FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN ADOLESCENCE: THE EFFECTS OF NEIGHBORHOOD, SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND PEER CONTEXTS

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Research on youth civic engagement has emphasized the importance of growing up in a civic context. We examined the relative influence of neighborhood characteristics (neighborhood opportunities and intergenerational closure), civic education at school, friends' civic engagement, and parents' civic engagement on civic attitudes and civic behaviors among youths. Participants were 403 11- to 15-year-old adolescents randomly selected from the city register of a midsized city in Italy. The hierarchical regression analysis found that all analyzed contexts were related to adolescent civic engagement. In particular, intergenerational closure, friends' civic engagement, and parents' civic engagement were associated with both civic attitudes and civic behaviors. Findings highlighted the importance of considering multiple contexts to understand what factors are associated with youth civic engagement. We discuss ways that findings can be transmitted into further research and practice to address the multiple contexts in which youths are embedded and their relative influence on adolescent civic engagement. © 2016 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

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Civic engagement is rapidly emerging as a critical aspect for positive youth development. Erikson's ego identity theories (1974) and German action theorists (Baltes, 1987) suggest that engaging in civic activities not only contributes to adolescents' well-being and positive development but also benefits both the community and the larger civil society (Bobek, Zaff, Li, & Lerner, 2009). Citizens' participation is a prerequisite for a successful democratic society (Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998). Moreover, several studies have shown that levels of civic responsibility during adolescence predict civic responsibility in adulthood (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997; Zaff, Malanchuk, & Eccles, 2008); hence, it is critical that communities provide young people with opportunities to develop civic values and behaviors.

The psychological literature on civic engagement, particularly within community psychology, holds a strong interest and value in finding a shared theoretical model predicting civic engagement (Lenzi et al., 2012; Vieno, Nations, Perkin, & Santinello, 2007; Zaff et al., 2008). Although there is empirical evidence supporting the role of different social contexts in influencing civic development, research is needed to understand the relative influence of different social settings on adolescents' civic development (Zaff et al., 2008). To address this goal, we examined the contextual correlates of adolescents' civic engagement to identify which characteristics of the main social settings in which youths are embedded (neighborhood, school, peers, and family) can promote or hinder the development of civic engagement in adolescence.

Defining Civic Engagement

Civic engagement represents a relatively new construct in psychology; extant literature has not yet identified a shared definition of what it means to be involved in civic life (Da Silva, Sanson, Smart, & Toumbourou, 2004). Studies in the field have used different theoretical constructs to define aspects of civic engagement, including civic responsibility, civic attitudes, civic identity, and civic participation, considering them in some cases as components of the multidimensional construct of civic engagement (Bobek et al, 2009) or, in other cases, as synonyms (Atkins & Hart, 2003; Zaff et al., 2008).

According to Youniss et al. (2002), civic engagement refers to attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, and skills that are aimed at improving society and is derived from an interest in improving the common good. Thus, civic engagement can be considered to be a prosocial behavior, expressed as a connection to the community, a commitment to improving that community, and the act of helping the community (Lerner, 2004). In general, civic development implies an understanding of how civic society functions and the acquisition of beliefs, competencies, and behaviors that allow citizens to meet, discuss their common problems, and work together to promote their interests (Youniss et al., 2002). Recent literature has suggested an integrated definition of civic engagement incorporating emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components (see Lenzi et al., 2012).

Most studies tend to investigate the components of civic engagement separately, by considering them as different outcomes (Crocetti, Jahromi, & Meeus, 2012; Da Silva et al., 2012; Lenzi et al., 2012). In some studies, civic responsibility has been conceptualized as a precursor of civic behaviors (e.g., Lenzi, Vieno, Pastore, & Santinello, 2013): The more adolescents have a set of beliefs valuing civic engagement, the more likely is their decision to actively take part in civic actions (Erikson, 1974; Selman, 1980; Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). Other studies have shown that civic participation further nurtures civic attitudes, underlining their reciprocal influences on one another (Hardy, Pratt, Prancer, Olsen, & Lawford, 2010; Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger,

& Alisat, 2007). Overall, empirical studies have documented the interrelations between the attitudinal and behavioral components of civic engagement (Crocetti et al., 2012; Hardy et al., 2010; Hardy & Kisling, 2006; Pancer et al., 2007; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997).

