CHAPTER 8

The Relation between Developmental Theory and Measures of Civic Engagement in Research on Adolescents

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ALTHOUGH RESEARCH ON civic engagement has increased in recent years, theory generation on the development of civic engagement has been less prolific. Theoretical foundations of other topics in developmental science, such as prosocial development or moral action and identities, have received greater attention (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1995; Hart, 2005). As a result, much of the research and measurement in the area of youth civic engagement has not been theoretically based. Insufficient theory from which to generate hypotheses can be problematic for a field of research. Furthermore, studies generally have been descriptive or correlational rather than longitudinal or experimental; there has been little empirical testing of hypotheses.

The purpose of the chapter is to discuss the ways in which civic development is like other aspects of human development and therefore may be examined under the lens of general theories in developmental science. The aim is to provide examples of developmental theory that relate to civic development and engagement in the first section of the chapter, and then to discuss the limited amount of theory that has been generated directly related to civic development. We will address the current disconnect between theory
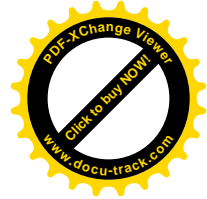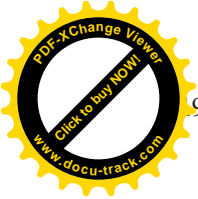
and measurement in this field and will describe a recent attempt to use theory in the early phases of an international civic engagement project and later in that project to apply developmental concepts to youth participation.
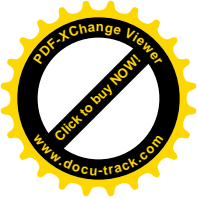
BACKGROUND

The surge in research on adolescent civic engagement can be attributed in part to the belief by some scholars that the participation of youth in society has decreased compared to previous generations (Putnam, 1996, 2000). However, other lines of research indicate a steady increase in youth volunteering since the 1970s and a recent increase in political activities such as voting and making political donations (National Conference on Citizenship, 2006). Although research on youth civic engagement has been on the rise, the absence of theoretically based research questions and measurement has hindered productive debate and the application of findings to practice.

Civic engagement is a part of young people's development that corresponds in important ways with other aspects of development, particularly its social and cognitive aspects. In this chapter we make the case for a reciprocal relation between theory generation in developmental science and civic engagement research. We start by reviewing several theories in developmental science and address their potential relevance to research on civic engagement. The theories were chosen based on their focus on cognitive and social domains of development, their specific discussion of adolescence, and their relevance to the civic domain. We discuss four cognitive and social theories (social cognitive theory, Kohlberg's theory of moral development, domain theory, and role taking theory), and also examine theories from the psychoanalytic and contextual perspectives (psychosocial theory and ecological systems theory, respectively). There are several developmental principles that all of these theories incorporate, even if they diverge in their specific theoretical assumptions or the details of the processes they describe:

1. Adolescents are active participants in their own development.
2. Development is bidirectional such that adolescents influence their environment just as the environment is having an influence on them; socialization is reciprocal.
3. Development is both continuous and discontinuous, is influenced by both learning and maturation, and occurs in a variety of settings.
4. Opportunities for development differ across the life span and for individuals growing up in different contexts.

In addition to the six developmental science theories mentioned above, we also analyze theories developed specifically for their potential contribution
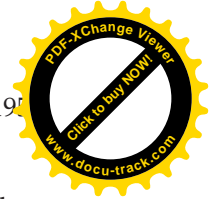
to developmental research on civic engagement. Finally, we consider the importance of theory for the generation of research questions and approaches to measurement.

Developmental theory is relevant to research in the field of civic engagement because of the value of understanding the processes behind changes in civic values, motivations, and identities during childhood and adolescence. Most research has emphasized adolescence, thus the field has really not grappled with civic development from childhood through late adolescence (or adulthood). While the adolescent period includes young people's transition into active political participation, there are likely to be precursors to participation. Understanding the mechanisms that underlie the connection between early development and later engagement is critical to designing programs and policies to promote civic development.

DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Social Cognitive Theory

An early recognition that people learn and display certain behaviors through the observation of others is found in theories such as those of Miller and Dollard (1941). Conceptual frameworks guiding research in this era, including social learning theory, concentrated on the environmental influence on behavior, often discounting the role of thinking or cognition. Albert Bandura, a prominent social learning theorist, expanded on this approach by adding the missing cognitive component in his book *Social Learning Theory* in 1977. Social cognitive learning theory, as it was called beginning with his subsequent book in 1986, concentrates on the environment's influence on behavior but also pays particular attention to personal characteristics, cognitive factors, and affective factors in human development. Neither version of this theory is developmental in the strict sense of attending to age progression and change; Bandura assumes that the same social or social-cognitive learning principles apply at every age (Astuto et al., this volume; Finlay et al., this volume). However, social cognitive theory has been used in youth civic engagement research because concepts such as self-efficacy and observational learning in this theory are clearly relevant to youth civic engagement. These and other concepts will be discussed further in the next section.

