

MOTIVATED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE: UNDERSTANDING
ADOLESCENTS' CIVIC ENGAGEMENT USING
SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

by

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ABSTRACT

Civic engagement is a powerful tool that can empower youth to make positive change in their community. An important step in understanding youth's civic participation involves considering the underlying motivational process that prompts them to action. Past research has delved into some of the individual processes that are linked to youth civic engagement, yet they often lack a broader, more fulfilling picture of motivation. This study builds off previous research by examining some of the interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that influence youth civic engagement, but it also provides a novel picture by examining engagement through the motivational processes outlined in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Specifically, this study examined a moderated mediational model through which youth civic engagement could be predicted by the fulfillment of basic needs outlined by SDT. Furthermore, I expected this relationship to be mediated by youth civic competence and the mediational pathways to be moderated by parental civic engagement. Findings indicated that there was a significant conditional indirect effect of basic needs satisfaction on youth civic engagement through civic competence at medium and high levels of parental civic engagement. However, basic needs satisfaction did not directly predict youth civic engagement, nor did parental civic engagement significantly moderate the link between needs satisfaction and civic competence. This study provides a unique look at the interplay of factors that influence youth prosocial motivation as well as the possible implications of these findings.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to all who have braved the foster care system.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

α	Cronbach's index of internal consistency
b	Beta: unstandardized regression coefficient
df	Degrees of freedom: Degrees of freedom: number of values free to vary after certain restrictions have been placed on the data
M	Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements in the set
p	Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme as or more extreme than the observed value
r	Pearson product-moment correlation
R^2	Percentage of the variation accountable for by all variables in the regression analysis
SD	Standard Deviation: a measure of the variability of a set of scores or values within a group, indicating how narrowly or broadly they deviate from the mean.
t	Computed value of t-test

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INTRODUCTION

Civic engagement represents a growing avenue for positive youth development (Brennan & Barnett, 2009). Active participation introduces teens to specific opportunities and problems that allows them to explore their beliefs and values while promoting connections with others and developing specific skills (Finlay & Flanagan, 2013; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). Interestingly, some researchers have noted a decline in adolescents' civic engagement (Galston, 2001). However, other research has indicated that there is not a decline, but rather a shift in what constitutes civic engagement (Wray-Lake et al., 2019). Previously, the definition only included adolescents' involvement in strictly political matters such as voting and knowledge of government functions (Youniss et al., 2002). Under this restricted definition, community service, volunteering, and activism are considered separate constructs (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Sherrod et al., 2010).

More recently, many researchers have adopted an expanded definition of civic engagement that is more multifaceted. In this broader definition, civic engagement encompasses the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and values necessary for implementing positive change within the community and society as a whole (Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). This approach suggests that it is important to consider diverse actions and issues within the political as well as social realms because they are interconnected and, therefore, should be viewed on a continuum rather than categorically (Youniss et al., 2002). Haste and Hogan (2006)

argue that it is these wider social movements that have “broadened the base of democracy” (p. 476) and accentuate the phrase ‘the personal is political’. For example, volunteering in a local homeless shelter can allow youth to distinguish a larger context in which they realize that the government is not sufficiently addressing the issue of how to reduce homelessness or provide assistance to those facing homelessness (Haste & Hogan, 2006; Yates, 1999). Therefore, by not including these other facets of involvement, researchers may miss out on key components of adolescents’ contributions to society (Wray-Lake & Shubert, 2019).

The factors that underlie youth’s desire and ability to become civically active has been extensively researched. Researchers have recognized that there are specific personal, economic, social, and institutional factors that influence adolescents’ desire and ability to participate in community-based activities and in this paper, I will focus on the putative contributions of civic competence and parental civic engagement. However, I will expand on this by acknowledging that these contributions to adolescents’ motivation to engagement are made because adolescents have first fulfilled three basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competency posited by the Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1980). In this way, this study will provide a fuller understanding of the processes underlying adolescents’ civic engagement. Additionally, these relationships will be examined within the context of specific recent issues and events (i.e., COVID-19, hurricanes, and the 2020 election) as well as broader activities (i.e., activism and volunteering). To do this, this paper will first explore how these factors contribute to civic engagement and explain how the fulfillment of basic needs proposed by SDT might provide a clearer understanding of adolescents’ motivation to become civically involved.

Civic Engagement During Adolescence

Adolescence has been the focus of much civic engagement research because of the many biological, psychological, and social changes that occur during this developmental period. Some of the most vital changes are in relation to psychosocial processes. Cognitively, as adolescents' brains mature, their ability to reason critically and abstractly, take others' viewpoints, and think introspectively grows (Remschmidt, 1994). These neural changes have been correlated with greater empathetic concern and prosocial behavior (Do et al., 2019). Socially, adolescents' relationships also begin to change. As children, parents are critical for promoting healthy mental and physical development. Children will develop internal working models about who they are, their abilities, and what to expect from other people based on the quality of the parent-child interaction (Overbeek et al., 2007). During the transition into adolescence, peers take over as the main socializing unit, although parents are still actively molding and influencing youth (Crockett et al., 1984). Moreover, adolescents begin to seek greater independence from parents in order to familiarize themselves with their environment, pursue self-discovery, and develop their identity (Nurmi, 2004). Combined, these changes in abilities and interpersonal connections are fundamental for high-quality civic engagement (Eisenberg & Morris, 2004).

Given that connectedness to one's community, other people, and one's own sense of self are at the root of civic engagement (Foster et al., 2017; Noble-Carr et al., 2014), it stands to reason that adolescents, who are in the midst of identity formation and exploring their social world would benefit tremendously from becoming active citizens in their communities. Indeed, research has consistently shown that civic involvement in adolescence is correlated with several psychosocial advantages over non-involved or civically apathetic youth (Yates & Youniss, 1996). For example, civically engaged adolescents have greater academic adjustment, higher

GPA, and greater educational expectations than non-civically involved youth (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Schmidt et al., 2007). Participation has also been linked to less disciplinary problems, truancy, interpersonal violence, drug and alcohol use, and overall delinquency (Calabrese & Schumer, 1986; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Zeldin, 2004). Civic engagement also promotes social and emotional well-being by providing a sense of empowerment and involvement with the community and promoting positive ties with peers leading to a reduced sense of alienation and social isolation (Calabrese & Schumer, 1986; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006; Zeldin, 2004). Additionally, Yeh et al. (2015) found that disadvantaged teens who took part in a civic activity reported a greater sense of social support, resilience, leadership, and desire to partake in future community activities. Further advantages of civic engagement include increased empathy, self-esteem, confidence, nurturance, and moral reasoning (Hobfoll, 1980; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006; Yates & Youniss, 1996). Benefits of being civically involved extend into adulthood as well. Longitudinal research has demonstrated that youth who are civically engaged also tend to participate in civic activities as adults (Chan et al., 2014; Finlay & Flanagan, 2013; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Obradović & Masten, 2007).

The social, political, and economic climate is constantly changing. Therefore what youth are engaging in varies based on current issues that they perceive as important (Wray-Lake, 2019). In addition, their participation may be precipitated by other factors such as their beliefs in their abilities to make positive change, their close relationships with others who are involved in the same or similar activities, and a feeling that their participation is self-initiated (Stattin et al., 2017). This may help explain why youth have been key components in broad social justice movements such as the March for Our Lives movement against gun violence, the #MeToo movement promoting women's rights and condemning sexual violence, and the Black Lives

Matter movement, which protests police brutality and racially motivated hate crimes (Hoffman et al., 2016).

Involvement in social movements is not a new trend, but it does seem to be an increasing one (Dalton, 2008). Meyer and Tarrow (1998) proposed the Social Movement Society (SMS) theory that argues that the protest movements from the 1950s and 1960s that dealt with civil rights, involvement in war, and the feminism initiated a trend toward social movements becoming more pervasive and regular. In addition, the theory supports the idea that social movements are less violent than previously and its members more diverse (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998). While some research supports the theory (e.g., Inglehart & Catterberg, 2002), it is also true that protests and demonstrations have simply become a commonly accepted means of expressing opinions (Rafail & Freitas, 2017). However, changes in social movement engagement may not be as clear as it appears. Caren et al. (2011) used cross-sectional data to determine differences in political forms of demonstration between 1978 – 2008. They discovered that there was no significant change in the diversity of those who protested, and that protest was a declining form of political participation. By and large, petition signing was more common and showed more period effects, indicating that there may be certain events that precipitate at least some form of civic engagement (Caren et al., 2011).

