YOUTH AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE AMERICAS

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM A THREE-CITY STUDY: RIO DE JANEIRO, CHICAGO, AND MEXICO CITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how civically engaged youth in three different cities and countries in the Americas became engaged in civic activity. The usual concern about youth is their lack of involvement. However, the authors have learned from their work in Rio de Janeiro, Chicago, and Mexico City that there are youth in each of these cities who care deeply about their communities and are active in diverse organizations and projects. This paper is part of a broader study that examines youth who are significantly engaged in civic activity. In this paper, the authors will focus particularly on the youths' initial process of engagement and what motivated them to get involved.

RESUMO

Este texto discute os processos de engajamento de jovens em três cidades de três países das Américas. É comum associar-se à juventude a falta de engajamento. Entretanto, a partir de suas pesquisas no Rio de Janeiro, Chicago e Cidade do México, as autoras se depararam com jovens profundamente preocupados e envolvidos com suas comunidades e ativos em diversas organizações e projetos. Este texto é parte de um estudo amplo que analisa vários outros aspectos do engajamento destes jovens, identificados como significativamente participativos. Neste artigo, as autoras focalizam as suas histórias de engajamento e os motivos que os levaram a se engajar.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how civically engaged youth in Rio de Janeiro, Chicago and Mexico City became engaged in civic activity and what motivated them to get involved.[1] There is a general concern about the declining involvement of youth in civic life, the implications and importance of which we discuss below. However, the authors have learned from their work that there are some young people who are deeply engaged in the world around them. This paper is part of a broader study that examines several aspects of the lives of young people who are significantly engaged in civic activity.[2] We trace how they became engaged, their activities, and their ideas about politics and society. Our main focus in this paper is the initial process of engagement in civil society and the reasons for that engagement.

There are several reasons why one should be concerned about the civic engagement of youth. Their declining involvement in civic life has led some to predict the end of democracy, a system of government that, by definition, requires the active and informed engagement of its members (Gimpel et al. 2003). The political aspect of the civic engagement of youth became salient in the 1960s as social scientists began asking how young people viewed politics. As a result, a literature emerged that described the existence of children's political lives. Political awareness began, in part, with a sense of place—usually the nation—and included feelings about authority figures and information about politics (Greenstein 1965; Hess and Torney 1968; Easton and Dennis 1970; Sigel 1969). It also appears that children's political development is closely tied to their overall development (Erikson 1968). For adolescents, political development may be tied to their search for a sense of community (Adelson and O'Neil 1966). The research suggests that certain stages of development in political attitudes vary for children of different backgrounds and nationalities (Coles 1986; Hirsch 1971). A variety of social agents, such as parents, teachers, and peers, influences young people's political behavior (Flanagan and Sherrod 1998).

More recently, there have been important cultural and economic changes in the world that affect the structure of politics and identity, changes which could further affect how children and youth perceive their political identity. These changes have led us to

wonder how the processes of increased global commercial activity, migration, and global electronic connection affect young people's sense of place, thereby affecting their civic and political participation.

It is clear that civic engagement has consequences for civil society. What may not be so obvious is that civic engagement also has consequences for a person's sense of self. An author who examines these two aspects of engagement is the South American writer Juan Díaz Bordenave, who himself was influenced by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. He writes:

> Participation is the natural way for man to express his innate tendency to fulfill, make things, affirm himself and dominate nature and the world. Beyond this, his practice involves other necessities that are no less important such as the interaction with others, self-expression, the development of reflexive thought, the pleasure in creating and re-creating things, and, further, to value oneself and be valued by others. In conclusion, participation has two complementary bases: an affective one, we participate because we feel pleasure in doing things with others —and an instrumental base—we participate because doing things with others is more effective and efficient than doing them by ourselves. (Bordenave 2002: 16)[3]

Civic engagement is also important because it can educate young people about their rights and responsibilities. In countries where basic human rights were repressed by military dictatorships until quite recently, civic participation can help promote social justice for young people and their families. This outcome of participation can also occur in countries with longer democratic traditions, but where particular groups have been denied their rights based on, for example, race/ethnicity or gender discrimination. Learning about young people's concepts of their rights has implications for strategies that help guarantee their rights in practice. As youth practice civic engagement, they may well develop a clearer sense of what rights they have, and of the fact that those rights are enforceable. If they do not believe that their rights will be enforced, then they are unlikely to exercise them.

As such, the civic activity of engaged young people is a rich and complex phenomenon. In this paper, we are particularly interested in the process by which the young people became involved in civic activity, and why and how they got involved. The authors separately examine the situations and civic engagement of young people in each

of the three cities. Clearly, the situations of youth in the three cities differ because of different economic, social, political, and cultural contexts. To some degree, young people's civic engagement takes different forms because of those structural differences. Each author analyzed the data in her own voice, which reflects the different situations of the youth and the authors' diverse academic backgrounds and concerns. But just as there are differences among the three cities—especially in the degree to which young people wished to become involved in traditional political activities—so too are there similarities in opportunities for participation and in the enthusiasm and energy the youth brought to their engagement.

METHODOLOGY

We proposed to engage approximately twenty-five young people in each city (ages 11 to 24)[4] in self-reflection about their civic engagement. The cities are among the most important cities in the Americas and are situated in the three countries with the largest populations in North and South America. We each chose our samples from different communities within the cities to include families in different social and economic groups. The samples were purposive stratified samples to include civically engaged young people representative by gender, economic status, race/color, and civic interests.

We developed an interview protocol around various aspects of civic engagement and used the same protocol in each city. In all three cities, the initial outreach to the young people was made through community organizations that work with youth. These organizations were asked to help identify engaged youth and each organization nominated several young people on the basis of their engagement. The researchers then did initial interviews with and observations of the young people in their organizations. They chose the samples according to the stratification categories and the young people's willingness to participate in the project. As the project progressed in the three cities, the respondents themselves nominated other engaged youth who were also selected to participate on the basis of the original criteria.

Each of the interviews was recorded and transcribed. All the young respondents were encouraged to write personal narratives about their civic involvement and about

one-third of the respondents accepted this invitation. They were also invited to attend meetings to work on their narratives and produce a joint publication of their own.[5]

YOUTH AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE THREE CITIES: Rio de Janeiro

The Context of Youth in Rio

Brazil is a young country: approximately half of its 187 million inhabitants are under 24 years of age. Of these, over 34 million are between 15 and 24 years old, representing about 20 percent of the population. Most young people (80 percent) live in urban areas or on the periphery of large urban centers (IBGE 2005). There are major challenges facing young people in a country so deeply marked by social and economic inequalities; Brazil has the fourth most unequal income distribution in the world.

