Prosocial Behaviour and Political Culture among Australian Secondary School Students[1]

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This study investigates the extent to which forms of prosocial behaviour and values of social responsibility are related to various domains of political culture among Australian youth. Using data from a survey of 1311 senior secondary students from the ACT and South Australia, it was found that 14 per cent had participated in one or more volunteer activities and 26 per cent scored highly on social responsibility values. Furthermore, it was found that at least one or the other of these prosocial measures was positively related to five of the six domains of political culture, the exception being the feeling of political efficacy. Students who were prosocial also manifested higher levels of political knowledge, political awareness, political activism experience, and positive attitudes towards political freedoms and towards human rights. The implications of these findings for family practices and school programs for volunteer activities and for the instilling of a sense of social responsibility are discussed.

Prosocial Behaviour, Political Culture, Australian Secondary Students

INTRODUCTION

The path for the political development of youth to adult citizenship is said to be "emotionally charged" (Coleman and Hendry 1999). For this reason some consider youth to be ill-equipped for political responsibilities, and they argue that too early an involvement with political education is irrelevant and perhaps a potential threat to political stability (Coleman and Hendry 1999; Frazer 1999; Saha 2000b). Others however contend that young people should acquire the knowledge of, an interest in, and an engagement with politics not only as a preparation for future political participation, but for its own sake (Frazer 1999). The latter maintain that the path to responsible adult citizenship and the maintenance of a participatory democracy assumes the gradual acquisition by young people of the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to engage in political action (Saha 2000a). In effect, adult citizenship requires this early and gradual acquisition of the political culture of a society.

Political culture refers to the multi-dimensional patterns of orientation to political action in a given society (Nathan and Remy 1977; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). In this paper it is defined in terms of six domains: political knowledge, attentiveness to politics, political activist experience, a feeling of political efficacy, values regarding political freedoms, and values regarding human rights.

The literature regarding the youth acquisition of these various domains of political culture is large. The importance of family background, schooling and other similar agents of political socialization, including politically-linked behaviours, is well documented (Beck 1977; Sears

[1] Parts of this paper were presented to the Social Studies Education Association Conference in Canberra on 25 January 2001.

1990). One type of behaviour which has been linked with political engagement of many forms is that of prosocial behaviour (Yates and Youniss 1999). However this form of behaviour has not yet been directly related to political culture. This paper will do just that, and will focus specifically on the relationship between prosocial behaviour and the domains of political culture.

PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND SCHOOL STUDENTS

Prosocial behaviour is usually defined as behaviour intended to help others. It is sometimes, but not always, referred to as altruistic behaviour, although the latter is often regarded as being sympathetically or morally motivated (Eisenberg 1996). Prosocial behaviour includes forms of volunteer work, unpaid work, charity, and community service. These terms are intended to convey the free choice of those who participate in it. The concept, as used in this paper, is taken also to include intentions, goals, and predispositions to work towards the betterment of society such as the alleviation of poverty or suffering. Therefore in this study prosocial behaviour is defined first, as volunteer activity, and second, as having a sense of social responsibility.

Volunteer Behaviour as Prosocial Behaviour

Prosocial behaviour in the form of volunteer work has long attracted the attention of politicians, economists, and social scientists. In an Australian national survey in 1999, it was found that 33 per cent of respondents participated in some form of voluntary unpaid work, with an average of 7.9 hours per week. This work had an estimated value of over 40 million dollars for Australian society as a whole (Evans and Kelley 2000).

But there are other benefits to volunteer behaviour to the giver and to the receiver. For the giver the benefits may take the form of a sense of well-being related to religious or ideological convictions. For the receiver volunteer activity may obviously bring material, social and psychological benefits which otherwise might not be forthcoming. Social scientists have often been interested in who engages in this form of behaviour, and why they do so. This interest is largely because there are characteristics which identify the real or potential participant in volunteer activity (Wilson and Musick 1997; Baldock 1999).

Young people benefit by engaging in volunteer work. Its very name focuses on the contributory aspect of the activity and also the link between prosocial behaviour and the community.[2] In this respect, volunteer behaviour by young people has attracted recent attention, not because it represents a form of economic benefit to society, but because of the benefits it brings to the participant in the development of a sense of engagement with the wider society. For some, volunteer activity by young people is seen even as a part of the political socialization process, and as a contribution to the formation of a civic identity, and the preparation for adult life in a democratic society (Youniss and Yates 1999; Niemi, et al. 2000).

Youth school-based volunteer activities, sometimes called extracurricular activities, range from community service projects to organised school sport, and can include various school-linked clubs, such as debating, chess, or stamp and coin collecting. But many activities take place outside

[2] Mandatory prosocial behaviour is not the same as volunteer behaviour, but it brings about the same consequences. For example, Yates (1999) found that youth who participated in a mandatory project for the homeless experienced heightened social awareness. “The data from this program suggest that required participation can be meaningful when the service is conceptualized and carried out as an integral part of a school’s or other community institution’s overarching mission.” Although the notion of mandatory voluntary work appears to be a contradiction, Seginer (1999) reports how, in Israel, compulsory volunteer programs in secondary school are by and large successful in promoting collectivist community orientations among youth in an increasingly individualistic cultural environment.

of school hours and are unpaid and community focused. Examples of these latter activities include the Red Cross, the Wilderness Society, the Royal Life Saving Society, and Amnesty International.

It is argued that these latter types of prosocial activities develop habits in young persons, which are beneficial for the principles of a democratic society. Studies have found that young people who engage in volunteer activities are more likely to become politically engaged as adults. They are more likely to vote, to participate in political debate, and generally to become more politically active citizens as adults (Verba, et al. 1995).