Indeed, certain factors, such as parental civic engagement, combined with powerful social events during the identify formation years of adolescence have a big impact on the development of civic consciousness (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). It seems that certain generations strongly identify with large-scale events going on at the time, such as World War II or women gaining the right to vote (Mannheim, 1972; Stewart & McDermott, 2004) For example, Stewart (2003) studied two cohorts, those who graduated in the mid 1950s and those who graduated in the late

1960s. She found that those who graduated in the 1960s were more likely to differentiate between formative events and other social events based on the current political and social climate. In the case of the group from the 1960s, they were facing an increasing change as the civil rights, desegregation, and school integration took hold. As such, they placed more personal meaning to these events as teenagers than did those in the 1950s cohort who were already past the teenage years when these events occurred. Therefore, specific historical events should not be empirically neglected since youth's sense of identity can be shaped by them (Stewart & McDermott, 2004).

The year 2020 is one such historic year in that it brought unprecedented change, both globally and locally, with the escalation of a world-wide pandemic, riots protesting racial violence, natural disasters, and a very controversial national election. This study will be one of the first to examine youth's participation in historical events, social movements, and activities addressing community-based issues during the pandemic. While this focus will harm the generalizability of the overall findings, it will also contribute to the understanding of how these events shaped youth civic engagement during this time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unforeseen challenges that have resulted in a sense of helplessness, confusion, financial instability, and social isolation (Polizzi et al., 2020); and there is still a lot that is unknown about the future of COVID-19 and its long-term effects. Unlike natural disasters where people band together to help each other out, the social constraints placed by COVID-19 may make it difficult to behave prosocially (Polizzi et al., 2020). The impact of COVID-19 restraints on youth's civic engagement remains unknown, but it may be possible for them to work in accordance with national and state mandates while aiding in community and broad social justice initiatives. For example, in one poll, 28% of respondents between the ages of

18-29 reported that during COVID-19, they delivered food or bought groceries for family or neighbors who were unable to leave the house, while 44% reported they would if given the chance (Lundberg & Junco, 2020). In addition to COVID-19, race relations in the United States have become a major source of attention and debate. In May 2020, George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, was killed by a White police officer while in custody. While Floyd wasn't the first Black man killed at the hands of police (or the last), an already distraught nation was again faced with a situation that was inequitable (McCoy, 2020). The news gained world-wide attention and sparked riots in cities across America, generated a social media movement showing solidarity with the Black community, and promoted petitions in several states seeking to defund the police (Cole, 2020). In addition to these events, 2020 has seen an historic number of hurricanes that have caused extensive structural damage and killed almost 140 people (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2020); and over 8,000 wildfires in California have destroyed almost 4 million acres of land and cost 31 lives (*California Daily Wildfire Update*, 2020). Due to the strong underlying political elements in many of the major events that have occurred in 2020, the democratic divide between Republican candidate Donald Trump and Democratic candidate Joe Biden has become increasingly apparent, and while adolescents are not old enough to vote, they still have the ability to make their political voices heard through student government and by contacting political officials (Dudley & Gitelson, 2002). These major events are noteworthy because research has noted that adolescents' civic interest is often spurred by recent global and national crises and events, especially those that are eye-opening or that challenge their perspective on rights, values, fairness, and a just society (Stattin et al., 2017).

While these broader events are important to recognize, most current youth activism is more locally focused (Hart & Gullan, 2010; Metzger, Ferris, et al., 2018). Community service,

also known as community engagement and service learning, is a subset of civic engagement that involves volunteering-based activities which helps others in the community (Yates & Youniss, 1996). These activities may involve distributing food and/or clothes at a shelter, environmental conservation projects, raising money for charity, or tutoring (Metz & Youniss, 2005). Since the 1990s, there has been a resurgence of community service, partly due to governmental legislation which increased service opportunities for youth and partly due to schools integrating more service learning into their school curriculum (Yates, 1999). Community service can be individually initiated or done as part of a larger organization, such as a school club or religious group (Moore et al., 2014). However, not all youth voluntarily engage in community service activities. While most youth who do engage in community projects do so voluntarily, some states encourage or require participation in service learning in order to graduate (Schmidt et al., 2007). Regardless, it seems that required community service is equally beneficial as voluntary community service and may promote future civic involvement for youth who may not become engaged otherwise (Metz & Youniss, 2005; Schmidt et al., 2007).

Interpersonal Relationships, Civic Competence, and Civic Engagement

Aside from the climate that youth grow up in and the events they are exposed to, part of how adolescents shape their identity is by exploring the world through the lens of people around them. Exposure to and interaction with key figures such as family members and peers helps them to identify their values, wants, and beliefs – in short, to answer the question, “Who am I?” (Erikson, 1968). This socialization process is what encourages youth to develop their civic attitudes and behaviors (Rossi et al., 2016). Similarly, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory proposes that individuals’ growth and development is influenced through personal interaction with broadening levels of their environment. At the most immediate and influential

level, the microsystem, lies the contexts that individuals interact with the most on a daily basis (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). For adolescents, this includes school, peers, family, and the neighborhood (Zaff et al., 2008). Indeed, all of these have all been found to be influential in promoting adolescents' civic involvement (da Silva et al., 2004; Foster et al., 2017).

Within the classroom, a sense of connectedness and discussions on civic matters can provide youth with understanding of current issues and promote their interest in participating in civic activities (Guillaume et al., 2015; Rossi et al., 2016). School and classroom practices such as establishing clear academic expectations, having students participate in open and respectful discussions, and providing an equitable climate are important for adolescents' civic development (Campbell, 2008; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Jagers et al., 2017). Other research has found that involvement in extracurricular activities in school and participation in required or voluntary school-based service projects increase their interest and chance of becoming civically involved (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Metz & Youniss, 2005). At the neighborhood and community level, opportunities to engage in community functions and activities promotes adolescents' civic awareness and behaviors (Atkins & Hart, 2003). Sense of community has consistently been linked to increased civic engagement (Albanesi et al., 2007; Cicognani et al., 2015; Di Napoli et al., 2019; Procentese et al., 2019). This is the idea that individuals in a community possess a strong interconnectedness among the members that is promoted through feelings of personal investment and security, the ability to contribute to the community well-being, fulfillment of personal needs, and shared emotional connection (Albanesi et al., 2007).

The interpersonal relationships with adolescents' parental figures and peers also have a strong influence on adolescents' civic engagement. Parents are key socializing units for youth and part of what motivates (or inhibits) youth's engagement in civic behaviors are parents' civic

modeling and socialization practices (McLellan & Youniss, 2003; Roth, 2008). Parental influence may involve engaging the child in familial discussions about civic issues and social responsibility as well as by the child directly observing parental civic engagement (White & Mistry, 2016). Research on civic engagement suggests that there are three necessary components to scaffolding youth: providing knowledge of civic engagement through training mechanisms (e.g., role play), having access to engagement opportunities through involvement with others who are already civically engaged, and guidance and support from those around them (*Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement in Youth*, 2010). Therefore, parents who are civically involved have all the tools necessary to properly scaffold youth engagement. In fact, not only is adult (e.g., parent) involvement related to positive youth civic outcomes (Youniss & Hart, 2005), but simply having more adults around is linked to greater civic knowledge in youth (Hart et al., 2004). Another way civic behavior and values are imparted to youth is through parenting practices. Research suggests that parents who are warm, autonomy-granting, supportive, and who engage in civic activities can increase their child's sense of civic responsibility and civic involvement (Benito-Gomez et al., 2020; Fletcher et al., 2000; Wray-Lake & Shubert, 2019). Yet, some research suggests warm and supportive parenting in adolescence may actually decrease civic engagement (Pavlova et al., 2016). Alesina and Giuliano (2011) found that individuals who reported strong family ties were less likely to become civically involved. Furthermore, Marzana et al. (2012) found no significant effect of family climate or parenting childrearing styles on adolescents' civic engagement. Pavlova et al. (2016) found in their study that warm and supportive parenting was linked to greater conformity and less self-direction but argued that adolescents who are autonomy-driven may actually become more involved because the power-struggle between parents and children may teach youth that questioning authority can

sometimes be effective. Since some parent-child relationships are strained during adolescence as youth seek to gain greater control over their own lives (Branje, 2018), it may be efficacious to focus on how parents are supporting their child's autonomy. As will be discussed later, this autonomy support is a critical element in motivation and should be analyzed within the context of youth civic engagement. Nevertheless, since parental warmth is imbedded in youth's interactions with their parents, it is important to understand whether this warmth is what is driving youth's civic activities. Therefore, youth's perceptions of parental warmth will be controlled for in this study.

