

Chapter 11

Promoting Contribution Among Youth: Implications from Positive Youth Development Research for Youth Development Programs

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The positive youth development (PYD) perspective views young people as assets to their families, their communities, and society. This perspective also suggests that when young people are provided with the necessary resources to become competent, confident, connected, and caring members of society with high character, they can become agents of social change and contributors to their life contexts (Lerner, 2004; see also Chap. 1). In PYD research, young people's contribution has been defined as forms of contribution to the self, others, and community (e.g., Lerner et al., 2005). Examples of youth contribution that have been assessed in contemporary PYD research include helping parents at home, holding a leadership position in student government, or volunteering at a homeless shelter. Contribution may also involve youth participating in social media campaigns to promote an issue of importance to them, such as animal rights, or participating in a protest to bring about some form of political change, such as immigration reform (e.g., Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Zaff, Hart, Flanagan, Youniss, & Levine, 2010). Contribution is important to study and promote in young people because it is a central marker of healthy development, or thriving, across the life span (Flanagan & Christens, 2011; Zaff, Hart et al., 2010).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information, research-based recommendations, and practical resources for youth development practitioners, educators, and policymakers who want to better understand and enhance contribution among

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diverse groups of youth across the United States. Although all forms of contribution ultimately benefit adolescents' personal development and promote their well-being, in this chapter, we focus on young people's contributions to others and to their community because these forms have received the most attention in the research. We specifically focus on implications from PYD research regarding young people's engagement with and contributions to their communities and society. That is, we focus on what has been learned from PYD research about young people's contributions primarily in the form of civic engagement, and we discuss how such engagement can be promoted by invested adults within the context of youth development programs (also see Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

First, we discuss what has been learned about promoting these youth contributions from the 4-H Study of PYD (Lerner et al., 2005; see also Chap. 1). This research provided important evidence about how positive development occurred among participants, most of whom were engaged in youth development programs around the nation. When discussing the study's relevant findings, we review what has been learned about some of the individual and contextual factors that may encourage youth to engage in contribution, as well as the other positive outcomes that may accrue for youth when they are engaging in contribution behaviors.

In addition to its direct results, the 4-H Study also informed PYD research involving groups of youth and in settings that were not represented in the 4-H Study. In particular, there was a limited representation of youth of color—and, specifically, youth of color from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities—in the 4-H Study. However, over the last decade, PYD researchers have built on the strength-based perspective generated in part from the 4-H Study and conducted studies of contribution among youth of color (Chan, Ou, & Reynolds, 2014). Researchers have also expanded these investigations to include alternative ways of thinking about and measuring contribution among youth of color and different groups of marginalized youth in the United States. These models include social justice youth development (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002), sociopolitical development (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Watts & Flanagan, 2007), and critical consciousness (Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, 2014). Accordingly, after reviewing contribution-related findings from the 4-H Study of PYD, we review research on contribution, and on some of these alternative formulations of contribution, among youth of color and in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities (Chan et al., 2014; Diemer & Li, 2011; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). We conclude this chapter with suggestions for practitioners, educators, and policymakers who are committed to fostering contribution among the diverse youth they serve.

A PYD Perspective on Contribution Within the 4-H Study of PYD

The PYD perspective is a strength-based approach to the study of youth development in context (J. Lerner et al., 2013; Lerner et al., 2005). There are several ways to approach promoting positive development; we focus on the Five Cs conception of

PYD advanced by Lerner and Lerner in the 4-H Study of PYD (see Chaps. 1 and 9). This approach suggests that when youth are competent, confident, connected, caring, and have character, then they will be on a pathway toward thriving, and they may exhibit a sixth C—contribution (Lerner et al., 2005).

According to this perspective, a thriving young person's identity should include a commitment to contribution predicated on a sense of moral and civic duty (Dowling et al., 2004; Lerner, 2004; and see Chap. 10). Consequently, we understand contribution as both adolescents' ideological commitment to support the context around them and behaviors (actions) that reflect this ideology. In the 4-H Study, young people's contribution ideologies and actions were assessed in several ways. First, we discuss studies of youth contribution ideologies and actions specifically in reference to civil society, which were conceptualized as active and engaged citizenship (AEC). Second, we discuss other studies that have examined contribution more generally.

