

April 2006

# Playing for an Active Community: Sports Participation and Civic Engagement

Ian E. Ritz

Macalester College, [iritz@macalester.edu](mailto:iritz@macalester.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/soci\\_honors](http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/soci_honors)

---

## Recommended Citation

Ritz, Ian E., "Playing for an Active Community: Sports Participation and Civic Engagement" (2006). *Sociology Honors Projects*. Paper 3. [http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/soci\\_honors/3](http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/soci_honors/3)

This Honors Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology Department at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact [scholarpub@macalester.edu](mailto:scholarpub@macalester.edu).

PLAYING FOR AN ACTIVE COMMUNITY:  
YOUTH SPORTS PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

BY  
IAN RITZ

HONORS RESEARCH PROJECT

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

MACALESTER COLLEGE

SPRING 2006

**ABSTRACT:**

Research on civic engagement in associations posits benefits at various levels in society. Critical perspective holds that sports may alternately teach positive social behaviors while reinforcing discriminatory stereotypes in its participants. The research question becomes, does participation in youth sports actually lead to civic engagement later in life? Using a longitudinal data set, I find that after controlling for other factors, there still is an indirect positive correlation between team sports participation and volunteering as a young adult. Analysis indicates that sports participation as an adolescent significantly accounts for sports participation as a young adult which in turn, influences volunteering.

Being part of a soccer team and volunteering to pick up litter at a local park may appear dissimilar from one another at first glance. Essentially civic engagement consists of citizen involvement in voluntary associations and is largely beneficial to American society. Conversely, critics contest the positive influence of formally and informally organized sports on individuals and society. Sports have alternately been shown to socialize discriminatory beliefs into participants or to instill positive social values such as cooperation and a drive to succeed. The contention over the value of sports to society and their seeming disconnection from civic engagement ultimately led to the research question for this project: Can team sports participation encourage civic engagement, specifically in the form of volunteering?

There is little sociological research studying sports participation and civic engagement together and therefore, it is difficult to discuss the two within an established theoretical framework. Acknowledging this, I investigate the relationship under broader constraints by applying socialization and exchange theories in my analysis. As broad theories, there are several different potential explanations that describe the relationship between sports participation and civic engagement. In terms of the interaction of playing sports and volunteering, socialization theory predicts that because sports teach discrimination and selfishness, participation could potentially discourage volunteering. Or, following the same notion, sports could teach cooperation and teamwork and consequently, encourage volunteerism. Exchange theory holds much the same potential dichotomies. Playing sports could be too great a time commitment and discourage volunteering or could build social networks and make it much easier to connect people

and volunteer in the community. Based on analysis of the empirical test results, this paper can help to illustrate the extent which, or none, of these theoretical relationships are accurate.

I am somewhat disheartened when I see negative aspects such as the predominance of violence and discriminatory perceptions that are undeniably present in sports as an institution. I have been actively involved in several sports, primarily soccer, ever since I can remember and I believe that they have had a tremendously positive influence on my life. However, I acknowledge that my athletic experience may not be typical of the average person. Perhaps my sports experience has been exceptional in my positive association with it, but I was interested to examine whether empirical evidence could demonstrate if sports participation produces positive results for individuals and society. This curiosity led me to investigate a possible connection between sports and civic engagement. The results of this study could have significant implications in sociology if sports participation can indeed be shown to influence civic engagement, which would indicate that civic engagement can be socialized in this manner.

The paper begins with a literature review which examines characteristics of civic engagement and factors that are associated with it in addition to research that has been done on sports in society. In sociology, sports participation and civic engagement have been studied extensively, yet the two topics have not been integrated. In an attempt to find a common theoretical base, I discuss sports participation and civic engagement primarily from socialization and exchange theory perspectives. Following that section, I

outline the methodology and the data and variables used in the analysis. After the methodology, I present the findings from the empirical investigation and present an analysis of the results. The results indicate that adolescent sport participation in teams has an indirect positive effect on civic engagement in the form of volunteering even after controlling for the effects of education, church participation, income and children among others. I conclude by reviewing the main points of the paper and by talking about gaps in the research and suggest future efforts to better understand the relationship between sports participation and civic engagement.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Though the investigation of civic engagement has received much attention with the field, sociologists have neglected to include sports participation in their analyses (Portes 1998: 2). The lack of inclusion is surprising given the prominent position of sports within American society. Many people young and old are involved in a variety of activities in their communities such as volunteering and playing sports every year. A study by the Athletic Footwear Association (1990) suggests that 20-35 million 5 to 18 year-olds participate in non-school sports and another 10 million 14 to 18 year-olds participate in school sports across the United States. Advocates argue that sports provide a positive medium for the expression of freedom and forums for enjoyment, self-awareness and human development. Critics however, see sports as way to limit personal freedom and reinforce social stereotypes and societal hierarchy (Gruneau 1983: 23). Although discussed separately in sociology, sports participation and civic engagement may not be as dissociated as they appear.

