whereby the working class is, respectively, used for cheap labor when it serves the goals of capital, sidelined when it does not, and never given a say in the proceedings throughout. The last two refer to sociocultural processes that either covertly or overtly assert the values and norms of one group over those of another. Outwardly pernicious forms of oppression are easily identifiable, such as the Jim Crow laws, ethnic cleansing, and physical violence toward LGBT populations. However, critical theorists argue that more subtle forms of institutionalized oppression make some settings less conducive to positive youth development and wellness than others.

McKnight (1995) argues that human service organizations are by nature oppressive and hegemonic—there is an inherent conflict of interest between service professionals' self-preservation and the wellness of the populations that they purport to serve. Service industries like hospitals, counseling centers, and social work agencies exploit and marginalize poor people by—often unintentionally—perpetuating the system in which poor people need services and not giving them a voice to self-determine a more sustainable solution to their problems. Service industries, McKnight claims, are ultimately more interested in preserving the arrangement whereby middle-class professionals are salaried to serve the needs of a poor clientele in a way that does not address the underlying structural issues that generate such need in the first place. Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) distinguish this mode of intervention as "ameliorative" rather than "transformational," as root causes are left unaddressed in pursuit of more superficial solutions. McKnight insists that human services are complicit in oppression and that true human development must be achieved through self-directed action on the part of the oppressed.

Reproduction theorists place schools under this same critical lens (Althusser, 1971; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). According to this approach, schools systematically reproduce the status quo by overemphasizing rote learning in lower income and urban schools. Reproduction operates through economics, culture, and language, as oppressed groups are intentionally denied various types of skills and knowledge that may build power and help to remake unjust social arrangements (Collins, 2009; Giroux, 1983). An example of reproduction in practice could be illustrated by the need for failing urban schools to meet the demands of high-stakes-testing policies by

focusing more and more attention on standardized tests and less attention on college

preparation, critical thinking, and interpersonal competencies. Reproduction theory

argues that by denying urban youth these latter faculties they are left with little option but

to seek menial employment in the manufacturing or service industries, to become

unemployed or underemployed and thus dependent on the human services critiqued

above, or to be incarcerated. In this way, schools, too, are complicit in the perpetuation of

group oppression.

Reproduction theory has been subject to much criticism in recent decades, due

largely to its rigidity in emphasizing structure over agency (Collins, 2009; Giroux, 1983).

Giroux (Giroux, 1983) held that while reproduction theory was helpful in understanding

how sociopolitical forces affect settings and how settings affect individuals, it did not

account for human agency and change. If schools systematically reproduce the status quo,

as reproduction theory contends, why do we have so many examples of low-income,

minority, and urban youth transcending oppression to achieve wellness and liberation?

The answer, according to these critics, is resistance. The counterbalance to oppression—

to neighborhoods and schools that consistently make it difficult for youth to meaningfully

grow and learn—are self-reflective youth who act to change their settings. As McKnight

(1995) argues, the oppressed themselves must be at the fore of any effort to challenge

oppression. The necessity of youth involvement in setting change is explored in greater

detail below.

Thinking back to the neighborhood and school effects described in the above

discussion of the ecological model, theories of oppression would contend that certain

neighborhood and schools, namely those in urban areas with large concentrations of low-

income and racial minority residents, consistently evince more toxic environmental effects. These effects are due not to some deficiency on the part of the people in the settings (e.g., neighborhood residents, students), but to larger sociopolitical forces rendering it extremely difficult to make the setting more conducive to positive youth development. Compounding this problem is that the very bodies tasked with the responsibility of positive youth development in these settings—human service organizations and schools—may have an unwitting hand in perpetuating oppression and inequality. The dilemma, thus, for those who subscribe both to the ecological theory of development and to the reality of oppression is that the assets necessary to overcome ecological barriers—collective efficacy, interpersonal relationships, a youth-centered climate—are not those often targeted by professional intervention. That is, ameliorative intervention is the *modus operandi* of human service and education institutions when transformational intervention may be what is truly needed.

Theories of oppression help ecological thinkers make sense of more distal ecological levels such as institutional policies and resource distribution. Whereas neighborhood- and school-effects theories begin to move the explanation for youth outcomes from the individual level to the micro- and mesosystem levels, an oppression framework incorporates the sociopolitical and cultural forces that help shape neighborhoods and schools. These forces are situated in what Bronfenbrenner called the meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. They help to explain why certain youth—particularly urban youth, youth of color, and low-income youth—enjoy fewer institutional resources and lower collective efficacy in their neighborhoods; why they experience more tenuous safety, less inspired teaching and learning, and poorer infrastructure in their schools; and

why the relationships in which they engage in both settings are less positive. This review of neighborhood- and school-effects research and theories of oppression paints a holistic picture of the ecology in which youth learn and grow.

> Proposition 5: Due to various manifestations of oppression, the negative effects of neighborhoods and schools are suffered disproportionately by urban youth, youth of color, and low-income youth.

> Proposition 6: Overcoming oppression requires self-reflective action on the part of youth who suffer its negative effects.

Youth Affect their Environments: The "Outward" Arrow

Neighborhood and school characteristics influence youth outcomes, but neighborhoods and schools are not static entities. First, as discussed above, they change and are maintained due to broader scale forces in the meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. Second, they are also affected by the acts of individuals and small groups, in a more bottom-up fashion. This latter phenomenon is addressed in this section.

There are myriad examples of people changing their environments, from the grandest level of social movements like the American civil rights movement and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa to much smaller instances of human agency, such as a person cleaning up a neighborhood park or a group of parents fundraising to purchase new athletic equipment for their children's school. I use the term "civic engagement" to describe the full range of human behavior undertaken to affect some entity larger than oneself and one's family. "Political" is often used in lieu of "civic" in such discourses (e.g., political participation, political socialization), but I follow Flanagan and Faison (2001) in using "civic" to refer to a more general version of a collective with which one may be engaged that includes but goes beyond the state, the government, and the partisan

arena. This definition follows from that of Levine (2007), who describes civic

engagement as any action taken to affect "public matters," which include public goods,

their distribution, and the norms that determine behavior. Public matters unfold in

settings like schools and neighborhoods and in institutional arenas like local governments

and school boards.

Why should we be interested in the civic engagement of young people, in

particular? There are a multitude of strategies for effecting environmental change, and

youth are disenfranchised and powerless in many ways. People under 18 years of age are

unable to vote; students are often cut off from formal decision making powers in the

organizations in which they spend their time; youth lack life experiences that engender

the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for civic action. Despite these barriers to

civic engagement for young people, I argue that it is advantageous—for a variety of

reasons—that youth be engaged in the shaping of environments that are pertinent to them.

Participating in public life has been considered an indicator of wellness by some

community psychologists (e.g., Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005); beyond that, as the

following sections explicate, it also has positive outcomes for individual youth, their

settings, and society at large.

Why Youth *Civic Engagement?*

Community psychology, as a discipline, is ultimately interested in people's,

including young people's, well-being. Community psychologists apply their tools and

values across various levels of ecology in pursuit of this interest. Youth civic

engagement, too, has been studied and promoted for its potential to improve young

people's well-being at various levels of ecology. In the developmental psychology

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literature, much of the research on youth civic engagement has sought to understand how being civically engaged affects outcomes for those youth who engage. That is, the interest is primarily in how to improve outcomes for individual youth. In the political science literature, youth civic engagement has been studied mainly to determine how larger political culture is shaped. The interest is in how to improve macrosystem outcomes. The growing field of youth activism and youth organizing mostly investigates how young people, working together, can change settings and local institutions—micro-, meso-, and exosystems.

There are various ways in which youth engage with their environments. Volunteering at a soup kitchen, participating in student government, and organizing and staging public protests represent very different behaviors but all constitute civic engagement. The manner in which youth engage determines, at least in part, the outcomes that result from engagement. For example, participating in a protest is probably more likely to effect change at the institutional level than volunteering at a soup kitchen. Both acts stand to benefit the individual youth who participate and the immediate settings in which the civic action takes place. All types of civic engagement have the potential to impact ecological levels beyond that of the individual. Still, it is important to remark on the distinctions between modes of engagement.

There have been several typologies of youth civic engagement advanced in the past decade. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argue that there are three fundamental understandings of citizenship that underlie efforts to involve young people in civic activities: (a) the personally responsible citizen who volunteers and is generally helpful in the community; (b) the participatory citizen who is actively engaged in local

organizations and institutions; and (c) the justice-oriented citizen who critically analyzes sociopolitical forces and takes action to fight injustice. Levine and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2010) in a recent handbook on research in youth civic engagement argue that a main tension in the field is whether young people should be socialized into extant political structures—as with Westheimer and Kahne's personally responsible citizen and, to a degree, participatory citizen—or engaged in changing them. This discrepancy between helping youth become part of systems versus changing them has been applied to service-learning, as well (Diemer, Voight, & Mark, 2011). For a community psychology that endorses theories of oppression, as described above, it becomes an important question whether youth should challenge rather than conform. In reality, the separation between different types of engagement is rarely as stark as depicted in these typologies, but they are helpful conceptual heuristics, nonetheless.

The following review of youth civic engagement research and theory is organized around two separate axes. First, I examine the literature based on the level of analysis of the outcomes of youth civic engagement: individual, macrosystem, and intermediate levels (i.e., settings and local institutions). Second, a distinction is drawn between youth civic engagement that happens within extant sociopolitical structures—herein referred to as "traditional"—versus that which challenges and seeks to change such structures—or "critical." An example of the former mode of engagement is a school-organized service-learning program to clean up a local park, while an example of the latter is a youth-led organizing initiative to change school discipline policies. Community psychology is interested in wellness-related outcomes that span the ecological spectrum, and it uses tools that would be considered within-system as well as critical of systems (Nelson &

Prilleltensky, 2005). Table 1 illustrates this organization. I conclude with a discussion of how youth civic engagement may serve to improve settings and institutions, an ecological level that has received relatively little attention in the field and one that is of primary interest to community psychologists.

Table 1. Youth civic engagement by mode of engagement and level of outcome

Level of outcome	Traditional engagement	Critical engagement
Macrosystem	Political socialization and strengthening democracy	Social change and emancipation
Individual level	Service learning, volunteering, and youth participation	Sociopolitical development and social action
Settings and local institutions	Relationships and social norms	Youth-led organizing and reform

Outcomes at all ecological levels are important for people's well-being. The power of youth civic engagement as a strategy for enhancing wellness is that it at once addresses multiple levels. Further, according to some thinkers, civic engagement is an end in and of itself; it is considered a constitutive element of wellness. Each of these rationales is examined here.

Youth Civic Engagement: An End in Itself

Defining wellness or positive development is a normative project, one that has occupied philosophers literally for millennia. Community psychology has a strong normative element to it, openly endorsing certain outcomes as good, including health, social justice, self-determination, and participation (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). One way that the values of community psychology have been articulated is through a capabilities approach (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Shinn, 2009). The capabilities approach is a theory of ethics forwarded primarily by economist Amartya Sen (2001) and

political philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2000) that defines wellness in terms of what people are able to do. Sen and Nussbaum each outline a series of capabilities or freedoms that should be enjoyed by all, and the ability to engage in the civic life of one's society is among them. Nussbaum contends that civic engagement is an important vehicle for nurturing other capabilities (e.g., health, economic prosperity), but a central argument of the capabilities approach is that every capability is an important end in and of itself. That is, even if being civically engaged leads to no positive outcomes, it is still good because it *constitutes* wellness. This thinking led youth participation to be included as a basic right in the United Nations (1989) international treaty, *Convention on the Rights of the Child,* and to more recently be featured as a key recommendation for successful adolescent development in a landmark report to the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

In terms of youth civic engagement, the capabilities approach implies that the participation of young people in the public sphere is an unqualified good. Such participation would require two things. First, youth would need opportunities to become civically engaged. As previously mentioned, youth under 18 years of age cannot vote in public elections, and there are few built-in opportunities for young people to participate in organizational decision-making process. These opportunities must be either furnished by adults or created by groups of youth who push for them. Second, youth would need the requisite skills to be effective civic actors. The capabilities approach is not satisfied simply with removing obstacles to wellness, but also providing needed resources to help people realize it. For youth to have the capability for civic engagement, then, they need the competencies and resources to do so. Because of the recognized value of youth civic

engagement, much research has been conducted to identify facilitators of and barriers to engagement (for reviews, see Hart & Gullan, 2010; Levine, 2007).

A community psychology that embraces the capabilities approach values youth civic engagement as an end in itself. This may be justification enough for its practice. But youth civic engagement is also a *strategy* for pursuing other wellness objectives, including development across levels of the ecological model.

Proposition 7: Civic engagement has intrinsic value for young people's wellness. It is a constituent of wellness.

The Ecological Benefits of Youth Civic Engagement

The intrinsic value of participation, as endorsed by the capabilities approach, gives good reason for community psychologists to pursue youth civic engagement. However, youth civic engagement is a particularly useful concept for community psychology because it has also been shown to have consequences that support the ecological goals of the field. As elaborated in the subsequent section, cultures and societies may be more conducive to wellness when young people are engaged. Individual youth participants have been shown to enjoy wellness benefits in terms of their health, education, and social relationships. Further, and of primary interest to the present review, settings and institutions may be healthier with an active youth population. Youth civic engagement may at once forward the mission of community psychology across multiple ecological levels.

Macro-level Outcomes of Youth Civic Engagement

The culture- and society-level outcomes of youth civic engagement have been treated mostly in theoretical rather than empirical analyses. In many cases, the

aggregation of individual-level competencies is assumed to define the larger political culture, and thus a change or development in competencies among a broad enough share of a population can alter culture in the long term. This is a hopeful, idealistic vision of youth civic engagement, one that Plato (2003) embraced in his call for the political education of young people as the key to a healthy society. Society will be better if the next generation knows better, the argument goes.

   Political socialization and the maintenance of democracy. This rationale is at the core of scholarship on political socialization. For scholars of youth civic engagement, political socialization may be thought of as a theoretical forebear. The concept is often attributed to Hyman from his 1959 publication *Political Socialization*, in which he defined it as the "learning of social patterns corresponding to his societal positions as mediated through various agencies of society." Learning may happen through classroom-based civic education, service learning, and other types of public participation (Galston, 2001; McIntosh & Youniss, 2010). The emphasis on learning brought a new dimension to scholarship on political behavior, and this integration necessitated an interdisciplinary approach, drawing especially on theory and methods from political science and developmental psychology (McIntosh & Youniss, 2010; Sapiro, 2004). While political socialization research is associated more with political science and civic engagement more with psychology, the two terms are often used interchangeably (Sherrod et al., 2010).

   In addition to understanding how young people learn, political socialization theory is interested in how that learning carries over into adult political behavior and how that behavior shapes society at large. Marsh (1971) extracted a chain of assumed causal

relationships in the early socialization research in a review of the then nascent topic. The assumed chain began with the process of political socialization, which determines young people's political attitudes, which determine their political behaviors in adulthood, which—en masse—determine the face of a society's macropolitical character. The connection between youth and adult civic engagement has since been established empirically by both psychologists (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997) and political scientists (Verba et al., 1995), but political socialization continues to be a field of study that is ultimately interested in making "democracy flourish" (Sapiro, 2004, p. 1). Civic engagement is viewed as an instrumental means to that end.

Political scientist Robert Putnam (1993, 1995) is perhaps most recognized for linking adult civic engagement to political culture. In his well-known study, he showed that Italian cities and regions that had higher levels of citizen engagement, on the aggregate, also enjoyed higher levels of economic development and institutional effectiveness. Precedent for this connection between civic participation and the effectiveness of democracy was provided by Almond and Verba (1963) in their classic research on civic culture. The mediator of this connection, according to Putnam, is social capital—the social networks in a community and the potential they hold for collectively addressing common goods (Putnam, 1995). According to this theory, when people live engaged, public lives, they build relationships with others that characterized by mutual trust, and these relationships make up the fabric of a responsive, accountable political system. Active social networks can effectively communicate needs to institutions (e.g., government), which helps institutions respond effectively and efficiently. Critics of this work have pointed out that structural forces, such as the economy and government policy,

influence individuals' civic participation as much or more so than the opposite (Jackman & Miller, 1998). Both perspectives are consistent with the ecological model, which asserts a reciprocal relationship between individuals' behaviors and their environments. While young people's behaviors are no doubt conditioned by their ecologies, their behavior, on the whole, may eventually shape larger political culture.

> Proposition 8: Broad youth civic engagement strengthens democracy by building networks of relationships that communicate needs to institutions and thus make them function more effectively.

Social change and emancipation. A major criticism of political socialization research is that it tacitly supports the status quo. The very term "socialization" implies a process of adapting to preset conditions. These conditions are precisely what reproduction and oppression theorists identify as the root cause of inequality and injustice. Critical civic engagement, then, must have the potential for changing macrosystem conditions.

The role of civic engagement in changing society and institutions is difficult to study empirically, and is treated mostly theoretically. Freire (1970, 1973) saw critical civic engagement ("critical consciousness," in his language) as the key to transforming society in a way consonant with justice and emancipation. While Freire did not address youth engagement, in particular, his theories have since been applied to adolescents (Watts, Abdul-Adil, & Pratt, 2002; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). The logic of the youth critical engagement argument is similar to that of Marsh, described above: critically engaged youth become critically engaged adults who may work together to make society more equitable. There is evidence to suggest that youth who engage in social critique in the course of civic participation develop a greater sense

of social responsibility and a stronger intention of being civically active as adults (Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003). McAdam (1989) found, in his research with former participants in the Civil Rights movement, that critically engaged youth were committed to activism long after their participation in the movement. They maintained connections with other activists into adulthood, held liberal political orientations, and were more likely to be involved in helping professions (McAdam, 1989; Van Dyke, McAdam, & Wilhelm, 2000). There is little empirical connection between critical adult engagement and macro-level social change, but the assumption is that a critical mass of socially conscious citizens will demand a more just system.

Further, an important argument in the critical youth engagement literature is that, in addition to shaping future political orientations, youth also hold the potential to affect broad social change *as youth*. The study of social movements in sociology offers a framework for how macro policy and broad public opinion can be reshaped via collective action (for a review, see Giugni, 1998). Youth played important roles in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the civil rights movement in the U.S, and movements associated with the recent Arab Spring, for example.

Proposition 9: Critical youth civic engagement builds a mass of conscious citizens who fight for change in the system in line with social justice and equity.

The potential for youth civic engagement to both strengthen democracy and to challenge and reform it make it a hopeful tool for addressing macrosystem forces that impinge on youth development. Community psychology does not typically deal directly with political culture and social movements—these are often the domain of political science and sociology, respectively—but they often point to root causes of problems at

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more intermediate levels that originate in broader structural forces. Thus, to the degree that youth civic engagement can effect change at this level, it is helpful to the mission of community psychology.

Individual-Level Outcomes of Youth Civic Engagement

Civic engagement implies action taken to improve some sort of collective, but there are demonstrated benefits also conferred to the individuals who take part in the action. In this way, youth civic engagement can be considered among an assortment of social and emotional learning strategies for promoting positive youth outcomes or preventing negative ones. Examples of positive youth outcomes include academic achievement, high school completion, career direction and occupational attainment, social connectedness, and high self-esteem whereas substance use, teen pregnancy, mental illness, criminal activity, and violent behavior are negative outcomes. Being engaged in the civic life of one's community may be a positive youth outcome in and of itself and it may be beneficial to society at large, but here the focus is on the relationships between traditional and critical civic engagement and other individual-level outcomes.

Service-learning, volunteering, and youth participation. Service-learning, volunteering and youth participation are discussed here as traditional forms of youth civic engagement. The primary emphasis of these modes of engagement—according to most definitions—is the education and development of its participants rather than collective good (Billig, 2000; Conrad & Hedin, 1991). Generally, these initiatives are organized through schools, but participating youth often provide service to communities outside of the school. Organized service activities are typically accompanied by structured reflection to help students consider the application of curricular concepts to their work.

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A good deal of empirical evaluation has been devoted to understanding the outcomes of service learning (SL). Youth who take part in SL show gains in academic and socioemotional outcomes. A recent meta-analysis of SL research among students in K-12 settings suggests that participation in a SL project has a moderate to strong effect on academic motivation and grades and a smaller but still significant effect on self-esteem, moral development, prosocial behavior, tolerance, and disposition toward helping others (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009). Earlier reviews support these positive effects of SL participation on academics and socioemotional development, as well as an association with less frequent risk behavior among middle and high school students (Billig, 2000).

