Civic Participation Profiles and Predictors Among French-Canadian Youths Transitioning into Adulthood: A Person-Centered Study

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Author's Note

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Abstract

How do young adults get involved in community and political life and what distinguishes those who are engaged from those who are not? In an attempt to answer these questions, the current study examines civic participation (CP) profiles, and their predictors, among 311 French-Canadian youths transitioning into adulthood. Latent Class Analysis (LCA) and multinomial logistic regressions were performed. Four CP profiles were identified: *unengaged* (N = 198; 64%), *political specialists* (N = 47; 15%), *community service specialists* (N = 31; 10%) and *dual activists* (N = 35; 11%). Higher civic attitudes, altruistic orientation, political attentiveness and educational aspirations predicted active CP profile membership. Implications for future research are discussed.

Keywords

Civic development, community service, political involvement, latent class analysis, transition to adulthood

The transition to adulthood is known to be an important period for identity formation (Erikson, 1968). Young adults' availability for civic involvement among youths transitioning into adulthood is debated in the literature. Proponents of the *life cycle* perspective (e.g., Kinder, 2006) argue that young adults are busy negotiating transitions in many areas of their lives as they explore educational, vocational, social and residential opportunities and that such institutional and social instability make them less available for civic engagement. They also propose that stable patterns of civic participation take hold once individuals have settled into steady adult roles (e.g., stable employment, marriage, parenthood) and that these roles provide a predictable structure that both increases opportunities for recruitment in civic initiatives and facilitates regular engagement in community affairs.

Conversely, other authors argue that adults may actually be more available to engage in civic actions when they are young, as they do not yet bear the time-consuming responsibilities of parenthood or full-time employment (Arnett, 2000). Moreover, they point out that young adulthood is an ideal time for moral and political identity formation as this life-stage is characterized by openness to experience and tolerance, being a time when youths are exposed to a diverse social network likely to challenge their individual worldviews (Alwin, Cohen & Newcomb, 1991; Nunez & Flanagan, 2015). Some authors also hold that the transition to adulthood can provide unique institutional opportunities for engagement, especially for those involved in higher education (Hillygus, 2005; Flanagan & Levine, 2010). All of these theories may hold some truth. Young adults' availability for civic involvement may vary depending on their life context and personal resources. Moreover, as they transition into adulthood, the extent and ways in which they get involved are likely to be heterogeneous given the variety of civic actions available to them, such as voting, canvassing, protesting or serving on community

committees, etc. (Finlay, Flanagan & Wray-Lake, 2010). In light of these considerations, recent studies have sought to conceptualize civic participation (CP), leading to refinements in its measurement and greater interest in the use of person-centered analyses.

Conceptualization of civic participation and use of person-centered analyses

CP is a component of civic engagement (CE), which is widely defined by the APA (2012) as " individual and collective actions aiming to identify and address issues of public concern." While CE is a broad concept encompassing civic duty and efficacy beliefs, civic knowledge/skills and CP (Moely, Mercer, Ilustre, Miron & MacFarland, 2002; Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner & Lerner, 2010), CP itself refers essentially to the behavioral component of CE. Most scholars differentiate CP subtypes according to the domain of the activity's intended influence, creating categories such as political involvement and community service (Ekman & Amna, 2012) or contrasting standard political behaviors (e.g., voting) and social movement behaviors (e.g., protest; e.g., Metzger & Smetana, 2009). Consequently, many specialists have moved from broad one-dimensional CP indicators to more sophisticated CP typologies (e.g., Keeter, Zukin, Andolina & Jenkins, 2002). Specialists are also increasingly relying on well-informed person-centered analytical tools to better capture the form(s) and breadth of individual involvement, although current knowledge of CP trends among youths relies on variable-centered analytic designs (e.g., multiple regression, latent growth curve modeling). Variable-centered methods produce average estimates across many participants but cannot identify groups of young people displaying specific patterns of participation (type, intensity, diversity, etc.). Person-centered analyses, on the other hand, can help identify subgroups of individuals showing similar trends (von Eve & Bogat, 2006).

To our knowledge, only three studies have investigated CP profiles among emerging adults using person-centered designs (Finlay, Flanagan & Wray-Lake, 2011; Weerts, Cabrera & Pérez-Meijas, 2014; Johnson, Agans, Weiner & Lerner, 2014). Although the conceptualization and measurement of CP differed slightly within these studies, they all identified three to four CP profiles: an unengaged profile, at least one profile characterized by one form of participation (e.g., mainly community service, traditional political involvement, etc.), and a profile characterized by more frequent and more diversified involvement. The proportion of youths assigned to each profile fluctuated from one study to another, although the group of youths involved in a greater diversity of civic actions was always smaller.

