

# PATHFINDER



The Pathways to Adulthood Newsletter



## In Brief

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Capacity building and advancing the understanding of productive youth development in an international context are the objectives of the PATHWAYS Post-Doctoral Fellowship Programme which is funded by the Jacobs Foundation since 2008. In our biannual issue of the PATHFINDER, our newsletter, we report on research conducted by the PATHWAYS fellows and the PATHWAYS team. **Issue number 10 focuses on studies examining the role of parenting in shaping young people's civic engagement and their adaption to racial discrimination and neighbourhood problems.**

Warm and supportive parenting is generally associated with positive development and engagement. But does this apply in all contexts and for all outcomes, or is the effect of parenting bounded by circumstances? The two papers represented in this issue of the PATHFINDER ask if parenting can support wellbeing in the context of racial discrimination and neighbourhood deprivation and does it support participation in society and civic engagement?

Meeta Banerjee, a PATHWAYS Fellow based at the University of California, Irvine, addresses the topic of race-related parenting - which involves for example, preparing young people for bias and experiences of possible racism and discrimination, and promoting behaviours that show the value of their culture and heritage. She reports on two studies that ask if race-related parenting can buffer against experiences of discrimination and neighbourhood deprivation. Using longitudinal data, she finds that exposure to discrimination is associated with increased levels of depression, yet race-related parenting can help to reduce the amount of anger felt when confronted with discrimination by peers in school, and is also associated with lower levels of depression. The

experience of neighbourhood disadvantage (unemployment, presence of gangs) is surprisingly not associated with mental wellbeing, i.e. levels of anger and depression, yet the sample was mostly composed of middle class families, where neighbourhood disadvantage might not have been a major issue.

Maria Pavlova, based at the University of Jena, reports on collaborative research that she and Rainer Silbereisen conducted with the PATHWAYS team from the University of Helsinki involving Katariina Salmela-Aro and her research associate Mette Ranta. The team uses data from the FinEdu study, following young people from age 14 to 24, to examine the role of warm and supportive parenting in promoting civic engagement among young people. They take a longitudinal perspective, linking parenting behaviour to civic participation in young adulthood. They find that warm and supportive parenting was associated with lower levels of political engagement and volunteering. The findings challenge previous assumptions regarding the overall beneficial role of warm and supportive parenting, and suggest that in the Finnish context it might actually prevent young people from actively engaging in society. The findings are discussed regarding their implications and relationship to existing theoretical models.

Together these studies suggest that parenting does play a significant role in young people's life and that it does have longer term impacts. This longer term impact is however not always in the expected direction and future research has to focus more on potential ambivalences, unintended consequences, timing, and the role of contextual opportunities and constraints.

Please visit our website to find out more about our work and the team:  
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# Parental Support and Youth Civic Engagement: Boon or Bane?

**Maria K. Pavlova**  
**Center for Applied Developmental Science (CADS), Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena, Germany**

Civic engagement refers to unpaid, voluntary activities that address issues of public concern and are usually undertaken collectively (American Psychological Association, 2015; Wilson, 2012). Examples are volunteering for social causes, political activism, and donations to charity. In democratic societies, civic engagement is regarded as an important developmental task of the transition to adulthood (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Why? First, communities and societies need members who care about social and political issues, know how to express and defend their political interests in a constructive way, and are prepared to stand by disadvantaged groups. Such civic knowledge, skills, and motivations are largely shaped in youth and early adulthood (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Second, young people benefit from civic engagement, because it provides opportunities to develop useful skills and social contacts, brings pleasurable social experiences, and offers a positive, normative identity that makes deviant and risky behaviours less attractive (Piliavin & Siegl, 2014).

PATHWAYS collaborations have given me an opportunity to look closer on family factors that may promote or hinder civic engagement during the transition to adulthood. In this newsletter, I report on one longitudinal study that I conducted together with PIs Rainer Silbereisen and Katariina Salmela-Aro and with Prof. Salmela-Aro's research associate Mette Ranta. Our study (Pavlova, Silbereisen, Ranta, & Salmela-Aro, submitted) addressed the role of parental warmth and support for civic engagement in the transition to adulthood. It was based on the data from Finnish Educational Transitions Studies (FinEdu; <http://wiredminds.fi/projects/finedu/>). The FinEdu currently spans seven waves and 10 years of observation. It has been widely used by other PATHWAYS fellows to study school and work engagement as well as educational and employment transitions of Finnish youth.

