# Adolescents' domain-specific judgments about different forms of civic involvement: Variations by age and gender

Aaron Metzger*, Kaitlyn Ferris

*Department of Psychology, West Virginia University, 53 Campus Drive, PO Box 6040, Morgantown, WV 26505, USA*

## ABSTRACT

Domain-specific judgments about different forms of civic engagement were assessed in a sample 467 primarily White adolescents (*M* age = 15.26, range = 11–19). Adolescents reported on the obligatory nature and social praiseworthiness (respect) of different forms of civic involvement. Adolescents distinguished among four different categories of civic involvement in their judgments: community service, standard political involvement (e.g., voting), social movement involvement (e.g., protesting), and community gathering activities. These mean differences were moderated by adolescent age (early, middle, and late adolescents) and gender. With increasing age, adolescents judged community service to be more worthy of respect but less obligatory. Compared to early adolescents, late adolescents prioritized standard political involvement as an activity in which US citizens should be engaged, but judged community gathering activities to be less obligatory. Across all age groups, girls judged community service and community gathering activities to be more obligatory than boys.

Adolescence entails a dramatic expansion of both privileges and responsibilities (Levesque, 2002). This tension between increased autonomy and responsibility occurs within the family as adolescents balance increased autonomy and choice over personal decisions (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003) with responsibility to help and support parents (Smetana, Tasopoulos-Chan, Villalobos, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2009). However, compared to younger children, adolescents spend more time outside of the home and have increased interactions with community and civic institutions (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). These macro-level contexts also provide adolescents with privileges (drivers' license) as well as increasingly give adolescents opportunities to fulfill civic responsibilities or "duties" and learn about the expectations of adult citizenship (Sherrod et al., 2010). Little research has explored how adolescents view their expanding civic responsibilities or whether beliefs about civic responsibility change with age. Indeed, adolescents' views of such responsibility may entail elements of moral or social conventional reasoning (Metzger & Smetana, 2010). Enhanced knowledge of adolescents' developing civic beliefs could both provide insights into social-cognitive dimensions of citizenship development and aid in the design of immersive civic programs which are consistent with youth's emerging civic understanding. Given gender differences in adult-level community and political participation, it is equally important to consider whether boys and girls exhibit different developmental trajectories in their beliefs about civic responsibility (Hooghe & Stolle, 2004). The current study utilized social domain theory to explore age differences in adolescents' judgments concerning their expanding citizenship responsibilities and whether these age-related patterns were moderated by gender.

Civic responsibility may take many forms. Political scientists have long argued that democratic countries such as the United States depend on both political and non-political participation of knowledgeable constituents in order to function

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 304 293 1762; fax: +1 304 293 6606.
  *E-mail address:* Aaron.Metzger@mail.wvu.edu (A. Metzger).

properly (Furnham & Stacey, 1991). Democracies require conventional political engagement (voting, keeping informed on current events) but also need citizens to contribute to their communities through volunteer service and to provide checks on government policy by engaging in civic activism and social movements (protesting, etc.; Zaff, Hart, Flanagan, Youniss, & Levine, 2010). Civic life also includes membership in community organizations and attendance of municipal events (Putnam, 2000). Thus, individuals might fulfill their citizenship responsibilities in a variety of ways (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Adolescents' understanding and conceptualization of different forms of civic involvement constitute an integral element of citizenship development (Metzger & Smetana, 2010). Of specific interest is whether adolescents view civic participation as obligatory and apply moral reasoning to different types of civic behavior, since such beliefs are viewed as important precursors to adult civic engagement (Carr, 2006).

Similar to other areas of development (e.g., physical, cognitive), citizenship development is hypothesized to be an elongated process (Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2008), which has its roots in childhood (Astuto & Ruck, 2010). Research on other types of civic and prosocial reasoning provides ample evidence to suggest age-related differences in adolescents' views of civic responsibility. Older adolescents have lower levels of social trust than early adolescents (Flanagan & Stout, 2010), but adolescents' prosocial reasoning increases as adolescents get older (Eisenberg, Miller, Shell, McNalley, & Shea, 1991). With age, there is increased sophistication in adolescents' conceptualization of prosocial phenomena such as honesty and kindness toward others (Eisenberg & Morris, 2004; Killen & Turiel, 1998). Young children tend to reason from a hedonistic perspective, but sympathy and perspective-taking increase during early adolescence, which leads to greater expressions of internalized prosocial values in middle adolescence (Eisenberg, 1990). Older adolescents also utilize more abstract principles in their reasoning about prosocial behavior (Eisenberg, Cumberland, Guthrie, Murphy, & Shepard, 2005). However, this pattern of advancing complexity and maturity may not be consistently linear as hedonistic reasoning reemerges for some middle and late adolescents (Eisenberg et al., 2005).

