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Abstract

Research suggests that empathy and positive social values are important drivers of youth prosocial and civic action. However, theory and research indicates that young people's civic behaviours are also shaped by their socio-contextual experiences. Drawing on a sample of 533 adolescents from public secondary schools in the Republic of Ireland, this research employed structural equation modelling to examine whether youth's (cognitive and affective) empathy and social responsibility values mediated the relationship between youth's social (parents, peers, school and community) contexts and their civic behaviour. Results suggest that youth's cognitive empathy and social responsibility values appear to mediate the relationship between a number of social contextual experiences and youth's civic behaviour. Overall, the findings from this research have important implications for research and practice.

Adolescence has been identified as a central period for the development of prosocial and empathic responding (Chase-Lansdale, Wakschlag, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Eisenberg, Spinrad & Valiente, 2016). Researchers propose that the development of empathy and social responsibility values among young people is key to enhancing civil society and promoting greater individual and social well-being (Levine, 2013; Malin & Pos, 2015; Smith, Kendall & Knighton, 2018; Verplanken & Holland, 2002; Wagaman, 2011). Evidence from an array of international research points to a strong connection between greater youth empathic or prosocial/civic responding, and a wealth of social and developmental benefits, including increased psychological functioning (Martela & Ryan, 2016; Miller, Kahle & Hastings, 2015; Zuffiano et al., 2014), greater cognitive performance (Ballard, Hoyt & Pachucki, 2018; Gerbino et al., 2018), improved interpersonal relationships (Attili, Vermigli & Roazzi, 2010; Spinard & Eisenberg, 2014), enhanced social competency skills (Allemand, Steiger & Fend, 2015; Sallquist et al., 2009) and lower prejudice (Nesdale et al., 2005). Notably, research indicates that youth engagement in empathic and prosocial responding not only promotes greater social and emotional adjustment during adolescence (Lenzi et al., 2012; Schmidt, Shumow, & Kackar, 2007), but also appears to have long term consequences, setting the stage for responsibility and citizenship throughout the lifespan (Allemand et al., 2015; Crocetti et al., 2016; Hope & Jagers, 2014; Zaff et al., 2011). It is now proposed that the promotion of empathy, social responsibility and prosocial or civic behaviour among young people should be a priority concern for research and practice (Konrath, O'Brien & Hsing, 2011; Malin & Pos, 2015; Rossi et al., 2016).

According to positive youth development frameworks (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Lerner et al., 2014; Overton, 2015), youth's developmental outcomes are shaped by various person-context dynamics. Specifically, theorists suggest that

youth's developmental learning and behaviours are influenced by the relationships or experiences that occur within their individual social contexts (Gayman, Fraser-Thomas & Baker, 2017; Osher et al., 2018). It is proposed that exposure to positive, social environments during adolescence helps promote positive developmental and behavioural outcomes (Lerner et al., 2014). Evidence from previous empirical research confirms that the development of empathy, social responsibility, and civic engagement is significantly linked to one's social-ecological experiences (Lerner et al., 2014; Rossi et al., 2016; Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2014; Wilkenfeld, Lauckhart & Torney-Porta, 2010). In particular, research suggests that youth's proximal social contexts (e.g. parents, peers, schools, communities) play a key role in moulding their empathic attitudes/values and guiding their civic behaviours (Carlo et al., 2017; Davis, 2018; Evans & Smokowski, 2015; Jaureguizar, Ibabe, & Straus, 2013; Lenzi et al., 2013; Miklikowska, 2017; O'Brien and Kauffman, 2013; Torney-Purta et al., 2007). For example, research has indicated that adolescents whose parents, or friends, model or encourage prosocial values tend to show higher levels of empathy and greater civic participation (Da Silva et al., 2004; Flanagan & Sherrod, 1998; Padilla-Walker & Christensen, 2011). Similarly, studies have found a connection between educational practices at school and youth's empathic and civic responding (Rossi et al., 2016), while a variety of other research has shown that youth's social values and behaviours are also linked to their involvement with their local communities (Atkins & Hart, 2003). For these reasons, researchers frequently contend that the seeds of civic engagement first germinate within the intimate relationships and contexts that encompass young people's daily lives (Wray-Lake and Syversten, 2011).