In addition to the beneficial outcomes of volunteer behaviour for a democratic society, much of its justification is related to individual outcomes that have social and political consequences.[3] The support for volunteer activity by young people is founded on the belief that prosocial behaviour helps the young person develop empathy, which is the ability to take the perspective of another person and is an essential component for responsible adult citizenship (Berman 1997). Furthermore, this process of personal development is seen as more effective if it is based on experiential rather than theoretical knowledge, since the actual experience of an activity leads to the formation of habits, which are more likely to be repeated later in life (Youniss and Yates 1999).

As a form of prosocial behaviour, volunteer work by youth does have positive political socialization consequences. However, given that political culture has many domains, and given that there are other determinants of the acquisition of political culture, the question to be analysed here is whether volunteer work exercises an effect independent of the family, school, and other agents in this process.

Social Responsibility as Prosocial Behaviour

There probably has been more attention directed to the study of antisocial than prosocial behaviour among youth (Coleman and Hendry 1999). The reason is obvious, as antisocial behaviours are seen as leading to social problems for society. On the other hand, since the 1970s there has been an increasing interest in prosocial activities among youth, particularly since they are now recognised as leading to a sense of social responsibility toward others, and because it already begins to develop in very young children (Eisenberg 1996).

A feeling of social responsibility is as much linked with active citizenship and political culture as is volunteer behaviour. Social responsibility focuses on the relational aspect of being a good citizen and has been defined as "the personal investment in the well-being of others and the planet" (Berman 1997, p.12). Insofar as a sense of social responsibility is a form of prosocial behaviour, its possession also can be expected to be related to political knowledge and other domains of political culture.

The acquisition of social responsibility is often linked with moral development from childhood to adulthood. The theories of Piaget and Kohlberg have been influential in attempting to explain the process whereby individuals internalise the moral values of society. These values are generally limited to the consideration of moral rules which prevent inflicting harm, either directly or indirectly, to another person (Nunner-Winkler 1994). However the positive side of morality includes everything from feelings of empathy, the sharing of objects, comforting behaviour,

[3] Alexis De Tocqueville, in his analysis of democracy in America, originally noted the link between volunteer community service and democracy. According to Gamson (1992) the experience of any kind of collective action, whether collective community service through an organised program, or other collective movement, contributes to the formation of collective identity, solidarity, and political consciousness. All of these, in one form or another, contribute to the practice of an active citizenship and the support of democratic processes.

behaviour intended to improve the well-being of others, and life goals which include the helping of others.

A characteristic of persons who engage in socially responsible behaviour is the ability to take the perspective of another person. This aspect of perspective-taking also includes groups or categories of individuals as well. Therefore individuals with a sense of social responsibility are also likely to be more concerned with the wider community and with issues related to the community. One aspect of this wider interest touches the domain of politics. Thus young persons who have a strong sense of social responsibility can also be expected to be more engaged with political culture. However, given that political culture has many domains, as was pointed earlier, it is not clear whether a sense of social responsibility will bring about engagement with all of them.

PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND POLITICAL CULTURE

Niemi, Hepburn and Chapman (2000) suggest that prosocial programs in schools, whether through volunteer community service projects or classroom exercises, represent a form of political learning that will lead to greater political engagement in adult life. They contend that consequent gains in politically related knowledge and an increase in a sense of social responsibility lead to favourable attitudes toward civic and political activities. Their own review of the literature suggests some positive support for this argument, although they do acknowledge both the paucity of evidence and the somewhat mixed results of previous studies. Nevertheless, Niemi and his colleagues demonstrate in their own study of American high school students, based on the 1996 National Household Education Survey, that volunteer activities can lead to greater political knowledge, political skills, and the formation of positive political attitudes. They also conclude that volunteering behaviour **causes** these changes because the pattern in relationships is the same irrespective of whether the activity was voluntary or mandatory, or whether the school arranged or did not arrange the volunteer experience. In other words, prosocial activity, along with civics education and other academic curriculum-related sources, makes an independent contribution to the acquisition of political knowledge, and therefore leads to a heightened sense of civic responsibility.

Niemi, Hepburn and Chapman (2000) admit, however, that their findings are a "mixed bag", and should be accepted with a number of cautions. These cautions relate to the importance of the intensity or amount of volunteer activity, the type of activity performed, and the apparent lack of any effect of prosocial activity on changes in political tolerance. For example, they found that one-off experiences with volunteer activities had little or no effect on political knowledge variables. Second, their measure of prosocial behaviour was based on a generic self-reported question that only required the student to indicate that they had performed a volunteer activity, and for what duration.[4] Finally, although they did find evidence of increased political knowledge by those who had participated in prosocial activities, these activities were not related to any increase in religious tolerance or in tolerant attitudes regarding the placing of controversial books in a public library.

There is little empirical data to test whether prosocial activities, as described above, cause similar gains among Australian youth. First, figures on the participation of young students in various prosocial activities do not exist except by inference from the age categories of wider social science surveys (Evans and Kelley 2000). Second, where these figures do exist, they are not related to politically related variables. The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (Fleming 2000), for example, do include questions regarding volunteer work, but there are no direct

[4] The actual question asked whether respondents had participated in "community service activity or volunteer work at your school or in your community" (Niemi et al., 2000).

political knowledge variables with which to relate this behaviour.[5] The analysis which follows will fill this gap in our knowledge, as it will investigate in greater depth the relationship between prosocial activities and political culture for a sample of Australian school students.

