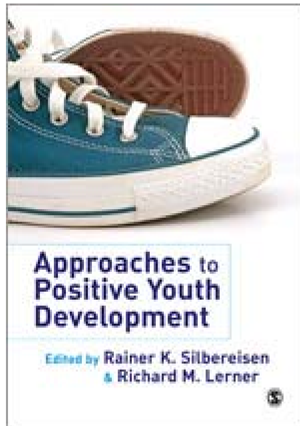

Chapter 13

Youth Political Activism: Sources of Public Hope in the Context of Globalization

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In R. K. Silbereisen & R.M. Lerner (Eds.), *Approaches to Positive Youth Development* (pp. 243-256). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Youth Political Activism: Sources of Public Hope in the Context of Globalization

Constance Flanagan, Amy Syvertsen, and Laura Wray-Lake

During the past two decades, positive youth development (PYD) has challenged a dominant stereotype of youth as carriers of risk and focused instead on their potential and the contributions that young people make to their communities. Most important, from our point of view, PYD has been adamant that *'all youth,'* including those whose families are poor, whose schools are of low quality, or who in other ways do not enjoy the resources society owes them, are, nonetheless, assets to their society and should be treated that way. Our chapter builds on this assets framework and argues that it is time for PYD to take a political turn. Specifically, we contend that there are fundamental structural inequities in the distribution of familial, institutional, and community opportunities in what PYD refers to as 'external assets.' Joining with young activists in redressing these inequities should be the next step for PYD.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the structural inequities and distinguishes the individualization of risk embodied in the 'youth at risk' paradigm from a PYD approach critical of the uneven playing field of external assets. We make the case that youth activism is a logical extension of the PYD perspective, which asserts not only that young people's voices, perspectives, and opinions should be heard but that, when taken seriously, they regenerate organizations and contribute to social change (Lerner & Benson, 2003; Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert, 2000). We maintain that youth activism is a particular form of the sixth 'C,' contribution, which implies some critique of the status quo. Drawing from a range of youth activist projects, we discuss five resonant themes motivating this work and contend, borrowing Mannheim's (1952) phrase, that these themes reflect younger generations' 'fresh contact' with their societies: legitimizing marginalized identities; redressing socioeconomic inequities; preserving the environmental resources that we share; demanding social responsibility

(of corporations, governments, and of individuals to one another); and adaptin to globalization of issues, solutions, and connections of peoples. We assert tha when adults listen to youth's observations and challenges and take seriously the points of view (as PYD insists adults should), social change is inevitable. Th chapter closes with a discussion of the unique lens that youth have on soci: change and with an appeal for PYD to convert the contemporary discourse, whic remains too focused on individual 'risks' and 'assets,' to a more public discourse o justice.

Structural Inequities in External Assets

Although the 'youth at risk' paradigm continues to dominate the field of adolescen development, PYD's 'youth as assets' framing has made significant inroads into th mainstream. According to a recent meta-analysis of the effects of community yout development (CYD) programs, there is a unique 'community building' advantage c this approach. Not only are the personal benefits of participation in such program significant but, compared to programs that focus on problems, those that focu on competencies are more likely to be endorsed and supported by adults in th community (Durlak, Weissberg, Quintana, & Perez, 2004). Thus, the 'youth as assets approach enjoys public support.

When categorizing assets, PYD has distinguished internal from external asset (Search Institute, 2005). The latter include such things as

- Youth feeling safe at home, in school, and in the community.
- Young person receiving support from nonparental adults.
- School providing a caring, encouraging environment.
- Youth participating in sports, clubs, and organizations at school/in community.
- Young person serving in the community.
- Youth perceiving that adults in the community value them.
- Young people having useful roles in the community.

A premise underlying several of these contextual assets is that youth benefit fron social capital, which accrues, in part, via the social resources and relationships of thos adults with whom the young person is connected. In other words, the prototypica 'assets enhancing' community is resource rich in quality institutions and adults wh are not stressed by competing demands such as making ends meet and thus can attenc to and facilitate the growth and development of young people.

