

Citizenship and civic engagement in public problem-solving

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Abstract

This chapter adopts a political psychology approach to understanding the social psychological processes that may characterize individuals who are civically engaged. Interdisciplinary evidence pertaining to four key assumptions that link individuals' civic engagement with their understandings of citizenship and "civic selves" and how these psychological constructs may be related to civic participation in the future is selectively reviewed. The chapter suggests that these assumptions about individual-level psychological processes may play an important role either in reviving civic participation or in maintaining current levels of civic engagement over time.

Chapter to appear in: M. X. Delli-Carpini, L. Huddy, and R.Y. Shapiro (eds.), Research in Micropolitics: New Directions in Political Psychology. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

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Political theorists and social scientists have long been interested in the significance and importance of civic participation. Active community engagement and participation have been hypothesized to have personal as well as community benefits (Boyte & Kari, 1996; Pateman, 1970; Thompson, 1970). Political activists report a variety of gratifications they receive from their work, including material gains such as career advancement, social gains such as the company they enjoy, civic gains such as fulfilling a sense of duty, and collective outcomes such as the opportunity to influence government policy (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Other forms of civic engagement, like volunteering, have been found to be related to additional psychological functions and needs such as providing individuals with a way to express their values or to learn more about a particular social issue (e.g., Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen, & Miene, 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 2002). Further, volunteer activity has been associated with an increase in self-esteem (Yates & Youniss, 1996a) and with improved personal health outcomes (e.g., Andrews, 1990). With respect to community advantages, researchers have argued that the efficiency of a local government and the economic development of an area may be strongly influenced by the active engagement of the local citizenry in community affairs (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993). In addition, as Putnam (1995a) has noted, researchers in fields as varied as health, education, urban poverty, and criminology have all concluded that communities benefit from an active citizenry.

The many benefits of civic engagement have not been lost on those outside of academia. Structured efforts aimed at stimulating active citizen engagement in community affairs and public problem-solving have recently been initiated around the country, both within school settings (Rutter & Newman, 1989; Yates & Youniss, 1997) and outside of these more traditional

citizenship education environments. Many of the programs have arisen independently and predominantly in response to local needs. Yet, there also has been a concerted nationwide effort to encourage citizens to become more involved in their communities. For example, in 1993, federal legislation created The Corporation for National Service, an organization dedicated to funding and supervising community efforts to engage the citizenry in local affairs. One of the Corporation's initiatives, AmeriCorps, has enrolled over 150,000 young people to get involved in hundreds of programs around the country since 1994. The 1997 President's Summit for America's Future, an event co-hosted by President Clinton and each of his living predecessors, celebrated the role of citizen engagement in both the public and private spheres of our society.

A common theme among each of the aforementioned programs and events is one of active involvement by citizens and a common goal of encouraging citizens to continue their involvement in their communities. As such, it is important to determine how much we know about the psychological processes through which individuals who get involved in civic opportunities are influenced and to understand the extent to which these processes can actually stimulate more civic participation by those individuals. The purpose of the current chapter is to provide a selective and multidisciplinary review of research that addresses such questions. We begin by reviewing several past and current perspectives on citizenship and civic engagement. Next, we take a political psychological approach, introducing individual-level assumptions we believe are being made by participatory programs and reviewing research applicable to each assumption. In this context, we also discuss relevant findings from our own research that assesses the effects of an ongoing civic participation program.

Past Approaches and Revitalization

The “return of the citizen” (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994) has been hailed in the literature of recent political theory. Spurred on by disheartening reports of voter apathy and assaults on the welfare state in the West to the world-historic revolutions in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, political theorists are bearing witness to one of those “intermittent revivals” (Walzer, 1989, p. 211) of interest in citizenship that can be traced back through the French and American Revolutions to classical antiquity. We are being reminded that citizenship expresses the ancient aspiration of the members of political societies to participate meaningfully in the legislation or execution of the laws to which they must obey, as well as to enjoy securely the rights and privileges that protect their lives, liberty, and property. As such, historians of political thought have undertaken in-depth studies of the classical theorists of citizenship, especially Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli, and Rousseau. Likewise, communitarian critics of liberalism (Sullivan, 1986) have revived the ideology of “classical republicanism” (Ignatieff, 1995; Pocock, 1995; Skinner, 1992), calling for greater attention to civic virtue, public participation, or the good that is not already entailed by liberalism’s own commitments to citizenship. A call for a “citizen politics” has accompanied the revival of the ideals of “the commonwealth” (Boyte, 1989), and feminists have disputed whether or not citizenship is connected to “mothering” or maternal practices (compare Dietz, 1985; Elshtain, 1981). Doubts have been raised, especially by cultural pluralists and theorists of identity (Young, 1990; Phillips, 1993; Benhabib, 1996), whether one can speak any longer, if ever one could, of a unitary culture of citizenship, given the great and abiding differences of individuals and groups in “civil society” (Walzer, 1995), and thus, some have argued that “multicultural citizenship” (Kymlicka, 1995), may be the only coherent conception of citizenship available for multi-nation states or for a trans-national world. This “explosion of interest in the concept of citizenship” by political theorists (Kymlicka &

Norman, 1994, p. 352) shows no sign of abating any time soon, despite or perhaps because of the real distance that exists between the ideals and the realities of effective citizen participation in modern politics.

Political theorists, of course, are not unique in espying the return of the citizen. In fact, a renewed interest in the theory and practice of citizenship is shared widely by social scientists more generally and is the focus of several current debates in a variety of literatures.

