

Civil Engagement in Adolescence

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How can educators and parents help children and adolescents become engaged in civil discourse?



Do adolescents respect their own personalities while also acknowledging their solidarities with and feelings for others in school?



Schools are institutions of the civil sphere that serve a communicative function.

- ~they teach the skills needed to participate in civil discourse.
- ~they can reveal how and why individuals sustain or fail to sustain a commitment to justice.

Thorkildsen, Golant, & Cambray-Engstrom, 2008



Civil discourse is the means by which a just society is imagined and enacted.

Alexander, J. C. (2006). *The civil sphere*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

People form solidarities as they endeavor to build a just world.



Ideally, civil discourse is comprised of the respect, criticism, and civility needed to identify and critique such solidarities.

Social solidarities can be concrete or abstract, but serve as the building blocks of society.



Civil discourse is maintained by appealing to cultural codes, public opinions, and institutional traditions as people strive to improve the world in which they live.

People with strong levels of ***civil engagement*** try to build and maintain a civil society by comparing solidarities



- ~with one another.
- ~with normative standards for the common good.



People who are not engaged in civil discourse may function in pre-civil or anti-civil ways and are ultimately excluded from conversations about how society functions.



Civil engagement



Civic engagement



Discourse in the civil sphere is
comprised of three basic dimensions

- ~Relational ties
- ~Institutional structures
- ~Personal motives

*Alexander, J. C. (2006). **The civil sphere**. Oxford, UK:
Oxford University Press.*