While these studies shed light on the distribution of civic involvement tendencies among young adults using rigorous person-centered analytical tools, it is worth noting that they were all conducted in the U.S. Given that previous cross-cultural variable-centered designs have brought out cultural differences in understandings of what it means to be an engaged citizen (Goering, 2013), as well as in the nature and prevalence of some forms of CP (Helliwell, 1996; Jahromi, Crocetti & Buchanan, 2012), the previous results gathered from American samples cannot be generalized to other countries. Furthermore, the participants were recruited in college (except for Finlay et al., 2011). Given that civic engagement is typically higher among young adults enrolled in college compared to their peers (Zaff, Youniss & Gibson, 2009), the frequency and diversity of CP are likely to be higher in these samples compared to the general population. Further person-centered research involving emerging adults from different cultural backgrounds and various occupational/academic contexts is therefore needed to properly map and differentiate CP profiles across youth populations. Another issue is that very little is known regarding the individual and

contextual attributes that may predict distinctive CP profiles among youths, as most of the knowledge on CP predictors also derives from variable-centered designs.

Overview of attributes associated with civic participation and civic profiles among youths

Flanagan and Levine (2010) identify two main sets of factors that contribute to differences in CP during the transition to adulthood. They suggest that both individual attributes nurtured over the long term since the early developmental years (e.g., character-related dispositions) and circumstantial contextual attributes (e.g., institutional opportunities provided by the specific educational, employment and civil institutions accessible to or selected by each person) may explain a significant portion of variance in CP and be associated with different CP profiles during the transition to adulthood.

With regard to individual attributes, researchers have sought to assess whether and to what extent attitudinal dispositions foster CP among youths. These dispositions have been examined under many names. Lawford, Pratt, Hunsberger and Pancer (2005) found a positive relationship between *generative concern* (the tendency to consciously care about the well-being of future generations) and community service among Canadian young adults. Johnson et al. (2014) showed that *contribution ideology* (a value orientation marking the extent to which contribution to self, family, community and society is important) was a strong predictor of active civic engagement. Vézina and Poulin (2019) reported positive relationships between *civic commitment attitudes* (the extent to which individuals value civic duty), *altruistic orientation* (the extent to which individuals feel empathy, compassion and concern for others and believe they would provide assistance in various situations) and higher and sustained CP trajectories. Lerner (2018) also details the ways in which *Character* (attributes of an individual's relations within his or her social context, involving coherently "doing the right thing" morally and behaviorally

across time and place to provide mutually positive benefits to both self and others) fosters CP. In fact, he considers *Character* to be the foundation on which a young person's civic engagement and community contributions are built.

Previous studies have also shown other attitudinal dispositions such as political attentiveness (i.e., things people do to follow and stay current with political and newsworthy happenings; Keeter et al., 2002) and academic aspirations to be related to concurrent and prospective CP. Geissel (2008) examined which psychological indicators were more consistent with the ideal citizen, defined as "a citizen who participates, is well-informed, identifies with democracy and politics, has good internal efficacy and is willing to defend democracy." Her data revealed that political attentiveness was the key factor promoting civic engagement. According to other studies, political attentiveness appears to increase political knowledge and civic efficacy beliefs, which, in turn, appear to increase CP (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; McLeod, Scheufele & Moy, 1999). Nonetheless, the effect of political attentiveness on CP profiles has not, to date, been examined. As suggested by Barrett & Brunton-Smith (2014), further investigation is needed to elucidate its role. Syvertsen, Wray-Lake and Flanagan (2011) also emphasized the importance of examining how educational aspirations contribute to CP. These authors pointed out that youths who are not inclined toward higher education often share similar disadvantaged demographics (e.g., less educated parents, poorer neighborhoods; Verba, Burns & Schlozman, 2003) while those who plan to attend college are more likely to come from financially stable families, have college-educated parents and benefit from greater opportunities and encouragement to participate in the civic arena (Ellwood & Kahne, 2000).

With regard to contextual attributes, some authors argue that the institutional opportunities provided by higher education and/or work networks may nurture CP among youths.

First, proponents of the *life cycle* perspective have theorized that stable patterns of civic engagement are more likely to be established once individuals have settled into steady adult roles, such as full-time employment (Kinder, 2006). Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) suggested that social learning mechanisms in the work environment may also play a role, observing that social settings (e.g., the workplace) serve as important networks for recruitment through the imitation and internalization of social expectations, such as when individuals see their coworkers getting involved in politics. Participation in the workplace may also provide unique opportunities to develop civic skills (e.g., perspective taking, organizational and communication skills) and become acquainted with roles related to social and political participation, which may, in turn, strengthen an individual's sense of political efficacy and foster active engagement (Adman, 2008).

Second, findings stemming from the civic education and social network hypotheses (Nie, Junn & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993) also suggest that higher education may provide unique opportunities for recruitment into civic life. Previous studies have indeed found that young adults with college experience tend to be more civically engaged than their peers who do not attend college (Lopez, Levine, Both, Kiesa, Kirby & Marcelo, 2006; Syvertsen et al., 2011). Although they are still unsettled, higher education may provide these youths with specific knowledge and skills that lessen the cost of participation (civic education hypothesis; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993) and/or allow them to develop relationships within politically important networks, promoting extended involvement (social network hypothesis; Nie et al., 1996). Taken together, these theories suggest that young people are more likely to become civically engaged when they are in settings such as workplaces, schools and informed community organizations

where they are provided with opportunities for engagement and encouraged to become more knowledgeable about collective issues and to take action on them.