Similar benefits may accrue to youth who are engaged and volunteer in a less structured manner than SL. General school- and community-based activity involvement has been associated with higher rates of academic achievement and socioemotional wellness (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Maton, 1990; Smith, 1999) and lower rates of risk behavior (Allen, Philliber, Herrling, & Gabriel, 1997; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Youniss, Yates, & Su, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs and a greater sense of connection to one's school and community are suggested mediators of the link between engagement and these developmental outcomes (Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Kielsmeier, 2000).

Youth participation refers to efforts to involve young people in collaborative decision-making and problem-solving with adults (Camino, 2000; O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002). There is smaller body of outcomes research on this form of engagement, but evidence suggests that including youth in school improvement efforts may confer certain benefits. Students who have the opportunity to contribute to school-

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wide change efforts may enjoy better relationships with teachers and academic

motivation as a result (Ames, 1992; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Lee &

Zimmerman, 1999). Further, when students are tapped to provide input into curriculum

and instruction decisions, they may experience an increase in achievement (Oldfather,

1995; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Giving young people the opportunity to tackle issues of

importance to them, in partnership with supportive adults, appears to be an instrument of

individual growth.

> Proposition 10: Engagement in service-learning, volunteering, and youth-adult
> partnerships improves young people's personal academic and socioemotional well-being.

Sociopolitical development and social action. Critical civic engagement is similar

to youth participation in that young people are included in planning and decision making

around issues that directly affect them. It is different from more traditional engagement in

that it emphasizes social critique and facilitates young people's consciousness of

oppression (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). In this way, critical engagement tends to

problematize the notion of common good; instead of asking "how to improve the

common good?" youth ask "*whose* common good?" Civic engagement is understood to

occur in a context of sometimes competing interests, and thus oppositional tactics are

sometimes necessary for forwarding young people's agendas. Youth-led organizing is

one such approach where young people use research, political analysis, and direct action

to alter power relations and create change in their local settings and institutions

(Ginwright & James, 2002; Listen Inc., 2003). Effective critical engagement, then,

requires both a consciousness of social problems and action to address them (Watts,

Diemer, & Voight, 2011). The process by which young people develop such a

consciousness through involvement in social action was termed critical consciousness by Freire (Freire, 1970) and has more recently been referred to as sociopolitical development in the community psychology literature (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999; Watts et al., 2003) .

The value of sociopolitical development for individual youth development is becoming clearer through recent research. Youth who engage critically have been shown to have greater social trust, intergroup tolerance, and interpersonal relationships (Flanagan, 2004; Watkins, Larson, & Sullivan, 2007), likely due to the collective nature of the approach. Critical engagement may also help youth develop self-efficacy and motivation to be successful in their schools and neighborhoods (Kwon, 2006; Watts et al., 2003). Further, there is evidence that critically engaged youth have a clearer sense of career identity and expectations for their future work lives (Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Diemer et al., 2010). Much of this research has been conducted with low-income youth of color, and the growing body of scholarship suggests that when these youth engage critically in their communities and schools, they experience more positive relationships and feel more efficacious and motivated.

Proposition 10: Critical engagement improves young people's personal relationships and their sense of agency.

There is promising evidence to suggest that youth civic engagement facilitates positive youth development in terms of academics, social relationships, reduced risk behavior, and self-efficacy and motivation. For this reason, youth civic engagement may be considered as one of many strategies for promoting academic achievement and positive youth development and for preventing risk behavior. The particular strength of

youth civic engagement as a strategy for individual youth development may be in its

potential for improving youths' relational and efficacy-related outcomes. But are the

benefits of youth civic engagement limited to the youth who actually engage? We have

already seen that youth civic engagement may serve the function of enhancing political

culture and effecting large-scale social change. This last section explores the potential for

youth civic engagement to effect change in settings and local institutions.

Setting-Level Outcomes of Youth Civic Engagement

What makes youth civic engagement any better than other prevention or

promotion strategy that community psychologists may employ? It has been argued

elsewhere that youth civic engagement is a preferable option versus other approaches

such as social marketing or remediation because—regardless of outcomes—it is an

intrinsically good thing for young people (Levine, 2011). This is in-line with the

constitutive value of youth civic engagement described above. It has also been argued

that youth engagement is a superior strategy because it strengthens civil society in the

long-term (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). The well-being that youth derive from

participating and the foundation their democratic competencies lay for future society are

both advantages of youth civic engagement vis-à-vis other strategies.

Lost in the developmental psychology literature on the individual outcomes of

civic engagement and the political science literature on societal outcomes are settings and

local institutions—the primary domain of community psychology. The advantages of

youth civic engagement may not be limited to personal growth for youth participants, on

the one hand, and delayed societal gratification, on the other. In the same manner

witnessed in youth-fueled social movements, young people may improve their more immediate settings via civic engagement in the short term, as well.

Youth-led organizing. As described above, youth organizing is a process whereby young people work together using research and other forms of analysis to inform direct action for structural change. Youth who participate in organizing derive certain personal benefits from their participation, but unlike service-learning and volunteering, the emphasis of youth organizing is less on the individual development of participants and more on improving youths' environments. It is considered a form of critical engagement because it is predicated on the analysis of power and competing interests. Youth organizing efforts target a specific systemic issue—such as school disciplinary policies or local hand-gun access—gather information on the issue, and use it to put pressure on those who have decision-making power (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Listen Inc., 2003).

The direct effects of youth organizing on settings are evident when youth are successful in addressing their target issue. There are a growing number of case studies that document such accomplishments. In terms of public school reform, youth organizing efforts have secured additional district resources for facilities improvement, college preparatory classes, and improved high-stakes testing practice (Shah & Mediratta, 2008) and have demanded a district-wide response to violence (Dzurinko, McCants, & Stith, 2011; Warren, Mira, & Nikundiwe, 2008), the tracking of English-language learners (Speer, 2008), and racial achievement gaps (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). The Funders' Collaboration on Youth Organizing has also documented several youth organizing campaigns to redress local community problems, such as environmental degradation and police violence (Hosang, 2005; Ishihara, 2007). The growing body of evidence suggests

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that young people, working in concert and using social action tactics, have the ability to effect change in their immediate settings and institutions.

> Proposition 11: Youth organizing can directly influence setting and institutional resources and policy.

Relationships and social norms in settings. Youth participation in more traditional adult-led efforts has also demonstrated the capacity for setting-level change, though the empirical evidence is scarcer. The concept of "student voice" describes a youth civic engagement process in schools that is similar to youth organizing, but that is often solicited by adults (Mitra, 2003). Qualitative work that documents intentional efforts to include students in school improvement has shown that such youth engagement improves teaching and learning and teacher-student relationships (Fielding, 2001b; Mitra, 2003; Soo Hoo, 1993). Further, youth-adult partnerships in community development organizations have resulted in adults feeling a greater sense of commitment and purpose in the organization and in helping the organization clarify goals (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert, 2000). The idea that youth engagement helps build youth-adult relationships and improves organizational effectiveness echoes the logic of Putnam and other political scientists who have argued that greater democratic participation brings the public policy agenda into greater focus and improves institutional functioning.

This logic is at home in community psychology. Tseng and Seidman (2007) proposed a theoretical model for setting change in which social processes are the fundamental mediating mechanism. This model is helpful in explicating how youth civic engagement can effect setting-level change in a more indirect fashion than the targeted approach of an organizing campaign (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). Social processes,

according to Tseng and Seidman, include relationships, norms, and participation in activities, and these phenomena directly influence how people experience settings. Indeed, these are some of the same general processes outlined in the school- and neighborhood-effects literature, summarized above, for understanding how setting characteristics affect individual development and behavior.

One can apply the principles of political science's macrosystem argument for civic engagement to settings. When youth are engaged in public activities, they build relationships with others, develop social skills, and gain a sense of efficacy. When these public activities happen in schools, the resulting in-school social networks may be useful in communicating student needs to teachers and administrators. That is, if students develop prosocial relationships with their peers via shared civic engagement, then the larger peer group may be able to clearly give feedback to teachers on instruction, for example, or to administrators on school rules. If students develop relationships with teachers and administrators in the course of their civic engagement, then this communication would only be more direct.

Further, an aggregation of civically engaged students in a setting may have a radiating effect on other members, even if students' civic participation happens outside of that setting. Maton (2008) described the radiating effect of empowered members as a potential pathway for setting change. Engaged youth, with their improved social skills and sense of agency and motivation, may serve as models for their peers. This phenomenon has been referred to as "descriptive social norms" in the social psychology literature (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990) and has been articulated as the basis for interventions to improve youth settings (Henry, 2008). Further, it is possible that the

relational skills that engaged youth develop are transferable from one setting to another.

For example, if youth develop prosocial relationships with adults leaders in a community-based organizing through civic activities, their ability to relate to adults may carry over to the classroom and improve their relationships with teachers. The potential for civic engagement to have an indirect effect on settings has received little empirical attention.

Proposition 12: A preponderance of civically engaged youth in a setting may improve its overall climate through improved relationships and social norms.

Civic engagement for local setting and institutional change. The evidence suggests that youth civic engagement has the potential to improve settings in two ways: (a) directly, through youth organizing and other action projects; and (b) indirectly, through the transformation of relationships and social norms. In considering the effects of neighborhoods and schools on youth development (i.e., the "inward" arrow of Bronfenbrenner's model, discussed and summarized in the preceding section), the factors of primary significance include

1. relationships,
2. collective efficacy,
3. teaching and learning,
4. safety,
5. institutional resources, and
6. the physical environment.

These are the aspects of both neighborhoods (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000) and schools (Cohen et al., 2009) that are believed to have direct effects on youth developmental outcomes. The first four factors may be indirectly influenced by civic engagement. Relationships are built via shared civic activity, and relational competencies may translate from one setting to another. Engaged youth develop a greater sense of efficacy and motivation, and this, in conjunction with a larger network of relationships,

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may engender a greater sense of collective efficacy. More positive relationships and a norm of engagement and motivation may improve the teaching and learning process in schools and create a heightened sense of safety.

The last four factors may be addressed via direct action. Teaching and learning practices and school safety policies have both been the targets of youth organizing campaigns, and evidence from case studies indicates that these campaigns have successfully leveraged desired changes. Organizing campaigns have also been successful in pressuring decision-makers to allocate more resources for local schools and community centers and to actually build new facilities to provide youth with improved educational and extracurricular opportunities (Shah & Mediratta, 2008).

The critical analysis and direct action aspects of youth organizing may make it uniquely capable—vis-à-vis traditional engagement—of addressing ecological barriers beyond the setting level, that is, issues of structural oppression. Proponents of critical engagement would contend that traditional engagement, with its lack of social analysis and oppositional tactics, is unable to truly wrest power from decision-makers whose interests are served by a social arrangement whereby some youth have little opportunity for positive growth (e.g., Giroux, 1980; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). This again raises the question of "whose common good?" One could argue that a classroom climate characterized by positive teacher-student relationships is good for all involved: teachers, students, administrators, parents, et cetera. This is relatively uncontroversial. But what happens if students decide that a district tracking system discourages too many youth from attending college, while administrators and teachers prefer such a system for organizational convenience and budgetary considerations? What, in this case is the

"common good," and how can students find a place to stand to advocate their side? Both traditional and critical youth civic engagement may be able to facilitate the indirect setting change described here, but critical engagement alone may have the capacity to affect resource distribution and more structural dimensions.

One may ask, why not pursue critical youth civic engagement over traditional given this emancipatory potential? Indeed, youth organizing has the potential to transform settings and institutions, but it is not without controversy. Its critical nature has led to defensiveness on the part of institutions like public schools. Some participants have experience retaliation from school administrators in the form of discipline and being barred from having meetings on school premises (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Shah & Mediratta, 2008). Further complicating the matter is that "students" are not a homogenous group with homogenous needs, and often times there is conflict and competition between youth across gender, race, class, sexual orientation and other points of diversity in the course of action projects (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2001a). Due in part to its contentious nature, many youth-organizing efforts are launched under the auspices of a community-based organization (Shah & Mediratta, 2008), but even then, there are constraints those organizations may face in their ability to support oppositional action. The practical considerations for critical youth engagement require further elaboration.

Conclusions: Youth Civic Engagement in Community Psychology Research and Practice

The purpose of this review is to argue that youth civic engagement has a key role to play in community psychology research and practice. In a field guided so strongly by the ecological model of youth development, youth civic engagement provides both the

theoretical and practical substance to simultaneously address change at multiple levels. I have discussed how youth civic engagement is philosophically consonant with the values of community psychology—it entails giving youth the capability for democratic participation. Youth civic engagement also has the potential to improve political culture at the macrosystem level, both in terms of oiling the machinery of democracy and also in altering oppressive aspects of the system. At the individual level, there is a large body of empirical evidence that shows that youth who engage in the civic life of their communities enjoy developmental benefits. Finally, youth civic engagement has the potential to change settings and local institutions, a primary concern of community psychology.

It is important to note the reciprocity of the relationship between youth civic engagement and phenomena at each of these ecological levels. The ecological model, as originally conceived by Bronfenbrenner (1979), posited a bidirectional relationship between people and their environments. This is almost certainly true of youth civic engagement, as well, as there is ample evidence across disciplines that, while youth may influence their ecologies, macrosystem (e.g., Jackman & Miller, 1998), meso- and microsystem (e.g., Hart & Gullan, 2010; Wilkenfeld, 2009), and individual (Flanagan, 2003) factors in turn influence civic behavior. A visual depiction of the ecological potential of youth civic engagement is shown in Figure 2.
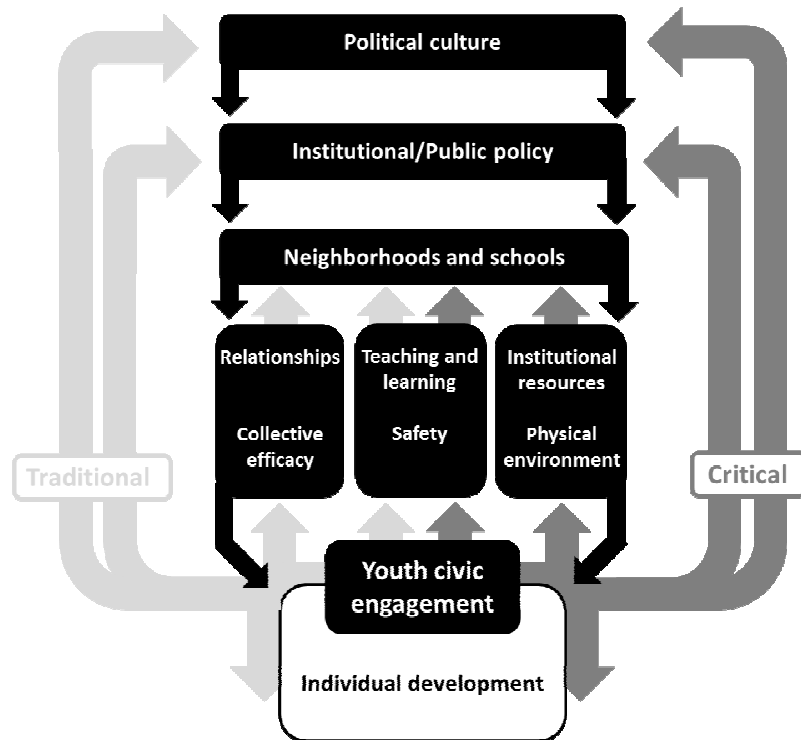
Figure 2. The outcome levels—and mediators—of youth civic engagement

There are myriad avenues for research and practice for community psychologists to explore in the area of youth civic engagement. What is the relative frequency of traditional versus critical engagement among youth, and for what ages is each brand appropriate or even possible? What types of youth are more likely to engage in each fashion? Are there differential benefits to individual youth participants of the various modes of engagement? Are there other sources of empirical support, beyond case studies, for the role of youth civic engagement in improving settings? In what contexts is critical youth engagement possible, and with what constraints? Can it be brought to scale as a broad strategy for neighborhood and school improvement?

There are many more questions that community psychology as a field can help to address. Much is still unknown about how youth civic engagement, in its various forms, may effect ecological change. What is known is promising—youth civic engagement

shows great potential to effect positive change at multiple ecological levels at once, and its practice is consonant with the democratic values of the field. For these reasons, it merits a more central place in community psychology.

This dissertation comprises three stand-alone studies, each of which addresses the relationship between youth civic engagement and the wellness of youths' ecologies, and each of which is designated by a chapter. The first study, entitled "A Typology of Youth Civic Engagement in Urban Middle Schools," uses a typological approach to measuring youth civic engagement. It then examines the relationships between a student's civic type and his or her achievement, attendance, and behavior. The second study, entitled "Youth Civic Engagement and Educational Outcomes in Urban Middle Schools," explores the aggregate, setting-level effects of youth civic engagement on school climate and student achievement, attendance, and behavior. The third study, entitled "Student Voice for School-Climate Improvement: A Case Study," explores how a specific form of youth civic engagement—student voice in school improvement—has the potential to improve the climate of schools. A brief conclusion summarizes these three studies.

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CHAPTER II

A TYPOLOGY OF YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Youth civic engagement has occupied an increasingly central space in applied developmental science during the course of the last decade. This period has witnessed a multitude of scholarship on the topic (see, for example, Balsano, 2005; Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003; Levine, 2008; Obradovic & Masten, 2007), including a special issue of *Applied Developmental Science* devoted to citizenship (Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002). Further, youth civic engagement has recently become a priority area for the U.S. Department Education (2012), which has committed to strengthening the civic capacities of the next generation of Americans. With this current wave of attention, it becomes especially important that we have good empirical methods for understanding youth civic engagement.

There is strong support for the value of civic engagement to the individual development of young people. Youth who are active in the civic life of their communities and schools have been shown to less frequently use substances, experience teenage pregnancy, suffer school failure and dropout, and perpetrate violence (Allen, Philliber, Herrling, & Gabriel, 1997; Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 1997; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). They also enjoy higher levels of academic achievement, career development, self-esteem, and connections with others (Barber et al., 2001; Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Gerber, 1996; Marsh, 1992; Maton, 1990). The growing body of evidence suggests that youth civic engagement is a promising instrument for healthy youth development.

Youth civic engagement is typically understood to comprise both behavioral and attitudinal components (Da Silva, Sanson, Smart, & Toumbourou, 2007; Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Levine, 2007). Whereas earlier research on youth political socialization emphasized behavior in the formal political arena (e.g., voting in elections, membership in political parties), civic behavior is now more often discussed in a broader fashion, including activities like volunteering, participation in local organizations, and working for community betterment (Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Torney-Purta, 2002). This latter conceptualization lends itself more readily to research with adolescents, who oftentimes are not of sufficient age to participate through official political channels.

Civic attitudes refer to predispositions toward some understanding of and appreciation for a common good. Youth are said to feel a sense of "social responsibility" or "civic commitment" when they consider the public interest a personal life goal (Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998). Attitudes that indicate a consciousness of and desire to remedy inequality and injustice are also considered a component of youth civic engagement by some scholars (Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Overall, the behaviors and attitudes that constitute civic engagement are increasingly recognized as important developmental assets for young people. This study represents an original attempt to measure civic engagement as it "naturally" occurs among young people. I first examine two traditional means of operationalizing youth civic engagement before proposing a typological, person-centered approach.

Approaches to Operationalizing Youth Civic Engagement

Most quantitative approaches to measuring youth civic engagement have (A) treated it as a binary item or series of binary items indicating whether a young person has

engaged in a certain civic activity (see, for example, Eccles & Barber, 1999; Yates & Youniss, 1998) or (B) as an index constructed of Likert-type survey items that measure the frequency of engagement in disparate civic activities and the endorsement of certain civic attitudes (see, for example, Bobek, Zaff, Li, & Lerner, 2009; Diemer et al., 2010; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). In Case A, binary items can be used as predictor or outcome variables in linear or logistic regression analyses to determine whether participating versus not participating in a civic activity is significantly associated with some outcome. In Case B, a civic-engagement score can be calculated by averaging the rate of participation across various activities or the strength of agreement with different civic attitudes and then used as a continuous predictor or outcome variable in a regression analysis.

Both approaches have shortcomings. In Case A, the association of a youth's involvement in a specific civic activity (i.e., an observed categorical variable) with an outcome is assessed independent of all other activities. Thus one may show, as Eccles and Barber (1999) did, that students who have participated in student government have significantly higher levels of academic achievement, and one may show that students who have engaged in community service also evince higher academic achievement. However, in this type of analysis, there is no way to know if the students who participate in student government are the same students who do community service, or if there are other civic activities that cohere together. One can ascertain the isolated associations of each activity with academic achievement, but in reality youth may be simultaneously engaged in a variety of activities with different attitudinal dispositions, and this complexity is lost in the binary-variable approach.