The Social Capital Debate

One of the most recent ways of thinking about citizenship and civic participation is represented in the theory of **social capital**. Social capital, a concept originally developed by Coleman (1990), but most recently advanced by Putnam (e.g., 1995a; 2000) and others (e.g., see Mondak, 1998), refers to “features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putnam, 1995b, p. 664-665). The defining features of social capital include the amount of civic participation within a community and the relationship between participation and the amount of trust citizens have for one another. However, the significance of social capital is its purported influence on the surrounding community. For example, Putnam (1993) concludes from his twenty year study of the history and government of the regional districts of Italy that a high amount of social capital within a community is positively associated with the efficiency of the local bureaucracy and with the economic development of the region. The implication is that communities at large benefit from high levels of social capital (cf. Berman, 1997).

Alternative empirical research examining some of the issues of social capital has employed an individual-level analysis and has offered insight about the relationships between the key social capital features and other relevant constructs. In an analysis of the General Social

Survey (1972-1994), Brehm and Rahn (1997) found that individuals' confidence in government and its institutions is influenced by both the amount of the individuals' civic engagement and their trust in their fellow citizens. The researchers found a negative relationship between participation and confidence in government, but a positive relationship between interpersonal trust and confidence in government. Importantly, the latter relationship is much stronger than the former. Brehm and Rahn concluded that the relationship between social capital and attitudes toward the government is complicated.

Many critiques of the theory of social capital have appeared in the literature (e.g., Edwards & Foley, 1997; Jackman & Miller, 1996; Levi, 1996), but one of the most vigorous debates focuses on whether levels of social capital within American society have decreased recently. Putnam (1995a) argued that these levels have steadily declined over the past three decades and he supports the claim with statistics revealing decreased voter turnout; decreased involvement in community affairs; decreased attendance at religious services; and decreased membership in organizations as diverse as labor unions, the PTA, the League of Women Voters, the Red Cross, fraternal organizations, and bowling leagues. Finally, Putnam (1995b) noted that social trust, or trust in "most" other people, has decreased by approximately one third since 1972. His conclusion was that the prospects do not look good for America, given the importance of social capital in relation to the health of communities.

In response to the statistics presented by Putnam, the Roper Center (1996) gathered alternative statistics that indicate that the amount of civic engagement in America in fact has not decreased. Rather, membership in the PTA has been influenced by the number of school-aged children, and membership in the PTA by parents with children in the appropriate age-bracket has actually increased by 28% since 1982. Further, data reveal that although voter turnout has

decreased recently, citizen activism in other forms of civic participation has not. Citizens were just as likely to report attending a political meeting or rally in 1987 as they were in 1967 (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). The Independent Sector (1999) reports that 56% of Americans reported volunteering within the last year. Such data are inconsistent with Putnam's conclusions about America's declining social capital.

Related critiques contend that the types of civic engagement may be changing (Schudson, 1996; Skocpol, 1996). For example, Lemann (1996) argued that while enrollment in Little League baseball may be down, enrollment in youth soccer leagues has increased from 127,000 twenty years ago to 1.2 million ten years ago to 2.4 million more recently. Further, critics note that Putnam's data do not take into account the various grassroots political movements that have occurred within the last three decades (e.g., the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the Christian Right movement, various militia movements), which, they argue, required some sort of active citizen participation (Minkoff, 1997; Schudson, 1996; Valelly, 1996).

Both sides of this debate have marshalled statistical evidence to support their reasoning, and thus the conclusions to be drawn are indeed debatable. However, the demonstrable changes in people's attitudes and beliefs are less disputable. As Putnam (1995b) noted, levels of interpersonal trust have declined—54% of Americans agreed that most people can be trusted in 1964, while only 35% agreed that most people can be trusted in 1995 (Morin & Balz, 1996). Approximately 53% of college freshmen thought “keeping up-to-date with politics” was important in 1970, but only 29% held this belief in 1995 (American Council on Education and the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, 1996). Levels of citizens' political efficacy may be down too. According to NES data, in 1960, 73% of Americans disagreed with the statement, “People like me don't have a say in what the government does,” but only 55%

disagreed in 1988 (Rosenstone & Hanson, 1993). Thus, the purported decline in social capital may be valid, if in no other way than in the weakening of the beliefs and attitudes that represent America's social capital.

What is missing from the debate?

Of course, such debates are necessarily limited and thus cannot address the full range of issues associated with active citizen involvement in community affairs. For example, there has yet to be a concerted effort to comprehend the processes through which civic involvement can be stimulated and maintained. In our opinion, given the aforementioned importance of civic engagement for communities and individuals alike, understanding these processes is paramount, regardless of whether current levels of civic engagement are low in comparison to those of twenty years ago or not. Others concur (e.g., Youniss, McClellan, & Yates, 1997), yet neither Putnam nor his critics sufficiently address how the goal of greater engagement may be realized. Putnam (1996) indicated that "public policy will be part of the answer" (p. 28), but he failed to explicate the kind of public policy he had in mind. He also implied that citizens themselves need to be part of the solution, but again, he failed to explain how. Importantly, understanding the processes through which levels of participation are positively influenced would help elucidate how policy makers, practitioners, and citizens themselves should proceed.

Researchers have historically turned to the role of education when thinking about such processes (see Ehman, 1980 and Ferguson, 1991 for reviews). And, to be fair, Putnam (1995b) examined the influence of education, along with a litany of other factors (e.g., economic hard times, suburbanization, the movement of women into the workforce, television), claiming that we must first ascertain the causes of the decline in social capital if we are to address it. In fact, Putnam concluded that education has a dramatic influence on civic engagement. Yet, after

pointing out that educational levels have increased at the same time as civic engagement supposedly has decreased, and that the decline has occurred within every educational stratum, he essentially retreated from a focus on the potential of educational efforts. Moreover, his references to “civic education” per se are extremely rare and vague. In his analysis of his study of social capital in Italy, Putnam mentioned that important social norms are taught and maintained through socialization processes, “including civic education” (1993, p.171), but the precise nature of these processes was not further developed.