Active and Engaged Citizenship

Active and engaged citizenship (AEC) was the focus of much of the research on contribution among 4-H Study youth (Lerner, 2004; Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). Like contribution, more generally, AEC is conceptualized as an integration of ideology and action, but is assessed by four components that are specific to contribution to civil society: (1) civic participation (young people's contribution-related behaviors specific to civil society), (2) civic skills (young people's abilities to effectively engage in these behaviors), (3) civic duty (young people valuing contribution to their community as an important part of their lives), and (4) neighborhood connection (young people's sense that they are important members of their community whose voices and desires are heard and respected) (Lerner, Wang, Champine, Warren, & Erickson, 2014; Zaff, Boyd et al., 2010).

Research on AEC among 4-H Study youth has generally found that youth who are civically engaged in early adolescence remain engaged throughout their development (Zaff et al., 2011). Similarly, youth who show low levels of civic engagement early in their adolescence may continue to be disengaged as they grow up. However, involvement with community-based institutions and programs was positively associated with AEC (Zaff, Kawashima-Ginsberg et al., 2011). Thus, it is possible that through engaging with community-based programs, young people in the 4-H Study became more engaged in society and, therefore, more engaged in contributing to their social worlds (Zaff, Kawashima-Ginsberg et al., 2011). These findings are consistent with other studies of civic behaviors. For example, youth who had access to opportunities for engaging in community-based programs and leadership initiatives in their schools and neighborhoods were more likely to remain civically engaged in young adulthood (see Flanagan & Levine, 2010 for a review of this research).

In addition to the benefits of participating in community-based institutions and programs, youth engagement in school-based activities was also associated with AEC. Youth in the 4-H Study who were highly engaged in school also had high levels of AEC, whereas youth who had low engagement in school reported low levels of civic behaviors (Li & Lerner, 2011; Zaff, Li, & Lin, 2011; see also Chap. 4). Thus, school is a significant context in which AEC develops, and it can also be promoted within a school, for example, in a curriculum, or through school-based civic activities (such as participating in student government). However, if youth are disengaged from school programs and activities, they may also be disengaged from civic activities. Therefore, practitioners and educators cannot rely solely on the school context for promoting AEC and other forms of contribution. Other contexts of contribution, such as community-based or neighborhood programs, should be available to youth who may have low engagement in school.

Contribution

In addition to findings regarding contextual influences on AEC (e.g., community-based programs and school-based activities), research with 4-H Study youth has also focused on contribution more generally. Some studies have highlighted direct and indirect associations between contribution and individual strengths, such as hopeful future expectations. For example, hopeful future expectations, or positive expectations for the future, were a strong predictor of contribution, beyond other individual strengths (Schmid & Lopez, 2011; see Chap. 5). Potentially, facilitating conditions in which young people are hopeful can promote youth contribution. This idea is consistent with the view that when young people are developing within a context that is nurturing, supportive, and growth promoting, they will contribute to the institutions and people in this context (Lerner, 2004).

Intentional self-regulation skills and youth program participation also play an important role in young people's contribution behaviors (Mueller, Lewin-Bizan, & Urban, 2011; see Chap. 2). Among 4-H Study participants, self-regulation skills alone predicted their PYD scores, but self-regulation and youth program participation together predicted young people's contribution behaviors. In other words, youth who had high self-regulation skills and participated in youth programs were likely to make contributions to their communities and societies. This finding suggests that although a person's characteristics (such as self-regulation skills) are important factors in youth contribution, it is also critical to take into account the access that youth have to community resources (such as youth development programs) and the extent to which they take advantage of such resources.