The factor that Bandura (1989) believed to have the most significant influence on a person's behavior is his or her sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the confidence in one's ability to control and execute the actions required to deal with current and future situations (Bandura, 1995, 1997). Incorporated into self-efficacy is the perceived ability to take actions that result in desired
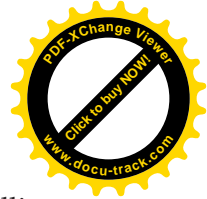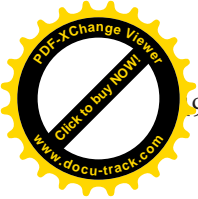
outcomes and prevent undesired ones (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001). There are four principal sources serving as the basis for self-efficacy judgments: performance mastery experiences, judgments of capabilities in comparison with social models, social influences and persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1995). These sources are likely to contribute to the development of civic or political efficacy in addition to a more globalized efficacy.

The manner in which the four principal sources mentioned above can contribute to the development of civic or political efficacy is illustrated here with the example of an adolescent leading a protest against a school board's decision to close a school. If the protest, and the associated pressure on the school board, contributes to the abandonment of the board's plan to close the school, this successful outcome will contribute to the adolescent's belief that her civic participation can make a difference (an example of performance mastery experience). Perhaps other community members or students attempted to organize efforts to sway the school board but could not mobilize people or initiate change. The young person was successful and therefore would evaluate herself as highly capable in comparison to others, which would be likely to contribute to higher efficacy (an example of self-judgment in comparison to social norms). Receiving positive feedback from other young people and adults would reinforce feelings of self-efficacy. Feedback could also come in the form of others choosing the individual to lead future protests (reflecting social influences and persuasion). Finally, the emotional "high" from successful civic participation would increase positive feelings and confidence, since physiological and emotional states also contribute to efficacy judgments. All of these sources of self-efficacy judgments are consistent with the proposition that an individual feels more efficacious about being able to complete a future task upon successful completion of a current one (Bandura, 2001). See Beaumont (this volume) for an extended application of Bandura's theory to the growth of political efficacy in college students. Specific kinds of civic engagement such as service learning have been shown empirically to relate positively to later civic engagement (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007; Youniss & Yates, 1997, 1999). It is likely that efficacy is one of the major links between early and later civic participation.

Groups of people can also feel efficacious about their change efforts. Bandura describes collective efficacy as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). Building on the concept of individual self-efficacy, collective efficacy represents the collective beliefs and power of group members to produce desired outcomes. A strong sense of self-efficacy plays a significant role in perceived collective
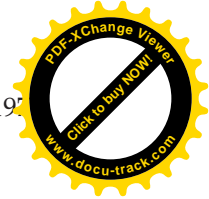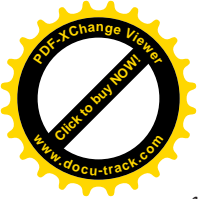
efficacy (Fernández-Ballesteros, Díez-Nicolás, Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Bandura, 2002). Collective efficacy is especially relevant to civic engagement in that being active as a citizen usually involves working with others to achieve a common goal.

One way in which youth are given the opportunity to work with others to achieve a common goal is through community service. Through schools, religious institutions, and community organizations, young people can work together to effect change in issues such as public health or environmental preservation. The experience of working with others and developing a sense of collective efficacy in addition to individual self-efficacy has been found to be important to civic development (Pasek, Feldman, Romer, & Jamieson, 2008). More research is needed to differentiate the importance of self-efficacy and collective efficacy, however.