Relational ties as life goals

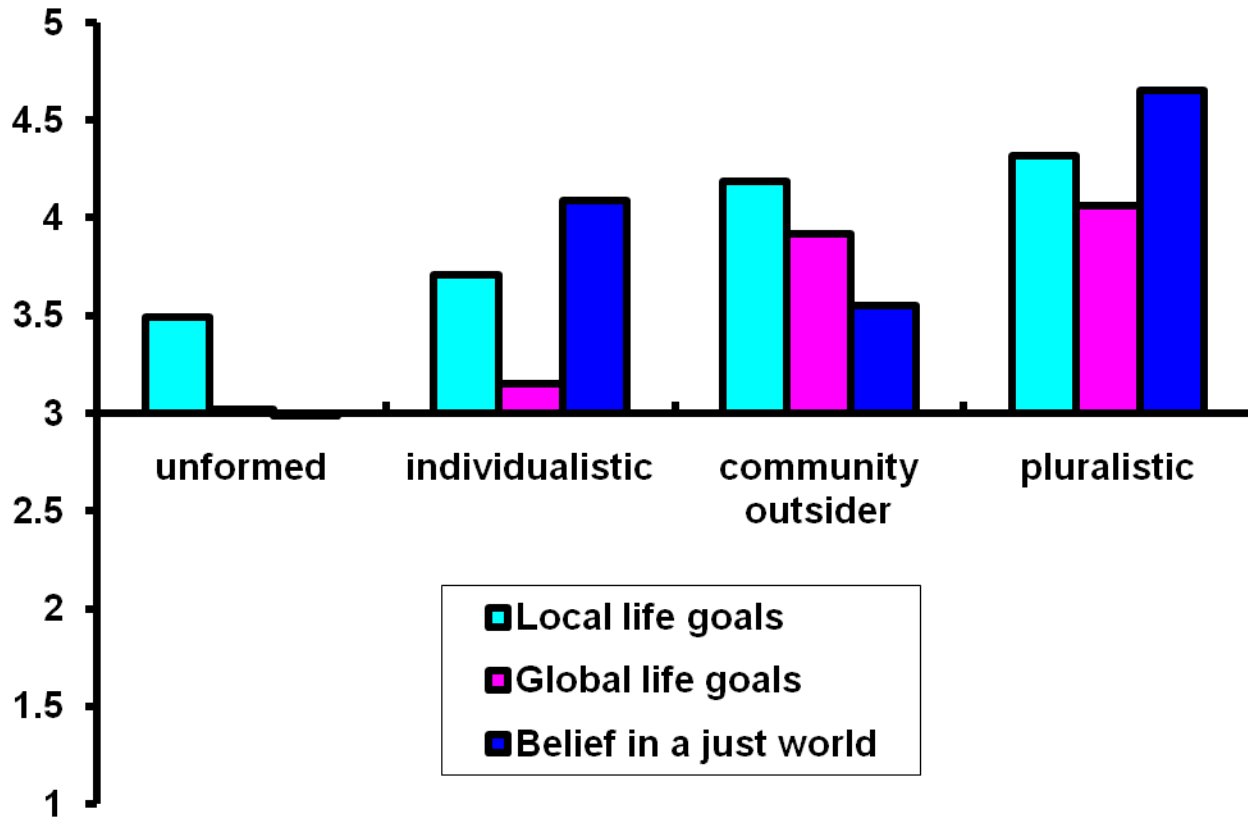
Local life goals

Global life goals

Belief in a just world



Validation of Civil Identities





Institutional structures as ideal school beliefs

Achieving fairness

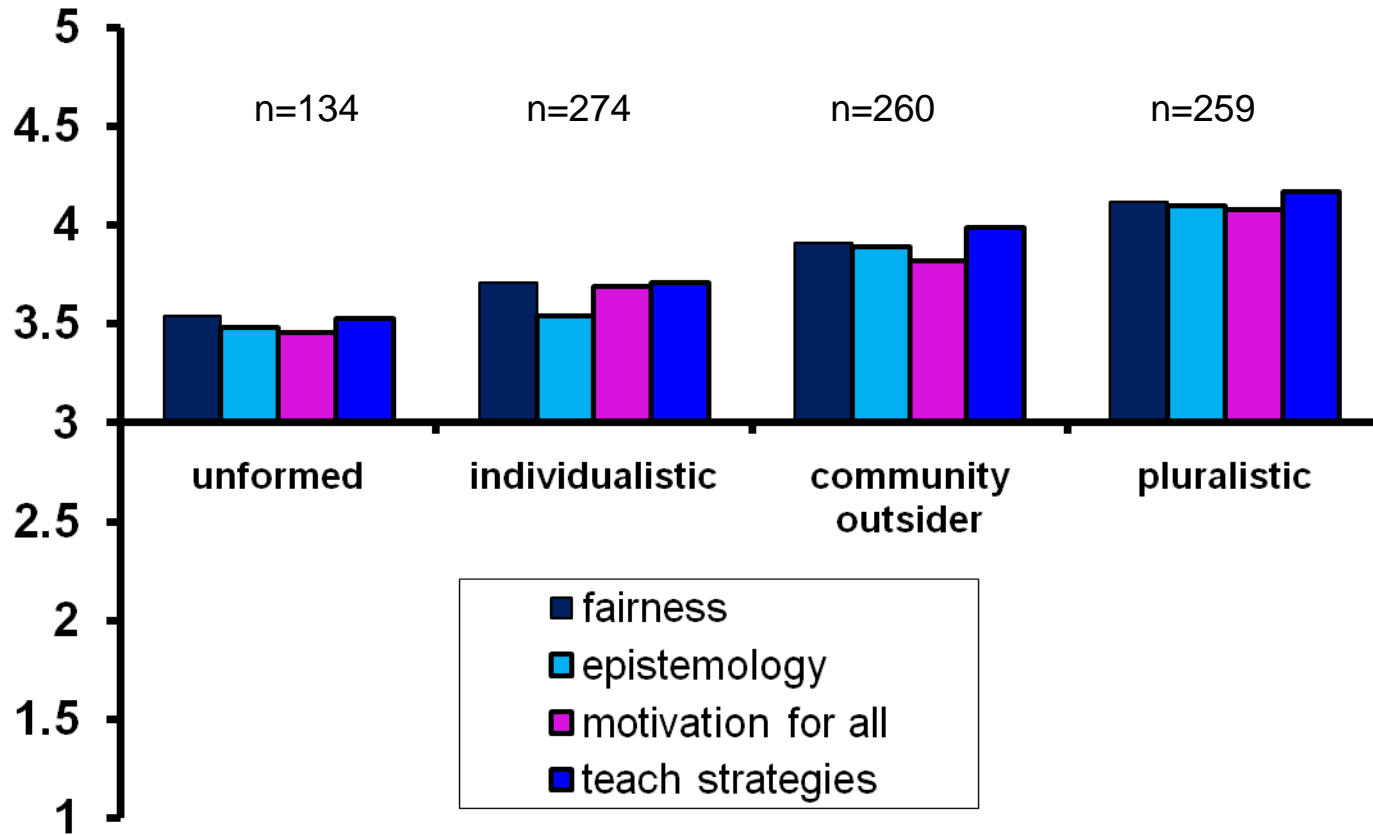
Balancing epistemologies

Sustaining students' motivation

Teaching learning strategies



Civil Identities and Ideal School Beliefs