Age-related differences in adolescents' understanding of civic responsibility are also anticipated by theories of moral and political development. Social domain theory posits that individuals reason about the social world from different domains of social knowledge (Turiel, 2006). *Moral* behaviors entail issues of welfare, rights, and justice, while the *conventional* domain involves rules, regulations, and social order. In contrast, *personal* issues are matters of individual prerogative and choice that lie outside the realm of conventional rules and moral concern. According to social domain theory, individuals establish domains of moral, conventional, and personal reasoning early in childhood, and development entails increased sophistication within domains (Turiel, 2006). For instance, younger adolescents tend to have fairly negative views of social conventions, considering them to be arbitrary rules based on social expectations (Turiel, 2006), but older adolescents understand that social conventions help coordinate interactions among people and allow society to run more smoothly (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Older, adolescents may understand that civic engagement helps societal institutions to function and that political participation is part of citizens' shared responsibility. Although the moral domain is established early, recent research has located a U-shaped pattern of moral growth with middle adolescents employing higher levels of personal reasoning to morally relevant situations compared to younger and older adolescents (Nucci & Turiel, 2009). Political thinking becomes less authoritarian and rigid with age (Flanagan & Gallay, 1995). Younger adolescents tend to have uncritical and compliant attitudes toward government and laws, but older adolescents are more likely to question laws and government policy and argue that laws should be reexamined or changed (Adelson, 1972). An increased understanding that laws and government policy are malleable may lead to favorable views of social movement forms of civic engagement.

Assessing individual's application of moral concepts such as obligation to prosocial activities poses unique methodological challenges. Traditionally, moral and social reasoning research focused on judgments and justifications of "negative" activities (stealing, intentionally causing harm; Nucci, 1986), which differ from judgments about civic engagement, civic duty, and citizenship. The latter concepts are "positive," discretionary, or *prosocial* behaviors directed toward or on behalf of other individuals, political institutions, or communities. Previous research has assessed whether individuals believe people *ought to* or *should* engage in various behaviors, but "should" judgments may not reflect moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1971), as viewing prosocial actions as "good to do" does necessarily imply moral obligations. To assess whether individuals view prosocial activities as morally obligatory, it is necessary to additionally measure whether it is *wrong NOT to* engage in the activity. Previous research has utilized both should and obligation (wrong if not done) judgments to capture adolescents' developing beliefs about prosocial activities (Kahn, 1992; Metzger & Smetana, 2009).

Obligation is only one dimension of moral evaluations (Smetana, 2006). According to moral philosophy (Williams, 1985), discretionary actions are thought to be moral if they are "greatly admired" or "well thought of." Praiseworthiness judgments have effectively distinguished the moral character of prosocial actions and were related to other moral judgments and justifications (Kahn, 1992). Assessing praiseworthiness also potentially reflects self-relevance, which is closely tied to emotional components of moral reasoning (Krettenauer, Malti, & Sokol, 2008). Strong emotional responses to behaviors (e.g., civic activities) have been linked to moral evaluations (Baird, 2008).

Assessing *should*, *obligation*, and *social praise* judgments concerning different forms of civic involvement would provide insights into adolescents' developing conceptualizations of civic duty. In previous research, late adolescents (Mean age = 17.01) judged community service and standard political involvement (e.g., voting) to be more obligatory and worthy of social praise than social movement (e.g., protesting) and community gathering involvement (e.g., community club membership) (Metzger & Smetana, 2009). Thus, adolescents have complex, domain-specific attitudes toward civic responsibility, but the developmental foundations and trajectory of these differentiated civic beliefs is unknown. Research in both prosocial and moral development indicate middle adolescents may display a slight "dip" in social reasoning compared to younger or

older youth, pointing to the importance of distinguishing early, middle, and late adolescents' judgments (Nucci & Turiel, 2009).

