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The Role of Community Service in Identity Development: Normative, Unconventional, and Deviant Orientations

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Responses from a nationally representative sample of 13,000 high school seniors were analyzed to identify predictors of normative, unconventional, and deviant orientations among youth. Normative orientation was indexed using indicators of conventional political involvement (e.g., voting), religious attendance, and importance of religion. Unconventional orientation was indexed with unconventional political involvement (e.g., boycotting). Deviance was measured through marijuana use. Frequency of community service substantially increased predictability of these variables over and above background characteristics and part-time work involvement. Involvement in most types of school-based extracurricular activities was positively associated with doing service, as was moderate part-time work. Background characteristics of attending Catholic school, being female, having high socioeconomic status, and coming from an intact family also predicted service involvement. Results are discussed in terms of a theory of social-historical identity development, suggesting that community service affords youth a developmental opportunity to partake of traditions that transcend the material moment and existential present.

In a previous article, we attempted to extend Barber and Olsen's (1997) scheme of connectedness, psychological control, and behavioral control in family relationships to youth's relationships with society (Youniss, Yates, & Su, 1997). We first sorted a national sample of high school seniors according

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to patterns of daily activities that were construed as indicators of students' integration into normative society. We assumed that seniors who worked on school publications and participated in other school-sponsored projects, for instance, had greater exposure to societal norms than students who spent considerable time having fun, joyriding, and attending rock concerts. We next compared seniors in the respective groupings and found that degree of integration was associated positively with voluntary service and negatively with marijuana use. These results are similar to those subsequently reported in an independent study by Eccles and Barber (1999). Using a longitudinal design, they reported that students who were categorized by activities at Grade 10 differed on grade point average in Grade 11, on alcohol and marijuana use in Grade 12, and on college attendance at 21 years old. In general, the more school- or adult-based organizations to which students belonged, the more likely they were to show positive social behaviors and the less likely to manifest personally or socially negative behaviors in subsequent years.

These findings correspond with a well-established result in the sociological literature that certain kinds of activities during youth predict a social orientation that persists into adulthood through behavior and attitudes. For example, Fendrich (1993) reported that Black college students' participation in the civil rights movement in the South during the 1950s and 1960s predicted their political interest and activism 10 and 25 years later. DeMartini (1983) and McAdam (1988) reported similar results for White civil rights participants who remained distinguishable from nonparticipants in their political and civic behavior 25 years later (see also Fendrich, 1993). Although involvement in the civil rights movement was enhanced by being part of a signal moment in history, more accessible activities, such as partaking in high school government, also have been associated with political participation in adulthood (e.g., Hanks & Eckland, 1978; Otto, 1976; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Similarly, membership in 4-H and other organizations during youth has been reported to predict membership and leadership in community organizations well into adulthood (Ladewig & Thomas, 1987).

Why do youth's activity patterns appear to have such sustained effects? One possibility is that they help to shape youth's identity during an especially opportune developmental period. In a theoretical examination of identity development (Youniss & Yates, 1997), we have discussed three core principles of identity—agency or industry, social relatedness, and political-moral understanding—that may be influenced by the experience of service. Insofar as youth define themselves in terms of their achievements through action—called industry by Erikson (1968)—actions at this time become formative for identity which then persists into later periods of the life span. This is especially the case when youth's actions are associated with and endorsed

by collective ideologies that have historical validity. The activities, then, orient youth to established norms and values that represent specific ideological niches in society. Thus, definitions of self take on social-historical meaning as individuals partake of traditions that transcend the material present and existential moment (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Participants in the civil rights movement, for example, could interpret their actions as part of a tradition in which nonviolent tactics were used to combat political and economic racial injustice. Thus, their actions could be understood within a broader framework that transcended this specific moment in the South.

Contemporary Youth

Coleman (1961) coined the term *youth culture* to symbolize an important feature of adolescence in post-World War II, industrialized societies that are marked by modern capitalism and participatory democracy. These societies limit youth's participation but establish parallel institutions that are designed specifically for them; for instance, schools and laws about mandatory attendance, work and laws controlling labor by minors. Contemporary youth, then, spend much of their lives outside the formal economic and political spheres, but in a milieu that reflects the larger structure and is designed explicitly for them. It is marked by clothes, food, music, entertainment, and the like, and is recognized as belonging to youth but excluding adults. Whether or not this should be called a culture, the fact is that youth have a sphere of their own that enhances their separation from, but mirrors the life of, the larger adult society.

