



Adolescents' expected civic participation: The role of civic knowledge and efficacy beliefs



Sara Manganelli ^{a,*}, Fabio Lucidi ^a, Fabio Alivernini ^b

^a Department of Social and Developmental Psychology University of Rome 'La Sapienza', via dei Marsi, 78, 00185 Rome, Italy

^b National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education System (INVALSI), via Borromini, 5, Villa Falconieri, 00044 Frascati RM, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 29 May 2014

Keywords:

Efficacy beliefs

Civic knowledge

Socio-economic status

Civic engagement

Structural equation modelling

IEA ICCS 2009

ABSTRACT

In the present study we examined the role of civic knowledge and efficacy beliefs as factors that can promote adolescents' expectations to participate in civic activities, while also taking into consideration the influences of socio-economic background and gender differences. Structural equation modelling techniques were used to examine data from the International Civic and Citizenship Study, collected from 3352 eighth grade Italian students. Gender was found to significantly moderate some relationships between the variables, while efficacy beliefs, rather than civic knowledge, positively influenced expected civic participation. Socio-economic background influenced all the variables included in the study, but it had a very small direct influence on adolescents' expected civic participation. It therefore appears that adolescents' expected civic participation can be encouraged by making them more confident about their civic and political abilities. These results extend our understanding of civic engagement in adolescents, and can inform policies aiming to promote it.

© 2014 The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Adolescents' civic engagement has been regarded as an expression of a successful and healthy development (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010) and as the foundation of civic and political involvement in adulthood (Flanagan & Sherrod, 1998). It is considered critical for the health of communities, governments, and societies (World Bank, 2007).

Civic engagement is a complex phenomenon that is best described by using multiple components (Bobek, Zaff, Li, & Lerner, 2009; Luengo Kanacri, Rosa, & Di Giunta, 2012; Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). Political participation has been widely regarded as a core element of civic engagement (Obradovic & Masten, 2007; Walker, 2002), but several authors (Haste & Hogan, 2006; Jugert, Eckstein, Noack, Kuhn, & Benbow, 2013; Youniss et al., 2002) have argued that also other forms of participation should be taken into account, especially when focussing on adolescents. These forms include civic actions pertaining to civil society (Flanagan & Faison, 2001) with people attempting to further their interests and uphold their opinions (e.g., signing petitions, taking part in a demonstration), as well as newer forms of participation (e.g., internet and consumer activism; Jugert et al., 2013).

Since adolescents have limited opportunities to participate as active citizens, at least until they come of age, research has often focused on their expectations to participate in political and civic activities, considering them as informative and

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +39 3296214069.

E-mail addresses: sara.manganelli@uniroma1.it, sara.manganelli@gmail.com (S. Manganelli), fabio.lucidi@uniroma1.it (F. Lucidi), fabio.alivernini@invalsi.it (F. Alivernini).

predictive of future engagement (Schmid, 2012; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). This approach is based on the large body of literature that has regarded behavioural expectations as immediate antecedents of behaviour and its best predictors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010), as well as on the results of studies that have shown a close correspondence between expectations to vote and voting behaviour (e.g., Granberg & Holmberg, 1990). The connection between adolescents' current expectations to participate and their future civic engagement is also supported by longitudinal studies, which have shown a high stability and persistence in political attitudes and participation from youth to adulthood (Braungart & Braungart, 1990; Jennings & Stoker, 2004). They also provide evidence that the civic context during adolescence predicts civic engagement in later life (Zaff, Malanchuk, & Eccles, 2008), and that attitudes toward political engagement and willingness to participate in politics become stable throughout the years of adolescence (Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012).

Building upon the literature summarized above, in the current study we assessed adolescents' expected civic participation by means of a construct that includes their expectations to participate in political activities (e.g., voting, helping a political candidate) as well as in civic activities, both traditional and more modern (e.g., taking part in a peaceful march, contributing to an online discussion). The definition of "civic" was chosen for this construct because nowadays this term has a broader meaning than the term "political" (Flanagan & Faison, 2001) and is thus more appropriate for the different forms of participation included in the present study.

As Amnå (2012) recently pointed out, there is a need for studies which aim to identify the factors that can promote civic participation in youth, and which can provide indications for implementing effective initiatives. Civic knowledge and efficacy beliefs referring to civic and political activities have been considered as core elements for the development of civic engagement and participation (Galston, 2001; Verba Scholzman, & Brady, 1995) also within some recently proposed theoretical frameworks (Schulz, Fraillon, Ainley, Losito, & Kerr, 2008; Torney-Purta, Amadeo, & Andolina, 2010). The influence of the socio-economic background on civic participation, attitudes and competencies has also been pointed out (Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002). However, the majority of studies carried out hitherto have investigated the relationships between civic engagement and civic knowledge or efficacy beliefs independently, usually focussing on specific forms of participation separately, without evaluating the influence of socio-economic background on all these variables.

The aim of the present study was therefore to simultaneously examine the influence of civic knowledge and efficacy beliefs regarding civic and political activities on adolescents' overall expected civic participation, also taking into consideration the influence of their socio-economic background. Moreover, since gender differences have been detected in the field of civic engagement (Cicognani, Zani, Fournier, Gavray, & Born, 2012; Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Schulz et al., 2010) we also investigated whether the above-mentioned factors had the same effect on expected civic participation in both boys and girls.

The present study is based on the Italian data from the International Civic and Citizenship education Study (ICCS 2009; Schulz et al., 2010) of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). Widespread feelings of disaffection and mistrust of politics, with low levels of participation and interest have recently been detected among Italian adolescents (ISTAT, 2010; Marta & Cristini, 2012), together with a slight shift toward alternative forms of civic action (Vecchione & Mebane, 2006). Several reforms have been recently introduced in Italian schools, which intend to encourage innovative teaching strategies so as to promote students' civic engagement (e.g., Terrinoni & Stringher, 2013). How these reforms should be implemented is still a matter of considerable debate, and there is a need for further indications concerning effective teaching strategies. Therefore, the study of the factors that promote civic engagement is particularly relevant to Italy, especially as very few studies have been conducted on Italian adolescents.

In the remainder of this paper, we first review the research literature on the relationships between efficacy beliefs, civic knowledge, socio-economic background, and adolescents' civic participation. Then, we describe the methods and the results of our empirical study. Finally, we discuss our main results, also drawing out some implications for programmes aiming to promote civic engagement in youth and for future research.

Efficacy beliefs and civic participation

Research on the relationship between efficacy beliefs and civic and political engagement has mainly focused on internal political efficacy, which refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to understand politics and to act politically (Vecchione & Caprara, 2009; Zimmerman, 1989). In order to include civic activities that are more familiar to adolescents in their everyday lives, the concept of citizenship self-efficacy has recently been developed (Schulz et al., 2008; Solhaug, 2006). This refers to adolescents' beliefs about their capability to perform activities regarding a general concept of citizenship participation at or outside school (e.g., discuss a newspaper article about a conflict between countries).

Efficacy beliefs influence the likelihood of adolescents' engagement because if they feel they are not able to deal effectively with the political system and civic issues, they will tend to avoid opportunities for involvement (Beaumont, 2010; Pasek, Feldman, Romer, & Jamieson, 2008). Internal political efficacy and citizenship self-efficacy were found to be positive predictors of youths' expected political participation and participation in legal protests (Ainley & Schulz, 2011; Schulz, 2005; Solhaug, 2006). Moreover, internal political efficacy assessed in secondary school students was found to be a predictor of their political activity during early adulthood and to positively influence their voting behaviour (Krampen, 2000; Pasek et al., 2008).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/880704>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/880704>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)