Previous research also suggests that boys and girls may exhibit different developmental trajectories in some dimensions of prosocial reasoning. In childhood and adolescence, girls tend to be more prosocial in their affective response (sympathy) and score higher on measures of prosocial reasoning than boys (Eisenberg & Morris, 2004). Girls also score higher than boys on measures of prosocial behavior, and the magnitude of this gender difference increases across adolescence (Balk, 1995; Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1999). Similarly, gender differences in civic reasoning may materialize, expand, or decrease as youth move through early, middle, and late adolescence. In late adolescence, boys prioritize standard political involvement (e.g., voting) and girls prioritize community service (Metzger & Smetana, 2009). Boys also have more favorable attitudes toward political activities than girls (Cicognani, Zani, Fournier, Gavray, & Born, 2012), but it is unclear when in development such gender differences in civic and political reasoning emerge.

The current study explored age differences in adolescent judgments about civic responsibility and tested whether age differences were moderated by gender. Although generally prosocial in nature, civic behaviors are diffuse and include community service, voting in political elections, protesting for causes, and membership in civic or community clubs (Youniss et al., 2002). Previous longitudinal research has located patterns of change in civic processes in both late (Finlay, Flanagan, & Wray-Lake, 2011) and early adolescence (Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009), but less research has examined differences in civic reasoning among early, middle, and late adolescents. Consistent with social domain research's focus on assessing reasoning through multiple criterion judgments (Turiel, 2006), the current study utilized judgments of positive appraisal (should), obligation (wrong if not done), and social praiseworthiness to capture moral and conventional dimensions of adolescent reasoning about civic involvement. Based on previous research, it was hypothesized that older adolescents would judge all forms of civic involvement to be more obligatory and worthy of social praise compared to younger adolescents and that girls would prioritize community service while boys would prioritize political forms of involvement. However, consistent with previous research and social domain theory, it was anticipated that age associations would vary by type of judgment, category of involvement, and also be moderated by gender.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants were 467 students in grades 6–12 (age range = 11–19 years, $M = 15.26$, $SD = 2.06$) from a middle and high school in a small, Eastern Atlantic town. For analytic purposes and consistent with previous research (Clark-Lempers, Lempers, & Ho, 1991; Eisenberg et al., 2005; Nucci & Turiel, 2009), the sample was divided into three age groups: early (grades 6–8, $n = 88$, 18.8%), middle (9th and 10th graders, $n = 179$, 49.9%), and late (11th and 12th graders, $n = 181$, 31.3%) adolescents. Age and grade in school were highly correlated ($r = .91$), but grade was used to account for potential contextual differences between schools (middle vs. high schools) and coursework (early vs. late high school students). The sample included relatively equal numbers of boys (46%, $n = 216$) and girls ($n = 251$) and was primarily White (92.2%, $n = 434$). There was a great deal of variability in the education levels of participants' parents, including less than high school education (mothers = 3.9%, fathers = 6.1%), high school diploma (mothers = 43.0%, fathers = 44.1%), college degree (mothers = 30.2%, fathers = 25.1%), and graduate degree (mothers = 12.8%, fathers = 9.8%). Parents' education was not reported by 35 adolescents. Mothers' and fathers' education were highly correlated ($r = .51$, $p < .001$), and were combined (mean) into a single parent education scale.

### Measures

#### Civic judgments

*Civic involvement categories.* Civic involvement judgments were assessed using 17 items, including four *standard political* activities (e.g. join a political party, keep up with current events and politics) and five *social movement political* activities (e.g. take part in a political protest or rally, write to a newspaper, magazine, blog, or website about a social or political issue). These items were selected from established measures of citizenship and civic engagement (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Youniss, Yates, & Su, 1997). Additionally, adolescents made judgments about four *community service* activities (e.g. volunteer to help disabled students at your school, volunteer for a fundraiser aiding victims of a natural disaster) and four *community social* activities (e.g. join a community sports or music club, attend a community social event or dance) (Metzger & Smetana, 2009).

*Should scale.* Participants rated whether individuals "should" engage in the 17 civic items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*doesn't matter*) to 5 (*definitely should*) (Kahn, 1992). Alpha coefficients for the four civic involvement categories ranged from .77 to .83. Higher ratings indicated stronger beliefs that an individual should be engaged in the activity.

*Obligation scale (wrong).* Consistent with Kahn (1992) and Kohlberg (1971), adolescents rated whether it was *wrong* if individuals did not engage in the activities from 1 (*not at all wrong*) to 5 (*very wrong*). Alphas for the four categories of civic

involvement ranged from .72 to .93. Higher ratings indicated stronger beliefs that the activity was obligatory. Extensive piloting and previous research (Kahn, 1992; Metzger & Smetana, 2009) indicated that even young children could reliably respond to the double-negative phrasing of this scale.