Additional investigations of factors influencing civic and political participation echo the importance of formal education (e.g., Beck & Jennings, 1982; Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Rosenstone & Hanson, 1993; Verba & Nie, 1972; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). For example, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) first divided the factors affecting participation into three broad categories—resources, psychological motivations, and institutional recruitment—and then presented an extensive analysis of the influence of education on each of these factors. They concluded that education has both a strong direct effect on participation as well as multiple indirect effects through its influence on income, opportunities to gain and develop necessary civic skills, political interest and knowledge, and increasing institutional involvement.

That education has consistently appeared as having such a strong influence on participation may lead one to assume that education is the simple answer to the question of how to encourage more involvement. However, as mentioned earlier, Putnam (1995b) noted that increases in education have paralleled decreases in civic engagement. In addition, the task of increasing educational levels may not necessarily be so simple, as years of educational reform

demonstrate. Finally, simply arguing that we should improve citizens' education does not provide advice as to how these reforms should be made, or what specific effects they may have.

Perhaps a more efficacious strategy for understanding the processes through which greater civic engagement can be achieved is one that focuses on the role of specific interventions designed to encourage participation and/or to actively engage citizens in public problem-solving. As previously noted, many such participatory endeavors exist; not only can one consider conventional civics classes, extracurricular activities, and school-sponsored community service programs, but also alternative efforts aimed at initiating and maintaining an active citizen movement. For example, programs like Boston's City Year provide opportunities and resources for diverse groups of young adults to work together to improve surrounding communities by building parks, renovating housing, organizing community clean-ups, or various other tasks. Public Allies, in Washington D.C., recruits individuals from under-privileged neighborhoods and teaches them organizational and leadership skills. Similar, but more established, programs include VISTA and the Jesuit Volunteer Corps.

However, for the most part, the primary goals of these programs are practical and concentrated on making a difference in the community, rather than on citizenship education and/or corps members development. Evaluations of such programs usually focus on the effects on the community or on the recipients of the work, rather than on the participants themselves (cf. Gray, Ondaatje, Geschwind, Robyn, & Klein, 1996).¹ Consequently, these evaluations fail to demonstrate how (and often whether) the programs influence their participants' orientations toward civic involvement and how the programs induce their participants to continue to

¹ However, evaluations of the "service learning movement," a related movement aimed at incorporating civic participation into education curricula, have attempted to document the impact of involvement on students' academic performance (e.g., Markus, Howard, & King, 1993).

participate in community affairs. Nonetheless, one might hypothesize that getting involved in these programs' efforts would have a favorable and prosocial effect on the participants. One approach to the analysis of such efforts is to examine various potentially relevant psychological assumptions associated with the effects on participants. We discuss this approach in the next section by drawing on different disciplinary bodies of empirical research.

A Political Psychology Perspective on Civic Participation

From our perspective, by presuming that individuals' civic engagement has a positive effect on their future engagement, one implicitly makes assumptions about how the engagement influences important psychological constructs (i.e., beliefs and attitudes) and about how those constructs may be related to subsequent behaviors. Specifically, four assumptions that link individuals' involvement with their understandings of citizenship and their "civic selves" and that in turn connect these psychological constructs to the individuals' future involvement can be identified. Those assumptions are as follows:

- Individuals have conceptualizations of what it means to be a "citizen," or a member of a community. These conceptualizations can be linked to action, and an understanding of political efficacy may be implicit in them.
- It is possible to influence individuals' citizenship conceptualizations as well as the beliefs associated with those understandings. An effective means of accomplishing this may be to provide individuals with concrete opportunities to engage in public problem-solving activities.
- It is also possible that, by engaging in civic action, individuals alter their "civic selves," or their social identities as members of their communities.

- Ultimately, citizenship conceptualizations and a civic self may be linked to actual behavior in the form of civic engagement, which includes both political and non-political participation in the community.

In the remainder of this chapter, we discuss each of the above assumptions, drawing upon theory and research from various disciplines (including political science, education, developmental psychology, and social psychology), to examine more closely the linkage between psychological processes and civic participation.

Citizenship conceptualizations

Although much of the research on citizenship and participation differentiates classifications of citizenship based on political theory (see Ichilov, 1990), there is also research examining how citizens themselves understand the concept of a “citizen,” especially that of a “good citizen.” For example, some of the classical work in political science (e.g., Jennings & Niemi, 1974; 1981; Lane, 1965) attempted to document the role citizens think they and others should play within their own communities. Classic research also revealed that the orientations of individuals’ citizenship conceptualizations can be active (e.g., political participation and assisting in community problem-solving) and/or passive (e.g., having rights and obeying laws) (Almond & Verba, 1963).