In Case B, various types of civic activities and attitudes factor into a single civic-engagement score (i.e., a latent continuous variable), allowing one to conclude, for example, that youth who are highly engaged in a range of civic activities and voice a strong civic commitment exhibit significantly higher levels of academic achievement. A youth's involvement in student government, community service, and other civic activities is thus reflected in a single index score. What is lost in this case is the ability to determine whether there are certain types of engagement that are the primary drivers of a significant association with an outcome such as academic achievement. If the ultimate conclusion from a study using such an index is that more civically engaged youth have higher achievement, the practical implications regarding the type of activities in which youth should be engaged and what attitudes should be encouraged are ambiguous. Should we try to get more students involved in student government? Or is mandatory community service a better approach? This approach acknowledges a difference in degree, but not in kind. Both Case A and Case B represent a trade-off between a more detailed understanding of the effects of specific civic activities and a more nuanced picture of how youth may be differentially engaged.

A New Approach: Youth Civic Engagement as a Typology

Treating civic engagement as a typology (i.e., a latent categorical variable) represents a compromise between these two traditions, and this is the approach explored in the present study (see Table 2 for a summary of these three approaches). A latent-categorical approach assumes unobserved heterogeneity in a behavior within a population (B. O. Muthen, 2001)—in this case, civic engagement among urban middle school students—and that qualitatively different types, or classes, explain that heterogeneity.

This approach allows for an organic description of differences in some characteristic among people, or as Meehl (1995) stated more poetically, it "carves nature at its joints, identifying categories of entities that are in some sense nonarbitrary, not man-made [sic]" (p. 268). By clustering young people together based on patterns of similarity, one can uncover naturally occurring social grouping or types. This approach has been endorsed over traditional multivariate techniques by proponents of applied research (Luke, 2005).

Table 2. Approaches to operationalizing youth civic engagement.

Treatment of civic engagement	Description	Example research question with academic achievement as outcome
Observed categorical variable	Multiple civic activities are binary coded (i.e., "0" or "1") depending on whether a young person has engaged.	"How does participation in student government affect academic achievement, holding all other forms of engagement constant?"
Latent continuous variable	The frequency of involvement in multiple civic activities or the strength of endorsement of multiple attitudes are averaged together to create a single civic engagement score.	"How is a high average level of engagement in civic activities and feeling of social responsibility predictive of academic achievement?"
Latent categorical variable	Each young person is categorized into a civic engagement type, taking into consideration all of one's civic activities and attitudes.	"How does a youth's manner of being civically engaged affect her academic achievement?"

The Benefit of a Typological Approach for Youth Civic Engagement Scholarship

There is theoretical precedent in the civic engagement literature for such a typological approach but scant empirical evidence to support it. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) describe three types of citizenship promoted—often implicitly—in youth civic engagement: (a) the personally responsible citizen who exemplifies good character and is

generally helpful in her community; (b) the participatory citizen who is actively engaged in clubs and organizations; and (c) the justice-oriented citizen who critically analyzes sociopolitical forces and takes action to fight injustice. In a similar vein, Levine and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2010) in a recent handbook on research in youth civic engagement argue that a major cleavage in youth engagement practice is whether young people are encouraged to engage and offer service within extant political structures—as with Westheimer and Kahne's personally responsible citizen and, to a degree, participatory citizen—or encouraged to reflect on issues of injustice and inequality and engage in a way that redresses them. This distinction between helping youth become prosocial parts of a system versus critics of the system has been applied to service-learning, as well (Diemer, Voight, & Mark, 2011). In "traditional" service learning, youth volunteer and seek to make their communities better places; in "transformational" service learning, youth are encouraged to critique social inequality and actively try to reduce it. These frameworks suggest qualitative differences between youth in the types of civic beings that they are encouraged to become.

The way in which youth are engaged (i.e., their civic "type") may have important implications for the benefits they confer from their engagement. There is evidence that personally responsible or prosocial youth who voluntarily help others exhibit fewer behavior problems, enjoy more positive social relationships, and have higher levels of self-efficacy, motivation, and academic achievement in school (see Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2009). These same types of outcomes have been associated with youth who are engaged in a more participatory fashion. Young people who take part in community- and school-betterment efforts, either through structured service-learning programs or through more

informal volunteering channels demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement, motivation, and self-efficacy and more positive social relationships compared to their peers (Billig, 2000), although the association may be weaker for academic versus socioemotional outcomes (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009). Most of the studies on which these findings are based have been conducted with samples of predominantly middle-class White youth, and less is known about these associations among youth of color and low-income youth.

By contrast, most research on the outcomes of more critical forms of engagement has been conducted with low-income youth of color. For youth who are engaged in a more critical fashion—one that keeps issues of inequality and justice at the forefront—there is less evidence of academic gains. However, this type of engagement may confer improved interpersonal and intergroup relationships (Ginwright, 2003; Watkins, Larson, & Sullivan, 2007), self-efficacy (Kwon, 2006; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003), and identity and career development (Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Diemer et al., 2010). Some work has found that for low-income youth of color, a high level of consciousness of inequality and injustice may actually result in *dis*engagement from school (Fine, 1991). Youth who see schools as part of an inequitable status quo may be unmotivated toward success by conventional academic standards. Some scholars have speculated that the academic benefits associated with less critical engagement—cited above—derive from a more preferential status in the eyes of teachers and peers (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000; Wentzel, 1993). It is possible that prosocial, acritical engagement leads to more compliant, socially desirable behavior that is rewarded by teachers and schools in terms of greater levels of achievement; a style of

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engagement that is critical of schools and social systems may not bring with it the same benefit. While there are no known studies comparing, at once, the outcomes of different types of civic engagement in youth, an overview of the broader literature suggests that the way in which a young person is engaged—or not engaged—has consequences for her development.

This study addresses gaps in the youth civic engagement literature in several ways. First, it uses cluster-analytic techniques to understand the types of civic engagement among a population of young people, demonstrating what brands of civic behavior and attitudes naturally cohere together. Secondly and to the point of the preceding paragraph, this study explores the associations between disparate types of engagement and youth social, emotional, and academic outcomes. The results lend themselves more directly to practical application, as this approach to measuring youth civic engagement captures young people where they are in terms of their diverse behaviors and attitudes. Lastly, this study examines a population that has received comparatively little attention in civic-engagement research: urban youth. Low-income youth of color, who make up the bulk of the study sample, are known to have fewer participatory opportunities (Hart & Atkins, 2002), and understanding the landscape of civic engagement in this population can serve as a helpful starting point for intervention.

<div align="center">Method</div>

Sample

The study relies on data collected in the spring of 2011 from 3,879 students in 11 public middle schools in the public metropolitan school district in Nashville, Tennessee. Middle school in this district comprises grades five through eight. The sample schools are

characterized by high proportions of low-income students: the mean percentage of sample students who were eligible for free- or reduced-priced lunch (FRPL) was 78%. In terms of race, 39% of the sample was Black, 33% White, 22% Latino/a, and 5% Asian. Approximately 10% of sample students received special-education services, and 14% were eligible for English-language-learner services. The sample was split relatively evenly across the four grade level.

Measures and Procedure

Data derived from two sources, (a) a student self-report survey that was completed by all students in attendance at the 11 sample schools on the day of administration in the spring of 2011 and (b) district administrative records from the 2010-11 school year, access to which was granted via a cooperative agreement between the district and the research team. The relevant constructs captured on the survey were civic behavior, measured using nine items, and civic attitudes, measured with seven items. All items are listed in full in Appendix A and were borrowed from a civic engagement instrument designed by Bobek and colleagues (2009) for use with middle-school students. Behavioral items gauged the frequency of activity involvement and were measured using four-point Likert scales (1 = "Never"; 2 = "Once or twice"; 3 = "3-5 times"; 4 = "6 or more times"). Attitudinal items also used four-point Likert responses that asked students about the importance of (1 = "Not important at all"; 2 = "Somewhat important"; 3 = "Important"; 4 = "Very important") and their agreement or disagreement (1 = "Strongly disagree"; 2 = "Disagree"; 3 = "Agree"; 4 = "Strongly agree") with various sociopolitical ideals, such as "How important is helping to make sure all people are treated fairly."

Variables extracted from administrative records include grade level, dichotomous

variables indicating FRPL, receipt of special-education services (SPED), and eligibility

for English-language-learner services (ELL), as well as race, grade level, attendance,

achievement, and the number of discipline referrals a student received during the course

of the year. Attendance represents the number of days that a student was not absent from

school during the school year, with a maximum of 168 possible days ($M = 155$, $SD =$

18). Achievement was measured using the state's standardized tests in math ($M = 44$, SD

$= 19$) and reading ($M = 42$, $SD = 20$), and scores were converted to normal curve

equivalents (NCEs) to allow for interpretation across grade levels. NCEs are similar to

percentiles in that they range from 1 to 100 but on a fixed-interval scale. They are norm-

referenced relative to statewide results; thus, since the sample mean is below 50, students

in the sample score worse, on average, than their same-grade peers statewide. Discipline

referrals ($M = 1.7$, $SD = 3.3$) were measured based on schools' respective monitoring

systems.

This study uses latent class analysis (LCA) to treat civic engagement, the concept

of primary interest, as a latent categorical variable. Motivation for using a latent

categorical approach to operationalizing youth civic engagement, as mentioned above,

grows from dissatisfaction with analyzing specific civic activities in isolation and with

averaging the frequency of disparate types of civic acts into a single continuous index of

civic engagement. Certain types of civic engagement (e.g., participating in student

government) are qualitatively different from other types (e.g., informally helping

someone in the neighborhood), and forming a single index of various types squanders the

opportunity to learn how unique types may be uniquely associated with other

developmental outcomes. For instance, the civic engagement survey items employed in this study describe such activities as helping someone at school, being a leader in a club or group in your neighborhood, and helping out at your place of worship. This rationale has motivated other studies to adopt a categorical treatment of youth civic engagement (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Alisat, 2007), but none has employed a LCA approach.

A Brief Description of Latent Class Analysis

LCA is a form of latent-categorical-variable modeling in that it assumes the existence of distinct types of individuals within a population based on some set of observed characteristics (B. O. Muthen, 2001). It further assumes that one's type accounts for the entirety of the association between characteristics in the set. For example, if in a population of youth we observe a correlation between participation in student government and volunteering in one's neighborhood, LCA assumes that this correlation is due to the presence of multiple types of youth: perhaps one type that participates in student government and regularly volunteers in the neighborhood and another type that does neither. Once a youth's type is taken into consideration, it is assumed that there is no longer an association between student government participation and volunteering among youth of the same type.

There are both model-based and non-model-based latent categorical approaches. LCA is a model-based approach and represents a more recent and typically preferred development compared to non-model-based alternatives, such as Ward's (1963) method or k-means clustering (Hartigan & Wong, 1979). LCA allows for a statistical test to compare competing models and determine the optimal number of "types," something that

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non-model-based clustering techniques lack (Fraley & Raftery, 1998; Steinley & Brusco, 2011). One previous study of high-school-student civic engagement used a non-model-based clustering approach to operationalize the construct (Pancer et al., 2007), but a model-based approach such as LCA has not been applied to the study of youth civic engagement and is able to identify classes in a more empirically driven and falsifiable fashion.

Analytic Plan

Analyses were conducted using Mplus 6 software (L. K. Muthen & Muthen, 2012), and include three phases. The first phase defines an appropriate class structure for urban middle school civic engagement. The second phase predicts the likelihood of a student's class assignment based on their demographic characteristics. The third phase treats class membership as a predictor of achievement, attendance, and disciplinary referrals. For all phases, full-information maximum likelihood estimators were employed that take account of all available data on outcome variables. There was no missing data for student demographics, attendance, discipline referrals, or test scores.

Phase 1. The nine civic engagement items and seven civic attitude items from the aforementioned student survey comprise the dependent variables in the LCA. Items are treated as ordinal variables in the analyses due to the Likert-type response options, and students' responses to these 16 items are the criteria on which class membership is based. The general path diagram for this model is depicted in Figure 3.
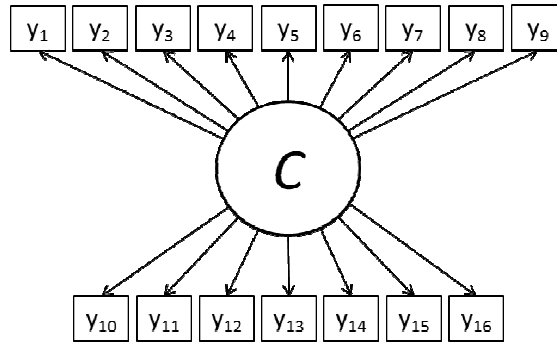
Figure 3. Path model of civic engagement latent class analysis.

The boxes encompassing y_1 through y_9 represent the nine civic behavior survey items while y_{10} through y_{16} represent the seven attitudinal items. The circle *C* represents the latent categorical variable assumed to underlie students' responses to the survey items.

Determining optimal class structure is achieved by fitting a series of models with a different number of classes specified in each model and subsequently comparing overall model fit indices. Here, Akaike Information Criteria (AIC), Bayesian Information Criteria (BIC), and Sample-Size-Adjusted BIC were used to gauge model fit, and the Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin (VLMR) likelihood ratio test helped determine if improvements in model fit were significant by testing the null hypothesis that a *k*-1 class model fits equally well to a *k* class model. For example, if better model fit is achieved by specifying a five-class structure versus a four-class structure (based on values of AIC, BIC, and Sample-Size-Adjusted BIC), but the VLMR test indicates that this improvement is insignificant, we would retain the four-class structure, as it is more parsimonious.

Once the optimal number of classes is established, the next step is to describe each of the classes based on their average response patterns to the 16 items. The model estimates a probability of endorsement of each Likert response option (e.g., "Strongly agree") for each item in each class:

$$pr(y_i \geq j|k) = \frac{\exp\left[-\tau_{jk}\right]}{1 + \exp\left[-\tau_{jk}\right]}$$

The parameter τ_{jk} is a threshold or cut-point on an underlying propensity to endorse a

response option *j* on the Likert scale to each item *y* for student *i*. If a student's underlying

behavior or attitude exceeds the threshold for the item response option, he or she chooses

that response option. The result of this first phase of analysis is a robust typology of

youth civic engagement in a sample of urban middle schools.

Phase 2. In the second phase of analysis, student demographic characteristics are

added as predictors of class membership in a second LCA in order to more fully elaborate

the civic classes. This analysis estimates a multinomial logistic regression model with the

categorical class outcome variable and student-demographic variables as covariates. The

multinomial logistic regression is estimated using the following equation to predict the

probability of class membership given some set of covariates:

$$p(c = k|\boldsymbol{x_i}) = \frac{\exp\left(\omega^{(k)} + \boldsymbol{\beta}'^{(k)}\boldsymbol{x_i}\right)}{\sum_{k=1}^{K} \exp\left(\omega^{(k)} + \boldsymbol{\beta}'^{(k)}\boldsymbol{x_i}\right)}$$

Where $\boldsymbol{x_i}$ is a vector representing demographic variables for student *i*, $\omega^{(k)}$ is a

multinomial intercept in a log-odds scale for class *k*, and $\boldsymbol{\beta}'^{(k)}$ is the transpose of a vector

of multinomial slopes of $\boldsymbol{x_i}$ in log-odds scales for class *k*. The parameters $\omega^{(K)}$ and $\beta^{(K)}$

are fixed to 0, as the last class represents the reference group in the multinomial logistic

regression.

A path diagram for this model is shown in Figure 4. In this model, the threshold

values for each response category to each item are fixed at the estimated values from

Phase 1 (indicated with dashed lines in Figure 4), so as to not allow demographic

characteristics to influence the definition of civic classes.
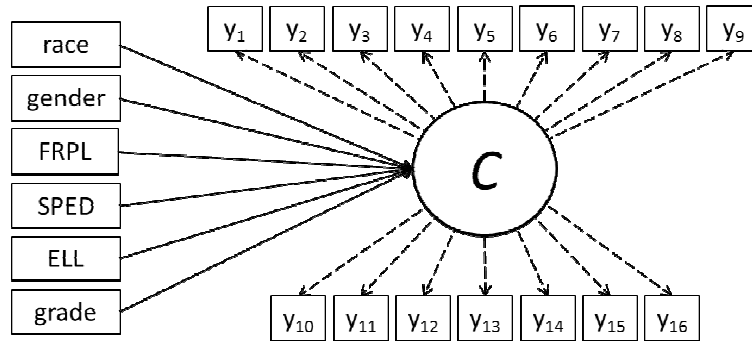
Figure 4. Path diagram of student demographic characteristics predicting latent civic-engagement class membership

The model results show whether there are significant differences in class membership based on student demographic characteristics. This step is included as an exploratory step to better understanding the typology.

 Phase 3. In the final phase of analysis, the civic engagement latent categorical variable is used to predict students' math and reading achievement, attendance, and discipline referrals (i.e., "distal outcomes" in the LCA literature), controlling for the covariates from the previous phase. There is some disagreement as to whether classes identified via a LCA should be "fixed" prior to the modeling of distal outcomes or whether the distal outcomes should be allowed to assist in determining the number of classes and their structure. The former method is employed here, as I contend that distal outcomes such as academic achievement, attendance, and discipline referrals should not factor into the determination of civic-engagement type. Thus, the item category response thresholds estimated in Phase 1 are imposed in this model. The following equation is used to estimate the mean value of math test scores, reading test scores, attendance, and discipline referrals in each class k:

$$y_{ij} = \mu_j{}^{(k)} + \boldsymbol{\beta}'^{(k)}\boldsymbol{x_i} + \varepsilon_{ij}, \text{ where } \varepsilon_{ij} \sim N(0, \sigma_j{}^{2(k)})$$

Here, y is the outcome j (math test scores, reading test scores, attendance, discipline referrals) for student i. The estimate of the intercept term, $\mu_j{}^{(k)}$, is of primary interest to this analysis, as it indicates the mean level of the outcome variable in each class k, controlling for other covariates.

The variable $\boldsymbol{x_i}$ is a vector representing demographic variables for student i and $\boldsymbol{\beta}'^{(k)}$ is the transpose of a vector of parameters of $\boldsymbol{x_i}$ for class k. These student demographic variables are included as controls to attenuate omitted-variable bias and isolate the effect of class membership on the outcomes; they are centered to allow the intercept to be interpreted in terms of an "average" student.

In order to test the significance of estimated mean differences in these outcomes between classes, separate models were estimated that restricted the outcomes between two classes to be equal and then the overall model fit index was compared to that of the original, unrestricted model. Specifically, the models were compared using the test statistic LRT,

$$LRT = -2(\ln L^r - \ln L^u)$$

where $\ln L^r$ is the estimated loglikelihood ratio for the restricted model and $\ln L^u$ is that of the unrestricted model. LRT is then tested using a chi-square significance test with 1 degree of freedom. The results of Phase 3 illustrate the significance of civic class membership for an urban middle school student's achievement, attendance, and behavior. The path diagram for the model tested in Phase 3 is depicted in Figure 5 below.
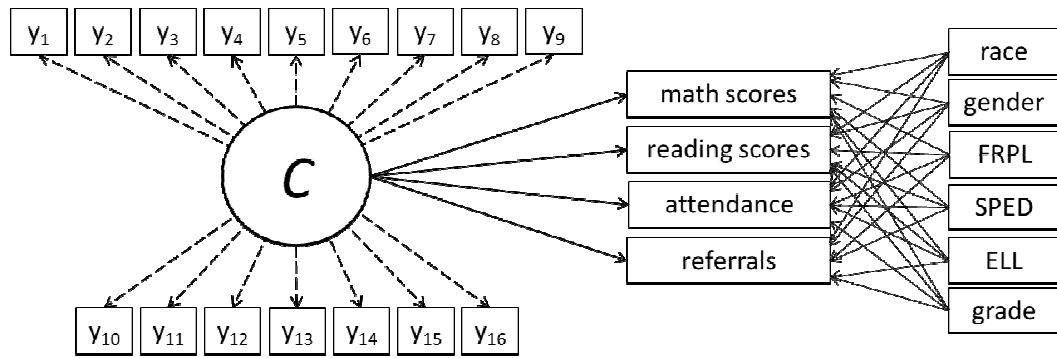
Figure 5. Latent class model of civic engagement in middle school, with covariates and distal outcomes.

Results

Phase 1: What Is the Class Structure of Urban Middle School Civic Engagement?

The results of Phase 1 of the analyses supported a three-class structure for civic engagement in middle school. The VLMR test indicated that additional classes beyond three did not significantly improve the fit of the model. According to these results, the most accurate typology for urban, middle-school student civic engagement includes three classes.

