DIFFERENCES IN PROFILES OF IDENTITY AND PURPOSE BETWEEN CIVICALLY ENGAGED AND NOT ENGAGED YOUTH

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Assuming that civic involvement contexts provide opportunities to explore facets of personal (i.e., understanding who one is), and social identity (i.e., one's place and role in society), we hypothesized that profiles of identity would differ between youth engaged and not engaged in civic and political activities. We modeled identity configurations in a sample of 538 late Chilean adolescents and young adults, that differed in their engagement with civic and political organizations. Using latent class analysis, three distinctive classes of identity configurations were identified: a class characterized by high levels of coherence, commitment, and purpose; a class characterized by value coherence and commitment, but low purpose; and a class characterized by high interest in current civic activities, but low value coherence and sense of purpose. Membership in the highly coherent and purposeful class was predicted by critical consciousness. Overall, results highlight that identity dimensions coalesce in consistent patterns, and that highly coherent, committed, and purposeful youth are more likely to be engaged in civic and political activities and present higher levels of critical thinking about society.

Key words: Civic engagement; Identity; Sense of purpose; Social and political participation; Youth.

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Identity encompasses the beliefs, ideals, and values that shape and give each person an enduring, integrated, and cohesive sense of self that provides guidance for beliefs and behaviors through life. In Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory of human development, the lifelong task of developing a coherent and stable sense of identity takes prominence in youth. The rapid transformations occurring in biological, cognitive, social, and psychological capacities motivate adolescents to reflect about themselves as persons, to anticipate their future selves and goals, and to define their place in society.

Erikson (1968) placed particular emphasis on ego identity as the facet of the self that connects to reality, and develops through social interaction. He argued that ego identity is constantly changing due to new experiences and information acquired in daily interactions with others. Adolescents grow in autonomy and explore the social world through new experiences and roles that challenge preconceptions and expectations about the self and thus, can strengthen or hinder the identity task. Successful resolution integrates earlier identifications into a unique sense of self, and gives rise to fidelity, the ability to live by society's standards and expectations (Erikson, 1968).

Moving beyond the status model, current approaches to identity formation aim to account for the dynamics between exploration and commitment highlighting the continuous evaluation of commitments once they have been made (Meeus, 2011).

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND IDENTITY CONFIGURATIONS

Civic engagement is an important developmental task in the transition to adulthood (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). During childhood and adolescence, youth are socialized in values, become members of social groups, and aware of social and political issues. In their course to adulthood, they are expected "to take stock of the values they stand for, and chart their role in the society they want to be part of" (Flanagan & Levine, 2010, p.160)

Theories of identity formation, both regarding its personal and social facets, provide a conceptual frame to understand why people become engaged in civic and political issues. The identity task involves deciding which values, goals, and beliefs are deemed more central to one's self, and what is our role and responsibility in society. Erikson (1968) argued that reflection about society — situated in a particular historical place and time — and our own role in society, become prominent as part of identity exploration in adolescence. He also emphasized experiences of connection and social validation by the adult community of society, for the benefit of both the person and society. Thus, youth experiences within social contexts (e.g., civic and political engagement), and relations with social actors are meaningful for identity configurations.

Previous findings indicate that involvement in civic activities is related to identity achievement. One line of evidence documents the role of values. Findings from several studies inform that involvement in different civic activities such as volunteering, community organizations, and service projects are related to prosocial values, such as compassion and interdependence with others (Yates & Youniss, 1996), integration of moral facets of identity (Youniss & Hart, 2005), and attachment to the social order (Flanagan, 2003). Examining the associations between identity statuses and civic engagement in a sample of high school students, Crocetti, Jahromi, and Meeus (2012) found that the link between identity processes (i.e., commitment and in-depth exploration), and past and future volunteer, and political participation was mediated by social responsibility.

Findings from other studies similarly indicate that civic actions are associated with a sense of social responsibility for the community or societal issues, and concern for social justice (Cicognani, Klimstra, & Goossens, 2014; Crocetti et al., 2012; Fisher, Busch-Rossnagel, Jopp, & Brown, 2012; Voight & Torney-Purta, 2013).

Other studies have examined how civic involvement relates to identity achievement. In a longitudinal study, Hardy and Kisling (2006) found a positive association between achieved identity and prosocial behavior. Alternatively, diffuse identity was negatively related to prosocial behavior. Similarly, in a sample of Canadian adolescents, Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, and Alisat (2007) found more mature levels of identity in youth involved in both political and prosocial activities, compared to their noninvolved counterparts. Additionally, the civically involved group showed higher levels of social responsibility, conceived as a sense of duty to helping others.