Following from this literature, we focus on two main components treated as two different outcomes of civic engagement: (a) civic responsibility, defined as attitudes and beliefs aimed to improving the local community and the wider society, supporting the idea that every community member has the responsibility of being an active citizen; and (b) civic participation, including behaviors and actions aimed to improve the community, such as volunteer work and being a member of political or cultural association.

The Development of Civic Engagement

The social development model (SDM; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996) is a theoretical framework that explains adolescent development within multiple social contexts and can thus help identify which factors might promote civic development. The SDM emphasizes how adolescents learn patterns of behavior through their interactions with multiple socializing units, such as family, school, peer groups, and community. According to the theory, four components are involved during the socialization process: (a) perceived opportunities for involvement in activities and interactions with others; (b) the degree of involvement and interaction; (c) the individuals' skills available to participate in these interactions; and (d) the reinforcement that adolescents perceive from this involvement and interaction.

This socialization process promotes the creation of a bond between youths and the various socializing units, allowing the transmission of norms, values, and behavior. Based on this assimilation process, adolescents develop their belief system. In support of this theory, research has found that peers, family, school, and community contexts play an important role in influencing the likelihood of youth involvement in the civic domain (Da Silva et al., 2004). Integrating past empirical and theoretical evidence, we describe which mechanisms underline the influence of these social settings on youth's civic responsibility and behavior.

Neighborhood influences. Focusing on the neighborhood as social setting, opportunities for interaction and involvement at meeting places in the community are important to foster civic development in adolescence. The political theorist Walzer (1989) argues that it is through their own experiences in local communities that young people can learn what it means to be a good citizen, exercising rights and assuming responsibilities as members of a community. Research has demonstrated that adolescents require opportunities to participate in their communities to develop civic attitudes and become active citizens (Atkins & Hart, 2003). Quane and Rankin (2006) showed that neighborhood-based factors are related to youth participation in the civic life and to the development of important prosocial competencies. In particular, they found that the availability of local organization was one of the most important neighborhood-level findings related to youth outcomes.

Focusing more specifically on social relationships in the neighborhood, research indicates that youth growing up in communities with higher levels of social capital (i.e., benefits achieved through cooperation) are more likely to be engaged in prosocial activities (e.g., Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999). A particular aspect regarding social connectedness in the neighborhood is represented by "intergenerational closure," which refers to what extent the adults and children in a community are linked to one other (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999). Intergenerational closure includes the

level of interaction and knowledge shared between adults and youth and between parents of children's friends and contributes to the development of social networks, increasing informal social control, and youth's perception of safety (Kegler et al., 2005).

Through a process of collective socialization, adults may promote knowledge and competence among youths, encouraging their actions as active and empowered citizens (Kegler et al., 2005; Zeldin, Larson, Camino, & O'Connor, 2005). In support of this idea, Lenzi, Vieno, Pastore et al. (2013) found that in neighborhoods where there are strong ties between adults and youth, adolescents report a higher sense of civic responsibility toward their local community and the belief that each resident should contribute to the well-being of the neighborhood. A resulting sense of safety may incentivize youth to spend more time outside and increase their involvement in community activities. However, to date just a few studies have examined specifically the role of nonfamily adults in the community related to adolescents' civic attitudes and behaviors.

Although this construct partly overlaps with other measures of social resources within the neighborhood such as informal social control or collective efficacy (Sampson et al., 1999), we chose to focus on the intergenerational component of neighborhood cohesion. A supportive relationship with adults in the neighborhood might be particularly relevant for adolescents' civic development, by simultaneously providing them a role model, informal social control, and a supportive relationship with someone easy to reach and experienced about the local community.

School influences. Another critical context for adolescent civic engagement is within the school, which is "the only institution with the capacity and the mandate to reach every young person in the country. Of all institutions, schools are the most systematically and directly responsible for imparting citizen norms" (Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003, p. 12). Research has demonstrated that some educational practices can increase the quantity and the quality of civic participation. For example, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, and Schulz (2001) found that discussing civic issues in the school, exploring different opinions about civic affairs, and comparing ideas with other students are positively correlated with a commitment to voting in the future. Moreover, the extent to which teachers and classmates have opportunities to discuss civic issues is a predictor of both knowledge and participation in civic activities (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). In another study, Kahne and Sport (2008) found that classroom civic learning opportunities have the largest impact on students' commitments to civic participation, more than neighborhood and family characteristics.