Violence is also on the upsurge, which particularly affects young people living in low-income communities. In Brazil, mortality rates for young males are extraordinarily high and have been increasing over the last twenty years; they are ten times higher than the equivalent rates for young women. Between 1980 and 2003, the mortality rates per 100,000 young men (ages 20–24) increased from 121 to 184.

Education levels are also a cause of concern. While enrollment in elementary school has been increasing and is above 90 percent, the general education levels remain relatively low for a country seeking to compete with industrialized nations. In Rio de Janeiro, 25 percent of adults have not completed elementary education, and elementary school graduation is the highest educational level attained by about 14 percent of adults. Twenty-one percent of adults in Rio have some high school education, 27 percent have completed high school, and 12 percent have some college or have graduated from college.

There are 2 million youth aged 15 to 24 living in the twenty municipalities that comprise the Rio metropolitan region (IBASE/PÓLIS 2005). There is some data about general patterns of youth civic participation in Rio: a survey conducted by the Institute for Religious Studies (ISER) in the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan region concentrated on the political aspects of youth civic involvement. Most of the youth in the survey participated in groups associated with churches (Novaes and Mello 2002). Young women

participated more than young men in church groups, while young men participated more in student groups. Ecological and community organizations also attracted young people while traditional political organizations, such as trade unions, interested them least.

Another survey showed strong youth interest in conventional and unconventional political activity:

> "The levels of political interest in conventional politics and involvement in unconventional politics are equally high: for example, the respondents' identification with political parties, approval of the government, confidence in political parties, participation in protests, social movements, etc., are numerically equivalent or higher than those recently observed among European youth." (Krischke 2004: 22)

As we assess this level of participation, we should note that Brazil—in its comparatively recent past—has experienced a number of events that aroused very high levels of political participation throughout the population (Rizzini and Barker 2002). In 1989, the first direct election for the presidency was held after twenty-one years of military dictatorship. In 1993, the nation's political passions were aroused by the spectacular corruption of the president, Collor de Melo, who was impeached and removed from office. In 2002, Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva, the head of the most significant progressive party in Brazil, the Workers Party (PT), was elected president after three previous unsuccessful attempts at that office. These events certainly created new levels of political participation.

The Rio Study

The sample of youth interviewed for this study in Rio de Janeiro were twenty-four young people between the ages of 15 and 24 of whom fourteen were female and ten male. Eighteen of the youth were non-white and six were white. Fifteen were low-income and nine were middle income. In addition to interviewing young people who lived in favelas (very low-income areas) and middle-income neighborhoods, we also interviewed young people who belonged to the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Rural Workers Movement, or MST).[6] One young person in the group had only completed

elementary school, sixteen young people had attended and/or completed high school, and seven of the youth had attended college.

The kinds of organizations the young people were engaged in can be briefly described as follows. Ten were involved with political parties and social movements (the official political parties, student movements, and the MST). Eleven young people took part in social and cultural projects whose purposes included some social impact. They included community radio, youth and human rights, gay rights, rap (*consciência negra* or black consciousness), hip-hop, and dance theatre groups and a group involved in the *vestibular comunitário* program, which trains low-income people for the nation-wide Brazilian university entrance exam, the *vestibular*. Three others were connected with church groups, including Catholic and evangelical groups.

Becoming Engaged

We will now focus on our group of youth in Rio and their civic participation, or *participação cidadã,* as we say in Portuguese.[7] We look at how the young people in Rio became engaged and what motivated them to do so.

When asked to describe what they remembered about how they started to become involved, most of the young people had interesting stories to tell. One group of respondents seemed to have a natural inclination to be active and to mobilize and lead others. Some of them began their involvement in school and church activities when they were still children. One young woman stated:

> "I have always been very engaged, always enjoyed participating in school activities and also in the church. I was only nine when I started engaging and now I teach in this church."

Another young female reported the following:

> "When I was 13 years old I started taking responsibility as coordinator of '*Mãe Rainha*' for the church. It involved thirty families. It is a group of people and everyone was over 40 years old. I took the responsibility for over a year and now I am one of the youth leaders."[8]

Another common example was participation in school as elected members and leaders of school committees, where they advocated for student interests. It became clear through the interviews that young people took these roles seriously.[9] One young man said, "I have been active in my school since 8th grade. This was because I saw there were so many problems: lack of funds from the government, lots of strikes… it was a conscious participation…"

A 19-year old woman, who was active as the president of the student association at the state level, declared, "I always wanted to organize myself to participate, to be part of the struggle, mobilizing students until I had a chance…I got elected and since then I sleep late, wake up early, and spend all day out."

Another group exhibited an internal restlessness that led them to action. Interestingly, some of them referred to the fact that they were restless, rebellious, and competitive as children. One young man reported, "I have always been like this. My mother used to say 'you are a very rebellious boy!' I have always been a fighter (someone who does not accept things as they are)—looking at things in a critical way."

This spirit was exhibited in children from all socioeconomic backgrounds. One of the participants who used to be a street child and is now the leader of a community radio station said, "I always had this desire for change inside me." Many times this sense of unease came from feeling different from the people around them, from the need to look for different ways of expressing themselves and to search for other affinity groups. "I am very different from my parents. I used to feel like a fish out of water. Because they are very different from me, we have different views about life," said one young woman. "I am very far from my childhood friends," remarked a young MST activist, "... we belong to very different realities."

A last group found people and spaces that both facilitated and encouraged their participation and activism. Several of the young people began to participate in settings that encouraged and supported them in the exercise of leadership, in expressing their ideas, and in becoming actively involved. Often, the stimulus for this came from the example of their parents and from the engagement of friends who were already involved.

Two young activists who were interviewed together declared:

"We started participating together when we enrolled in the same school. It looks like we've known each other for a long time but it is not true—we started engaging together. We had met these other guys from the *gremio* [school student council] who had good ideas. They were organizing a demonstration to press the local *prefeitura* [city hall] to get free bus fare for all students from public schools. They pressed us to participate to help many others, they said, and that is how it all started."

Motivations for Engagement

According to their responses, most of the young people in the sample became engaged out of a desire or a real urgency to participate in society, to do something concrete, to be useful, or to help others. These responses seem to come out of a sense of restlessness, and indignation motivated by a deep sense of social awareness. A young man of 18 years said, "This is what I think: society is the most important thing one has. So to participate in society is to work so that this society becomes a bit more just, less unequal." Similarly, a young woman of 20 stated:

"All our advances [e.g., all the progress achieved by humankind], if we don't work or act together in favor of the communal, if we don't have the perspective of the community, of the demands of solidarity, in a little while we won't have a planet left, you understand? This is the issue."