The 4-H Study data have also been used to examine the role that supportive adults play in promoting contribution (see Chaps. 1 and 6). For youth in Grades 5 through 8, having a parent who was warm and nurturing, and who also appropriately monitored the behavior of the youth, predicted their self-regulation skills

(Lewin-Bizan, Bowers, & Lerner, 2010). These self-regulation skills were also related to overall PYD and, subsequently, to their contribution behaviors (Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010). These findings indicate the combined influences that individual and contextual factors can have on young people's contribution.

Another finding from the 4-H Study is that young people who contribute may also simultaneously display indicators of risky or problematic behavior across different portions of adolescence (Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010; Phelps et al., 2009). This finding is important because it suggests that young people can experience challenges while still being positively engaged with the world around them. More importantly, this finding suggests that contribution is an outcome that can be effectively promoted for all youth and not just those who refrain from engaging in problem behaviors. Similarly, research using data sets other than the 4-H Study has shown that promoting contribution and civic engagement among youth who experience potent risks in their lives and engage in some problem behaviors promotes their well-being in early adulthood (Chan et al., 2014; Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

In another investigation, Hershberg, DeSouza, Warren, Lerner, and Lerner (2014) reviewed open-ended responses from a small sample of youth in the 4-H Study about the activities and aspects of their day-to-day lives that they found most meaningful. The researchers sought to explore potential nuances in the kinds of contribution behaviors in which these youth engaged and found value. These data also included youth responses to questions about what they imagined their future ideal selves to be like. Youth in this study provided responses to these questions of interest when they were in Grades 6, 9, and 12. Analyses of these responses showed that young people's descriptions about what was most important to them in their present lives differed from what they envisioned for their future selves, especially in regard to contribution. In particular, few youth described engaging in contribution activities and finding value in those activities at Grades 6, 9, or 12, but the majority of youth in the sample described hoping that their future selves would "give back" in some way to their communities and society (Hershberg et al., 2014).

The responses of these youth suggested that some of them may not have been engaged in daily acts of contribution that were of much value to them, despite having ideological commitments to contribution and life goals related to contributing to society and others (Hershberg et al., 2014). Moreover, participants varied greatly in their descriptions of the most meaningful aspects of their day-to-day lives. Some youth described their relationships with others and/or serving others as most meaningful to them, whereas other youth described an individual focus (e.g., receiving good grades in school). Despite potential differences in youth orientations to self, others, and community, all youth in this selected group had consistently high levels of PYD. The variations in youth responses, including in their descriptions of what they valued most at Grades 6 compared to when they were in Grades 9 and 12, support other 4-H Study findings that indicate that 4-H Study youth took multiple and diverse paths to healthy development and contribution to others and to their communities (Hershberg et al., 2014; Zaff, Kawashima-Ginsberg et al., 2011).

Studying Contribution Among Youth of Color

PYD research highlights the importance of accounting for diversity both in regard to the potential pathways to contribution that are being studied and to the characteristics of research participants (Hershberg et al., 2014; Spencer & Spencer, 2014). There is considerable geographic variation in the 4-H Study; however, there is limited racial, ethnic, and economic diversity. Therefore, some of the 4-H Study findings may not be as relevant to the youth who are not represented among 4-H Study participants, that is, youth from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds and, in particular, youth of color from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds (Spencer & Spencer, 2014). The 4-H Study findings may also be limited in their relevance to the youth development programs that serve these youth.

For these reasons, it is important for practitioners and researchers committed to promoting PYD among all youth in the United States to draw from studies of PYD and contribution that have, as well, been conducted with youth of color (e.g., Chan et al., 2014; Hope & Jagers, 2014; Travis & Leech, 2014) and other groups of marginalized young people who are, likewise, underrepresented in the 4-H Study sample (e.g., LGBTQ youth and youth with special needs) (Gorter, Stewart, & Woodbury-Smith, 2011). Through partnerships with youth development programs and community-based organizations serving youth with different experiences of marginalization, researchers have developed alternative conceptualizations of contribution for practitioners and researchers to use in their work with youth. These conceptualizations may be useful for practitioners serving youth from both majority and minority racial and ethnic backgrounds in the United States as well as youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). These conceptualizations of contribution include youth organizing, youth activism, and a “social justice youth development” (SJYD) approach (see Christens & Kirshner, 2011 and Ginwright & James, 2002, respectively). In the next section, we provide a brief review of some of this research, specifically with youth of color, and describe how these forms of contribution may be promoted within youth development organizations. We also describe tools that have been developed for assessing these instances of contribution among youth (Diemer et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2014).