*Respect ratings.* Participants rated the praiseworthiness of all 17 civic activities (Kahn, 1992; Metzger & Smetana, 2009). Based on adolescent focus groups and piloting, it was determined that adolescents best understood the concept of praiseworthiness of prosocial behavior in terms of *respect*. Thus, adolescents were asked whether they found the different forms of civic involvement to be worthy of *respect* ("How much would you RESPECT someone who takes part in the following activities?") on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*none at all*) to 5 (*a lot*). Alphas for the four categories of civic involvement ranged from .81 to .88. Higher ratings indicated stronger beliefs that the act was morally worthy based on praiseworthiness (respect).

### Procedures

Permission to collect student data was granted by the school district's superintendent and individual school principals. All students at the middle and high school were eligible for participation. Sixth- through eighth-grade students were recruited in the middle school's auditorium, and questionnaires were administered in the cafeteria. High school students (grades 9–12) were recruited and surveys were administered in social studies classrooms. Only students who both assented and obtained parental consent were allowed to participate. Research team members were present to administer the surveys, answer questions about survey items, and collect completed surveys. Instructions given to participants stressed that the survey was not a test (no right or wrong answers), participation was voluntary, and all responses were completely confidential (would not be shared with parents, teachers, or fellow students). Participants were eligible for randomly drawn cash prizes ranging from $25 to $100.

### Analytic plan

Planned analyses assessed whether adolescents' *should*, *obligation*, and *respect* judgments differed across the four categories of civic involvement: community service, standard political, social movement, and community gathering. Statistical models tested whether these within-person differences varied as a function of adolescent age (early, middle, late) and gender.

### Results

Means and standard deviations for the civic judgments for each of the civic involvement categories are presented Table 1 along with the separate means for boys and girls and for the three age groups.

**Table 1**
Means and standard deviations for key study variables by adolescent gender and age ($n = 467$).

| | Early Adolescents | | | Middle Adolescents | | | Late Adolescents | | | Overall | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Males | Females | Total | Males | Females | Total | Males | Female | Total | Males | Females |
| **Should judgments** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Community service | 3.88 (1.06) | 4.02 (.86) | 3.96 (.94) | 3.67 (.89) | 4.26 (.74) | 4.00 (.86) | 3.65 (.90) | 3.95 (.99) | 3.79 (.95) | 3.70 (.93) | 4.12 (.85) |
| Standard political | 3.05 (1.12) | 2.97 (.89) | 3.01 (.98) | 3.03 (.99) | 3.28 (.99) | 3.17 (.99) | 3.18 (.98) | 3.36 (1.10) | 3.27 (1.04) | 3.09 (1.01) | 3.24 (1.01) |
| Social movement | 2.78 (.99) | 2.71 (.91) | 2.74 (.94) | 2.75 (.75) | 3.05 (.87) | 2.92 (.83) | 2.92 (.93) | 2.95 (.97) | 2.93 (.95) | 2.82 (.86) | 2.95 (.91) |
| Community gathering | 2.79 (1.05) | 3.18 (1.05) | 3.02 (1.06) | 2.88 (.86) | 3.19 (.94) | 3.05 (.92) | 2.80 (1.03) | 2.91 (1.07) | 2.85 (1.05) | 2.84 (.95) | 3.11 (1.00) |
| **Wrong (obligation)** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Community service | 2.31 (1.39) | 2.53 (1.27) | 2.44 (1.32) | 2.47 (1.28) | 3.09 (1.35) | 2.81 (1.35) | 2.25 (1.20) | 2.71 (1.36) | 2.47 (1.29) | 2.36 (1.27) | 2.86 (1.35) |
| Standard political | 2.21 (1.19) | 2.29 (.97) | 2.25 (1.06) | 2.21 (1.03) | 2.32 (1.01) | 2.27 (1.02) | 2.06 (1.04) | 2.36 (1.13) | 2.20 (1.09) | 2.16 (1.06) | 2.32 (1.04) |
| Social movement | 1.97 (.83) | 1.97 (.75) | 1.97 (.78) | 1.81 (.68) | 2.00 (.73) | 1.92 (.71) | 1.66 (.64) | 1.87 (.79) | 1.76 (.72) | 1.78 (.70) | 1.95 (.75) |
| Community gathering | 1.48 (.68) | 1.72 (.81) | 1.62 (.76) | 1.54 (.79) | 1.65 (.84) | 1.60 (.82) | 1.33 (.58) | 1.43 (.67) | 1.38 (.63) | 1.46 (.70) | 1.60 (.80) |
| **Respect judgments** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Community service | 4.14 (1.04) | 4.20 (.84) | 4.18 (.93) | 4.18 (.88) | 4.63 (.62) | 4.43 (.78) | 4.20 (.81) | 4.55 (.62) | 4.36 (.74) | 4.18 (.88) | 4.52 (.69) |
| Standard political | 3.35 (1.04) | 3.17 (.94) | 3.25 (.98) | 3.10 (.98) | 3.33 (.92) | 3.23 (.95) | 3.16 (.97) | 3.41 (.92) | 3.28 (.95) | 3.16 (.99) | 3.32 (.92) |
| Social movement | 3.19 (.88) | 3.18 (.79) | 3.19 (.82) | 3.10 (.83) | 3.39 (.78) | 3.26 (.81) | 3.29 (.76) | 3.46 (.80) | 3.37 (.78) | 3.19 (.81) | 3.37 (.79) |
| Community gathering | 3.04 (1.06) | 3.23 (1.06) | 3.15 (1.06) | 3.08 (.87) | 3.17 (.92) | 3.13 (.90) | 2.98 (.95) | 3.03 (.96) | 3.01 (.95) | 3.04 (.93) | 3.14 (.96) |