THE DATA

The data necessary to investigate these questions are found in the second *Schools, Work and Politics Project*, which was conducted by the author in Canberra, ACT, and Adelaide and Whyalla, South Australia, in 1991 and 1992.[6] The survey did include questions about political knowledge and attitudes, student participation in extra-curricular activities and also student life goals. The study included students from Years 10, 11 and 12 in 27 schools. The schools were selected on a stratified random basis to be representative regarding school type (government or private) and regions of the respective cities. Of the 1311 students surveyed, 73 per cent attended government schools and 27 per cent attended private schools. The students were almost evenly distributed by state, with 54 per cent from the ACT and 46 per cent from South Australia. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers during class periods, and required about 35 to 50 minutes to complete. The sample provides a reasonable cross-section of the Canberra and South Australian secondary school population.[7]

The independent variables and the variables of interest

The content of the survey focused specifically on how students learned about politics and about jobs. In addition to questions about their family background, schooling, and their leisure and part-time work activities, students were asked about their attitudes and knowledge regarding work, life goals, and politics. Information was also obtained about part-time work, homework, and some politically related actions. (Saha 2000b) Among the life goal items, two specifically asked about the importance to the student of helping to correct social inequalities and helping others in need.

Finally, students were asked to list the extracurricular activities in which they were currently involved.[8] In the questionnaire, there were seven numbered lines on which they could list these activities, although there was room on the page for more. From these data two variables were created. The first included the total number of activities listed, and the second included only those activities that were considered of a prosocial or volunteer work nature. It is the latter variable that is used in this study.

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[5] The 1999 Wave 5 survey reports that 15.9 per cent of the 8783 student responses claim to have engaged in volunteer work, of whom 11.2 per cent do it once a week. However the only items in the questionnaire which have any bearing on political knowledge concern the reading of newspapers or books. There are, however, interest items, such as interest in the "state of the world", and satisfaction items, such as "satisfaction with the way the country is run", and "satisfaction with the state of the economy" (Fleming, 2000).

[6] Although the data were collected some time ago, they are unique in the range of politically-related variables that were included in the same questionnaire. There is no current data set known to the author with which to examine the issues developed in this paper. Furthermore the study was conducted before the development and introduction of specific civics-related curriculum materials in Australian schools.

[7] Appreciation is due to the government departments of education in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and South Australia in helping to develop a sample of schools and gaining access to them. Appreciation is also due to the principals, teachers and students of the schools in this study for their cooperation in making this study possible. The study was supported by a small ARC Grant.

[8] The actual question was as follows: "Do you participate in any extra-curricula activities (eg, rugby club, debating club, student representative, choir, etc.? If yes, list any extra-curricula clubs or associations, both school and non-school, to which you presently belong or in which you are now participating".

Thus, the two prosocial variables are as follows. The first is Volunteer Activity, which indicates whether or not a student had participated in one of the extracurricular voluntary work activities. Of the student respondents, 14 per cent had done so. The second variable, Sense of Social Responsibility, was composed from two variables, namely whether the student had life goals to correct inequalities (three response categories) and whether the student found helping others to be satisfying (four response categories). Of the students, 26 per cent were said to be 'very high' on Sense of Social Responsibility in that they had a score of 6 or 7 on this variable, meaning that they had given the highest response category for at least one of the two component items, and next to highest response category on the other. (See Table 1 for a more detailed description of these variables.) [9]

Table 1. Description of Independent Variables in the Analyses

VARIABLE LABELS	VARIABLE DESCRIPTIONS
	Variables of Interest
Prosocial Orientation	
Volunteer Activity	Belongs to, or participates in, community-oriented volunteer club or activity: 0 = no, 1 = yes; Mean = 0.20, SD = 0.51
Sense of Social Responsibility	Variable constructed by combining two items: 1) "Life goal is working to correct inequalities" (four codes, from low to high agreement), and 2) Work is satisfying if it is helping others" (three codes, from low to high importance). For the variable 2 = low social responsibility, to 7 = high social responsibility; Mean = 4.86, SD = 1.07
	Control Variables
Background	
State (ACT)	The State of student: 1 = South Australia, 2 = ACT; Mean = 1.54, SD = 0.50
Year in School	Year in school: 1 = 10th, 2 = 11th, 3 = 12th; Mean = 1.86, SD = .80
Sex (Male)	The Sex of student: 1 = Female, 2 = Male; Mean = 1.48, SD = 0.50
Father's Occupational Status	ANU2 scale with 331 = worker, to 880 = profession; Mean = 577.49, SD = 133.21
Mother's Occupational Status	Same as above; Mean = 4.23, SD = 1.47
Father's Education	Seven codes with 1 = no schooling, to 7 = university degree; Mean = 4.59, SD = 1.75
Mother's Education	Same as above; Mean = 523.65, SD = 92.48
School	
Private School	Attendance at Private School: 0 = no, 1 = yes; Mean = 1.27, SD = 0.44
Interaction with Teachers	1 = poor, to 4 = very good; Mean 3.40, SD = 0.63
Like School	1 = hate it, to 4 = yes, very much; Mean = 2.85, SD = 0.76
Civics Class	Studied Australian government: 1 = no, 2 = yes; Mean =1.52, SD = 0.50
Achievement Index	An index based on five recent grade results, with 1 = Fail, to 5 = A. The range is from 64 (highest) to 14 (Lowest); Mean = 36.94, SD = 6.77
Social Psychological	
Australian Identity	Identify with Australia: 1 = not at all, to 5 = completely; Mean = 3.77, SD = .99
Trust Gov	Trust Government: 1 = none of the time, to 4 = all the time. Mean = 2.15, SD=0.72
God is Important in Life	The extent to which respondent considers God as important to one's life: 1 = not important, 2 = important, 3 = very important; Mean = 1.74, SD = 0.80