The experiences youth have within their family unit can have significant implications for the quality of their subsequent relationships with peers. For example, youth who have secure attachments to their parents are more likely to have high quality friendships (Booth-LaForce & Kerns, 2009). In addition, youth who are experiencing an appropriate level of autonomy are more likely to become self-directed and learn how to maintain positive connections with others (Chen et al., 2009). It is important to note that there are several important aspects to close friendships in adolescence that make them fundamentally different than friendships in childhood. Some of these factors include similarity, reciprocity, equality, intimacy, and commitment (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011a). Therefore, high quality friendships are those that involve mutual support, guidance, disclosure, and conflict resolution (Parker & Asher, 1993). Within high quality friendships, more mutual socialization occurs (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011b; Vitaro et al., 2009). In a study by Barry and Wentzel (2006), they found that adolescents' prosocial behavior was predicted by their friends' self-reported prosocial behavior, and this relationship was moderated by perceived friendship quality. Within the civic engagement literature specifically, friendship has also been noted as an important motivational factor (Rossi et al., 2016). Not only

are friend's civic involvement indicative of adolescents' civic behavior, but engaging with peers on a project can promote a sense of belonging in the peer group (Albanesi et al., 2007). While peers are of particular importance in youth's civic engagement, it is likely that the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a separation from peers, but more time spent at home with parents. As such, this context may have provided youth with a greater chance of interacting with and being influenced by parents' own civic behaviors, rather than peer behaviors. Consequently, this study will directly address the role of parents in promoting youth civic engagement.

Positive socialization is fundamental for helping youth develop their civic competence (Hart & Atkins, 2002). Specifically, being in an environment where they are exposed to civic issues and interact with others who are civically active, youth are instilled with a sense of civic duty, stay informed and knowledgeable about civic issues, develop stronger positive connections with their community, and cultivate confidence (Iwasaki et al., 2014; LeCompte et al., 2020). Furthermore, adolescents who feel civically competent are more likely to develop or seek out ways to become civically engaged (Lenzi et al., 2013; Zanbar & Ellison, 2019). Youth can then cultivate and refine their skills with each civic activity they participate in, thus promoting future civic engagement (McLellan & Youniss, 2003; Obradović & Masten, 2007; Youniss et al., 2002). Bandura (1989) was one of the first to demonstrate the importance of competence in motivation and action. His Social Cognitive Theory states that people are not simply passive vessels in which experience is poured nor are they purely free from all influence. Individual motivation and action lie within a triad of interconnected influences including environmental factors, behavioral factors, and personal factors (Bandura, 1989). However, he argues that the most pervasive trait among human agency is the belief in one's abilities. Those with high competence set higher goals for themselves, are more persistent, and are therefore more likely to

have greater accomplishments (Bandura, 1989). In this way, competence may best be understood as a cognitive mediator between certain factors and motivational outcomes (Bandura, 1989).

Within the civic engagement realm, competence regarding one's civic abilities may be developed and refined through important interactions and once developed, may then promote the motivation for civic action.

Individual and Contextual Factors Influencing Civic Engagement

However, not all youth will become civically active, or civically active in the same way. In fact, there appears to be specific factors, aside from the social aspects of their environment, that have been linked to involvement, or lack of involvement, in civic activities. One such aspect is gender. Trajectories of prosocial reasoning tend to differ between boys and girls, such that girls engage in prosocial reasoning and behaviors earlier than boys (Eisenberg & Morris, 2004). Additionally, girls tend to value more community service, whereas boys tend to value political engagement (Jagers et al., 2017; Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009). There may be several reasons for this difference. Girls may focus on activities that involve helping others because they value more relational and communal activities; they may believe that political activism is a more male activity; or it may be that socialization regarding civic activities is different for boys and girls (Cicognani et al., 2012; Metzger & Ferris, 2013). Girls are also more likely to be civically involved and inclined to serve than boys (Jagers et al., 2017; Martínez et al., 2020; Metz & Youniss, 2005).

There is also a significant opportunity gap that alienates minority, low-income, and rural youth from being able to engage in their community (Chan et al., 2014). This marginalization is further impacted by factors such as racism, discrimination, violence, social exclusion, and lack of community support (Iwasaki et al., 2014). Furthermore, disparities in civic education experiences

leaves many of these youth without a source civic information or a way to develop civic self-efficacy (Hart & Atkins, 2002). For rural youth in particular, they may face place-based stigma, in which they are stigmatized based on their residence. This can lead to issues with determining whether they want to affiliate, identify, and engage with their community (Wolfe et al., 2017). Interestingly, even though minorities, low-income, and rural youth have a contentious relationship with the U.S. political system, have a lack of resources to become civically involved, and are at an overall disadvantage compared to White and upper-SES youth, some research has found that they still find ways to become civically involved (Bañales et al., 2020; Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020). For example, Malin et al. (2017) found that Black and Latino youth were more likely to participate in and sustain expressive political activities into young adulthood than Whites and Asian Americans. Additionally, Godfrey and Cherng (2016) found that youth in unequal socioeconomic counties were slightly more civically engaged, placed more importance on helping others in the community, and volunteered more than White, upper-SES youth. One reason for these findings might be that although income inequality and minority status place these youth at a stronger disadvantage, ethnic group attachment, which is made more salient by current issues, and social values may increase their prosocial behavior (Brittian et al., 2013; Littenberg-Tobias & Cohen, 2016; Piff et al., 2010). Additionally, rural communities may provide a denser social network where youth take part in activities that are led by the same community leader, which may multiply the activities they participate in (Elder & Conger, 2000; Oosterhoff et al., 2020). Even with the stigma of living in rural areas, youth can still find ways of engaging through non-stigmatized organizations (e.g., Habitat for Humanity), effectively allowing them to connect with their community while remaining autonomous. Alternatively,

youth may choose to confront the stigma head-on through the creation of their own community-based events (Wolfe et al., 2017).

Self-Determination Theory

According to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1980), human motivation can either be intrinsic (i.e., doing something because it is enjoyable) or extrinsic (i.e., doing something in order to gain a reward or avoid punishment; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Research has consistently shown that individuals who are intrinsically motivated to complete activities are more likely to find satisfaction and perform better in that domain. However, in order to become intrinsically motivated, three basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be met in what has been termed basic needs satisfaction (BNS; Deci & Ryan, 1980, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT has been applied to multiple domains including work, academics, relationships, sports, and healthcare (Fulton & Turner, 2008; Hagger et al., 2006; Kinoshita et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 1994). It has also been used to understand the motivation to engage in prosocial activities (Séguin et al., 1998). In one study, Stattin et al. (2017) found that adolescents who encountered events that triggered their civic interest were more likely to seek out behaviors that fulfilled their need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and this increased their civic interest over time. Another study found that adolescents' engagement in civic behaviors satisfied their basic needs which increased their overall well-being (Wray-Lake et al., 2019).

Arguably one of the most misunderstood aspects of the three components of SDT is autonomy (Chirkov et al., 2003). Autonomy has often been confused with independence, but while independence focuses on freedom from external influences, autonomy is the ability to self-initiate and feel that actions are an extension of the self even if they are being influenced by

outside sources (La Guardia et al., 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2002). In adolescence, parents who challenge youth to think critically while providing a secure base for support allow youth to gain confidence in their individuality and promote optimal psychological development (Hodges, Finnegan, & Perry, 1999). Adolescents' need for parental autonomy support has been amply documented in the SDT literature as well as the civic engagement literature, indicating its importance for understanding adolescents' motivated behavior (Eccles et al., 1991; Gagné, 2003). The second factor, competence, relates to an individual's abilities and the desire to engage in activities that are optimal for maintaining and refining their capabilities (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Adolescents' competence begins to build early on in childhood by having warm, supportive, and interactive caregivers (Feldman et al., 2013; Pomerantz & Grolnick, 2017). Later, peers begin to help shape adolescents' competence through emotional support and positive social interactions (Wentzel et al., 2016). Finally, relatedness involves feeling connected to and cared for by others (Ryan & Deci, 2002). As noted earlier, parents and close friends are important influential forces for adolescents' social development and civic engagement interest (Barry & Wentzel, 2006; Farrell et al., 2017); therefore, having a healthy parent-child relationship and high quality friendships may play an important role in the fulfillment of adolescents' need for relatedness (Collibee et al., 2016; Deci et al., 2006). There is not much research on how the various needs influence one another, although some research suggests that competence may function as a mediator in the relationship between the satisfaction of basic needs and well-being (Talley et al., 2012). In their study, Talley et al. (2012) found that having autonomy and relatedness needs met within social roles promotes feelings of self-efficacy, which may help explain the impact of BNS on well-being. Although this study focused on social competence and well-being, it may be that other forms of competence may provide a more proximal link to motivational outcomes.

Furthermore, there has been an inconsistency regarding the scoring of the Basic Needs Satisfaction Scale. Some researchers have computed composite scores for the individual needs to determine whether one need is dominating the overall score and to understand the unique contribution of each need to a specific outcome. However, Ryan and Deci (2017) note that the needs are highly correlated and reciprocally related to each other. As such, this study will use a combined score.