In a two-wave longitudinal analyses of a sample of 1,308 adolescents between 14 and 18 years old, Crocetti, Erentaitė, and Žukauskienė (2014) examined reciprocal associations between different styles of processing identity-relevant information, civic engagement (i.e., participation in school government, volunteering, youth political and nonpolitical organizations), and adolescent adjustment measured by the Five Cs model (Lerner, et al. 2005). Their findings indicated that adolescents with an information-oriented identity style had higher levels of civic engagement and overall indicators of positive adjustment development, compared to those with a normative style that showed only indicators of positive youth development. Comparatively, the information-oriented benefited both personally and contributed to society.

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Together, these findings document the links between civic engagement — political and prosocial — and identity. However, most studies have used the status model to account for this association and, several authors (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Meeus, 2011) argue that the status model of ego identity does not lend well to accounting for the dynamic interplay between self and others involved in identity formation. Though Erikson emphasized the importance of contextual influences in shaping identity, research on ego identity has not acknowledged this emphasis (Côté & Levine, 1987). As Schachter and Ventura (2008) argue, approaches to identity development have largely focused on adolescents as the main reflective agents in the process of constructing a mature identity. Because civic engagement describes experiences of involvement with others, we use a different approach to understand how it can translate into identity configurations, focusing on the dimensions of self-understanding, acting upon, and committing to beliefs and values deemed important to the self.

Several scholars have emphasized the relevance of processes of identity exploration and commitment for civic development (Crocetti et al., 2012; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997; Youniss & Yates, 1999; Wilkenfeld, Lauckhardt, & Torney-Purta, 2010). Similarly, numerous studies assume that personal identity plays a role in youths' outcomes derived from participation in service or civic pursues, and suggest that experiences of engagement nurture facets of identity over time. Comparatively, few empirical studies actually examine or test this association.

Analyzing studies that bear on the connection between youth civic activities and their sense of identity, Yates and Youniss (1996) concluded that civic and political experiences in youth feed into civic identity development in adulthood. Specifically, sense of purpose (Ballard, Malin, Porter, Colby, & Damon, 2015), and commitment to political activities (Metzger & Smetana, 2009), can become reference points in the formation of political understandings and engagement in youth.

SENSE OF PURPOSE AND CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY

As stated, personal identity as the person's representation of his/her core self provides a frame to interpret personal experiences and derive meaning, purpose, and direction in life. Erikson (1968) pose that through their choices, youth simultaneously explore and commit to purpose and identity. As high-order personal belief systems, identity and sense of purpose can motivate behavior to achieve a person's goals in life (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). Clarity of self-relevant standards in the form of convictions and aims provide direction and purpose in life (Berzonsky, 2003). Though related, identity and sense of purpose are also distinct concepts. Identity reflects a more internal focus on whom one is and will become, whereas purpose is more externally-oriented on what one expects to accomplish in life (Bronk, 2011).

It can be assumed that the civic facet of identity provides the motivation for individuals to participate in the civic and political life (Cicognani et al., 2014; Voight & Torney-Purta, 2013). Civic engagement is motivated by an individual's interest to contribute to others and the community (Ballard et al, 2015), and manifests in behaviors that reflect values (e.g., social justice), and confidence in the capacity to collaborate with others for the benefit of the common good (Flanagan, 2003). Thus, it is important to advance understanding on how cognizing and reflecting on issues of society becomes part of a person's core self in the process of engagement with civic aims. To document whether experiences of civic engagement offer opportunities for reflection about the causes of social problems and society, we explore the role of critical consciousness in predicting class membership. Critical consciousness (CC), the ability to reflect and effect changes over inequities in society, is an essential component of individual sociopolitical development

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(Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). Freire (1973) described it as the person's ability to take perspective on the immediate cultural, social, and political environment, to engage in critical dialogue with it, bringing to bear fundamental moral commitments including concerns for justice and equity, and to define their own place within their surrounding reality. He contended that the experiences that shape CC are specific to life contexts. Thus, it follows that CC can vary across individuals and within individuals, across different domains depending on the experiences of marginalization or exclusion that individuals or social groups may experience.