The probability of responding to each Likert response option j for each of the 16 items, τ_{jk}, can help to understand the overall response patterns for each class. Class #1, had the lowest or near-lowest probability of frequent (i.e., three or more times) involvement in all nine civic behaviors and the lowest probability of agreement (i.e., "important" or "very important" or "agree" or "strongly agree") with all seven civic attitudes. Class #3 had the highest probability of frequent involvement in all nine behaviors and the highest or near-highest probability of agreement with all of the attitudinal items. Class #2 had the lowest or near-lowest probability of frequent involvement in all of the behaviors but the highest probability of agreement with almost

all of the civic attitudes. The relative rankings on the behavioral and attitudinal items for each class are shown in Figure 6.
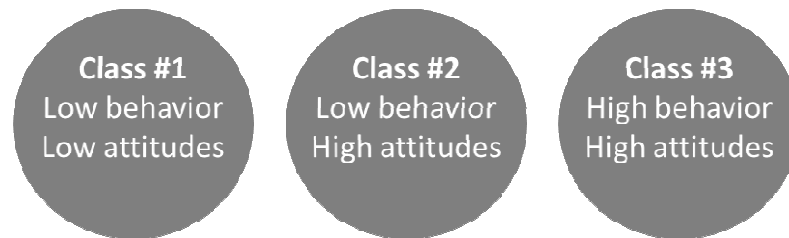
Figure 6. Relative rankings of latent civic classes on behavioral and attitudinal items

There is no formal procedure for labeling the classes that result from an LCA, but labeling is often done, post-hoc, for ease of interpretation. Only Class #3 was highly engaged in civic behaviors, accompanied with high levels of civic attitudes. This class was labeled "actors." Class #2 evinced strong civic attitudes but had low levels of involvement, and was therefore labeled "sympathists." Class #1 had low levels of involvement and relatively low civic attitudes. Members of this class were called "bystanders." The specific probabilities (expressed in percentages) of item response category endorsement for each of the three classes are shown in Table 3.

Each student, based on their observed item responses, has a probability of membership in each of the three classes, which sums to 1 across the three classes. Based on the class for which students have the highest probability of membership (i.e., their modal class assignment), there is a roughly even split across the three class: 1,152 bystanders (30%), 1,309 sympathists (34%), and 1,418 actors (37%). The classification certainty is high. For students whose modal class assignment is bystanders, their average probability of membership in that class is 0.92, for

Table 3. Civic engagement item responses, by civic class (%).

Item	Class #1: Bystanders N=1,152				Class #2: Sympathists N=1,309				Class #3: Actors N=1,418			
Civic behaviors: "How often have you…"	*0*	*1-2*	*3-5*	*6+*	*0*	*1-2*	*3-5*	*6+*	*0*	*1-2*	*3-5*	*6+*
…offered to help someone at school?	7	36	35	22	3	27	41	29	0	7	29	64
…been a leader in a club or group at school?	47	33	12	8	52	36	9	3	21	32	26	21
…participated in school government?	79	14	4	2	85	12	1	1	58	24	10	9
…helped make you school a better place?	35	42	18	6	26	49	19	6	4	20	38	39
…participated in an afterschool activity at your school?	31	29	18	22	33	31	17	20	16	17	23	44
…helped someone in your neighborhood?	19	39	26	15	16	38	30	16	1	9	28	62
…helped out at your church, synagogue, or other place of worship?	30	32	22	16	29	31	18	22	7	16	22	55
…been a leader in a group or club in your neighborhood?	63	20	10	7	80	15	3	2	31	22	24	23
…helped make your neighborhood a better place for people to live?	44	36	13	6	41	44	12	3	3	21	36	40
Civic attitudes: "How important is…"	*NI*	*SI*	*I*	*VI*	*NI*	*SI*	*I*	*VI*	*NI*	*SI*	*I*	*VI*
…helping to reduce hunger and poverty?	6	18	51	26	0	1	14	84	1	2	16	82
…helping to make the world a better place to live?	4	13	48	36	0	0	6	94	0	0	8	92
…helping to make sure all people are treated fairly?	5	21	57	18	0	0	14	86	0	2	20	78
…helping other people?	4	24	58	14	0	1	26	73	0	1	24	75
…speaking up for equality (everyone should have the same rights)?	5	17	47	31	0	1	10	89	1	3	13	84
Civic attitudes: Strength of agreement	*SD*	*D*	*A*	*SA*	*SD*	*D*	*A*	*SA*	*SD*	*D*	*A*	*SA*
I believe I can make a difference in my community.	13	22	54	11	3	9	51	36	1	2	34	64
It's not really a problem if my neighbors are in trouble and need help.[R]	11	27	33	30	9	11	18	62	15	11	10	64

Notes: Percentages are rounded, thus sums across item response options may not equal 100%.
[R] = Item is reverse-coded.
0 = "Zero times", 1-2 = "One or two times", 3-5 = "Three to five times", 6+ = "Six or more times"
NI = "Not important", SI = "Slightly important", I = "Important", VI = "Very important"
SD = "Strongly disagree", D = "Disagree", A = "Agree", SA = "Strongly agree"

sympathists it is 0.87, and for actors 0.91. This suggests that there is a high probability that students are correctly classified based on modal class assignment.

Phase 2: What Are the Demographic Characteristics of Students in the Three Civic Class?

Phase 2 was included as an exploratory measure to better understand the characteristics of students in each civic class. Table 4 describes student demographics per class. There are few striking demographic disparities across classes, with the possible exception of gender, where 60% of bystanders were male versus 45% and 47% of sympathists and actors, respectively. The multinomial regression results, shown in Table 5, test the significance of these differences.

Actors were held out of the model as the reference group, and the odds-ratios, computed from coefficients[1] estimated in the multinomial regression model are thus in comparison to actors. Further, the White race group was the reference category for the race predictor variable, and race coefficients are thus in reference to White students.

Table 4. Student demographics by modal civic-engagement class assignment.

Covariate	Bystanders (N = 1,152)	Sympathists (N = 1,309)	Actors (N = 1,418)	Total (N = 3,879)
Asian	6.4	5.2	4.9	5.4
Black	42.2	34.5	41.4	39.3
Latino/a	21.9	28.1	17.0	22.2
White	29.4	31.6	36.7	33.0
Male	60.0	45.4	47.0	50.3
FRPL	81.8	75.8	76.2	77.7
SPED	14.8	9.9	8.7	10.9
ELL	14.4	12.1	14.8	13.8
5th grade	21.8	23.7	32.6	26.4
6th grade	23.5	25.4	27.4	25.6
7th grade	27.8	26.1	22.6	25.3
8th grade	26.9	24.8	17.4	22.7

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[1] Results in log-odds units were exponentiated into odds-ratios units for interpretation.

The results show that bystanders ($OR = 1.88$, $p < .001$) and sympathists ($OR = 2.15$, $p < .01$) were much more likely to be Asian versus White—in other words, the odds of bystanders being Asian were 0.88 times higher than the odds for actors and 1.15 higher for sympathists. Furthermore, bystanders were more likely than actors to be Latino/a ($OR = 1.45$, $p < .05$), male ($OR = 2.01$, $p < .001$), FRPL ($OR = 1.95$, $p < .01$), SPED ($OR = 1.64$, $p < .001$), and more senior in terms of grade level ($OR = 1.25$, $p < .001$); they were less likely to be ELL ($OR = 0.94$, $p < .001$). Sympathists were more likely than actors to be Latino/a ($OR = 2.25$, $p < .001$) and in higher grades ($OR = 1.39$, $p < .001$); they were less likely to be Black ($OR = 0.66$, $p < .01$), FRPL ($OR = 0.65$, $p < .05$), and ELL ($OR = 0.23$, $p < .001$).

Stated alternatively, the results of Phase 2 suggest that male students are most likely to be bystanders. Students eligible for FRPL are most likely to be bystanders and least likely to be sympathists. SPED students are most likely to be bystanders. ELL students are most likely to be actors and least likely to be sympathists. A series of slight respecifications of the model with each racial group included on its own, suggests that Asian students are mostly likely to be bystanders; Black students are most likely to be actors or bystanders; Latino/a students are most likely to be sympathists and least likely to be actors; and White students are most likely to be actors.

Table 5. Multinomial logistic regression of civic-engagement class on student demographics (OR = odds ratios; "Actors" is the reference group).

	Bystanders		Sympathists	
Covariate	*OR*	*SE*	*OR*	*SE*
Asian	1.88***	0.17	2.15**	0.29
Black	1.36	0.16	0.66**	0.14
Latino/a	1.45*	0.17	2.25***	0.16
Male	2.01***	0.09	0.95	0.11
FRPL	1.95**	0.22	0.65*	0.19
SPED	1.64***	0.13	1.06	0.21
ELL	0.94***	0.21	0.23***	0.28
Grade	1.25***	0.07	1.39***	0.06

*$p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Apart from the interest in exploring the characteristics of the civic classes, this phase of analysis also emphasizes the importance of controlling for these demographic characteristics of students in the next phase, where civic class membership is treated as a predictor of educational outcomes. For example, it is well documented that students from low-income families perform worse than their peers on achievement tests. These results suggest that low-income, or FRPL-eligible, students are also more likely to be bystanders. Therefore, not taking family income into account in an analysis of the relationship between civic class membership and achievement would likely confound the results.

Phase 3: What Is the Relationship Between Civic Class Membership and Achievement, Attendance, and Discipline?

Generally, the results of Phase 3 suggest that a student's civic-class membership has a significant association with her or his educational outcomes. Table 6 shows the results of this analysis, where significance levels indicate the difference in each group's outcome from each of the other two groups. The results suggest that sympathists clearly demonstrate the most desirable educational outcomes, followed by actors, and then bystanders.

Table 6. Latent class analyses of distal academic outcomes on modal civic-engagement class membership.

Covariate	Math test		Reading test		Attendance		Referrals	
	μ	SE	μ	SE	μ	SE	μ	SE
Bystanders	39.08***	1.03	36.81***	0.75	145.49***	1.01	3.42***	0.19
Sympathists	47.79***	0.88	45.75***	0.86	160.90***	0.22	0.28***	0.05
Actors	44.30***	1.01	40.74***	0.88	159.13***	0.45	1.65***	0.17

Note: Model includes the control variables Asian, Black, Latino/a, other race, male, FRPL, SPED, ELL, and grade.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Sympathists have the highest math scores ($\mu = 47.79$, $p < .001$), reading scores ($\mu = 45.75$, $p < .001$), and attendance rates ($\mu = 160.90$, $p < .001$) and the fewest discipline referrals ($\mu = 0.28$, $p < .001$). Actors score, on average, about three and a half NCEs lower on math tests ($\mu = 44.30$, $p < .001$) and five points lower on reading tests math scores ($\mu = 40.74$, $p < .001$) compared with sympathists. They attend slightly fewer days of schools ($\mu = 159.13$, $p < .001$) and receive six times as many discipline referrals over the course of the year ($\mu = 1.65$, $p < .001$). Bystanders evince the least desirable outcomes of the three civic classes. Their math scores ($\mu = 39.08$, $p < .001$) are, on average, nine points lower than sympathists and five points lower than actors; their reading scores ($\mu = 36.81$, $p < .001$) are nine points lower than sympathists and four points lower than actors; they attend 16 and 14 fewer days of school than sympathists and actors, respectively ($\mu = 145.49$, $p < .001$); and they receive over twice as many discipline referrals as actors and over 12 times as many as sympathists in an academic year ($\mu = 3.42$, $p < .001$).

For reference, a recent study found that math-focused comprehensive school reform explains an annual difference of approximately one NCE in the math scores of urban middle school students (Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009). Further, in Tennessee, the state in which the present research was conducted, it is considered "exceptional" by the state department of education in their value-added assessment for an elementary or middle school to increase its average math score by 1.5 NCEs and their average reading

score by 1.2 NCEs from one year to the next (Tennessee Department of Education, 2009). Thus, the differences in test scores between members of the three civic classes are not unsubstantial.

Test score NCEs are a preferred over percentiles as units of measurement in regression analyses due their equal-interval scale in raw score units, but percentile scores are more intuitive for some readers. In percentile terms, sympathists would be at the 46th and 42nd percentiles in math and reading, respectively; actors would be at the 39th and 33rd percentiles; and bystanders would be at the 30th and 27th percentiles. Again, these scores are in reference to statewide norms.

Discussion

The results of this study are interesting yet, to some extent, troubling for promoters of youth civic engagement. The results of the latent class analysis of civic engagement items suggest a three-class structure for civic engagement in urban middle schools. One main distinction is between those students who are engaged (attitudinally or behaviorally) and those who are not. This is the difference between bystanders, on the one hand, and sympathists and actors, on the other. Another main distinction is that, among those students who are engaged, some are engaged both behaviorally and attitudinally (i.e., actors) and some only have strong civic attitudes but are not frequently engaged in civic behaviors (i.e., sympathists).

The class structure is somewhat inconsistent with the theoretical models of youth civic engagement presented in the introduction of this study (Levine & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2010; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Those frameworks also implied multiple types of civically engaged youth, but the main distinction was typically *among* youth who were involved in civic activities. According to these theories, some of these

young actors expressed values of equality and social justice, and some did not. The present study suggests only one type of middle-school student that is readily engaged in civic activities—the actors. Another type—sympathists—engage in civic behaviors much less frequently but have strong civic attitudes and notions of equality. A third type—bystanders—expresses relatively modest civic attitudes and is not frequently involved in civic activities.

This tells us something about the nature of civic engagement in urban middle schools. The activities in which a young person engages and the attitudes that she or he endorses may simply be a manifestation of an underlying civic "type." This type, then, is the true phenomenon of interest. The actor types tells us that students who are involved in student government are also the students most likely to help improve their neighborhoods and places of worship, and these students have strong inclinations towards equality and fairness. The bystander type tells us that students who express less concern for helping to make the world a better place also tend to be less committed to equality and less involved in all types of civic activities. Knowing that these behaviors and attitudes cluster together is a convenience of a latent-categorical treatment of civic engagement that an observed-categorical approach cannot offer (see Table 2).

The sympathist class demonstrates the contribution of a latent-categorical treatment of civic engagement beyond that of a latent-continuous approach. A latent-categorical, or factor approach to measuring civic engagement would show that some students have high overall engagement (as with actors) and some have low overall engagement (as with bystanders). It would not, however, reveal that there is a potentially

a third type of civically engaged middle school students who have strong civic attitudes but are not regularly involved in civic behaviors.

This takes on special significance since it is the sympathist type that is associated with the most positive educational outcomes. Sympathists tend to have higher levels of achievement, better attendance, and fewer discipline problems compared to their peers who exhibit more frequent civic behaviors, even when controlling for student demographic characteristics that may make students predisposed to certain civic types.

This is the finding that is troublesome for the field of youth civic engagement. Why are civically minded but uninvolved students experiencing better outcome than students who are both civically minding *and* involved? A simple answer may be that heavily involved students have less time for academic work. But this contradicts research that shows that students active in many extracurricular pursuits also tend to be the highest achievers (Shanahan & Flaherty, 2001). Activity involvement in adolescents does not appear to be a zero-sum game.

An alternative explanation that takes into account the predominantly low-income, urban sample of this study is one that is more sociopolitical. Some research suggests that low-income Black youth who are active and engaged (Hoffman & Xu, 2002; Ogbu, 1991) have an oppositional attitude toward establishment institutions like public schools, causing them to exhibit higher delinquency. Most of this research and other research on the critical awareness of marginalized youth has been conducted with high-school aged youth (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011), and may or may not apply to those in early adolescence.

Limitations and Future Directions

The civic-engagement survey items used to generate this typology give only a rough picture of how these types look. It is mere speculation as to whether actors are critical of institutions, as suggested above, or if sympathists really have more time for homework. A qualitative investigation of these types could help to further elaborate them. This is an important task in light of the poorer outcomes for actors vis-à-vis sympathists, lest one conclude that being involved is bad for learning.

Furthermore, it is tempting to impose a staged relationship between the three civic types, but this is not supported by the present cross-sectional analysis. For example, one may assume that youth start as bystanders, learn civic attitudes over time and become sympathists, and are ultimately compelled by their attitudes to take action. In fact, in the present sample, more 5th graders than 8th graders are actors, suggesting perhaps that youth become discouraged in the course of their civic engagement and gradually disengage. This speculation could be addressed by a qualitative study, as mentioned above, and a longitudinal design—a latent transition model, for example—would allow for an empirical inspection of evoluation from one class to another over time.

Practical Implications

The present study helps understand the landscape of civic engagement among urban middle school students. The results suggest that some are relatively unengaged, some have strong civic attitudes, and some are regularly involved in civic activities. This is useful baseline information for interventionists in youth civic engagement when deciding where to start and what to emphasize in working with young people.

Where they go from there is more of an open question. An apparent Catch-22 is that most prescriptions for increasing youths' civic attitudes involve immersing them in

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civic activities (Flanagan, 2004). However, involving youth in civic activities would make them actors, the less desirable class in terms of academic correlates. Putting differences between actors and sympathists aside, this study suggests that civic engagement, in general, is good for youth. Actors and sympathists alike are better off than bystanders—students engaged both attitudinally and behaviorally.

Using a latent categorical treatment of youth civic engagement has shed new light on the dynamics of engagement for urban middle-school students. The revelation of distinct classes and the enigma of the sympathist class would not have come to light using a more traditional operational definition of civic engagement. However, it is a finding that begs further attention to more fully understand youth civic engagement in an urban setting.

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Appendix A. Student survey items and associated constructs.

Civic behavior (nine items)
Response options: *0 = "Never", 1 = "Once or twice", 2 = "3-5 times", 4 = 6 or more times"*
How often have you…
1. …offered to help someone at school?
2. …been a leader in a club or group at school?
3. …participated in school government?
4. …helped make your school a better place?
5. …participated in an afterschool activity at your school?
6. …helped someone in your neighborhood?
7. …helped out at your church, synagogue, or other place of worship?
8. …been a leader in a group or club in your neighborhood?
9. …helped make your neighborhood a better place for people to live?

Civic attitudes (12 items)
Response options: *1 = "Not important at all", 2 = "Somewhat important", 3 = "Important", 4 = "Very important"*
How important is…
1. …helping to reduce hunger and poverty in the world?
2. …helping to make the world a better place to live in?
3. …helping to make sure all people are treated fairly?
4. …helping other people?
5. …speaking up for equality (everyone should have the same rights and opportunities)?

Response options: *1 = "Strongly disagree", 2 = "Disagree", 3 = "Agree", 4 = "Strongly agree"*
6. I believe I can make a difference in my community.
7. It's not really my problem if my neighbors are in trouble and need help.*

* Item is reverse-coded

CHAPTER III

YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN URBAN
MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Early in 2012, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan put youth civic

engagement squarely on the federal government agenda in remarks at a forum entitled

"For Democracy's Future":

> Too many elementary and secondary schools are pushing civics and service-
> learning to the sidelines, mistakenly treating education for citizenship as a
> distraction from preparing students for college-level mathematics, English,
> science, and other core subjects. . . [This] is counterproductive. Preparing all
> students for informed, engaged participation in civic and democratic life is not
> just essential—it is entirely consistent with the goals of increasing student
> achievement and closing achievement gaps (Duncan, 2012).

These comments accompanied the release of a Department of Education (2012) report

that called for increased focus on youth civic engagement among American educators and

a report by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

(2012) that represented a commitment on the part of colleges and universities to make

student civic engagement more central to their missions. Further, a landmark joint

publication by the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and the Annenberg

Institute (Gould, 2011) was recently issued that provided a series of recommendations for

improved civic learning nationwide, citing benefits for school climate, student

engagement, and national democracy. Indeed, this is an exciting moment for the field of

youth civic engagement.

With such broad endorsement for youth civic engagement, it is important that

research keep pace. For instance, there is ample empirical evidence to support Secretary

Duncan's claim that civic engagement is positively associated with student achievement. Youth who are engaged in the civic life of their communities have, on average, higher levels of academic achievement and other socioemotional assets than their peers, even when controlling for demographic characteristics (see Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009). There is less evidence for the benefits of civic engagement that accrue to settings such as schools, as implied by the secretary's latter remarks on achievement gaps and the Civic Mission of Schools discussion of school climate. Setting-level change is of particular interest to America's urban schools, where a host of strategies have been applied in hopes of improving longstanding deficits in achievement and safety. The purpose of this study is to examine the association of youth civic engagement with outcomes at the level of educational settings in the urban United States. Specifically, it explores how a concentration of civically engaged students may bring with it a better place to learn, in terms of school climate, student engagement, and academic success.