However, communities vary significantly in the quality and quantity of institutiona opportunities, in available adults, in the ways in which youth manifest responsi bility and obligation and in access to resources, power, and political voice. Fron fundamental inequities in the quality of schools and the safety of streets to th number of available adults and their connections to sources of influence and power opportunities for youth are uneven across communities and around the world.

According to the most definitive national study on adult civic engagement in the United States, people are recruited into civic participation through institutional connections such as work, school, and religious organizations (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). In addition, young people get engaged via their membership in institutions and organizations in their communities. However, as already noted, opportunities for civic engagement and membership are uneven across communities. Youth residing in poor communities and whose families have lower incomes have lower rates of participation in extracurricular activities at school and, according to some studies, lower rates of participation in community-based organizations (National Center for Youth Statistics, 1996). Even when activities are free, there are hidden costs in such things as uniforms, supplies, and transportation. Furthermore, communities with fewer financial resources also have fewer human resources insofar as the ratio of children to adults is much higher in resource-stressed communities (Hart & Atkins, 2002).

Children living in resource-stressed communities also are likely to have fewer opportunities to learn how citizens can get the system to work for them. Over and above the negative effects of a family's poverty on an individual's political efficacy, the level of poverty in the community further depreciates the number of civic organizations, church groups, and indirect ties to public officials that enable local citizens to solve their community's problems (Cohen & Dawson, 1993). When communities have fewer opportunities for their members to connect to one another, levels of trust decline and cynicism may take over. Although there are numerous examples of youth from resource-stressed communities engaging in community action (Curnan & Hughes, 2002), our point is that they have to overcome extra obstacles to do so. This is an issue of justice to which PYD should attend.

External assets also point to opportunities for youth to exercise meaningful roles that are valued by adults in the community. In this case the inequities are not in opportunities to fulfill meaningful roles, but in the definitions of those roles and the mechanisms whereby they are recognized and valued. In addition to the financial constraints and lack of options associated with being poor, poverty also exacts psychological costs on families. When parents are stressed by the demands of making ends meet, young people are often recruited into adult-like roles, giving as much, if not more, support as they receive. Often these youth perform 'useful roles' and 'serve their communities' by holding families together. Yet their contributions may go unnoticed because they do not mesh with dominant images of civic engagement or service to the community. In fact, mandates from schools that students do service in the community may overextend the obligations with which some 'adultified' children already are saddled (Burton, 1997).

In summary, we have argued that there are fundamental structural inequalities in the external assets that different communities provide for children and youth. Insofar as scholars in the PYD field have identified developmental assets as the right way to frame youth development, we contend that it is now time for PYD to take a political turn and emphasize the injustice of unequal opportunities for building

developmental assets. To do so, we believe that PYD can learn from youth themselves, and specifically from the forms of youth activism that have been emerging in recent years. Thus, we now turn to a discussion of youth political activism and the logical links to the theory of PYD.

Political Activism: An Extension of PYD

Elsewhere we have argued that 'civic development' is a logical next step in community youth development because in CYD youth develop a sense of identity as a 'public' and of solidarity with and accountability to fellow members of the public (Flanagan & Van Horn, 2003). In this chapter we extend the analogy and make the case that political activism is a logical extension of PYD. Why?

First, a core tenet of PYD is the principle that youth are agents of their own development. Communities have to provide opportunities for agentic behavior and take the voices and opinions of young people in that process seriously. Youth in governance, youth on boards, and youth–adult partnerships are all examples of community responses to this PYD challenge, and both organizations and the adults in them are revitalized when young people are true partners (Zeldin et al., 2000). Second, as generational replacement theory posits, one of the driving forces behind social change is the replacement of older by younger generations in society. The mechanism whereby younger generations change the status quo was explained by Karl Mannheim (1952) in the classic essay, *The Problem of Generations*. Mannheim argued that youth had a particular vantage point, a 'fresh contact' with society as they came of age. The benefit of being at the brink of adulthood but not yet enmeshed in social roles that constrain their choices means that youth can grapple with social issues in ways older adults cannot. Inevitably there are differences in the ways members of a generation grapple and resolve issues at their historical moment, but the very fact that youth see society with a fresh lens means that some critique of the status quo is inevitable.