Bandura (1997) also developed theory about political efficacy, defined as the belief and confidence that one can use political action to produce desired outcomes. Political efficacy is comprised of internal political efficacy, which refers to one's perceived ability to influence political decisions, and external political efficacy, referring to perceptions of the response of the government to individuals' efforts (see Beaumont, this volume). It is important to note the connection that Bandura (1997) makes between the development of political efficacy in a young person and a young person's sense of efficacy to influence the behaviors of adults in institutions of which they are a part (e.g., schools, community centers, and religious institutions). Bandura claims that if children feel that they are able to influence the actions of adults in societal institutions, they may generalize that feeling of efficacy to politics and feel that they can have an influence on government as well (Bandura, 1997). One reason that voter turnout among young people historically is lower than other age groups may be that they do not feel efficacious about their vote; youth believe that nothing will change as a result of their choosing one candidate over another (Delli Carpini, 2000). However, voter turnout among 18- to 29-year-olds increased in the 2008 U.S. presidential election (CIRCLE, 2008), indicating that various attempts to mobilize young people were effective. By specifically reaching out to young voters, the campaigns were sending a message that politicians listened to young people, which may have increased their sense of external political efficacy.
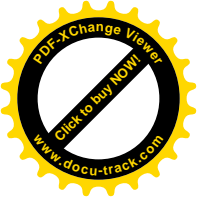
Bandura (1986) has asserted that learning occurs through direct interactions with, or indirect observations of, others' behavior and the associated consequences. Observational learning, also termed modeling, is a way to convey social norms, values, and other thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Modeling plays an important role in socializing because it affects attitudes and emotional dispositions toward others, toward issues, and regarding the worth of certain behaviors (Bandura, 1989). Behavior can be intentionally
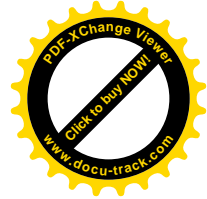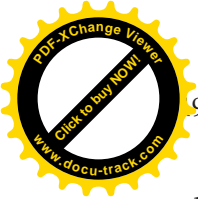
observed and then manifested in an individual's behavior. Even when explicit observation is not occurring, however, expectations of behavior are often cognitively processed and internalized (Bandura, 1986). Intentional and unintentional observational learning is especially important to recognize in the socialization of civic behavior. Some of the early political socialization studies employed questions about the child's perspective on whose attitudes he or she was copying (Hess & Torney, 1967, reissued 2006); the internalization of parents' attitudes was part of what the authors called the identification model of political socialization. Other researchers interviewed both parents and children to identify attitude similarities (Jennings & Niemi, 1974). These and more recent studies have found evidence for political modeling, including findings that children's and adolescents' civic behavior and attitudes tend to be consistent with their parents' behavior and attitudes (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Hart, Atkins, Markey, & Youniss, 2004; Zaff, Malanchuk, Michelsen, & Eccles, 2003).

Mapping the construct of modeling onto youth civic engagement, Torney-Purta (1995) described the process by which political socialization occurs through interactions with parents and peers. Adolescents start with cognitive structures (based on prior experience, biological development, and other factors), but cognition is changed through exposure to new ideas or perspectives, reading about political topics, and discussion of political and social issues. Through social relationships, adolescents participate in the collaborative construction of knowledge, meaning that cognitive structures are created and changed when young people interact with others. For example, an adolescent may have an established stance on an environmental issue such as global warming. Her stance, that global warming is not a serious problem, could be based on her own experience (e.g., the lack of any drastic change in weather in her town) and exposure to her parents' attitudes (e.g., overhearing criticism of scientists as alarmists). Discussion and debate in the classroom, exposure to other students' perspectives, and reflection over different sides of the issue could lead to the adolescent developing a new perspective. Through interactions with others and exposure to new ideas she has created new cognitive structures. Of course, some beliefs will remain stable and continue to serve as the lens through which new information is interpreted. Therefore, political socialization is not merely imposed onto young people, but rather youth are active participants in the construction of their knowledge, political ideals, and values.

Reflection plays an important role in both directly reinforced learning and observational learning, and therefore is relevant to civic engagement. As students reflect on the impact that they personally have or have observed in a certain situation, they may feel more efficacious in similar situations. Alternatively, critical reflection may contribute to a lack of efficacy through
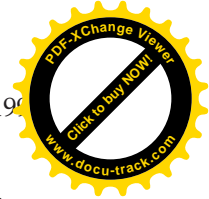
cynicism or frustration. Not only has reflection in a civic engagement activity been shown to support Bandura's views about social cognition (Wilkenfeld & Torney-Purta, 2005), but the reflection that takes place in activities such as community service has also been linked to the impact of service participation on moral development (Youniss & Yates, 1999). Furthermore, adults who participate in the reflection process also serve as coaches and models. Hence, the reflection component of social cognitive theory also has implications for research on civic education and policies to promote it. It suggests the importance of asking research respondents explicitly about links between experiences such as volunteering and classroom discussion of community problems, for example.