The Current Study

Adolescence is a prime developmental period to become civically involved. Yet, what motivates youth to become involved in community or global events is only partially known. The present study had two primary aims.

The first primary aim was to provide initial descriptive data on the nature of adolescent civic engagement and how this relates to broad demographic qualities of youth including gender, race, and household income. The data for youth civic engagement are collected during the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, they provide an opportunity to examine not only more familiar contexts of civic engagement, specifically engagement in school and the broader community and nation, but also pandemic-specific civic engagement. This aim is primarily exploratory and studied through comparative descriptive analyses of engagement in 11 specific activities focused three broad categories. Given that not all youth would have had the same opportunities to get involved or an interest in all the activities provided, this study primarily focused on the frequency of activities that youth were involved in as a determinant of their overall level of civic engagement.

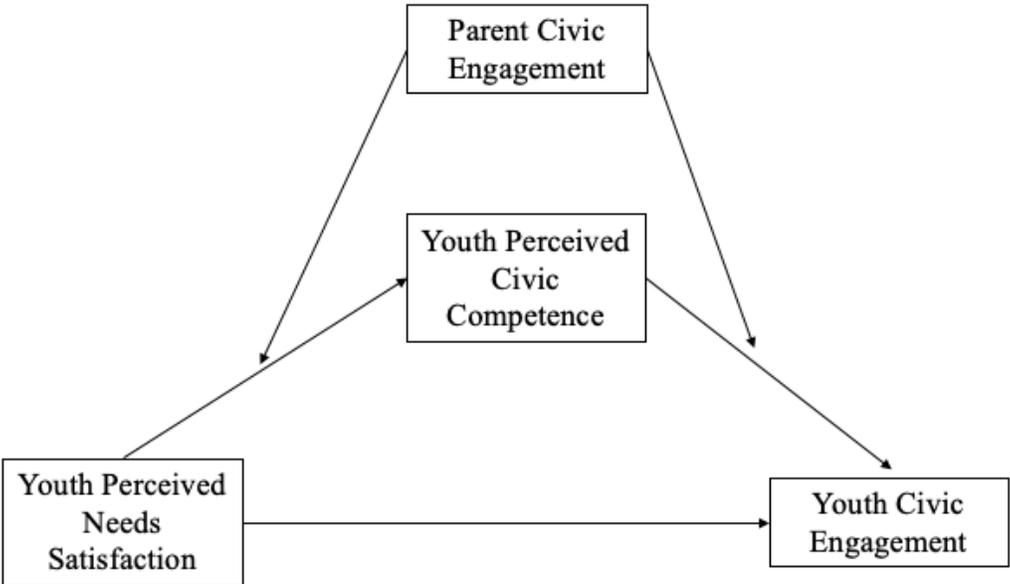
The second primary aim was to test a proposed model of the promotion of youth civic engagement using regression-based moderated mediational analysis. Research has consistently

shown that there is a myriad of factors that promote adolescents' interest, and engagement in civic activities. To date, only one study (e.g., Stattin et al., 2017) has examined the link between basic needs satisfaction and civic outcomes. However, this study will seek to expand on that and examine the important impacts that parental civic engagement and civic competence have on the proposed relation of basic needs satisfaction and youth civic engagement. As noted, there are many social routes that could allow for the fulfillment of all three basic needs. Within the realm of civic engagement, when youth feel their basic needs are met (such as when they feel like their choice to engage in civic activities is their own; when they feel an overall sense of competence; and when they feel close and supported by those around them) their civic interest might be triggered. This interest may be particularly influenced by those close to them (e.g., parents) who are scaffolding civic beliefs and behaviors (Dudley & Gitelson, 2002; Fletcher et al., 2000). When this occurs, their belief in their civic abilities might be enhanced which may be enough to prompt them to action, especially when they have their parents' civic engagement to guide them (Metzger, Alvis, et al., 2018). With that in mind, the model was developed based on the interplay of some of these intrapersonal and contextual factors.

The conceptual model proposed for this study is shown in Figure 1. This model displays a moderated mediation, where fulfilment of these basic needs will promote perceived civic competence, which will predict civic engagement. These links will be strengthened when parents are also civically engaged.

Figure 1

Proposed Moderated Mediation with Youth Basic Need Satisfaction Promoting Civic Engagement Through the Mediation of Youth Perceived Civic Competence and the Moderation of Parents' Civic Engagement



This figure demonstrates the expectation that there are two differential pathways to youth civic engagement. The first is an indirect pathway through perceived civic competence. Specifically, basic needs satisfaction is expected to contribute to civic engagement initially by increasing youths' feelings of competence in their ability to organize themselves and others for social action, public speaking, social persuasiveness, and other skills and qualities necessary for being effective at addressing social change. Enhanced feelings of civic competence, in turn, are expected to be related to evidence of increased actual civic engagement, under certain circumstances. In particular, this indirect influence is expected to operate most strongly when youth come from homes in which they have a parent who is engaged in civic activities themselves. In the first place, civically engaged parents are expected to promote feelings of civic

competence in children who feel fulfilled in terms of basic needs by exemplifying the attitude that work on social justice and other community service causes is an appropriate domain for applying oneself and developing competence. In the absence of highly engaged parents, even children with well met basic needs will not come to see themselves as capable of mastering the skills necessary for action in this area specifically. In addition, highly engaged parents may also assist motivated youth who feel civically competent to actually act by including them in the opportunities they have for community service, by scaffolding, or otherwise organizing such opportunities for their children to engage in. This moderating role may be particularly important during periods of social turmoil or during health and wellness crises, such as COVID-19 and in the aftermath of natural disasters. Without the opportunities, examples, and encouragement of socially active parents, even children who otherwise imagine themselves as potentially effective in this area will fail to act. Thus, I expect the indirect link from needs to competence to engagement to be largely limited to families in which parents are active themselves. Finally, Figure 1 contains a residual, direct link between need satisfaction and action, to initially evaluate whether need satisfaction may also promotes civic engagement through other (unmeasured) mechanisms that do not involve the promotion of feelings of competence in children with civically active parents.

METHODOLOGY

Recruitment and Participants

Participants were recruited as part of a larger project on the impact of COVID-19 on mental and physical health in families in Alabama. The study spanned from December 2020 to July 2021. For this project, a community sample was recruited using social media posts, flyers posted in schools and handed out by professional mental health workers, and letters sent home to youth in several schools with the support of the principal and district. Parents who had a child in the targeted age range were asked to contact the project through a link. The link outlined the goals, requirements, and procedures of the project. Five hundred and eighty-three parents expressed an interest and were sent another link to a formal consent form. Of these, 412 completed the consent form and were sent a link to the surveys for themselves and their child using email addresses they provided. Three hundred and ninety-six parents provided full or partial data on the parent questionnaire. Two hundred and seventy-one of their children also provided full or partial data. Due to a technical error in Qualtrics, 99 children did not receive the questions related to civic competence and could not be included in analyses involving that construct. In addition, 46 children did not complete the assessment of parental warmth and could not be included in analyses involving this construct. Likewise, the parents of 36 children elected to skip reporting household income or their education status.

The parent survey took approximately 45-60 minutes to complete while the child survey took 30-45 minutes to complete. Participants had the option of stopping and returning to the survey. Both questionnaires contained additional measures that related to family functioning,

adjustment, COVID experiences, and mental health, but none of these measures were used in this project. Parents were paid \$40 for completing the survey and children received \$20 for completing the survey. Those who completed at least half of the survey received a prorated payment.

The sample of participants with complete parent and child data on all variables was 153, including 77 boys (50.3%) and 76 girls (49.7%). These participants represented 56 of the 67 counties in Alabama. Using the USDA rural urban code for their zip code 46.3% of the sample resided in a metropolitan area (in a community of 50,000 or larger); 33.7% resided in a micropolitan area (population between 10,000-50,000); and 20% resided in a rural area or a small town of less than 10,000. Furthermore, 73.9% of parents reported themselves as White, including 4 Hispanics; 23.5% of parents reported themselves to be Black, including 1 Hispanic; 2.7% reported themselves to be a race other than White or Black, and 0.07% declined to specify. According to children, 70.0% of participants were White, including Hispanics (3.3%); 28.1% reported themselves to be Black; 2.0% of children reported themselves to be a race other than White or Black. Parents also reported on their education status and income. Almost half (48.7%) of parents reported having less than a college degree; 31.8% reported having an associate's or bachelor's degree; 18% indicated that they had an advanced degree (i.e., master's, Ph.D., or M.D.); and 1.5% declined to answer. Furthermore, 44.4% of parents reported their yearly household income as less than \$50,000; 27.6% reported their income as between \$50,000-\$100,000; 16.8% reported having an income above \$100,000; and 11.2% declined to specify.