Our third point is that PYD has always been committed to understanding and mobilizing youth's lives in real contexts (Benson & Saito, 2001). When one compares the real contexts in which different young people are growing up, the uneven playing field for the 'haves' and 'have nots' becomes apparent. For example, in communities of concentrated poverty, young people must contend with unsafe schools and streets, few community-based youth organizations, and a high child-to-adult ratio, to name a few. Finally, political activism is a venue through which youth can demonstrate positive assets. Through activism youth perform useful roles and serve their communities, exercise their political voice, and share their opinions. They are defining a positive purpose to which they are dedicating themselves, which signifies a refusal to adapt to things as they are (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). As the next section shows, not only are there common themes but there are many forms through which political activism takes shape, including digital media, protest, advocacy, information dissemination, public art, boycott, and culture. Why should PYD attend

to these various forms of youth activism? First, because they are youth led and PYD has been steadfast in asserting that the voice of youth must be heard. Second, not only are activist youth demonstrating positive internal assets but the groups they are forming and activities in which they are engaging provide new models of external assets. These organizational forms provide safe (free) spaces where alternative points of view can be aired.

Themes in Contemporary Youth Political Activism

A review of the political activism literature reveals five themes that resonate with young people: (a) legitimizing marginalized identities and redressing discrimination, (b) rectifying socioeconomic disparities, (c) protecting the environment, (d) acting on feelings of social responsibility, and (e) establishing roles as global citizens.

Legitimizing marginalized identities

Identity consolidation is the primary developmental task of adolescence and early adulthood (Erikson, 1968), and for many youth, community-based organizations are a setting where they explore possible selves and find a niche. In the most definitive review of the role that community-based organizations play in positive youth development, Eccles and Gootman (2002) pointed to the significance of mattering that youth in true CBYOs realize, i.e., they matter to fellow members of the organization. However, some youth do not find a niche in mainstream culture or CBYOs and others experience outright rejection.

Young people who feel alienated from mainstream culture are more likely to be attracted to activist organizations than to traditional programs. Activist organizations provide a free space to explore alternative identities with others who also feel alienated from the mainstream. Organizations such as the Coalition for Asian Pacific American Youth or the International Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organization provide an identity support group and challenge young people to critically examine the legacy of oppression, to claim the civil rights denied to their group, to use self-reflection to transcend internalized discrimination, and to confront their own personal biases (Yu, Soukamneuth, & Lewis-Charp, 2005). These groups tap into a long history of marginalized groups who have employed identity (whether it be race, gender, sexual preference, or disabilities) as a politics for organizing and claiming full citizenship in the polity.

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are one example of an identity-support activist organization. GSAs bring together sexual minority and heterosexual students to support their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) peers and foster an inclusive school climate (Russell, 2006). Over the past decade GSAs have championed social change efforts around LGBT issues in middle and high schools by creating an alternative safe and supportive social environment where like-minded peers can socialize and lead efforts to change school policies. Through their involvement

with GSAs, young people are transforming educational institutions into places where LGBT youth no longer feel marginalized.

Contesting socioeconomic inequities

Youth are contesting race and class inequities in education, housing, public spaces, and prisons to name a few. For example, *Unequal Education*, a student-produced film, documents stark differences in the quality of middle schools in two different neighborhoods in the Bronx, New York. This video galvanized the community, spurring political leaders to action (Tolman & Pittman, 2001). Similarly, the documentary, *2371 Second Avenue: An East Harlem Story*, exposed the hardships endured by people living in substandard housing projects (Tolman & Pittman, 2001). Not only did this video draw national attention to the miserable living conditions of America's poor, but it also resulted in repairs of more than 90 housing code violations.