Previous research for a long time has identified family background and school experience as important determining factors for a range of politically-related attitudes and behaviours among

[9] Of the student respondents, 59 per cent indicated that they had participated in one or more types of extracurricular activity, about 25 per cent listing more than one activity. Less than one per cent listed seven activities. Girls were more likely to participate in extracurricular activities than boys, the percentages being 45 per cent and 37 per cent respectively. With respect to voluntary activities, 16 per cent of the students indicated participation, again with a slightly larger proportion of girls (20 %) than boys (13 %) listing an activity in this category. The propensity for girls to be more inclined to participate in voluntary activities is consistent with findings in both Canada and the United Kingdom (Pancer and Pratt 1999; Roker et al., 1999).

youth. (See, for example, Sears, (1969), Jennings and Niemi, (1974) and Beck (1977). Selected variables which measure these two environments are included in the analytical model. The state of residence is included to investigate whether regional differences exist. In addition, three important social psychological variables are included which are expected to affect political culture variables, namely national identity, trust of the government, and the importance of religion. Finally, two prosocial variables complete the analytical model. All independent variables are described in Table 1. For ease of interpretation, the variables of interest for this analysis, namely Volunteer Activity and Sense of Social Responsibility, are placed at the top of the table.

Measures of political culture

In many studies, a number of variable clusters are used to measure political culture. For example Niemi, Hepburn and Chapman (2000), in their study of American high school students, include variables that cluster within the following political domain categories: political knowledge, attention to politics, participation skills, political efficacy, and political tolerance.

This study builds on that by Niemi and his colleagues, and includes political culture variables in similar clusters. There are small differences in the measurement of the political culture variables used here and those used by Niemi and his colleagues. However, as a whole they measure the range of political culture domains that are conceptually similar to those in the Niemi study.

Six domains of political culture are used in this analysis. Each of these six are factor variables that were constructed from a larger number of the questionnaire items (see Appendix), and therefore they are measured in the same metric. In addition to the factor scores, the variables for each domain were checked for scale reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The components of each of the six political culture variables, the factor weightings, Cronbach's alpha, and the bivariate correlations with the two prosocial behaviours are described in Table 2.

Political Knowledge includes three survey questions relating to knowledge about the houses of Parliament and the ability to name both Australian and international political figures. Cronbach's alpha for these items is 0.68, and the correlation coefficient between the factor variable and Volunteer Activity is 0.14. Political Knowledge does not correlate with Sense of Social Responsibility.

Attention to Politics includes talking about politics with parents, reading about politics, watching news on TV, and getting political information from media, friends and other adults. The reliability coefficient for these items is 0.72, and the factor variable correlates significantly with both Volunteer Activity ($r = 0.26$) and Sense of Social Responsibility ($r = 0.21$). Clearly, students who engage in volunteer activity and who have a sense of responsibility toward others in society, are also likely to be more interested in, and attentive to, politics in various forms.

Activism Experience measures the extent to which the students have experienced forms of political activism that are considered to be within the acceptable or normative limits of behaviour.[10] This factor variable includes signing and collecting signatures, writing letters to the Prime Minister, other politicians, and the media, and taking part in a peaceful demonstration (Saha 2000b). Students who engage in volunteer behaviour or who have a sense of social responsibility are also likely to have participated in normative activism, and therefore have activism experience ($r = 0.15$ and 0.18 respectively). These correlations support Loeb (1994), who

[10] The survey items actually measured a second "non-normative" type of activism that included damage and violence (see Saha (2000b)). However it was not consistent with definitions of activism in other studies and therefore was dropped from this analysis.

argues that individuals who are activist-oriented, tend to alternate between direct forms of activism, as represented in the normative activist scale, and various kinds of prosocial activity.

Table 2. Description of Dependent Variables (Political Culture Factor Variables)

Variable Name	Variable Description	Correlations with:	
		Volunteer Activity	Social Responsibility
Political Knowledge	A factor variable constructed from three political knowledge variables (factor weightings in parentheses): Number of Australian Politicians Named (0.88), Number of International Political Figures Named (0.89), and Can You Name the Houses of Parliament (0.57). Cronbach's alpha = 0.68.	0.14***	0.04
Attention to Politics	A factor variable constructed from five political attentiveness variables (factor weightings in parenthesis): Active Interest in Politics(0.65), Read Politics (0.52), Political Information from Friends (0.37), Friend Interested in Politics (0.71), and Talk about Politics with Parents (0.64) . Cronbach's alpha = 0.72.	0.26***	0.21***
Activism Experience	A factor variable constructed from six activism variables (factor weightings in parentheses): Have Signed a Petition (0.49), Have Collected Signatures (0.60), Have Participated in a Demonstration (0.59), Have Written or Contacted the Prime Minister (0.76), Have Written or Contacted a Member of Parliament (0.79), and Have Written or Contacted the Media (0.66). Cronbach's Alpha = 0.70.	0.15**	0.18**
Political Efficacy	A factor variable constructed from four political efficacy variables (factor weightings in parentheses): Youth Have a Say in Government (0.69), Government Does Care What the People Think (0.83), Government is in Touch With the People (0.82) and Political Parties are Interested in People's Votes and Their Opinions (0.80). Cronbach's Alpha = 0.79.	0.08**	0.01
Political Freedoms	A factor variable constructed from three political freedom variables (factor weightings in parentheses): Citizens must be free to criticize government (84), It is good for the government to be frequently criticized (0.83), and Regular elections are necessary (0.66). Cronbach's Alpha = 0.67.	0.11***	0.11***
Human Rights	A factor variable constructed from three human rights variables (factor weightings in parentheses): Migrants should stand for elections and take part in politics (0.77), No matter what a person's nationality, if they are qualified for a job, then they should get it (0.82), and Women should have the same rights as men in every way (0.61). Cronbach's Alpha = 0.58.	0.04	0.22***