Measures

Youth's Perceived Civic Competence

Youth's perception of their ability to make a positive change in their community was measured using five items from the Competence for Civic Action Scale (Flanagan et al., 2007). Participants were given a prompt and then asked to rate on a scale of 1 (*I definitely can't*) to 5 (*I definitely can*) their perceptions of how effective they could be in getting others to act on or care about a community problem, at organize and running a group meeting designed to plan for civic action, at public speaking related to a community or social justice cause, and at locating and recruiting other individuals who might help them with a community or social justice problem. Internal consistency was $\alpha = .87$.

Youth's Basic Needs Satisfaction

The 21-item Basic Needs Satisfaction Scale (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné, 2003) was given to assess adolescents' overall basic need satisfaction. Participants will respond on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very true*) to items representing the extent to which others meet their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Example items include "I generally feel free to express my ideas and opinions" (autonomy); "People I interact with on a daily basis tend to take my feelings into consideration" (relatedness); and "Most days I feel a sense of accomplishment from what I do" (competence). Previous research has found support for a single general factor structure and demonstrated good discriminate and convergent validity for this scale (Besharat, 2013). Therefore, the items were combined for a total basic needs satisfaction score, $\alpha = .85$.

Youth's Civic Engagement

Adolescents reported on their civic engagement recently (i.e., since March 2020) and past civic engagement (in the previous two years) with a measure that was created specifically for this study. They were presented with 11 potential and salient civic activities covering three engagement domains (i.e., COVID-19, school-based activities, and community or nation-based activities). These areas of engagement were chosen due to the recency, proximity, and popularity of the events.

Three items were used to measure activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., making masks, delivering food/groceries, babysitting children of essential workers). Two items were used to assess their involvement in school-based engagement (i.e., how much they ran for a student government position and engaged in a classroom debate about a topic affecting their community or society). The final six items focused on broader service to their community or nation. These included helping clean up debris following hurricanes that struck their state or neighboring states, contacting a political official about an issue in the community, writing a petition related to a social justice or community issue, recent and past attendance at a protest, demonstration, or sit-in, or miscellaneous community service work. They responded to how much they participated in each activity on a scale of 0-3, with 0 standing for *not at all* and 3 standing for *frequently*. An overall civic engagement scores that combined information about the frequency and diversity of civic engagement was computed by averaging the frequencies with which participants engaged in any or all of the potential activities. In addition, participants were permitted to describe any other significant engagement activities not listed and the frequency with which they engaged in these activities were included.

Parental Civic Engagement

The main parental guardian was also be given the same civic engagement questionnaire. However, they had additional questions asking if they hosted a family displaced by the hurricanes, canvassed the neighborhood for a political official, provided voter registration information to others, or hosted a fundraiser for a political candidate. Their scores were similarly totaled.

Perceived Parental Warmth

Youth's report of parental warmth was measured using six items developed by Lamborn et al. (1991). Example items include "This person spends time just talking with me" and "This person keeps pushing me to do my best in whatever I do". Response options ranged from 1 (*Never True*) to 7 (*Always True*). The Cronbach's alpha for the combined items was $\alpha = .90$.

RESULTS

Preliminary Data Analysis

A post hoc statistical power analysis performed through G Power (Erdfelder et al., 1996) using the minimum sample available for any analysis after considering missing data ($N=153$) indicated good power ($> .90$) based on the sample size, effect size, and number of predictors when $\alpha = .05$. Additionally, all primary variables were examined for skewness and kurtosis to determine their suitability for analyses and were deemed within the tolerance level.

Aim 1: Exploration of Adolescent Civic Engagement

Table 1 presents descriptives of boys' and girls' reported frequency of participation in 11 specific engagement activities for all participants with data on these variables. The activities are grouped based on whether they are COVID related, school-based, or community or nation-based. The table gives the n , mean, and standard deviation of the reported frequency from 0 (*Never*) to 3 (*Frequently*) for boys and girls as well as the results of an independent samples t-test comparing the means. As shown in Table 1, boys and girls did not differ significantly on any aspect of their civic participation.

Table 1*Frequency of Youth Civic Engagement Between Boys and Girls*

Types of Civic Engagement	Boys			Girls			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>D</i>
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
COVID-Related										
Made masks	115	0.43	0.84	111	0.60	0.93	-1.51	224	0.13	.88
Delivered groceries	115	0.90	0.99	111	0.90	0.90	-0.04	224	0.97	.95
Babysat	115	0.50	0.96	111	0.52	0.89	-0.15	224	0.88	.93
School-Based										
Student government	114	0.25	0.60	111	0.23	0.54	0.15	223	0.88	.57
Classroom debate	114	0.65	0.91	111	0.69	0.95	-0.36	223	0.72	.93
Community or Nation-Based										
Cleaned up debris	115	0.32	0.76	111	0.23	0.53	1.11	224	0.27	.66
Volunteered (other)	114	0.90	0.97	111	0.86	0.95	0.37	223	0.71	.96
Attended a protest (r) ^a	115	0.13	0.51	111	0.17	0.63	-0.54	224	0.59	.57
Contacted a political official	115	0.14	0.53	111	0.11	0.47	0.46	224	0.64	.50
Written a petition	115	0.08	0.38	111	0.13	0.52	-0.79	224	0.43	.47
Attended a protest (p) ^b	114	0.17	0.55	111	0.09	0.44	1.16	223	0.25	.50

Note. The *n* represents the total number of participants who had complete data for these variables.

^a Attended a protest recently.

^b Attended a protest in the past two years.

Table 2 presents the comparisons of races in terms of the frequency of participation in the same 11 activities for participants with this data. The table gives the n, means, and standard deviations for the three race groups for each activity as well as the results of an ANOVA comparing these means.

As shown, there were no significant differences among races in school-based civic engagement. There were also no significant differences in two of the three COVID-related activities. However, Black youth reported more frequent involvement in making protective masks for others than did White youth. Finally, five of the six community or national activities did not show racial differences. But Blacks reported being involved more frequently in activities related to debris clean up in the aftermath of a hurricane in Tukey post hoc comparison with other groups (see Table 3).

Table 2*Frequency of Youth Civic Engagement Among Races*

Types of Civic Engagement	White			Black			Other			<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	Eta Squared
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
COVID-Related												
Made masks	115	0.32	0.67	102	0.72	1.05	9	0.67	0.87	5.72*	225	.049
Delivered groceries	115	0.86	0.84	102	0.97	1.06	9	0.56	1.01	0.97	225	.009
Babysat	115	0.50	0.87	102	0.54	0.98	9	0.33	1.00	0.21	225	.002
School-Based												
Student government	115	0.20	0.44	101	0.30	0.70	9	0.11	0.33	1.02	224	.003
Classroom debate	115	0.62	0.87	101	0.75	1.00	9	0.44	0.73	0.85	224	.008
Community or Nation-Based												
Cleaned debris	115	0.17	0.53	102	0.39	0.76	9	0.22	0.67	3.07*	225	.027
Volunteered (other)	115	0.87	0.91	101	0.94	1.02	9	0.33	0.71	1.68	224	.015
Attended a protest (r)	115	0.15	0.57	102	0.17	0.60	9	0.00	0.00	0.36	225	.003
Contacted political official	115	0.09	0.43	102	0.18	0.59	9	0.00	0.00	1.15	225	.010
Written a petition	115	0.10	0.46	102	0.12	0.47	9	0.00	0.00	0.30	225	.003
Attended a protest (p)	115	0.13	0.51	101	0.14	0.51	9	0.00	0.00	0.32	224	.003

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Note. The *n* represents the total number of participants who had complete data for these variables.

Table 3*Tukey Post Hoc Analyses for Racial Differences in Youth Civic Engagement*

Civic Activity	Groups		Mean Difference	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>D</i>
Made a mask	White	Black	-.39	.003*	.45
		Other	-.35	.485	.40
Cleaned up hurricane debris	White	Black	-.22	.038*	.34
		Other	-.05	.975	.07

p* < .05; *p* < .001

Table 4 presents the correlations between parent reported family income and the frequency of engaging in each of the 11 activities by category for participants with data available on the relevant variables. In addition to the overall correlation for the sample, Table 4 gives the correlation separately for boys, girls, Whites, Blacks, and those who reported their race as Other. Finally, Table 4 gives the relation between family income and frequency of involvement across all categories and types of involvement. Findings show that being a boy from a lower-income family was significantly related to hurricane debris cleanup. Additionally, the correlations revealed that being a White, higher-income youth was significantly related to school-based civic engagement; and this relation was true for the individual items as well as the total category. Finally, correlations for volunteering indicated that coming from a White girl from a higher income family was significantly related to more frequent volunteering.