$F_{(9, 2769)}=4.24, p<.001, \eta^2=.014, \text{obs. power}=.998$



X





Personal motives as action readiness

Readiness to work hard

Readiness to cheat or take shortcuts

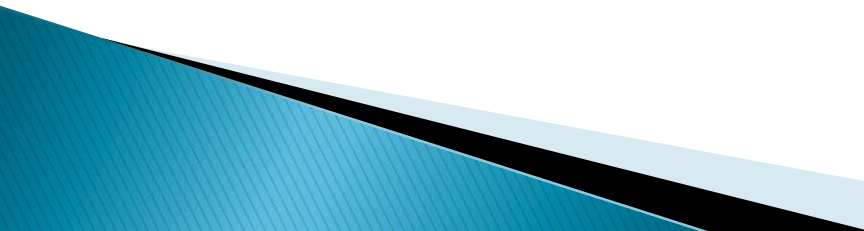
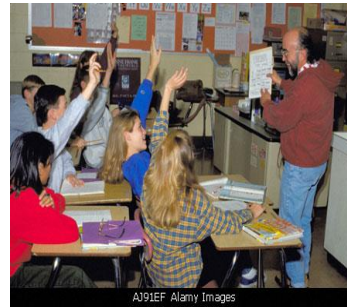
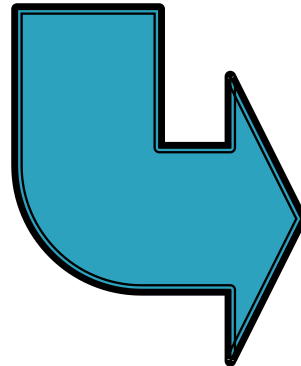
Readiness to address justice

Academic Performance

Participation in classroom activities
Academic achievement
(GPA, class standing)