## Effects of Parenting on Youth Civic Engagement and Their Explanations

Traditionally, positive parenting has been regarded as a prerequisite to all kinds of prosocial behaviours in children and adolescents, including civic engagement (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995; Lerner et al., 2003). Warm and supportive parents are thought to convey the norms of mutual support and caring and nurture youth's desire as well as ability to give back to others (Flanagan, 2003; Lerner et al., 2003). A lot of empirical

studies support these notions; most of these studies come from the US and Canada (see Pavlova et al., submitted, for a review).

However, there is accumulating evidence that warm and supportive family may also play a less positive role for civic engagement. Several studies, including our own, found nonsignificant or even negative effects of family support on civic engagement in youth and adults (see Pavlova et al., submitted, for a review). These findings come from various parts of the world, and various explanations for these surprising effects could be identified from the literature.

First, individuals with low family support may seek new sources of social support through involvement in voluntary organizations (i.e., self-selection; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Second, in family-oriented societies, such as Southern European countries, warm and supportive families may restrict prosocial behaviours to one's own kin and discourage cooperating with strangers and helping them (i.e., cultural context; Alesina & Giuliano, 2011). Third, in the absence of appropriate demands and control, parental warmth and support may promote self-centredness rather than caring for the welfare of others (i.e., authoritative vs. permissive parenting; Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995). Fourth, warmth and support experienced in the family may detain individuals from less socially desirable or more confrontational activities, such as political activism, while fostering purely prosocial, conflict-free types of engagement, such as nonpolitical volunteering (i.e., type of activity; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Pavlova & Silbereisen, 2015).

## Our Findings

In the present study (Pavlova et al., submitted), we set out to replicate the negative effect of warm and supportive parenting on young individuals' civic engagement in the Finnish context and to test for its possible mechanisms. As Finland does not belong to countries where family is prioritised over other social connections and individual interests (Alesina & Giuliano, 2011), we assumed a priori that a family-oriented cultural context could not be an explanation. For other potential explanations, we formulated testable hypotheses.

We used four waves of data from the FinEdu that followed 1,549 secondary school students from late adolescence (ca. 16–18 years of age, 2004) into young adulthood (ca. 25–27 years of age, 2013/14).

**Table 1:**

Parental warmth and support predicts offspring's lower civic engagement

Predictor	Org. involvement 2013/14	Political engagement 2013/14	Volunteering 2013/14
Org. involvement 2011	1.19*** (0.09)	–	0.27** (0.08)
Political engagement 2011	–	2.27*** (0.15)	0.68*** (0.15)
Maternal warmth 2004	-0.13 (0.33)	-0.33** (0.12)	0.08 (0.19)
Parental support 2011	0.02 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.09* (0.04)

Mothers' reports on their parenting styles were collected in 2004 in a subsample of participants ( $n = 231$ ).

Maternal warmth and support was measured by items such as "I believe that praise is more effective than punishment" and "I often show my child that I love him/her". In 2011, the entire young adult sample reported on perceived parental support in the context of occupational choice (e.g., "My relationship with my parents is very close" and "My parents have supported me in my decisions"). Finally, in 2013/14, young adults reported on their civic engagement in the past two years, including organizational involvement (i.e., participation in some union or association activities, such as student or hobby-related associations), political engagement (i.e., boycotted or bought a product for political reasons; signed a petition; participated in a demonstration or in another political event), and volunteering.

As Table 1 shows, we did find negative effects of parental warmth and support on later civic outcomes in young adulthood. Warm and supportive parenting reported by mothers in 2004, when participants were late adolescents, predicted their lower political engagement assessed 10 years later. Additionally, perceived parental support reported by young adults in 2011 predicted their lower volunteering two years later. These effects held when controlled for prior levels of civic engagement in 2011 and for a range of sociodemographic and personality variables (not shown in the table).

However, none of the available explanations for these negative effects appeared to fit. First, if the self-selection hypothesis were true, individuals with low family support would seek new sources of support through any kind of organizational involvement (e.g., participation in hobby-related associations), not necessarily those aimed at resolving social issues. However, we found no significant effects of parenting on organizational involvement in general (see Table 1). Second, the type of engagement hypothesis predicted that family

support would have negative effects only on political engagement as a confrontational, less socially desirable activity; however, we found a negative effect of supportive parenting on volunteering too. Third, if the distinction between authoritative and permissive parenting were relevant, the effects of maternal warmth and support on offspring's civic engagement would only be negative at low levels of maternal control and knowledge, which were also assessed in 2004. However, we tested the corresponding interaction effects and found no evidence for such moderation (not shown in the table).

