

# Promoting the Development of Citizenship in Diverse Youth

Lonnie R. Sherrod, *Fordham University*

## Introduction

Youth in this country have been described as showing a lack of civic engagement (Putnam, 1996, 2000). Youth who feel marginalized from the mainstream, in particular, poor and minority youth, are particularly disaffected (Jankowski 1992, 2002). However, we have found in focus groups with such youth that they do have opinions, loyalty, and commitment about political issues related to family, race, and religion, for example, but not directly related to the country (Sherrod, Flanagan, and Youniss 2002). Our research examines youth's political attitudes and socialization experiences in regard to family, race, and religion in order to discover a potential "hook" or "handle" which could be used to redirect youth attention and interest to citizenship. Political attitudes are a form of civic engagement found even in youth who do not participate politically. Thus, the study of political attitudes provides a means of examining civic engagement in all youth. We hope eventually to develop an intervention to promote the civic engagement of youth. Our current work, focusing on the examination of youth's political attitudes and their socialization experiences, particularly in poor and minority youth, is the first step toward the longer term goal of developing such an intervention.

## Political Socialization of Youth

Key to development of citizenship is some identification with the nation state, so that the country becomes the social reference group for the development of political attitudes, and attitudes then function to promote participation as a citizen in the country (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Niemi 1999). However,

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**Lonnie R. Sherrod** is professor of psychology in Fordham University's Applied Developmental Psychology Program. His area of research is youth political development, and he has co-edited special issues of the *Journal of Research on Social Issues* (1998) and *Applied Developmental Science* (2002) on the topic. He can be reached at [sherrod@fordham.edu](mailto:sherrod@fordham.edu).

there are numerous social groups other than country or nation state that can impact the development of attitudes and one key issue for research is which social group influences the development of which values and attitudes.

Behaviors traditionally defined as citizenship are not evident until late adolescence; 18 is the legal voting age, which is the first formal opportunity to exercise citizenship. Hence, the developmental progression to explicitly defined citizenship behaviors must involve earlier, different forms of civic engagement (Dudley and Gitelson 2002). What then is the socialization process that leads to participation as a citizen in the social group that defines loyalty to country, and how does this process vary by specific group within the country, such as by race or class membership?

There are several mechanisms for entry into the arena of citizenship. Certainly, youngsters show involvement in and commitment to institutions such as schools or community organizations before they exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Organizations such as 4-H and Boys/Girls Clubs, for example, may offer opportunities for precursors to citizenship behavior. In fact, there is some evidence that participation in such activities and in school-based extracurricular activities correlate to adult civic engagement (Barber and Eccles 1997; Jennings and Niemi 1974; Niemi and Junn 2000; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Youth also take civics or government classes in middle or high school (Niemi and Junn 2000; Torney-Purta et al. 2001; Torney-Purta 2002). And they may discuss political issues or citizenship with friends, teachers, or others as a result of media coverage, political advertisements, or surfing the Internet (Conover and Searing 2000). It may therefore be that childhood and youth, when properly configured by society, provide opportunities to "practice" active citizenship behaviors in arenas other than the nation state or government. Nonetheless, available research does not allow us to differentiate if childhood clubs and other such activities relate generally to citizenship, or to more specific activities and attitudes such as voting and concern for others. Such experiences do seem to contribute to the development of atti-

tudes relevant to citizenship. Furthermore, membership in social groups determines the experiences that characterize the child's socialization.

## Race and Class Differences in the Development of Citizenship

It is important to examine the mechanisms by which poor and minority youth may feel some social group identification in terms of the nation state. It is also imperative that we make clear distinctions about components of citizenship when attending to the development of citizenship in poor and in minority youth; the ways in which citizenship is expressed may differ in these youth. Poor and minority youth have different opportunities than majority and affluent young people to practice citizenship in the form of behaviors such as extracurricular school activities. We know, for example, that they are less likely to engage in extracurricular activities, community service, and other group involvement that relate to the development of civic engagement (Hart, Atkins, and Ford 1998). They may be less likely to develop concern for others or a sense of group membership outside their own race or community because of the constraints imposed by impoverishment or because of the prejudice and discrimination minorities often face (Fisher et al. 2000; Hughes and Chen 1997; McLoyd and Steinberg 1998; Ogbu 1991; Spencer 1999).