While a growing body of variable-centered research has documented the effect of several individual and contextual attributes on CP in general, very few studies have explored how these attributes relate to specific CP profiles (i.e., Finlay et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2014; Wray-Lake et al., 2016). Overall, these latter studies found that educational variables such as college attendance, academic engagement, prior engagement in a community program and experiencing a climate of respect on one's college campus were predictive of membership in either a *voting involved* or *highly committed profile* (Finlay et al., 2011; Wray-Lake et al., 2016). Some results suggested that attitudinal attributes may also exert an influence on future CP. Specifically, Johnson et al. (2014) found higher contribution ideology to be predictive of membership in a *highly involved* profile.

In summary, some contextual attributes (related to educational status and engagement) and individual dispositions (e.g., contribution ideology) have been examined in relation to CP profiles. However, the relationship between CP profiles and other pertinent contextual attributes (e.g., employment status) and individual attributes (e.g., academic aspirations, political attentiveness) have not been empirically tested. Furthermore, the differential contribution of distinctive attitudinal dispositions (e.g., civic attitudes, altruistic orientation) when it comes to predicting CP profiles also remains unknown. Given that several specialists have previously theorized that individual attributes may be the most powerful predictors of civic identity among young adults (Vráblíková & Císař, 2015; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Johnson et al., 2014; Lerner, 2018), it appeared essential to include these variables in our design. Finally, the predictive effects of the aforementioned contextual and individual attributes on CP profile membership have never

been examined simultaneously within a single model. Doing so may provide key information on their relative contribution and allow scholars to determine which set of predictors fosters actively engaged profiles of CP.

Study aims

The current study aimed to (1) identify civic participation profiles among a sample of French-Canadian youths transitioning into adulthood (age 20), based on the specific CP subtypes (i.e., community service and/or political involvement) and number of CP subtypes (0, 1, 2) in which they were engaged, and (2) examine the predictive effect of both individual attributes (altruistic orientation, civic commitment attitudes, academic aspirations, political attentiveness) and contextual attributes (educational status, main occupation – education vs. employment), assessed one year earlier, on CP profile membership.

Methodology

Participants

Participants were drawn from an ongoing longitudinal study that initially aggregated 390 sixth-grade students from eight different schools in a large school board in suburban area north of Montreal (Canada). Approximately 75 % of the available student population participated in this study. These participants then took part in a longitudinal follow-up study. Over the course of this longitudinal study, we lost track of some participants who had moved away, while others decided to withdraw from the study. At age 19, participants were contacted and 311 (62% female) agreed to participate. These participants are considered representative of the area, being mainly Caucasian (90%) and French-speaking (100%). At age 19, 55.78% were enrolled in an academic stream at junior college, 11.56% were enrolled in a technical program at junior college, 4.08% were still in high school and 28.57% were no longer studying. Mean comparisons revealed that the sub-sample did not differ from the 25% remaining participants involved in the first data collection point with regards to baseline sociodemographic indicators (parents' education,

annual family income before taxation, family structure, gender, and ethnicity). The data were collected at two time points, one year apart. Predictor variables were measured when the participants were 19 years old and CP indicators were assessed at age 20. Missing data points on the items selected to measure both the predictor variables (3.56% at age 19) and civic indicators (2.40% at age 20) were estimated performing multiple imputations (MI), as recommended for epidemiological and longitudinal studies (Asendorpf, van de Shoot, Denissen, & Hutterman, 2014; Sterne et al., 2009).

Procedure

Assessments were carried out annually during the spring through self-reported questionnaires. Participants' written consent was provided each year. Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the authors' university.

Measures

Civic participation profiles – age 20

Civic participation was assessed using fourteen items from Keeter et al.'s 2002 survey entitled *The civic and political health of the nation*, which, based on their own classification, included six items tapping community service-related actions and eight items tapping political actions (see Table 2 for description of items). Participants were asked to rate how often they had performed each community service-related/political action during the previous year on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often,* 5 = *nearly always*). While conducting our exploratory analyses, we noted that a disproportionally large number of participants reported no involvement across the fourteen items, a condition commonly referred to as a *preponderance of zero values* (Kreuter, 2004; Olsen & Schafer, 2001; Muthén, 2001). This condition prevented the use of the five anchors, given the low variance among the four remaining anchors. Consequently, we collapsed the five anchors into three: 1 = *never,* 2 = *rarely/sometimes* and 3 = *often/nearly always*.

Sociodemographic control variables

Socioeconomic status. Participants were asked the following question: "Considering all your sources of income, what is your total income for the current year? "

Gender. Gender was coded 1 for female and 2 for male.

Predictors of civic participation profile membership – age 19

Civic commitment attitudes. Six items from Flanagan, Jonsson, Botcheva, Csapo, Bowes, Macek et al. (1999) were used to assess whether participants considered it important to contribute to their community and to society as a whole (e.g., "doing something to improve my community"). Their responses were coded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *very important*. Participants' mean score for all six items was computed (a = .88).

Altruistic orientation. Altruistic orientation was assessed using six items (e.g., "In the future, I would be willing to work fewer hours and earn a lower income if it created jobs for unemployed people") from Greenberger and Bond's Psychosocial Maturity Inventory (1976). Participants' responses were coded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Participants' mean score for all six items was computed (Cronbach alpha = .86).