* $p < 0.05$
** $p < 0.01$
*** $p < 0.001$

Political Efficacy is measured by an alienation scale, which has been reverse coded. This scale is made up of four items that measure the extent to which the student feels that young people have some say in the decisions of government, and that generally politicians are responsive to young people's needs and views.[11] The correlations in Table 2 indicate that students who engage in

[11] The actual questions were as follows: 1) Young people like me don't have a say about what the Government does; 2) I don't think that people in Government care much about what young people like me think; 3) Those elected to Parliament in Canberra lose touch with the people pretty quickly; and 4) Political parties are only interested in people's votes and not in their opinions. There were four response categories, ranging from strongly agree to strongly

volunteer activities also feel more empowered (r = 0.08). This suggests that engaging in forms of volunteer activity is consistent with an empowered feeling of being noticed politically, and of being able to have an impact on the decisions of government and politicians. However having a sense of social responsibility, or wanting to help people in need, does not correlate with political efficacy.

Political Freedoms is a factor variable, which measures the extent to which the student endorses citizen freedoms with respect to the government. It consists of three questionnaire items concerning the freedom to criticize the government, the benefits of government criticism, and the necessity of regular elections. The reliability coefficient for these items is 0.67. Both prosocial variables correlate positively with Political Freedoms (r = 0.11 for both), indicating that students who volunteer, or whose life aim is to help others, endorse political or civic freedoms.

Finally, *Human Rights* is a factor variable, made up of three questionnaire items, which measures the extent to which the student endorses political and human rights for migrants and women. The reliability coefficient for the items is 0.58. Consistent with the findings of Niemi and his colleagues (2000), students who engage in volunteer activities are not more tolerant regarding the rights of women and minority groups. However students who have a strong sense of social responsibility do have a strong commitment to human rights (r = 0.22).

These six domains are relatively independent of each other, which means they measure different aspects of political culture. The inter-correlations between the six domains range from zero to a high of 0.29 (the latter is between Attention to Politics and Activism Experience). Therefore it is appropriate to treat each as a dependent variable, and compare the effects of the independent variables across all six. In this way, it will be possible to determine how school students differentially acquire, or engage with, different components of political culture. Finally, it will be possible to determine the independent effects of student prosocial behaviour, as defined here, on the domains of political culture.

The Multivariate Analysis

The same variables described in Table 1 constitute the empirical model for the multivariate analysis of the determinants of the domains of political culture. OLS multiple regression procedures are used to test the hypothesis that the prosocial behaviour variables, independent of the other variables in the model, do contribute to, or cause an increase in political culture. Thus, if volunteer activity and sense of social responsibility remain significant when the other variables also have been included in the analysis, it can be concluded that they exercise an independent effect on the various domains of political culture.

Missing data were excluded using the pairwise deletion procedure. The resulting sample size for each analysis varied from a low of 832 for the political knowledge domain to a high of 1041 for the political freedom and human rights domains. As is apparent in Table 2, much of the missing data occurred with the creation of the factor variables. However given the nature of the dependent variables, and the robustness of the regression procedure, it is unlikely that the results have been systematically affected.

The figures reported in Table 3 include both the unstandardised (metric) and standardised regression coefficients of the model for each of the six political culture domains.[12] The

disagree. The responses were summed to form an additive scale. (See Table 1.) A high score indicates a high level of alienation.

[12] Only the variables that were statistically significant are shown in Table 3.

unstandardised coefficients (B) are useful in comparing the effects of a particular variable across the six political culture domains. The standardised regression coefficients (beta) are important for comparing the relative effects of each independent variable within the same political culture domain. The results for the two prosocial behaviour variables, as the variables of interest, are presented at the top of the table for ease of interpretation.

Table 3: Regression Coefficients of Independent Variables on Selected Political Culture Variables (Standardised Coefficients in Parentheses)