Recent research on individuals’ citizenship conceptualizations and civic identities (Conover, 1995; Conover, Crewe, & Searing, 1991; 1993; Conover, Leonard, & Searing, 1993) continues to examine the active and passive dimensions within these understandings and suggests that cultural differences may exist (see also Ichilov & Nave, 1981). There also appears to be much variation within the American culture in terms of how involved individuals think citizens should be in politics and community affairs. For example, there may be normative,

developmental changes in individuals' citizenship conceptualizations. In their study of children's political attitudes and beliefs, Hess and Torney (1967) found that young children (7-9 years old) are likely to understand a "good citizen" as equivalent to a "good person" (e.g., someone who helps others and obeys the laws), but that by their early teens, children are more likely to incorporate political participation into their conceptions of a "good citizen." Jennings and Niemi (1974) also found that 60% of their sample of high school seniors indicated that good citizens vote and/or pay attention to politics (see Shantz, 1972, as well). A more recent study conducted by Peter D. Hart Associates for People For the American Way (1989), however, revealed that only 12% of 15 to 24 year olds include voting and/or being involved in politics in their definition of a good citizen.²

In addition to normative differences in citizenship conceptualizations, individual differences may exist among American adults too. Using Q-sort methodology, Theiss-Morse (1993) found four distinct conceptualizations of the participatory responsibilities of citizens. The first of these, the *Representative Democracy*, represents a perspective advocating that citizen involvement be limited to voting and staying informed. The *Political Enthusiast* perspective submits that politics is pervasive and that citizens should use any and every means possible to get involved, while the *Pursued Interests* perspective is endorsed by individuals who think that informed citizens alone should be involved in the political process and that they should do this by supporting the activity of special interests groups. Finally, the *Indifferent* perspective agrees that citizens should vote and be informed, yet individuals who endorse this perspective are likely

² Haney, Burgess, Rahn, Sullivan, and Snyder (1996) argue that more recent generations of youth, as compared to earlier generations, are, and may have good reason to be, more pessimistic about their current social and political circumstances. The weak endorsement for political participation by the current generation of youth may be part of the broader trend of decreasing social capital discussed earlier.

to feel some alienation from and apathy toward the political system. Thus, citizenship conceptualizations not only differ in terms of how active a citizen is expected to be in political affairs, but also in terms of which activities citizens are expected to perform.

Our first assumption also states that an understanding of political efficacy may be implicit in the conceptualizations citizens hold. As demonstrated in the Theiss-Morse (1993) research, people who endorse an Indifferent conceptualization are not as likely to believe that citizens have the power to effect real political change as are those who endorse a Political Enthusiast perspective. The concept of political efficacy, including both the belief that citizens have the ability to engage in political activities and the belief that those actions will actually be influential, has a long history within the study of political psychology and participation (e.g., Almond & Verba, 1963; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Jennings & Niemi, 1974; 1981; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Rosenstone & Hanson, 1993; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). In general, those with a greater sense of political efficacy are more likely to be involved in political and civic activities and thus should be more likely to endorse citizenship conceptualizations with participatory expectations.

In sum, the literature supports the assumption that individuals hold specific understandings of the role citizens should play in political and social affairs. Further, these conceptualizations can be examined in terms of several dimensions, including the degree to which people think citizens should be actively involved in addressing community affairs and the degree of efficacy citizens have in the political system. We now turn to an examination of whether such conceptualizations have been shown to be mutable.

Changing citizenship conceptualizations

The second assumption we identified asserts that it may be possible to influence individuals' citizenship conceptualizations as well as the beliefs associated with those understandings. Further, it states that an effective means of accomplishing this change may be to provide individuals with concrete opportunities to engage in public problem-solving activities. If we think of citizenship conceptualizations as schemas, or cognitive structures that embody the duties and rights of citizenship, then there is some empirical basis for believing that these conceptualizations can be influenced by interventions involving problem-solving and/or participation. Torney-Purta (1989, 1990) advocates thinking about political constructs in this way. For example, she found that after participating in the decision-making of an international crisis simulation, adolescents are likely to develop more complex schemas of how the political and economic systems can address foreign policy (Torney-Purta, 1992). Leighley (1991) demonstrated that people who engage in campaign activities and problem-solving at a national level (e.g., by contacting a public official), acquire more abstract and developed understandings of the political system as assessed by their "political conceptualizations," a measure similar to political sophistication (Luskin, 1987) and political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Research by Avery and colleagues (e.g., Avery, Bird, Johnstone, Sullivan, & Thalhammer, 1992) has shown that exposure to a political tolerance curriculum that engages students in role-playing and simulations may result in more complex and abstract understandings of issues surrounding civil liberties. Likewise, a focus on civic participation and the role citizens can play in community problem-solving may influence individuals' citizenship conceptualizations, especially if those individuals are given the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making themselves.

However, in their reviews of research examining the influence of civics curricula on students' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, both Ehman (1980) and Ferguson (1991) conclude that traditional American civics and government courses do *not* appear to have a significant impact on political attitudes and beliefs, including how politically active students think citizens should be. Other findings suggest that the effects of school and civics curricula on political attitudes toward government are positive, but rather small and weak effects (Niemi & Junn, 1998, see Table 6.5). Perhaps this should not be surprising, as numerous researchers have concluded that traditional social science texts, courses, and teachers offer a very narrow and limited view of the citizen's role in society and the political system (e.g., Ichilov, 1990; Oliner, 1983; cf. Anderson, Avery, Smith, & Sullivan, 1997). Nonetheless, other aspects of the schooling experience (i.e., participation in school government and/or other extracurricular activities, a non-traditional classroom climate and/or school culture) are often related to political beliefs and attitudes in positive ways (Ferguson, 1991; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Patrick & Hoge, 1991). For example, students who participated in a comprehensive student government program allowing for a great deal of student self-governance demonstrate greater gains in their knowledge about citizen duties than students who participated in a more traditional student government program (Borg, 1966). Similarly, Dillon and Grout (1976) found that students in open-classrooms (i.e., environments in which students help design the classroom structure) are less likely to feel politically alienated, although other researchers have not found significant effects for classroom climate (see Ehman, 1980).