Table 4*Correlation of Household Income and Civic Engagement Frequency by Gender and Race*

Types of Civic Engagement	Income	Gender		Race		
		Boy	Girl	White	Black	Other
COVID Related						
Made masks	-.060	.014	-.130	.174	-.132	.187
Delivered groceries	.009	-.074	.095	.061	.025	-.257
Babysat	-.062	-.082	-.041	-.013	-.068	-.369
Total	-.054	-.078	-.031	.098	-.080	-.298
School-Based						
Student government	.118	.057	.185	.196*	.174	-.369
Classroom debate	.109	.108	.107	.237*	-.011	-.143
Total	.128	.098	.161	.260**	.077	-.222
Community and Nation-Based						
Cleaned up debris	-.135	-.243*	-.012	-.061	-.152	.168
Volunteered (other)	.159*	.088	.229*	.204*	.099	.704
Attended a protest (r)	.013	-.008	.032	.013	.053	–
Contacted political official	-.119	-.191	-.044	-.173	-.022	–
Written a petition	-.084	-.050	-.103	-.032	-.175	–
Attended a protest (p)	.041	.079	-.009	.083	.011	–
Total	-.001	-.061	.058	.047	-.022	.494
All categories of involvement	.033	-.014	.083	.164	-.042	-.141

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Note. Due to the small proportion of the sample who identified their race as “other”, there were four items where these participants indicated they did not participate in the activities. Therefore, correlations for these items could not be computed. This is signified with a dash.

Aim 2: Influences on Civic Engagement

The simple bivariate correlations among all the variables used to evaluate Figure 1 are presented in Table 5. As shown, civic competence and parental civic engagement were positively and significantly related to youth civic engagement, as expected. Also as expected, basic needs satisfaction was significantly correlated with youth civic competence. However, basic needs satisfaction was not significantly related to youth civic engagement, nor was parental civic engagement related to youth civic competence or basic needs satisfaction. Youth gender was not significantly correlated with any of the other variables, which was unexpected. Perceived parental warmth was positively and significantly correlated with both basic needs satisfaction and civic competence. Interestingly, parents' education was significantly and negatively correlated with youth basic needs satisfaction and perceived parental warmth, which indicates that the more educated parents were, the less their child's needs were satisfied and the less warm they were to their child. Nevertheless, parents who had high education were also significantly more likely to report a high frequency of civic engagement. Parents with lower income were significantly more likely to be warmer parents, but higher income was associated with higher parental educational attainment. Finally, youth race was significantly and negatively correlated with income, indicating that higher income was associated more strongly with being White.

Table 5*Summary of Intercorrelations Among All Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Youth Civic Engagement	–								
2. Youth Civic Competence	.271**	–							
3. Basic Needs Satisfaction	-.087	.259*	–						
4. Parental Civic Engagement	.416**	.139	-.089	–					
5. Youth Gender	.007	.089	-.053	.046	–				
6. Parental Warmth	.010	.232**	.542**	-.077	-.009	–			
7. Parental Education	.089	.054	-.173*	.166**	-.077	-.154*	–		
8. Family Income	.034	.104	-.123	.084	-.013	-.181*	.544**	–	
9. Youth Race	.076	.036	.032	.056	.038	.078	-.091	-.387**	–

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Following Hayes (2022) a regression approach to conditional analyses was conducted to evaluate the model shown in Figure 1 using the PROCESS 4.0 macro and Template 58 for the sample of 153 participants with complete child and parent data on all variables. The PROCESS macro uses ordinary least squares (OLS) and logistic regression path analysis to estimate the conditional indirect effects for moderated mediational models and bootstrapping across 5,000 samples with 95% confidence intervals (CI). All predictor variables were centered prior to analysis to prevent multicollinearity. Gender, race, parental income, parental education, and perceived parental warmth were entered as covariates.

Initial results indicated a good overall fit ($R^2 = .274$, $F[9, 142] = 5.96$, $p < .001$), but no evidence that parental civic engagement was a significant moderator between needs satisfaction and civic competence. Accordingly, to simplify the evaluation of other paths, the initial model depicted in Figure 1 was re-run using a simpler, nested model that excluded moderation of needs satisfaction to civic competence by parental civic engagement but retained the proposed moderation of the link between civic competence and youth civic engagement by parental civic engagement (PROCESS Model 14). This simplified model is shown below in Figure 2. As shown, this model only includes one moderated pathway. The mediation and covariates entered in the analyses did not differ from the initially proposed model.

Figure 2

The Revised Moderated Mediation Model with Youth Basic Need Satisfaction Promoting Civic Engagement Through the Mediation of Youth Perceived Civic Competence and the Moderation of Parents' Civic Engagement

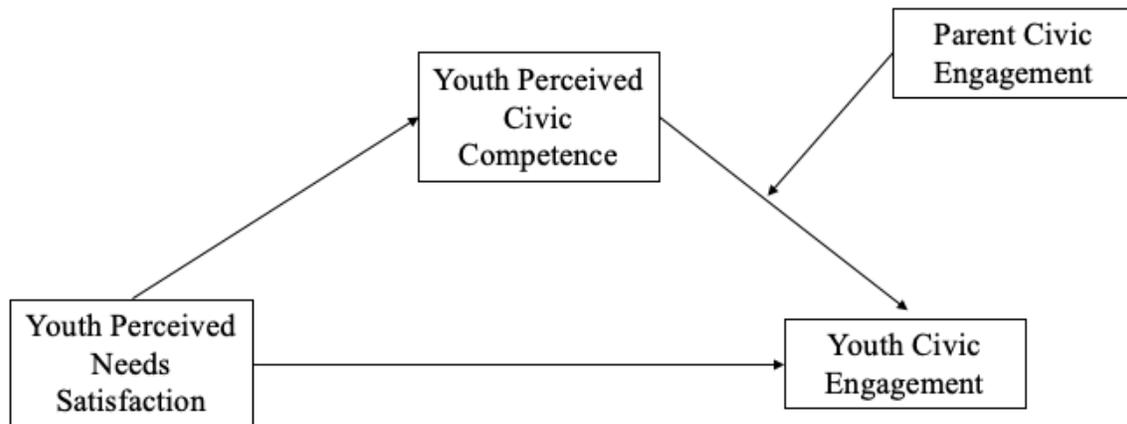


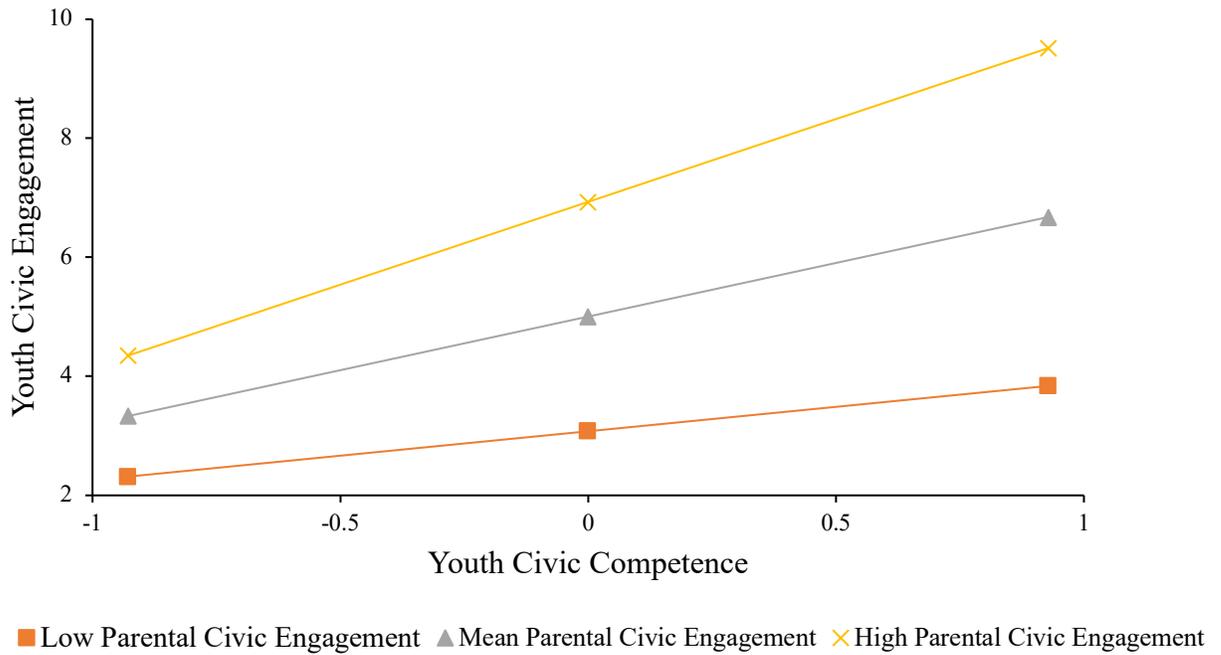
Table 6 presents the findings at each step of the presented model, As shown, the first step tested the prediction of youth civic competence from basic needs satisfaction controlling for gender, perceived parental warmth, parental educations, and race (White/Black). The analysis revealed that basic needs satisfaction significantly predicted youth civic competence, as predicted. Parental warmth significantly predicts civic competence as expected, however none of the remaining covariates were significant