## Our Research Program at Fordham on the Political Views of Youth

The main purpose of this paper is to summarize and review the program of research begun two years ago at the Applied Developmental Psychology Program at Fordham University. For the past two years, we have studied the political views of youth. Most other research in the past has focused on knowledge and/or behavior (Dudley and Gitelson 2002). We are interested in attitudes or political views because they may mediate the relationship between

knowledge and behavior. In fact, even youth with insufficient political knowledge are likely to form political attitudes, which may then influence their behavior. However, influencing behavior is only one function that attitudes can serve. Another function of political attitudes involves developing a political self-concept. The formation of political attitudes constitutes one form of civic engagement; therefore, the study of political attitudes provides an entry into the study of the development of citizenship. Attitudes provide a means of studying citizenship development in youth that do not otherwise show much civic engagement.

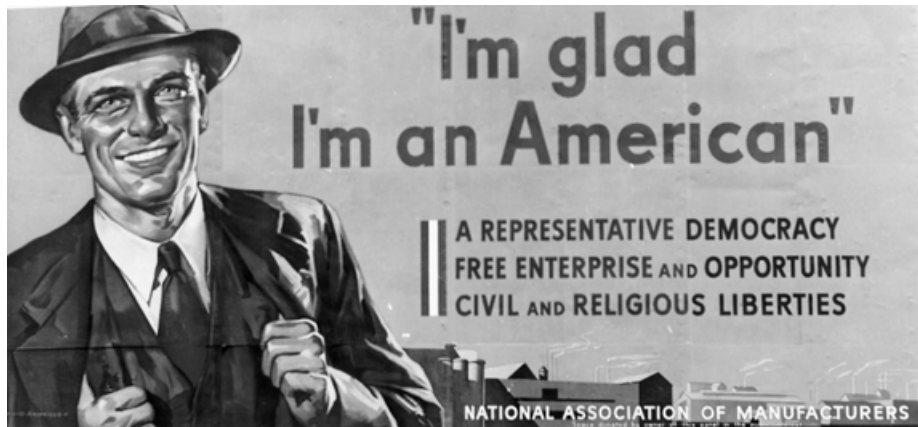
By high school, adolescents are well into exploration of the political world (Flanagan and Faison 2001). Similarly, racial identity and awareness of actual or potential discrimination has become salient (Spencer 1999). By college, youth already have well-formed political views and have fully identified as a member of a race or social class (Sherrod, Quinones, and Brabeck 2002). We have used these two age groups—high school and college aged youth—in our work to date because they adequately capture the developmental trajectory of political attitudes and of affiliation with and socialization into the social groups of race and class.

## Our Survey

Our survey indexes youth political beliefs and their ideas about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The survey also covers several other areas that have been shown to relate to civic engagement, including demographic information, academic history and orientation, and school activities.

### *Political Attitudes and Beliefs*

We have developed several surveys to measure both political views and conceptions of citizenship. Our surveys are based on the work of others in the field such as Conover and Searing (2000), Flanagan et al. (1998), Galston (2001), Torney-Purta et al. (2001), and Youniss and Yates (1997). Although based in part on surveys used by these other investigators, this section of the survey covers a wider range of political issues and topics. In addition to being based on previous research, this section is also based both on our focus groups in schools as well as on the survey used in our previous research with other samples of students, also diverse by race and class.



**I Yam What I Yam.** Key to the development of citizenship is some identification with the nation state, so that the country becomes the social reference group for the development of political attitudes, and attitudes then function to promote participation as a citizen in the country. Photo: Library of Congress.

Students rate on a five point Likert scale (0–4) how important an issue such as poverty or defense is to them—or how concerned they are about it. They are also asked to rank corresponding policies or programs such as anti-poverty programs or an increased defense budget in order to ask if they also are willing to support action in the form of policies and programs to address the issues they are concerned about. It is easy to be concerned about issues, but requires more of a commitment to actually work for a cause or to pay increased taxes for programs. Asking about both issues and policies gauges both concern for issues and willingness to act on their behalf. Our work indicates that there are similar factor structures to youth's ratings of issues and programs. The corresponding factor scores also correlate significantly and in the expected directions. That is, the views of the youth we have sampled are consistent; they rate issues and programs similarly.