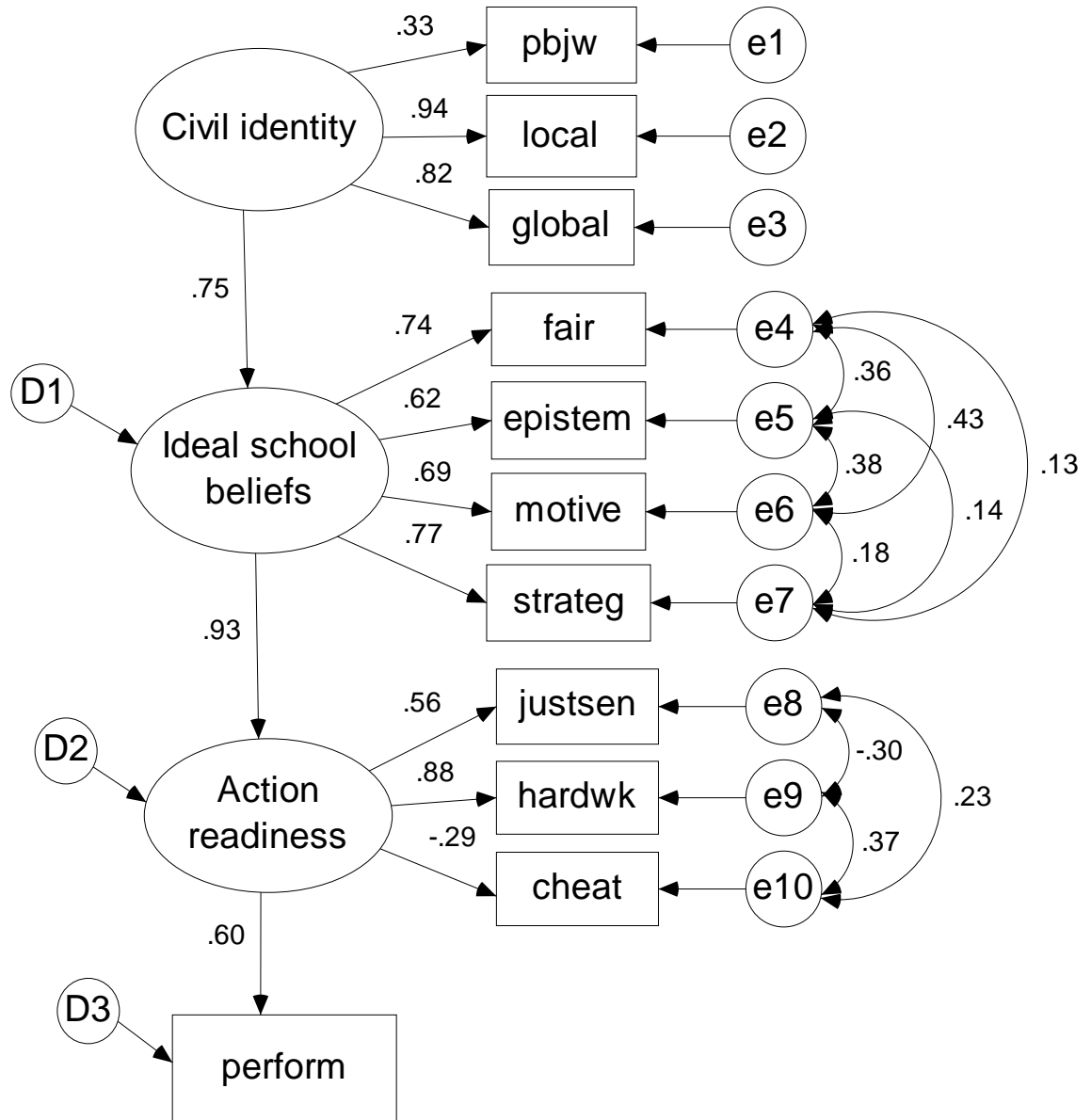


Civil Engagement in School



Structural equation modeling resulted in strong fit indices (GFI>.950, CFI>.950, RMR<.05).