Theories of Moral Development

Kohlberg's perspectives. Theories of moral development can also inform the study of civic and political engagement. In his developmental theory, Lawrence Kohlberg (1976) proposed that moral functioning involves the understanding of justice and fairness, and that this understanding is the basis for distinguishing right from wrong. Moral development occurs throughout the life span with progress through six stages of moral reasoning. Stage theories offer a particular view of development. Movement from one stage to the next can be considered growth or progress but may also be conceptualized as a rejection and reconstruction of earlier views. Through an awareness of its contradictions and inadequacies, the logic of an existing stage is rejected and a new stage is created.

At first glance, Kohlberg's (1969, 1976) theory of moral development may not seem directly relevant to the study of civic and political engagement because civic engagement is not believed to develop in stages. However, reasoning about moral issues bears some similarity to reasoning about political issues. When reasoning about complex issues, there are seldom clear choices, at least for individuals who make informed and reasoned political choices rather than following the lead of parents or peers or the dictates of a particular party. Therefore moral reasoning (as well as reasoning in general) seems relevant to certain political choices. Interesting lines of future inquiry include whether moral and political development occur in parallel, and whether moral reasoning drives political behavior (or vice versa).

Kohlberg's measurement of moral development also provides guidance regarding the measurement of civic or political development. In particular, the dilemmas used in research on moral reasoning suggest ways to study political reasoning. The researcher could prepare a political or civic dilemma, for example, about citizens' rights or about loyalty to a nation. Early political socialization research indicated that younger children are more likely
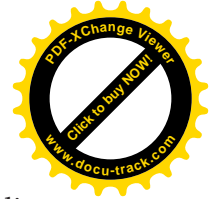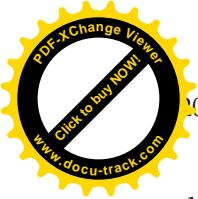
than older children to agree that it is acceptable for a political leader to lie to another country if the lie protects the country's citizens (Hess & Torney, 1967, reissued 2006). Using scenarios modeled on those in research on moral development, children and adolescents of different ages could be given a scenario in which a political leader has lied about a public matter and claims that it is because of a desire to protect the people in that nation. Young people could be asked to give their reasoning about whether this was or was not the right thing to do and why. In other words, Kohlberg's theory of moral development could inform civic development research by providing an approach to measurement as well as to studying differences in political reasoning between age groups.

Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, and Bebeau (2000) take a neo-Kohlbergian perspective in their assertion that moral development can be understood in terms of schemas rather than stages. Similar to Kohlberg's (1969) stages, moral schemas allow for change when new knowledge is acquired and new experiences affect a person's view on specific issues. However, transitions between schemas are more gradual than the discrete movement from one stage to the next as postulated by Kohlberg. The three schemas proposed by Rest et al. (2000) are personal interest ("what is best for me"), maintaining norms (guided by societal norms, rules, and obeying authority), and post-conventional (enhanced and flexible understanding of societal and moral constructs). Using the previous example, an individual's stance on whether a leader should have lied might be the same throughout adolescence, but the reasoning could change depending on the particular schema reflected. An adolescent who reflects the personal interest schema would reason that the leader was justified as long as the adolescent and his or her family remained safe and secure. The adolescent's reasoning under the norm maintenance schema might involve a belief that leaders have so much authority that their lies are not to be judged in the same way as those of private citizens. Using the post-conventional schema, a more complex balancing of the value of truthfulness against the protection of the common good might be made.

Nearly 40 years ago the work of Adelson and his colleagues took a similar approach (Adelson & Beall, 1970). They assessed adolescents' conceptions of law and government using hypothetical scenarios set on a desert island where residents were presented with social problems to solve in a setting that lacked established laws and government. The researchers noted that young adolescents were especially likely to express an obedience orientation toward law, while a pragmatic or popular-will orientation was more common among older adolescents.

Research on character education or service learning has attended to moral development processes more fully than has research in civic or political education. Assessment of the reasoning that characterizes responses to hypothetical
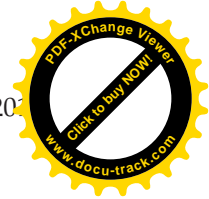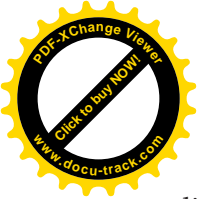
dilemmas could make a greater contribution to understanding the development of civic values, attitudes, and behaviors than it has in the past.