It is not exceedingly difficult to imagine an intuitive link between sports participation and civic engagement. Players build relationships with teammates as well as with the supporters, be they a small group of parents or a stadium full of people, who embrace them. Players feel a connectedness to one another and to the community around them. As part of this relationship, the players may be disposed to do something in return. Participants learn values and are more compelled or feel obligated to show their appreciation and reciprocate support to the larger community. Players may volunteer in the community and a connection forms to be engaged civically as well as athletically. However, this intuitive connection has not been translated into the world of academia. To rectify the lack of consideration of sports in relation to civic engagement, I will review explanations for variation in civic engagement, connecting them with the critical theories over debate of the role of sports in society.

*CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:*

America has a rich history of engagement in civic activities and participation in voluntary associations. In his famous visit to the United States in 1831 Alexis de Tocqueville was impressed by the quantity and variety of voluntary associations and decentralized institutions. Taking part in civil society is a continual and dynamic process of interaction between people and the associations linked to their interests and values. Examples of such associations include religious communities, civic organizations as well as fraternal orders among other things, and are seen by some as training grounds for

citizenship, leadership and are seen to create crucial communication networks (Rich 1999: 16).

While the literature varies in precise definition of the term, the fundamental understanding is that civic engagement in the United States is based on the participation of individuals in civil and political associations. These associations range in how they are oriented but they are influenced by societal institutions and help maintain normative behaviors (Brint & Levy 1999: 164). Classically, civic engagement is considered as active involvement in the political sphere of society but contemporary discussion has grown to include communities (Putnam 1995: 665). Under this context, civic engagement has expanded to contain activities ranging from volunteering locally, political canvassing or joining local organizations. This looser interpretation of civic engagement includes a wider variety of societal associations.

The sociological investigation of civic engagement almost exclusively becomes subsumed by the discussion of social capital in the United States. A somewhat abstract concept, social capital is understood as features of social life such as connections, behaviors, practices and trust that enable people to act together more effectively to accomplish shared goals (Putnam 1995: 664). Taken from a Durkheimian perspective, individuals involve themselves in group activities to feel connection and acceptance in a social group. Participation in civic activities builds relationships with colleagues as well as fosters cooperative behavior to accomplish a collective goal (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999: 13). Many scholars consider social capital instrumental because it focuses on the



benefits accrued by individuals by virtue of participation in groups (Portes 1998: 3). Sociological literature on the subject however has simplified the conception of social capital to refer to features of social life; that is networks, norms and values that link citizens together and enable them to pursue common objectives more effectively (Stolle and Rochon 2001: 143).

Sociological study has focused on social capital in relation to civic engagement due to the overlap between the nature and type of activities for each. Many civic activities involve close interaction of people and rely on social connections to operate. The overlap is seen in the example of a local elementary school that holds a fundraising effort in which a volunteer organizer uses established social networks throughout the process to successfully raise money. Such civic activities reinforce existing types, as well as produce new forms of social capital through the interaction of people and between groups and because of this, civic engagement is used as an indicator of social capital.

Recent study of social capital has actually suggested a downward trend in American society (Putnam 2000: 39-43). Contention exists among some scholars regarding the measures used for civic engagement and how they are employed as indicators in the debate on social capital however. For instance, an entirely new system of social networking has come about in cyberspace via the internet which is still being studied (Rich 1999: 26). Nonetheless, as a result of the association, the findings about variation of social capital hold relevance to the discussion of civic engagement.

The diversity of civic engagement and the dynamism of the social capital debate have led to the identification of a variety of factors that influence levels of civic engagement. Some key societal factors that have reduced levels of civic involvement and social capital in the United States include the rise of suburban sprawl which disconnects communities. Another is a weakened family structure brought on by high divorce rates and single parenthood. Previous investigation has indicated that people with children are less likely to be involved in associations and activities in the community but if the person is still in school it actually raises the likelihood of community involvement (Putnam 1995: 666-672). Also affecting levels of civic engagement, an increase in time and energy spent at work, a generational shift in the importance of being involved civically have reduced social capital in America. The emphasis of many studies on social capital has focused on negative influence, but in positive terms church involvement has specifically been shown to promote active civic involvement (Putnam 1995: 667-676). Although some scholars note a trend away from social interaction, the range in which people create social capital and are engaged civically is wide and inevitably, there is variation between individuals.

