

Youth Activism: Developing Sociopolitical Synergy across Interest, Knowledge, and Involvement

Laura Wray-Lake, Elan C. Hope, J. Abigail Saavedra, M. Alejandra Arce, Jerusha O. Conner

Data from ACLU were used in close partnership with Dr. Emily Greytak, Research Director.

Background

- Youth activism is arguably more impactful when youth are highly interested, knowledgeable, and involved in a social justice cause.
- We refer to the alignment of high levels of youth's interest, knowledge, and involvement in social justice issues as sociopolitical synergy.
- Developing sociopolitical synergy may have benefits for youth and benefits for communities and social movements.
- Youth with sociopolitical synergy may also experience more costs of activism.
- Correlates of sociopolitical synergy may differ for youth involved in racial justice and gender justice.

Research Aims

Data came from 677 youth activists surveyed by ACLU in 2021 (78.4% high-school age; 62% female, 12% nonbinary; 16.1% multiracial, 29% monoracial youth of color).

We examined whether young activists with synergy:

- Differed demographically by race, gender or sexuality.
- Reported higher benefits and costs of activism.
- Were more politically active, efficacious, or felt more effective as activists.
- Had greater access to organizations and belonging to activist communities.



UCLA

ACLU



Young activists with **sociopolitical synergy** (high interest, knowledge, & involvement in a social justice issue) experience more belonging, flourishing, and civic efficacy.

For more information, contact wraylake@ucla.edu

Scan to download the manuscript and poster



Results

- Sociopolitical synergy was more common for racial justice (n = 178, 26.3%) than gender justice (n = 116, 17.1%). The synergy groups had little overlap (n = 35, 5%).
- Synergy was compared to three other groups: Low Priority (low interest, high knowledge &/or involvement), Interested but Less Engaged, and Disengaged.

Racial justice youth with synergy were more likely to be:

- Youth of color
- Gender nonbinary
- Higher on flourishing
- Higher on self-expression
- Higher on problems
- Higher on physical health
- Higher on social justice efficacy
- Higher on belonging
- Higher on access to orgs

Gender justice youth with synergy were more likely to be:

- LGBQA
- Higher on purpose
- Higher on flourishing
- Higher on self-expression
- Higher on effectiveness of activism
- Higher on political actions
- Higher on number of familiar orgs
- Higher on belonging

Multinomial Logistic Regression Results

	Racial Justice			Gender Justice		
	Interested but Less Engaged	Low priority	Disengaged	Interested but Less Engaged	Low priority	Disengaged
Model 1: Demographics						
Monoracial youth of color	.547**	.430***	.368***	.918	.696	1.199
Biracial youth of color	.833	.514**	.474***	2.402	2.106	2.510
Gender nonbinary youth	1.069	.917	.345**	.832	1.829	1.822
LGBQA youth	.871	1.175	.999	.575*	1.001	.424***
High school age	1.007	1.122	1.32	1.38	.698	.690
Model 2: Benefits and Costs of Activism						
Flourishing	.680*	.852	.703	.461***	.760	.632*
Purpose benefits of activism	1.405	1.204	1.697	1.554	.547**	.406***
Self-expression benefits of activism	.410***	.662	.286***	.472**	1.737	1.057
Problems from activism	.787	.956	.634*	.733	1.082	.850
Burnout from activism	1.072	.904	1.032	1.395	.881	.802
Mental health	1.090	1.000	1.423	1.808	1.230	1.352
Physical health	1.126	.851	.676**	1.017	1.349	1.138
Model 3: Activist Actions and Effectiveness						
Social justice efficacy	.550**	.824	.379***	.796	1.435	.872
Effectiveness of activism	.737	.961	.839	.514***	.568***	.444***
Political actions	.883	.951	.627	.444*	.916	.381***
Model 4: Access and Belonging						
Belonging	.649***	.808	.516***	.623**	.693**	.445***
Access to organizations	.595***	.935	.656**	.932	1.170	.867
Number of familiar organizations	1.232	1.015	1.121	.728*	1.019	1.061

Note. Odds ratios reported. Demographics were included as controls in Models 2-4. Reference group = Synergy (high interest, knowledge, and involvement). *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Potential Applications of Study Findings

- The concept of sociopolitical synergy can be useful for identifying meaningful developmental goals for young activists.
- Young activists are not all the same and still need to be supported in their civic and personal development.
- Sociopolitical synergy is issue-specific, and youth may have synergy on some issues but not others.
- Opportunities to access organizations and form belonging with other activists may be ways to support youth in developing synergy.