*Civic judgments: categories of involvement, gender, and age*

Each judgment (*should*, *wrong*, and *respect*) was examined utilizing a 4 (type of civic activity: community service, standard political activities, social movement activities, community gathering activities) × 3 (early, middle, late adolescents) × 32 (gender) mixed-model ANOVA. To adjust for multiple comparisons and tests, significant main effects and interactions were further disaggregated using Bonferroni post hoc adjustments. Fig. 1 presents the means for the civic judgments for each type of civic activity. Significant age group × involvement category interactions and significant gender × involvement category interactions are presented in Figs. 2 and 3, respectively.

*Should judgments*

Analysis of adolescents' *should* judgments revealed significant main effects for type of civic involvement ($F(3,1390) = 230.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .33$) and gender ($F(1,462) = 5.45$, $p = .016$, $\eta^2 = .012$). Across all activities, females reported that individuals should be involved ($M = 3.41$) more than males ($M = 3.12$). Should judgments for each of the four types of civic activities were significantly different from one another, with community service receiving the highest should judgments followed by standard political involvement, community gathering involvement, and social movement involvement. These main effects were qualified by significant gender × type of involvement ($F(3, 1390) = 3.07$, $p = .031$, $\eta^2 = .007$) and age group × type of involvement ($F(6, 1390) = 4.02$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .017$) interactions. Compared to males, females provided higher should ratings for both community gathering activities ($t(465) = 2.88$, $p = .004$) and community service ($t(465) = 4.76$, $p < .001$). Significant age differences emerged for adolescent should judgments of standard political involvement ($F(2, 464) = 4.56$, $p = .028$, $\eta^2 = .010$) with late adolescents giving higher should judgments than early adolescents.

*Obligation (wrong) judgments*

Significant obligation judgment main effects emerged for type of civic involvement ($F(3,1390) = 157/88$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .26$) and gender ($F(1,464) = 6.76$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .014$). Across all activities, females reported that it was more wrong to not get involved ($M = 2.35$) compared to males ($M = 1.93$). Obligation judgments for each of the civic involvement categories were also significantly different. Adolescents reported that it was most wrong to not engage in community service, followed by standard political, social movement, and community gathering. These main effects were qualified by significant gender × involvement type ($F(3,1390) = 2.93$, $p = .030$, $\eta^2 = .006$) and age group × involvement type interactions ($F(3,1390) = 3.45$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .014$). Compared to males, females rated community service as more obligatory ($t(465) = 3.92$, $p < .001$). Significant age differences also emerged for community service ($F(2, 464) = 4.76$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .017$) with middle adolescents rating community service as more obligatory than both early and late adolescents. The age groups also differed in their obligation judgments of community gathering activities ($F(2, 464) = 4.25$, $p = .020$, $\eta^2 = .015$) with late adolescents giving lower obligation judgments than both middle and early adolescents.