What Good is Youth Civic Engagement?

Civic engagement refers to a set of activities and dispositions in support of some collective good. Service-learning, membership in student government, volunteering, and discussing social issues all constitute civic activities (Gould, 2011). When youth are civically engaged, they embrace an attitude of good citizenship in the course of their activity participation (Levine, 2007). Thus, for example, young people exhibit civic engagement when they volunteer in their community and also *believe that it is important* to try to improve one's community. Some theorists further argue that support for social justice and equality are important attitudinal components of civic engagement (Ginwright & James, 2002; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Individual benefits. Civic engagement is generally considered to be a good thing for young people. There is a line of thinking in the field of ethics that holds that civic engagement is intrinsically good—that is, regardless of what it may bring about, participating in public life has value unto itself (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 2001). This thinking led youth participation to be included as a basic right in the United Nations (1989) international treaty, *Convention on the Rights of the Child.* We might say, as did Sen (2001), that civic engagement has *constitutive* value—it is good in and of itself.

There are also claims for the *instrumental* value of youth civic engagement; that is, it is valuable insofar as it is associated with other desirable outcomes (e.g., educational success, mental health). Scholars and practitioners have espoused the benefits of youth civic engagement across ecological levels: for young people who are themselves engaged, for schools and communities, and for the health of national democracy. As mentioned above, there is ample empirical evidence to support the claim that being engaged is good for youth. Youth who are active in the civic life of their communities and schools have been shown to less frequently exhibit risk behavior, including substance use (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Eccles & Barber, 1999), teenage pregnancy (Allen, Philliber, Herrling, & Gabriel, 1997), school failure and dropout (Allen et al., 1997; Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 1997; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997), and problem behavior (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001; Mahoney, 2000). They also enjoy higher levels of positive developmental outcomes: academic achievement (Davila & Mora, 2007; Gerber, 1996; Wentzel, 1993), self-esteem (Barber et al., 2001), and connections with others (Maton, 1990), to name a few. Several recent reviews and meta-analyses have helped summarize the contribution of civic engagement

to healthy youth development (Conway et al., 2009; Gould, 2011; Levine, 2007; Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). Overall, the body of evidence suggests that being civically engaged is good for young people.

There is some evidence, however, to suggest that certain types of engagement may not confer such benefits. Urban youth of color who have a critical understanding of social problems may actually be more *dis*engaged from school (Fine, 1991). For youth who are engaged in a fashion that makes them sensitive to issues of inequality and injustice, institutions such as schools may be seen as supportive of an inequitable *status quo*. In large part, participation in civic activities and a desire to help others are correlated with more positive educational and socioemotional outcomes for young people; however, there is some question as to whether marginalized youth who become critical of social institutions experience these outcomes to the same degree as their less critical civically engaged peers.

Setting and institutional benefits. The role of youth civic engagement in improving settings and institutions—as opposed to individual youth participant outcomes—is limited mostly to the realm of theory. The theory of political socialization has sought to understand how youth political development carries over into adult political behavior and how that behavior shapes society at large (Sapiro, 2004). The logic of political socialization begins with the idea that youth civic engagement shapes young people's political attitudes, which determine their political behaviors in adulthood, which—en masse—determine the face of a society's macropolitical character (Marsh, 1971). The connection between youth and adult civic engagement has since been established empirically (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates,

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1997) but political socialization continues to be a field of study that is ultimately interested in making "democracy flourish" (Sapiro, 2004, p. 1). Youth civic engagement is viewed as an instrumental means to that end.

Political scientist Robert Putnam (1993, 1995) is perhaps most recognized for empirically linking adult civic engagement to political culture. In his well-known study, he showed that Italian cities and regions that had higher levels of citizen engagement, on the aggregate, also enjoyed higher levels of economic development and institutional effectiveness. The mediator of this connection, according to Putnam, is social capital—the social networks in a community and the potential they hold for collectively addressing common goods (Putnam, 1995). According to this theory, when people live engaged, public lives, they build relationships with others that characterized by mutual trust, and these relationships make up the fabric of a responsive, accountable political system. Active social networks can effectively communicate needs to institutions (e.g., government), which helps institutions respond effectively and efficiently.

The political-science line of research is largely predicated on the notion that youth civic engagement is valuable insofar as it engenders adult civic engagement, which, in turn, is the assumed motor of macropolitics. This attitude is changing, however—the opening quote by Secretary Duncan being a case in point. Through their civic activities, youth hold the potential to change settings and institutions *now*. They need not wait until adulthood.

Youth Civic Engagement and School Change

The following discussion focuses on how young people can affect educational settings, but the same concepts may be applied to other types of settings and institutions

that represent relevant contexts for youth. There are several plausible channels through which youth may affect their schools through civic engagement. First, through targeted action projects, there is evidence to suggest that a group of students can leverage change in school policy and practice (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Shah & Mediratta, 2008; Speer, 2008; Warren, 2007). This mechanism is characteristic of youth organizing, a practice in which a collective of young people identify a social issue they want to change, gather information on the issue, and use their research and coordinated voice to pressure decision-makers for change (Listen Inc., 2003). Due to the sometimes contentious nature of this strategy, it is often facilitated through community-based organizations (Shah & Mediratta, 2008), although there are recent examples of public schools playing host to youth-organizing-type initiatives (Cammarota, 2011; Cammarota & Romero, 2011).

A second channel through which youth civic engagement may affect school-level change is more indirect, through social relationships. Civic engagement is a proposed precipitator of social capital, a kind of actionable resource that is embedded in a system of relationships (Hyman, 2002). In much the same fashion that political scientists such as Putnam (1995) have explained how increased social capital in a region can improve collective outcomes, the bonds that form through youth civic engagement may improve outcomes in youths' settings. To wit, if there are many students in a school who are civically engaged, one would expect their civic behaviors and attitudes to help improve communication and trust among students and between teachers and students. A denser network of prosocial relationships in a school may be supportive of better academic and behavioral outcomes, as indeed has been shown in research connecting school relational climate to achievement outcomes (see Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009).

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Another manner through which relationships may mediate the effect of youth

civic engagement on schools is through social norms. As mentioned above, civically

engaged young people tend to have higher levels of academic and socioemotional

development. A preponderance of such youth in a school should then have an impact on

average school outcomes due to their numbers alone. However, there may be a positive

effect from the presence of civically engaged students even for those students who are not

themselves active. Maton (2008) described the radiating effect of empowered members as

a potential pathway for setting change. Engaged youth, with their improved social skills

and sense of agency and motivation, may serve as models for their peers. This

phenomenon has been referred to as "descriptive social norms" in the social psychology

literature (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990) and has been articulated as the basis for

interventions to improve youth settings (Henry, 2008). It is interesting to note here the

aforementioned possibility of critically engaged young people becoming more

disengaged from school. This finding may have important implications on the

relationship between youth civic engagement and school-level outcomes.

These latter two channels—relationships and social norms—are constituents of a

school's climate. School climate, according to the National School Climate Center

(2007), refers to "people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values,

interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures"

(p. 5). A school has a positive climate when students feel safe, are motivated to learn, and

have prosocial relationships with their peers and teachers (Cohen et al., 2009). There is a

substantial body of empirical evidence to suggest that a positive school climate is

associated with higher levels of student achievement, attendance, and prosocial behaviors

(for a review, see Cohen et al., 2009). Thus, to the degree that youth civic engagement alters relationships among students and between teachers and students and establishes norms more conducive to motivation and prosocial behavior, it can be said to affect school climate. As mentioned, above, the Civic Mission of Schools (Gould, 2011) is explicit about the connection between youth civic engagement and school climate, postulating that climate may be a mediator between civic engagement and improved academic outcomes for schools at large.

Research Questions

What effect, if any, does youth civic engagement have on schools? This is the central question addressed in this study and one that has received scant attention in the literature on youth civic engagement and that on school improvement. There are a number of case studies that document how intentional youth organizing efforts have changed school policy and practice, but the more indirect effect of youth engagement on school outcomes proposed above has not been assessed empirically. This study also explores how different types of youth civic engagement may be connected to school outcomes. It has been mentioned that young people who are civically engaged in a way that renders them critical of social institutions may evince different outcomes compared to youth who are engaged in a more traditional fashion. As a result, this study explores how the presence of different types of civically engaged youth in a school may have different associations with school outcomes. Specifically, this study explores how youth civic engagement is associated with grade-cohort-level math and reading achievement, attendance, and disciplinary behavior. It also explores how school climate may be a mediator of these associations, given the theoretical mechanisms described above. Youth

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civic engagement is being put forward as an engine of school improvement—this study puts that thesis to an empirical test.

<div align="center">Method</div>

Sample

The study relies on data from approximately 4,000 students in 10 public middle schools in the metropolitan school district in Nashville, Tennessee. Middle school in this district comprises grades five through eight. A salient level of analysis in this study is the "grade cohort," defined as all the students in a school who are in the same grade. By this definition, there are 39 grade cohorts in the sample (one school includes grades 6 through 8 only).

The grade cohort is a theoretically meaningful social grouping at the middle school level, as students move from classroom to classroom throughout the day but oftentimes share the same team of teachers and are spatially segregated in the school building from other grades (Farrel, Henry, Schoeny, Bettencourt, & Tolan, 2010; Simmons, Carlton-Ford, & Blyth, 1987). In the sample district, specific teacher teams are responsible for instruction at each grade level. Further, students at different grade levels are intentionally segregated within the school building and have unique lunch and recess periods. Previous empirical work has also shown that for many educational outcomes, more variance is attributable to grade cohorts than to schools (Voight, Nixon, & Nation, 2011).

The sample schools are characterized by high proportions of low-income students. The mean rate of free- or reduced-priced lunch eligibility (FRPL) is 78% in the 39 grade cohorts, with 24 of the grade cohorts evincing FRPL rates above 90%. The average

sample grade cohort is 39% Black, 33% White, 22% Latino/a, and less than 6% another

race. The average grade-cohort size in the sample is 99 students.

Measures and Procedure

Data were derived from two sources, (a) a student self-report survey that was

completed by all students in attendance at the 11 sample schools on the day of survey

administration and (b) district administrative records for all students, access to which was

granted via a cooperative agreement between the district and the research team.

Independent variables. Youth civic engagement is the primary predictor variable

of interest. This study uses latent class analysis (LCA) to treat civic engagement as a

latent categorical variable, which accounts for the possibility of qualitatively different

types of engagement. The civic items used to determine the latent class structure are

listed in full in Appendix A and are borrowed from the civic engagement instrument

designed by Bobek and colleagues (2009) for use with middle-school students.

Behavioral items gauged the frequency of activity involvement and were measured using

four-point Likert scales (1 = "Never"; 2 = "Once or twice"; 3 = "3-5 times"; 4 = "6 or

more times"). Attitudinal items also used four-point Likert responses in asking students

about the importance of (1 = "Not important at all"; 2 = "Somewhat important"; 3 =

"Important"; 4 = "Very important") and their agreement or disagreement (1 = "Strongly

disagree"; 2 = "Disagree"; 3 = "Agree"; 4 = "Strongly agree") with various sociopolitical

ideals, such as "It is important for me to contribute to my community and society."

A previous study (Voight, 2012) identified three latent classes of civic

engagement among urban middle school students. Those classes are used here. The first

class, "bystanders," had the lowest or near-lowest probability of frequent (i.e., three or

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more times) involvement in all nine civic behaviors and the lowest probability of

agreement (i.e., "important" or "very important" or "agree" or "strongly agree") with all

seven civic attitudes. The second class, "sympathists," had the lowest or near-lowest

probability of frequent involvement in all of the behaviors but the highest probability of

agreement with almost all of the civic attitudes. The third class, "actors," had the highest

probability of frequent involvement in all nine behaviors and the highest or near-highest

probability of agreement with all of the attitudinal items. The relative rankings on the

behavioral and attitudinal items for each class are shown in Figure 7.
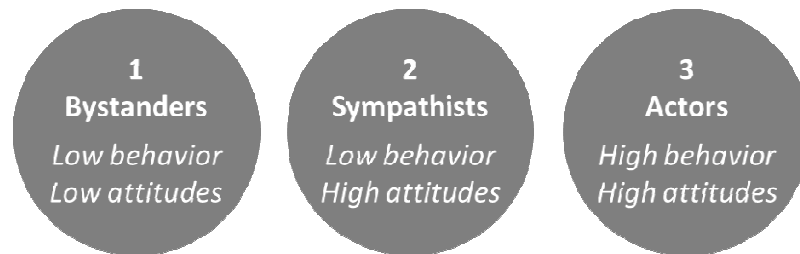
Figure 7. Relative rankings of latent civic classes on behavioral and attitudinal civic items

Each student, based on her or his observed item responses, has a probability of

membership in each of the three classes, which sums to 1 across the three classes. Based

on the class for which students have the highest probability of membership (i.e., their

modal class assignment), there is a roughly even split across the three class: 1,152

bystanders (31%), 1,309 sympathists (32%), and 1,418 actors (36%). The classification

certainty is high. For students whose modal class assignment is bystanders, their average

probability of membership in that class is 0.92, for sympathists it is 0.87, and for actors

0.91. This suggests that there is a high probability that students are correctly classified

based on modal class assignment.

Civic engagement is also treated as a grade-cohort-level variable in this study. For each grade cohort, three aggregate civic-engagement variables were calculated to indicate the respective proportion of the cohort that is bystanders, sympathists, and actors. In order to account for the error in student civic class assignment noted in the paragraph above, students were weighted in the calculation of these aggregates based on their probability of class membership, so that each class aggregate for each cohort is a mean posterior probability. For each cohort, the weighted proportion of bystanders, sympathists, and actors sums to one. The proportion of a grade cohort that is bystanders, sympathists, and actors is referred to herein as bystander share ($M = 0.31$, $SD = 0.09$), sympathist share ($M = 0.32$, $SD = 0.07$), and actor share ($M = 0.36$, $SD = 0.09$), respectively.

Other cohort-level predictor variables were taken from district records for use as controls to isolate the effect of civic engagement on the outcomes. These variables include grade level ($M = 6.54$, $SD = 1.12$) and the proportion of cohort students who are male ($M = 0.50$, $SD = 0.05$), Black ($M = 0.47$, $SD = 0.23$), Latino/a ($M = 0.20$, $SD = 0.16$), and eligible for FRPL ($M = 0.81$, $SD = 0.21$).

Dependent variables. There are nine outcome variables overall. Five were drawn from the student survey and are related to school climate: (1) student engagement (constructed from nine survey items, $\alpha = 0.72$, $M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.58$), (2) bullying victimization (six items, $\alpha = 0.78$, $M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.57$), students' perceptions of (3) positive (four items, $\alpha = 0.77$, $M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.81$) and (4) negative (four items, $\alpha = 0.84$, $M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.91$) peer relationships and (5) teacher-student relationships (nine items, $\alpha = 0.80$, $M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.71$). All items were measured using four- and five-

point Likert scales[2]. These constructs are analyzed as outcome variables in their own right and also as mediators of four additional outcome variables derived from administrative records: (6) math ($M = 44.47$, $SD = 19.44$) and (7) reading ($M = 42.06$, $SD = 19.84$) state standardized test scores (measures in normal curve equivalents or NCEs), (8) attendance (i.e., number of days in school, $M = 155.45$, $SD = 18.19$), and (9) office discipline referrals ($M = 1.73$, $SD = 3.30$). These four variables are herein referred to as a group as "educational outcomes."

Analyses

A series of multilevel models were estimated in three steps. Each model includes a cohort-level predictor variable representing actor, sympathist, or bystander share[3]. The first set of models treats cohort-level civic engagement as a predictor of each of the four educational outcomes. The second set of models treats cohort-level civic engagement as a predictor of school climate. The third set of models examines how school climate may mediate the effect of cohort-level civic engagement on educational outcomes. The models are described below, elaborated with both equations and figural diagrams.

All models include student-level civic class membership alongside the cohort-level predictor variable. This specification allows for an interpretation of compositional setting-level effects adjusting for the effect of the individual on her or his personal outcome (Maton, 1989; Shinn, 1990). This is important because—as detailed above—there are documented benefits of civic engagement (e.g., academic achievement) to individual youth who are engaged, and thus one must be able to rule out that any

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[2] A full list of items used to construct these variables is given in Appendix A.
[3] All three models are estimated using multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) in Mplus 6. Mplus uses full information maximum likelihood (FIML) to address missing data, using data from all cases for which there is at least one value on any of the dependent variables in the model.

significant associations between setting-level civic engagement and setting-level

outcomes (e.g., average academic achievement) are not merely an artifact of a higher

proportion of civically engaged individuals. It would make sense, for example, that a

school would have a higher level of achievement if it served more civically engaged

students who are themselves higher achievers—this does not help us to understand

whether civic engagement has an effect beyond that which it imparts to the individual

participant.

Step 1: Cohort-level civic engagement predicting educational outcomes. The

outcome variables are four criteria for which schools are often held accountable to state

and federal education departments: math and reading achievement, attendance, and

disciplinary referrals. In all, 12 models were estimated—one for each combination of the

three civic engagement types and four educational outcomes. All models were estimated

using the generic two-level equation:

$$y_{ic} = \beta_{0c} + \beta_{1c}(civic\ class\ K)_{ic} + \varepsilon_{ic} \tag{1}$$

$$\beta_{0c} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(civic\ class\ K\ share)_c + \boldsymbol{\gamma'_{02}X_c} + \zeta_c$$

$$\beta_{1c} = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\varepsilon_{ic} \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$$

$$\zeta \sim N(0, \psi)$$

where y_{ic} is the outcome variable (i.e., math score, reading score, attendance, or

discipline referrals) for student i in grade cohort c. β_{0c} is the intercept for grade cohort c,

or mean level of the outcome variable when controlling for student i's civic engagement

type, $(civic\ class\ K)_{ic}$, and assuming random error, ε_{ic}. β_{0c} is subscripted with a c

because the mean level of the outcome variable varies across grade cohorts. In the grade-

cohort-level equation, the share of the cohort that is civic class K helps to explain this variance. The estimated slope for this variable γ_{01} is the main parameter of interest. The grade-cohort-level covariate vector, $\boldsymbol{X_c}$, represents a vector of control variables, including cohort-aggregate race, gender, and FRPL and grade level, and ζ_c is a cohort-level random error term. A conceptual model for Step 1 is shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Conceptual model of grade-cohort-level civic engagement predicting educational outcomes.
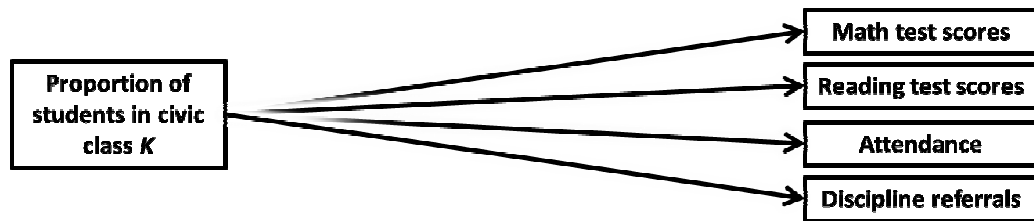
Step 2: Cohort-level civic engagement predicting school climate. The second set of three models are similar to those described above, but the four educational outcome variables are replaced with the five school-climate-related survey constructs: positive peer relationships, negative peer relationships, teacher-student relationships, student engagement, and victimization. Due to the high number of estimated parameters in this model, these school-climate constructs were treated as observed student-level variables. That is, a measurement model was not estimated to determine the factor loadings of individual survey items on the latent construct, and error associated with generating these latent constructs is not taken into account in the structural model. The generic equation for these three models is:

$$SC_{ic} = \beta_{0c} + \beta_{1c}(civic\ class\ K)_{ic} + \varepsilon_{ic} \tag{2}$$

$$\beta_{0c} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(civic\ class\ K\ share)_c + \gamma'_{02}X_c + \zeta_c$$

$$\beta_{1c} = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\varepsilon_{ic} \sim N\left(\begin{pmatrix}0\\0\\0\\0\\0\end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix}\sigma_1^2 & & & & \\ & \sigma_2^2 & & & \\ & & \sigma_3^2 & & \\ & & & \sigma_4^2 & \\ & & & & \sigma_5^2\end{pmatrix}\right) \quad \zeta_c \sim N\left(\begin{pmatrix}0\\0\\0\\0\\0\end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix}\zeta_1 & & & & \\ & \zeta_2 & & & \\ & & \zeta_3 & & \\ & & & \zeta_4 & \\ & & & & \zeta_5\end{pmatrix}\right)$$