In a third example, youth joined with their parents and grandparents to challenge the garment industry to change long-standing practices that were detrimental to workers' health. For years, the Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) has organized immigrant women in the garment industry and also has provided services such as free medical check-ups. In 1997, Youth Build Immigrant Power (YBIP) was launched to draw in young people to support their mothers' and grandmothers' efforts in the AIWA organization. YBIP's workshops attracted mostly young women, ages 14–20. YBIP members and adults at AIWA and the garment workers joined together to negotiate healthier conditions in the factories. The YBIP project is an example of some of the best in political activism insofar as it shows how people realize their personal or private problems have public (i.e., shared) roots and that addressing those problems can only be accomplished through collective action. YBIP also is an example of activists linking across generations in an era when there has been a dearth of intergenerational transfer from older to younger activists in recruitment, mentoring, and leadership. According to Kim and Sherman (2006), older generations of activists have typically not paid enough attention to nurturing the next generation of social justice leaders.

Environmental activism

Environmental resources are public goods, and, compared to their elders, youth seem to be more aware of threats to these resources (Public Agenda, 2005). As a civic issue, youth have successfully challenged standards of government, corporations, and local communities to establish greater environmental protections. Age does not preclude involvement in environmental efforts, as youth of all ages have made a difference. An environmental group at Pelican Island Elementary School in Florida successfully lobbied their school board, as well as congressional representatives, to create a wildlife preserve protecting an endangered species in their community (http://www.indian-river.k12.fl.us/pelican/). This example demonstrates that local

and national representatives can be influenced by citizens as young as elementary school age. Clearly, the youth-led environmental movement is also linked to the culture of the school, as the school is named after the United States' first wildlife refuge. The implication is that schools that are true assets for activism, giving youth a voice and supplying the structure for following through with their ideas, create opportunities for successful youth action.

Young environmental activists have also influenced the practices of corporations. For example, youth played a major role in the StarKist® Tuna Company's decision to start using only dolphin-safe products. After learning about the fate of dolphins at the hands of tuna fishermen, students nationwide pressured their school boards to stop serving tuna in lunchrooms and also flooded Heinz Corporation, the parent company, with letters and postcards ('The power of kids,' 1999). Similarly, youth in Europe have helped stage a widespread consumer boycott of foods treated with pesticides and genetically modified foodstuffs, which has led to the expansion of the organic food sector and governmental support of this form of eco-friendly farming. In examples like this, youth recognize their political power both as citizens and as consumers. Partnering with adults is a common element as well. In the example of the tuna boycott, Bonnie Reiss, an environmental activist and lawyer, spearheaded environmental education and support of this student movement via a national afterschool program (http://www.afterschoolallstars.org). Developmental assets, such as feelings of value and utility in the community, as well as education about the problem, were at the heart of this successful environmental movement.

School- and community-based clubs are common but not the only avenues for environmental community organizing. Some ambitious youth have even formed their own environmental action networks. Alternattiva Demokratika Żgħażagħ, or Green Youth, is the Malta-based section of the Federation of Young European Greens. Organizations such as Green Youth have taken on the charge of forcing 'radical democracy' and fighting for environmental and social justice by, for example, hosting international training camps and spearheading public awareness campaigns on pressing environmental issues such as deforestation. They also organize rallies and distribute educational materials aimed at empowering youth to take environmental action (http://www.alternattiva.org.mt). A comparable U.S. example is the Youth for Environmental Sanity organization, which began in 1990 from the vision of two teenagers, ages 16 and 19. This organization is an ongoing support network for young environmental activists that is now national in scope (http://www.yesworld.org).