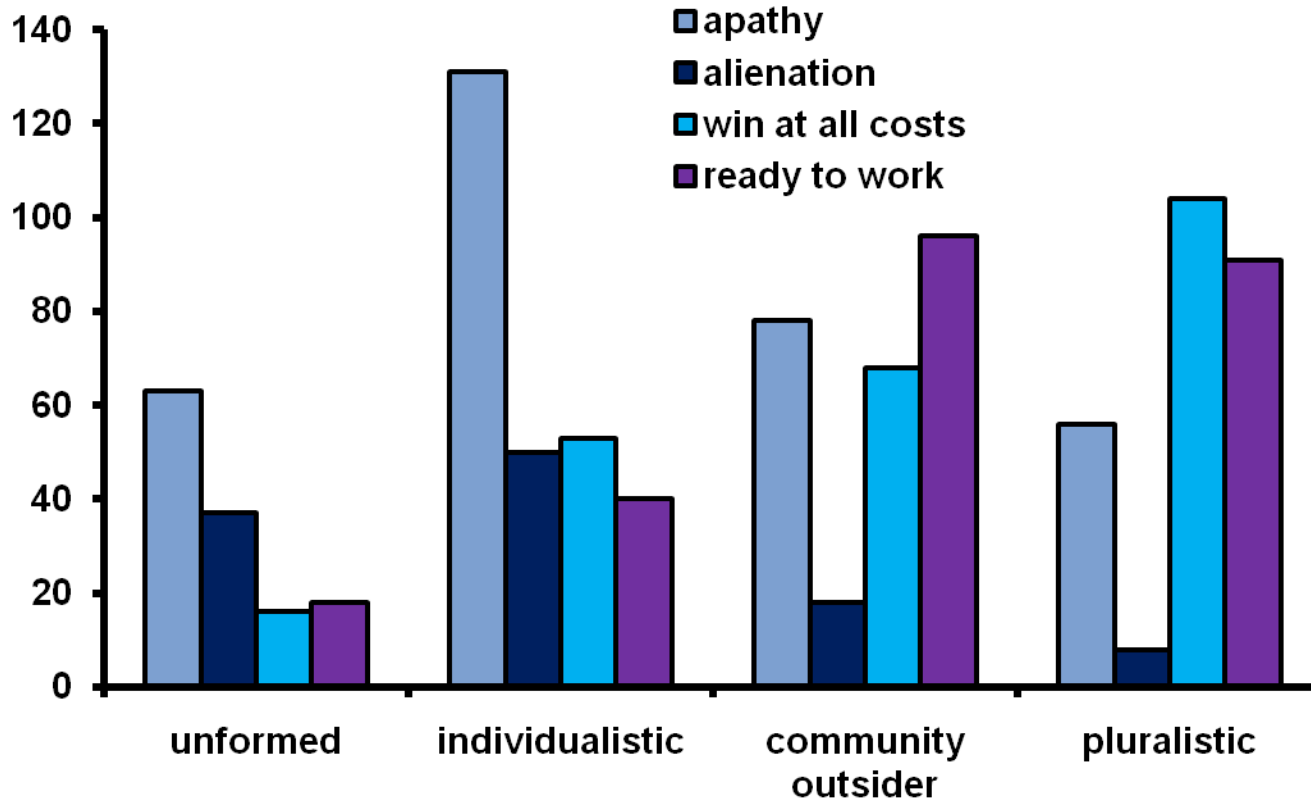
Yet, some interesting puzzles arose in how the action readiness indicators were associated with one another.



Correlations among Action Readiness Indicators

	Address justice	Work hard
1. Readiness to address justice		
2. Readiness to work hard	.38	
3. Readiness to cheat	.02	-.09