	Political Culture Variables					
	Political Knowledge	Attention to Politics	Activism Experience	Political Efficacy	Political Freedoms	Human Rights
Variables of Interest						
Pro-Social Variables						
Volunteer Activity	0.188*** (0.098)	0.328*** (0.167)	0.183** (0.099)	n.s.	0.163** (0.084)	n.s.
Social Responsibility	n.s.	0.123*** (0.130)	0.137*** (0.153)	n.s.	0.119*** (0.127)	0.131*** (0.139)
Control Variables						
Background						
State (ACT)	0.455*** (0.232)	0.191** (0.094)	n.s.	n.s.	0.131* (0.066)	-0.157** (-0.078)
Year in School	0.107** (0.087)	0.190*** (0.150)	n.s.	0.082* (0.065)	0.077* (0.061)	n.s.
Sex of Student (Male)	0.326*** (0.166)	0.118* (0.058)	-0.175** (-0.092)	n.s.	0.139* (0.070)	-0.461*** (-0.230)
Australian Born	n.s.	-0.279*** (-0.099)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-0.293*** (-0.105)
Father's Occupational Status	n.s.	0.001* (0.080)	n.s.	n.s.	0.001* (0.095)	0.001* (0.088)
Mother's Occupational Status	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Father's Education	n.s.	n.s.	0.076** (0.139)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Mother's Education	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	0.090** (0.133)	0.080** (0.118)
School						
Private School	0.213** (0.096)	0.213** (0.093)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Taught About Aust Government	0.257*** (0.131)	0.239*** (0.119)	n.s.	0.139* (0.069)	n.s.	n.s.
Interaction with Teachers	n.s.	0.127** (0.079)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	0.155** (0.097)
Like School	n.s.	0.198*** (0.149)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	0.113** (0.085)
Achievement Index	0.011* (0.077)	0.012** (0.080)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	0.010* (0.067)
Social Psychological						
Australian Identity	0.066* (0.066)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-0.101*** (-0.100)
Trust Government	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	0.583*** (0.417)	-0.187*** (-0.135)	0.094* (0.067)
God is Important in Life	n.s.	0.078* (0.062)	-0.085* (-0.072)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Constant	-3.235***	-4.368***	-1.435***	-2.120***	-1.576***	-0.685
R^2 (adj)	0.188	0.299	0.11	0.209	0.065	0.181

n.s. = coefficient not significant, * p > 0.05, ** p >0 .01, *** p > 0.001

RESULTS

The analysis produced different patterns across the six political domains, with the variance explained (adjusted R^2) ranging from 29.9 per cent for Attention to Politics to a low of 6.5 per cent for Political Efficacy. Furthermore, there is considerable difference in the variables that make a contribution to the explanations for each of the six domains. Finally, some variables, in particular the two prosocial variables, show significant effects for most of the political culture domains. In order to facilitate the discussion of the findings, the profile for each political culture variable is briefly summarized below, and important points noted.

Political Knowledge

The independent variables in the model explain 18.8 percent (adjusted R^2) of the total variance in political knowledge. After controlling for other variables, Volunteer Activity causes a significant independent increase in Political Knowledge (beta = 0.10), whereas Social Responsibility, as might be expected from Table 2, does not. The positive relationship between volunteer activity and political knowledge is consistent with the findings of Niemi, Hepburn and Chapman (2000).

It is easy to argue that Volunteer Activity does increase political knowledge, because as an activity it brings the student into contact with the wider community and the social and political issues found there. On the other hand, a sense of social responsibility, as a goal in life, does not of itself provide the experiential basis for the motivation to acquire political knowledge. Berman (1997) argues that a sense of social responsibility, without some form of subsequent action, is not sufficient for higher levels of political consciousness and political knowledge.

The other contributing variables to an increase in Political Knowledge, in order of size of impact, (see the beta coefficients in parentheses) are a) being in the ACT rather than South Australia, b) being male, and c) having been taught about the Australian Government in school. Having engaged in volunteer activity and attending a private school are the next two important contributors. Finally, the remaining but less important contributors to Political Knowledge are higher Year level, higher academic achievement, and a positive Australian identity.

It is important to note that in the context of the model none of the home background variables, school interaction variables, religious commitment, or trust in government, were significant in predicting the student scores on the political knowledge variable.

Attention to Politics

The variables in the analytical model were successful in explaining about 30 per cent of the variance in Attention to Politics. All but five of the 18 independent variables contributed significantly. Of these variables, Volunteer Activity was the most important (beta = 0.17), followed by Year in School (beta = 0.15), Like School (0.15) and Social Responsibility (0.13). Thus the prosocial variables were among the most important in explaining how much the student possessed a political consciousness by reading and talking politics with family and friends. As with Political Knowledge, later year males, who came from private schools and who were engaged with the school, were also more attentive to politics. They were also more likely to come from the ACT, from higher socio-economic backgrounds, held religious beliefs, and most surprisingly, were likely to be non Australian-born (beta = -0.10). It is not clear why migrant students should be more attentive to politics, unless migrant status generates a heightened interest in the political culture of the new homeland. A closer examination of ethnicity would be necessary in order to explain further this somewhat counter-intuitive finding.

What is most important, however, is that both prosocial variables were significant in contributing to the extent of interest and attentiveness to politics among this sample of school students. Students who are involved in forms of prosocial behaviour are surrounded by people interested in politics, pay more attention to politics, and they talk more about it. To the extent that awareness and attention to politics provide an opportunity for the production of politically informed and engaged adults, the benefits of prosocial behaviour for adult active citizenship is clearly indicated in these figures.

Activism Experience

The variables in the model explain only a modest amount of variance in the demonstrated possession of activism experience, with only 11 per cent of the variance explained.

The most important variable contributing to activism experience is a sense of social responsibility (beta=0.15). What is more interesting, however, is the fact that in the context of this model, volunteer activity is also a significant contributor to activist experience (beta=0.10). It can be inferred, therefore, that the experience of engaging in voluntary activities, which involves a looking outwards toward the community and society, does contribute to the development of the participation skills and activist experience necessary for political engagement. Therefore, students who have prosocial actions and sentiments are also more likely to have experienced signing petitions, writing letters, and possibility joined a demonstration in support of a protest group.

Other characteristics which explain the experience of activism are being female (beta = -0.09), and coming from a family background where the father has a higher level of education (beta = 0.14). It is interesting, and perhaps consistent with a kind of humanitarian sense of responsibility, that having a secular rather than religious commitment also contributes to these activist tendencies (beta = -0.07). In this domain of political culture, secular rather than religious values seem to prevail.