It is also possible to examine how participation and involvement in community decision-making apart from formal schooling and curricula, but within the political arena or within other structured environments, influences citizenship conceptualizations. For example, Hamilton and

Fenzel (1988) found that adolescents who had participated in community service programs developed a greater understanding of the rest of society's responsibility to help those in need, especially if the youth were involved in projects that required greater responsibility and autonomy from adults (see Conrad & Hedin, 1982; Newmann & Rutter, 1983; Yates & Youniss, 1998 as well). In their panel study, Jennings and Niemi (1981) found that college graduates who had been involved with political protests were more likely than those who had not protested to emphasize active political involvement and to de-emphasize the passive, obedient role when describing a good citizen. Finkel (1985) demonstrated that voting and campaign activity may have positive effects on individuals' sense of external political efficacy, or the degree to which they believe that their actions will affect government policy and actions. In comparing employees in a democratic work environment to those in more traditional, authoritative work environments, Elden (1981) found that participation in workplace decision-making also may have a positive influence on political efficacy.

Thus, there is support in the literature for the claim that participating in public problem-solving, whether in the school, political arena, or workplace, may alter how citizens understand their responsibilities and abilities within the community. However, it should be noted that although some of the relevant studies are experimental research endeavors, many of them are correlational in nature. Thus, it is possible that many of the findings reflect a self-selection bias such that individuals who are already more participation-oriented than others are more likely to become involved in the "interventions" reviewed. In addition, there is some evidence that some of the curricula and participation opportunities may have a greater influence on individuals of some segments of society (i.e., the less advantaged; Finkel, 1985; Jennings, Langton, & Niemi, 1974) more than others (see also Jones, 1974; Litt, 1963). Such differential effects should be

important to consider when thinking about the influence of civic participation on individuals' conceptualizations of who citizens are and what they should do. The next section reviews research suggesting that individuals' civic identities, or their conceptualizations of themselves, may also be influenced by their active participation in the community.

The emergence of civic selves

Our third assumption focuses on an additional potential intrapersonal consequence of civic engagement; it maintains that by engaging in civic action, individuals may alter their "civic selves," or their social identities of themselves as members of their communities. Current psychological theory on the self acknowledges that there are many different dimensions of the self and that these dimensions can be found within individuals' self-schemas, or the cognitive representations individuals hold about who they are (Baumeister, 1998; Linville & Carlston, 1994; Markus, 1977). Self-schemas are believed to be primarily a result of past experiences and thus to represent previous aspects of the self, although they can also portray dimensions of the self that individuals want to realize in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Several different lines of research focus on individuals' *civic selves*, or on their self-schemas as members of communities and/or as civic beings. For example, Conover and Searing (Conover, 1995; Conover, Crewe, and Searing, 1991, 1993; Conover, Leonard, and Searing, 1993) found that individuals present unique depictions of themselves and their rights and responsibilities in relation to the community and that such self-understandings are, in part, culturally determined. Other researchers specifically focus on the self-concepts of individuals who have participated extensively in community involvement. For example, Hart and Fegley (1995; Hart, Yates, Fegley, & Wilson, 1995) studied the self-schemas of "care exemplars," a group of adolescents who had exhibited an unusual amount of commitment to their surrounding

social environments. According to the findings, such adolescents, as compared to a matched sample of adolescents who were not involved in community service, are more likely to attribute moral and caring personality traits to themselves. The researchers also found that there is greater congruency between the care exemplars' ideal selves (the kind of persons the adolescents would like to be) and their actual selves (the kind of persons the adolescents think they actually are), and that there is more continuity between care exemplars' past, present, and future selves. They concluded that the care exemplars differ from the matched sample predominantly in the way in which they incorporate moral dimensions into their self-concepts (see Teske, 1997). Importantly, these moral dimensions are usually civically-oriented.

As psychological theory on the self (Bem, 1972; Linville & Carlston, 1994) would suggest, research demonstrates that participation in civic efforts may alter individuals' civic selves (cf. Finkel, 1985). First, individuals who participate in community affairs view themselves as having changed as a result of their civic involvement (Fendrich, 1993; Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988; McAdam, 1988). Further, studies that compare individuals' identities before and after participation opportunities also reveal increases in the degree to which those individuals include civically-oriented aspects in their self-understandings (e.g., Conrad & Hedin, 1982; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Newmann & Rutter, 1983). A recent study of university students participating in community affairs as part of their academic learning (Gray et al., 1996) found that participation positively influenced how committed students felt they were to serving the community and to engaging in community action programs. Similar findings emerged for the influence of participation on individuals' beliefs about their own leadership abilities and about their own understandings of community and national problems. Finally, within their emerging line of research, Yates and Youniss (Yates, 1998; Yates & Youniss, 1996a, 1996b, 1997, 1998) have

studied the effect of a mandatory service program on high school juniors' identity formation. They have found that after participating in the program, students are more likely to identify themselves in relation to others in society and/or in relation to their own role in effecting societal change. In sum, there is reason to believe that civic engagement may change individuals' self-schemas such that a "civic self" may begin to emerge and become more prominent in how people think about themselves.

Ideally, individuals who participate in civic efforts will be motivated to continue their engagement in community affairs long after their participation in any one program or experience is over (Fendrich & Lovoy, 1988; Flanagan et al., 1998; Hanks & Eckland, 1978; Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1998; McAdam, 1989; Rosenthal et al., 1998; Yates & Youniss, 1998). The significance of self-schemas, then, is that they are assumed to be powerful determinants of future behavior (Cantor, Markus, Niedenthal, & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Nurius, 1986). That is, it is believed that if individuals hold strong images of themselves as civic beings, then they will be more likely to behave in ways that are in line with this image (Hart, Yates, Fegley, & Wilson, 1995). Thus, those with more well-defined civic selves should be more likely to actually engage, and to stay engaged, in civic behaviors. In the next section, we examine research relevant to the relationships between individuals' psychological constructs and their civic behaviors.