The lower portion of Table 6 presents the evaluation of proposed conditional mediation of the link between need satisfaction and youth civic engagement through civic competence after controlling for demographic variables and parental warmth. As shown in Table 6, basic needs satisfaction was not a significant direct predictor of youth civic engagement after considering the contributions of civic competence and parental civic engagement and controlling for

demographic variables and parental warmth. As expected, youth feelings of civic competence predicted greater civic engagement but the presence of an interaction between competence and parental engagement indicated that this mediational pathway was moderated by parental civic engagement. Figure 3 displays the nature of this conditional mediation. Figure 3 displays the relation of competence to engagement at three comparative levels of parental civic engagement: Low (-1 standard deviation), Average (Mean), and High (+1 standard deviation). As shown in Figure 3, competence was unrelated to engagement in households when the youth's primary parent or caretaker was relatively uninvolved in civic engagement themselves. As predicted, however, competence became more strongly related to engagement as parental civic engagement increased, supporting the proposed mediated pathway from needs to competence to engagement in households with increasing parental engagement. None of the demographic covariates (i.e., income, gender, parental education, warmth, and race) significantly predicted youth civic engagement and, importantly, these patterns were obtained after controlling for parental warmth, supporting the expected interpretation that the important parental context was parents own direct engagement in their communities, rather than the broader warm climate in the home.

Figure 3

The Link Between Youth Civic Competence and Youth Civic Engagement at Low, Medium, and High Levels of Parental Civic Engagement



Note. Low and High parental civic engagement equate to ± 1 *SD*.

Table 6

Moderated Mediation Results for the Relation Between Basic Needs Satisfaction and Youth Civic Engagement

Moderated Mediation Results	Coefficient^a	LLCI	ULCI
Outcome: Youth Civic Competence <i>R² = .127, F(8, 143) = 2.99, p = .003</i>			
Basic Needs Satisfaction	0.22	0.03	0.40
Parental Warmth	0.22	0.03	0.42
Gender	0.09	-0.07	0.25
Race	-0.00	-0.18	0.18
Income	0.11	-0.09	0.31
Parent Education	0.04	-0.15	0.24
Outcome: Youth Civic Engagement <i>R² = .274, F(9, 142) = 5.96, p < .001</i>			
Basic Needs Satisfaction	-0.16	-0.34	0.02
Youth Civic Competence	0.32	0.16	0.48
Parental Civic Engagement	0.35	0.19	0.50
Civic Competence x Parental Engagement	0.17	0.01	0.33
Parental Warmth	0.00	-0.18	0.19
Gender	-0.03	-0.18	0.13
Race	0.06	-0.12	0.24
Parent Education	-0.08	-0.27	0.10
Conditional Indirect Effect	Effect^b	LLCI	ULCI
Low Parental Civic Engagement	0.14	-0.07	0.35
Mean Parental Civic Engagement	0.32	0.16	0.48
High Parental Civic Engagement	0.11	0.01	0.25
Direct Effect	-0.16	-.34	0.02

Note. LLCI = Lower Limit Confidence Interval; ULCI = Upper Limit Confidence Interval.

^a Coefficients are standardized.

^b Effects are standardized.

DISCUSSION

Youth who are civically involved tend to have better inter- and intra-personal outcomes than youth who are not civically active. Yet, the factors that motivate youth to become active are not well understood. This study aimed to help answer the question of what motivates youth to get involved in their communities. Specifically, this study is grounded in the idea that when youth have their basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness met, their overall motivation increases. This motivation may directly encourage youth to get involved in their communities, but more importantly, needs satisfaction may indirectly promote youth civic engagement by impacting their competence in the civic domain. However, youth involvement may not simply rely on internal attributes of the child but may also be determined by parental civic role modeling. Understanding whether these factors do indeed influence civic engagement in this way may provide an important contribution to discovering the “why” behind youth civic engagement.

Aim 1 dealt specifically with exploring differences in youth civic engagement based on certain demographic factors. Findings revealed interesting trends in youth civic engagement by race, gender, and family income. There did appear to be some gender differences in civic engagement, especially in relation to income and race. For example, White girls reported a higher frequency of volunteering than boys, which supports research that girls engage in more volunteer-related activities (see Yates & Youniss, 1996). Furthermore, Black, low-income boys reported significantly more debris cleanup. This makes sense given that boys may be required to do heavy lifting (e.g., removing tree limbs). Aside from these findings, this study demonstrated

that boys and girls were relatively similar on civic engagement in all three categories (COVID-related, school-based, and community or nation-based). Although it is encouraging that boys were unexpectedly as involved as girls in civic service of various sorts, a closer look at the types of activities boys and girls do and when they do is warranted in the future. In the present study, girls and boys were asked about their involvement in three domains of civic action: school-based, COVID-related, and broader community and national causes. Participants were provided instances of specific salient types of activities in these areas and also allowed to supply their own. Even so, the nature and opportunities available to youth change over time with social, political, and cultural change, and any evaluation of how youth get involved in community service must be regarded as situated in this broader opportunity and motivational envelope. Differences between boys and girls could emerge with a more sweeping assessment of types of available participation or changes over time. A better understanding of the engagement opportunities that do and do not display gender differences in participation and when could be helpful in building a more thorough model of why youth serve.

Findings did reveal some racial differences in certain civic activities with Black youth making protective masks and cleaning up natural disasters more frequently than White youth. These findings make sense, given the current data regarding racial differences in these areas. For example, research has demonstrated that COVID disproportionately affects Black communities, and these communities also report higher fear of COVID (Bhogal et al., 2021; Jacobs & Burch, 2021). Therefore, Black individuals are more likely to take certain COVID precautions such as socially distancing and wearing a mask (Hearne & Niño, 2022). Likewise, minority communities were disproportionately negatively affected by the natural disasters studied in this research (Berg & Reinhart, 2020). Racial communities are not only less likely to have disaster preparedness, but

they are also more likely to be affected by the aftermath of a natural disaster given lack of safe housing and shortage of adequate resources in their communities (Fothergill et al., 1999). This impact is exacerbated by the fact that federal aid often neglects low-income minority areas after natural disasters, while giving a greater amount of aid to wealthier White neighborhoods (*National Advisory Council Report to the FEMA Administrator*, 2020). Therefore, much of the recovery that is required after a natural disaster must come from the residents themselves. Seen in this light, it is interesting and not unexpected to find racial differences in community service surrounding these events. To the extent that events and causes that are “close to home” are likely to provide greater motivation and opportunity for service for youth and adults, these findings may say less about possible stable character- or family-driven racial differences than about the ordinary ebb and flow of service opportunities and historical change. Historical changes happen to youth who are more or less prepared to serve. Thus, I would expect that the general model tested in this research might still apply, even as the demographics of those who serve change from location to location or time to time.

Household income also showed important distinctions in youth civic engagement, although generally in intersection with other demographic characteristics. Of particular note, being White and coming from a higher income family were significantly correlated with school-based civic activities, such as engaging in a classroom civic debate and running for student government. This finding reiterates previous research showing a distinct gap in civic opportunities for youth based on family income and race in schools (see Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). This alienation can have a strong impact on youth’s civic knowledge and their civic interest (Yates, 1999). To inspire a civic identity into these youth, it is vital that they receive the same opportunities and resources as wealthier White schools. Accordingly, future research

should address more closely the opportunity structure of schools and communities to help understand when youth serve.

This racial disparity in school civic education may also help explain why being a White higher-income girl was significantly related to the frequency of volunteering. Because of their greater capacity to help (i.e., greater resources to give), higher income White individuals are significantly more likely to volunteer than their low-income minority counterparts (Macchia & Whillans, 2021). Combined with the lack of civic education and opportunities just described, it appears that low-income minority youth lack the physical and educational resources to become civically involved.