It is also argued that youth's developmental outcomes are shaped by their individual characteristics and internal processes (Lerner et al., 2014; Gayman et al., 2017; Osher et al.,

2018). Research has identified positive links between youth's prosocial/civic responding and their efficacy beliefs, personality traits, or emotional regulation skills (Alessandri et al., 2014; Caprara et al., 2010). Notably, both theory and research emphasise the role that empathy and positive social/moral values play in motivating prosocial and civic action (Bernhardt & Singer, 2012; Eisenberg et al., 2016; Metzger et al., 2018; Padilla-Walker & Christensen, 2010; Luengo Kanacri et al., 2016; Pratt et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2018). For instance, according to social empathy theory, both social responsibility and empathy are necessary prerequisites for the promotion of social justice related behaviours (Segal, 2011). In addition to these direct effects, researchers propose that empathy and social responsibility may also have indirect associations with youth prosocial and civic responding (Carlo & Hardy, 2005; Crocetti, Jahromi & Meeus, 2011). For example, research has shown that empathy and social responsibility significantly mediate the relationship between various parenting factors and youth's prosocial behaviour (Mesurado & Richaud, 2017; Padilla-Walker & Christensen, 2011; Pieroti, 2016). There is now a growing consensus that in order to generate a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of adolescents' civic development, greater understanding of how individual and contextual factors interact to influence behaviour is needed (Gayman et al., 2017; Lerner et al., 2014; Malin & Pos, 2015). However, there appears to be a dearth of empirical research examining how youth's individual characteristics mediate or moderate the relationship between youth's proximal social contexts and their prosocial/civic behaviour (Cuff et al., 2016; Rossi et al., 2016; Vasconcelos et al., 2012). In particular, there is a lack of research investigating how both social responsibility and empathy mediate the relationship between youth's civic behaviour and different aspects of their social environments.

In conclusion, a large body of research attests to the importance that multiple social contexts (e.g. parents, peers, schools and communities) play in the socialisation of youth's empathic attitudes, social values and civic behaviours. Although researchers propose that empathy and social responsibility are central to the promotion of civic behaviour, there is a lack of research examining how youth's empathy and social responsibility values mediate the relationship between various socio-environmental contexts and their civic engagement. Thus, the current research sets out to extend existing knowledge and understanding about the relationship between youth's social contexts and their empathic and civic responding. This study aims to examine whether youth's civic behaviours, empathic attitudes and/or social responsibility values are significantly linked to their experiences or relationships within their proximal social contexts (e.g. parents, peers, schools and communities). Specifically, this study employs a structural equation model to examine 1) Whether there are significant, direct links between youth's parental, peer, school or community contexts and their civic behaviour? 2) Whether the relationship between youth's civic behaviour and their parental, peer, school or community contexts is mediated by youth's empathic attitudes and social responsibility values?

Method

Participants

A total of 533 (266 male, 262 female, 5 other) adolescents from nine public secondary schools located in the Republic of Ireland participated in this research. Schools were recruited to the study through a stratified randomly sampling approach and participants were recruited from within participating secondary schools. All participants were enrolled in their second year of secondary education and were aged between 13-16 years ($M=13.75$, $SD = .54$). The

majority of participants (88%) identified as Irish. Approximately, 8% identified as being from other European countries and the remaining 4% identified as Non-European.

Instruments

Parental factors. Two aspects of the parental context were assessed in the current study; Parent Social Responsibility and Parent Civic Engagement. *Parent Social Responsibility* (Flanagan, 2013) was assessed through a seven item scale, which measures youth's perceptions of parental encouragement of social responsibility values (e.g., "My parents /guardians encourage me to be helpful to others, especially the less fortunate"). Responses are scored on a scale of 1-5, where higher scores indicate greater parental promotion of social responsibility values. *Parent Civic Engagement* (Flanagan, Syvertsen & Stout, 2007) was assessed by a three-item scale, with responses ranging from 1-5. Higher scores indicated greater youth reported parental engagement in prosocial behaviours within their community (e.g. "My parents/guardians do volunteer work in the community").

Peer factors. *Prosocial Friend Norms* (Farrell et al., 2017) were assessed through the use of a six-item Likert scale, with scores ranging from 1-5. Adolescents were asked to indicate how often their friends engaged in a variety of prosocial activities (e.g., "Help people without expecting something back?"). Higher scores represented greater prosocial norms among friendship groups.