*Respect judgments*

Similar to the findings for the should and wrong judgments, significant main effects emerged for type of civic involvement ($F(3,1390) = 345.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .41$) and gender ($F(1,464) = 4.40$, $p = .036$, $\eta^2 = .009$). Across all activities, females gave higher respect ratings ($M = 3.55$) than males ($M = 3.42$). Respect judgments significantly differed for all involvement
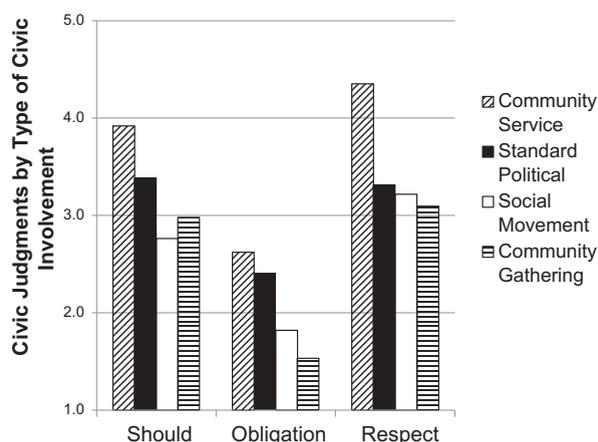


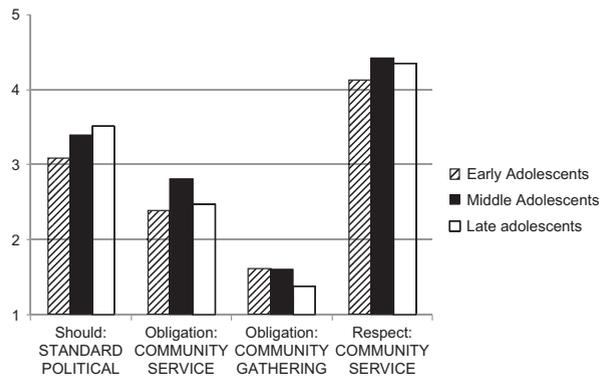Fig. 1. Means for adolescent judgments for each type of civic involvement.

**Fig. 2.** Age-group differences for adolescent civic judgments.

categories with community service receiving the highest respect ratings followed by standard political involvement, social movement involvement, and community gathering involvement. This main effect was qualified by an involvement type × age group interaction ($F(3,1390) = 3.11$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .015$). Significant age differences emerged for adolescent respect judgments of community service ($F(2, 464) = 4.32$, $p = .013$, $\eta^2 = .016$) with both middle adolescents and late adolescents allotting more respect for community service than early adolescents.

*Follow-up analyses*

The above mixed-model ANOVA's were re-run with parents' education as a covariate (including the 432 adolescents who reported parents' education). The above significant main effects, interactions, and follow-up analyses were unchanged indicating parents' education did not influence the pattern of findings.

## Discussion

Adolescence is a time of expanded responsibility, as individuals prepare for adult-level obligations including citizenship duties. The current study explored age and gender differences in adolescents' understanding of citizens' responsibility to actively participate in community and political activities. The current study points to considerable heterogeneity in adolescents' civic reasoning, as should, obligation, and respect judgments varied by civic involvement category, age group and gender. Though cross-sectional, the findings hint at domain-specific stability and change in adolescents' interpretation of civic responsibility.

Across all judgments, adolescents prioritized community service over other civic activities. Community service directly contributes to the physical and psychological welfare of others (e.g., feeding the homeless or helping community members affected by natural disasters), characteristics which are central to moral acts (Turiel, 2006). Although even young children understand that prosocial acts are discretionary (Kahn, 1992), they nevertheless view them as obligatory and prioritize positive moral activities (helping others) over other types of positive activities (Smetana, Bridgman, & Turiel, 1982). Similarly, community service is not compulsory based on rules/laws, but adolescents judged community service as highly necessary, obligatory, and worthy of social praise (respect).
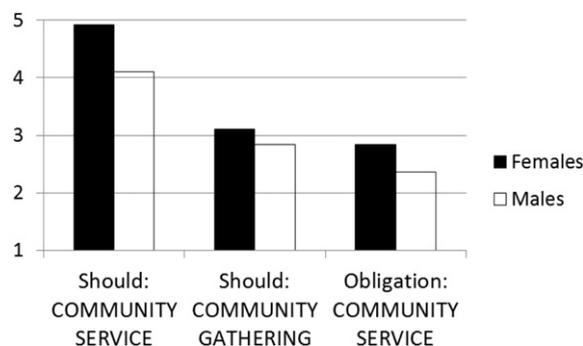