Educational aspirations. Participants were asked to rate their educational aspirations on a five-point scale where 1 = *high school diploma*, 2 = *high school vocational program*, 3 = junior *college technical program*, 4 = *undergraduate studies* and 5 = *graduate studies*.

Political attentiveness. Participants were asked to rate how often they had followed public/political affairs in the news during the previous year on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always or nearly always*.

Educational status. Participants were asked to specify their current educational status on a four-point scale where 0 = *not currently studying*, 1 = *high school*, 2 = *junior college, technical program* and 3 = *junior college, academic stream*.

Main occupation. Participants were asked to indicate whether they were involved in a full-time academic program. If so, their main occupation was coded as *education* (2). Youths who were not currently subscribed full-time in school were asked if they were working (full-time or part-time). If so, their main occupation was coded as *work* (1). Finally, other occupations (e.g., on maternity leave, on sabatical) was coded as *other* (0).

Data analytic strategy

Step 1. Latent Class Analyses (LCA; Muthén & Muthén, 2000) were performed to investigate whether, and if so, how many civic participation profiles could be identified. These analyses were conducted using MPlus 6 software. The six community service indicators and eight political action indicators from Keeter et al.'s survey (2002) were included as dependent variables. Indicators were treated as ordinal variables in the analyses due to the Likert-type response options. Participants' responses to the fourteen items were the criteria on which class membership was based. The optimal classification model was determined by fitting a series of models, with a different number of classes specified in each model, and subsequently comparing overall model fit indices, certainty of classification, parsimony and interpretability. The Akaike Information Criteria (AIC), Bayesian Information Criteria (BIC) and Sample-size-adjusted BIC (SaBIC) were used to gauge model fit. The Lo-Mendell-Rubin likelihood ratio test (LMR) was performed to determine whether improvements in model fit were significant by testing the null hypothesis that a k - 1 class model fit as well as a k class model. The certainty of classification was assessed using the Entropy values.

Step 2. To account for the potential effect of two sociodemographic variables (gender and socioeconomic status) on civic engagement, univariate multinomial logistic regressions were performed with IBM SPSS Statistics 21, since previous studies have shown both gender and socioeconomic status to contribute to predicting civic engagement rates (Lechner, Pavlova, Sortheix, Silbereisen & Salmera-Aro, 2017; Malin, Tirri & Liauw, 2015). Next, the contextual and individual predictors of civic participation profile membership were examined using a set of multinomial logistic regressions. First, univariate multinomial logistic regressions were performed to identify the selective effect of each predictor variable on civic participation profile membership. Then, all significant predictors were included in a final multivariate model to examine their relative contributions.

Results

Latent Class Model Selection

LCA models with two-, three-, four-, five- and six- class solutions were compared to identify the best fitting model. Each model iteration used 100 random starting values. Fit statistics are reported in Table 1. The LMR *p*-value was not significant for the three- four- and five-class solutions, indicating that none of these solutions significantly improved the data fit when compared to the previously tested solution. However, it should be noted that the LMR test does not assess whether solutions involving a higher number of classes provide more substantive and theoretically interpretable models – which is why other indices (i.e., information criteria) must also be taken into consideration. Indeed, in contrast to the LMR, incremental decreases in the AIC, BIC and SaBIC values combined with continuous increases in the Entropy values between the two- and four-class solutions suggested an improvement in fit as the number of classes grew, until reaching the five- and six-class solutions. Then, conversely, the AIC, BIC and

SaBIC values increased and the Entropy values dropped between the four- and five-class solutions and the six-class solution did not converge in the end. With regard to the two additional qualitative criteria (i.e., parsimony and interpretability), the four-class solution also appeared to be the most parsimonious and most theoretically interpretable. Thus, the fit indices (except the LMR) and entropy values as well as the parsimony and interpretability criteria provided consistent evidence that the four-class model showed the best overall fit.

Means and standard deviations for all community service and political indicators included in the LCA for each profile are presented in Table 2, with the superscripts 1 and 2 in bold characters respectively identifying the profiles exhibiting the highest and second highest mean scores for all indicators, compared to the means of the other profiles. The four latent profiles were assigned the following interpretation labels based on these descriptive data: unengaged (UN), political specialists (PS), community service specialists (CS) and dual activists (DA). Over half the sample was assigned to the UN profile (N = 198; 64%), composed of youths who displayed the lowest frequency of involvement in all the community service-related/political actions listed in the questionnaire. By comparison, participants assigned to the PS profile (N = 47; 15%) showed a relatively high frequency of participation in political actions (e.g., voting, protesting, discussing political issues) while remaining mostly inactive in the community sphere. Participants assigned to the CS profile (N = 35; 10%) displayed the opposite pattern of involvement, reporting a higher frequency of participation in community actions (e.g., non-political volunteering, membership in a community club/organization, giving goods to charity organizations) and weaker engagement in political actions. Finally, participants assigned to the DA profile (N = 31; 11%) displayed the highest frequency of involvement in both community service-related and political actions.