Family and peer influences. The fundamental role of microsocial contexts as families and peers on adolescents' civic engagement is strongly recognized in the literature (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Da Silva et al., 2004; Flanagan et al., 1998; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Lenzi, Vieno, Nation, Voight, & Santinello, 2014). Family and peer contexts can contribute to the civic development of adolescents by giving them the opportunity to discuss political and social issues, challenge adolescents' construction of knowledge, and provide models of conscientious citizens (Wilkenfield, 2009). Studies investigating the association between family context and civic development have found that adolescents whose families are civically active and encourage social responsibility were more likely to perceive civic commitment as important and to participate in volunteer work (Flanagan et al., 1998).

In their study, McIntosh, Hart, and Youniss (2007) found that parents' political knowledge, news monitoring, internal political efficacy, giving money to a political cause, and membership in community or professional organizations were all related to youth civic

development. Regarding the peer context, a number of studies show that bonding to peers involved in prosocial behaviors increases the likelihood of involvement in prosocial behaviors (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). Consistent with the SDM, Da Silva et al. (2004) emphasized the role of peer group in promoting adolescent civic engagement: Attachment to peers who encourage participation in civic activities and participate themselves is critical for adolescents' civic development.

STUDY PURPOSE

According to the SDM, it is critical to take into account multiple contexts of socialization to understand the development of civic attitudes and behaviors. However, despite many studies identifying influences of social contexts on adolescents' civic development, studies analyzing multiple contexts are rare. For this reason, we examined the relative influence of neighborhood, school, family, and peer contexts on adolescent civic attitudes and behaviors. By focusing on those social domains, we are able to explore three SDM levels: (a) opportunities for involvement, (b) the degree of involvement and interactions, and (c) the reinforcement that adolescents perceive from this involvement and interaction. The selected variables are as follows: opportunity for involvement and intergenerational closure (neighborhood level), civic education (school level), friends' civic engagement (peer level), and parents' civic engagement (family level). We explored to what extent adolescents' civic engagement levels are reinforced from their perceptions of both structural opportunities (opportunity for involvement) and social involvement and interaction opportunities (civic education, friends' civic engagement, and parents' civic engagement). Regarding the role of schools, family and peers, we focused on the importance of growing up in a civic context; for this reason, we explored contextual characteristics directly related to the promotion of civic responsibility and civic behavior.

Consistent with previous studies and theoretical models described, we hypothesize that when adolescents perceive that they live in a neighborhood with many opportunities for activities and meeting places and high levels of intergenerational closure, they also report higher levels of civic responsibility and participation (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Kegler et al., 2005; Lenzi, Vieno, Pastore et al., 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005). Regarding the role of schools, we expect that adolescents attending schools where there is a strong focus on civic education also report higher levels of civic attitudes and civic participation in the community (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Finally, we hypothesize that young people whose friends and parents are strongly engaged in civic issues also report higher levels of civic responsibility and civic behaviors (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Da Silva et al., 2004; Flanagan et al., 1998; Kahne & Sporte, 2008).

METHODS

Participants

Participants were randomly selected from the city register office in the municipality of Padova, a midsized city located in the Northeast of Italy. Participants were 403 early and middle adolescents (47.9% male) from different neighborhoods of the city. Their ages ranged from 11 to 15 years, with a mean of 13.6 years old (standard deviation [*SD*] = 1.64). Almost all participants were born in Italy (95.3%), with small percentages from Eastern Europe (2.7%) and other countries (2.0%).

Procedures

Data were obtained through questionnaires and are part of a larger study conducted in Padova during October 2009–January 2010 and approved by the institutional review committee at University of Padova. After the approval of the Padova municipality, participants were randomly selected from the city register office. A letter explaining the aims of the study and a written consent for parents to allow their children to participate in the study were sent home. Families that gave their consent, after being contacted by a member of the research team, were sent the questionnaires. Researchers contacted the families by phone or at their home to make an appointment to collect the completed questionnaires. The response rate was 59.5%, excluding families who relocated (4.5%) or who were not found (10.9%).

Measures

Adolescents' demographics (gender, age, father's education), civic attitudes and civic behavior (dependent variables), and contextual correlates of civic engagement (independent variables) were measured through a self-report questionnaire completed by adolescents.