PYD Research on Contribution with Youth of Color

The Five Cs model of PYD has been used in research with diverse populations of young people, including rural African American young men (Murry, Berkel, Simons, Simons, & Gibbons, 2014), youth living in urban public housing communities (Lopez, Yoder, Brisson, Lechuga-Pena, & Jenson, 2014), and urban youth exposed to community violence (McDonald, Deatrck, Kassam-Adams, & Richmond, 2011). In addition, researchers have worked to integrate culturally and contextually appropriate approaches to youth and community development within

the Five Cs approach to PYD (Evans et al., 2012; Murry et al., 2014, Travis & Leech, 2013; Williams, Anderson, Francois, Hussain, & Tolan, 2014).

Research on contribution among youth of color has also increased since the start of the 4-H Study. Some research has focused on the development of civic knowledge and skills among youth of color. Youth of color have been found to have lower civic knowledge and civic skills, including debate and conflict resolution skills, than their white and more affluent peers (Levinson, 2007, 2010). Some scholars have called attention to the inequitable distribution of civic education classes as one potential reason for this “civic gap” (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Levinson, 2007, 2010). Specifically, youth of color in lower-socioeconomic status neighborhoods often have less access to civic education classes than their peers in more affluent neighborhoods (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008).

Other scholars have argued that it is not simply the case that youth of color have fewer civic skills or are engaged in society at a lower rate than their white peers but, rather, that these youth may engage in their communities and society differently than their peers from more privileged backgrounds. This variation may be due to experiences of being marginalized from particular sites of civic engagement (e.g., schools, local government) (see Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Hope & Jagers, 2014; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). These scholars also suggest that there may be forms of civic engagement that could be promoted among marginalized youth, such as youth activism, that are more reflective of their lived experiences and that, therefore, may resonate with these youth more strongly than examples of contribution that serve to maintain the status quo (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Hope & Jagers, 2014; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Youth activism includes behaviors that aim to influence policy or change institutional practices (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Kirshner, 2007). Youth activism has been described as critical civic engagement, in which youth question the status quo and begin working toward better alternatives for themselves and their peers, both in the contexts of institutions, such as schools, and in the broader society (Kirshner, 2007; Watts & Guessous, 2006). Research on youth activism has examined how primarily marginalized youth may come to engage in these forms of contribution, and the outcomes that may be associated with such contributions (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). We now turn to discussing some of this research. We provide an example of one partnership between youth development researchers and community-based organizations that illustrates how these forms of contribution may be promoted within youth development organizations (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007).

Promoting Youth Activism and Social Justice Youth Development

Youth of color, and, particularly, youth of color in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, may have negative experiences with authority figures (such as teachers, principals, police officers) and institutions (such as schools, local government),

including being excluded from these institutions (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Spencer, 2006). From these experiences of marginalization, youth could develop feelings of distrust toward institutions, including skepticism about traditional government or school policies and if and how they may benefit them and their communities (Flanagan, 2003; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Lerner, 2004). These feelings could then influence youth attitudes regarding engaging in different kinds of civic activities, such as voting or volunteerism (Hope & Jagers, 2014; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Flanagan & Christens, 2011). It could therefore be argued that the “civic gap” found in the civic skills of white youth and youth of color could more accurately reflect limitations in the ways in which contribution has historically been conceptualized, promoted, and measured among these youth.