### *Citizenship*

This section of the survey is intended to assess ideas about citizenship, to cover the family or parents' political involvement and encouragement of beliefs and behaviors in the youth, and to examine the extent to which youth think about or talk about citizenship outside class. It asks about their conceptions of citizenship, regarding rights and responsibilities, their self-concept in regard to citizenship, and their political knowledge. This section is based on instruments used by Conover and Searing (2000), Youniss and Yates (1997), Flanagan et al. (1998), and Torney-Purta 2002.

Again, students rate on a five point Likert scale how important they deem a right or responsibility of citizenship. Or they rate how often they discuss a particular issue or idea with their family or friends. They also rate how likely they are to engage in a particular political behavior in the future, such as vote or campaign. Finally, they are asked open ended questions about the definition of citizenship.

### *Race, Family, and Religious Socialization*

Fisher et al. (2000) have developed a scale of experienced discrimination and associated stress that has been used rather extensively and that has good psychometric properties. We have adapted this scale to our survey. Another set of items in our survey relate to racial and class socialization within the family, often as result of the experience of discrimination (Hughes and Chen 1997; Johnson 1996, 2000; Stevenson 1994), and to racial self-identity (Spencer 1999). Another section asks about aspirations for wealth and success, and is based on work by Kasser and Ryan (1993). The next section asks about loyalty to, commitment to, and involvement with their family (Fuligini et al. 1999). Finally, work by Youniss and colleagues (Youniss and Yates 1997; Youniss et al. 2002) and King (2002) allows us to examine the importance of religion and spirituality.

### *Activities and Organizations*

Another section of the survey examines participation in extracurricular school activities and participation in other clubs or youth activities (based on work by

Barber and Eccles 1997), since these types of experiences have been shown to relate to adult civic participation.

### Political Knowledge

We have developed a short inventory of questions to assess students' political knowledge. It covers both civics course type information (how to amend the constitution) and current events (why did Congress consider impeaching President Clinton). Several questions were taken from the large, international study of civic education by IEA (Torney-Purta et al. 2001) and relate to the understanding of democracy and citizenship. Hence, responses in this section can be compared to analyses of political knowledge from the IEA study.

In summary, the survey assesses attitudes, behavior, knowledge, and diverse socialization experiences. The extensive length of the survey is not a problem for college students. At the high school level, we frequently give the survey across two sessions. At this level, we also frequently read the survey aloud to make sure it is understood. Monitors watch for behaviors indicating poor attention or random responding.

### Data Analyses

In this section of the paper, I describe our general data analysis plan, which we apply to data collected with the survey described in the preceding section. Results from completed analyses are described in the subsequent section.

Factor analyses of ratings of political issues and programs are first performed to identify typologies and to check for consistency between issues and programs. Similar factor analyses are run on the ideas about rights and responsibilities of citizenship in order to identify their underlying dimensions. Factor analyses are also run on behaviors. In analyses to date, for example, expected future political behaviors reduce to three factors: traditional political behaviors such as voting, volunteerism such as service and donations, and activism such as demonstrating. Knowledge is coded simply as the total number correct and the number correct by type of question, e.g., civic knowledge, current events, or knowledge of citizenship and democracy (IEA questions). Race and family socialization scales also can be factor analyzed.

Bi-variate correlations and regressions are then run using factor scores to find correlations between attitudes, knowledge, and behavior and to assess which

**Table 1**  
**Youth's Political Views**

Across three analyses on three samples across the age range of 14–24 years, we find the following dimensions to youth's political attitudes

**Across all three analyses we find four common factors**

- (1) Conservative Morality—censorship, pornography, religion
- (2) Crime/Violence or Quality of Life—crime, violence, child care
- (3) Causes/Vulnerable Populations—discrimination, AIDS, gay and minority rights, homelessness
- (4) Inequality/Human Welfare/Concern for Others—poverty, homelessness, jobs, gap between rich and poor

**One common factor is found across two of the three analyses**

- (1) Terrorism/Self-Preservation—terrorism, defense

**And one factor was found on only one analysis**

- (1) Social Issues—taxes, economy, voting

Note that for a variety of reasons, the list of political issues was not identical across the three studies.

attitude and knowledge variables predict which behaviors. Relationships to socialization variables are also explored. We ask if the relationships between socialization into social group and the typology of attitudes explain the function of the attitudes. We then ask if attitudes with different functions relate to different behaviors. Does behavior in terms of current school activities or expected future political behaviors differ according to political attitudes or social group membership? Regression analyses are used to analyze whether political attitudes and/or social group membership predict behavior.