Domain theory. In a further departure from Kohlberg's (1969) theory of moral development, Eliot Turiel has proposed that moral development does not occur in stages; rather it is through distinct conceptual domains that moral and social reasoning develop. Instead of a global understanding of the social world that is distinctly different in each stage, domain-specific knowledge develops simultaneously in distinct domains (Turiel, 1983). According to domain theory (Turiel, 1983, 1998), people's judgments of right and wrong, or of appropriate and inappropriate behavior, are affected by whether the judgment falls in one of three domains: moral, social convention, or personal jurisdiction. The moral domain involves fairness, rights, and the welfare of others. Judgments of social conventions pertain to societal-based regularities and expectations that promote group functioning. Personal jurisdiction involves issues of personal choice and agency.

Researchers have begun to inquire about whether adolescents' conceptions of civic engagement fall in the moral, social convention, or personal jurisdiction domain (Metzger & Smetana, this volume). The appropriate domain will likely vary based on the type of civic engagement and level of individual commitment. A major contribution of domain theory to research on civic engagement is that measures used in studies based on domain theory (e.g., semi-structured interviews and story-reaction methods) might be useful in surfacing information about the processes behind civic-related decisions (Killen, 2007).

Theory of Role Taking

Robert Selman's (1976) theory of role taking is also relevant to civic engagement research because, as with the previous theories, it takes a social cognitive perspective (Selman et al., this volume). Additionally, this theory has been the basis for exploring measures of psychosocial maturity to be used to evaluate character education programs (Schulz, Selman, & LaRusso, 2003). Perspective taking is a key concept in this theory and in civic engagement. A coordinated understanding of the different perspectives (of individuals, groups, or even society as a whole) is important for young people when they participate in processes such as interpersonal negotiation. This was clear from Selman's early work (1976, 1980) and is even more explicit in his recent book (2003). Being civically or politically active inevitably involves interacting with others who take different positions on issues and resolving conflicts that may result.

The third and fourth levels of the development of perspective discussed by Selman (1976, 1980, 2003) are especially relevant to civic engagement.
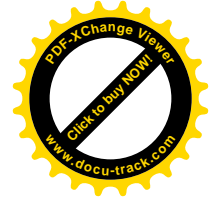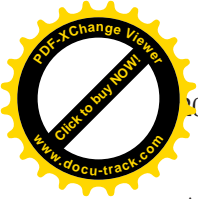
As development advances to these levels, adolescents have the ability to view their own thoughts, feelings, and behavior from the other's perspective. They also recognize that others can do the same. Finally, adolescents can also "distinguish between one's own point of view and a more generalized perspective that might be taken by an 'average' member of the group" (Muuss, 1982, p. 516). Since civic activism often involves groups of people with both common and divergent goals or perspectives, this ability is critical to the development of civic engagement.
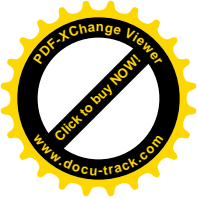
At advanced levels of development, the individual also has the ability to take a societal perspective. An individual with this ability can step back and understand the various points of view being presented and how they affect others in the group. Being able to understand that members of a group share mutual as well as individualized goals is among the qualities of an effective citizen. This understanding also contributes to individuals feeling that they are responsible for doing their part as active citizens.

Selman's theory of role taking and social awareness (1980, 2003) delineates the development of several abilities that are important for civic engagement. Researchers could address ways to specify, refine, and expand these developing competencies to make them more specific to the political domain. The fact that a survey instrument has been developed relating to psychosocial maturity as formulated in this theory is a helpful first step.

Psychosocial Theory

Another developmental theory that could inform examination of adolescents' civic engagement is Erik Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory of development. Psychosocial theory encompasses life-span development and each stage represents a specific crisis or tension that requires resolution (either positive or negative) before the individual advances to the next stage. Development is seen as cumulative; therefore, the positive or negative resolution of a crisis affects later stages and functioning.

All eight life stages proposed by Erikson have implications for the development of civic engagement. Three specific stages are discussed here, starting with the crisis experienced in infancy—trust versus mistrust. Most infants are able to establish a trusting relationship with their parents, which will lay the foundation for future trusting relationships. Flanagan and colleagues (this volume) have described social trust as an important factor contributing to youth civic engagement. To some extent, the trust developed early in life may underlie social trust in adolescence, either directly or indirectly as an extension of social trust in childhood. Understanding more about this connection may explain the strong association between parental behavior and attitudes and the level of youth civic engagement.