Predictors of civic participation profile membership

Univariate multinomial regressions revealed that neither gender $X^2(3, N=311) = 1.34$, N.S. nor socioeconomic status $X^2(3, N=311) = 3.48$, N.S. predicted CP profile membership. Therefore, these variables were not considered in the subsequent analyses. As for both the individual and contextual predictors examined in relation to the CP profiles, frequencies, mean scores and standard deviations are presented by profile in Table 3. Univariate multinomial logistic regressions were performed to bring out the unique effect of each predictor on profile membership, and these results are also reported in Table 3. The four significant predictor variables were then tested simultaneously in a multivariate model. All four variables remained significant predictors of profile membership. A detailed account of the results is presented in Table 4. Specifically, (1) youths who reported higher educational aspirations (i.e., university undergraduate and graduate studies) were more likely to be assigned to the PS profile than to the UN [β=.69(.34), $p<.05$], CS [β=.27(.18), $p<.05$] or DA profile [β=.76(.48), $p<.05$]; (2) youths who exhibited a higher altruistic orientation were more likely to be assigned to the PS profile than to the UN profile [β=.68(.31), $p<.05$] and to be assigned to the DA profile than to either the UN [β= 1.09(.47), $p<.05$] or CS profile [β=.97(.55), $p<.05$]; (3) youths who displayed higher civic commitment attitudes were more likely to be assigned to the PS profile than to the UN profile [β=.63(.29), $p<.05$] and to be assigned to the DA profile than to either the UN [β=.51(.29), $p<.05$] or CS profile [β=.25(.16), $p<.05$]; and finally, (4) youths who showed higher political attentiveness were more likely to be assigned to the PS profile than to either the UN [β=.61(.15), $p<.001$] or CS profile [β=.66(.21), $p<.001$] and to be assigned to the DA profile than to either the UN [β=.64(.20), $p<.001$] or CS profile [β=.69(.24), $p<.01$].

Discussion

Heterogeneity of civic participation expressed in profile composition

Given the active debate – addressed in our introduction and further detailed in previous studies (e.g., Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Hirshorn & Settersen, 2013) – regarding the availability of emerging adults for civic involvement as well as the dearth of person-centered study designs targeting CP among non-American and non-college bound youths, we examined how heterogeneity in civic development was expressed in a French-Canadian non-college bound sample by identifying CP profiles. Consistent with previous studies conducted in the U.S., four civic participation profiles emerged, referred to as the (1) unengaged (UN; 64%), (2) political specialists (PS; 15%), (3) community service specialists (CS; 10%) and dual activists (DA; 11%) profiles. The profile composition and distribution rates appeared to share similarities with some of the profiles previously identified by other research teams in the U.S. (Finlay et al., 2011; Weerts et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2014). As expected, the UN profile was the most prevalent, comprising two thirds of our sample.

Summary of profile-related attributes

We also took a closer look at the ways in which both the individual attributes (i.e., civic commitment attitudes, altruistic orientation, political attentiveness and academic aspirations) and contextual attributes (i.e., main occupation and educational status) selected as potential predictors differentiated the profiles that emerged. Following preliminary analyses, only the four individual attributes, namely civic commitment attitudes, altruistic orientation, political attentiveness and academic aspirations, were included in the final model. Nonetheless, interesting contrasts were found between the four profiles.

First, the UN profile stands out as that in which the participants displayed significantly lower levels of both *Character*-related dispositions (e.g., civic commitment, altruistic orientation) and political attentiveness compared to the two profiles involving formal political involvement (i.e., the PS and DA profiles). However, no attribute differences were found between the UN profile and CS profile. These results are intriguing given that engagement in community service, while less formal than institutionalized political involvement, still requires time and a disposition to work in close collaboration with members of the community. Since the CS profile comprised only 10% of our sample, we may have lacked the numbers to capture potential differences with regard to individual attributes. However, it is also likely that other variables (not included in our study design) exerted a greater influence on the participants' decision to engage in community service during the transition to adulthood. For example, previous studies have discussed how other attitudinal dispositions such as higher civic efficacy beliefs (Manganelli, Lucidi & Alivernini, 2015) and contextual factors such as active citizenship norms or the social capital gained from family, friends and educational/professional networks (Napucu, 2011) promote engagement in community service among youths. It would be useful for future research to examine these attributes in relation to CP profiles.

Second, the PS profile appeared to be the most distinctive of all with regard to the four attributes considered. Members of this profile reported higher *Character*-related dispositions (e.g., civic commitment and altruistic orientation) than members of the UN profile. They also displayed higher political attentiveness than members of both the UN and CS profiles. Finally, they reported higher educational aspirations than members of all other three profiles. These results suggest that the attributes we selected may be more closely related to various forms of political involvement among youths transitioning into adulthood. Third, the CS profile was the

hardest to pin down in terms of the attributes that differentiated it from the other profiles. As mentioned above, no attribute differences were found between this profile and the UN profile. Moreover, the significant contrasts that emerged between the CS and DA profiles with regard to civic commitment attitudes, altruistic orientation and political attentiveness were unspecific, since these same contrasts were found between the DA and UN profiles. Furthermore, aside from educational aspirations, which were generally higher among members of the PS profile compared to those of the other three profiles, only slightly lower levels of political attentiveness differentiated the CS profile from the PS profile.