School factors. *Civic Education* was assessed using Flanagan's et al. (2007) Social Analysis scale, which is used to measure the extent of civic education adolescents receive in school (e.g. "In our classes, we learn about problems in our society and what causes them"). Responses are scored on a four-item scale, which ranges from 1-5. Higher scores are indicative of greater levels of civic education. *Open Classroom Climate* (Flanagan et al., 2007) was also measured to assess the degree to which adolescents are encouraged to share

their opinions in class (e.g. “In our classes, students are encouraged to express opinions”). Adolescents were asked to respond to this four-item scale, on a range of 1-5, where higher scores were indicative of a more open classroom environment.

Community factors. *Community Connectedness* (Wray-Lake et al., 2017) was measured using a six-item scale, which assessed the degree to which young people feel a sense of connection to and within their local communities (e.g. “In general, people in my community work together to solve problems”). Items are scored on a range of 1-5 and higher scores are representative of a greater sense of neighbourhood connectedness.

Empathy. Affective and Cognitive empathy were assessed using the *Empathic Concern* and *Perspective Taking* sub-scales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983). Affective Empathy was assessed through the use of the seven item Empathic Concern sub-scale, where responses were scored on a range of 1-5 (e.g. “I am often quite touched by things that I see happen”). Higher scores are indicative of higher levels of affective empathy. Cognitive Empathy was measured through the use of the seven item Perspective Taking sub-scale, which is also scored on a scale of 1-5 (e.g. “I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective”). Higher scores on this scale are indicative of higher levels of cognitive empathy.

Social responsibility. The Youth Social Conscience scale (Bebiroglu et al., 2013) was used to assess adolescents’ *Social Responsibility Values*. The Youth Social Conscience scale is a six-item scale that assesses the sensitivity and sense of responsibility of youth regarding problems in society. Specifically, adolescents were asked to indicate the extent to which a number of values (e.g. “Helping other people”; “Speaking up for equality”) were important to them. Responses are scored on a scale of 1-5, where higher scores were indicative of greater social responsibility values.

Civic engagement. *Youth Civic Behaviour* was assessed using the Voight & Turney-Purta (2013) Civic Behaviour Scale. This scale consists of nine-items, scored on a scale of 1-5, and measures the extent to which adolescents voluntarily engage in a number of civic behaviours both in and outside school (e.g., “Offer to help someone at school”; Help make your community a better place for people to live”). Higher scores represent higher levels of youth civic engagement.

Procedure

All students in their second year of education at participating secondary schools were invited to take part in this research. The researcher outlined the aims and objectives of the study to prospective participants and any student interested in participating in this study was required to return a signed parental consent and personal assent form to the school. All students who returned signed parental consent and assent forms, and were present on the day of research, were gathered as a group in a specified classroom. Pen-and-paper booklets containing the questionnaire items were distributed to all participating students. This survey took approximately 30-40 minutes for students to complete. The researcher and a designated member of school staff remained with the students during the research process. Once students had completed the questionnaire to their satisfaction, they were thanked for their participation and debriefed.

Ethical Considerations

Full ethical approval for this research was granted by the Research Ethics Committee at the authors’ associated university. Informed consent and assent were sought from all participants and data was collected on an anonymous and confidential basis.

Results

SEM analyses were conducted to examine whether youth's parent (Parent Social Responsibility values & Parent Civic Engagement), Peer (Prosocial Friend Norms), School (Classroom Climate & Civic Education) and Community (Community Connectedness) contexts were directly linked to their civic engagement. Indirect relationships between these social factors and youth's civic behaviours, via youth's affective empathy, cognitive empathy and social responsibility values, were also assessed using this SEM analysis. All missing data was handled using the EM algorithm. All quantitative data were analysed using a combination of PASW Statistics 22 (IBM, 2017), and AMOS v.23 (IBM, 2017).