It is recognized that youth culture is not monolithic, but allows for variations and differences among adolescents (Brown, 1990). Individuals vary in the degree to which they are oriented to aspects of youth and adult culture, as well as to the time they spend in these spheres. Some youth may rarely cross over into the normative world of adults, whereas others may spend equal amounts of time in both spheres. Given the structure that divides youth from adults, opportunities to participate in and reflect on adult society are critical to the development of identity (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Youth who experience adult society through meaningful activities are exposed to its norms, values, and ideological traditions. Insofar as youth seek identities that transcend the present moment, there are obvious advantages to engagement with adult society. Youth learn about society and the various orientations they may take toward it. They may seek to support, reject, or revise the traditions they find. But in order for identity to develop, youth need to have social substance on which to reflect and build.

This is not a new idea, but was espoused by G. Stanley Hall (1904) in his classic depiction of adolescence and by James (1909/1971) in his still-cited essay on the moral equivalent of war. In this respect, they anticipated Erikson (1968), who argued that youth need to be given clear tests of their agency and clear ideological options by which they can relate to the preceding generation while they consider their future possibilities. This theme has been echoed by Coleman (1987) in his more recently conceived concept of social capital that is formed through youth-adult relationships. Adams and Marshall (1996) make a similar point with their proposition that in technologically complex societies, persons select identity from a set of goals based on a general set of values. Some of these values include social responsibility (i.e., ideological commitments) and equity (i.e., justice). The common thread throughout these writers is that youth benefit from meaningful exposure to adult society because it gives them the opportunity to reflect on its ideological traditions as they construct a future with which they can identify.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Youniss, Yates, et al. (1997) viewed youth's daily activities as formative of basic orientations toward or away from normative society. The present study reassesses this work by examining the specific role of community service and participation in civic organizations on identity formation. We used data from the most recently available 6-year period of the Monitoring the Future survey (Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 1993), which provides a nationally representative sample of high school seniors. Our hypothesis is that participation in community service—civic affairs will enhance the likelihood of youth's integration into adult normative society and, by inference, promote identity development.

Sample

Monitoring the Future is an ongoing study of high school seniors that began in 1976. In the spring of each year, seniors complete a questionnaire focused on drug use that also includes a wide range of items sampling personal, school, political, and other matters. Form 2 of the questionnaire contains the item of interest that assesses individuals' participation in community service or community affairs. To obtain a large sample of seniors for the present study, we combined Form 2 data for the years 1988 to 1993, which resulted in a sample of 16,800 seniors. Because we did several analyses, each

involving different items from the survey, *N* fluctuated between 10,000 and 13,000 per analysis.

Measures

Focal Items

The items of interest are categorizable according to type. Background characteristics included gender and race, which we categorized as minority versus White. Other characteristics included father's and mother's education, which we used to represent socioeconomic status, and family intactness (two biological parents in the home versus other). In addition, because Catholic schools regularly mandate that students do service, we included membership in religious denomination, categorized as Catholic versus other, and we compared students who attended Catholic schools versus public schools. Because of previous findings on differences between non-Catholic students attending Catholic schools and other students (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993), we made a variable to look at this contrast.

Part-time work was assessed by self-report of number of hours per week spent working for pay during the school year, as this variable might affect participation in service. Previous research (e.g., Mael, Morath, & McLellan, 1997) suggests that students who partake of a moderate amount of part-time work during the high school year may have more extracurricular involvement than those who work excessively or not at all. We compared students who did moderate amounts of work, defined as 1 to 10 hours, with those who did no work or more than 10 hours of work per week.

Daily Activities

Students specified the frequency with which they participated in 21 teenage activities. We grouped items according to the following self-evident scheme: (a) school, that is, working on school publications and other school-sponsored nonathletic activities; (b) sports, that is, participating in school-sponsored and non-school-sponsored sports; (c) fun, that is, going to parties, bars, rock concerts and visiting with friends; (d) performing arts, for example, acting in plays or musical performances; and (e) solitary, consisting of activities done alone, reading books, or doing crafts.

Community service was assessed by a single item in which seniors indicated whether they participated in community service or civic affairs (not at all, a couple of times a year, or more frequently, defined as monthly, weekly, or daily).

Conventional political behavior was assessed by asking seniors whether they already had or were likely in the future to vote, work on a political campaign, contribute money to a political candidate, and write a letter to an officer holder.