Civic responsibility. A scale to measure the adolescent level of civic responsibility was created by combining items of the Participatory Citizen, Political Efficacy, and Justice-Oriented Citizen Scales (Flanagan, Syvertsten, & Stout, 2007) and by adding an explicit reference to the neighborhood in the items. Examples of the 15-item scale are as follows: "I think it's important to work for improving conditions in my neighborhood" and "I think it is important to protest when something in society needs changing." Likert scale responses ranged from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). Internal consistency of the scale was good (alpha = .89).

Civic behaviors. Civic behaviors were assessed through items drawn from the Media Consumption Scale (Flanagan, Syversten et al., 2007) and the work of Albanesi, Cicognani and Zani (2007), combined in a four-item scale. Participants were asked to report the frequency with which they performed different behaviors during the 12 months before the study, such as keeping up to date about events occurring locally or around the world and volunteering or working for the local community (e.g., participating in the organization of a local party). On a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*everyday*), participants rated the frequency of each civic behavior (alpha = .63).

Neighborhood opportunities. Adolescents' perception of the availability of places and activities in the neighborhood was assessed by the Opportunity for Involvement subscale of the Sense of Community for Adolescents (Cicognani, Albanesi, & Zani, 2006). Examples of the seven-item scale are as follows: "This neighborhood gives me opportunities to do many different things" and "In this neighborhood, it is easy to find information about things that interest young people." Adolescents responded on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*low)* to 5 (high; alpha = .92).

Intergenerational closure. A five-item scale developed by Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) assessed adolescents' perceived interaction between adults and youth in the neighborhood. This questionnaire was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*low*) to 5

Table 1. Mean Score (Standard Deviation) and Differences by Gender and Age for Civic Responsibility and Civic Behavior

	Gender			Age			
	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	F	11 M (SD)	13 M (SD)	15 M (SD)	F
Civic responsibility	3.82 (0.53)	3.90 (0.49)	0.70	3.93 (0.54)	3.91 (0.47)	3.72 (0.53)	3.63[*]
Civic behavior	2.59 (0.83)	2.53 (0.73)	0.51	2.46 (0.81)	2.65 (0.73)	2.52 (0.81)	1.45

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation.
*p < .05.

(*high)* and includes items such as "Parents in this neighborhood know their children's friends" and "There are adults in this neighborhood that children can look up to" (alpha = .77).

Civic education. Civic education at school was measured through an adapted version of the California Civic Index (Kahne, Middaugh, & Schutjer-Mance, 2005) and assessed using the following items: (a) "In our class, we learn about people and groups who work to make society better"; (b) "In our classes, we learn about things in society that need to be changed"; (c) "In our classes, we learn about problems in our society and what causes them"; and (d) "In our classes, we talk about current events in Italy and in the world." Responses were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*low)* to 5 (*high)*. Alpha reliability was .82.

Parents' civic engagement. Adolescents' perception of their parents' civic participation and civic responsibility was measured through the six-item Parents Civic Engagement Scale (Flanagan, Syverste et al., 2007). Sample items included in the questionnaire are as follows: "My parents (at least one of them) are active in the life of the community (neighborhood)" and "For my parents it's important to volunteer for helping people in need." Internal consistency of the scale was good (alpha = .85) and responses ranged from 1 (*low)* to 4 (*high)*.

Friends' civic engagement. We adapted the Parents Civic Engagement Scale (Flanagan, Syvertsen et al., 2007) to measure perceived civic engagement among adolescents' friends. The scale comprises six items that ask participants to report their perceptions of their friends' civic engagement. "Most of my friends volunteer for helping people in need" and "Most of my friends think that everyone has a responsibility to work to make the world a better place" are sample items. Internal consistency of the scale was good (alpha = .81) and responses ranged from 1 (*not at all)* to 4 (*a lot).*

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

Mean and standard deviations of adolescents' civic responsibility and behavior by gender and grade are presented in Table 1. No differences were found in mean levels of adolescents' civic responsibility and behaviors between girls and boys, whereas differences were

found in levels of civic responsibility between age groups. Post hoc analyses show higher levels among the youngest group (11 year olds, mean $[M] = 3.93$) compared with older adolescents (15 year olds; $M = 3.72$), $p < .05$.

Table 2 presents bivariate correlations for all of the variables included in our models. Being female was associated with higher levels of friends' civic engagement, whereas age was negatively associated with most of the independent variables examined and civic responsibility. Finally, a higher father's education was positively associated with parents' and friends' civic engagement. All the predictors included in the study were positively correlated. The dependent variables (civic responsibility and civic behavior) were also positively correlated ($r = .31$, $p < .001$), but the association was modest, thus suggesting that the dependent variables explore different dimensions of civic engagement.