where y_{ic} is a vector of the five observed school-climate outcomes for student i in cohort c. A conceptual model for Step 2 is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Conceptual model of grade-cohort-level civic engagement predicting school climate.
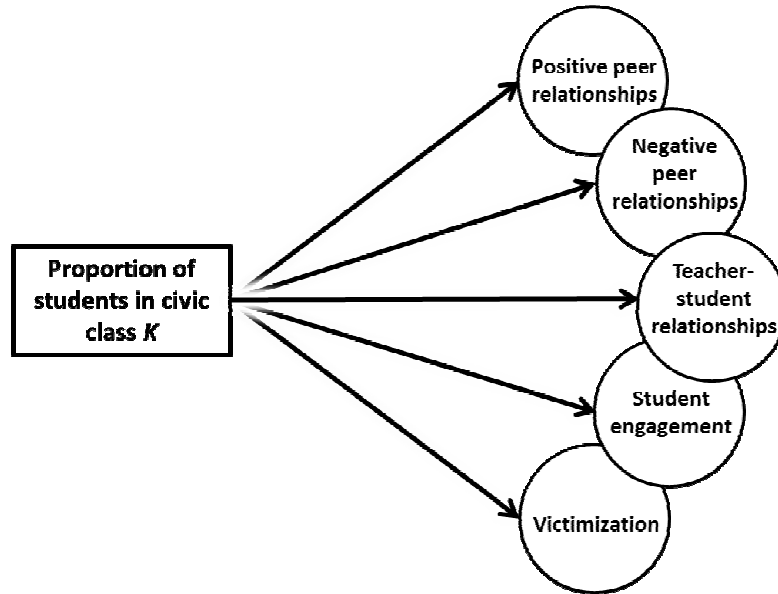
Step 3: School climate as a mediator of the effect of cohort-level civic engagement on educational outcomes. The third set of models takes advantage of the SEM framework to model the five school climate variables as mediators of the relationship between cohort-level civic engagement and the four educational outcomes. Preacher, Zyphur, and Zhang (2010) promote an SEM framework for multilevel mediation modeling as an

improvement over traditional approaches as it attenuates bias and allows for the

simultaneous modeling of multiple dependent variables. The path diagram for these three

models is depicted in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Conceptual model of grade-cohort-level civic engagement predicting educational outcomes, mediated by school climate
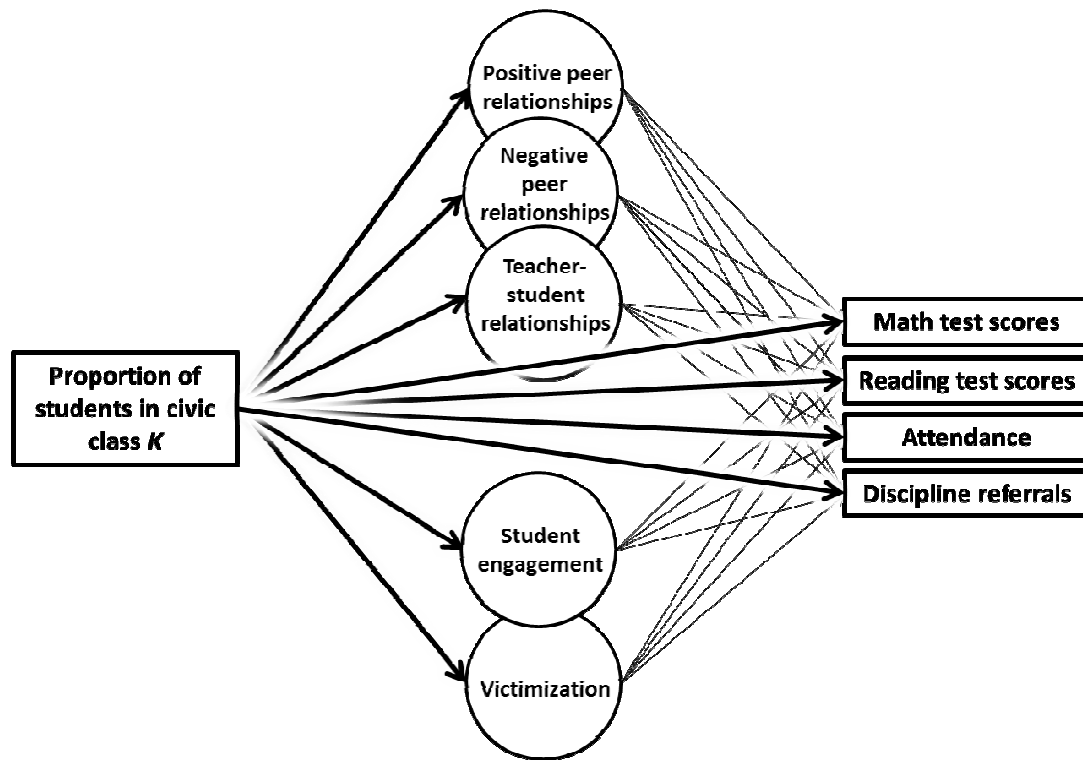
As in Step 1, 12 separate models were estimated, one for each combination of the three

civic engagement types and the four educational outcome variables.

These models have three components, all estimated simultaneously. First, school climate

is regressed onto civic class *K* share, using equation (2) from Step 2. Second, the

educational outcome is regressed onto the five school-climate variables and civic class *K*

share using the two-level equation:

$$y_{ic} = \beta_{0c} + \beta_{1c}(civic\ class\ K)_{ic} + \varepsilon_{ic} \qquad\qquad (3)$$

$$\beta_{0c} = \gamma_{00} + \boldsymbol{\gamma'_{01}}\boldsymbol{SC_c} + \gamma_{02}(civic\ class\ K\ share)_c + \boldsymbol{\gamma'_{03}}\boldsymbol{X_c} + \zeta_c$$

$$\boldsymbol{\beta_{1c} = \gamma_{10}}$$

$$\varepsilon_{ic} \sim N(0,\sigma^2)$$

$$\zeta \sim N(0,\psi)$$

where the student level equation is identical to the equation in Step 1 and the grade-cohort level equation includes a vector, $\boldsymbol{SC_c}$, representing the five school-climate variables. The third component involves the calculation of indirect effects of cohort civic engagement on educational outcomes, mediated through school climate by taking each combination of the product of γ_{01} from equation (2) and $\boldsymbol{\gamma'_{01}}$ from equation (3)[4]. The indirect effect is the main estimate of interest in Step 3.

Results

The results are organized around the three models described above, preceded by a presentation of the correlations between cohort-level variables in Table 7. Bystander share is correlated in an unfavorable manner with all the outcome variables. For example, it has a negative association with math test scores ($r = -0.54$) and a positive association with discipline referrals ($r = 0.56$). Sympathist share, conversely, has a favorable relationship with all of the outcomes. Actor share has a favorable relationship with all outcomes except for negative peer relationships ($r = 0.05$) and victimization ($r = 0.34$).

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[4] For the calculation of the standard error of this indirect effect coefficient, see Preacher, Zyphur, and Zhang (2010).

Table 7. Correlations among cohort-level variables (N = 39).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Bystander share											
2. Sympathist share	-.30										
3. Actor share	-.70	-.46									
4. Math scores	-.54	.29	.29								
5. Reading scores	-.46	.27	.23	.88							
6. Attendance	-.46	.16	.31	.69	.59						
7. Discipline referrals	.56	-.28	-.31	-.66	-.65	-.66					
8. Positive peer rel.	-.38	.23	.18	.06	.01	.17	-.29				
9. Negative peer rel.	.19	-.31	.05	-.31	-.23	-.26	.32	-.38			
10. Teacher-student rel.	-.53	-.01	.49	-.07	-.22	.06	-.26	.53	-.07		
11. Student engagement	-.74	.18	.55	.56	.49	.39	-.56	.42	-.05	.49	
12. Victimization	.00	-.46	.34	-.39	-.38	-.15	.21	-.15	.53	.27	-.13

Step 1: Cohort-Level Civic Engagement Predicting Educational Outcomes

The multilevel regression results suggest that the proportion of civically engaged students in a grade cohort has significant implications for achievement, attendance, and problem behavior (see Table 8). The coefficients for the cohort-level civic engagement variables can be interpreted as such: the expected change in the outcome associated with a 1-unit increase in the proportion of cohort students of the specified civic type. In other words, if the cohort-level variable is bystander share, the coefficient would reflect change brought about in the outcome from adding more bystanders to a cohort, relative to either sympathists or actors.

Math test scores. Cohorts with more actors have significantly higher math scores, even when controlling for the higher math scores of the actors themselves and cohort demographics ($\gamma = 21.61$, $p < .01$). This implies that moving a student from a cohort made up of 15% actors (the lowest in the study sample) to a cohort made up of 57% actors (the highest in the sample) would be associated with a 9.07 NCE increase in her or his math score. For reference, in Tennessee, the state in which the present research was conducted, it is considered "exceptional" by the state department of education in their

value-added assessment for a middle school to increase its average math score by 1.5

NCEs from one year to the next (Tennessee Department of Education, 2009).

Conversely, cohorts with a larger proportion of bystanders have lower math

scores ($\gamma = $ -20.52, $p < .10$). This effect is only marginally significant, but it suggests

that a ten percentage-point increase in bystanders in a cohort is associated with a drop in

average math scores of 2.05 NCEs. Cohorts with more bystanders appear to be lower

achieving, even when controlling for demographics and for the lower math scores of

bystanders themselves.

Attendance. The results suggest that more actors in a cohort are also associated

with better attendance ($\gamma = 10.24$, $p < .01$). Using the same illustration from above, this

finding suggests that moving a student from a cohort of 15% actors to one of 57% actors

would bring with it an expected increase of 4.30 days of school attended. There is a

marginally significant negative effect of sympathist share on attendance ($\gamma = -8.87$, $p <$

.10), implying that a 10 percentage-point increase in sympathists is associated with

roughly one more absence per year for the average student.

Table 8. Compositional effects of civic engagement on student educational outcomes.

	Bystander share		Sympathist share		Actor share	
Outcome	β	*SE*	β	*SE*	β	*SE*
Step 1						
Math test scores	-20.52[+]	10.65	-3.84	11.91	21.61[**]	8.24
Reading test scores	-10.19	9.24	1.96	10.74	9.87	7.28
Attendance	-6.75	4.59	-8.87[+]	5.23	10.24[**]	3.92
Discipline referrals	1.38	1.76	-1.74	2.62	-0.22	1.76
Step 2						
Positive peer relationships	-0.10	0.28	0.12	0.28	-0.03	0.31
Negative peer relationships	0.72	0.52	0.08	0.54	-0.77	0.50
Teacher-student relationships	-0.86[*]	0.35	0.24	0.43	0.61	0.47
Student engagement	-0.35	0.29	0.29	0.27	0.12	0.36
Victimization	0.24	0.46	-0.18	0.27	-0.16	0.53

Note: At the student level, the student civic engagement types is included as a control; at the cohort level, the variables Black, Latino/a, FRPL, and male proportions and grade level are included as controls.

There are no significant associations of the grade-cohort civic engagement variables with reading scores or with discipline referrals. The results imply that these outcomes are not meaningfully connected to aggregate civic engagement.

Step 2: Cohort-Level Civic Engagement Predicting School Climate

The results of the multilevel regressions of school climate on cohort civic engagement are largely insignificant (see Table 8). The only finding of significance is that more bystanders in a cohort is equated with poorer relationships between teachers and students ($\gamma = -0.86$, $p < .05$). This suggests that there is a 0.42 standard-deviation-unit difference in teacher-student relationships between a cohort with the lowest proportion of bystanders in the sample (11%) and one with the highest (46%). In other words, more sympathists or actors in a cohort is associated with better teacher-student relationships.

Table 9. Indirect compositional effects of civic engagement on student educational outcomes, mediated through school climate indicators.

Covariate	Math test scores		Reading test scores		Attendance		Discipline referrals	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Bystander share, direct effect	-42.80	44.05	8.31	53.24	-12.78	14.84	-1.82	9.72
Indirect effect through:								
- Positive peer relationships	30.95	28.38	-12.47	48.22	1.76	11.78	4.15	7.17
- Negative peer relationships	2.82	6.30	-5.09	4.64	-0.26	1.98	-0.46	1.13
- Teacher-student relation.	0.30	14.06	23.89	18.08	-0.78	6.86	1.82	3.97
- Student engagement	-32.58[+]	18.87	-22.12	26.60	6.82	10.12	2.52	7.97
- Victimization	-21.19	29.10	-0.99	42.30	1.67	8.02	5.02	5.92
Sympathist share, direct effect	-20.85	24.38	8.68	14.60	-12.66[+]	7.59	-4.14	4.93
Indirect effect through:								
- Positive peer relationships	2.58	18.15	-1.05	10.89	0.13	1.25	0.31	2.53
- Negative peer relationships	1.98	4.19	-3.09	4.05	0.25	1.10	-0.05	0.46
- Teacher-student relation.	1.54	4.16	-6.38	8.78	1.31	2.46	-0.31	1.04
- Student engagement	20.44	19.87	9.39	13.30	0.51	3.05	-0.53	2.14
- Victimization	7.87	17.04	2.29	14.82	-1.72	5.25	-2.65	5.27
Actor share, direct effect	60.30	37.68	-14.77	66.82	16.94[+]	9.84	4.52	5.31
Indirect effect through:								
- Positive peer relationships	-34.63	25.15	15.76	60.64	-2.90	9.56	-4.61	5.46
- Negative peer relationships	-5.62	8.14	6.98	6.35	0.27	1.43	0.40	1.20
- Teacher-student relation.	-0.76	9.40	-13.12	14.42	-0.81	4.20	-1.75	2.06
- Student engagement	14.55	12.51	12.59	13.20	-2.54	3.03	-1.58	2.72
- Victimization	12.33	21.36	2.36	27.63	-1.76	4.17	-3.21	3.19

Step 3: School climate as a mediator of the effect of cohort-level civic engagement on educational outcomes.

There is little evidence, in general, that school climate mediates the relationship between cohort civic engagement and educational outcomes. Table 9 shows that negative effect of bystander share on math scores is partially mediated by student engagement, but this finding is only marginally significant ($\gamma = -32.58$, $p < .10$). The implication is that more bystander students in a cohort is associated with lower average student engagement, which in turn produces lower math scores. Stated conversely, more sympathists and actors is associated with higher student engagement and, indirectly, high math scores. Moving a student from a cohort with the most bystanders to one with the fewest is associated with a 11.40 increase in math score NCEs due to the increase in that student's engagement. There is little evidence to support other indirect effects.

Discussion

This study put to the empirical test the notion that youth civic engagement is good for schools. The findings are mixed. The presence of more actors—or students who are highly involved in civic activities and strongly endorse civic values—in a grade-level cohort corresponds to better overall math achievement and attendance. Actors themselves have better math scores (Voight, 2012), but even when controlling for the increased scores that these students bring with them, the cohort-level finding still stands. More bystanders—or students who are less involved and have weaker civic attitudes—equates to lower student engagement and, in effect, math achievement and poorer relationships between teachers and students.

A third group of students who are not regularly involved in civic activities but who do strongly endorse civic values of justice, equality, and personal responsibility—sympathists—did not seem to have a significant association with setting-level outcomes on the aggregate. Overall, however, one could conclude that educational settings are better off when they include more civically engaged students.

One unexpected finding bears further consideration. First, there is a significant association of actor share with average cohort math achievement and attendance. This makes sense in light of the study introduction, as students who are involved in civic activities are those most likely to build relationships, practice civic skills, and gain self-efficacy. However, the finding that this actor-share effect is not mediated through school climate leaves one to question how exactly having more actors around may bring about these outcomes (if we are to assume to theoretical directionality implied at the outset of this study). Something about students who are heavily involved correlates with an educational setting that produces overall better achievement and attendance—that something, however, does not appear to include school-climate-related phenomena.

The indirect effect of bystander share on math achievement, through student engagement may help shed light on this connection. More actors *or* sympathists in a cohort appears to be associated with higher student engagement, which is in turn associated with higher math scores. This supports the notion of a radiating effect of civically engaged (either behaviorally or attitudinally) students on their peers. Engaged students may serve as role models for their peers, potentially altering the prevailing social norm to one characterized by motivation and self-efficacy.

It is notable that sympathist share is related to lower attendance in a way that trends toward significance. Sympathists may be most akin to the critically aware but inactive youth described by Fine (1991). That work suggested that youth who understand issues of justice and equality, but find little recourse to address them, are more likely to drop out of school. A mass of such students in one setting may somehow contribute to a climate of helplessness or disengagement.

Limitations and Future Research

Care has been given throughout this report to describe the findings as "associations" rather than "causes" or "effects." The theoretical framework presented at the outset makes the case for how group-level civic engagement has the potential to change settings, but the analysis are unable to empirically support such causality. Model control variables help to account for third-variable explanations for both civic engagement and educational outcomes, but other omitted variables may still confound the results. The directionality of the civic engagement-educational outcomes association could also be questioned.

Additionally, the low number of grade cohorts in the analysis inflated random error and limited the ability to detect significant findings. There are interesting trends in the data that cannot be safely interpreted due to the amount of noise. A larger sample size of grade cohorts or schools would allow for a more powerful analysis. This study represents a novel approach to empirically investigating the role of civic engagement on setting-level achievement, attendance, and behavior. Future work could add more setting-level units and take measure to allow more causal assertiveness.

Practical Implications

Given the above caveats, practical considerations of this study should be drawn with caution. However, the somewhat exploratory findings suggest that having more civically involved and conscious students in a setting may be good for academic health and having more students who are neither of these things may be bad.

There are many things that schools can do to help students become more civically engaged. Promoting service-learning, volunteering, and leadership in the curriculum are becoming increasingly common practices (Conway et al., 2009; Flanagan, 2004). Some schools are also creating space for students to participate in school improvement through student-voice initiatives that allow students to help in the process of identifying problems and planning for action (Benard & Slade, 2009; Cook-Sather, 2006). Finding opportunities for meaningful youth participation should be a priority for schools.

How to best engage youth in the civic life of their schools and communities remains an open question. The Department of Education (2012), in the report referenced at the outset of this study lays out nine steps to advance civic learning and democratic engagement that includes measures to identify "what works" in civic-engagement programming and practice. The renewed focus on civic learning is moving ahead on the research and practice fronts. This study helps with former, providing evidence that student civic engagement may be good for educational settings.

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Appendix B. Student survey items and associated constructs.

Civic behavior (nine items)
Response options: *0 = "Never", 1 = "Once or twice", 2 = "3-5 times", 4 = 6 or more times"*
How often have you…
    10. …offered to help someone at school?
    11. …been a leader in a club or group at school?
    12. …participated in school government?
    13. …helped make your school a better place?
    14. …participated in an afterschool activity at your school?
    15. …helped someone in your neighborhood?
    16. …helped out at your church, synagogue, or other place of worship?
    17. …been a leader in a group or club in your neighborhood?
    18. …helped make your neighborhood a better place for people to live?

Civic attitudes (12 items)
Response options: *1 = "Not important at all", 2 = "Somewhat important", 3 = "Important", 4 = "Very important"*
How important is…
    8. …helping to reduce hunger and poverty in the world?
    9. …helping to make the world a better place to live in?
    10. …helping to make sure all people are treated fairly?
    11. …helping other people?
    12. …speaking up for equality (everyone should have the same rights and opportunities)?
Response options: *1 = "Strongly disagree", 2 = "Disagree", 3 = "Agree", 4 = "Strongly agree"*
    13. I believe I can make a difference in my community.
    14. It's not really my problem if my neighbors are in trouble and need help.*

School engagement (nine items, α = .74)
Response options: *1 = "Never", 2 = "Hardly ever", 3 = "Sometimes", 4 = "Most of the time", 5 = "Always"*
    1. I try to do well in school.
    2. When I'm in class, I work as hard as I can.
    3. I pay attention in class.
    4. When I'm in class, I listen very carefully.
    5. When I'm in class, I pretend like I'm working.*
    6. I don't try very hard at school.*
    7. In class, I only work as much as I have to so that I don't get in trouble.*
    8. When I'm in class, I think about other things.*

Bullying victimization (six items, α = .77)
Response options: *0 = "Never", 1 = "Once or twice", 2 = "3-5 times", 4 = 6 or more times"*
How often…
1. …has another kid bullied you by pushing or fighting?
2. …has another kid bullied you by saying mean things or spreading rumors?
3. …has another kid used cell phone pictures to bully you?
4. …did another kid try to keep others from liking you by saying mean things about you or spreading rumors?
5. …has anyone at school threatened to beat you up or hurt you if you didn't give them your money or something else that belonged to you?
6. …have you brought something to school to protect yourself?