Religious attendance was measured by frequency of attendance at religious services (never, weekly, or less frequently). Religious importance was indexed by the degree to which seniors judged religion to be important in their lives (not at all, somewhat, or very important).

Unconventional political behavior was measured by asking seniors whether they had already or would in the future boycott some organization or participate in a public demonstration for some cause.

Marijuana use was measured by the number of occasions students reported having used marijuana or hashish in the previous 12 months (zero, 1 or 2 times, 3 to 19 times, or more than 20 times).

The analysis was divided into two parts. We first used background characteristics, part-time work, and community service as predictors in five regression analyses. The five dependent or criterion variables signified either a normative orientation to society (conventional political activities, religious attendance, personal importance of religion), an unconventional orientation (unconventional political activities), or a deviant orientation (marijuana use). These analyses verified the importance of community service in predicting normative, unconventional, and deviant stances. We then examined the factors that predicted youth's involvement in service using regression to assess the influence of background characteristics and daily activities on community service. Methodological limitations to this approach are noted in the discussion section of this article.

RESULTS

Regression analyses were used to determine the degree to which background factors affected normative, nonnormative, and deviancy measures. Factors of part-time work and community service were then entered to determine the degree to which they made additional contributions to the prediction of the five outcomes. Table 1 summarizes the findings. Three models were tested for each of the five analyses. Model 1 contained the background predictors of gender, minority status, religious denomination, family intactness, socioeconomic status, type of school, and whether the student was a non-Catholic attending a Catholic school. Model 2 added part-time work and Model 3 added community service as predictors.

TABLE 1: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Normative, Unconventional, and Deviance Variables

Predictor	Conventional Political		Religious Attendance		Importance of Religion		Unconventional Political		Marijuana Use	
	R ²	Beta	R ²	Beta	R ²	Beta	R ²	Beta	R ²	Beta
Model 1: Background characteristics	.032		.059		.049		.023		.025	
Model 2: Background Characteristics, + part-time work	.033		.066		.051		.023		.027	
Model 3: Background Characteristics, + part-time work, + community service	.078		.129		.096		.041		.058	
Catholic school	.001		.098		.040		.026		-.009	
Catholic religion	.026		.103		.019		.010		.023	
Gender (high = female)	-.011		.052		.084		-.021		-.073	
Socioeconomic status	.142		.050		-.033		.120		.023	
Minority	.002		.081		.180		.057		-.103	
Intact family	-.007		.086		.015		-.041		-.079	
Non-Catholic in Catholic school	.022		-.072		-.054		.005		.017	
Moderate part-time work	.003		.055		.024		.005		-.027	
Frequency of community service	.219		.259		.216		.135		-.180	

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

The results reported in Table 1 show that a consistent pattern emerged for the relative contribution of the three models in predicting normative, unconventional, and deviant stances. Background characteristics alone accounted for 2% to 6% of the dependent measures' variability. The addition of part-time work led to a marginal improvement in R^2 . However, the addition of community service increased predictability substantially for each of the measures, typically by a factor of two or more. Thus, with a model including community service as a predictor, we were able to account for about 8% of the variability on conventional political behavior, 13% for religious attendance, 10% for personal importance of religion, 4% for unconventional political behavior, and 6% for marijuana use.

The beta weights for Model 3 indicate direction and strength of the relationship between the full set of predictors considered simultaneously and the five criteria. Being enrolled in a Catholic school was positively associated with religious attendance, personal importance of religion, and unconventional political behavior, but not significantly related to conventional political behavior or marijuana use. Being Catholic was positively associated with all dependent variables, except unconventional political activity as Catholic respondents were more likely to engage in conventional political behavior, attend church, feel that religion is personally important, and to use marijuana. Female students were more likely than males to attend religious services and to feel that religion was personally important, but less likely to engage in unconventional political behavior or use marijuana. Gender was not significantly related to conventional political behavior.

Socioeconomic status was significantly and positively related to all dependent measures with the exception of the personal importance of religion to which it was negatively related, so that higher socioeconomic status students were less likely to say that religion was personally important. Minority status was positively related to religious attendance, the importance of religion, and unconventional political behavior, but negatively related to marijuana use. Minority status was not a significant predictor of conventional political behavior. Membership in an intact family was significantly associated with three of the five measures, such that students from an intact family were more likely to attend religious services but less likely to engage in unconventional political behavior or use marijuana.