Descriptive Statistics

An overview of adolescents' mean level of responding on all contextual, mediator and outcome variables is shown in Table 1 below. In relation to the contextual factors (e.g. *Community Connectedness, Civic Education, Classroom Climate, Friend Prosocial Norms, Parent Civic Engagement and Parent Social Responsibility*), a review of these mean scores and scale ranges indicated that youth endorsed moderate to high scores on all contextual factors, apart from perceptions of parental civic engagement, which was relatively low. Similarly, adolescents reported having moderately high levels of social responsibility values, affective empathy and cognitive empathy, but endorsed low scores on the youth civic behaviour scale. A full overview of adolescents' pattern of responding on all measures, including means, standard deviations, scale ranges, normal distribution and reliability estimates is provided in Table 1. As can be seen in here, all factors evidenced good or acceptable levels of internal consistency, with alpha levels (α) ranging from .66-.89. While all scales showed acceptable kurtosis levels (< 3), two factors (Parent Social Responsibility and Youth Social Responsibility) showed evidence of skewness (e.g. skewness $> .80$;

Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). However, deviations from normal skewness are to be expected in large sample sizes (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

[Insert Table 1 here]

Correlational Analyses

Prior to testing the hypothesised structural equation model, correlational analyses were carried out to examine associations between the six contextual indicators and youth's empathy, social responsibility values and civic behaviours. Specifically, bivariate correlation analyses were conducted to examine the preliminary patterns of associations between the following factors: Parent Social Responsibility; Parent Civic Engagement; Prosocial Friend Norms; Civic Education; Classroom Climate; Community Connectedness; Youth Social Responsibility; Affective Empathy, Cognitive Empathy and Youth Civic Behaviour. Significant, positive associations were observed between the majority of factors. As seen in Table 2, only one non-significant correlation was observed. Youth's affective empathy and parent's civic engagement were not significantly related.

[Insert Table 2 here]

SEM Analyses

A multiple mediator structural equation model was employed to examine the direct and indirect links between Parent Social Responsibility, Parent Civic Engagement, Prosocial Friend Norms, Social Analysis, Classroom Climate and Community Connectedness and youth's civic behaviour. Three mediators (Affective Empathy, Cognitive Empathy and Social Responsibility) were included in the model (See Figure 1). In order to assess the fit/adequacy of the model, assessments of the relevant fit indices (chi-square; RMSEA; CMIN; SRMR; CFI and TLI) were carried out, following recommended guidelines set forth by Byrne (2016) and Kline (2011). In addition to these model-fit indices, Modification Indices (MI) and

Expected Parameter Change (EPC) values were reviewed to determine whether additional model parameters should be specified. Model re-specifications were only made provided MI and EPC values were large and theoretical justification for the changes was established (Byrne, 2016). Model fit and Delta AIC values were reassessed after each change to the model, to ensure that any new parameter added made a significant improvement to the model. All model parameters were estimated using Maximum Likelihood estimation.

In order to examine the goodness-of-fit of the proposed mediation model a number of preliminary analyses were conducted. First, the factor structure of the proposed latent constructs were examined through confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). In general, factors loadings were significant and varied from .37-.89 (see Appendix A). However, two items on the perspective taking scale evidenced item loadings lower than .3. A simple structural equation model was then specified in order to examine the direct effects of Parent Social Responsibility, Parent Civic Engagement, Prosocial Friend Norms, Social Analysis, Classroom Climate, Community Connectedness, Affective Empathy, Cognitive Empathy and Social Responsibility on Youth Civic Behaviour. This simple model evidenced mediocre fit indices, $\chi^2(1722) = 3705.71, p < .001; Q = 2.15; RMSEA = .047$ (90% CI: .044, .049); CFI = .86; TLI = .85, SRMR = .07, AIC = 4043.71 and BIC = 4766.78. Finally, the mediation model was specified examining the direct effects of Parent Social Responsibility, Parent Civic Engagement, Prosocial Friend Norms, Social Analysis, Classroom Climate and Community Connectedness on Youth Civic Behaviour, through Affective Empathy, Cognitive Empathy and Social Responsibility. This mediation model yielded acceptable model fit: $\chi^2(1717) = 3395.16, p < .001; Q = 1.97; RMSEA = .043$ (90% CI: .041, .045); CFI = .88; TLI = .88, SRMR = .06, AIC = 3743.16 and BIC 4487.62, and accounted for 55% of the variance in youth civic behaviour ($R^2 = .55$). Although the Chi-Square test is