We also ask if knowledge differs by the different underlying dimensions of attitudes and if it relates to behavior. And when it does relate, we ask which is the best predictor: knowledge, attitudes, or social group. Eventually, we hope to develop social structural models relating social group, attitudes, and behavior, but the work summarized here is preliminary to that phase.

### Summary of Results to Date

We now summarize the analyses we have completed to date on surveys given to high school and college students in the New York Metropolitan area.

#### *Youth's Political Ideas and Activities*

Our current research shows that some youth are concerned about political issues, such as poverty, that reflect a concern for other persons. Other youth are concerned about issues that represent a

conservative morality, such as pornography or a decline in religious participation. And still other youth are interested in political issues concerning self-protection—issues such as defense and the control of terrorism (Sherrod, Quinones, and Brabeck 2002). These types of views are similar to those reported by Schwartz (1992) in his large cross-national study of teachers' attitudes, but they are not identical, in part because our study only asks about political attitudes. Our work demonstrates that there is an inherent typology to political attitudes and that the different types serve different functions—e.g., self-protection versus altruism. Across three different studies, three different samples, and across an age range of 14 to 24 years, we find that certain typologies of attitudes predominate. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 1.

We have also found that these types of political attitude differences were represented in youths' reactions to the tragedy of September 11, 2001 (Sherrod and Quinones 2002). For example, youth concerned about political issues that reflect a concern for others were concerned about prejudice against Arab Americans. Youth concerned about political issues related to self-preservation had higher PTSD scores and showed fears about continuing terrorism, whereas youth showing a conservative morality were concerned with retaliation (Sherrod and Quinones 2002).

Furthermore, we find that youth's reasons for doing community service, a demonstrated precursor to civic engagement (Youniss and Yates 1997), relate to their political views; youth concerned



about political issues reflecting a concern for others engage in service for altruistic reasons, whereas youth concerned about political issues that are self protective do service for more pragmatic reasons such as “it looks good on one’s record.” History of participation in service, amount of current service, and participation in service learning programs do not relate to political views (Sherrod, Quinones, and Brabeck 2002).

Political knowledge does not relate to political views, although it does relate to behavior such as voting; that is, even youth with inadequate political knowledge develop political attitudes, but they are less likely to vote. Knowledge predicts whether or not youth vote, but it does not predict how they vote. Hence, attitudes relate to why youth engage in certain behaviors such as service, but it does not determine participation in either community service or voting. Attitudes and knowledge relate to behavior in different but equally important ways.

Focus groups with a diverse population of students in New York indicate that race is one important contributor to views. In planned research, we wish to ask how one’s experience as a minority person—whether one has experienced discrimination, the amount of stress it caused, and whether one’s family has offered strong socialization into membership into one’s race affects their political views. Because race is often correlated with social class, we will also examine the impact of class as a social group, in particular asking how it affects youth’s interest in pursuing wealth and success.

We expect that youth who feel marginalized from mainstream society due to discrimination may hold more self-protectionist views. Flanagan and Tucker (1999) have shown that poor, minority youth have different views of poverty than majority youth; they tend to attribute poverty to individual causes rather than to social structural constraints. This is understandable because if youth believe they are poor due to individual causes rather than social-structural causes, they can escape individually from poverty; whereas if poverty results from social constraints, they are trapped in the low social class. We want to extend this line of work to a wider range of political issues.