Political Efficacy

The model is very successful in explaining the extent to which the students feel politically empowered, with almost 21 per cent of the variance in Political Efficacy explained. However, what stands out with respect to this political culture domain is that only three variables emerge as important, namely Trust in Government (beta = 0.42), having been taught about the Australian Government (beta = 0.07) and year in school (beta = 0.07).

Political Efficacy, or a sense of political empowerment, is the only political culture variable, which is not influenced by either prosocial variable. Neither volunteer activity nor a sense of social responsibility makes a significant independent contribution to the variance explained. From Table 2, it is clear that Sense of Social Responsibility would not be expected to be important, as it does not correlate with Political Trust. However volunteer activity does correlate to a small extent (r = 0.08). It may be that the importance of trust in government overpowers volunteer behaviour and the other variables in the model. It may be that that without trust, volunteer activity on its own does not lead to stronger feelings of political efficacy. Neimi and his colleagues (2000) did find a positive link between community service and political efficacy, but they did not have a measure of political trust among their control variables.

On the other hand, studies have shown that both political trust and political efficacy are affected by school experiences (Berman 1997; Niemi and Junn 1998). Students who have studied about the government generally feel more empowered and in control of their political environment. The figures in Table 3 support this relationship and indicate that having been taught about the government has an independent effect on Political Efficacy. For this domain of political culture,

these findings underscore the importance of the school context rather than prosocial behaviour as a major influence. Prosocial activity alone seems to have little to do with feelings of political efficacy.

Political Freedoms

The multivariate model was least successful in predicting attitudes towards political freedoms, with only about seven per cent of the variance explained. However, even within this small amount of variation, both Volunteer Activity and Sense of Social Responsibility were significant contributors. In short, students who had been involved in volunteer work and who had a sense of social responsibility were also much more likely to hold views which endorse political freedoms regarding the government (betas = 0.08 and 0.13 accordingly).

The most important predictors for the support of political freedoms were the lack of trust of the government (-0.14), and having a better-educated mother (0.13). Other variables which made significant but smaller contributions were higher father's occupational status (0.10), being male (0.07), living in the ACT (0.07), and higher year level (0.06). One of the more interesting patterns in explaining support for political freedoms is the absence of effects by school and school-related variables. The suggestion from this pattern is that attitudes toward political freedom with respect to government are more a function of social background and life experiences than schooling. This is consistent with the cognitive development explanation for the increasing complexity of political reasoning and understanding among youth (Berman 1997).

Human Rights

The model was successful in explaining the extent to which students held expansive views regarding the rights of various racial and ethnic groups, migrants and women, the variance explained being 18.1 per cent. It is therefore somewhat surprising, but not inconsistent with the findings of Niemi and colleagues (2000), that Volunteer Activity does not contribute to a belief in human rights. However having a strong sense of social responsibility is a significant contributor, with a beta of 0.14.

The strongest contributor to variation in commitment to human rights is sex of student: girls are much more likely to hold expansive views about human rights than boys (beta = -0.23). Similarly, students with better educated mothers, and those who were engaged with school (they liked school more, they interacted more with teachers, and they made better grades), and those who trusted the government, also were more committed to an inclusive view of human rights.

What is particularly interesting and unique in the pattern for this political culture variable is that students from South Australia (beta = -0.08), who were not Australian-born (- 0.11), and who did not have a strong sense of an Australian identity (- 0.10) were more likely to hold strong attitudes towards human rights. This pattern may in part be related to the operationalisation of the variable (the questionnaire items explicitly mentioned both migrants and women). However it may also be a function of personal experience in that being a migrant or a female might make a person more sensitive to human rights issues and less likely to take them for granted.

DISCUSSION

Prosocial Behaviour and Political Culture

The findings reported in this analysis confirm that youth involvement in prosocial behaviour represents a powerful independent contributor to the acquisition of a wide range of political culture domains. It is clear that students who engage in volunteer activity, even measured in a

somewhat crude and arbitrary manner, manifest a higher level of political knowledge, higher political attentiveness, greater political participation experience, and a stronger commitment to political freedom. This is an impressive range of political culture domains, and given that the significant impact of volunteer activity persists in a multivariate model in which another prosocial characteristic (social responsibility) and 15 demographic, home background, school and attitudinal variables are controlled, adds considerable significance to the findings presented here. Even in the two political domains for which the multivariate model was least successful in terms of total variance explained, namely political activism experience and political freedoms, the positive impact of volunteer activity remained.

It is interesting, but also perplexing, that the lack of a relationship between volunteer activity and the concern for human rights is consistent with that of Niemi and his colleagues (2000). Although several explanations were put forward, the fact that even with the variations in the measurement of variables, the consistency in the findings between these Australian youth and Niemi's American sample suggests that a concern for human rights, or what they call tolerance, somehow represents a domain of political culture which differs markedly from the others described in both studies. However, the fact that having a sense of social responsibility is related to an endorsement of human rights suggests that at least some prosocial tendencies might be driven by altruistic motives.

The second prosocial variable, having a sense of social responsibility, also exerted independent effects on four political culture domains, namely attention to politics, activism experience, commitment to political freedoms and commitment to human rights. However, the desire to help others as a goal in life is not related to political knowledge or a sense of political efficacy. Given that a sense of social responsibility is a community or social-oriented tendency, the possession of political knowledge and political efficacy, both individual-level political domains, may not be necessarily present. However activism experience, attention to political events, belief in political freedoms, and the endorsement of human rights could be categorised as outward-looking and more related to wider community and social issues. Therefore the patterns found in these data do have a plausible explanation.