According to Erikson, school-aged children are at the developmental stage in which they must face the task of industry versus inferiority. The child tries to develop a sense of self-worth by refining skills and developing feelings of efficacy. Understanding what happens at this stage could aid in understanding factors that contribute to a child's sense of competence and agency in the civic domain. Providing children with age-appropriate activities that involve altruistic behavior in the community could assist in developing a sense that one's actions can have positive results, which is the core of a sense of industry.

The last stage discussed here is adolescence, the developmental stage in which identity versus diffusion is the issue. Adolescents explore multiple roles and identities in an effort to define themselves. Political and civic identity has, however, rarely been studied from a psychosocial perspective. Erikson (1958) mentions political identity as the individual's sense of connectedness with others and an investment in a collective future. As Youniss and Yates eloquently stated, "As youth focus inwardly to find self-sameness (continuity with the past), they must also look outward to form relationships with society's traditions" (1997, p. 22). Therefore, a pivotal component of identity formation is an understanding of one's role in society. The development of a general identity in terms of worldview and values may translate to feelings about society, but development of a specific political identity is a more critical component of civic engagement. Although a clear, empirically supported distinction has not been made between generalized identity and civic or political identity, there are studies that attempt to understand youth identity issues as they relate to civics and politics (Flanagan, Syvertsen, Mitra, Oliver, & Sethuraman, 2005; Goossens, 2001; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001).

Erikson's (1968) theory of development takes a life-span perspective and suggests directions for examining the precursors of adolescent civic engagement. Additionally, the developmental crises faced at each stage suggest age-appropriate measures. Psychosocial theory also offers some guidance in designing measures of three concepts important in civic engagement: trust, sense of industry, and identity. Empirical research is needed to determine the extent to which psychosocial conflicts faced by the individual are reflected in the civic domain, however.

Ecological Systems Theory

In a contextual theory of development, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the multiple interacting influences on development throughout the life span, ranging from micro- to macro-level factors. Ecological systems theory posits that individuals learn and develop as a result of multiple interacting
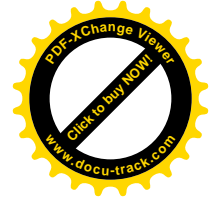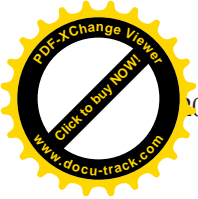
systems of influence over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). In addition to the ongoing interaction between the individual and the systems of influence, the systems also are interdependent with each other. Indeed, development is affected by the direct influence of each system, as well as the indirect influences of distal systems operating through more proximal systems. The nested systems of the ecological model include the individual's microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

The system that is most proximal to the adolescent is the microsystem, which includes individuals and societal institutions that directly interact with youth through interpersonal relationships and recurring patterns of activity (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Because of their proximity to the individual, components of the microsystem directly affect development. Different aspects of the microsystem environment are more salient depending on the age of the individual. For young children, the family and home have the largest influence, but as children grow older and explore their surroundings they experience additional influences, including school and peers. The influence of each context may change over time, especially given interactions with other contexts. An initial microsystem that influences civic development is the family. Some research on civic engagement has emphasized the role of family socialization early in life (Flanagan & Sherrod, 1998). If parents are active in civic pursuits and are involved in the democratic process, their children are more likely to be involved as well (McIntosh, Hart, & Youniss, 2007). It may also be the case that at a young age, children are given the opportunity to participate in certain family processes much like adolescents and adults have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes in society. Other components of the microsystem are associated with youth civic engagement, including peer groups (Zaff et al., 2003), schools (Torney-Purta, Barber, & Wilkenfeld, 2007), and youth organizations (Hart & Kirshner, 2009).

The interactions between individuals and settings of the microsystem make up the adolescent's mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). In the mesosystem, relationships between multiple settings have the potential for an additional influence on development. For example, the connection between parents and the school can enhance positive outcomes. Parental involvement in the school may provide additional opportunities for learning outside the classroom, such as field trips to the state capitol building or city hall. Some qualitative research has also identified conflict between microsystems, for example, the views of civic processes found in school textbooks and everyday life experiences in the family and neighborhood (Rubin, 2007).