### Youth’s Conceptions of Citizenship

Citizenship represents one particularly important constellation of political attitudes. Thus, in addition to broad political attitudes, we also wish to exam-

**Table 2**  
**Youth’s Conceptions of Citizenship**

**Factor analyses of ranking of dimensions: Rights**

<i>Entitlements</i>	<i>Rights</i>
Get an education	Freedom of speech
Get health care	Freedom of religion
Have housing	To be homosexual
Be free of discrimination	To join any group
Have privacy	To vote
To work at any job	To demonstrate

**Factor analyses of ranking of dimensions: Duties**

<i>Participation/tolerance</i>
Vote, defend rights of minorities, protest bad laws, stay informed, be tolerant of others’ differences
<i>Good Samaritan, or helping others</i>
Promote good of community, help the needy, do community service
<i>Loyalty to country</i>
Be patriotic, respect the flag
<i>Be productive</i>
Speak English, work

**Tell us in your own words, what it means to be a good citizen.**

Percent responding: Obey the law (46.7%), help others/improve things (46.2%), respect others/be tolerant of differences (17%), be patriotic (11%), be productive (7.5%), be informed (6.2%), be honest (5%), be an individual (2.5%), and protest or vote (each 1.2%).

Furthermore, 70% listed only one quality, 25% two qualities, 2.5% three, and the balance only 1 quality of citizenship.

ine youth’s ideas specifically about citizenship. In recent publications on the development of citizenship, we addressed the conceptualization of citizenship in terms of community versus political participation. There is some controversy in the field about the definition of citizenship and whether it inherently has to include political behavior (Flanagan and Faison 2001; Flanagan and Sherrod 1998; Flanagan and Tucker 1999; Sherrod, Flanagan, and Youniss 2002; Walzer 1990). A next phase of our work will examine how youth’s ideas about citizenship relate to their political attitudes. For example, do youth who see citizenship in terms of altruism view community service as actual political participation? Do youth who are more concerned about issues of self-protection see career advancement as an expression of good citizenship? We hope to use youth’s views of citizenship to guide further attention within the field to the conceptualization of citizenship.

Preliminary research indicates that youth see the rights of citizenship as mainly consisting of entitlements and freedoms. Factor analyses indicate that youth believe duties of citizenship to consist of four components: participation

and tolerance of others different from oneself; altruism; patriotism; and productivity (e.g., learning English for immigrant youth). We have not yet related these views about citizenship to broader political attitudes.

A question simply asking youth “in your own words, tell us what is a good citizen?” elicits far more limited responses than asking them to rank qualities of citizenship. More than 70% list a single characteristic, with “obeying the law” and “helping others” topping the list. Tolerance is next. Only one or two youth from a sample of 80 will list activities such as protesting or challenging the status quo, or political activities such as voting. Only about 10% mention patriotism. Hence, youth have ideas about citizenship, but their ideas are too limited and unsophisticated to drive highly productive political participation (Sherrod 2002). This work on citizenship is summarized in Table 2.

Do marginalized youth develop different attitudes toward citizenship, regarding their potential future roles in society, than youth who see a clear-cut path to meaningful adult responsibilities? Our initial work indicates that they do not. For example, focus groups with minority youth report good behavior such as obeying

laws as good citizenship (Sherrod, Flanagan, and Youniss 2002). However, many of these youth are at risk for delinquency so that obeying laws is, in fact, a first step toward good citizenship. One might therefore argue that they have the more meaningful view of citizenship than those youth surveyed because this view is important to their future participation as citizens. It may also be that this view is a developmental precursor, present in all youth, to later more sophisticated views stemming from actual political participation. We hope to address this issue in future work.

We also want to specifically examine the role of race in the development of attitudes to citizenship. How does racial

identity and experienced discrimination relate to ideas of citizenship? What is the relationship between attitudes about citizenship and political views in minority youth?

## In Conclusion

We have summarized our research during the past two and one half years at Fordham University examining youth's political ideas, their conceptions of citizenship, and their relationship to race and class. We are just now beginning this final phase asking about race and class. We hope to develop models that relate attitudes and behavior and that incorporate socialization experiences

as a member of a particular race or class.

We also wish to use the interests and experiences of youth to identify areas and strategies that might be used to promote youth civic engagement. The goal is to present youth in a positive light (Larsen 2000). We hope to develop a school-based program, to be used in conjunction with civics classes, which uses what youth "are into" as a foundation for redirecting attention to and involvement in citizenship. For example, some youth are into political music. Does this constitute a form of political participation, and can it be used to promote more traditional behaviors such as voting?

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