The links between psychological constructs and behavior

Our fourth assumption states that citizenship conceptualizations and civic selves may be linked to actual behavior in the form of civic engagement, and that this engagement may include political and non-political participation, or prosocial behavior. Again, there is empirical research to support this linkage. For example, a recent study by Cole and Stewart (1996) revealed that there may be a positive relationship between having a strong sense of social responsibility, as

assessed by one's sense of community and one's sense of personal political efficacy, and engaging in a wide range of political behaviors (see Funk, 1998 as well). Moreover, this relationship appears to be independent of one's sense of political identity. As noted earlier, Finkel (1985) provided evidence that participating in campaign activities and voting positively influence one's sense of external political efficacy, but he also demonstrated that this relationship is reciprocal, such that increases in external political efficacy result in a greater likelihood of engaging in these political behaviors. Other research indicates that the relationship between citizenship conceptualizations and political behavior may differ depending on the type of political behavior being considered. Rosenstone and Hanson (1993) found that stronger feelings of civic duty had a small impact on whether one voted, but no real influence on whether one worked on a political campaign, donated money to a political campaign, or tried to influence how another would vote. Interestingly, Theiss-Morse (1993) found a direct association between the type of citizenship conceptualization individuals endorsed and the type of political behavior in which they engaged. That is, citizens who endorsed a citizenship perspective that emphasized voting as the most important political behavior were indeed more likely to vote, whereas those who endorsed perspectives that were either indifferent to politics or that advocated alternative political behaviors were less likely to vote. Of the people who endorsed one of these latter two perspectives, those who were indifferent to politics were also less likely to engage in unconventional political behaviors such as joining in a protest or refusing to obey an unjust law. Yet those who advocated political behaviors other than voting were more likely to engage in these unconventional political behaviors. Such findings lend support to the idea that if it is possible to modify individuals' cognitions and attitudes about what being a citizen means, then it may also be possible to influence their civic behaviors.

A similar relationship is believed to exist between how individuals think of themselves as civic beings and their civic participation (Youniss, McClelland, & Yates, 1997). As discussed earlier, there is psychological evidence that our self-schemas serve as important mediators of our behaviors (Cantor, Markus, Niedenthal, & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Nurius, 1986). For example, well-defined self-schemas appear to guide individuals toward specific roles or social situations in which they are more likely to be able to verify those self-schemas (Niedenthal, Cantor, & Kihlstrom, 1985; Setterlund & Niedenthal, 1993; Swann, 1983). Therefore, it may be that individuals with well-defined civic selves prefer social situations in which they have a greater opportunity to engage in civic affairs, thereby making such behaviors all the more likely. Other research provides more direct evidence that the extent to which individuals endorse positive social attributes or specific self-concepts positively influences the extent to which they will engage in a prosocial behavior related to those social attributes or self-concepts (e.g., Brown & Smart, 1991; Gorassini & Olson, 1995). In fact, Cole & Stewart (1996) found that one's political identity may be positively related to the number of political behaviors, both formal and informal, in which one engages. Finally, qualitative evidence documents that individuals who have a clear sense of themselves in relation to their community and society are more likely to be actively involved in the affairs of the community and society (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1995; Hart & Fegley, 1995; McAdam, 1988). Thus, it seems likely that if a participatory program is able to instill a well-defined civic self in its participants, it will also be able to affect the likelihood that those individuals will continue their civic engagement.

In sum, there is sufficient evidence to support each of the four hypotheses we identified as implicit in efforts aimed at influencing citizens' future civic behaviors by first encouraging them to engage actively in current civic affairs and discussions. In this context, we now present

findings from our own research on a specific civic engagement program that generally pertain to the first three of these four hypotheses.

Involvement in Public Achievement: A Case Study

Public Achievement, designed by the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs in conjunction with the University's Political Science Department, is a youth and politics initiative that stresses active civic engagement for middle and high school students along with college undergraduates in selective schools in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Kansas City, Milwaukee, and elsewhere.³ The program's primary goal is to encourage the younger students to get more involved in civic affairs by identifying problems in and around their schools and communities, and then working in small groups throughout the academic year to try to solve or clarify those problems. For example, students may try to initiate a curriculum to address sexual harassment in the hallway, plant trees in their neighborhoods, change their school uniform policy, raise money for new playground equipment, develop a plan to get after-school jobs, or organize a peace march at the state capitol building. *Public Achievement's* civic philosophy is one of public works. That is, by engaging in public problem-solving in the most immediate surroundings, citizens of all ages can begin to master the civic skills needed to continue their political involvement and, potentially, to take their newly developed problem-solving skills to different or broader political contexts.

The structure of *Public Achievement* is designed to be flexible and loose, depending upon school structure and community institutions. Throughout most of the academic year, the middle and high school students meet for approximately one hour each week in groups dedicated to the problem they have identified. In these meetings, the students report advances in their work, plan

future directions, and discuss the implications of their efforts (both for themselves and for the community at large). But there are no formal requirements or set structures regarding how each student group's experience will unfold. University of Minnesota and other undergraduates, as well as some teachers, parents, and the program's staff, act as "coaches" for the youth, introducing the key concepts and helping develop the civic skills. However, it is the younger students themselves who must take all of the necessary steps to implement their public problem-solving ideas, from discussing the sexual harassment policy with the school principal, to presenting a suggested new uniform policy to school board members, to surveying parents for support of a new playground, to soliciting neighbors for after-school jobs, to calling the police to coordinate a planned peace march. Again, the emphasis of *Public Achievement* is on actual involvement in (rather than just discussion about) political and social issues. Because of this, it represented an opportunity to examine empirically some of the general hypothesized effects of citizen involvement discussed earlier. Below we present an overview of the findings from this investigation.