Predicting Civic Responsibility and Civic Behaviors

To evaluate the influence of neighborhood, school, peers, and family on adolescent civic engagement, we ran two multiple regression models with adolescent's civic responsibility and civic behaviors, respectively, as dependent variables. The five steps were the same for the two models: In the first step, we included the demographic characteristics (gender, age, and father's education); in the second step, we introduced neighborhood characteristics (intergenerational closure and opportunities); the third step includes school civic education; the fourth step adds friends' civic engagement; and the fifth step introduces parents' civic engagement.

Table 3 displays each step of the hierarchical regression analysis predicting civic responsibility. Regarding demographic characteristics, age was the only variable significantly associated with adolescents' civic responsibility: Older youth tended to report that it is less important to participate in civic life; however, this association disappeared when friends' civic engagement was included in the model. The association between school civic engagement and adolescent civic responsibility also disappeared after friends' civic engagement was added to the model, underlying the importance of having friends civically engaged in promoting civic attitudes and values among adolescents.

The final model showed a positive association between neighborhood intergenerational closure ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$), friends' civic engagement ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$), parents' civic engagement ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$), and adolescents' civic responsibility. These findings show that when adolescents perceive higher levels of closeness between adults and youth living in their neighborhood and consider parents and friends as active citizens, they also consider it more important to be involved in civic life. Overall, the predictors examined explain 35.2% of the variance in adolescents' civic responsibility.

Table 4 shows each step of the hierarchical regression analysis predicting civic behaviors. In the final model, age was positively associated with adolescent civic behaviors, meaning that older adolescents tend to be more involved in civic activities. In relation to the contextual correlates of civic behaviors, a positive association was found between neighborhood intergenerational closure ($\beta = .14$, $p < .01$), civic education at school ($\beta = .14$, $p < .01$), friends' civic engagement ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$), parents' civic engagement ($\beta = .14$, $p < .01$), and adolescents' civic behaviors. Neighborhood opportunities were the only independent variable showing no association with adolescent civic behaviors.

Findings indicate that when adolescents report having close relationships with adults within the neighborhood, attend schools where there are frequent discussions about civic issues, and perceive their family and friends as civically engaged, they are more likely to

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations

Variable	Gender	Age	Father's education	Intergenerational closure	Neighborhood opportunities	School civic education	Friends civic engagement	Parents civic engagement	Civic responsibility
Gender	—								
Age	.029	—							
Father's education	.044	−.063	—						
Intergenerational closure	−.029	−.160**	.034	—					
Neighborhood opportunities	−.060	−.161**	.087	.431**	—				
School civic education	−.036	−.037	.015	.268**	.253**	—			
Friends civic engagement	.117*	−.179**	.114*	.266**	.172**	.400**	—		
Parents civic engagement	.007	−.185**	.148**	.259**	.176**	.215**	.461**	—	
Civic responsibility	.063	−.161**	.075	.321**	.165**	.266**	.488**	.466**	—
Civic behavior	−.037	.005	.126*	.294**	.195**	.298**	.361**	.298**	.317**

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

Table 3. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Civic Responsibility

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE(B)	β	B	SE(B)	β
Gender	0.07	0.05	0.07	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.09	0.05	0.09	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.05
Age	-0.05	0.01	-0.17***	-0.04	0.01	-0.12*	-0.04	0.01	-0.13*	-0.02	0.01	-0.07	-0.1	0.01	-0.04
Father's education	0.04	0.02	0.08	0.03	0.02	0.07	0.03	0.02	0.07	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.02
Intergenerational closure				0.22	0.04	0.32***	0.2	0.04	0.3***	0.16	0.03	0.22***	0.13	0.03	0.20***
Neighborhood opportunities				-0.02	0.03	-0.03	-0.02	0.03	-0.05	-0.03	0.03	-0.05	-0.03	0.03	-0.06
School civic education							0.1	0.03	0.16***	0.00	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.03	0.00
Friends civic engagement										0.36	0.04	0.42***	0.26	0.04	0.30***
Parents civic engagement													0.24	0.04	0.30***
R	0.03			0.12			0.14			0.28			0.35		
F for change in R^2	5.04**			19.07***			10.28***			69.69***			36.56***		