Lastly, members of the DA profile differed a great deal from members of the UN and CS profiles, but not in very specific ways, as they displayed significantly higher *Character*-related dispositions (i.e., civic commitment attitudes and altruistic orientation) as well as higher political attentiveness than members of these profiles. In theoretical terms, we also expected members of the DA profile to differ from members of the PS profile. We predicted that attitudinal dispositions closely related to Lerner's concept of *Character* (Lerner, 2004; 2018) might be particularly strong among participants assigned to the most actively engaged profile, as this profile was characterized by the most diversified CP and was likely to require greater time, flexibility and commitment. Given that the DA profile was a small group (11%), we may, once again, have lacked the numbers to capture potentially higher levels of both civic commitment attitudes and altruistic orientation among its members, although the raw results were indeed slightly higher for this profile (see Table 3). Nonetheless, as suggested earlier, it is also plausible that other attributes (not included in this study) may have exerted a greater influence on the participants' decision to engage in community service and political actions during the transition to adulthood.

Effect of context and attitudinal dispositions

Throughout this research, we were curious to discover which of the main sets of predictors suggested by Flanagan and Levine (2010) would most contribute to predicting CP profile membership in our sample – circumstantial predictors related to occupational and educational contexts (i.e., main occupation and educational status) or individual dispositions related to *Character* and personal ambitions (i.e., civic commitment attitudes, altruistic orientation, political attentiveness and academic aspirations).

Univariate analyses quickly ruled out the contextual attributes selected. Contrasting with the *life cycle* theory (Kinder, 2006) and previous U.S. research, full-time employment at age 19 was not predictive of membership in the active civic participation profile. Since very few studies have attempted to empirically investigate the *life cycle* hypothesis, potential explanations for our findings remain speculative and call for caution. Nevertheless, it has previously been shown that the relationship between an individual's employment status and civic/political participation can vary a great deal depending on the form of participation in question (Lorenzini & Giugni, 2012). The impact of work networks on community service and political involvement has also been found to be mediated by the differing viewpoints to which individuals are exposed in their work settings (Scheufele, Nisbet, Brossard & Nisbet, 2004). Thus, the impact of full-time employment on community service and political involvement may vary according to the specific nature of the community service-related/political actions engaged in by youths as well as the breadth of differing viewpoints to which they are exposed in their work settings.

Also, contrary to previous findings, our results revealed that educational status at age 19 was not predictive of civic participation profile membership at age 20. Although previous studies have shown higher educational status to be linked to greater civic involvement (Lopez et al.,

2006; Syvertsen et al., 2011), recent studies have revealed that the encouragement and opportunities for civic learning provided by colleges appear to vary widely (Barnhardt, Sheets & Pasquesi, 2015). Thus, compared to their counterparts, students who pursue higher education may not always be more highly sensitized, encouraged or assisted when it comes to civic involvement. The extent to which college impacts a student's civic engagement levels has also been shown to differ depending on the academic program chosen (e.g., education vs. math or business program; Ishitani & McKitrick, 2013). Moreover, given that youths' educational and occupational statuses are known to evolve at a rapid pace during the transition to adulthood (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Johnson et al., 2014), a single time-point measure may not have been the most robust way to assess these factors and may have failed to capture the intricacies of their respective relationships with CP profile membership. Finally, other findings have also suggested that the relationship between higher education and civic participation may, in fact, result from a selection effect and be better explained by pre-existing characteristics, such as favorable family background, greater social capital or higher cognitive skills (Berinsky & Lenz, 2010; Kam & Palmer, 2008).

With regard to attitudinal attributes, our results show that civic commitment attitudes and altruistic orientation best predicted membership in the profiles characterized by active engagement and, more specifically, the two profiles entailing political involvement (i.e., the PS and DA profiles). These results are consistent with previous findings (Boulianne, 2016; Lopez et al., 2006; Vézina & Poulin, 2019) revealing that youths who hold stronger civic and altruistic attitudes are more likely to engage in actions that are congruent with these attitudes (i.e., civic and political actions). Lerner (2018) recently posited that *Character*-related dispositions (e.g., contribution ideology, generative concern, civic commitment attitudes, altruistic orientation) may be the foundation of youths' positive development and thus lead to greater civic involvement.

The results obtained for our sample partially support this stance, although it appears that the attributes spurring engagement in community service may be different ones, since members of the CS profile did not differ from those of the UN profile with regard to either civic commitment attitudes or altruistic orientation.

Other attitudinal dispositions – political attentiveness and educational aspirations – were also found to be related to membership in the profiles characterized by active engagement (i.e., the PS and DA profiles). Regarding the positive effect of political attentiveness at age 19, it is believed that an interest in and focus on collective issues promotes youths' civic knowledge and awareness of other viewpoints as well as existing opportunities for involvement in civic/political causes, which may then drive and facilitate their civic/political participation (Semetko, Holli & Patti, 1998). Finally, consistent with Syvertsen et al. (2011), we found that youths who exhibited higher educational aspirations at age 19 were more likely to be assigned to the PS profile than to the UN profile. In line with social capital theory (Coleman, 1988), it is believed that youths who plan to obtain a college degree may have greater opportunities and receive more encouragement for civic involvement at home and at school (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008), and benefit more than other youths from various forms of social capital (Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011). Previous studies have also shown that youths who display higher institutional trust (i.e., belief that societal institutions such as colleges will generally operate in ways that are beneficial rather than detrimental to them) are more likely to engage in formal political actions (Torney-Purta, Barber & Richardson, 2004).