The exosystem also involves the interaction between individuals and settings; however, only one component of the relationship is from the adolescent's microsystem. Since a necessary requirement for being contained in the exosystem is that one of the aspects is not in a person's microsystem, the
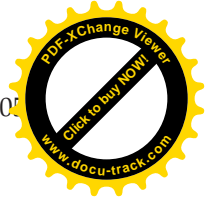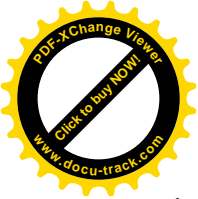
influence of relationships and processes in the exosystem on development is indirect (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). A frequently mentioned exosystem is the connection between an adolescent's parents and the parents' workplace; however, the connection between an adolescent's school and the neighborhood in which the school is located also relates to adolescents' outcomes, including civic attitudes and behavior (Wilkenfeld, 2009). Also included in the exosystem are local school boards, community groups, and public policies that affect youth through their school and families (e.g., state policies regarding the maximum income level for students to receive free lunch at school or state curriculum frameworks in social studies).

The most remote system of influence on adolescent development is the macrosystem. The macrosystem includes the overarching attitudes and ideologies that characterize the broader social context and frame other systems of influence. Although the effect is indirect, these larger societal processes permeate all stages and domains of development because they are by definition a "societal blueprint" (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 228). The macrosystem is especially relevant to the study of civic development. A collectivist society may place specific emphasis on helping others and being involved in one's community as opposed to an individualistic society, which may promote concern for individual wishes or needs. Indeed, research has found country differences in outcomes such as adolescents' civic commitment (Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998). Even more obvious, however, is how the structure of government within a society can impact an individual's knowledge base and ability to become civically active. In a study examining 27 countries (utilizing data from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement [IEA] Civic Education Study), adolescents in countries whose governments were active in international human rights dialogue had greater knowledge and understanding of the United Nations and the Convention on the Rights of the Child than those in countries where the government was less active in this international discourse (Torney-Purta, Wilkenfeld, & Barber, 2008).

Each of the systems described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) plays a significant role in civic development, but the interaction between the systems offers the most promising opportunities for new research on civic engagement. For example, a particular community may not provide an individual with opportunities to become civically involved, but other aspects of the individual's microsystem may provide such opportunities, for example, by joining with parents in volunteer activities. The interactions between these systems of influence and their relation to civic engagement have rarely been systematically studied. Use of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory also promotes multidisciplinary research in that different disciplines have traditionally studied the different levels of influence. Research on civic engagement would benefit
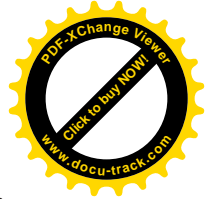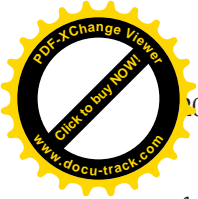
from a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates concepts and theories from psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, and economics, as well as social work and education.

The theories discussed in this section provide foundations on which theories of civic development might be formulated. Although research on civic engagement could benefit from concepts and measurement inspired by the theories discussed here, these perspectives are infrequently found in research on civic and political development. The theories discussed in the next section pertain specifically to the development of civic engagement.
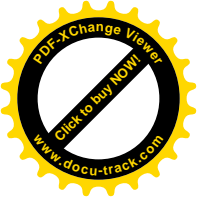
THEORIES SPECIFIC TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Theories about development in social and cognitive domains are well established, but few have been applied to the investigation of civic development. In contrast, there are two theories that directly address the civic domain, but they are in the early stages of elaboration and use by researchers. In this section, we discuss these two theories: Larson's work with colleagues on a theory of motivational change and engagement (Pearce & Larson, 2006; Wood, Larson, & Brown, 2009) and Watts's psychological theory of sociopolitical development (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). These theories are not central in developmental science because the scope of their application is different.

Theory of Motivational Change

Pearce and Larson (2006) utilized interviews and a grounded theory approach to address the need for theory in understanding the motivation behind youth participation in and commitment to civic action. Their work focuses on linking profiles of organizations with experiences of youth that promote youth participation (such as peer interaction and leader support). The theory, developed primarily from qualitative data, stresses that participation in youth programs fosters feelings of self-reliance and responsibility and gives adolescents the opportunity to exercise individual choice and fulfill clearly stated expectations (Larson, Pearce, Sullivan, & Jarrett, 2007; Wood et al., 2009).

In some of their studies, the researchers found evidence for a three-stage engagement process. First, the youth have to be present in the setting, whether it is required or of their own volition. Second, they need to feel a personal connection to the organization's mission, and third, the activities in which they participate need to generate intrinsic motivation. This approach to theory development suggests ways to operationalize different aspects of civic action involved in youth participation in organizations and programs,
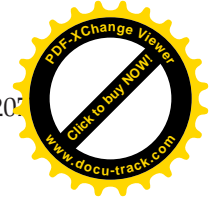
as well as providing information to guide the development of a set of constructs to be included in assessments. Theoretically based empirical research can then be used to revise and more fully develop the theory.