Another young woman of the same age reported, "When you do something good for others, you feel good yourself… it is not just a favor you are doing, but I think, well, I don't know, I think we human beings look for meaning in life."

The word "help" appeared quite often in the interviews. For some, helping had a political meaning, as for this 24-year-old male who declared, "To participate is to build. It is to insert oneself in the social environment and help the process of constructing society: this is what it is to participate."

Another young man of the same age saw participation in an altruistic light and remarked, "To work, man! We must always be working, helping the person next to us, doing good." For a few of the youth, participation was linked to altruism; helping meant

an altruistic gesture, associated with religious motivation. The young woman who told us about her participation as the coordinator of the *Mãe Rainha* (or novena) when she was only 13 also shared with us that she had feared she would not be able to accomplish her mission, but that she knew she was right in helping others and that she trusted "the saint was guiding her."

For several of the youth, the act of participating gave them a meaning in life and a place in the world. This was particularly true for those who felt discriminated against. A young woman of 24 said "The hip-hop movement gave me a direction in my life regarding the racial issue, an understanding of what I want from now on."

Many of the young people affirmed having dreams of being able to contribute to changing the things that offended them in the world. A good example was given to us by a 20-year-old man who said, "When you participate you are helping in some way, you are helping to change something… tomorrow, for example. When I took part in the political campaign, I think I made a difference, I added something."

A peer echoed the sentiment and stated, "To participate is a form of transforming society. I think that the students' movement is fair and crucial. But it does not solve the problem. What we need is the transformation of society. With a movement with this conception, one can transform the world."

We notice, also, that several showed a passion for what they did, speaking about a personal commitment to participation. One 16-year-old woman affirmed that to participate "is to give of your best so that what you are engaged in works out well; to do all that you can and beyond that. If you can jump, you jump. If you fall, that act of falling shows people that this experience, too, is part of life. So I think it is about giving totally of yourself."

Finally, some talked about that moment of realization that they had succeeded in being heard and that they had participated in something very important. Two young people had very moving stories about this experience: The first young man, taking part in gay rights demonstration, said:

> "And so, when I looked in front of me and saw that crowd, I had not seen all those people. I had been engaged in the task, I had seen nobody around me. And then

when I breathed and saw a million people I thought, my God! I am part of this, I have succeeded, and I wept. I had helped make this happen. And it worked."

Another young man was equally emphatic and remarked, "I guess what most moved me was when I realized that I was really participating in the history of Brazil. It was when I got my voting card and when I voted for the first time in 2002 for the presidency. I was so emotional and I felt that I was truly taking part in society."

This young man came from a very poor family on the margins of Brazilian society, but, despite extreme poverty, took great pride in participating in the civic act of voting. This young man did not have to vote, since he was between 16 and 18 when voting is voluntary rather than mandatory: yet, despite his position in a traditionally powerless group, he seized the opportunity to exercise his citizenship.

The testimony of this group of young people demonstrated a strong desire to contribute in some way to improve the common good. Both the young people from middle-class families and those from poor families showed that they were connected, that they were present, that they cared about the state of society, and that they struggled to make their dreams and aspirations for society come true. The young people who participated in this study made it clear that they benefited from this process of participation. They became better able to express themselves in public, better prepared to act, and their voices were heard and respected. Finally, there is no doubt that they developed a strong sense that it was necessary to struggle and that they were no longer passive, but rather active participants in their society.

YOUTH AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE THREE CITIES: CHICAGO

The Context of Youth in Chicago

According to the 2000 Census, Chicago's total population is comprised of approximately 2,900,000 inhabitants, of whom 440,214 (or 15.2%) are between the ages of 15 and 24.[10] Although Chicago is a city of immigrants, much of its political history has played out along deep racial divides. It is a city with high levels of engagement in neighborhood

politics, much of which is geared towards young people. It is also a city in which there has been a high influx of immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries.

Youth Civic Engagement in Chicago

The main criterion for identifying the Chicago organizations from which youth were chosen was that they be organizations with projects conceived and run by youth themselves. These included Southwest Youth Collaborative and some of their partnering organizations (Tepochcalli, Interfaith Leadership Council, and the Multicultural Youth Project), Video Machete, Young Chicago Authors, Girls Best Friend Foundation, and the Mikva Challenge. The collaborative was involved in a city-wide school reform project led and designed by students. Video Machete had a group working on a video exploring the impact of the Patriot Act[11] on immigrant communities. Young Chicago Authors had a youth-led program that encouraged the use of the written word so that young people's ideas could be heard. Girl's Best Friend Foundation had a girl-run board that gave grants to girl-conceived and -run projects. The Mikva Challenge, named after a distinguished former member of Congress from Chicago, encouraged youth to work on electoral campaigns and gave grants to school-based social justice projects conceived and carried out by young people to address their concerns. The organizers—young adults themselves—were asked to help identify youths who were active and interested in participating in this study.

In total, twenty-five youth from various communities were interviewed. Most were from working-class families that were not involved in politics. Many had a strong sense of self and all had plans to attend college.

At the time of the interviews, the youth ranged in age from 11 to 19. Of the total, eight were males and seventeen were females. Fourteen were Latino, seven were African American, one Asian American, two whites and one Afro/Latino. All of the young people were given a transcription of their interviews and invited to elaborate on their ideas by writing an essay. Ten young people did so and the following account is based on the interviews and the essays.

Getting Involved

Family

Of the twenty-five youths interviewed, only two had parents actively involved in political activities. Others recalled being taken to political events by their parents even if they were not necessarily activists. Many nonimmigrant parents voted and made it a point to instill in their children a sense of duty in casting a vote. This was especially true for African American youth, whose parents taught them that the vote had long been denied to their community and that they had a historical responsibility to vote. In most families, politics was a common topic of conversation even if parents themselves were not activists. A young man recalled, "We talked politics at dinner all the time. My parents would give me a book to read and we would discuss it and then they would give me another one."

Although activist parents were the exception, one experience the youth seemed to share was having a parent at home who respected them and their ideas, listened to them, and let them speak up at home to express their points of views. It was not so much that politics and political activism was encouraged, but that the parents respected their children as individuals. As the young woman from the Mikva Challenge said, "I was the first kid, and grandkid, in my family, and because of that I was never treated like a kid…I was never told, 'don't do that,' rather, 'go ahead, do it.' "

In some cases, parents counseled against political involvement for a number of reasons, including the belief that political activities would distract youth from their studies. Immigrant parents worried that their children's political activism would draw the attention of the government to members of their family who were undocumented. But even in these situations, youth reported that they felt respected by their families. The fact that the youth from immigrant families spoke English and had more knowledge of US society placed them as brokers between their private, familial context and the public sphere.