Being a non-Catholic student in a Catholic school significantly predicted two of the five criteria. These students were less likely than all others to attend religious services or to think that religion was personally important.

Spending a moderate number of hours doing part-time work during the school year was not a significant predictor of either type of political behavior.

TABLE 2: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Frequency of Community Service (N = 10,292)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Step 1			
Catholic school	0.09	0.03	.03*
Catholic religion	-0.02	0.02	-.01*
Minority	0.06	0.02	.04*
Intact family	0.09	0.02	.05*
Socioeconomic status	0.08	0.06	.13*
Gender (high = female)	0.18	0.01	.12*
Non-Catholic in Catholic school	-0.03	0.06	-.01
Step 2			
Catholic school	0.07	0.03	.02*
Catholic religion	0.00	0.02	.00
Minority	0.01	0.02	.01*
Intact family	0.06	0.02	.04*
Socioeconomic status	0.04	0.01	.06*
Gender (high = female)	0.11	0.01	.07*
Non-Catholic in Catholic school	-0.04	0.06	-.01
School orientation	0.08	0.00	.21*
Fun orientation	-0.01	0.00	-.02*
Sport orientation	0.04	0.00	.09*
Solitary orientation	0.03	0.00	.08*
Performing arts orientation	0.04	0.00	.18*
Moderate part-time work	0.12	0.02	.06

NOTE: $R^2 = .03$ for Step 1; $R^2 = .17$ for Step 2; and $\Delta R^2 = .14$ for Step 2.

* $p < .05$.

However, it was positively associated with both religion measures and negatively associated with marijuana use.

The item measuring frequency of community service was the strongest predictor for all five criteria. The frequency of community service was positively related to both types of political behavior and both religion measures. It was negatively related to marijuana use.

Predicting Service

Table 2 reports the results of a regression analysis in which frequency of community service participation was the dependent variable with background characteristics, part-time work, and daily activities as predictors. The R^2 value for Model 1 indicated that approximately 3% of the variance in frequency of service is accounted for by background characteristics. Model 2,

which added part-time work and daily activities as predictors, substantially improved on Model 1 by accounting for 17% of the variability in frequency of service.

The beta weights for Model 2 in Table 2 indicate that being Catholic, from a minority group, or a non-Catholic attending a Catholic school did not predict frequency of service when all other background and activity variables are simultaneously considered. It is interesting to note, however, that minority status was a significant predictor of service when only background characteristics were looked at in Model 1. The background characteristics that still predicted service in Model 2 were being a student in a Catholic school, coming from an intact family, being in a higher socioeconomic status level, and being female.

All daily activity groupings, except fun, were significantly related to community service. Orientations toward school, sports, artistic endeavors, and solitary activities were positively related to service. Doing a moderate amount of part-time work (1 to 10 hours per week versus no work or more than 10 hours per week) was positively associated with service.

DISCUSSION

The analyses presented above indicate that participation in community service is a relatively potent predictor of normative, nonnormative, and deviant behavior and attitudes among high school seniors. In five regression analyses, service was by far the strongest predictor of indicators in these three areas. In each case, the addition of service to a set of predictors, including background characteristics and part-time work, roughly doubled the amount of variability accounted for. This is evidence that, beyond the influence of demographic factors and employment, service experience is a developmentally helpful influence in the areas of political involvement, religion, and substance use. Given this apparent salutary effect of service experiences, we sought to examine the predictors of service involvement. Before embarking on a discussion of those findings, it is worth commenting on some parallels that can be observed between service and moderate levels of part-time work as predictors of normative, unconventional, and deviant stances. Setting aside the debate over the value of part-time work for youth (D'Amico, 1984; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986), we think it is clear that part-time work may be viewed as an opportunity to be exposed to the adult-centered world of work. Our findings indicate that a moderate amount of such exposure positively predicts indicators of religious involvement and negatively predicts marijuana use; that is, there is a similar but weaker pattern of influence for

work than for service in these areas and no significant influence of work on the political domain. This is an interesting finding in that paid work and community service typically offer similar levels of contact with nonschool, non-family adults in a goal-oriented labor setting.

The analysis of factors that predict community service concurs with Nolin, Chaney, Chapman, and Chandler's (1997) data from the 1996 household survey of 8,043 students in Grades 6 through 12. Nolin et al. reported that the likelihood of doing service was higher for females than males, for students with more educated parents, and for students in Catholic rather than public schools. The greater likelihood for service by high school females is consistent with an earlier report and coincides with the cultural role of helping that is sometimes assigned to females. However, the female-male differential seems too small in quantitative terms to reflect a cultural bias of assigning helping roles to females.