Youth organizing and activism, rather than activities such as volunteering, may more accurately reflect the contribution behaviors of marginalized youth and/or the kinds of contribution behaviors to which these youth may be drawn (Christens & Kirshner, 2011). Indeed, over the last decade, organizations that promote this type of youth contribution have been especially effective in high-poverty and urban communities in supporting the contributions of young people to their communities (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, 2007). These organizations embrace social change strategies that differ from traditional approaches to youth contribution (such as community service through volunteering at shelters in low-income communities), and they give voice to youth experiences of marginalization (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

Social justice youth development (SJYD) is an example of one framework that has been implemented in youth development organizations to promote youth organizing and activism (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; for descriptions of other approaches, see Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). The idea that youth can be actively engaged with promoting their own positive development in contextually relevant and meaningful ways is consistent with a PYD approach to optimizing outcomes for youth (Lerner, 1982, 2004). The focus of SJYD on the lived experience of youth is sometimes overlooked in PYD research but provides an important challenge and complement to more mainstream research.

An SJYD approach is informed by the belief that marginalized youth may feel low levels of agency and, thus, may feel unable to effect change in their worlds due to their experiences of marginalization (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Ginwright & James, 2002). An SJYD approach aims to increase young peoples’ self-efficacy in promoting change in their communities and society, through developing their awareness of how power operates in society (Ginwright & James, 2002). In community-based organizations that draw from an SJYD framework, youth may be given opportunities to reflect together on how they, their families, and their communities have suffered particular social ills and, through this healing, develop ideas for taking action to redress injustices (Ginwright & James, 2002). In the SJYD framework, youth develop sociopolitical awareness, which been referred to elsewhere as critical reflection (Freire, 1993). As youth develop sociopolitical awareness and problem-solving skills, they also develop and implement plans for action

with the support of their peers and adult leaders engaged in these community-based and youth-serving organizations (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007).

This SJYD approach to working with youth is consistent with a PYD perspective, as well, because it is a contextualized approach to understanding young people and focuses on their ability to impact change in ways that are relevant to their experiences in their communities. Much like PYD, this approach views young people as active in understanding their context and capable of influencing their own outcomes (Lerner, 1982, 2004). Furthermore, an SJYD approach to working with youth may foster the Cs of PYD. In turn, youth who participate in organizations that take an SJYD perspective are likely to engage in meaningful contributions that are relevant to and reflective of their own lives and, simultaneously, directed at improving their communities and society.

As an example of how this process may operate, we provide details from a study of two youth development organizations that approached working with marginalized youth from an SJYD perspective (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). These organizations were observed by two youth development researchers, Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammarota, who documented how an SJYD approach operates in practice (see Ginwright & James, 2002 for a description of all the components of SJYD). We provide details from their study to encourage practitioners to consider embarking on SJYD work. We then describe additional tools that are available for practitioners who wish to promote youth contributions in the form of youth activism and organizing and assess their progress in doing so.

Social Justice Youth Development in Practice

Young Black Leaders and El Pueblo Community Center are two community-based organizations in Oakland, California, in which program leaders implemented aspects of an SJYD approach (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). At these organizations, adult leaders facilitated the development of sociopolitical awareness or an understanding of some of the root causes of problems in their communities and society (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). Youth participated in workshops with adults where all members of the group were encouraged to speak and articulate how experiences in their families and communities, as well as their personal experiences of poverty, could be related to larger economic forces (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007).

In workshops at El Pueblo Community Center, for example, Latino/Latina youth expressed their frustrations at the low quality of their neighborhoods and their limited options for postsecondary school (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). Through college preparatory activities sponsored by the center, these youth also learned that they were not being offered the high school classes they needed to become competitive applicants to postsecondary school. Eventually, these youth organized among themselves to confront their schools about the limited preparation they were receiving. The school, upon recognizing these students' desire to take advanced classes, began making those classes available to them (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007).