Note. SE = standard error.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 4. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Civic Behaviors

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE(B)	β	B	SE(B)	B
Gender	-0.07	0.08	-0.05	-0.05	0.08	-0.03	-0.05	0.08	-0.03	-0.09	0.07	-0.06	-0.08	0.07	-0.05
Age	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.08	0.03	0.02	0.06	0.05	0.02	0.1*	0.05	0.02	0.11*
Father's education	0.1	0.04	0.14	0.1	0.04	0.13	0.1	0.03	0.13	0.08	0.03	0.11	0.07	0.03	0.09
Intergenerational closure				0.26	0.06	0.24***	0.2	0.06	0.18***	0.16	0.06	0.15*	0.15	0.06	0.14**
Neighborhood opportunities				0.06	0.05	0.73	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.04
School civic education							0.22	0.05	0.23***	0.13	0.05	0.14	0.13	0.05	0.14**
Friends civic engagement										0.32	0.07	0.25***	0.25	0.08	0.20***
Parents civic engagement													0.17	0.07	0.14**
R		0.02			0.1			0.15			0.19			0.21	
F for change in R^2		2.68*			14.88***			20.24***			20.42***			6.31***	

Note. SE = standard error.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

be active in the public civic life. Overall, the factors examined explain the 19.3% of the variance in adolescents' civic behaviors.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we explored different contextual correlates of civic engagement during adolescence. Adolescence is the crucial period in which youths start to collect new experiences on societal issues and struggle to figure out their place in society (Erikson, 1974). With the increase of age, youths achieve more independence and are able to gain new experiences in broader contexts. Through interactions in different situations, youths experience new patterns of behaviors and are exposed to more diverse values. Because civic behaviors depend strongly on contextual factors, such as to what extent the environment in which the person is embedded offers opportunities and reinforces pattern of actions (Youniss & Levine, 2009), our study examined several models designed to study patterns in association between various social domains and civic engagement and ultimately isolate what factors are related to two important components of adolescent civic engagement: sense of civic responsibility and civic behavior.

Results indicated that all analyzed social domains (neighborhood, school, family, and peers) were associated with youth's civic development. Adolescent perceptions that there are cohesive relationships between youth and adults in the neighborhood, discussions at school speaking about current civic issues, and having parents and friends civically involved all showed a positive association to civic behavior and civic responsibility. Yet a more detailed analysis of each domain will reveal subtle aspects of these associations that inform and advance the literature on adolescent civic engagement.

Neighborhood Domain

Two neighborhood characteristics were evaluated: intergenerational closure and opportunities for involvement. Our findings indicated that living in a neighborhood where youth perceive there are adults they can look up to promotes civic engagement; intergenerational closure was a significant predictor of both civic responsibility and civic behavior. Consistent with recent studies, this finding underlines the importance of the relationship between adults and youths on civic engagement (Lenzi, Vieno, Santinello, & Perkins, 2013; Lenzi, Vieno, Pastore et al., 2013; Kegler et al., 2005; Whitlock, 2007; Zeldin et al., 2005).

Many mechanisms may explain these associations and are all linked with the creation of a positive climate to foster positive youth development. Adults may represent positive and stable models, stimulating the development of youth's civic attitude and actions addressed to improve the well-being of the collectivity (Lenzi, Vieno, Pastore et al., 2013); in addition, this bonding may increase adolescents' perception of both support (Lenzi, Vieno, Pastore et al., 2013) and safety (Kegler et al., 2005). This process of socialization between adults and young people might promote social cohesion within a neighborhood, thus nurturing the belief that everyone has the responsibility to work for the betterment of their community (Lenzi, Vieno, Pastore et al., 2013; Levental and Brooks-Gunn, 2000) and has active participation in community life.

Unlike what the SDM and other studies would predict, perceiving neighborhood opportunities (Atkins & Hart, 2003; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Quane & Rankin, 2006) was not a significant predictor of civic engagement. This result may be explained by

our operationalization of neighborhood opportunities: We asked about the availability of general opportunities in the neighborhood, such as opportunities to join structured activities or to find meeting places. However, previous studies that found associations between civic engagement and opportunities investigated the availability of specific activities, such as community services and voluntary association (Youniss et al., 1997), which are more directly linked with working for the common good, such as helping people in need or collecting money for a cause. Atkins and Hart (2003) found that the possibility of joining these kinds of activities was associated with civic competence and civic participation.