**Fig. 3.** Gender differences for adolescent civic judgments.

However, older adolescents rated community service as less obligatory than middle adolescents but more worthy of respect than early adolescents. Older adolescents' higher ratings of community service as morally worthy based on praise-worthiness is consistent with previous findings that prosocial moral reasoning increases with age (Eisenberg & Morris, 2004). However, social domain theory posits that individuals develop an understanding that some actions lie within the personal domain and are not regulated by conventional rules or moral concern (Nucci, 1996). Expanded autonomy development during adolescence may accelerate the intensity and range of personal reasoning (Smetana, 2011), leading older adolescents to recognize a wider array of behaviors (including prosocial acts) as lying outside of moral or conventional authority. The present findings may illustrate this tension. Older adolescents ascribed moral value in their favorable ratings of individuals who volunteer while increasingly acknowledging the discretionary nature of such morally worthy civic action. However, adolescents' prioritization of community service could also stem from their exposure to such involvement, as adolescents have opportunities to engage in community service, but may be less likely to engage in some political activities due to legal or other restrictions (adult-level political activities such as voting).

Adolescents also viewed standard political involvement as highly obligatory and worthy of respect. Standard political involvement includes more normative civic expectations or "conventional" forms of engagement. Voting is colloquially referred to as a "civic duty" and citizens are generally expected to know who their elected officials are and follow current political events. Standard political activities involve working within the existing political structure and are essential behaviors for citizens of a representative democracy (Levine & Lopez, 2002). Consistent with previous research (Metzger & Smetana, 2009), adolescents in the current study prioritized more conventional forms of political involvement over social movement involvement. The latter involves forms of civic activism designed to influence government actions and policies through engagement in public protests, distributing petitions, or writing letters to news outlets including blogs (Galston, 2001).

This prioritization of "conventional" involvement appears to increase with age, as late adolescents applied higher should ratings to standard political activities than early adolescents. Older high school students in the United States are generally enrolled in civics and government classes that specifically discuss democratic participation, including the organization of the United States government, voting, and political parties. Classroom exposure to these concepts may enhance beliefs concerning the importance of democratic participation (Galston, 2001). However, recent research has questioned the link between civic knowledge and civic activity (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007). Age-related increases in adolescents' conceptualization of standard political involvement may also stem from accumulated political socialization from family (Jennings, 2002) or mass media (Zaff et al., 2010).

Adolescents also experience significant normative cognitive transformations (Steinberg & Morris, 2001) and enhancements in social-cognitive understanding (Smetana, 2006) including advancements in conventional reasoning (Turiel, 2006). Young children view social conventions as random and capricious, but adolescents come to view conventional regulations as vital for coordinating interpersonal interactions and helping society to operate efficiently (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Older adolescents may understand that standard political involvement is necessary for societal institutions to function and that participation in the political process is part of citizens' shared responsibility. The fact that older adolescents did not rate standard political involvement as more worthy of social praise (as they did with community service) indicates adolescents' growing understanding of political responsibility may primarily entail development of conventional rather than moral evaluations.

Interestingly, adolescents' judgments of community gathering activities, such as attending community events or belonging to community social clubs also illustrated domain-specific and multi-dimensional civic reasoning. Although not civic engagement per se, theorists have argued such activities are both proxies for active engagement (Putnam, 2000) and also furnish individuals with social connections that are hypothesized to encourage and support civic activity (Zaff et al., 2010). However, adolescents did not view community gathering activities as obligatory or socially praiseworthy compared to other civic activities. Additionally, late adolescents viewed engagement in such activities as less obligatory than early and middle adolescents. Increased autonomy development and the expansion of personal reasoning during adolescence (Smetana, 2002), may culminate in older adolescents viewing as optional those civic activities which do not contribute to human welfare or the conventional social order.

Contrary to hypotheses, gender did not moderate age-group differences in adolescents' civic judgments. Instead, gender main effects emerged, which varied by civic involvement category. Adolescent girls and boys appear to prioritize different civic behaviors but exhibit similar developmental and domain-specific shifts in civic judgments. Future research should explore whether gender differences in civic reasoning emerge at an earlier age, as even young boys are more interested in politics and more likely to use the internet for political participation than same-age girls (Cicognani et al., 2012).