STUDY AIMS

In both theory and research, there have been different approaches to conceptualizing and measuring identity. To explore whether there is a patterning of identity features that relates to civic involvement, we build on identity indicators of the functions of identity (Adams & Marshall, 1996), and Berzonsky's (1989) conceptualization of identity as a self-theory. Differentiating status from the functional purpose of identity as a self-regulatory system, Adams and Marshall (1996) proposed five functions of identity that include: a) the structure for understanding who one is; b) the meaning and direction through values, goals, and commitments; c) a sense of personal control; d) harmony in the form of consistency and coherence between values, beliefs, and commitments; and e) the ability to recognize future possibilities and alternative choices. Among these five functions, both structure and harmony were considered more central to the purpose of this study. By definition, structure provides an awareness of oneself as a person. Understanding who one is provides a base for self-certainty and self-esteem (Adams & Marshall, 1996). As a motivating, self-regulatory system, identity can provide the motivation to act in ways consistent with own values and beliefs. Thus, acting on proper beliefs about our role in society and responsibility about others may enhance personal coherence and harmony, and a sense of peace with oneself.

Relatedly, Berzonsky (2003) defined identity as a conceptual structure composed of self-representational and self-regulatory constructs. In addressing the questions of identity (i.e., who am I?, what is my place in the world?), Berzonsky (1989) unpacked the two central dimensions of Marcia's (1966) model of identity status, namely crisis and commitment. Crisis describes active self-exploration of identity options and issues. Alternatively, commitment refers to personal involvement with the beliefs and values one stands for (Berzonsky, 1989). Berzonsky argued that adolescents function as different types of self-theorists and described three different strategies or identity processing styles (i.e., information-oriented, normative, and diffuse-avoidant), for purposes of this study we prioritize descriptive indicators of identity commitment.

To better understand how identity dimensions and purpose manifest in youth representations of themselves, we included indicators of both these concepts in our study. Because civic engagement experiences expand opportunities for self-exploration and involve integration of psychological and social dimensions of the self, we expect to find different configurations of identity dimensions in the form of self-understanding, coherence, commitment, and sense of purpose between the civically engaged and the not engaged group. In addition, and assuming that opportunities for reflection on political and civic experiences are relevant for identity formation, we explored the role of CC in predicting identity configurations and examined differences between the civically engaged and not engaged in our sample.

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METHOD

Participants

The sample included 583 late adolescents and young adults (18-25 years-old, M = 20.94, SD = 1.76, 58% female), the majority of them (93%) enrolled in different universities at the time of the study. Over 30% (n = 178; 31%) of the sample, was engaged in social, community, and political organizations.

Procedure

Participants were recruited in their colleges and universities and were invited to participate by completing a questionnaire either in paper and pencil or online (58%). Participation was voluntary and unrewarded. The research protocol was approved by the ethics board review of the parent university and the funding agency.

Measures

To represent different profiles of dimensions of identity, for the present study we used identity items from three different identity scales

Functions of Identity Scale (Serafini & Adams, 2002). We used five items drawn from the sense of personal coherence subscale (e.g., "I am certain that I know myself," "My values and beliefs say a lot about who I am"). Cronbach's alpha was estimated at .71.[1]

Identity Style Inventory (Berzonsky et al., 2013). We used three items from the commitment subscale (e.g., "I know basically what I believe and don't believe," "I know what I want to do with my future"). Cronbach's alpha for these three items was estimated at .53.

Sense of Purpose Scale (Damon et al., 2003). We included three items of sense of purpose (e.g., "My life has a clear purpose"). Cronbach's alpha for these three items was estimated at .78.

All the items in the scales were answered in a 4-point Likert scale format and were recoded as 0 = it "does not represent me" or "represents me little," and 1= "represents me a lot" or "represents me completely." The decision to recode was based on substantive and empirical criteria, as the differences between the response options "does not represent me" and "represents me a little," and between the "represent me a lot" and "represent me completely" were too subtle. Enhancing the distinctions facilitated the modeling of the latent classes.

Additionally, we included a scale of critical consciousness (Watts & Jagers, 2003), a measure of the understanding of society, as predictor. CC was measured by an adapted form of the *Critical Consciousness Scale* developed by Thomas et al. (2014) consisting of seven items, each containing three statements arranged as a Guttman scale to indicate an increasing degree of critical consciousness items (e.g., "I believe the World is basically fair, though other people find it unfair," "I believe the World is unfair to some people," "I believe the World is unfair and I make sure I treat other people fairly"). Cronbach's alpha was estimated at .55.

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Analytic Plan

We run a series of latent class analysis (LCA) using five items from Serafini and Adam's (2002) sense of coherence subscale, three items from Berzonsky et al.'s (2013) commitment subscale, and three items from Damon et al.'s (2003) Sense of Purpose Scale.