Within this SJYD framework, sociopolitical awareness is viewed as critical to promoting youth thriving. Even confident youth, who have strong relationships and supportive parents (in other words, connection), are generally kind and honest in their interactions with others (in other words, are caring and have character), and are academically achieving (in other words, competent), are not viewed as thriving if they do not have sociopolitical awareness. Promoting sociopolitical awareness may be one way in which youth development practitioners can facilitate youth becoming not only engaged citizens but also justice-oriented citizens, who contribute to their communities while continuing to critique those same communities and think about how to best work toward creating a just society (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

SJYD may also be an effective approach for promoting contribution in youth because it is consistent with PYD and AEC. According to the SJYD perspective, within community-based and youth development organizations, youth must be engaged in supportive relationships with adults, and these relationships should be “horizontal” or have more of a balance of power than typical youth-adult relationships (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Spencer, Tugenberg, Ocean, Schwartz, & Rhodes 2013). Through these relationships, youth build a sense of collective efficacy and sense of community. Through supportive youth-adult relationships and a sense of collective efficacy, youth may develop confidence in and ideological commitments to their abilities to effect change and act on this confidence (Camino & Zeldin, 2002).

Youth may resist participating in community-based organizations when they feel they are not being taken seriously by the adults with whom they interact at these organizations or that their voices are not being heard (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013). Within an SJYD-oriented youth development program, authentic opportunities for youth-adult partnerships may be one way in which thriving can be promoted for all youth.

However, youth-adult partnerships in community-based organizations may be insufficient for promoting youth contribution if adults in these organizations are not facilitating an analysis of inequalities in the United States, as well as providing experiences of healing for the marginalized youth they serve (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). That is, an SJYD framework suggests that marginalized youth need to be provided with tools for analyzing the systems of power that play a part in their lives as part of the process of promoting their contributions to community and society and as essential to their well-being (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002).

Other work on civic education also describes how important sociopolitical awareness is for the health, positive development, and civic development of diverse youth in the United States (Rubin, 2007; Rubin & Hayes, 2010). Teachers can be resources for youth to promote their sociopolitical awareness in addition to their civic knowledge (see Rubin, 2007; Rubin & Hayes, 2010). For example, Black youth who had civic education classes were more likely to be civically engaged than Black youth who did not have civics education; as well, their civic engagement was positively associated with their feelings of efficacy in their abilities to participate in politics and effect social change (Hope & Jagers, 2014).

In addition to community connectedness and political efficacy, many other positive individual- and community-level outcomes have been associated with sociopolitical awareness. The development of sociopolitical awareness was associated with healthier sexual decision-making among South African youth of color (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002), academic and community engagement among African American youth (Torre & Fine, 2011), political participation among poor and working class youth (Diemer & Li, 2011; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007), and the attainment of higher-paying and more prestigious occupations in early adulthood for youth of color in the United States (Diemer, 2009). This pattern of findings suggests that promoting sociopolitical awareness cannot only promote young people's contribution but also can have wide-reaching effects on their positive development more generally.

Assessing and Promoting SJYD and Contribution Among Marginalized Youth

Drawing from these findings, Diemer and colleagues (2014) developed an assessment tool that can aid in promoting and assessing sociopolitical awareness, as well as contribution behaviors that may be connected to sociopolitical awareness (such as youth organizing and activism). This scale is a measure of critical consciousness.

The development of this measure (as well as the SJYD framework) was largely influenced by the work of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1993). Paulo Freire (1993) first defined critical consciousness as a concept and pedagogical method that guided his own work with Brazilian peasants. He aimed to facilitate their learning to “read the word” as well as “read the world,” through fostering literacy and their capacities for thinking critically about inequitable social conditions (Diemer et al., 2014; Freire, 1993). Freire also aimed to facilitate these peasants taking actions to change the social conditions on which they were reflecting. Specifically, Freire (1993) defined critical consciousness as “critical reflection and action on the world in order to transform it” (p. 51).

One part of Diemer and colleagues' (2014) measure assesses young peoples' *critical reflection*, or their perceptions of social inequalities, including racial/ethnic, gendered, and socioeconomic constraints on educational and occupational opportunities. This measure also assesses critical reflection in terms of endorsing egalitarianism or, more specifically, values about equality. The second component is *critical action* and assesses the participation of individuals in actions aimed at producing sociopolitical change (Diemer et al., 2014).