It is possible that other factors related to neighborhood opportunities (such as type, aims, and quality of the offered services) may play a role in the relation between neighborhood context and the development of civic engagement. Rather than the simple and general perception of opportunities, future research should identify what specific activities and/or public places promote civic action and responsibility. Alternatively, it is possible that the association between opportunities for activities and meeting places and adolescents' civic engagement is completely mediated by intergenerational closure (also based on the positive association between the two neighborhood indicators examined). Future studies should investigate in greater depth how structural and institutional opportunities in the local community might shape social relationships between adults and adolescents in the neighborhood.

School Domain

Focusing on the school context, school civic education–talking about current events and discussing societal problems in the classroom–was positively associated with civic behavior. As demonstrated by previous studies (Lenzi et al., 2012; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Zaff, Malanchuk, Eccles, & Michelsen, 2003), civic learning opportunities improve students' commitment to work actively for society. Through discussions and debates, students can develop civic values, knowledge, and skills that are the basis for higher involvement in community life (Lenzi et al., 2012). In this context, they might have their first experiences of civility, respect, fair and equal treatment, and democratic climate (Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gallay, 2007; Lenzi, Vieno, Sharkey et al., 2014) that in turn might promote engagement (Murdock, 1999).

With regard to civic responsibility, association with the school context disappeared with the inclusion of friends' civic engagement in the model. Our findings suggest that speaking about current societal issues at school promotes civic action, but it is not associated with youth's attitudes, i.e., their feelings of responsibility toward the society. Prior studies exploring the association between school characteristics and civic engagement among adolescents considered other variables influencing the development of adolescents' civic attitudes, such as democratic climate (Flanagan, Cumsille et al., 2007; Lenzi et al., 2012; Lenzi, Vieno, Sharkey et al., 2014; Vieno, Perkins, Smith, & Santinello, 2005). These studies suggest that the perception of a democratic classroom climate and teacher support, along with discussion of civic issues, might be necessary to nurture adolescent civic responsibility.

Considering the positive bivariate correlations between school civic education and friends' civic engagement, it is possible that school influences were mostly because of compositional effects: Schools might appear positively correlated to civic responsibility only because of a higher concentration of civically engaged students in some classrooms. In addition, some of the friends that adolescents are asked to evaluate in terms of their

civic involvement may also be classmates, thus confounding school and friends' influences. In order to disentangle school and peer influences on civic engagement, future studies need to separately assess friends' and classmates' civic engagement (and their potential overlap) and examine in greater depth the mechanisms through which they operate; for example, frequent discussion about civic issues at school might promote cohesive relationships between students, which in turn might contribute to nurture adolescents' civic engagement.

Family Domain

Within the contexts of family, findings showed that having family engaged in civic activities is associated with higher levels of adolescents' civic engagement. These results can be interpreted in light of the SDM, which underlines the crucial role played by the social contexts in which youths are daily embedded, in the understanding of both their attitudes and behaviors. That is, by discussing political and social issues, parents facilitate adolescents' construction of knowledge and provide models of conscientious citizens (Wilkenfield, 2009). Specifically, growing up in a family that shows interest for civic issues was positively related to civic responsibility and civic behaviors.

These findings are consistent with past studies demonstrating that parental modeling of civic behaviors constitutes an important predictor of civic participation among adolescents (McIntosh et al., 2007; Wilkenfield, 2009; Zaff et al., 2003), and that through the transmission of knowledge, values, and behaviors from an older generation to a younger one, adolescents develop civic responsibility (Flanagan & Sherrod 1998). Hence, our findings confirm that having parents engaged in civic activities and with whom adolescents can speak about civic issues promotes and enhances both civic action and the development of civic attitudes, above and beyond the influence of other social settings where the adolescent is embedded.

Peer Domain

Finally, consistent with the SDM and other studies (Da Silva et al., 2004; Kahne & Sporte, 2008), our findings confirm the important influence of peers' civic engagement on adolescents' own civic engagement: The perception of having friends who are involved in civic activities and sensitive to civic issues was the strongest predictor of both civic responsibility and civic behavior. Peer groups that maintain norms supporting civic involvement appear to have the potential to influence youth's beliefs and civic ideologies (Da Silva et al., 2004; Harell, Stolle, & Quintelier, 2008).