Assessing the Effects of Public Achievement

After identifying the aforementioned implicit assumptions of this type of effort, Haney and Borgida (1997) were particularly interested in the effect of *Public Achievement* on students' conceptualizations of the role of students in the school community, on their sense of political efficacy, and on their own civic self-concepts.⁴ Thus, during the 1994-1995 and 1995-1996 academic years, Haney and Borgida assessed the civic attitudes and beliefs of 4th-8th graders in

³ More description and analysis of *Public Achievement* may be found in Farr (1997) and in Boyte and Farr (1997).

⁴ Because *Public Achievement* considers children's role of being students in a school as equivalent to adults' roles of being "citizens in a community," questions assessing students' citizenship conceptualizations were framed in terms of the role of students in the school.

three Twin Cities schools that sponsored the *Public Achievement* program. Specifically, they administered a brief questionnaire to students in their classrooms at three different points each year—prior to the start of *Public Achievement* (September/October), at a midpoint (March), and after the program had ended (May). Based on the program's goals and rationales, Haney and Borgida predicted that involvement in the experiential civics program would have a direct, positive impact on each of several key psychological constructs (i.e., a citizenship conceptualization about active participation, a civic self-concept of being problem-solvers, a civic self-concept of being able to work well with others).

To assess the influence of continued involvement, analyses were conducted using repeated measures analyses of variance on each of the psychological constructs across the survey administrations.

In two of the schools, *Public Achievement* was not offered to all students. Therefore, participation in the program could be used as a dichotomous between-subjects variable for the analyses within these schools.⁵ However, the students who participated in the program in these schools were also not the same during the two years of the research. Therefore, separate analyses need to be conducted for the 94-95 academic year and the 95-96 academic year within these schools (see Table 1 for the sample sizes).

⁵ Descriptive analyses revealed that students from these schools differed systematically along several dimensions, including age and socioeconomic status. Thus, analyses were run separately for each school. Further, it should be noted that there was an issue of nonindependence in the observations (see Kenny & Judd, 1986), in that students participated in groups of approximately ten during their public problem-solving efforts. However, because of the small sample sizes in each school, Haney and Borgida needed to use the individual as the unit of analysis, rather than the students' problem-solving groups. The extremely small sample sizes within each school also prevented a break down of the data by gender, age, and prior participation in *Public Achievement*.

Insert Table 1 about here

The few significant results obtained in these analyses displayed effects opposite to the predictions—students participating in the program were actually less likely to endorse some of the psychological constructs (i.e., the active participation citizenship conceptualization, the civic self-concept of being problem-solvers, and the civic self-concept of being able to work well with others) as the year progressed, and as compared to students not participating in the program. By the end of the second year, however, participating students in one school endorsed the citizenship conceptualization about active participation as much as they had in the beginning of the year.

In the third school, all students were expected to participate in *Public Achievement* during both years of the research. Thus, a comparison group was not available in this school, but it was possible to identify forty-eight students who were involved in the program both years and completed the survey at each of the six administrations across the two years. This afforded Haney & Borgida (1997) the opportunity to examine whether the program's effects may emerge beyond one year. Again, they predicted that the effects of the program would be positive and cumulative over the two years. And again, the majority of the statistically significant effects revealed that students participating in *Public Achievement* were actually less likely to endorse some of the psychological constructs (i.e., political efficacy in their school, political efficacy in their neighborhoods, a civic self-concept of being community-oriented) as their involvement in the program progressed. Nonetheless, the general trend for a last significant effect revealed a very different pattern. That is, students participating in *Public Achievement* were less likely at

the end of the first year to endorse a civic self-concept of being able to work well with others, but were significantly more likely to endorse this self-concept as the second year progressed.

In conclusion, the findings reported in Haney and Borgida (1997) are suggestive that participation effects may emerge over time. But, rather than having a positive influence on students' citizenship conceptualizations, efficacy, and civic selves, participation in *Public Achievement* may actually decrease the likelihood that students will endorse these beliefs and attitudes, at least in the short-term. It is important to remember that working together to solve common problems or address social issues is hard work, requiring cooperation and persistence in the face of possible failure. Therefore, it is possible that the student-citizens in this program were simply acknowledging the difficulties and rigors associated with civic problem-solving. However, the results from the third school also suggest that with time, and as students gain some additional experience with public problem-solving, they may begin to show improvements on some of the key psychological dimensions. Importantly, one of these long-term effects may include a positive influence on their perceptions of their ability to work well with others, an effect participatory theory would predict (Thompson, 1970) and other research has also documented (e.g., Rutter & Newmann, 1989).

There are several important methodological constraints, however, that limit the strength of inference and generalizability of findings from the Haney & Borgida (1997) study of the *Public Achievement* program to other community service or experiential learning programs. Participants in the study of *Public Achievement*, for example, were not randomly assigned to the program or to a control group and therefore self-selection biases may have influenced the pattern of results. Similarly, the format of *Public Achievement*, which was developed in the absence of any guiding research design or methodology, was set up such that students who participated in

the program attended all other classes with students who did not attend the program; hence, to some unknown extent, students in the comparison groups may have been informally exposed to information presented in the treatment groups. While exposure to the *Public Achievement* curriculum was only approximately one hour per week for participating students, this possible “contamination” nevertheless could serve to undermine further the strength of an already minimal programmatic treatment.