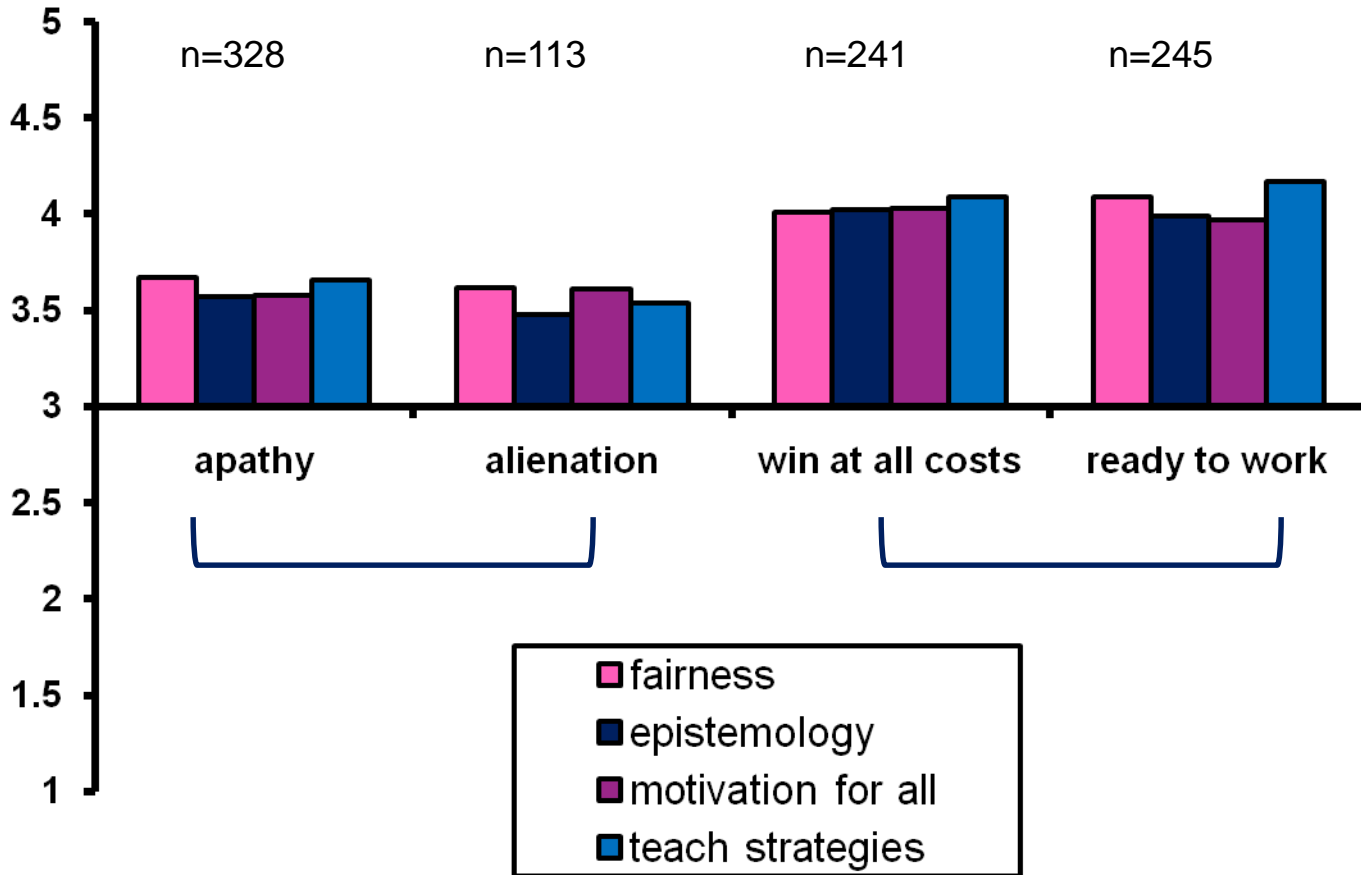
Civil Identities by Action Readiness Profile



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Action Readiness and Ideal School Beliefs



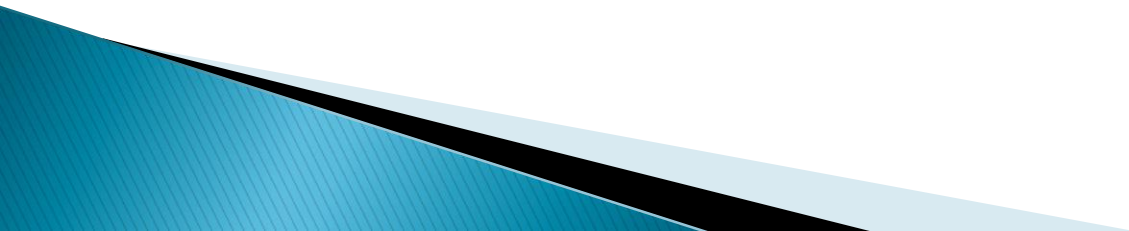
$F_{(9, 2769)}=4.69, p<.001, \eta^2=.02, \text{obs. power}=.999$



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While some adolescents are clearly able to integrate their personal interests with those of society, others would benefit from activities that encourage such integration.