Finally, as noted, my sample was broadly representative of the overall makeup of the state of Alabama. Despite this, I did not directly address the role of geographical location in youth; particularly, the distinction between urban and rural youth in civic engagement. This may be an important distinction since there may be differences in how and what youth are engaged in based on their location. As described earlier, rural youth may lack the same resources, opportunities, and abilities to become civically involved compared to youth who live in cities (see Wolfe et al., 2017). Therefore, research should aim to assess these differences as well as understand whether the motivational pathway differs for rural youth compared to urban youth.

Aim 2 directly examined the predictors of youth civic engagement using a moderated mediated model. Specifically, I tested the idea that basic needs satisfaction functions to improve civic engagement by promoting civic competence under the right circumstances. Based on the overall findings, the model for this study supports the idea that basic needs satisfaction and civic competence are related to promote youth civic engagement when parental civic engagement is taken into effect. I did still expect a direct link between basic needs satisfaction and youth civic

engagement, but this hypothesis was not supported. Overwhelmingly, it appears that most of the influence of basic needs satisfaction on youth civic engagement comes indirectly through civic competence, which is an important contribution to the literature on youth civic motivation.

Part of the proposed model indicates that the first path to civic engagement comes from the impact of needs satisfaction on the development of youth civic competence. As expected, this pathway was significant. Therefore, residing in an environment that allows youth to feel competent, related, and autonomous is likely to promote their feelings of civic efficacy, such that they believe they have the skills, abilities, and knowledge necessary for being civically engaged. However, youth who do not have the opportunity to fulfill their basic needs may not reap the rewards of basic needs fulfillment and may regard themselves as less able in certain domains.

The second important pathway that is demonstrated in Figure 1 is the direct impact of civic competence on youth civic engagement. This link was also successfully supported by the data, indicating that having the skills needed to become civically engaged is an important predecessor to becoming civically active. Indeed, this pathway supports much research indicating the importance youth's belief in their own skills as an important aspect of prompting youth to action. Youth who may question or criticize their abilities to form a plan of action, get others to care about a problem, or seek ways to address an issue are much less likely to find ways to become engaged, perhaps out of fear of failure.

Yet, as indicated, there is likely to be outside influences that strengthen these pathways. Indeed, an important contribution this study offers is by emphasizing the importance of parents and their own civic engagement. My first expectation was that basic needs satisfaction would only promote youth civic competence only when parents had high civic engagement. This

pathway was expected based on the literature which argues that parents play an important role in promoting youth civic competence (see Hart & Atkins, 2002). However, I found this was not the case. This seems to imply that having basic needs met is important in promoting feeling capable in the civic domain. Yet, while parents' civic engagement did not moderate as expected, parental warmth did seem to strongly predict how civically competent youth felt. Therefore, it may be the warmth in the parent-child relationship that is helping to explain why youth feel efficacious. This finding implies that youth's perceptions of treatment toward them (i.e., parental warmth) and their innate feelings about their basic needs being satisfied are more important in the development of their civic competence than outside influences that may not be directly targeted toward them. Nevertheless, it emphasizes that parents are, in some respect, important for developing competence.

Furthermore, findings from this study showed that once youth have developed civic competence, it does promote civic engagement more strongly when parents are highly civically engaged. This relationship supports previous literature that indicates the importance of internal and social factors in motivating civic engagement (Hart & Atkins, 2002; McLellan & Youniss, 2003). When youth feel like they can make a difference in the community, they use their parents' civic behaviors as a map of how to engage and what to engage in. However, this study did not directly address what it was about the parental role that was so influential in promoting youth's civic engagement. It may be that parents are directly discussing civic matters with their child; they may take them along when they participate in civic activities, or perhaps their child learns what to engage in through observational learning. Future studies should examine this link more closely to determine what it is about parental civic engagement that is so important in the motivational pathway to youth civic engagement.

Importantly, the findings showed support for the model shown in Figure 1. Although parental civic engagement did not play a significant role in the relationship between basic needs satisfaction and civic competence, the remaining moderation showed that parent's civic engagement did promote their child's civic engagement. However, for parents' civic engagement to inspire civic engagement in youth, they must have their basic needs met and must feel civically competent. This model supports the idea that youth motivation is a complex and multifaceted pathway that involves factors within the youth as well as factors outside of them.

This study did have specific limitations. In particular, I did not ask participants whether their activities were individually initiated or as part of a larger organization, therefore there was no way to disambiguate whether there were differences in what was done individually versus those done in a group, and how this impacted the frequency in which they engaged in these activities. Also, given that participants were in middle school it is likely that much, if not all, of their activities were in some way determined by their parents. This confound was not addressed in this study, so it is not possible to know how much of their civic engagement was due to their own civic interests and how much was the result of parental pressure. Furthermore, there were some activities that may be specific to where data collection occurred (i.e., Alabama). Certain natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes) are relatively common occurrences in areas bordering water but are much less likely in other areas. Since this activity is geographically dependent, it is less likely that youth in areas outside of this geographical area would be able to be engaged in this civic activity. Finally, this study was conducted during a time of social turmoil. Although this context afforded a unique look at how global unrest can create unprecedented spirit for being civically engaged when people might otherwise not be civically engaged, it is not particularly representative of the experiences that youth generally face. In particular, COVID-19 brought

unique opportunities and barriers that required people to navigate a potentially dangerous climate in order to behave prosocially. The findings from this study might have been different during a more placid time, one in which there was less disruption. While there was nothing specific about COVID overall that seemed to indicate that it had a special role in youth's civic engagement, it would be useful to understand the model in a different context.

Despite these limitations, this study does provide an important contribution to the literature on youth civic engagement. There are several different directions that would be useful for future research in this area to take to better understand the link between basic needs satisfaction and civic action. One way might be to understand how the individual components of basic needs satisfaction promote youth civic competence and youth civic engagement. For this study in particular, subscales did not have adequate reliability to test this and, as noted earlier, Ryan and Deci (2017) indicated that the scale works better as a whole measure than as three separate measures. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to understand whether one of the needs is driving the influence on civic competence and civic engagement.

Secondly, this study employed a measure of global needs satisfaction instead of one that is domain specific. Yet needs satisfaction can be particular to one domain, for instance family relationships, friendships, school, and work. Youth may have their basic needs satisfied in one area more than another. It may be that a domain-specific measure would provide a stronger direct link to youth civic engagement. It would be useful to examine more context-specific needs satisfaction to answer these questions.

Additionally, although the basis of this study focused on the role of civic competence as a byway through which basic needs satisfaction promotes civic engagement, needs satisfaction might relate to civic engagement through other mechanisms, such as empathy and compassion.

Indeed, as discussed earlier, there are several important factors that might help us understand this pathway, including youth's peers, school-based civic curriculum, and larger community influences. It would be highly advantageous to examine these other factors in future studies. Furthermore, there may be several pathways and possible models in which basic needs satisfaction relates to youth civic engagement. For example, Stattin et al. (2017) used basic needs satisfaction as an outcome and civic activities as a predictor. This suggests that there might be multiple ways to examine how these factors relate to one another. As parents may serve an important role besides increasing the impact of competence on engagement. Perhaps parents may also serve as a significant moderator for the direct link between needs satisfaction and civic engagement, or even as a direct predictor.

Overall, this study provides novel information about what motivates youth to become civically engaged. Of importance, this was the first study to examine how Self-Determination Theory can be used to predict youth civic engagement through the promotion of civic competence. Self-Determination Theory has been used in many contexts, but this is one of the first studies that has used it to examine civic motivation in youth. Based on the findings, Social Determination Theory is a promising way of understanding youth civic engagement. Moreover, this study demonstrates the importance of parental scaffolding in molding civically involved youth, above and beyond warm parenting. This information can be useful for schools and organizations focused on creating civic engagement curriculum meant to involve youth in issues affecting their communities or the larger society. Based on these findings, programs should evaluate racial disparities in civic opportunities, focus on providing civic scaffolding by role models, and encourage civic competence through education and practice. In this way, we can create, encourage, and sustain the next set of leaders who will change the world.

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APPENDIX

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



August 26, 2020

Jeffrey Parker, PhD
Department of Psychology
College of Arts & Sciences
Box 870348

Re: IRB # 20-05-3636 "The Wellbeing of Adolescents and Families in Rural Alabama during COVID"

Dear Dr. Parker:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

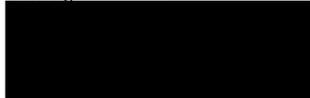
(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Please note that study activities may begin only after approval from a school system has been secured. Upon receipt of additional approvals, please forward a copy to the UA IRB in the form of a modification request via the e-Protocol system. The approval for your application will lapse on June 28, 2021. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the Continuing Review form to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent/assent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Director & Research Compliance Officer

Jessup Building | Box 870127 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127 | 205-348-8461
Fax 205-348-7189 | Toll Free 1-877-820-3066 | rscompliance@research.ua.edu