The gender main effects were generally consistent with previous research, as girls gave higher should and obligation judgments of community service than did boys (Metzger & Smetana, 2009). Though gender differences in general moral reasoning are generally small to negligible (Walker, 2006), the types of prosocial activities emphasized by boys and girls may differ (Eagly, 2009). Girls score higher on measures of prosocial attitudes than boys, which could lead them to prioritize activities which focus on helping others (Eisenberg, Carlo, Murphy, & Van Court, 1995). Consistent with this theorizing, girls also gave higher should judgments for community gathering activities than did boys. Girls are slightly more care-oriented than boys (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000) and tend to emphasize prioritize behaviors that are communal and relational (Eagly, 2009), which may lead to a heightened appreciation for public events that enhance community connectedness. Alternatively, girls could more clearly distinguish community service from political activities, potentially viewing politics as a "male" activity (Mayer & Schmidt, 2004). Adult women state less interest in politics and a lower willingness to be directly involved in

the political process compared to men (Burns, 2007). Girls' prioritization of community service may also stem from civically-active adult role models, as adult women prefer volunteer work because they are more confident in their abilities to make "micro-level" changes to their communities; men show greater interested in institutional politics (Hooghe & Stolle, 2004). Additionally, parents may differentially communicate the importance of specific forms of involvement to boys and girls within political discussions (Mayer & Schmidt, 2004).

These gender differences may have implications for adult civic participation. Political theorists have cautioned that the education system's current focus on service learning shifted attention away from political participation, and girls may especially be vulnerable to patterns of civic learning that highlight service or volunteering rather than political answers to social problems (Walker, 2000, 2002). These findings also have implications for the ways in which civic opportunities are structured and promoted. The reinforcement of traditional masculine values, including leadership, and feminine traits, such as nurture and care, may influence boys to prioritize justice-oriented types of civic engagement, specifically standard political activities, and encourage girls to pursue care-oriented activities, including community service.

Findings from the current study need to be interpreted in light of its limitations. Self-reports are susceptible to social desirability biases (especially for measures of moral reasoning and prosocial phenomena such as civic engagement) and lead to shared method variance issues. Cross-sectional data cannot directly explore developmental change and is suspect to cohort effects (Baltes, Reese, & Nesselroade, 1988). Age (or grade) is only a proxy or marker for developmental processes (Wohlwill, 1970). Measurement equivalence across grade groups could also be an issue (Labouvie, 1980) though this concern is mitigated by the fact that age-group differences were domain-specific, not across categories. Although measures were adapted from established civic measures and were piloted on late and early adolescents, younger adolescents may not be acquainted with or understand all civic involvement items. However, trained research team members were present to answer participant questions. The age groups (similar to those used in previous research) had unequal *n*'s, but analyses indicated that variability was equivalent across age groups (homogeneity of variance). The current sample was comprised of White youth from a small United States town, so findings may not generalize to adolescents in other countries, urban areas, or communities with greater ethnic and racial heterogeneity. Finally, the present analyses included multiple post hoc tests to assess pairwise comparisons and disaggregate significant interactions. Although corrected *p*-values were used for these post hoc tests, problems stemming from multiple tests (Type I error) may have arisen.

Despite these limitations, the current study highlights the potential for social-cognitive research to further our understanding of civic development. Developmental researchers have become increasingly interested in the ways in which individuals acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for citizenship (Sherrod et al., 2010). An informed and engaged populous is critical for democracies to function efficiently (Flanagan & Faison, 2002), but membership in the civic order is also an essential aspect of adult life and a fundamental component of social and moral identity (Yates & Youniss, 1996). Thus, beyond benefiting democratic societies, established citizenship represents an essential, though under-studied individual developmental outcome (Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2008). Much research has focused on behaviors and values (Zaff, Malanchuk, & Eccles, 2008), but civic engagement also includes related prosocial attitudes, beliefs, and cognitions (Bobek, Zaff, Yibing, & Lerner, 2009; Flanagan, 2003; Ruck & Peterson-Badali, 2006). There has also been an increase in recent efforts to map out comprehensive theories of citizenship development (Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009; Zaff et al., 2010). Adolescents' civic beliefs and attitudes are central though under-studied components of these theories. Individual differences in civic beliefs may also help to explain variation in adult engagement, as nascent feelings of civic duty and community responsibility are hypothesized to motivate later civic participation (Metzger & Smetana, 2010). The present study's use of multiple social and moral judgments indicates that adolescents' understanding of civic responsibility may develop in complex, domain-specific ways.

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