**Thank you
for listening!**



Relational Ties

Civil Relations	Anticivil Relations
Open	Secretive
Trusting	Suspicious
Critical	Deferential
Honorable	Self-interested
Altruistic	Greedy
Truthful	Deceitful
Straight forward	Calculating
Deliberative	Conspiratorial
Friendly	Antagonistic

Alexander, J. C. (2006). *The civil sphere*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Institutional Structures

Civil Institutions	Anticivil Institutions
Rule-regulated	Arbitrary
Law-governed	Power-governed
Equality-driven	Hierarchy-driven
Inclusive	Exclusive
Impersonal	Personal
Contract-driven	Loyalty-driven
Group-laden	Faction-laden
Office-governed	Personality-governed

Alexander, J. C. (2006). *The civil sphere*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Personal Characteristics

Civil Motives	Anticivil Motives
Active	Passive
Autonomous	Dependent
Rational	Irrational
Reasonable	Hysterical
Calm	Excitable
Self-controlled	Wild-passionate
Realistic	Distorted
Sane	Mad

Alexander, J. C. (2006). *The civil sphere*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Sample

927 high school freshmen
(*M* age = 15.33 years)



Gender

454 males

467 females

6 undeclared

Ethnicity

827 Latino

21 White/Caucasian

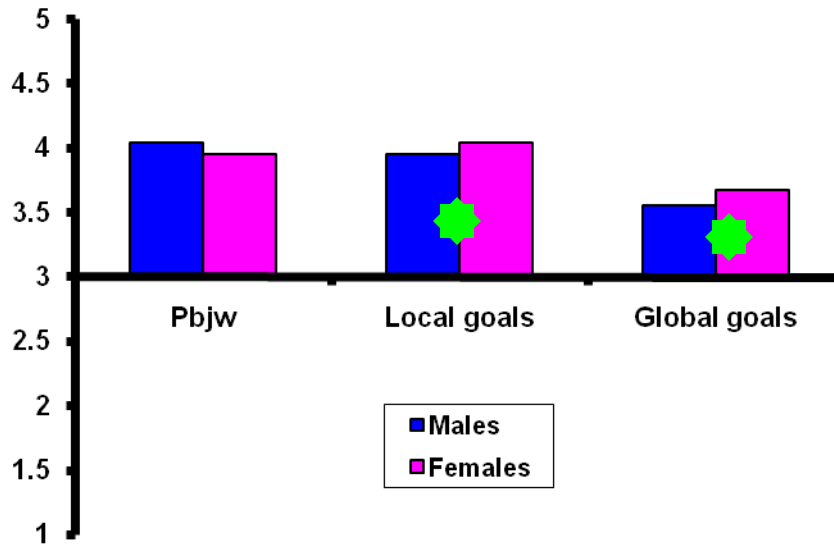
12 Black/African American

4 Asian/Pacific Islander

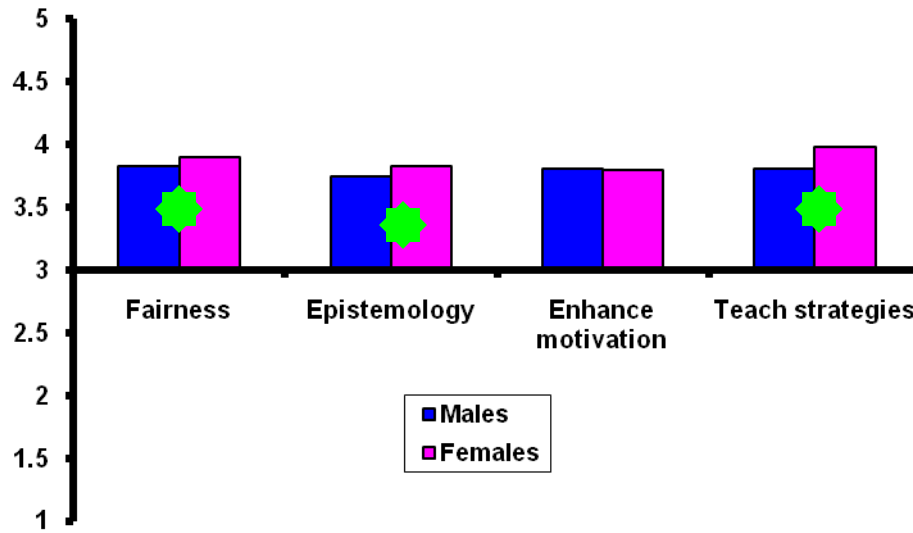
63 Other (mostly dual ethnic)