It is important to point out that environmentalism is often considered a white, middle-class phenomenon (Kahn, 2002; Sherkat & Blocker, 1993). Paradoxically, the existence of environmental racism is pervasive, with ethnic minorities disproportionately exposed to conditions such as lead paint and other toxic waste compared to nonminorities (Bullard & Johnson, 2000). The racial disparity in environmental activism is not because of a lower concern for the environment on the part of ethnic minorities (Kahn, 2002; Sherkat & Blocker, 1993). Thus the challenge for environmental organizers and scholars in the PYD tradition is to further unpack

the sources of inequality in environmental action. Youth themselves recognize the connection between inequalities and environmentalism and engage in environmental justice—action that links the two (Bullard & Johnson, 2000).

Global justice activism

As forces of globalization have shaped the nature of interactions and the exchange of ideas, contemporary youth are no longer confined by geographical boundaries, but are increasingly connected on a global scale. Many have found a shared sense of identity and values with peers around the world (Harell, 2006). New forms of youth activism are borne out of the recognition that inequalities exist transnationally and are often perpetuated by large multinational corporations. The United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) organization embodies the idea of global citizenship and is a prime example of young people who have rallied around labor, environmental, and human rights issues. This particular movement, initiated and continued by college students around the United States, has been called a 'formidable challenge to businesses operating in the international sportswear-producing industry' (Ballinger, 2006, p. 663). This group developed out of a growing awareness of the unfair labor conditions (e.g., low wages, long hours) of multinational outsourced factories in developing countries. Because the logo apparel of many universities is produced in these factories, USAS has lobbied for changes in the buying practices of university bookstores—from products made in sweatshops to products made under just conditions. USAS has also expanded to more local interests, such as campaigning for living wages of campus service staff (Ballinger, 2006).

Work such as that of the Oaktree Foundation, the world's first completely youth-run and youth-driven international aid and development foundation based out of Australia, typifies how youth around the world are reaching out to make a difference in the lives of their peers in less privileged environments. The young volunteers backing this organization raise financial support and public awareness about the inequity of educational opportunities in developing communities and funnel monies through local partnerships toward sustainable educational systems. Through its four internationally based organizations, the Oaktree Foundation—started by a 19-year old—has rallied over 3000 youth to support its mission (http://www.theoaktree.org).

Other youth have used their knowledge of global inequities to fuel civic action aimed at international political leaders as well as corporations. This form of global justice activism made headlines with the youth-infused protests of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, Washington in November of 1999 (Juris, 2006). The WTO protests turned into an annual meeting of activists from around the world to discuss issues of social justice and sustainability in a global context, called the World Social Forum (http://www.forumsocialmundial.org). Similar to research showing that community service involvement is linked to later civic outcomes, many youth activism projects suggest that activism at a single occasion often gives way to more enduring commitments to social change.

Global issues of fairness and justice are becoming integral to the identity of many youth, who are embracing lifestyle and consumer choices that reflect these values. Although not conventional politics, these 'lifestyle politics' or 'political consumer' behaviors reflect political savvy about the implications of corporate decisions on people and environments and the activist's desire to act morally. While the former (lifestyle politics) captures the notion that globally-linked political behaviors are a part of an individual's daily life, the latter (political consumption) is often associated with more collective tactics where activists use their power as consumers to confront injustices. Indeed, citizens are increasingly recognizing their power as consumers and using this politically (and strategically) to support social justice locally and globally (Follesdal, 2004; Hertz, 2001; Micheletti & Stolle, 2006). In one recent national survey in the United States, more than 50% of the 15- to 25-year olds reported that they used boycotts or buycotts to express their political views (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002).