In order to identify the best fitting model, we run a series of latent class analyses with classes ranging from 2 to 6. The best model was decided based on a combination of conventional information criteria — Bayesian information criterion (BIC), Akaike information criterion (AIC) — and substantive criteria in terms of the interpretability of classes.

As a second step, we run a multigroup analysis with engagement in community and political organizations as the grouping variable. We tested for invariance in the configuration of the classes by group (i.e., civically engaged and not engaged).

RESULTS

The fit statistics for the different models are presented in Table 1. While BIC and CAIC favored the 3-class model, AIC and adjusted BIC favored a solution with a larger number of classes. Examination of the solution with more than three classes suggested that new classes were a division of existing classes and fairly small in size. Consequently, a decision was made to retain the 3-class solution.

TABLE 1
Fit statistics for models with different number of classes

	G^2	df	AIC	BIC	CAIC	Adj BIC	Entropy
2-class	783.34	2024	829.34	929.81	925.81	856.80	0.85
3-class	638.29	2012	708.29	**861.18**	**896.18**	750.06	0.87
4 3-class	571.65	2000	665.65	870.96	917.96	721.75	0.84
5-class	509.63	1988	627.63	885.35	944.35	**698.05**	0.83
6-class	478.54	1976	**620.54**	930.68	1001.68	705.28	0.84

Note. AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; CAIC = consistent AIC; Adj BIC= adjusted BIC. Values in bold represent the optimal model according to each particular criteria.

The item-response probabilities for the 3-class solution are presented in Figure 1. Three distinctive classes are identified: a) a class with high probability of feeling represented by all identity statements (coherent with values, certain with life commitments, and purposeful [CCP] class, that represents 62% of the sample); b) a class with high probability of feeling represented by coherence with self-values and identity commitment, but low probability of feeling represented by the sense of purpose items (coherent and committed [CAC] class, that represents 31% of the sample); and, c) a class with low level of coherence in values and uncertain with life commitments (except for those that represent activities of current moment in life), and low endorsement of sense of purpose (belief and interest [INT] class, that represents 7% of the sample).

In order to test for class invariance, we then run a multigroup analysis comparing the group engaged in community, social, or political organizations with the group not engaged at the time of the study.

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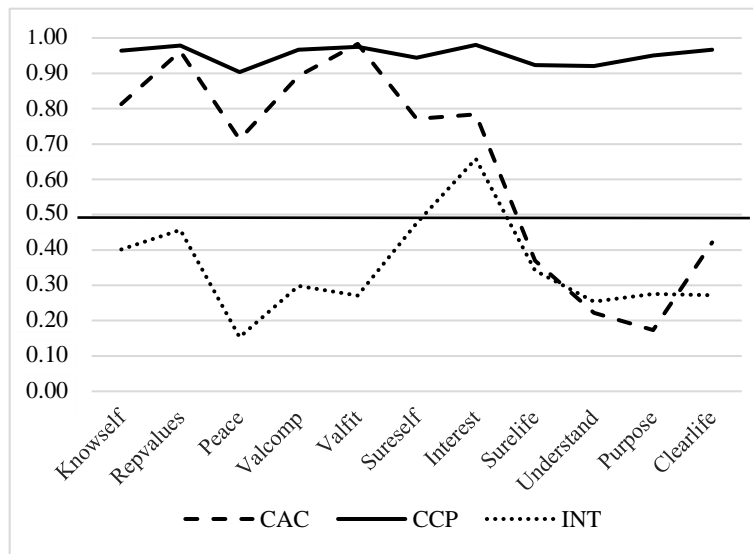Martínez, M. L., & Cumsille, P.
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FIGURE 1
Item-response probabilities conditional on class membership. Line set at 0.50 represent chance probability.
Knowself: I am certain I know myslef; Repvalues: My values and beliefs represent who I am; Peace: I feel
at peace with myself; Valcomp: My values and beliefs reflect my commitments; Valfit: My values and be-
liefs fit with me as a person; Sureself: I feel sure about my beliefs; Interest: I am really interested in what I
am doing with my life; Surelife: I am sure of what I want to do with my life; Understand: I understand the
meaning of my life; Purpose: My life has a clear purpose; Clearlife: I know what give meaning to my life.
CAC = coherent and committed class; CCP = coherent, committed, and purposeful class;
INT = interested only class.