significant and the CFI and TLI fit indices are below the recommended cut-off levels of .90, all remaining fit indices evidenced good model fit (Hooper, Coughlan & Mullen, 2008). As the mediation model evidenced better model fit than the simple model, this model was retained, and is the model referred to hereafter. A visual overview of the structural equation model, tested in the current research, is provided in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Overall, results showed that parent social responsibility exerted significant, positive effects on all mediators – affective empathy ($\beta = .23$, $B = .23$), cognitive empathy ($\beta = .13$, $B = .18$) and social responsibility ($\beta = .21$, $B = .21$), but was not found to have any direct association with youth's civic behaviour. In addition, community connectedness was positively associated with all mediator variables – affective empathy ($\beta = .24$, $B = .22$), cognitive empathy ($\beta = .25$, $B = .30$) and social responsibility ($\beta = .20$, $B = .18$), but had no direct link with civic behaviour. Significant positive effects were also found between prosocial friend norms and affective empathy ($\beta = .19$, $B = .15$), cognitive empathy ($\beta = .22$, $B = .23$) and social responsibility ($\beta = .24$, $B = .19$), although no relationship between youth's prosocial friend norms and civic behaviours was observed. Classroom climate was found to have a significant association with cognitive empathy ($\beta = .18$, $B = .16$), while Civic Education was significantly linked to youth's social responsibility values ($\beta = .18$, $B = .13$). Parent Civic Engagement was not significantly related to either youth's cognitive empathy or social responsibility values. However, a significant, negative relationship between parent civic engagement and youths' affective empathy ($\beta = -.22$, $B = -.15$), and a significant, positive relationship between parent civic engagement and youth civic behaviour ($\beta = .42$, $B = .34$), were found. Higher levels of cognitive empathy ($\beta = .30$, $B = .36$) and youth social responsibility values ($\beta = .16$, $B = .14$) were also significantly associated with greater levels of

youth civic behaviour. A summary of all significant and non-significant regression weights, including standard and unstandardized estimates, and standard errors (for direct effects) is provided in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 here]

In order to determine evidence of mediational effects, all indirect effects were evaluated for significance at the $p < 0.05$ level, with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) established via bootstrapping techniques, implemented using 10,000 bootstrap samples (following recommendations specified by Hayes, 2013). Significant indirect effects are represented by an appropriate alpha level ($p < 0.05$) and a lower (L) and upper (U) bound confidence interval range that does not contain zero (Preacher, Rucker & Hayes, 2007). A full summary of all indirect model effects is outlined in Table 4. As can be seen in this table, affective empathy did not produce any significant indirect effects on youth civic behaviour. However, some significant indirect effects, through youth's cognitive empathy and social responsibility values, were observed. In particular, significant, indirect effects between parent social responsibility and youth civic behaviour via youth social responsibility ($B=.07, p=.001$) and cognitive empathy ($B=.03, p=.03$) were observed. Similarly, both community connectedness and prosocial friend norms were found to have indirect links with youth's civic behaviour, through increased social responsibility values ($B=.06, p=.01$; $B=.07, p=.001$) and cognitive empathy ($B=.04, p=.02$; $B=.03, p=.02$). Classroom climate ($B=.02, p=.04$) was indirectly linked to youth civic behaviour through increased cognitive empathy, while civic education at school ($B=.05, p=.01$) had a positive, indirect relationship with youth civic behaviour through increased social responsibility.

[Insert Table 4 here]

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine whether adolescents' civic behaviours were directly linked to their contextual experiences, and whether youth's empathy and responsibility values mediated this relationship. Significant support for a mediated model was observed, with results suggesting that there is an important link between youth's social contextual experiences and their civic actions, and that this relationship may be explained by differences in youth's perspective taking abilities and social responsibility values. Overall this research identified six specific aspects of youth's social milieu (e.g. *parent social responsibility, parent civic engagement, prosocial friend norms, classroom climate, civic education and community connectedness*) that appear to be significantly associated with their (cognitive and affective) empathy, social responsibility values and/or civic behaviours. However, notable differences in the nature of these relationships emerged. Additionally, differences in how youth's cognitive empathy, affective empathy and social responsibility attitudes mediated the relationship between each individual socio-contextual predictor and youth's civic behaviour were also transparent.