While these kinds of methodological concerns constrain the strength and scope of claims that can be made about *Public Achievement*, the strength of (positive or negative) effects associated with community service and experiential learning programs that have been evaluated with stronger research designs also tend to be small and inconsistent (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988). In fact, “while scholars and professionals affirm the value of adolescents engaging in responsible activities in their communities, evaluators have often found it difficult to document the developmental benefits of participation in community service or other forms of experiential learning” (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988, p.66). There are several factors that may account for this difficulty (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988). The experiences of younger students (e.g., those of middle school age), in particular, would be expected to vary considerably in programs like *Public Achievement*. Second, there may also be notable variability within treatment conditions such that student participants selectively focus on aspects of the treatment program that may not be central to the evaluative criteria used to assess programmatic success. Third, more general and enduring changes in, for example, self-esteem, efficacy, or social responsibility are unlikely as a function of typically minimal and specific treatment approaches (like *Public Achievement*).

A fourth reason why effects associated with programs like *Public Achievement* may be difficult to assess involves the kind of quantitative and qualitative measures typically included in

studies of program effects. It may be the case, for example, that the survey-based measures used to assess the program's effects are either too specific or too global for the program under investigation. Specific beliefs about and attitudes toward *Public Achievement*, for example, were not assessed by Haney & Borgida (1997) who instead included measures to gauge the broader impact of the program on a range of beliefs and attitudes pertaining to civic participation. As with other programs, qualitative as well as quantitative measures also should be incorporated into research designs to assess as many different aspects of the treatment approach as possible. Haney & Borgida (1997), for example, reported anecdotal findings about impressive student-initiated projects generated by participation in *Public Achievement* that were simply not captured by quantitative measurement; but a systematic qualitative assessment of the program was beyond the scope of the research project. Finally, it is also important to include measures of participants' baseline civic skills and political knowledge (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Lack of civic skills in youth and adults, for example, may account for the low level of participation in some programs (Patrick & Hoge, 1991). Knowing whether the parents of student participants themselves are involved in community service also is important to assess; students whose parents are so involved and/or emphasize a social responsibility ethic are more likely to intend to be and to be involved in community service (Fitch, 1987; Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998; Hart, et al., 1995; Rosenthal, Fiering, & Lewis, 1998).

In summary, the assessment of programs like *Public Achievement* requires a comprehensive (i.e., qualitative and quantitative) measurement approach and a commitment to a longitudinal research design that will enable investigators to examine the long-term as well as the short-term effects of community service programs (Youniss, McClellan, & Yates, 1997).

Conclusions

The focus of this chapter has been an examination of the psychological processes that may characterize individuals who are civically engaged. We suggest that an understanding of the processes through which civic involvement can be stimulated and maintained is an important but neglected aspect of the social capital debate that has dominated and continues to influence the ways in which political theorists and political psychologists think about citizenship and civic participation (e.g., Mondak, 1998). If the level of social capital has indeed been declining, then an understanding of these individual-level processes can contribute to designing educational and experiential programs that may stimulate and maintain civic engagement over time. On the other hand, if, as some have suggested, social capital in the United States has *not* been a steep decline, then an understanding of these processes may be necessary for a more complete understanding of how civic engagement can be maintained and potentially enhanced over time. We have suggested in this chapter, in other words, that assumptions about civic involvement and conceptions of citizenship and civic selves may play an important role *either* in reviving civic participation *or* in maintaining involvement.

The evidence that we marshaled to examine these assumptions is illustrative rather than exhaustive. Citizenship conceptualizations indeed seem to be held by individuals and seem to vary in terms of how active citizens are expected to be and how diverse an array of activities they are expected to engage in. What seems to be clear is that embedded within these citizenship expectations are participatory tendencies, that, if targeted appropriately, could be influenced by persuasion-based approaches. There also seems to be some support for the assumptions that these conceptualizations are malleable which in turn suggests again that there is the potential for

programs like *Public Achievement* and other service learning programs to affect the nature and perhaps even the stability of these intra-individual conceptualizations.

But the identification and assessment of such effects, as suggested by Hamilton & Fenzel (1988) and others, depends in part on the substantive nature of the programmatic “treatment” involved, in part on whether the hypothesized effects are examined short-term (albeit, post-treatment), and in part on the sophistication of the measurement approach incorporated into the research design used to examine the target program. Self-selection may be quite a threat to validity in studies of programs like *Public Achievement* in that more highly motivated participants, those who may already be more committed to civic participation and community service, may be more likely to maintain and extend civic engagement over time. Self-selection and other methodological artifacts, therefore, must be addressed in order to more rigorously assess the extent to which civic selves mediate civic engagement. Moreover, these research designs should be developed and in place at the inception of each program (and preferably implemented by independent researchers).

Finally, any serious consideration of civic engagement over time must begin to address the question of the effects on actual behaviors, which were not examined in the research reported in the previous section of the chapter. To what extent does changing civic self-concepts or inducing a sense of civic self contribute to our understanding of the processes associated with sustained civic participation? More importantly, by asking such questions, political psychologists may play an important role in determining whether and the ways in which programs like *Public Achievement* can be effective in initiating, sustaining, and enhancing the quality of civic engagement over time. In turn, insights into these questions may also shed light

on the extent to which programs that promote public problem-solving may ultimately build social capital.

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Table 1: Sample Sizes for the Two Participating Schools

		Participating in <i>Public Achievement</i>	Not Participating in <i>Public Achievement</i>
School A	94-95	13	15
	95-96	21	27
School B	94-95	26	22
	95-96	17	27