The chi-square differences test indicated no strict invariance at $p > .05$ — $\Delta\chi^2(n = 583) = 46.7$, $df = 33$, $p = .047$. The examination of the item-response probabilities and the graphical display (Figure 2) suggested that only the pattern of CCP was similar between engaged and not engaged youth. The compari- son of the prevalence of the CCP by group (Table 2) showed that youth engaged in social and political or- ganizations had higher prevalence than not engaged youth (71% versus 57%, respectively). Further, the en- gaged group showed a different patterning of identity dimensions. The classes for the not engaged group showed a pattern very similar to the one described for the whole sample, that is both CAC and INT classes were low in value certainty as well as in the direction of their lives, reflecting low sense of purpose.

Alternatively, the CAC class was high on self understanding and value coherence, and high in value commitment, but low on sense of purpose, whereas, the INT class showed high probablility of endorsing value commitment and a clear direction of life as reflected in sense of purpose. In the civically engaged group, CAC and INT showed high probability of endorsing either value coherence and/or sense of purpose.

Finally, we run a multinomial logistic regression analysis using our measure of CC as predictor of class membership, separated by engagement. We controlled for sex and age. The results of this analysis showed the odds of being in the CCP class were more than 10 times, 95% CI [1.87, 55.88], higher per point of increase in critical consciousness compared with any of the other two classes, but only for the engaged group. For the not engaged group, the odds of being in the CAC class for males were more than 3 times higher than for females, compared with the INT class.
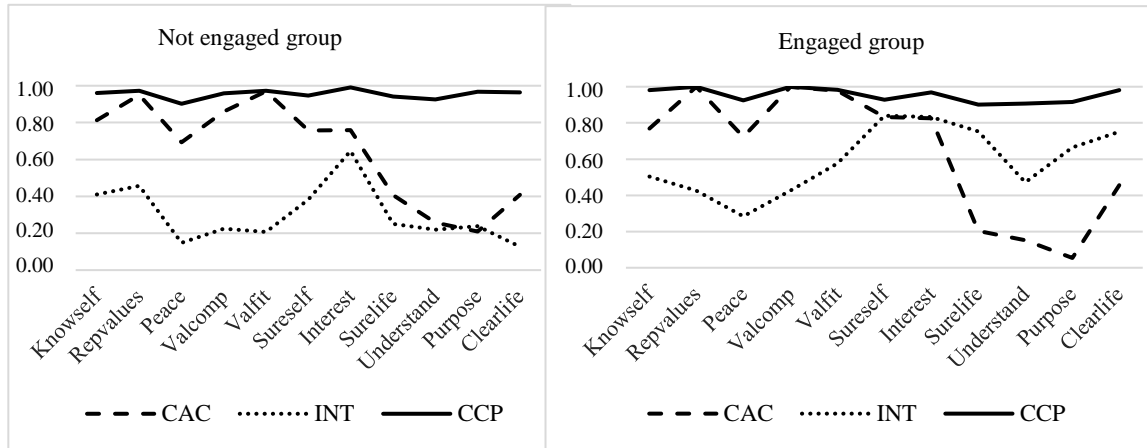
FIGURE 2

Item-response probabilities conditional on class membership for the civically engaged and not engaged groups. Knowself: I am certain I know myslef; Repvalues: My values and beliefs represent who I am; Peace: I feel at peace with myself; Valcomp: My values and beliefs reflect my commitments; Valfit: My values and beliefs fit with me as a person; Sureself: I feel sure about my beliefs; Interest: I am really interested in what I am doing with my life; Surelife: I am sure of what I want to do with my life; Understand: I understand the meaning of my life; Purpose: My life has a clear purpose; Clearlife: I know what give meaning to my life.
CAC = coherent and committed class; INT = interested only class;
CCP = coherent, committed, and purposeful class.

TABLE 2
Class prevalences by engagement group without invariance

Group	CAC	INT	CCP
Not engaged	36.13	7.00	56.87
Engaged	21.35	7.54	71.11

Note: CAC = coherent and committed class; INT = interested only class; CCP = coherent, committed, and purposeful class.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper was to identify patterns of identity dimensions in a sample of late adolescents and young adults, some of whom were actively engaged in civic, social, and political activities. Known dimensions of identity in young people representing value coherence, commitment to acting upon personal values, and sense of purpose were used in the analysis. Using a person-centered approach and an empirical strategy, we identified three profiles of identity dimensions in a sample of youth that differed in their involvement with civic and political organizations.