Perception of positive peer relationships (four items, α = .77)
Response options: *1 = "Never", 2 = "Hardly ever", 3 = "Sometimes", 4 = "Most of the time", 5 = "Always"*
1. Students in this school are mean to each other.
2. In classes, students find it hard to get along with each other.
3. There are students in the school who pick on other students.
4. Students in this school feel that students are too mean to them.

Perception of negative peer relationships (four items, α = .84)
Response options: *1 = "Never", 2 = "Hardly ever", 3 = "Sometimes", 4 = "Most of the time", 5 = "Always"*
1. Students get to know each other well in classes.
2. Students in this school are very interested in getting to know other students.
3. Students enjoy doing things with each other in school activities.
4. Students enjoy working together on projects in classes.

Perception of teacher-student relationships (nine items, α = .80)
Response options: *1 = "Never", 2 = "Hardly ever", 3 = "Sometimes", 4 = "Most of the time", 5 = "Always"*
1. Teachers go out of their way to help students.
2. If students want to talk about something teachers will find time to do it.
3. Students really enjoy their classes.
4. If some students are acting up in class the teacher will do something about it.
5. Students understand what will happen to them if they break a rule.
6. Teachers make a point of sticking to the rules in classes.
7. In our school, students are given the chance to help make decisions.
8. Students get to help decide some of the rules in this school.
9. Teachers ask students what they want to learn about.

* Item is reverse-coded

CHAPTER IV

STUDENT VOICE FOR SCHOOL-CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT: A CASE STUDY

> It occurred to me that we had not been listening much to children in these recent years of "summit conferences" on education, of severe reports and ominous prescriptions. The voices of children, frankly, had been missing from the whole discussion. This seems especially unfortunate because the children often are more interesting and perceptive than the grown-ups about the day-to-day realities of life in school (Kozol, 1991).

Many urban schools are not working for their students, and educators are consequently getting innovative. Amid dissatisfaction with testing-, choice-, and curriculum-based solutions to the problems of urban education, a growing movement is advocating for approaches that target school climate, which refers to a variety of social, emotional, and physical aspects of the school environment. There is strong evidence to suggest that these factors are associated with academic and other developmental outcomes for urban students (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). Common approaches for improving school climate include, on the one hand, staff-based interventions that emphasize professional development and the cooperative installation of behavior management systems (see Center on Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, 2004), and, on the other hand, student-based interventions that emphasize teaching students skills conducive to positive social relationships (see CASEL, 2003). Both of these strategies—staff-based and student-based—are primarily initiated and managed by adults. This study explores

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how students can exercise voice and be centrally engaged in improving their school's climate using the example of a specific initiative in an urban middle school.

School Climate and Socioemotional Interventions

The social environment is increasingly being recognized as an important part of the equation to improving urban schools. Educational researchers have long used the metaphor of the instructional triangle to understand the educational process and depict the dynamic relationship between student, teacher, and subject matter. Thinkers in the tradition of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory—including many community psychologists and sociologists of education—would argue that this triangle is embedded in a social context that affects how it functions and thus how students learn and grow. Part of young people's social contexts includes their schools, and the school context has come to be known by some as school climate.

School climate was a topic of early interest to community psychology, most notably with Trickett and Moos' (1973, 1974) pioneering research and instrumentation. In the intervening years, it has become a more mainstream concept in the education world. According to the National School Climate Center (2007), school climate refers to "people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (p. 5). Cohen and colleagues (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009) have proposed four specific dimensions of school climate, based on a synthesis of research on the topic: (a) safety, (b) teaching and learning, (c) relationships, and (d) institutional environment. There is a substantial body of empirical evidence to suggest that a positive school

climate, based on these four dimensions, is associated with higher levels of student achievement, attendance, and prosocial behaviors (for a review, see Cohen et al., 2009).

There are several commonly employed strategies for school-climate improvement. Among them are School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports (SWPBS) and Social Emotional Learning (SEL). SWPBS involves all school staff in the installation of a behavior management system that incentives prosocial student conduct, institutionalizes consistent and proactive classroom management strategies, and emphasizes professional development (Center on Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, 2004). SWPBS draws from behaviorism theory and posits that setting and consistently enforcing rules and expectations, teaching students appropriate behavior, and positively reinforcing that behavior will lead to a healthier school climate.

Whereas staff development and school policy are the focus of SWPBS, SEL makes student development central. SEL employs classroom social-skill instruction along with activities that give students opportunities to apply the skills they have learned. This approach is grounded in social-cognitive theory, with the underlying assumption that student behavior is mediated by context-dependent cognitions and emotions. These cognitions and emotions are then the target of change. Osher and colleagues (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010) compare and contrasts SWPBS and SEL in a recent review.

An element that is underemphasized or neglected in these and other conventional approaches to improving school climate is meaningful student participation. This, I argue below, is a missed opportunity, as youth participation has the potential to, at once, effect change in climate-related outcomes, facilitate the positive development of individual

youth, and uphold an ethic of democratic citizenship. Research on student voice and youth civic engagement, reviewed below, helps to reconcile school climate intervention with student engagement and participation.

Student Voice and Civic Engagement

Among the benefits of a positive school climate is an association with a higher level of student civic engagement (Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gallay, 2007; Flanagan & Stout, 2010; Torney-Purta, 2002). Indeed, by many accounts, civic learning is a key goal for school-climate improvement (Cohen, 2006). The presumed directionality of this relationship typically implies that a positive school climate promotes student civic development. However, according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, the dynamic between structure (i.e., school climate) and agency (i.e., student civic engagement) may be reciprocal. Engaged youth may also be able to promote a positive school climate. The conceptual argument for youth civic engagement to affect school climate was recently spelled out in a report by the Civic Mission of Schools (Gould, 2011).

How does this happen? How can engaged youth change school climate? These questions are the focus of the present study. Extant theory on youth civic engagement suggests three potential pathways: (1) direct action through which youth work together to leverage change in school policy and practice; (2) strengthened relationships amongst students and between students and teachers that result from shared experience in school-based civic activities; and (3) an aggregation of students who become more socially and emotionally competent individuals through civic engagement. The first pathway is characteristic of youth organizing, in which young people use research, political analysis,

and direct action to alter power relations and create change in their local settings and institutions (Ginwright & James, 2002; Listen Inc., 2003). The second pathway may also indirectly derive from youth organizing efforts, and may be characteristic of other, more general, student voice efforts that include young people in school improvement processes with adults. The third pathway does not require that youth are necessarily involved in school-based activities but rather assumes—in the same spirit as the SEL approach described above—that they develop socioemotional competencies in the course of any civic engagement, and that a school's climate will necessarily improve when there are more of such youth among the student body, particularly if a prevailing prosocial norm is established.

Pathway #1: Direct action and youth organizing. Youth-led organizing efforts target a specific systemic issue, gather information on the issue, and use it to put pressure on those who have decision-making power (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Listen Inc., 2003). The direct effects of youth organizing on settings are evident when youth are successful in addressing their target issue. There are a growing number of case studies that document such accomplishments. In terms of public school reform, youth organizing efforts have secured additional district resources for facilities improvement, college preparatory classes, and improved high-stakes testing practice (Shah & Mediratta, 2008) and have demanded a district-wide response to violence (Dzurinko, McCants, & Stith, 2011; Warren, Mira, & Nikundiwe, 2008), the tracking of English-language learners (Speer, 2008), and racial achievement gaps (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). The growing body of evidence suggests that young people, working in concert and using social action tactics, have the ability to effect change in their school environments.

Pathway #2: Relationships and social networks. Qualitative work that documents intentional efforts to include students in school improvement has shown that such youth engagement improves teaching and learning, peer relationships, and teacher-student relationships (Fielding, 2001b; Mitra, 2003; Soo Hoo, 1993). The idea that youth engagement helps build relationships and improves organizational effectiveness echoes the logic of political scientists who have argued that greater local democratic participation and dialogue strengthen social networks, clarify public needs, and improve institutional functioning (Putnam, 1993). This logic is at home in community psychology. Tseng and Seidman (2007) proposed a theoretical model for setting change in which social processes are the fundamental mediating mechanism. This model is helpful in explicating how youth civic engagement can effect school-climate change in a more indirect fashion than the targeted approach of an organizing campaign (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). When youth are engaged in institutional-improvement efforts, they build relationships with others, develop social skills, and gain a sense of efficacy (Kwon, 2006; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). In schools, this may result in students more clearly communicating their needs to teachers and administrators. For example, if students develop prosocial relationships with their peers during the course of a service activity (itself a constituent of school climate), then the larger peer group may be able give representative feedback to teachers on instruction or to administrators on school rules in a more organized fashion.

Pathway #3: Aggregation of individual competencies and social norms. When youth participate in civic activities they become more socially and emotionally competent. Evidence suggests that being involved in service-learning (Conway, Amel, &

Gerwien, 2009) and volunteering (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001) promotes self-esteem and prosocial behavior. Having more students with such characteristics in a school would logically improve the quality of the climate. An aggregation of civically engaged students in a setting may further have a radiating effect on less engaged classmates. Maton (2008) described the radiating effect of empowered members as a potential pathway for setting change. Engaged youth, with their improved social skills and sense of agency and motivation, may serve as models for their peers. This phenomenon has been referred to as "descriptive social norms" in the social psychology literature (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990) and has been articulated as the basis for interventions to improve youth settings (Henry, 2008). Further, it is possible that the socioemotinoal skills that engaged youth develop are transferable from one setting to another. The potential for civic engagement to have an indirect effect on settings has received little empirical attention.
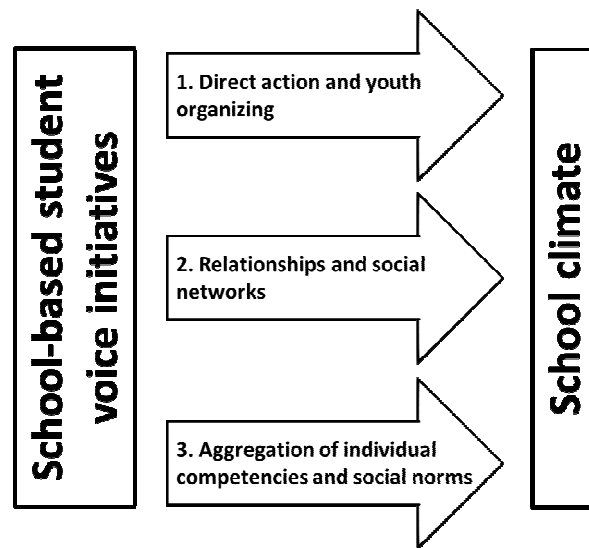
Figure 11. Theoretical pathways through which student voice affects school climate

These three proposed pathways are presented in Figure 11. It is feasible that all three pathways are accessed through a school-based student voice initiative. When

students have voice and power in school decision-making, they may be able to leverage specific policy changes, they may strengthen peer and teacher-student social networks, and they may develop their own individual socioemotional competency. All of these outcomes have the potential to, in turn, improve school climate; indeed, by some measures they are constituent of school climate themselves.

This study explores the validity of these pathways through a case study of an initiative in an urban middle that sought to engage students in school-climate improvement. The fundamental question of interest is "How can students exercising voice in school decision making affect school climate?" The theoretical framework introduced above will serve an organizational heuristic for the investigation. This study further explores the practical considerations of coordinating such a student-voice initiative in a public middle school. Giving youth the power to make institutional change is a delicate issue in public schools, which are historically top-down hierarchical institutions. Some youth organizing participants have experienced retaliation from school administrators in the form of discipline and being barred from having meetings on school premises (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Shah & Mediratta, 2008). As a consequence, most youth-organizing efforts are launched under the auspices of a community-based organizations (Shah & Mediratta, 2008). The practicalities of meaningful youth engagement in school improvement are also illustrated in the present study.

<div align="center">Method</div>

Site and Program

This study was conducted in a public middle school in an urban district in the Southeastern U.S. that is referred to herein by the pseudonym Park Hill Middle School.

<div align="center">123</div>

The school had an enrollment of approximately 400 students at the end of the 2010-2011 school year, according the district website, 88% of whom were Black, 8% White, and 4% Latino/a. There is a large majority of low-income students, as evidenced by 95% of students being eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch. In 2010-11, the school had an attendance rate of 93%, slightly below the district average, and a mobility rate[5] of 44%, much higher than the district average. Park Hill struggles with student discipline and academic achievement—just under half of all students were suspended out of school at least once during the 2010-11 academic year and only 11% and 17% met proficiency standards on statewide math and reading tests, respectively. The school is located in an industrial area of the city, geographically separated from the neighborhoods where students live. This, combined with a shifting of the student body due to recent zoning policy changes, creates special challenges to the social dynamics of Park Hill.

Park Hill was one of four district middle schools to participate in a five-year, federally-funded, youth-violence-prevention project. The main component of the intervention involved the hiring of one new staff person in each school to serve as a school climate coordinator (SCC). Each of the four SCCs performed environmental scans to determine climate-related needs and created logic models to develop a comprehensive intervention. The SCC at Park Hill expressed interest in building in a student-voice component to the broader intervention and, after securing the approval of the school principal, collaborated with the author and a nonprofit service provider to do so.

The core of the student-voice initiative involved the establishment of three teams of students, one each from the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. The teams were composed of eight to ten students who were jointly selected by the SCC and grade-level

[5] Entries and exits after second week of school as a proportion of enrollment

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teacher teams to be representative of students in the school in terms of demographics, academics, and disciplinary behavior. Representative teams were of special concern, as many student voice initiatives have omitted the voices of certain types of students (Fielding, 2001a). Even in the course of extending voice to one marginalized group—students—other marginalized groups (e.g., youth of color, girls, youth with behavior problems) may go unheard.

Each student team met for one hour per week with an outside service provider. Meetings were spent using a structured group-problem-solving process modeled on Freire's (1973) dialogue circles, in which students identified problems in their school environment, diagnosed causes and effects of those problems, and brainstormed possible solutions. A ballot system was used to allow all students in the school to offer input on the most pertinent problems and most promising solutions, and the student teams took these survey results into consideration when deciding which issues and solutions to focus on. After eight weeks, student teams formally presented their ideas to school administrators, concluding with a series of recommendations for school-climate improvement. From there, the teams became more action-oriented, continuing to meet every week but focusing more on the implementation of their recommendations. The initiative ran from October, 2010 until the end of the school year in May, 2011. The author helped with the facilitation of the weekly student team meetings, and this involvement likely made the research less intrusive and the author more credible in the school community, both of which are important considerations in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Sample and Data Collection

This study employs a single-case design to explore the practicalities of the Park Hill student-voice program (SVP) and the pathways through which it may have effected change in the school climate. The unit of analysis is the program, and the SVP is examined holistically using a variety of data sources. This single-case, holistic approach is preferred when examining unique programs and when determining which presupposed theoretical explanations for program effectiveness—if any—may be valid (Yin, 2003).

Multiple sources of evidence are brought to bear in examining the role of the SVP in school climate change. These include participant observation of program activities, interviews with affiliated students and staff, program documentation (e.g., meeting minutes, letters, pre-post questionnaires with student participants), and school administrative data (e.g., student achievement, attendance, and discipline). The use of multiple data sources in a case study triangulates findings in a way that makes the research more valid and cogent (Patton, 1987; Yin, 2003). Each of these data sources are discussed here in greater detail.

As mentioned above, the author was an active participant and helped to facilitate student team meetings and general program logistics. The author took regular notes on the process of the team meetings, student meetings with school administrators and teachers, and organized program activities. Participant observation was a useful data collection technique for documenting the overall evolution of the program as well as the program outcomes. Ongoing observation helped to triangulate and elaborate data derived from interviews, artifacts and administrative records.

Of the thirty students who were part of a SVP grade-level team, a representative group of ten was selected to participate in in-depth interviews with the author at the

conclusion of the academic year to discuss their experience with the SVP. Additionally, two teachers, the SCC, and the school principal were interviewed to capture staff perspectives on the SVP. All interviews were semi-structured in design, were conducted during the school day, and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Interview questions and areas for participant observation were based on concepts derived both from the review of the literature in the introduction to this study and from the author's preliminary fieldwork in the program setting.

In terms of program documentation, the dialogical process used in the student team meetings was recorded on flipchart paper each week. Further, the student teams wrote several letters to teachers and administrators to recommend actions and solicit cooperation on several initiatives. Lastly, a simple pre-post questionnaire was administered to members of the student teams to gauge changes in socioemotional competencies. These program documents were useful artifacts in constructing a holistic picture of the SVP.

Finally, publically available data from all 37 middle schools in the district were used to explore changes in outcomes for Park Hill versus other district schools. These data were available for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years and include school-level measures of achievement on the state standardized tests of math and reading tests, attendance rates, and out-of-school suspension rates. Changes in school-level academic and behavioral quantitative indicators bring another lens to the larger understanding of the SVP's impact.

Anaylsis

The goal of the study is to understand how student voice can influence school climate, and, in the process, begin to develop a theory of how this may occur. To that end, an iterative analytic procedure was used to code and interpret qualitative data. To begin, interview transcripts, participant observation notes, and program documents were coded using an open coding procedure to identify distinct concepts or incidents from the data. A constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was employed to group together concepts and incidents to form higher-level themes related to the process of student voice and its relationship to school climate. The technique of negative case analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was used to identify concepts and incidents that did not fit the resulting thematic framework, helping to safeguard against a drift toward a priori assumptions during this second stage of coding. While a grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis typically eschews an *a priori* theoretical framework, the conclusions of this thematic coding process were juxtaposed with the theoretical pathways proposed in the introduction to the study in order to explore the potential for extant theory to complement and extend the present findings. Corbin and Strauss (2008) offer that this is a useful function of theoretical frameworks for qualitative analysis.

The quantitative data were used to establish whether there were any discernible changes in school-level climate-related outcomes vis-à-vis other district middle schools. A regression point displacement (RPD) design is used toward this end (Linden, Trochim, & Adams, 2006). The RPD is a quasi-experimental method for assessing program effect that is especially suitable for cases where only one site participates in a pilot program. It estimates a regression line of posttest on pretest scores for a group of control sites and

determines if the posttest score of the program site significantly deviates from that regression line.

The pre- and posttest variables employed here are schools' (1) attendance rate, (2) the percent of students who were suspended out of school, and the percent of students proficient on the state standardized tests of (3) math and (4) reading achievement. The following equation is used to model the RPD:

$$Y_s = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_s + \beta_2 Z_s + \varepsilon_s$$

where *Y* is the 2010-11 indicator for school *s*, *X* is the 2009-10 value of the indicator for school *s*, and *Z* is a binary variable coded "1" for Park Hill and "0" for the other 36 district middle schools. The coefficient β_2 indicates program effect.

Results

The presentation of findings are organized in such a fashion that the quantitative results are discussed first, followed by those of the qualitative analysis. This serves to tell the story starting with a rough sketch of changes in school-level indicators over the course of the SVP and concluding with a rich, in-depth exploration of the workings of the program and its influence on the climate of Park Hill. Qualitative results are first discussed in relation to each of the three pathways through which student voice may affect school climate identified in the introduction to this study: (a) direct action, (b) relationships, and (c) social norms. Other themes that emerged regarding school climate change are then discussed, followed by issues surrounding the implementation of student voice initiatives in public schools.
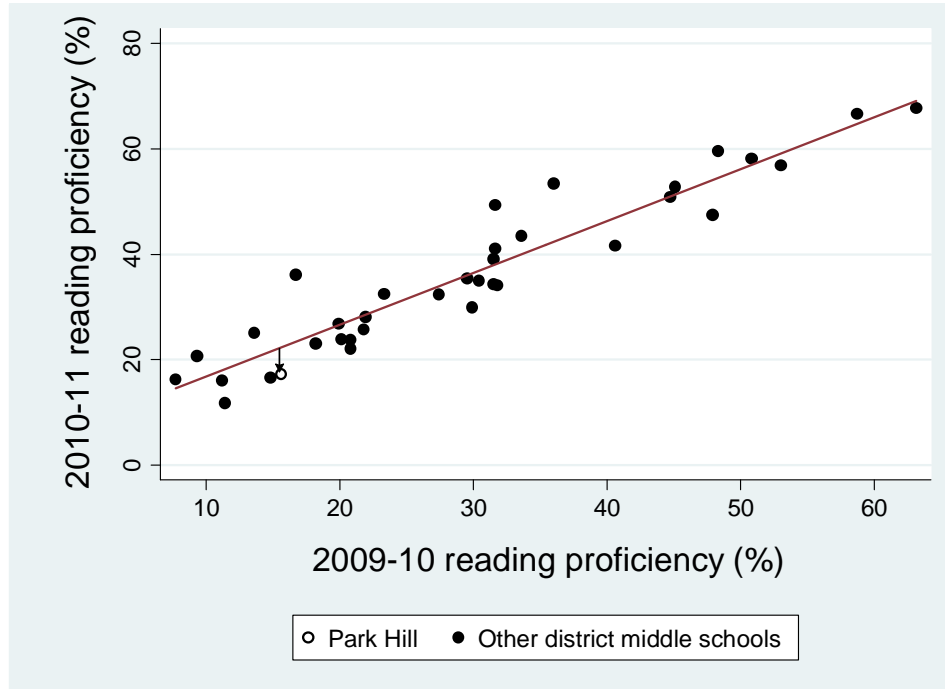
Regression Point Displacement Results

The regression analyses do not point to any meaningful improvements in

attendance, achievement, or suspensions at Park Hill from 2009-10 to 2010-11. As shown

in Table 10, Park Slope had a higher than expected attendance rate and out-of-school

suspension rate and lower than expected proficiency rates on the math and reading tests

in 2010-11. This latter finding is the only one of significance (β = -5.47, p < .01),

suggesting that Park Hill actually had a lower proficiency rate in reading in 2010-11 than

in 2009-10, beyond which would be expected due to random error. This result is

displayed graphically in Figure 12.