Other youth attributed family values and traits to having led them to activism. One young woman said that her parents gave her a strong will. A young female, a member of the Interfaith Leadership Project in Cicero, said that when she was little, her grandfather

taught her the importance of giving back to people by reading her stories of people who behaved like a good Samaritan. She reported, "I always saw myself giving something back to humanity."

If activism is partly traceable to the ways in which children are validated in the home, then efforts to increase youth engagement should also focus on parents and how they relate to their children.

Institutions Outside the Family

Institutions outside the family can be important resources for working-class youth. Indeed, for our sample, schools were an important influence on youth political development. Some youth mentioned a specific teacher who taught them civics lessons. For instance, two young men from Tepochcalli mentioned a teacher at Farragut High School in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood who taught a special class on law and politics and spent a lot of time with students after school. One of the young men commented, "He taught us about laws, and what our rights are." Civics teachers in some Chicago public schools worked closely with the Mikva Challenge to get students to identify issues facing students and to set up a specific program to address those issues.

Many of the youth held leadership positions in school organizations, such as student council, math and science clubs, and black student unions. Debate clubs, in particular, are training grounds for political activism, as students learn to articulate and research positions. A young man from Mikva Challenge said, "Debate teams taught me how to think politically, order my thoughts, and allowed me to meet people from all over the state, from rich suburbs and poorer school districts."

The youth community organizations also provided a place for activism and skill development. In their respective projects, the youths encountered enthusiastic and supportive community organizers who taught them important political skills, including surveying, lobbying, and writing press releases. The organizations also introduced them to other young people from across the city.

Early political victories encouraged optimism about social activism. A group of three youth from the Chicago suburb of Cicero's Interfaith Leadership Project convinced a local businessman to donate a building to their organization. The young people became

excited about all the programming they consequently were going to be able to provide other youth. Those involved in the Barack Obama campaign for the US Senate were ecstatic about his victory. "This showed me that someday I can be a senator too," said one volunteer. For the group from Brighton Park, involvement in a local campaign that resulted in the election of an alderman who later failed to respond to their needs only seemed to make them want to work harder. "We helped get him elected," a young woman said, "and he turned his back on us. Now we have to find a better person."

Schools and community organizations, however, played different roles from each other because schools are also places where some youth struggle to be heard. Youth in this study often defined schools as the place where they lost their voices and which failed to teach them critical skills. In contrast, community organizations were places where they met other committed youths and where they learned political skills.

Religion, although identified by most as a family practice, does not seem to play a significant role in young people's political involvement. The exceptions included two Muslim youths who felt that their value system came from their religious texts, and another young woman who had gone through the initiation rites of Santeria, an Afro-Caribbean religion. For her, religion was a centering experience that allowed her to reach out to others.

Why Young People Got Involved

Awareness of Social Identities

All of the young people interviewed had a special awareness of their status as youth; furthermore, some thought that because they were young, they brought special sensibilities to the political process. A young African American man said of his experience:

> "What I have learned in the Mikva Challenge is that youth have a voice and the power to affect change. Youth make up a constituent, when we shop, buy clothes or when they go to the corner store they pay taxes and some have jobs … when youth come together and have a vision, a good leader, they can definitely change a lot of things."

Because our sample saw themselves as inexperienced due to their age, they were highly motivated and committed to learning both inside and outside of school. They watched the news on television, read newspapers, and often discussed politics with friends and family. They were high achievers, with many reporting high grades in school, or at least in classes they really liked.

In addition to age awareness, race and ethnicity are dimensions which also demarcate a sense of group and self. This awareness was very marked in the African American and Latino youth. As the young man from Video Machete described it:

> "When I was younger, race was not relevant. I did not know what color I was. I knew we ate different foods at home, that you rolled the r's in our last name. Until I started hearing words, racial slurs, and started to understand what they were, why some people get to do something and others not. And why some people in class got yelled at more than others."

The multiracial kids found that they were constantly battling racism from multiple communities and struggled to find a voice that allowed their complexities to emerge. Latino youth have multiple terms for their ethnic and national identities; there is even a longstanding debate among social scientists as to how and when Latinos choose national origin or pan-ethnic labels to identity themselves. The Latino youth interviewed usually defined themselves first by their national origin and secondly as Latino. One young woman said, "Mexican, even though I was born in the United States. It is a way of carrying on my parents' and grandparents' heritage. I want to keep it going." Another young woman said, "I am Puerto Rican, I don't deny it, but I don't rub it in people's faces. We are all humans, and we all have needs." But for one Latino male from the same organization, Mexican did not sound right. "I grew up over here [in the United States], and I am totally different than they are. I would call myself Latino." For others, Latino is used strategically as a way of uniting and not offending others. An example of this was the view expressed by a young woman from the Interfaith Leadership Project in Cicero: "What unites us is our native language, Spanish." This was a conscious choice in order not to leave anyone out. Latino thus becomes a cultural reference and is also deployed strategically as an ethno-political category (Padilla 1985).

For many, identifying as American is problematic. The young woman from Tepochcalli said, "I came to the United States at three, I don't want to be American, because when I think of 'American,' I think of the American dream, and this is unattainable … it's just a dream. America has failed [its] minorities." For some youth, identifying with their parents' national origin was not always a progressive strategy. Another young woman who was born in Cambodia, found that, as a Cambodian, she was expected to play certain roles that she found demeaning to women. Her response to this dilemma was to say, "I don't see myself as part of the Cambodian community, but I do think of myself as part of a youth community, really a member of the activist youth community."

For white youths, their affinity to black culture was an entry into understanding privilege and inequalities, as well as the deep divisions in their own world. A young man remembered when he started listening to hip-hop, "A lot of hip hop is involved with the African American community. All my friends were white, I started thinking, well, it shouldn't just be like that."

The girls from Sisters Empowering Sisters had an age-related gender perspective on their identities. "We are girls, not little women." While others used race as a way to identify themselves, gender was a very important component of these young women's identities.

Membership in racial and/or ethnic groups is often a positive point of reference (Sanchez-Jankowski 2002; and Pizarro 2005). A Mikva Challenge youth expressed it this way: "I feel that it is a privilege to be an African American male...I feel that the rights that I have to affect change are great, especially since I am a youth. People will listen, especially since they are expecting something else."