First, important differences in the type of associations found between youth's affective empathy, cognitive empathy, social responsibility values and their civic behaviours were observed. In particular, findings from the mediated structural equation model revealed that while cognitive empathy and social responsibility were both significantly, and positively, related to youth's civic behaviour, no significant connection between youth's affective empathy and civic behaviour was found. These findings conflict with other theoretical and empirical evidence which contends that both aspects of empathy (i.e. the understanding of others' emotions *and* the ability to experience feelings of concern for others) are key motivators of prosocial action (Hoffmann, 2000; Eisenberg, Eggum & Di Gunta, 2010; Segal, 2011). However, recent research has proposed that while both affective and cognitive

empathy may facilitate prosocial responding, they may be associated with different types of prosocial or civic behaviour (Silke et al., 2018; Van Lissa, Hawk & Meeus, 2017; Verhofstadt et al., 2016). Research indicates that differences in “feeling” versus “understanding” may result in different forms of prosocial engagement, with some evidence suggesting that cognitive empathy may be more associated with social justice behaviours than affective empathy (Decety & Yoder, 2015; Van Der Graff et al., 2018). It is argued that cognitive empathy is a more powerful predictor of civic behaviour than affective empathy as it may be more adaptive in certain situations and can help expand one’s circle of care and understanding to include unfamiliar others (Decety & Yoder, 2015; Powell & Roberts, 2017). The findings from the current research have notable implications as they not only highlight the importance of examining the relationship between civic behaviour and both components of empathy, but also suggest that both empathy *and* responsibility values play a key role in predicting youth civic engagement.

A number of interesting findings also emerged regarding the relationship between youth’s social contexts and their empathic and civic responding. Results indicated that parents’ encouragement of social responsibility was directly associated with greater youth affective empathy, cognitive empathy and responsibility values. Additionally, although findings revealed no direct connection between parent social responsibility and youth civic behaviour, a positive, indirect connection through increased youth social responsibility and cognitive empathy skills was observed. On the other hand, parent civic engagement, another aspect of the parental context, was the only aspect of the social environment found to have direct associations with youth’s civic behaviour. In the current study, higher levels of parent civic engagement were linked to greater youth involvement in civic activities, which is consistent with findings observed in other international research (Lai et al., 2015; Jessor &

Turbin, 2014). In contrast, parent civic engagement was found to be negatively associated with affective empathy. It is possible that this relationship may be reflective of a suppression effect, as no significant correlations were observed between these two variables. Although further research is needed to explore this relationship further, the current findings may have relevance for research and practice as they suggest that while aspects of the parental context can exert positive effects on adolescents' civic and empathic responding, they may also have negative ramifications, which highlights the complex nature of this relationship.

In addition to these two parental factors, youth's civic behaviour was found to be indirectly associated with both community connectedness and prosocial friend norms. Results indicated that having friends who engage in more prosocial behaviours and feeling a greater sense of connection with one's community were associated with higher levels youth civic behaviour, through increased cognitive empathy and social responsibility values. Community connectedness and prosocial friend norms were also positively associated with greater affective empathy. These findings have applied relevance as they indicate that youth's civic and empathic development are intricately linked to their experiences and interactions within their wider social networks. Research and policy may benefit from further considering the potential role that friends and neighbours play in facilitating youth civic engagement.

Furthermore, while both classroom climate and civic education were also found to be indirectly associated with youth civic education, these connections were found to occur through alternative mediators. Results indicated that experiencing an open classroom climate in school was associated with greater cognitive empathy skills, which in turn was linked with greater civic action. Similarly, greater levels of civic education in school were associated with greater youth civic engagement, but through increased social responsibility. These findings indicate that while interactive classroom discussions may be important tools for

enhancing young people's perspective taking abilities, learning about civic/societal issues in school may be more relevant for helping to instil youth with a greater sense of social responsibility. Thus, the current findings have relevance for research and practice as they not only add to a growing body of literature which suggests that schools play an important role in shaping youth's civic and empathic development (Acosta et al., 2019; Luengo-Kanacri et al., 2017), but also suggest that youth's empathy and responsibility values may be uniquely affected by different aspects of the school's learning environment.