Adults as well as youth are involved in activism defined by global citizenship values. However, youth occupy the leading edge of the anticorporate globalization movement by offering technological innovations and unconventional means of political action and protest (e.g., virtual sit-ins, theatrical performances). Again, Mannheim's analysis of the unique developmental position of youth is relevant: Not only are they savvy about the links between environmental degradation and low wages in the developing world and insecure jobs in the developed world, they use their fluid command of technology to educate the public about these links. Importantly, because of easy access to the Internet, political actions are not just global in theme, but collective action can take place in a global context (Juris, 2006). New forms of technology offer sources of hope. Youth who realize the magnitude of the challenges may feel powerless as individuals but through technology can connect across great divides and create a network of action. Often these networks offer more flexible participation and a less hierarchical structure, a format of engagement with great appeal to youth (Levine, 2006).

Social responsibility through analysis

Social (not just individual) responsibility is a guiding principle of youth's actions to redress social inequalities, create sustainable solutions for scarce environmental resources, and hold corporations and government officials accountable for global injustices. Social responsibility at an individual level is generally defined as one's sense of duty or obligation to society in which the individual is concerned about the welfare of others (Gallay, 2006). With the proper knowledge and skills, youth can move beyond individual acts of service and link their sense of social responsibility to constructive political action. For example, in youth-led action research, young people are using social analysis to channel their anger and frustration into reasoned and collective strategies for change (London, 2006).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) empowers youth through knowledge and the research process to take action against frustrating community issues. Arming youth

with research skills enables them to frame problems, collect data, assess the sources of power and influence over the problem, and engage in informed actions—all of which they carry out collectively (Torre & Fine, 2006). PAR turns the 'youth at risk' paradigm on its head, as youth are the researchers solving problems rather than the subjects of research or the problems to be solved. Using the PAR model, a wide range of projects have addressed social injustices such as the Educational Opportunity Gap Project, investigating the causes of racial inequalities in school achievement in New York and New Jersey; Sistas and Brothas United in which youth document poor neighborhood conditions in the Bronx and then organize to improve them; and Youth Justice Coalition, where youth do the research and act as policy makers to address the problem of disproportionate incarceration rates for minorities, immigrants, and the poor (see Torre & Fine, 2006).

Also using this model, youth can be the authors of their own experiences, communicating their feelings about social issues in a way that is heard by community members. As an illustration, a youth-led organization called Serving Our Youth and Community in San Francisco enabled a team of youth to administer and analyze survey data and then report to their community on youth experiences and aspirations in their neighborhood. This project changed the face of a community that was historically entrenched in commercial influences to one that used the information provided by youth to create youth-friendly spaces in the neighborhood (London, 2006).

In most of these grassroots projects, the youth involved are fighting for their own communities. The research and social analysis tools they learn are sources of power that enable them to analyze oppression and rise above it (London, 2006). Furthermore, participants also have the opportunity to validate their identity through a shared sense of community with others in the movement. Youth participatory research and action flow naturally from PYD principles that insist youth are central to making and sustaining positive change in their communities. The fact that these grassroots projects, as well as many of the environmental projects discussed earlier, are enacted at a local level means that the extent of the problem that can seem daunting is transformed into actions that can be taken locally. As in any political action, participants also learn that they cannot achieve goals on their own. The sense of efficacy results both from doing one's part and from recognizing that one is part of something much larger than oneself.

From individual lives to public issues: What PYD can learn from a youth activist lens

What are the take-away lessons for PYD from these youth activist projects? First, youth have a unique lens on the future because their personal aspirations are intimately connected to the future possibilities they imagine. Thus, the kinds of activist projects in which young people are engaged provide a barometer of issues that should concern all of us. Our brief overview of youth activist projects points to their awareness of how lives are interconnected and fragile resources endangered by irresponsible actions;

their commitment to redress inequities in the distribution of resources and the erosion of public goods; and hopes for a world organized on a different set of values than those global capital offers.