Findings on the role of the peer context also help elucidate the association between age and civic responsibility and behavior. Older adolescents tended to report a significantly lower sense of responsibility toward the common good than younger adolescents, but there was no association between age and civic behavior (in the bivariate analyses). However, once friend civic engagement was taken into account, the negative relation between age and civic responsibility was no longer significant. These results suggest that being older becomes a factor promoting civic participation because increasing age also means having access to a wider range of opportunities in terms of peer social activities. Our findings point to the need to study in greater depth the relation between age and the peer context in promoting civic engagement to disentangle the effect of friends' civic engagement and age on civic development.

Limitations

The study has some limitations to acknowledge. First, we used a single source of information: a self-report questionnaire measuring adolescents' perceptions. The use of independent measures to evaluate contextual characteristics would be important to limit the same-source bias and having objective indicators.

Another limitation of the current study is in the cross-sectional nature of our data, which does not allow for identification of the variables' effect directions. Thus, it is possible that civically engaged adolescents are more likely to perceive particular characteristic in the considered contexts; for example, they may perceive more opportunities than others, and that through their civic engagement they are more likely to develop a civic network, facilitating the development of positive relations with civically engaged people, such as with friends and adults. Despite these limitations, our findings provide an important contribution for the support of the theory that living within a civic context, derived from a combination of features in multiple social settings, is associated with adolescent civic engagement.

Future Directions and Implications

Future studies need to clarify which mechanisms are responsible for the positive association between characteristics of the social environments and adolescents' civic development and how these interactions evolve over time. The literature on antisocial behavior has already evidenced that different patterns of delinquency (Wolfgang, Thomberry, & Figlio, 1987) and drug use (Anthony & Cohler, 1987) occur at different developmental stages. It seems that over the course of development, different units of socialization have different predictive power (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). However, with regard to civic engagement, the question still remained opened (Lerner, Alberts, & Bobek, 2007).

To develop programs promoting adolescents' civic involvement in the society, it is critical to understand in what specific ways intergenerational closure, friends' and parents' civic engagement, and school civic education promote adolescent civic responsibility and/or engagement within age ranges. For example, within the school context, education may be more or less effective based on additional variables such as student–teacher relationship, teacher enthusiasm for the subject, and/or credit given to assignments related to civic engagement.

Reflecting upon our theoretical model, SDM discusses four levels of socialization: opportunity, involvement, skill development, and reinforcement. Our results indicate that opportunity, as reflected by our neighborhood opportunity construct, did not support civic responsibility or engagement at least within the least proximal (neighborhood) context. School civic education provides support of civic engagement but not civic responsibility. On the other hand, parent and peer civic engagement were significantly related to both civic responsibility and civic engagement. It is possible that it is not only the context (neighborhood vs. school versus family versus peer) that is important for civic engagement, but also the type of engagement that is important and to what extent it supports youth's sense of empowerment.

The SDM model would suggest that opportunity is the lowest level of socialization; perhaps increasingly more active levels of involvement, skill development, and reinforcement are needed. Our results suggest that perhaps youths must be actively engaged in civic opportunities across all of the social domains. Moreover, according to SDM, it is possible that reinforcement of skills and engagement within a peer context must occur to support

behavior over time. Future studies should build upon our findings and investigate the type of context versus all four levels of the SDM model to parse out these two potential types of effects.

Once mechanisms to promote civic engagement are clarified, they can be translated into further developing intervention programs to more successfully encourage youth civic engagement. What seems to be crucial is the promotion of collaborative civic commitment across social domains. Boosting community and school civic engagement with peer-focused activities may be effective; because the peer group influence proved crucial for older adolescents, involving whole classrooms in civic interventions may yield more salient civic discourses and practices than targeting individual students. Such interventions could address work within the community and integrate the parents of students.

This would furnish opportunities for involvement and interactions with others, the possibility of developing individuals' civic skills, and an environmental arena supporting civic values and civic behaviors. Creating such an environment would positively affect both youth development, because it strengthens the transmission of the importance of civic engagement, and parents and whole families, by providing possibilities to broaden their social network (with teachers, parents of the other children, etc.), as well as increasing their civic knowledge.

In addition to further developing intervention programs, more rigorous intervention studies are needed to test their success. Longitudinal studies are needed to understand if such interventions encourage civic engagement for adolescents in the long term, if particular age groups are more effective to target, and how findings relate to more diverse adolescents across different cultural contexts.

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