The Catholic versus public school differential in service is most likely due to the fact that many Catholic schools mandate service as part of the religious curriculum. This requirement is based on a coupling of religion with the ethic of social justice that is directed to helping others in disadvantaged conditions (Tropman, 1995; Youniss & Yates, 1997). The effect of parent education may reflect the fact that opportunities for service typically come through organizations to which more educated or higher socioeconomic status parents might have. Family intactness, which further predicted service, may be viewed in similar terms.

Background aside, daily activities proved to be a powerful predictor of service, as in Youniss, Yates, et al. (1997). This result confirms Nolin et al.'s (1997) finding that students' participation in school government and other types of school activities doubled the likelihood of service. Nolin et al. (1997) also reported that the number of such activities was positively related to service, indicating perhaps that participation in several school-based activities redundantly exposes students to norms and routines of organized collective action (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). The aspect of norms has been emphasized by Coleman (1987) in his argument about acquiring social capital, and fits with Eccles and Barber's (1999) findings that participation in school-based organized activities enhances academic grades and deters deviant behavior. The finding that students who scored high on the solitary dimension tended to do more service may be due to the fact that the pursuit of solitary activities is an indicator of a studious propensity, associated with doing well in school. This concurs with Nolin et al.'s (1997) result of a positive correlation between grade point average and service participation.

The foregoing results support the notion that activities in which youth participate expose them to norms and values that provide reflective material at a

critical moment in identity development (see Adams & Marshall, 1996). Insofar as part of the identity process involves exploring and relating to extant societal traditions, daily activities play an instrumental role in helping to shape youth's emerging self-definitions. Community service, then, may play a pivotal function by being a result of a normative orientation that is established through daily activity patterns, and by reinforcing this orientation as youth adopt a service organization's ideological outlook. For example, in a case study in one high school, we found that in the process of doing service, youth discussed and reflected on the ideological options they were formally presented, with the service itself being a stimulus for comparing political ideals with disparate social realities (Youniss & Yates, 1997).

Carrying this theoretical perspective one step further, we consider the role of service in helping to mediate ostensibly normative attitudes toward politics and religion. Service enhanced the likelihood that students would have a conventional political orientation (e.g., voting) and express a conventional religious orientation, exemplified by church attendance and judging religion was an important factor in their personal lives. At the same time, service was negatively associated with marijuana use, indicating again the normative character that service supports.

The finding for unconventional political acts of boycotting and demonstrating is important in showing that service does not merely stand for naive compliance with adult norms. These unconventional acts typically represent dissent from the majority viewpoint and imply a critical stance toward the political center. In taking the position that service helps in the construction of identity, we have proposed that service allows youth to compare society as it is with society as it might ideally be. If service is useful to identity development, it should stimulate serious reflection on norms and political processes so that youth can explore and sort out alternative stances toward the society in which they want to live. Thus, service does not necessarily lead to acceptance of adult norms but affords exposure to reality that might, in turn, challenge extant norms while fostering exploration of possible ideals.

Various limitations are posed by our use of cross-sectional survey data to address developmental issues. One such limitation involves the fact that we believe the kind of community service in which youth partake has important developmental implications (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Although they are nationally representative, the present data do not contain items describing the nature of the community involvement by youth. We are also limited in the extent to which we can make causal inferences about service experience in the absence of experimental manipulation or longitudinal data. The regression method we employ does not permit us to assert that the relationships we observe between variables are causal in nature. However, our finding that the

amount of community service predicts normative, unconventional, and deviance variables over and above preexisting family, school, and religious background characteristics is a provocative one. We think these results offer a framework for the longitudinal studies we summarized in the introduction to this article. It is now well-established that youth's daily activities may foster an orientation toward adult society that is instrumental in identity formation and surprisingly long lasting in effect. For example, participation in school government predicts voting and the absence of political alienation 15 to 25 years later (Hanks & Eckland, 1978; Verba et al., 1995). When service is the formative youth experience the effects have been equally enduring and broad in effect, producing politically active citizens who, on one hand, vote at exceptionally high rates, but on the other hand, are ready to protest and lead other citizens to take critical stands toward the status quo (Fendrich, 1993; McAdam, 1988).

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