As hypothesized, sample participants involved in civic and political activities had higher prevalence in the class characterized by high value coherence, commitment, and sense of purpose. Further, compared to the not engaged group, classes within the civically engaged group were somewhat different in prevalence and patterning of identity dimensions. Specifically, the identity class characterized by high self-

understanding, value coherence and commitment, and high sense of purpose was more prevalent in the civically engaged group. Further, the patterning of classes in the civically not engaged group more closely resembled that of the total sample.

If we assume that identity integrates the person's core self, it can serve to motivate a person to act in ways that are consistent with his/her representation of core self (Hardy & Carlo, 2005). The motivations to becoming involved in social and political issues are certainly related to self-definitions. In turn, acting on our own expectations for our place in society can feed back into self-understanding and foster a sense of harmony. That is, a feeling that our behavior is in consonance with the beliefs we stand for. Findings from previous studies inform that participants in volunteering programs describe that through participation they could explore facets of themselves (Crocetti et al, 2012), and actualize a sense of social responsibility and contribution, for example that working with others they could make a difference in society (Martinez, Peñaloza, & Valenzuela, 2012).

Thus, the links between identity commitment and civic action can mutually feedback. Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus (2008) argue that in defining and refining their identities, youth make commitments and revise them over time in iterative manners. Though it can be assumed that experiences in civic contexts challenge youth's self-definitions and value commitments, research identifying the processes involved is needed to test this claim. Even if current findings show differences in the patterning of identity between the civically engaged and not engaged groups, we cannot draw conclusions about the direction of these associations.

The contexts of civic and political organizations within which some participants are involved expose them to social and economic realities that oftentimes challenge their previous conceptions about society, and can motivate self-reflection and commitment to action. From a developmental contextual point of view, we assume participants have been socialized in diverse ways — encultured in the values and social norms — of the settings they participate in.

A question that guided the present study was whether experiences of civic engagement such as community service or political engagement can facilitate identity exploration and commitment. In sum, current findings expand evidence of the links between civic experiences and identity formation, and confirm the interplay between values, beliefs, and behaviors in achieving coherence, commitment, and purpose.

Membership in the high self-understanding, value coherence, and commitment (i.e., CCP class) was also predicted by level of CC. It is possible to think that the opportunities that different contexts of participation afford for youth to reflect on the aims or implications of civic and political experiences may deepen identity exploration, thus clarifying personal motivations and commitments. Youth are active agents in cognizing social and political events: they construe ideas, affects, and derive meaning about societal issues. Their ways of dealing with sociopolitical issues implicate identity work, with unique consequences for their continuous understandings of themselves. Recchia & Wainryb (2011) argue that understanding and making sense of the social and political reality lies in the intersection of personal and social identity.

The relationship between CC and the pattern characterized as highly coherent, committed, and purposeful also highlights the interplay between experiences of engagement, dimensions of identity, and reflection about society. Overall, this association illustrates that youth civic and political involvement bear significance for youth identity development, and highlights the political meaning of establishing relationships with others in civic contexts (Youniss & Yates, 1999).

Likely, the civically engaged group in this sample has different experiences of participation depending on the aims, activities, and initiatives that they had undertaken. Future research should continue to examine the effects that different forms of civic involvement have on facets of identity. Schmid (2012) found that sense of social responsibility was differentially associated with different forms of participation.

In her sample, youth with higher levels of social responsibility showed intention to participate in legal protests, and no disposition to participate in political actions that involved violence. Similarly, Marzana, Marta, and Pozzi (2012) concluded that volunteers had higher levels of religiosity and social trust compared to youth involved in political action that displayed higher levels of self-determination.

Study Limitations

Given that our group of civically engaged participants bear very different experiences depending on the contexts of civic engagement they have been involved, our study cannot inform about the why different patterns of identity emerge. Further, the cross-sectional design of our study prevents conclusions about the direction of the relations between identity and civic engagement. Our measures do not allow to disentangle whether differences in identity configurations actually reflect preexisting differences in motivations, dispositions that self-select individuals into contexts of civic and political participation, and how these interact with contextual features of civic and political participation. Future research should continue empirical efforts to identify what are the processes that account for the associations between identity configurations and civic participation. In their study of events associated with identity status change in adult development, however, Kroger and Green (1996) conclude that the relationship between contextual variables and the identity formation process remains complex and that further research should identify the pathways of interaction between contextual variables as well as individual dispositions to shape identity formation.

NOTE

1. Internal consistency is not as relevant for latent class analysis as it is for other types of analysis. However, we provide the estimates as a reference.

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