Strengths, limitations and future research directions

Despite the strengths of this study (i.e., a mixed sample including both full-time workers and youths involved in higher education, the combined examination of individual and contextual

predictors, the inclusion of gender and SES as control variables), there were several notable limitations. First, the CP measure used to identify the profiles at age 20 was not exhaustive. Some important and frequent civic and political actions such as online activism, volunteering for a political party, canvassing, or publicly expressing opinions on sociopolitical issues were not tapped by our CP questionnaire and were thus not considered. Therefore, the high prevalence of unengaged youths in our sample (66%) should be interpreted with caution, as CP could be underestimated overall. Furthermore, Keeter et al.'s questionnaire was developed by specialists in the U.S. and there is no existing French version. Therefore, we used the services of a professional translator but the French version of the questionnaire was not validated. Also, while our sample size was adequate for performing person-centered analyses, it was nevertheless small. This may have somewhat impacted the results. For example, very few participants were assigned to the CS (10%) and DA (11%) profiles and we may thus have lacked statistical power to capture differences in terms of how these profiles related to some of the individual and contextual attributes considered. We are also aware that our findings regarding the relative contribution of contextual attributes pertaining to institutional involvement (education, work) when it comes to predicting CP profile membership remain limited since we only considered participants' educational status and main occupation one year prior to measuring CP. Ideally, educational attainment, work status (part-time vs. full-time) and work stability measures, as well as other adult role measures pertinent to testing the *life cycle* hypothesis, such as marital and parental status, should also be included. Finally, our sample was also quite homogenous, as most participants were French-speaking Canadians of European descent living in the same specific suburban geographical area and coming from intact families and privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. The specific interculturalist oriented policies endorsed by the Quebec province (Laxer, 2013) alongside documented regional differences in civic education

and civic engagement in Canada (Turcotte, 2015) suggest that our findings may not be generalizable to all North-American youths transitioning into adulthood.

Moreover, given that only two dimensions of CP were captured by the LCA (i.e., the specific CP subtypes and number of subtypes engaged in by the youths), other dimensions such as the intensity/frequency of youth involvement and their levels of engagement when performing civic actions should also be accounted for in order to provide a more complete portrayal of CP patterns during the transition to adulthood. Moreover, as we were unable to pinpoint the attributes distinguishing the UN and CS profiles, future studies should perhaps include other attributes shown to relate to higher CP within variable-centered designs (e.g., social trust, civic efficacy beliefs, active citizenship norms, social capital gained from relationships and networks, residential status, marital status and parenthood), and examine how they relate to CP profile membership. The opportunities for CP provided by youths' work and educational environments should also be considered as predictor variables.

Practical implications

The current study's results highlight for the very first time how attitudinal dispositions such as civic attitudes, altruistic orientation and political attentiveness for fostering engaged CP profiles in young adults. According to Lerner (2018), community programs targeting such character strengths must relay on (1) positive, caring and stable relationships, (2) effective selection and optimization of the means chosen to target personal goals and (3) attractive opportunities for community involvement and leardership during earlier developmental stages.

Conclusion

The current study enriches the civic development literature by portraying the CP profiles found in a sample of French-Canadian youths transitioning into adulthood and identifying the

attributes most likely to predict membership in profiles characterized by active engagement. Our results suggest that the character developed by young adults over time exerted a greater influence on their CP patterns than the contexts in which they were living the previous year. Such results support early intervention programs targeting attitudinal dispositions such as civic responsibility, political interest and contribution ideology to promote greater civic participation during the identity-defining period that is the transition to adulthood.

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TABLE 1

Model Fit Statistics for the Tested Civic Participation Latent Class Models

No. Classes	Entropy	AIC	BIC	SaBIC	LMR
2	0.932	7276.90	7436.31	7299.93	0.0019
3	0.937	7029.80	7244.81	7060.87	0.2984
4	**0.948**	**6762.05**	**7032.67**	**6801.15**	**0.3795**
5	0.942	6827.16	7053.39	6874.30	0.9866

Note. AIC = Akaike's Information Criterion. BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. SaBIC = Sample-Size Adjusted BIC. LMR = *p*-value for the Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio Test. Rows in bold represent the model fit statistics for the chosen solution.