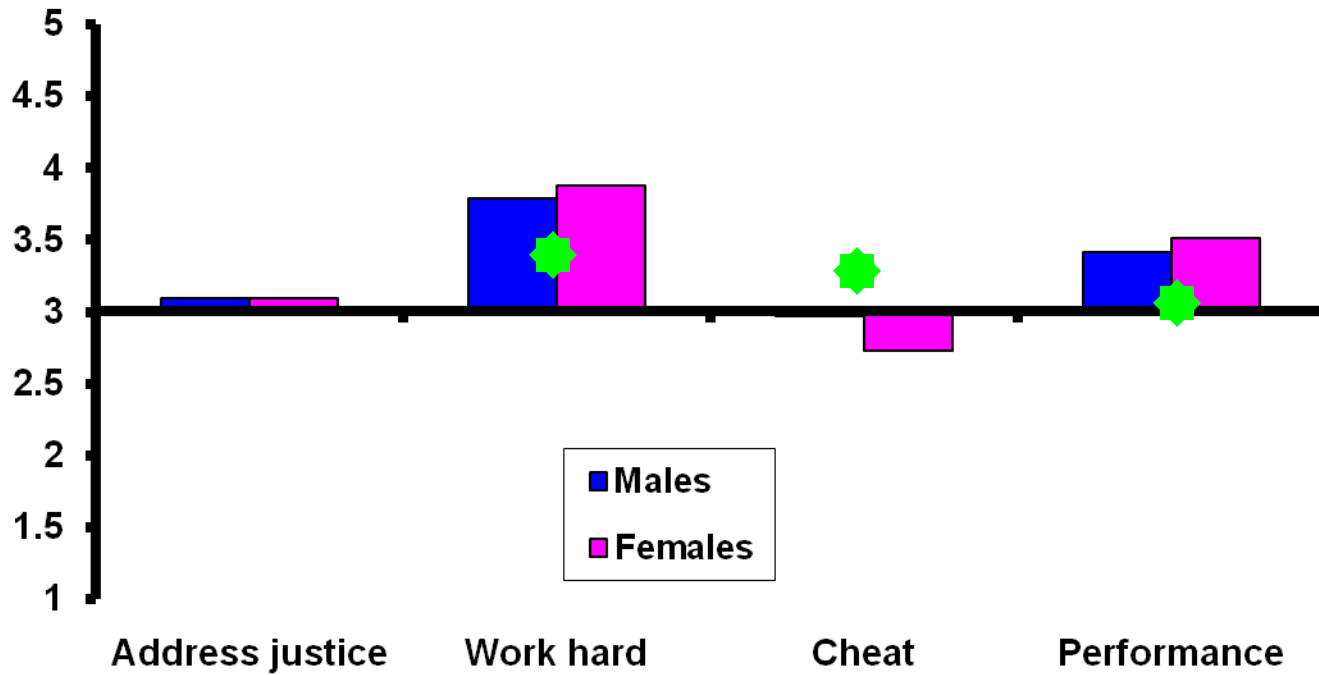


Civil Identity Scales



Ideal School Scales

Girls reported more positive views than boys, but these differences are not detectable when scales are combined to test our civil engagement theory.



Action Readiness and Performance