Discrimination and Activism

As empowering as group membership may be, many of the youth are also aware that they face discrimination precisely because of their age, race, and gender. Most importantly, they are keenly aware of how they are portrayed in popular culture and feel misrepresented because of their age. Negative portrayals of youth in general are compounded for youth of color. Popular images of youth oftentimes portray them as

uncaring and apolitical, and—if they are African American or Latino—violent as well. One youth of color said young men are "portrayed as gang bangers … stereotypes make it very hard to work yourself up the ladder."

Young women face special stereotypes. For some of the young women, gender inequities within their religion and society were a barrier to becoming full members of society. One young woman reported, "In my religion, they separate girls from boys. The older I get, the more this becomes an issue. This is not preparing for real life." Others were bothered by the effects that stereotypes have on women and girls' ability to get ahead. Another young woman said:

> "I feel strongly about just women and how we can do so many things and how sometimes, especially teenage girls, we allow stereotypes to put us in little itty-bitty boxes as to what we can do or what we should do. You shouldn't be loud, you shouldn't be sexual, you shouldn't be outspoken a lot of time, you shouldn't push the envelope, you shouldn't question things, and I don't know, I just feel that's not how you learn. You have to push the envelope to learn about the world. To know yourself, you have to be out there and experience things."

Youth are particularly keen on battling popular images which portray them negatively. Said one youth, "They dumb down the news for us because they think that youth are uncaring and not interested." Some young people chose to combat stereotypes by reaching out to adults in their communities. A young man put it this way:

> "One particularly rewarding experience was bringing together the parents of the youth in our organization and having them involved, and at the same time having them recognize the importance of the work their children were doing."

The girls in Sisters Empowering Sisters were working on a video to show how the media's portrayal of girls was taking away their voices. In addition, they were being trained on grant making through an organization that gave money to girl-focused projects. In another reference to the power of video, a person from Video Machete said, "Video Machete is my way to say exactly what I want to say…It is not so much persuasion, but the chance to have our voice heard." Similarly, a young man from Young Chicago Authors stated, "The best portrayals of youth come from youth themselves." Youth in the Little Village neighborhood of Chicago went straight to the point and started an organization called *Stop Ignoring Youth.*

Identity: a Bridge to a Broader Community Action

Given the fact that some communities in Chicago are defined by the ethnic and racial composition of their residents, many of the youth were keenly aware that their communities were discriminated against. This realization motivates many of them to be involved, reflecting a sense of responsibility to their families and communities. A young man from the predominantly Mexican Little Village neighborhood said,

> "What really motivates me to get involved is my family, the problems that my family has deep down inside the family, the financial problems, other things. I don't want them to continue facing hardships, and I want to make me want to help and change the things that affect them, and not just for my family, but other families in the communities as well who have similar problems."

A young woman from the same community summed up her feelings: "I don't think we really have democracy. We don't get equal rights. Our public schools are not funded as well as suburban schools, we are not seen as equals." Another Latino said, "I hate to go back to the Latino thing. But it exists. There are a lot of people who have more power than Latinos, and they ignore them. They don't know we exist historically or otherwise."

Racial profiling and targeted repression by the police tends to affect youths disproportionately, especially in immigrant and African American communities. For example, a suburb of Chicago where 90 percent of the youth are Latino prohibits more than three youths from gathering in public spaces. "It is a law that targets us," said a young Latina.

Several of the youth were aware that while they might be specific targets because of their age and background, their entire community was repressed. A young Latino man from Little Village said, "The cops in my community have power over certain people because they are not citizens and many do not know their rights."

The need to change cultural representation included the awareness that the young people were part of a larger community and that they needed to represent that constituency. Some felt particular responsibility for the youth community. One respondent stated, "I think I have responsibility to show people that young people are more than just the kind that slack off and we do take things seriously and we do

understand that there are things in the world besides social circles." Another said, "I'm responsible for myself, but I have to definitely take into account my actions because of how they will be perceived by others because it will affect how all youth are perceived." A young woman felt she had "the responsibility to the people I represent, other young people and Latinos, to other women, and people who practice my religion, other writers. In other words," she added, "I need to be a role model…I feel strongly that my responsibility is to change the image that others have of young people."

For others, their representation was based on their gender and racial and ethnic background. One person stated, "I have responsibility to represent women, represent black women, intelligent black women, strong black women...I feel I have the responsibility to represent black people…to represent my parents and myself." Another said, "I don't want to be pitied as little Mexican girl, I want to show them I can be just as smart."

For youth, age awareness helps transcend particular ethnic and racial groups to create a youth community. But as long as race, ethnicity, and gender create obstacles to equality, these social categories will be arenas where young people join the struggle and spaces where community is defended and created.

YOUTH AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE THREE CITIES: MEXICO CITY

The Context of Youth in Mexico City

Mexico is characterized by great social and economic disparities.[12] Over half the population lives in poverty while 10 percent controls almost half of the country's wealth. Only 1.5 percent of Mexican youth and 1.7 percent of youth living in Mexico City are actively involved in a political organization (IMJ 2006). This is not surprising considering that youth—and the general population as well—do not have faith in the political system and in politicians. Political participation has been discredited because it has historically been controlled by *caciques* (local political bosses) or by collective, compulsory membership in the main labor union groups. It has also been characterized by *clientelismo*, the common practice of giving preferential treatment to a particular interest group in exchange for its political support (Durand Ponte 2004).

But paradox and inconsistency have been invoked to describe the political culture of Mexicans since the 60s. Half of the youth interviewed in the Citizens and Democratic Culture in Mexico National Survey in 2000 (Flores and Meyenberg, 2000) think that citizens can influence the decisions of political actors, but only 18 percent express interest in politics.[13] Trust is considered an important element of democracy; but while half of the youth in the 2000 survey described themselves as having strong attitudes of social distrust, almost 70 percent thought that "democracy is here to stay."[14]

According to the National Youth Survey of 2000 (IMJ 2002), political parties and Congress ranked the lowest of all institutions on reliability. The recent 2005 National Youth Survey (IMJ 2006) reports that 76 percent of youth declare that they would avoid being involved in political parties' public actions. They believe that political parties are corrupt and serve themselves rather than the electorate (Flores 2003).

Low participation rates (no more than 12 percent) in elections for local officeholders such as block representatives and city counselors are evidence of the gap between the formal advances in recent laws and actual democratic participation.