#### More Questions than Answers

How are the negative effects of family support on civic engagement to be explained, then? It could be the life stage: During the transition to adulthood, emotional separation from parents may be a prerequisite to young individuals' forming an interest in broader social issues and becoming concerned about the welfare of strangers (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995). Hence, it is possible that warm and supportive parenting experienced earlier in childhood fosters prosocial behaviours of all kinds, including those towards strangers, but these beneficial effects vanish and may even turn into their opposite during the transition to adulthood. A more disturbing possibility is that family relationships, which are most private in nature, are inherently antagonistic to the civic realm, which is public. As to the often found positive effects of family support on civic engagement in US samples, we attributed them to a direct encouragement of civic activities by nurturing parents, because such activities are often a requirement and a matter of reputation in the US (Hustinx et al., 2010). By contrast, in Finland, civic engagement is common but is regarded as a matter of personal choice. Even though the mechanisms remain yet unclear, our findings challenge the popular belief that all good things go together and call for a more attention of researchers to potential ambivalences and trade-offs across multiple domains of development.

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## Author profile:

### Maria K. Pavlova

Dr. Maria K. Pavlova is a post-doctoral researcher based at the Center for Applied Developmental Science (CADS), Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena in Germany working with Professor Rainer Silbereisen

Maria joined the PATHWAYS programme in October 2014. She completed her PhD in psychology at the Moscow State University, Russia, in 2006 and her habilitation in psychology at the University of Jena, Germany, in 2014. Currently, she is a research associate at the Center for Applied Developmental Science (CADS) at the University of Jena, working with Prof. Rainer K. Silbereisen. Maria's research interests revolve around psychology of civic and political engagement, life-course processes of cumulative advantage and disadvantage, the interplay between paid work and volunteering, and the impact of social change on individual psychosocial adjustment and

development. During her PATHWAYS fellowship, she began a very productive collaboration with the FinEdu team. Together with Clemens Lechner, she visited Helsinki in April 2015, which resulted in two collaborative projects on the predictors of youth civic engagement. The first is detailed in her article in this issue of Pathfinder. In the second project (in collaboration with Clemens Lechner, Florencia Sortheix, and Katariina Salmela-Aro), they find that the negative effects of low parental socioeconomic status on offspring's civic engagement are partly mediated by extrinsic work values, that is, by young people putting value on rewards and security in paid work. Both studies



are based on longitudinal data from Finland that span 10 years. Currently, Maria is preparing the data from the German Socio-Economic Panel to investigate other research topics, namely the links between employment histories and trajectories of subjective well-being across the life span.

# The Role of Contextual Factors on Parenting Practices and Outcomes in African Americans in the United States.

**Meeta Banerjee**  
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“How are contextual factors related to specific race-related parenting practices in African American families in the United States?” These questions have been addressed using data from the Maryland Adolescent Development in Contexts Study (MADICS; PI: Jacquie Eccles, 1991) a 20-year longitudinal study on African American and European American adolescents and their families who reside along the Eastern seaboard of the United States. Based on the integrative framework the study of developmental competencies in minority youth (Garcia-Coll et al. 1996), my research focuses on the role of race related parenting as a potential protective factor in the face of racial/ethnic discrimination and neighborhood disadvantage, which both have been associated with poorer mental health and lower academic outcomes for minority youth (Sellers et al., 2003; Neblett et al., 2006). Garcia-Coll and colleagues (1996) suggest that race-related parenting practices such as racial/ethnic socialization that can be protective for African American children and youth. African American parents may provide these behaviors and messages to help their children.

## **Race-Related Parenting in African American Families**

Scholars initially began studying African American parents as a way to understand how parents manage the difficult task of protecting their children from imminent discrimination while promoting healthy well-being and positive self-esteem (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Boykin & Toms, 1985). Racial/ethnic socialization has been defined as the transmission of verbal and non-verbal messages on the attitudes, beliefs and values surrounding race (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006). Though studies have shown that racial/ethnic socialization can be adaptive for African American children and youth, very little research has examined the linkages over time. To understand how racial/ethnic socialization functions for youth over time, may give us a better picture of how these parenting practices are adaptive for youth. Additionally, most studies have focused on single source reports, either parents' reports of their practices or youth's perceptions of parents' practices.