Strengths, Limitations & Implications of the Research

This research provides a number of important implications and suggestions for both future research and policy or practice. One major strength of the current research is that the mediation model tested here was found to evidence acceptable model fit and account for a large percentage of the variance (approximately 55%) in youth civic behaviour. Thus, this research advances the literature by providing further empirical support for a social-contextual approach to youth civic engagement. Although previous research has indicated that youth's civic engagement can be impacted by their social experiences (Rossi et al., 2016; Wray-Lake et al., 2011), this research is among the first to show that the relationship between youth's social contextual experiences and their civic responding is mediated by both their (cognitive) empathy and responsibility values. Moreover, the findings from the current study have further implications for policy and practice as they show that adolescents' empathy and civic responding are influenced by their experiences and relationships across multiple, different social contexts - including those experienced at home (e.g. with parents) and within their wider communities (e.g. at school, or with friends and neighbours) (Evans & Smokowski, 2015; Lenzi et al., 2013; Wray & Svyersten, 2011). Hence, results suggest that applied initiatives, which aim to promote greater civic and empathic responding among young

people, may benefit from utilising a multidimensional approach that targets both interpersonal (e.g., parents, peers) and organisational (e.g., school, community) social networks.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge a number of potential limitations associated with this research. First, it should be noted that 45% of the variance in youth's civic behaviour remained unaccounted for by the current contextual model. This suggests that other social or individual factors are also likely to play a role in influencing youths' civic engagement (see Allesandri et al., 2014; Davis, 2018) and further comparative research examining the relationship between other individual or contextual factors and youth's civic/empathic responding is called for. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that although 'significant', the indirect relationships observed between the five social contextual factors (e.g. parent social responsibility, civic education, classroom climate, prosocial friend norms and community connectedness) and youth's civic behaviours were all relatively weak. Although, these low effect sizes may be due to the small observed sample size, these low effect sizes may also indicate that these social contexts are more strongly associated with youths' empathic attitudes and social values, than with their civic behaviours. It is also important to note that the current research is cross-sectional in nature and assumptions about the direction of effects should be interpreted with caution (Levin, 2006). Further experimental and longitudinal research, which utilise a larger sample size, would be beneficial in order to be able to infer more causal inferences. Another limitation of the study is the reliance on self-reported instruments. Future research would benefit from including data from multiple respondents in order to reduce the potential impact of common method variance bias. Finally, as this research was carried out in an Irish cultural context, it is important to recognise the

cultural homogeneity of the current research participants and acknowledge that these findings may not generalise beyond this specific cultural context.

Conclusions

Overall, this research provides a number of key insights. Results indicate that youths' empathy, social responsibility and civic behaviour are linked to their experiences and relationships within the parent, peer, school and community domains. However, findings suggest that these contextual factors are linked to youths' empathic and civic responding in different ways. Additionally, this research indicated that while youth's cognitive empathy and social responsibility values appear to mediate the relationship between youth's social contexts and their civic behaviours, affective empathy has no direct or indirect links with this type of youth civic behaviour. Overall, the findings from this research have important implications for practice and policy. Nonetheless, greater research in this area is still needed in order to gain further insight into how other social-ecological processes impact youth's prosocial or civic engagement.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics, Reliability and Normal Distributions

Contextual Factors	M	SD	Possible Range	Attained Range	Skew	Kurtosis	(α)
Parent Social Responsibility	30.60	4.43	7-35	10-35	-1.24	1.72	.88
Parent Civic Engagement	8.14	3.29	3-15	3-15	.24	-.82	.79
Prosocial Friend Norms	22.66	4.58	6-30	6-30	-.66	.54	.82
Civic Education	14.84	3.55	4-20	4-20	-.64	.09	.86
Classroom Climate	13.83	4.01	4-20	4-20	-.34	-.54	.83
Community Connectedness	29.84	6.52	8-40	8-40	-.47	-.20	.88
Youth Social Responsibility	24.98	4.39	6-30	6-30	-.90	.67	.89
Affective Empathy	25.96	4.84	7-35	8-35	-.21	.02	.73
Cognitive Empathy	23.16	4.64	7-35	7-35	.00	.30	.66
Youth Civic Behaviour	25.85	7.53	9-45	9-45	.35	-.44	.83