However, when we define participation more broadly, the picture is different. The last National Youth Census of 2005 found that around 25 percent of youth participate in at least one organization not related to politics. Although the census categories do not show whether these organizations are geared toward the public good instead of individual interests, they do suggest nevertheless, that youth are more attracted to civic activities that are not directly connected to politics or government.[15]

Youth Civic Engagement in Mexico City

A total of 22 youth participated in the detailed Mexico City interviews. At the time of their interviews, the eleven women and eleven men were between the ages of 12 and 24. We were concerned with representing youth from various social classes, who lived in different parts of the metropolitan area, and were involved in a diversity of projects. They lived in eight of the sixteen municipal districts that make up Mexico City and in two of the municipalities of Mexico State that are part of the capital's metropolitan area.

Based on Mexican standards, ten of the twenty-two youth live in low-income neighborhoods or communities; another nine can be considered part of lower-middle-

class or middle-class families, while only three youth are members of the upper middle class. Except in one case, the economic conditions coincide with the mothers' educational level. A high school level was the highest reached by those living in socially excluded neighborhoods, while it is the lowest for those living in either low-income or high-income neighborhoods.

At the time the interviews took place, all except one of the young people were in school (the exception returned to school the following semester) and none were working during the school year, although some did have working experience. The youngest respondent had just finished elementary school while the oldest was in university.

The youth belonged to eleven organizations that worked in a variety of social areas from environmental causes to reproductive health to social and children's rights. Six young people belonged to Machincuepa, a social circus project. Three participated in Greenpeace, an international environmental protection organization. Five belonged to Ixtehuan or Video Activo, both community video projects. The remainder participated, respectively, in a summer camp for disadvantaged youth (*colonias de vacaciones*), an international, intercultural exchange program (AFS), a family planning and reproductive health organization (MEXFAM), a youth participation program (Causa Jovena), Tepocatl, which provides cultural, social and sports activities, Selider, which promotes youth participation in Mexican society, and a children's rights organization (Cuauhtémoc Municipality).

The youth we interviewed differ little from the overall general patterns of participation by Mexican youth. None were actively involved in political organizations and only two participated in governmental projects. Some were truly concerned about the uncertainty or the possibility of political change denoted by phrases like these from a participant of SELIDER: "our country is on the edge…there is total uncertainty…you cannot know what may happen after July the 2nd [the date of presidential elections]…for one part youth votes seem decisive…if they give us a chance…but it may be that we may return to the same state of things after the election…however we have to trust that we are important. We need to have hope." One participant, working to organize independent political spaces with young people, developed the following way of thinking: "The citizen is in politics as long as the campaigns last, and in this time his participation gets

only halfway. He doesn't even analyze the proposals of his candidate, nor knows who he is…I believe that we have to work and improve that political culture with education."

Their opinions about politics were unfavorable. The young man from AFS said, "It is pure farce. There is no democracy, there is nothing of anything." In a similar tone, one of the participants from Ixtehuan remarked, "I have always come into conflict with politics because our society is very corrupt." A young woman from Machincuepa thought that "there are many problems; they [politicians] make promises but never keep them." Yet another believed that "they [politicians] do what they want. The power is in the hands of those who are not close to the people." The common denominator of these comments, as well as those of the other interviewees, is lack of faith in politicians because of an inadequate system, corruption, broken promises, and the feeling of powerlessness. "They come here and bring supplies in order to have your support. They want to win your vote by buying you," says one of the youth from a low-income neighborhood. The only respondent that made a clear distinction between politics and politicians was a young man who said, "Politics is fine, if it is understood as a form of organization that is geared to help…and it must represent the people. It is not necessarily identified with the government."

The young people identified themselves with organizations doing work that personally interested them. Their projects focused on promoting rights, expressing themselves, and making room for youth in the public sphere.

When talking about their values, the young people repeatedly said that change must first come from oneself to effectively promote change in others. A young woman from Selider said, "First, one has to change. Then, little by little, one can transmit the message to those around him or her. First to one's family, then to one's friends and community, and, afterwards, why not get involved with a group of people that has the same ideals as you?" A young woman from Greenpeace had a similar opinion: "I think that the best method is example-setting. If people see that you are doing something and that you have faith in your actions, then other people become aware of your effort and follow in your footsteps." Our respondents believed that social change is made possible because individuals promote it. "If the people decide to hold the reins of our country, we

will make it. Yes! We will make it! It is just a matter of awakening," exclaimed the founder of Tepocatl.

Values aside, the young people enjoyed participating in their organizations because they had horizontal—rather than vertical—structures, which made it possible for the youth to be heard and to participate in the decision-making processes. This horizontal structure gave them greater flexibility to develop their own ideas and projects. A young man summed up many of the young people's feelings about their organization when he said, "Here in MEXFAM, there is a sense of warmth about the organization. You can say 'Hi, Ester' to the program coordinator, or 'Hi, Vicente' to the director of the organization. Relationships are not based on hierarchy." Youth appreciated that they had a place that was theirs. In comparing his organization to his school, a young man from Machincuepa stated, "Here we can do things our way. Once we have learned a little technique we can start being creative. This way, we also participate when we give our ideas." Youth had a sense of ownership in their projects and in organizations that motivated them to participate.

The study also explored the reasons why the young people became engaged in their organizations in the first place and why they decided to continue to volunteer. With a few exceptions, the youth got involved in organizations because the opportunity presented itself to them, rather than because they looked for an opportunity.

Interviews and questionnaires revealed that youth found out about their organizations in a variety of ways. Six youth were directly invited to participate in the organization's activities by an existing participant who was either a friend or a family member. Another two were invited by members of the organization while participating in activities unrelated to those of the organization. One young person was encouraged to participate by someone outside the organization. Another eight young people learned about their future organizations from their promotional materials, including posters, flyers, small booths, visits to schools and, in the case of Greenpeace, the mass media. Three other young people actively looked for an organization in which they could get involved. The remaining two respondents were each cofounders of their respective organizations.

These findings reveal the importance of actively promoting participation. In Mexico, the voluntary sector is undernourished and the philanthropic tradition is weak (Merchant and Rich 2005).[16] Youth have very few models of civic participation. There is a strong authoritarian tradition in schools and in homes, and even more so in low-income families, which make up at least half of Mexico's population. We agree with Hart when he states, "While the child's freedom of expression and participation in community issues may often be contrary to the childrearing attitudes of the child's parents or caretakers, it is ultimately in the best interest of all children to have a voice. This is sometimes especially difficult for disadvantaged, low-income parents to understand when they themselves have had no voice and see authoritarian child rearing as the best approach for their child's success" (Hart 1992: 26).