To investigate how youth perceive those messages while also being given parents' reports helps provide a fuller understanding of the effects of racial/ethnic socialization. Furthermore, though there has been a call to study other contexts such as the connection between racial/ethnic socialization within neighborhoods, there is little research that has focused on these factors (see Caughy et al., 2006 as an exception).

Here I report two studies that 1) examined the relation between racial discrimination and racial/ethnic socialization on African American youth's psychological outcomes over time and 2) investigated whether racial/ethnic socialization may protect youth in high risk neighborhoods. In particular, I focus on how parent and youth's experiences with discrimination is linked to youth's reports of mental health (i.e., resilience, anger and depressive symptoms). Moreover, I investigate if racial/ethnic socialization (e.g. cultural socialization, preparation for bias) buffers the effects of racial discrimination over time. Using the MADICS data, I was able to focus on the longitudinal nature of parenting during adolescence. In addition, we were able to use both parent and youth reports of racial/ethnic socialization to study its linkages to these contextual factors. Also, the MADICS sample is unique in that these youth resided in an area of the United States where African Americans and European Americans were equal in income and had an average household income of \$45,000 in 1991. Therefore, the sample was largely middle class, although participants came from both middle and working class families. I focused on data collected from 1991-1997 (waves 1 through 4), where approximately 550 African American youth participated. Youth were 12 years of age at wave 1, 13 years of age at Wave 3 and 16 years of age at Wave 4. Forty-seven percent of the sample was female.

### Racial/Ethnic Socialization Can Buffer Against the Effects of Racial Discrimination

I found that parents' reports of discrimination at work during Wave 3 was linked to youth's reports of more depressive symptoms in Wave 4. Furthermore, I found that youth's reports of racial discrimination in Wave 4 were related to higher levels of depressive symptoms in the same wave. When examining whether or not racial/ethnic socialization buffered the effects of racial discrimination on youth's mental health, I found that youth who received preparation for bias messages and who reported discrimination in school by peers, actually reported lower amounts of anger (Figure 1). Furthermore, youth who reported discrimination by peers, but also reported cultural socialization practices, reported lower depressive symptoms (Figure 2). These findings indicate that racial discrimination that is experienced by both parents and youth can have negative effects on youth's mental health and that racial/ethnic socialization can be adaptive for African American youth.

This study emphasizes the importance of race-related parenting practices within African American families. Moreover, it adds to the field of study that highlights how certain dimensions of racial/ethnic socialization functions within the context of racial discrimination.

### Racial/Ethnic Socialization Can Buffer Against Neighborhood Problems

For adolescents, the neighborhood is an important context while growing up, especially if their peers and friends reside in the same neighborhood. Moreover, the other individuals in the neighborhood may become sources of socialization for youth. As suggested by Garcia-Coll and colleagues (1996), neighborhoods can be either promotive or inhibiting. In this study, I examined the effects of neighborhood problems as reported by parents and its connection to racial/ethnic socialization and mental health in African American adolescents. Parents were asked to provide their assessments of how much each issue (e.g., neighborhood gangs, unemployment) was a potential

problem in their current neighbourhood in wave 1. Neighbourhood problems from the first wave were not predictive of mental health (e.g., depression, anger) in the fourth wave. However, I did find a significant interaction that youth who reported more cultural socialization and lower neighborhood problems reported more resilience, which was characterized by the individual's ability to bounce back after failure or facing adversity. It could be that parents were asked about the neighborhood problems in the first year of the study and neighborhoods are not stagnant but forever changing. Neighborhood problems that may exist in the first year of the study, may not be affecting youth in similar ways by waves three and four. It may be more that the effects of the neighborhoods may be a problem concurrently but not longitudinally. Additionally, the participants in this study were largely middle class, the questions asked on our neighborhood problems measure may not have been an issue to families who lived in areas that were middle class.

### Implications

These two studies add to our literature on racial/ethnic socialization practices in African American families in the United States. The studies highlight the importance of focusing on the different dimensions of racial/ethnic socialization and how they may function in different contexts. Additionally, it is important to focus not just on youth's reports of racial/ethnic socialization but also the parents' reports of racial/ethnic socialization as well. The practices and messages that African American parents may be participating in may promote positive mental health for their children. These are vital pieces to making successful interventions that could help African American children psychologically within schools or the communities. It is crucial that we study how these race-related parenting practices are important for all ethnic minorities all over the world to help the children of the future become successful adults and essential members of our society.