Table 2

Correlations Between all Contextual, Mediator & Outcome Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Parent Social Responsibility	--								
2. Parent Civic Engagement	.31**								
3. Prosocial Friend Norms	.36**	.27**							
4. Civic Education	.27**	.27**	.34**						
5. Classroom Climate	.25**	.24**	.33**	.53**					
6. Community Connectedness	.35**	.40**	.44**	.41**	.47**				
7. Youth Social Responsibility	.38**	.18**	.40**	.35**	.30**	.38**			
8. Affective Empathy	.31**	.03	.31**	.26**	.25**	.28**	.49**		
9. Cognitive Empathy	.25**	.15**	.32**	.22**	.29**	.35**	.42**	.46**	
10. Civic Behaviour	.26**	.48**	.35**	.32**	.35**	.44**	.41**	.23**	.23**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Table 3

Standardised and unstandardized regression weights (with standard errors) for the Model

Outcome	Predictor	β	B	SE
Affective Empathy				
	<i>Parent Social Responsibility</i>	.23**	.23	.06
	<i>Parent Civic Engagement</i>	-.22**	-.15	.04
	<i>Classroom Climate</i>	.09	.06	.05
	<i>Community Connectedness</i>	.24**	.22	.06
	<i>Civic Education</i>	.11	.08	.05
	<i>Prosocial Friend Norm</i>	.19*	.15	.05
Cognitive Empathy				
	<i>Parent Social Responsibility</i>	.13*	.18	.07
	<i>Parent Civic Engagement</i>	-.09	-.08	.05
	<i>Classroom Climate</i>	.18*	.16	.06
	<i>Community Connectedness</i>	.25**	.30	.08
	<i>Civic Education</i>	.02	.08	.06
	<i>Prosocial Friend Norm</i>	.22**	.23	.06
Social Responsibility Values				
	<i>Parent Social Responsibility</i>	.21**	.21	.05
	<i>Parent Civic Engagement</i>	-.10	-.07	.04
	<i>Classroom Climate</i>	.03	.02	.04
	<i>Community Connectedness</i>	.20**	.18	.06
	<i>Civic Education</i>	.18*	.13	.04
	<i>Prosocial Friend Norm</i>	.24**	.19	.04

Outcome	Predictor	β	B	SE
Civic Behaviour				
	<i>Parent Social Responsibility</i>	-.09	-.10	.06
	<i>Parent Civic Engagement</i>	.42**	.34	.05
	<i>Classroom Climate</i>	.09	.07	.05
	<i>Community Connectedness</i>	.09	.10	.07
	<i>Civic Education</i>	-.03	-.03	.05
	<i>Prosocial Friend Norm</i>	.06	.06	.05
	<i>Youth Social Responsibility</i>	.30**	.36	.06
	<i>Affective Empathy</i>	.04	.05	.09
	<i>Cognitive Empathy</i>	.16**	.14	.06

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Table 4

Tests of the Mediating Effects of Empathic Concern, Social Responsibility and Perspective Taking on Youth Civic Behaviour, including Upper (U) and Lower (L) Confidence Intervals (CI)

Predictors	Direct Effect		Total Effect		Indirect Effect (M = AE)				Indirect Effect (M = SR)				Indirect Effect (M = CE)			
							CI 95%				CI 95%				CI 95%	
	B	p	B	p	B	p	L	U	B	P	L	U	B	P	L	U
Parent Social Responsibility	-.10	.22	.01	.87	.01	.44	-.02	.07	.07	.001	.03	.16	.03	.03	.002	.08
Parent Civic Engagement	.34	.003	.30	.003	-.01	.41	-.05	.02	-.03	.12	-.07	.01	-.01	.09	-.04	.002
Classroom Climate	.07	.21	.11	.09	.003	.36	-.01	.04	.01	.62	-.03	.05	.02	.04	.001	.07
Community Connectedness	.10	.21	.22	.01	.01	.46	-.02	.07	.06	.01	.02	.15	.04	.02	.01	.11
Prosocial Friend Norms	.06	.36	.17	.01	.004	.36	-.01	.04	.07	.001	.03	.13	.03	.02	.01	.09
Civic Education	-.03	.59	.02	.65	.01	.41	-.02	.05	.05	.01	.01	.11	.003	.63	-.02	.03

Note: M = Mediator; AE = Affective Empathy; SR = Social Responsibility; CE = Cognitive Empathy

Figure 1. Mediation model showing standardised estimates for all significant (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$) direct and indirect effects.

Note: Factor loadings and non-significant paths are not shown for simplicity purposes.