Knowledge of an organization is the first step toward participation, but the second step is motivation. A variety of reasons, both personal and external, induced the youth we interviewed to become engaged,

On the personal side, reasons included learning French, developing new skills, "learning how to juggle, to pirouette, to have fun, and become less shy and more sociable," learning how to use a video camera and use videos, and "looking for something to do while my sisters went to their gymnastics and tennis classes." In general, these respondents were looking for something interesting to do. They were also in search for a broader spectrum of opportunities: "I plan something with the idea that it may bring me more options later on," says a young boy whose migrant-worker mother had no chance to study. "I have found my own labor alternatives within these projects," concludes one of our eldest participants, arguing: "I have an educational profile that does not open those doors."

The external motivations centered on social problems and the wish to make a difference. One of the young girls stated that she became involved "because of my desire to help to save the world and what is being destroyed due to lack of public consciousness." Another young man was motivated "to clear the way for youth to become informed and express themselves. And therefore help to fight against the disinterest youth felt in politics and other spheres." Another young woman became involved because "I…had witnessed situations where children's rights had been violated.

Children matter in this project." Similarly, another young man liked working with children and thought it would be a good way to help.

Most youth of the youth mentioned social reasons for staying in the group. They talked about their organization having a friendly atmosphere where they got along well not only with their peers but also with adult members: "We are surrounded by talented people eager to help," exclaimed a girl with admiration. Social contact paved the way to reciprocity and reflection: "They approached you and talked about their life and I also told them about what I was doing. They let you grow, they let you be… and you step in and you feel accepted as you are. They do not judge you, they don't say anything, but instead they give you the possibility to explore your inside to get acquainted to yourself."

Many mentioned that they could identify with the other members of the organization. One even said that they are: "the first people with which I can identify so much." Another recurrent comment is that their organizations respected them and their ideas; they felt listened to and important: "one has the freedom to say: 'I want to do this' and propose ideas…and if they all agree, it is done," said a young boy with a long trajectory in the social circus project.

Some of the young people had internal motivations for joining their group that could be variously described as obtaining the favorable opinion of others, legitimizing their identity, and gaining social recognition. They felt empowered by presenting themselves as part of an organization and, in return, the organization became an extension of themselves. One young woman said, "You become the organization... not because they force you to be there, but because they catch you. They win your heart and they become a part of who you are. You will always be a part of them."

Several noted that they belonged to a group to deal with the reality that they felt socially stigmatized for being poor, of indigenous origin, or gay. The organizations gave them the security to voice their concerns. For example, an indigenous teenager said:

> "They felt they were better than us because they weren't Indians. One lady would tell her daughter, 'That girl is an Indian, do not play with her.' I just stared at her mad,[17] and she turned around and didn't say anything, and after a while she began to talk to me. She found out that I was part of the children's council and she looked at me surprised. I imagine she was thinking, 'That Indian, she does do something.'"

For this young woman, being part of a children's council represents her way of breaking social prejudice against her people—the indigenous,—who are often considered lazy and inept in Mexico. In the oral indigenous tradition, the official certificates of participation that she earned with her essays were special proof that women were competent and helped her confront her father's machismo.

As was evidenced in the Brazilian part of the study, indignation about discrimination, violence, and unequal conditions of life were frequent themes in our interviews. "It can't be possible that women are raped, that women are battered and lose their lives in trying to avoid the rape…It outrages me," said a young man when questioned about his activism. Another participant mentioned how participation involved a growing social and ethical awareness that cannot be denied: "We have so much injustice and discrimination in here…this really moves me so much! We are so blind! That is exactly how I was before. I was totally blind to these issues. The project has made me sensitive to this reality in which we live in Mexico."

The possibility of breaking into public spaces with their work, a privilege generally reserved for adults, made the youth conscious of their power to challenge the status -quo not only among their friends and relatives, but also in a broader social context. As a result of their engagement, they learned that they had a lot to offer. These ideas are reflected in the collective introduction to the book they wrote about their experiences.

> "We have to say that all the youth that participated in the construction of this book where we share our experiences agree that it has not been easy to make people take us into account and accept our opinions. It is not easy to deal with people who believe they have the only true answer and expect that children and youth must comply without any question." (Del Río and Coutu 2007:13)

Finally, several youth joined their organizations to gain social recognition because they had a strong need to strengthen their identity by receiving positive feedback from their social circles. Through their participation, they became visible by attracting attention to themselves. A young man, for example, wrote in his essay for this project, "Mom, buy the book. I was published in a book." Our young people sought recognition

from their family, their friends, their community, and the people in the organization also as a way of feeling a sense of ownership and of social membership in giving back what they feel they were capable of offering. "I believe I can organize people, I have the initiative, I am conscious of this," says a confident youth after having displayed his own video project.

The above discussion demonstrates what Clary and Synder (1999:157) say about the decision to engage: "many volunteers' motivations cannot be neatly classified as either altruistic or egoistic, both because some specific motives combine other-interested and self-interested considerations and because many people indicate that they have both kinds of reasons for volunteering."

Motivation cannot be isolated to the initial phase of participation only. Rather, it is also a key factor in youths' continued engagement. Each time they accomplish something they set out to do, their self-esteem is affected positively. Participation builds competence, which favors new challenges that empower youth to bring about social change.

FINAL REMARKS

While it is tempting to compare and contrast the histories of—and reasons for—youth engagement in the three cities, we should remember that the different processes of finding the young people influenced which youth participated in the study. This and other factors do limit the possibility of making formal comparisons. The youth in the different cities did, however, have some striking characteristics in common, particularly when it comes to their commitment to be engaged and active as citizens.

Among the variety of ways in which youth became civically involved, some deliberately sought out a way of connecting to the social and civic worlds outside of their families. Others were invited by friends and acquaintances. For some, the common institutions of childhood and youth—church and school—were the jumping-off points because they provided opportunities for engagement and leadership. We also note that while these organizations and people could encourage involvement, they could also discourage participation. For example, some young people saw schools as a barrier to opportunity and some parents were ambivalent about their children's activism. However,

no matter what the occasion of engagement, the precondition of civic engagement is, of course, the prior existence of something to which they can be connected. The richness of civic institutions on the ground is, therefore, an important determinant of youth engagement.

We also heard from our respondents that, in many cases, their parents supported their choices for involvement although in some households the messages were mixed. Some families were concerned about the political risks of involvement and the negative consequences of activism on the development of traditional careers or on current income generation. However, many of these youth felt that although they were not encouraged by parents to participate, they were respected.

We found engaged youth in every social class. We also noted that young women were as active as young men across the range of civic activity. Gender issues were of concern for many of the young women and several of them were particularly concerned about women's rights. Several of the young people were concerned about other forms of exclusion and injustice, including discrimination by race, ethnicity, and gender. Some were concerned about unfair treatment against low-income youth, particularly those who lived in low-income neighborhoods, such as the favelas in Rio.