TABLE 2

Means (and Standard Deviations) for Civic and Political Indicators by Profile

	Unengaged *N = 198* (64%)	Political specialists *N = 47* (15%)	Community service specialists *N = 31* (10%)	Dual activists *N = 35* (11%)
Community service indicators				
Non-political volunteering	1.30 (0.54)	1.67 (0.77)	**1.95 (0.55)[2]**	**2.32 (0.75)[1]**
Walking/running/cycling for charity	1.13 (0.36)	1.24 (0.48)	**1.45 (0.51)[2]**	**2.08 (0.76)[1]**
Membership in community club or organization	1.45 (0.58)	2.00 (0.67)	**2.27 (0.67)[2]**	**2.56 (0.58)[1]**
Activities aimed at helping the community	1.11 (0.33)	1.24 (0.48)	**1.35 (0.48)[2]**	**2.00 (0.82)[1]**
Informal work on a community problem	1.48 (0.65)	2.20 (0.69)	**2.38 (0.60)[2]**	**2.60 (0.58)[1]**
Giving goods to charity organizations	1.68 (0.65)	2.62 (0.49)	**2.86 (0.51)[1]**	**2.76 (0.44)[2]**
Political indicators				
Petition signing	1.09 (0.34)	**2.07 (0.54)[1]**	1.84 (0.52)	**2.06 (0.79)[2]**
Protesting	1.62 (0.57)	**2.24 (0.68)[1]**	1.52 (0.57)	**2.22 (0.44)[2]**
Boycotting	1.11 (0.33)	**1.60 (0.72)[2]**	1.40 (0.00)	**2.64 (0.49)[1]**
Discussing political issues	1.00 (0.00)	**2.00 (0.42)[2]**	1.20 (0.46)	**2.24 (0.44)[1]**
Giving money to social/political groups	1.91 (0.68)	**2.60 (0.54)[2]**	2.16 (0.74)	**2.64 (0.49)[1]**
Voting	1.46 (0.57)	**2.71 (0.58)[1]**	2.34 (0.79)	**2.56 (0.58)[2]**
Following political/public affairs	1.33 (0.49)	**2.40 (0.58)[2]**	1.65 (0.75)	**2.42 (0.65)[1]**
Discussing an election prior to voting	1.67 (0.68)	**2.18 (0.75)[2]**	2.12 (0.62)	**2.52 (0.65)[1]**

Note. [1] Profile displaying the highest mean score; [2] Profile displaying the second highest mean score.

TABLE 3

Proportions, Frequencies, Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Predictor Variables at Age 19, by Profile

	Unengaged	Political specialists	Community service specialists	Dual activists	X^2
Categorical predictors	*N* (%)	*N* (%)	*N* (%)	*N* (%)	
Educational status					X^2 (3, N = 291) – 2.55, N.S.
Junior college, academic stream	99 (51%)	33 (73%)	18 (60%)	14 (56%)	
Junior college, technical program	24 (12%)	3 (7%)	5 (17%)	2 (8%)	
High school	4 (2%)	1 (2%)	5 (17%)	2 (8%)	
Not currently studying	68 (35%)	8 (18%)	2 (6%)	6 (28%)	
Educational aspirations					X^2 (3, N = 291) – 9.47, $p < 0.5$
High school diploma	4 (3%)	1 (3%)	5 (22%)	2 (11%)	
High school vocational program	28 (16%)	2 (6%)	2 (9%)	4 (21%)	
Junior college, technical program	37 (21%)	12 (34%)	8 (35%)	6 (32%)	
Undergraduate studies	50 (32%)	20 (57%)	8 (35%)	7 (37%)	
Graduate studies	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
Main occupation					X^2 (3, N = 291) – 8.53, N.S.
Education	128 (65%)	37 (82%)	23 (74%)	19 (76%)	
Work	57 (29%)	6 (14%)	5 (16%)	5 (20%)	
Other	12 (6%)	2 (4%)	3 (10%)	1 (4%)	
Continuous predictors	*M* (SD)	*M* (SD)	*M* (SD)	*M* (SD)	
Altruistic orientation	3.19 (.73)	3.69 (.55)	3.34 (.75)	3.95 (.69)	X^2 (3, N = 291) – 37.62, $p < .001$
Civic attitudes	2.96 (.82)	3.52 (.66)	3.19 (.86)	3.81 (.79)	X^2 (3, N = 291) – 33.95, $p < .001$
Political attentiveness	1.72 (.69)	3.01 (.74)	1.79 (.66)	3.21 (.73)	X^2 (3, N = 291) – 53.19, $p < .001$

TABLE 4

Multivariate Model Predicting Civic Participation Profile Membership

	Profile Comparisons					
	Political specialists vs Unengaged	Community service specialists vs Unengaged	Dual activists vs Unengaged	Community service specialists vs Policital specialists	Dual activists vs Policital specialists	Dual Activists vs Community service specialists
Predictors (age 19)	OR (CI)	OR (CI)	OR (CI)	OR (CI)	OR (CI)	OR (CI)
Educational aspirations	**1.987*** **(.984-4.012)**	1.513 (.721-3.175)	.926 (.398-2.157)	**.762*** **(.300-1.936)**	**.466*** **(.183-1.189)**	.612 (.214-1.748)
Altruistic orientation	**1.985*** **(1.021-3.859)**	1.124 (.579-2.183)	**2.962*** **(1.178-7.448)**	.567 (.239-1.343)	1.492 (.542-4.109)	**2.634*** **(.901-7.702)**
Civic attitudes	**1.098*** **(.620-1.945)**	1.290 (.703-2.367)	**1.886*** **(1.285-2.768)**	1.175 (.552-2.503)	1.512 (.661-3.459)	**1.286*** **(.520-3.182)**
Political attentiveness	**1.840***** **(1.369-2.473)**	.949 (.974-1.337)	**1.018***** **(.995-1.032)**	**.516***** **(.343-.776)**	1.025 (.674-1.559)	**1.987**** **(1.235-3.197)**

Notes. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence intervals
~ * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$