In addition to Diemer's measure, clinical psychologist Anita Thomas and colleagues (2014) developed a critical consciousness inventory that is explicitly designed for youth practitioners and interventionists to use to assess critical consciousness among the youth with whom they work. This measure has been used with youth from diverse racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds in Chicago, Illinois. The measure was specifically developed for assessing changes youth may

experience through their participation in youth development programs that aim to enhance their critical consciousness development and civic engagement (Thomas et al., 2014). Thus, there are resources available for youth-serving practitioners who are committed to promoting contribution, including youth organizing and activism, among the diverse youth they serve.

Recommendations for Practitioners and Policymakers

In this section, we provide some recommendations, based on the research discussed above, for practitioners who serve diverse youth in the United States and who aim to promote young people's contributions to community and society. We also provide recommendations for policymakers who are, as well, interested in promoting youth contributions to society.

Various facets of contribution have been conceptualized and measured with different populations of youth, including community service, helping behaviors, civic awareness, sociopolitical awareness, active and engaged citizenship, sociopolitical efficacy, and critical consciousness (critical reflection and actions). All of these components of contribution are associated with well-being for youth and their communities. A focus on the multiple aspects of civic engagement, whether knowledge, skills, or community connection, will help practitioners to elucidate meaningful participation among diverse youth.

If youth programs provide more opportunities for the many examples of youth contributions described here, youth may develop commitments to contribution and participate in these forms of contribution as they grow up (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). This long-term outcome of contribution could be especially important for marginalized communities, as adults of color in particular have also been found to engage in civic behaviors (e.g., voting) at a lower rate than white adults (Chan et al., 2014).

Partnerships between youth-serving organizations and researchers may be an effective means of promoting contribution among youth served by these organizations. In addition, youth participatory action research (Y-PAR) has become an increasingly popular way to facilitate youth contributions to society and to research. In Y-PAR, youth are part of the entire research process, from asking research questions about an issue of concern to them and their communities, to collecting and analyzing data, to presenting and sharing the data with policymakers, educators, and practitioners. In Y-PAR, youth gain critical thinking and research skills and play a part in actions that result from their research. Accordingly, practitioners should consider working with the youth they serve to reach out to educators and academics at universities in their communities to initiate Y-PAR projects of relevance to these youth (see Cammarota & Fine, 2010 for more information).

Promoting more horizontal relationships between youth and adults in community-based organizations is a central part of the PYD perspective, and it may be an especially beneficial strategy for organizations that are committed to promoting youth organizing and activism within their communities (see Zeldin et al., 2013).

Practitioners should identify leadership roles within their organizations that could be taken on by the youth themselves.

Research on the civic gap between youth of color and white youth in their access to high-quality civic education classes suggests that our Department of Education should emphasize the importance of these courses for all youth, and they should make them available to all youth (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008).

Policymakers should ensure that youth have opportunities for authentic participation in institutions of civil society. For example, they should consider potentially lowering the voting age so teenagers can more actively contribute to the sociopolitical landscape (Hart & Atkins, 2011). In addition to providing legal protections for the rights of young people—that is, ensuring their safety, access to resources, proper nutrition, appropriate housing, and freedom from harassment—policymakers should look to young people as sources of knowledge and active participants in their own development. To this end, individuals involved in setting policy agendas should engage young people as part of advisory councils for public office holders (such as governors, council members, mayors, or senators).

Conclusions

The array of youth experiences related to contribution, as well as barriers youth may experience to contributing to society, should be part of researchers' and practitioners' thinking about contribution and how to promote it among youth. In addition, youth experiences of marginalization, as well as instances where youth come together around these experiences to redress injustices, should be part of how youth contributions to self, others, and society are assessed.

Youth have engaged in these various forms of contribution throughout history. Examples include youth in South Africa protesting against the Bantu education system and youth of color in California protesting against Proposition 21, a ballot initiative that sought to try incarcerated minors as adults (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, 2007). The student immigration movement is another example of youth coming together to effect change related to immigration policies in the United States, including the opportunities children of immigrants have to attend postsecondary institutions (Seif, 2011).

Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) suggest that young people are at the vanguard of social movements (see also Youniss, Barber, & Billen, 2013). However, youth continue to experience marginalization within United States institutions that may discourage such forms of contribution (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Rubin, 2007). Moreover, for youth engaged in community-based organizations, research suggests that some young people may believe that their views are not of value to the adult leaders in the organizations in which they are engaged or to the larger communities of which they are a part (Zeldin et al., 2013). In addition, high-quality civic engagement resources continue to be inequitably distributed to youth throughout the United States (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Levinson, 2010). Researchers and practitioners

alike need to do more work to promote meaningful contribution among all youth in the United States and throughout important contexts of their lives.

Questions also remain about how various components and forms of contribution discussed here develop in youth; through continued partnerships between researchers and community-based organizations, some of these questions could eventually be answered. For example, researchers have only begun to examine why youth goals regarding “giving back” to society are not reportedly reflected in the aspects of their day-to-day lives that they experience as meaningful. Youth development researchers have also only given limited attention to examining when and why ideological commitments to contribution are not reflected in the actions and activities in which youth are engaged (Hershberg et al., 2014; Zaff, Boyd et al., 2010). In addition, more research is needed that examines how civic engagement that includes some form of sociopolitical awareness can be promoted for all youth.

Finally, there should be more of a focus on promoting contribution among youth with different constellations of relationships of power and privilege in the United States and on whether paths to contribution may vary between groups based on these relationships. Practitioners and researchers alike have infrequently examined what types of contribution are meaningful, for what groups of youth, and in what contexts. Thus far, much of the research on critical consciousness and related concepts, for example, has been conducted with youth of color. There is a need for more research and research-community partnerships that examine the development of critical consciousness among different populations of marginalized youth, as well as among youth from white and affluent backgrounds (Diemer et al., 2014).

These are some of the questions and research-community partnership goals that should be on the agendas of youth practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. Answering these questions will contribute to creating a more equitable world and one wherein all youth have opportunities to place themselves on pathways toward contribution and thriving.

The 4-H Study of PYD has contributed to the development of some of these questions. Through the 4-H Study, researchers learned about important precursors to contribution (namely, access to community-based programs and ecological resources, including parents, that promote civic knowledge and engagement) for specific groups of youth. In addition, the study has identified individual strengths associated with contribution (such as self-regulation and hopeful future expectations). Findings from the 4-H Study have also informed more recent instantiations of research on youth contribution, some of which focus directly on promoting contribution among youth of color and youth from other marginalized communities. The research reviewed here, thus, directs our attention to thinking about differentiating, in both research and practice, among the many types of contribution that are meaningful to various groups of youth and, as well, the many pathways these youth may take to developing commitments to contributing to self, others, and society.

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Recommended Additional Resources

The resources below provide more details about the development of civic engagement among young people (Flanagan, 2013), demographic and social trends related to civic life (CIRCLE), and forms of youth civic participation aimed at redressing social injustices (Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Ginwright et al., 2006). These resources are useful for direct service providers (educators or practitioners), as well as individuals who influence the broader contexts of youth development in the United States (policymakers).

Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. New York: Routledge.

This book presents five examples of youth participatory action research (Y-PAR) projects by leading activist academics who are committed to facilitating youth contributions to social change. This book is a resource for educators, researchers, and youth development practitioners who are interested in engaging with youth in meaningful contributions to their communities and to research.

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) (<http://civicyouth.org>).

CIRCLE has a variety of resources about civic life and education of young people. Their website includes fact sheets, tools for practitioners, and topic-specific research conducted nationally.

Flanagan, C. A. (2013). *Teenage citizens: The political theories of the young*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

This book connects theories about youth development, and the study of youth development, to youth political behavior. Flanagan focuses on young peoples' views of political life and their relationship with their social worlds.

Ginwright, S. A., Noguera, P., & Cammarota, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Beyond resistance!: Youth activism and community change: New democratic possibilities for practice and policy for America's youth*. New York: Routledge.

This book is a collection of essays about civic engagement in the form of activism, focused on urban youth, and includes work by some of the leading youth development scholars and research practitioners.

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