The single domain for which the two prosocial tendencies were not related is that of political efficacy. One would think that either volunteer activity or wanting to help others could not exist without some feeling of political empowerment. However, the finding here indicates that the single most powerful factor influencing political efficacy is whether the students said they could trust the government. Clearly without trust, there can be no feeling of having an impact on political matters, irrespective of a person's prosocial tendencies.

Other Determinants of Political Culture

There are additional findings in this analysis that should not be overlooked. The importance of sex of student, and in particular the difference between boys and girls in the acquisition of political culture, should be explored further. While boys emerge as dominant in political knowledge, political attentiveness and commitment to civic freedoms, girls are dominant in the experience of activism and the concern for human rights. These differences are consistent with findings reported elsewhere (Saha 2000b; Saha 2002) and clearly demonstrate that sex differences are related to specific political culture domains.

The consistent positive impact of year of school (and by implication, age) for four of the six political culture domains strongly underscores the cognitive developmental explanation for the acquisition of political culture. Family background, as measured here, exercises only a modest and somewhat random impact on political culture. However where family background variables are

important, the direction of impact is consistent: higher status and higher levels of parental education do result in heightened engagement with political culture. Aspects of schooling are particularly relevant for three of the six political domains, namely political knowledge, attentiveness to politics, and a commitment to human rights. What is particularly interesting is that no school variables have an independent effect on the acquisition of activism experience or a commitment to political freedoms, while both prosocial variables did have strong impacts. Having been taught about the Australian government emerges as independently important for three of the six domains, and its impact on the feeling of political efficacy should be noted.

Finally, the minimal and mixed results regarding the importance of religious commitment suggests that there is not much of an independent link between religion and a commitment to various political domains. However, religious values may have a strong impact on prosocial activities, a question that is not explored here, but one that merits further investigation.

CONCLUSIONS

Niemi and his colleagues referred to their findings as a "mixed bag" (2000). In some respects this also may be said of the present Australian findings. However, the consistency of the findings, and the fact that youth involvement in forms of prosocial activity does exercise independent and significant positive impacts on political culture domains, provides very important implications for parents, schools, and communities. These findings strongly support the efforts of these agents to facilitate, and create prosocial programs as a means for improving the level of political culture among youth. Insofar as the possession of political culture is a desirable goal in the preparation of youth for adult political life, these findings have enormous significance for family practices and educational policies regarding the extracurricular activities of young people.

Parents who encourage their children to participate in forms of volunteer activity, or who inculcate in them a sense of social responsibility towards others, do contribute to the development of young people who will have higher levels of political culture. They also contribute to the complex process whereby young people become politically literate and politically active adults, which is a prerequisite for the maintenance of a democratic society.

These findings also have some positive implications for schools that not only encourage, but also require, students to acquire a strong prosocial perspective, both by encouraging forms of volunteer behaviour, and by creating a curriculum which promotes a feeling of responsibility for the community and the desire to help others (Berman 1997). Whether required or not, these educational interventions can have positive and favourable impacts on the prosocial development of youth. As the results of this study confirm, the engagement in these prosocial behaviours and dispositions will produce adults who are better equipped with the skills and motivation to become active citizens in the political life of society.

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APPENDIX:
DESCRIPTION OF ITEMS IN POLITICAL CULTURE FACTOR VARIABLES

POLITICAL VARIABLES	VARIABLE DESCRIPTION
Political Knowledge	
Total Australian Names Listed	Total Australian Political Figures Named: None = 1, 1 = 2 etc to 5 = 6
Total International Names Listed	Total International Figures Named: None = 1, one = 2, etc to 5 = 6
Houses of Parliament	Name Houses of Parliament: None = 1, one correct = 2, two correct = 3
Attention to Politics	
Active Interest in Politics	Interest in Politics: 1 = Not at All, to 4 = Active Interest in Politics
Read Politics	Do You Read Politics as Leisure?: 1 = Rarely, to 4 = Almost Every Day
Friends Interested in Politics & Religion	Talk to friends about politics and religion (two items): 2 = never, to 12=almost every day
Political Info from Friends	"Where do you get your information about political matters? friends". 1=none, to 4=most.
Talk Politics with Family (additive scale)	Talk Politics With Dad, Mum and Friends: 3 = Never, to 18 = Every Day *(Cronbach's alpha = 0.83)*
Activism Experience (Normative Activism)	
Have signed a petition	Yes = 2, No = 1
Have collected signatures	Same as above
Have participated in a demonstration	Same as above
Have written or contacted the Prime Minister	Same as above
Have written or contacted a member of Parliament	Same as above
Have written or contacted the media	Same as above
Political Efficacy (Empowerment)	
Youth have a say in government	Strongly Agree = 5, to Strongly Disagree = 2
Government does care what the people think	Same as above
Government is in touch with the people	Same as above
Political parties are interested in people's opinions	Same as above
Political Freedoms	
Citizens must be free to criticize the government	Strongly Agree = 4, to Strongly Disagree = 4
It's good for the government to be criticised	Same as above
Regular elections are necessary	Same as above
Human Rights	
Migrants should for elections and take part in politics	Strongly Agree = 4, to Strongly Disagree = 1
No matter what a person's nationality, if they are qualified for a job, then they should get it	Strongly Agree = 4, to Strongly Disagree = 1
Women should have the same rights as men in every way	Strongly Agree = 4, to Strongly Disagree = 1