Table 10. Regression point displacement results.

2010-11 posttest	Attendance rate		Out-of-school suspension rate		Math TCAP proficiency rate		Reading TCAP proficiency rate	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
β_1, 2009-10 pretest	1.04 ***	0.55	0.72 ***	0.15	1.04 ***	0.07	0.96 ***	0.04
β_2, Park Hill	0.23	0.23	6.05	8.53	-1.68	1.75	-5.47 **	1.53

Note: Standard errors are robust HC3   ** p<.01   *** p<.001

These results paint a rough sketch of changes in school climate in Park Hill during

the course of the SVP. It suggests that there were no improvements in attendance,

discipline, and achievement. Attendance rates, suspension rates, and standardized test

proficiency rates are more distal indicators of school climate, however. The results from

the qualitative analysis of interviews, observations, and program artifacts provide a more

nuanced picture of the dimensions of school climate at Park Hill surrounding the SVP.

Figure 12. Regression point displacement for TCAP reading proficiency.

Qualitative Data Results

The first task for each student team was to identify the most significant perceived

barrier to learning. After initial meetings and balloting of the larger student body, each

student team selected one school-climate-related issue on which to focus their efforts.

The sixth-grade team chose disruptive student behavior; the seventh-grade team chose

gossip and bullying, and the eighth-grade team chose a lack of engaging activities. Each

of these issues fits neatly within most conceptual frameworks of school climate, and they

were the explicit targets of student team activities.

What changes were evidenced in these and other climate-related outcomes? Most

generally, the Park Hill principal noted that the climate, following the SVP, was "totally

different," and that students were generally more engaged in the classroom and had better

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relationships with their teachers. The SCC corroborated these outcomes, adding further that peer relationships were markedly improved and that students, in general, felt a greater sense of ownership over school improvement. There were also changes in the physical environment of the school as the seventh-grade student team posted social marketing materials around the school to discourage bullying and gossip. How these changes may have been effected is explored herein. The full presentation of results, below, is organized around the three theoretical pathways described in the introduction.

Direct Action for Change in Policy and Practice

There were several examples of the student teams' recommendations leading directly to changes in school policy and practice. The teams used a quasi-community-organizing process to identity a problem that affected them, research and analyze the problem, brainstorm solutions, and then propose changes to relevant decision-makers. These changes were negotiated in a series of meetings with the school administration (i.e., principal, assistant principal, teacher team leaders) planned by the student teams. As with community organizing, they used a focused message and relied on their united voice. As one student participant put it, "if you're in a group and not by yourself, the more people you are the bigger change you can make."

The majority of student recommendations involved actions that *students* could take to improve the school, and few requests were made for action on the part of administration and staff. Perhaps for this reason, students' recommendations were met with little opposition by administration. For example, the seventh-grade team proposed to organize an anti-bullying campaign in which they created social marketing materials to discourage gossip and bullying behavior among students. Teachers and administrators

supported this student-led initiative by helping the group create an anti-bullying video and showing it during class periods and helping the group create anti-bullying posters and other publicity to post around the school. Student-team members also took it upon themselves to be proponents of anti-bullying in their informal interactions with classmates, and several team members felt that this advocacy reduced bullying and gossip at Park Hill.

The sixth grade team initiated a "do snitch" program wherein they served as monitors the classroom to help teachers identify students who were the sources of disruptive behavior. They felt that teachers could not accurately identify the students who instigated classroom disruption. The student team worked closely with the sixth grade teacher team to refine this initiative. One SVP team member explained that this initiative improved classroom behavior by focusing attention on the ringleaders of misbehavior. Also in their effort to improve student classroom behavior, the sixth-grade student team convinced the administration to instate a "relaxation time" for the first two minutes of the class period immediately following recess—the period during which the team believed their classmates were most poorly behaved—when music would be played on the public address system.

The SCC observed that these practices initiated by the sixth- and seventh-grade teams helped the faculty maintain a focus on student behavior. In previous years, he explained, student-support staff had tried to prioritize consistent management of student behavior, but it would typically fall to the wayside several months into this school year. With students championing the issue through the SVP, behavior management remained a focus of the staff. Several staff felt that this improved student behavior at Park Hill.

The eighth-grade team had perhaps the most institutional focus in terms of their recommendations for school improvement. Their goal was to make learning more experiential and interactive, as they felt that student boredom and lack of engagement was the biggest deterrent to positive climate. The eighth-grade team successfully organized several fundraisers to fund educational field trips. They had little success, however, in affecting changes in instruction and curriculum. This reflects a prevailing theme of the SVP in its ability to improve school climate through changes in policy and practice. Student teams were able to implement their own practices to address bullying and disruption, sometimes with staff partnerships, but there were no examples of their successful negotiation of staff-led action, save perhaps the relaxation-time initiative described above.

Strengthened Social Networks

The process of the SVP afforded students frequent opportunities to cooperate with their peers and adults in the school. A major theme of the outcomes of the program was improvements in peer relationships and staff-student relationships.

Staff-student relationships. For staff who were more intimately involved in SVP activities, there was a development in mutual trust with students. The student teams regularly consulted teachers outside of class to get assistance implementing ideas such as fundraisers and the student-monitor initiative. This student-initiated collaboration seemed to help these teachers appreciate students' ideas and built openness and understanding between the two sides. This theme was expressed by one student: "I think I used to by shy to talk to teachers about something because I didn't know them as well. But now that I'm in [the SVP] I actually know that if I talk to teachers or the principal they'll actually

listen to me and do something about it." Another student said, "It was weird because we're not used to getting along with our teachers, but then we started to get along." One staff person was skeptical that this improved trust extended to staff who were not involved with the SVP. However, for staff who were involved, he felt that they gained social capital with students, helping them leverage positive student behavior.

This trust was also evident in SVP participants feeling more comfortable communicating their needs to adults in the school. As one student put it, "actually doing something like this, seeing that we can change the school, I can also know that I can just go talk to the principal and I can do something myself, too." Many of these middle school students had simply never had a person-to-person conversation with their principal, and their SVP collaboration helped to make these adults more approachable in the eyes of students. This growth in trust is particularly important in middle school, a time when teacher-student relationships typically deteriorate (Eccles et al., 1993).

Student relationships. The most significant changes in peer relationships happened within the SVP teams. The inclusion of a diverse group of students on the teams helped to break down traditional social boundaries. One team member noted, "[SVP team members] got to know each other much better. Some of us didn't know each other that good. Some of us thought that we were nerds, we were geeks, so we got to know each other much better."

Many team members already knew one another and shared friendships, but working together in a structured fashion helped to further strengthen their relationships. For example, team members learned to support one another in giving presentations to their peers and to staff. They learned how to share ideas, constructively disagree with one

another, and achieve consensus in decision-making. One student described this group-problem-solving process: "When we thought of an idea, someone else would be like 'well, what if we did this,' and it would add to ideas and make them better."

There were changes, too, in the relationships between SVP team members and student who did not participate in the program. Team members consulted with other students as they formulated issues and recommendations and implemented initiatives, and this allowed for a multitude of prosocial interactions. One staff person noted that in the course of such interactions, many students "gained confidence that there was a community there that understood things that they'd been personally feeling but didn't talk about."

Further, according to SVP team members, they became prosocial role-models for their peers. In one example, the seventh-grade team decided to invite classmates with the greatest discipline problems to participate in the development of anti-bullying posters. Giving these students a hands-on opportunity to help the school had a positive effect. According to one team member, "it helped them , instead of being bad sometimes, it helped them understand what it's like to be good. They got to show their creativity." A common theme in student interviews was their taking a proactive role in encouraging their peers to work toward making the school a better place to learn. This theme came up frequently in interviews with staff and students. One student described the process, saying "Some people would actually ask me what I've been doing in [the SVP] and they'd also ask me about stuff that's going on in the school. I actually tell them about what we've done in school, and I've told them that we've made a difference and they can, as well."

Aggregation of Individual Competencies

There were many demonstrable individual benefits of the SVP for students who directly participated. The youth civic engagement literature is fairly conclusive that involvement in civic activities—such as improving one's school—confers a variety of social and emotional benefits to youth, and that was corroborated in the SVP teams. A basic pre-post questionnaire that was administered to student-team members indicated increases in prosocial behavior and sense of social responsibility over the course of the initiative.

These individual changes were confirmed by staff who saw these students develop a greater sense of "buy-in" and "ownership" over the common good of the school. Many SVP team members came to see the school as a "common good" that they had responsibility for upholding. Students described this responsibility as including both an effort to maintain high personal character as well as turning outward to contribute to school improvement.

As part of this ethic of citizenship, students expressed an improvement capacity to understand why other students behave the way they do. In assessing, the underlying causes of disruptive student behavior and bullying, team members became more sympathetic toward their peers. One student noted: "I think more about the reasons that students are being bad instead of just getting angry at them. I think more about what they may be thinking."

It is logical to assume that the greater proportion of the student body that exercises good citizenship, the better the climate of the school. But beyond this simple aggregation of good citizens, there may be a norming phenomenon that results from their

increased number and increased level of empowerment. Several staff noticed that the sense of ownership for positive school climate felt by SVP team members was contagious. One staff person recalled a specific anecdote to illustrate this point: "Once there were four or five students who really decided to act crazy and act out. The majority of the students, especially the [SVP team members], kept saying to themselves, to each other, and to their peers, 'you know what: we still have work to do; we're here to learn; we're here to act better than this; let's not fall into that trap.'" This radiating influence of civically engaged students may have the potential to improve school climate in a way not directly intended by a program like the SVP.

Issues of Power and Representation

Limits of student voice. The SVP met with remarkably little resistance from school administration and staff. However, student teams did not put significant pressure on the administration to make changes. The majority of the teams' recommendations involved student-led efforts for school improvement. The administration did accommodate one team's request to play music over the public address system and observe several minutes of silence after the recess period to calm students down. Beyond that, there were few actions taken by the administration. The eighth-grade team decided that a lack of engaging learning activities—largely a responsibility of school staff—was the biggest culprit of negative school climate. The administration took little action to address this issues, and the students' strategy involved fundraising to support field trips.

Had students pushed more aggressively for action on the part of school staff, the SVP may have generated more conflict. When asked if there were issues around which students should not be involved in conversation, the Park Hill principal cited discipline

policy and dress code. It was also implied that curricular issues should not be on the table. One reason for these issues to be excluded from a student-voice process, according to the principal, is that many policies are mandated by the district, and thus are out of the purview of the school administration to change. A second reason indicated a general mistrust of students to always make responsible decisions. The principal noted, "I think when you give students too much voice, things can go in a crazy direction."

"Good" and "bad" students. A concerted effort was made to make the SVP teams as representative of the student body as possible. Nonetheless, there were indications that school staff selected students who generally exhibited better behavior. Possibly as a result of this, the student teams tended to situate the responsibility of disruptive behavior and bullying on the shoulders of individual students. As mentioned above, the eighth-grade team identified a lack of stimulating instruction as the main cause of negative student behavior, but overall, teams believed that students needed to be more accountable for their actions.

Furthermore, students felt a great deal of pride in being selected to participate in the SVP, leading to a ingroup-outgroup dynamic between team members and the rest of the student body. Regular reference was made by team members to their role as "leaders" or "good kids," while their classmates were often generalized to be "bad kids." Part of this identity may have developed as a result of the program, but some students held this distinction prior to the SVP. One team member, when asked why he was selected to participate answered, "Because I'm a good child. Because of the way I act." This suggests that special care should be taken to diversify SVP participation in terms of student behavior and even reputation among staff and students.

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Conclusions

There is evidence to suggest that Park Hill witnessed an improved school climate during the course of the SVP. School-level indicators of student achievement, attendance, and suspensions did not point to significant improvements, but there were marked changes in relationships, classroom order, and student engagement. These former indicators may be more distal outcomes of school climate, requiring more time and sustained improvement in things like relationships, teaching and learning, and safety. The longitudinal nature of school-climate change and its relationship to academics, attendance, and behavior is an area of school-climate scholarship that bears more attention.

Policies, Practices, and Institutional Change

This case study illustrated some of the pathways through which a school-based SVP may be able to contribute to a more positive climate. First, using a youth-organizing process to identify key issues, research them, and advocate for changes allowed the SVP teams to implement some climate-friendly changes in school policy and practice. These policy and practice changes, however, were limited mostly to student-led initiatives, such as an anti-bullying campaign and student classroom monitors. Findings from the study suggest that more aggressive policy recommendations may have been met with resistance from the administration. There is an obvious tension for public schools in managing student behavior and allowing students to dictate terms. A program such as the SVP may be a first step in sensitizing school staff to the value of student voice, but at least at Park Hill, there was some mistrust of the process on the part of administrators. The school principal made repeated reference to activities like the planning of pep rallies, dances,

and other events as the ideal outlet for student voice. This perspective puts a serious constraint on the menu of options students have for school improvement. Important school-climate-related issues like discipline policy and instructional practices that students no doubt have opinions on, may be difficult to bring to the table in a student-voice process.

Another potential impediment to SVP teams' ability to effect deep change at the school policy level is their lack of awareness regarding the school system. Despite the questioning, Socratic nature of the SVP team meetings, students tended to eschew institutional explanations for negative school outcomes in favor of individual student misbehavior. Most research on the sociopolitical development of youth has focused on older adolescents (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011), and middle-school-aged youth may be at a developmental stage during which it is difficult to make complex institutional attributions for everyday problems. Further work on the sociopolitical development of this age group could help shed light on how—or whether—this type of awareness can be enhanced.

Social Relationships

Of course, most of the standard school-climate interventions discussed in the introduction do not require complex political analysis. Those programs typically make student behavior and relationship-building central. The growth of prosocial networks between staff and students and among students was easily the most significant outcome of the SVP discussed in interviews and remarked in observations. Relationships were formed and strengthened as students and staff worked together on school-improvement efforts, and these relationships may be leveraged for future communication, cooperation,

and support. Whereas policy and program changes were somewhat superficial, there was evidence of profound changes in the way in which students—especially SVP participants—communicated with and viewed school staff, and vice-versa. Peer relationships, too, were enhanced as SVP team members used a structured group process in their work, and reached out to other students to help realize their projects, as well. The students who participated in the SVP developed citizenship competencies, and these competencies may "rub off" on their classmates, raising the average level of prosocial activity in the student body.

The reader may ask, can't interactions between staff and students and among students be nurtured in most any type of program, not necessarily a SVP? Perhaps, but the data suggest that the civic nature of the program had an important role in characterizing interactions in a way that emphasized cooperation and responsibility. Relationships can be built in a group tutoring program, for example, but they may be less likely to foster the communication, empathy, accountability, and unity demonstrated through the SVP.

Implications for Student Voice in School-Climate Improvement.

Student-voice and youth-civic-engagement initiatives may be considered on a spectrum. On the one end are youth-organizing efforts coordinated by nonprofit group rooted in social change and social justice (see, for example, Kwon, 2006; Warren et al., 2008). These types of initiatives may be politically unpalatable for school administrators and thus difficult to house within public schools. In an era of accountability where administrators face myriad insecurities to their positions, many may hesitate to cede much control to students. On the other end of the spectrum are nominal attempts at

soliciting student opinions in the process of school improvements, such as having students complete school-climate surveys.

Some schools are finding a middle ground, however, to engage students in school-level problem solving. The Safe and Supportive Schools program in California, for example has implemented a student voice component into its school-climate improvement practices that facilitates discussion and action planning between students and staff (Benard & Slade, 2009). Other schools have created student leadership elective courses that allow students to develop semester-long projects to address identified problems in the school. This study suggests that student voice, however deeply integrated into school practice, may serve as an important component to school-climate improvement—one that is underemphasized in many mainstream school-wide-systems approaches and socioemotional-learning approaches.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

These three studies, taken as a whole, tell a story about youth civic engagement. The general theme of the story is that when youth endorse civic attitudes and are involved in improving their environment, their ecologies are healthier. The engaged youth, as individuals, experience more positive academic and behavioral outcomes, and their school settings exhibit more support, safety, connectedness, and academic success.

Specifically, the first study showed that in urban middle schools students tend to be one of three civic types: (1) those who do *not* strongly endorse civic values and are *not* frequently involved in civic activities ("bystanders"); (2) those who strongly endorse civic values and are *not* frequently involved in civic activities ("sympathists"), and (3) those who both strongly endorse civic values and are frequently involved in civic activities ("actors"). Both sympathists and actors evince higher levels of academic achievement and attendance and lower rates of discipline problems, on average, compared to bystanders. Sympathists demonstrate the most favorable outcomes of all, calling into question the nature of civic activity involvement among urban middle school students. Certain low-income urban youth, particularly youth of color, may maintain mild oppositional tendencies that predispose them to civic involvement and community betterment but not necessarily to *status quo* definitions of success, like academic achievement in school. Nonetheless, both of the civically engaged types are associated with greater wellness for urban youth.

The second study showed that, while actors do not necessarily have the best individual-level outcomes, an aggregate of actors in a school setting is associated with higher overall levels of achievement and attendance for all students in the setting. This compositional effect of actors suggests that their civic involvement has a radiating influence on their classmates in a way that improves academic outcomes. There is some evidence to suggest that this compositional effect of civic engagement on achievement is mediated through a general heightening of students' engagement with their school work. Further, the study suggests that a preponderance of bystanders in a school setting may be associated with less positive relationships between teachers and students. It is suggested that there is reciprocity in the relationship between the school environment and youth civic engagement—each affects the other. At least in part, this study provides evidence that civically engaged youth may promote healthier school settings.

The third study sheds light on how this may happen, using the example of a student-voice program in one urban middle school. It shows that by giving students a structured opportunity to reflect on problems in the school and formulate action strategies, the overall climate of the school may be improved. This may happen through three pathways: (1) direct changes in school policy and practice that result from student action projects; (2) transformations in relationships among students and between teachers and students as they work together in the school-improvement process; (3) the simple addition of more students in the school who have a sense of ownership and agency in making the school a better place, who in turn serve as role models for their peers. There are challenges in implementing such a program in a public school setting. School leaders may be reluctant to cede decision-making power to students and middle school students

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may lack the analytic capacity to diagnose systemic causes of problems. However, even a student-voice program that is non-radical stands to improve the overall climate of the school.

Giving students a voice in school-climate improvement represents one means of intervention to augment youth civic engagement. This dissertation suggests that these types of interventions would improve wellness for urban youth in a way that is reinforced across ecological levels. That is, youth civic engagement may help develop individual youths' capacities, and also make their settings more conducive to positive youth development. Other interventions that promote youth civic engagement include, on a continuum of traditional to radical: (a) civics education in the formal curriculum; (b) volunteering and community service; (c) school-based service learning; (d) student voice initiatives that involve students in school decision making; (e) youth organizing initiatives whereby youth take the lead in imagining and executing change. Schools and other youth-serving organizations may be comfortable intervening at various points along this continuum; however the potential for positive transformational change may increase as youth are given more control and opportunity to make real differences.

The beauty of youth civic engagement as a strategy for positive youth development is that it can be made a part of most any youth program or fit within most any youth development framework. Furthermore, in an era where the importance of context in youth development is broadly recognized and where interventionists often feel they have to choose at which level to intervene, youth civic engagement may have to the potential to affect multiple levels at once. Caring about one's community and helping to

shape it is good, at once, for individual young people and the settings in which they live their lives.