Theory of Sociopolitical Development

In the second theory of civic engagement, developed by Watts and colleagues (Watts et al., 1999, 2003), the researchers define sociopolitical development as "the evolving understanding of the political, economic, cultural, and other systemic forces that shape society and one's status in it, and the associated process of growth in the relevant knowledge, analytical skills, and emotional faculties necessary to engage in political activity" (Watts, Armstrong, Cartman, & Guessous, 2008). This theory was developed from a liberation psychology perspective (also drawing from the cognitive psychology and spirituality literatures).

Each of the five stages delineated in the theory incorporates the concept of critical consciousness, because of its perceived contribution to sociopolitical development (Watts et al., 1999, 2003). Critical consciousness is defined conceptually in a way that distinguishes between the mechanisms and outcomes of oppression (Freire, 1990). It is a process that involves critically analyzing socially constructed norms and beliefs, and associated institutions. Additionally, the theory suggests that spirituality in the form of belief in a higher power can play a supportive role for an individual and can provide the motivation to become an advocate for change (Watts et al., 1999).

The theory of sociopolitical development is more developmental than some other empowerment theories in community psychology because of its premise that the impact of events on individuals is cumulative over time. The chronology of this process is represented within the five stages laid out by the theory. The first stage of sociopolitical development is the acritical stage. Persons in this stage believe that there are minimal differences in resources based on group membership and that individuals have complete control over their place in society. The second stage of sociopolitical development is the adaptive stage. Individuals in this stage are able to recognize that there may be institutional asymmetry but choose to adopt a defeatist attitude. The precritical stage is the third stage, at which point individuals become more concerned about the asymmetries and inequalities that exist and correspondingly less complacent. In the fourth stage of sociopolitical development, the critical stage, individuals have a desire to learn more about the inequalities in society and come to realize that activism and advocacy are necessary to combat these injustices. In the fifth and final stage of sociopolitical development, the liberation stage, involvement in social action and community actions stimulates the awareness of oppression (Watts et al., 1999, 2003).
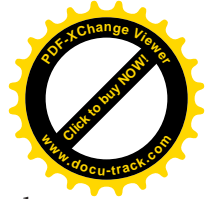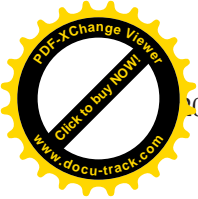
Watts and colleagues (1999) suggest a series of key questions designed to enhance consciousness and promote the movement of the individual through the stages. For example, young people in early stages can be asked to consider why affluent children are allowed to take their books home from school while impoverished children cannot. In higher stages young people are asked what they can do to confront systemic problems of injustice.

In order to elaborate the theory of sociopolitical development, Watts et al. (1999) conducted interviews with African American males, a population that has historically experienced oppression. The researchers found that critical consciousness increased among the young men who participated in a particular program. Key action questions were asked of the participants in order to facilitate progression through the five stages (discussed above). Unfortunately, the researchers were not able to determine which factors actually contribute to critical consciousness, or whether or not critical consciousness does in fact lead to civic action. However, the empirical results allowed the investigators to more clearly define the social analysis and worldview portions of their theory.

Watts and colleagues (2008) describe four elements of a conceptual model: a worldview and social analysis, a sense of agency, awareness of the opportunity structure, and behavior representing societal involvement. An individual's analysis of society ranges from the notion that people get what they deserve due to their own actions and pursuit of opportunities (stage 1), to an acknowledgement of social institutions that influence individuals' lives (stage 3). Watts et al. (2003) posit that increased awareness of social injustices increases the likelihood of social activism. However, the relationship between knowledge and awareness of social injustice and actually taking action is moderated by a sense of agency and the opportunity structure for action (Watts et al., 2003). As an individual's sense of agency and the available resources to take action increase, the relation between social analysis and social involvement is postulated to become stronger.

The work of Watts and colleagues in attempting to understand the role of critical consciousness in civic development takes a different direction from the other theories presented here. The empirical work associated with it is at a relatively early stage, however.

This section provided examples of the use of specific theories to guide research on civic engagement. The associated research illustrates the complicated interplay between theory and empirical research that is essential to growth of a new research area. With the exception of these two theories, there has been little theory generation specifically dealing with civic and political development. The perceived inadequacy of relevant theories results in studies not being consistently guided by theories or even by well-explicated conceptual frameworks.