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### Meeta Banerjee

Dr Meeta Banerjee is a Research Specialist at the Achievement Research Lab, School of Education, University of California, Irvine. She is also a Postdoctoral Fellow, for the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development at the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

Prior to joining PATHWAYS Meeta received her Ph.D. in Ecological-Community Psychology from Michigan State University. Her dissertation investigated the moderating relationship between racial-ethnic socialization and exposure to community violence on the academic and psychosocial outcomes of African American college students. Her area of research focuses on parenting practices and their links to youth's positive developmental outcomes. In particular, Dr. Banerjee investigates how racial-ethnic socialization is protective for ethnic minority youth in the United States with regards to

different contexts (i.e., discrimination, violence, poverty). During her time with PATHWAYS, Dr. Banerjee worked with data from the Maryland Adolescent Development in Contexts Study (MADICS) to examine how racial-ethnic socialization and racial discrimination is associated with psychosocial outcomes in African American families, as discussed in her article in this issue of Pathfinder. Furthermore, Dr. Banerjee has begun to explore if there are parallels to her findings utilizing the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE). Dr. Banerjee is



a recipient of a National Institutes of Health Minority Training Grant, which was awarded for 2014 and will continue to December 2015. In September 2014, Meeta joined University of California, Irvine as a research specialist in the School of Education. In January 2016, Dr. Banerjee will be joining California State University-Northridge as in a tenure-track Assistant Professor position in the Psychology department.

# MSU, Finland partners receive \$3.6M grant to study science learning

More students need to feel motivated and excited about learning science if the United States is going to succeed in producing a more scientifically literate workforce.

Michigan State University researchers hope to make that happen by testing the best ways to improve learning experiences in high school. The team is using a \$3.6 million grant from the National Science Foundation and partnering with scholars in Finland, where students outperform most of the world on international tests.

“Our interest is really to enhance engagement in science,” said principal investigator Barbara Schneider, Pathways PI, John A. Hannah Chair and University Distinguished Professor in the College of Education and Department of Sociology. “Not everyone will be a scientist, but all students need scientific knowledge to understand and contribute to the world. We want to develop a model where we can maximize their opportunities to learn.”

Over the five-year project, science education researchers will work with teachers in the United States and Finland to design and implement curriculum units in physics and chemistry classes. These project-based lessons will allow researchers to study the impact of new science teaching strategies modeled after the Next Generation Science Standards, a voluntary set of guidelines now being introduced in schools in many parts of the United States.

Participating students will each receive smartphones to provide real-time data to researchers. The system prompts students to answer questions on the phones about their learning experiences from a social and emotional, as well as academic, perspective. Of particular interest are the classroom messages that may be discouraging underrepresented student groups from pursuing careers in science-related fields.

Like the United States, Finland is in the process of restructuring its science curriculum in an effort to increase overall interest in STEM learning. Joseph Krajcik, Lappan-Phillips Professor of Science Education at MSU and co-principal investigator, will oversee the creation of curriculum materials and professional development for teachers. He said it will be exciting to collect evidence across two very different education systems and learn about which classroom ingredients lead to success for all students.

“The Finnish students do well on global tests, but they are not necessarily more interested in science,” Krajcik said. “We want to know how we can create zones where students feel empowered by learning science, know why it’s important and how they can use it in their lives.”

Collaborating researchers in Finland are Pathways PI Katariina Salmela-Aro and Jari Lavonen, both based at the University of Helsinki. Also working on the project from MSU are Corey Drake, Melanie Cooper, Deborah Peek-Brown, Marcos Caballero and Laurie Van Egeren.



- The major objective of the programme is to promote the next generation of researchers through funding, mentoring and collaboration
- The mission of this Collaborative Post-Doctoral Fellowship Programme is to stimulate innovative, interdisciplinary, and comparative research of productive youth development.
- Our programme brings together experts from the UK, Germany, Finland, Sweden and the US
- We engage with different stakeholders in how best to equip young people or mastering the challenges of growing up in a changing social context.

## Principal Investigators and participating institutions

- Lars Bergman – Stockholm University
- Jacquelynne S. Eccles – University of Michigan
- Katariina Salmela-Aro – University of Helsinki
- Barbara Schneider – Michigan State University
- Ingrid Schoon – Institute of Education, University of London
- Rainer K. Silbereisen – University of Jena
- Ulrich Trautwein -University of Tübingen

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