The motivations for getting involved and staying involved reflect two theories that we quoted earlier: Bordenave's twin bases for participation (the instrumental and affective), and Clary and Synder's altruistic and egoistic concerns. On the instrumental side, the young activists want to change the world; some of them choose to do this by being involved directly in political activity while others are involved in activity aimed at social or civic change. It is interesting to note that in these particular samples of young people, the Rio contingent tend to talk about improving the communities and society around them, while the Chicago contingent talk about improving conditions for their particular identity group. Identity politics are probably more sharply developed in the United States than Brazil. In contrast, Brazilians continue to place strong emphasis on collective action and collective advancement, a phenomenon with roots in opposition to the dictatorship, in the liberation theology traditions of the Brazilian Catholic Church, and in a strong Marxist element in twentieth-century Brazilian politics. On the affective side, involvement clearly brings companionship, new interests, skills, and self-

confidence, and a different status. Whatever the reason, the young people exhibited deep passion and commitment for the objects of their concern.

In contrast to some people's concerns about the lack of engagement in the current generation of youth, our young people's commitment to their causes confirms the findings of the surveys we quoted in this paper. But our findings about their engagement do raise the issue of how to encourage such participation. Bordenave reminds us that participation cannot be taught in the classroom. Rather, "It seems that we can only learn to participate, participating," he says.[18] On the other side of the equation are the organizations that provide opportunities for participation. These were largely found in the civic sector. The organizations to which the youth in the study were connected gave them the opportunity, the space, and the training to engage.

It became clear from the young people's accounts that what really made a difference was the fact that they knew they had something to say and that they felt respected by those around them. To us, the most striking aspects of their stories were the passion, commitment, and imagination they brought to their youthful encounters with civil society.

ENDNOTES

[1] We broadly define "civic engagement" as engagement in civil society and we understand civil society to refer to the totality of voluntary civic and social organizations as opposed to the organizations run, or backed, by the state. This term implies both citizenship and active participation in society. Some distinguish civic participation from political participation. Political participation may be seen by some as a part of civic participation, or it may be seen by others as separate from it. We are concerned here with the broader term; for the purpose of this paper, we see political participation as an aspect of civic participation. Some of the young respondents were engaged politically and others were not. We do, however, use the terms "civic participation" and "civic engagement" interchangeably.

[2] The research project "Civically Engaged Youth in the Americas" is a joint venture linking three cities and organizations: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, coordinated by Irene Rizzini, the International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood (CIESPI) in association with the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro; Chicago, USA, coordinated by Maria de los Angeles Torres, University of Illinois; and Mexico City, Mexico, coordinated by Norma Alicia Del Río Lugo, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana de México (Metropolitan Autonomous University, or UAM). It was carried out with support from the Chapin Hall Center at the University of Chicago and from the Kellogg Foundation (USA).

The main focus of the project was to analyze the testimonies of youth in the three cities about their processes of civic engagement. The study focused on several aspects of their engagement; for example, how and why they became civically engaged, who supported them, and their views about their participation in society. Each of the three researchers did a series of in-depth ethnographies of about twenty-five young people, 11 to 24 years old, of different socioeconomic status, and from different communities.

[3] Translation of Bordenave's definition by Udi Butler (Butler et al., 2007).

[4] Most of the selected young people in the three cities were over age 15. We included a few younger ones when recommended by their organizations as very active and mature young people.

[5] The narratives written by the youth were published and promoted in events that presented the project and launched the books. Their titles are: *Global Youth, Local Politics* (Chicago: De Paul University, 2005); *Nós: a Revolução de Cada Dia* [*We/Knots: The Everyday Revolution*] (Rio de Janeiro: CIESPI/PUC-Rio, 2007); *Jóvenes Comprometidos en América* [*Engaged Youth in the Americas*] (Mexico City: Metropolitan Autonomous University–Xochimilco (UAM), 2007).

[6] Brazil's Landless Rural Workers Movement is the largest social movement in Latin America with an estimated 1.5 million landless members organized in twenty-three out of twenty-seven states. The Lula government in its first administration promised to settle 400,000 families by 2006. While the government claims it has already reached that goal, the MST disagrees and wants the administration to set another, higher goal.

[7] We use the term "civic participation" for lack of a better way of translating the Portuguese term, *participação cidadã,* which is strongly linked to the notion of citizenship and active participation in society. The term marks the difference between the present and the last period of dictatorship when civic participation was forbidden.

[8] This girl decided to volunteer to coordinate the Novena for *Mãe Rainha* ("Mother Queen" is a title for Mary, the mother of Jesus, and here refers to a church devotional group), consisting of nine days of public or private devotion to obtain special graces. During the period, the statue of Mary circulates from house to house and ends up in the house of the coordinator, the main person responsible for the novena's organization.

[9] This point also emerged in the OAS-commissioned study: *Strengthening Democracy in the Americas through Civic Education* (Amadeo, Torney-Purta, et al. 2002). This study added four countries (Colombia, Chile, Norway, and Sweden) to the twenty-eight countries in the study conducted by Torney-Purta (2001).

[10] US Census Bureau, Census 2000.

[11] The Patriot Act is a federal law that tightened control on immigration as part of the response to the 9/11 attacks.

[12] Mexico has the most unequal distribution of income per capita among the 19 Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) nations with a GINI index of 45 (OECD 2007).

[13] Very few youth read newspapers; their main information sources are word of mouth and the mass media (González Navarro and Garduño Olvera 2006).

[14] IFE-IISUNAM, Encuesta Nacional Ciudadanos y Cultura de la Democracia en México, México 2000, cit. in (Flores 2003)

[15] The census categories were: student, neighborhood, ecological, cultural, religious, community service, and social assistance (we left out sports, which accounted for 40 percent, and fan clubs).

[16] There are no official statistics on youth organizations or organizations that have young volunteers. According the CEMEFI (Mexican Center for Philanthropy) database, there are at least

125 organizations in Mexico City whose target population is young people and about 2,000 NGOs that work in a wide variety of sectors and that could possibly have young volunteers.

[17] This frontal gaze is a strong indicator of the way she felt empowered since it is part of the indigenous tradition (enforced also as a sign of "imposed respect," and a gesture of recognition and acceptance of an inferior position, socially reproduced as a symbolic trace of a racial conquest) that women may not stare or hold the gaze of another person.

[18] "Participation is not a content that can be transmitted, but a mental state and behavior that is coherent with it. Also it is not a dexterity that can be acquired merely through training. Participation is a collective not individual experience, in a sense that it can only be learned in group praxis. It seems that we can only learn to participate, participating" (Bordenave 2002: 24).

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