Second, PYD should heed how the forces of globalization are both opening new opportunities but also changing the terms of the social contract for younger generations. By the changing social contract we refer to the declining role of welfare states in providing safety nets and some level of security for citizens, the increased role of the market in determining social relations, personality traits to cultivate (e.g., flexibility, entrepreneurship), and values to live by, and consequent individualization of risk. For youth in Europe and North America, globalization has introduced new uncertainties, especially in the forms and structure of work and its role in identity (Giddens, 2000). Economic trends suggest that the notion of continuity in a career is a thing of the past. Increasingly, work will be defined by part-time, contract, and contingent jobs with fewer benefits and less security with which to plan a future. A 2002 survey conducted for the AFL-CIO found that while young workers between the ages of 18 and 34 believe deeply in the American dream, they fear their future prospects for finding secure employment and fair treatment at work are limited (Peter D. Hart Associates, 2002).

Institutions have not caught up with these changes in the world of work. The apprentice system in Germany is a good example. The newer knowledge-based industries change more rapidly than their production-based predecessors, making it difficult for the apprenticeship system to create training curricula, school placements, and other guidelines as jobs emerge. Although the system has become more flexible, responding more rapidly to the creation of new occupations such as apprenticeships in information technology, there is a persistent gap between emerging fields and available apprenticeships (Miller Idriss, 2002).

Within North America and Europe the costs of global economic change are borne disproportionately by youth from working-class families who have fewer sources of financial, social, human, and identity capital than their more privileged peers. In other words, they have fewer assets with which to build a life. The social costs of ignoring this divide are considerable. Trends in North America and Europe point to sobering statistics about the numbers of youth transitioning to adulthood who are falling through cracks in the system. According to the Kids Count (2004) report, a barometer of quality of life for young people in America, one in six 18–24 year olds in 2002 held no degree beyond high school, had no job, and was not enrolled in school. The 3.8 million young people who were in this group represented an increase of 19% over the 3 prior years. Similarly, according to one report from the Council of Europe, there are significant proportions of young people between the ages of 15–19 who are not in education, training, or work. Many of these disconnected youth live in southern and especially southeast Europe and the Caucasus (Chisholm & Kovacheva, 2002).

There are no private solutions to the massive changes in the social contract that global economic changes have ushered in. The 'youth at risk' paradigm privatizes what is essentially a public problem by targeting individuals who, in the end, are

likely to live in communities that supply fewer of the external assets recognized in PYD. Although PYD's focus on 'external assets' turns attention to the conditions that promote thriving, too many communities do not provide even the most basic necessities for thriving. Ultimately, the discourse on assets and risks puts too much emphasis on individuals and not enough on the public problems of inequities in the conditions for thriving. As the youth activist projects outlined in this chapter suggest, it is time for a more public discourse. Not only are younger generations keenly aware of the uncertainties that global capital has kindled, many also are exploring the possibilities of globalization for creating more egalitarian and democratic societies (Flanagan, in press).

By choosing to focus on youth activism as an interpretive lens, we expose ourselves to questions of the validity of this perspective. We welcome such questions, in part because we would like to see the question of validity raised more generally in social science. By challenging the youth-at-risk paradigm, the field of positive youth development itself has raised questions of validity. We also note that values and even political views are implicated, no matter what interpretive lens we choose. As C. Wright Mills (1959, p. 78) reminds us, 'Values are involved in the selection of problems we study; values are also involved in certain of the key conceptions we use in our formulations of these problems, and values affect the course of their solution.' We are not suggesting that the youth activist lens is a scientific one but rather that social scientific inquiry can be enriched by a serious consideration of this perspective.

From its inception PYD took an inclusive and democratic stance by insisting that the voices of *all youth* should be heard and that the very naming of some youth as 'at risk' marginalized them. PYD took a political stance by insisting on inclusion, i.e., that all youth should have a stake and a voice in democracy. In this chapter we have urged the PYD field to be more intentional about its politics, to attend to the social critiques of young activists, and to work with them to redress injustice. In *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills outlined the social responsibilities of social scientists in these words: 'It is the political task of the social scientist—as of any liberal educator—continually to translate personal troubles into public issues, and public issues into the terms of their human meaning for individuals' (1959, p. 187).

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