Sociological theory argues that civic engagement produces tangible results in a community. Some argue that face-to-face participation will make a more informed and capable citizenry by educating the people about community life and teaching tolerance and cooperation. These benefits however, do not only come from direct political participation but also active involvement in all types of cooperative civic activity where the goal is to create a better community (Berry 1999: 367). Though most would agree

that civic engagement positively influences society, this is not an absolute. Involvement in associations that are oriented around a negative ideal would certainly be harmful to society. For instance, participating in the Ku Klux Klan reproduces racial discrimination in its members and decreases levels of tolerance and acceptance in society.

The form which civic engagement takes is not limited by a prescribed mold. Any quantity of people can become incorporated into an activity at all levels of society, local, state and national. However, a smaller body of literature support that trends of civic engagement in recent years indicate a bureaucratization of associations across the United States through the rise of civically minded institutions. The shift from personal interaction toward larger organizations has compartmentalized the social conscience of those involved and freed them from connection to the local community (Brint and Levy 1999: 179-180).

Seeking to fully understand the subject, the study of civic engagement has revealed several explanations for the variation of involvement in American society. Social scientists have shown civic engagement to be a self serving activity. This could be physical object or emotional feeling but some people are involved in it to gain something for them in return (Janoski, Musick and Wilson 1998: 496).

Another perspective is that civic engagement represents a patterned behavior with positive interactions that can be developed in social institutions (Wilson 2000: 220-221). Institutions such as schools represent a cohesive social group that has certain like

attitudes and behaviors. In such settings, the group is socialized to homogenous attitudes and behaviors by influencing individual members' beliefs and values through personal interaction (Friedkin 2004: 415-416). In this manner, through the process of education, schools have the capacity to socialize tendencies toward civic engagement in the individual. Schools are important institutions for encouraging civic engagement and there has also been a correlation to higher levels of education and an increased likelihood to be engaged (Janoski et. al. 1998: 496-497).

In most instances, civic engagement is not an isolated activity. The event is repeated and through continued participation becomes routine. As the individual continues in this mode, a sense of comfort develops and the individual may become attached to the patterned behavior. In concert with this, some theorists explain civic engagement in terms of *habitus* as proposed by Bourdieu. Habitus is defined as a system of predispositions and theorizes that people become habituated and accustomed to certain modes of practice which gives them comfort in their routine (Washington and Karen 2001:190-191).

Others however, support an exchange theory explanation for variance in civic engagement where the costs and benefits are weighed against each other (Wilson 2000: 222). Following the exchange theory, there is a sense of a trade-off where the individual may decide to be involved in some other activity instead of a civic activity. Exchange theory explanations are not limited to individual trade-offs; they can be applied to larger organizational contexts as well. The theory understands civic engagement as a rational,

rather than an acculturated, behavior. From an exchange perspective, people decide to participate if the feeling of satisfaction gained from exercising instead of volunteering for example, outweighs the cost of the time invested.

Sociology views volunteering as reflective largely of individual motivation. Some of the motivation for the individual is self serving, in that they are involved in the activity for their own interests (Wilson 2001: 219). In a sense the motivation represents a type of exchange in that the decision to act is based on what is received by the individual and whether it is worth the investment. Another part is that motivation comes from the individual's ideology and values. For instance, a person who holds stewardship of the natural environment highly might be compelled to remove litter from a city park. Though the particular set of values may vary, public social institutions disseminate and socialize values into the participant. Patterns of behavior reflect people's socialization of values (Janoski et. al. 1998: 497). The patterned behavior of volunteering reflects the degree to which these norms and values are internalized and inculcated to the individual.

#### *SPORTS THEORY:*

The institution of sports provides the researcher with an opportunity to examine a myriad of social structures that are not found in one single entity elsewhere in society. "No other activity so paradoxically combines the serious with the frivolous, playfulness with intensity, and the ideological with the structural" (Frey & Eitzen 1991: 504). Sports in America are a microcosm of society as a whole; richly filled with individual interaction and social dynamics. As with other aspects of society there are contradictory

viewpoints of how sports affect those involved. Scholars disagree on the value of sports in terms of possible individual benefits as well as on the negative impact sports may have at a societal level.

Sociologists maintain that sports have a tremendous socializing effect on the participants. Consisting of certain sets of ideals specific to the activity, sports emphasize these respective attitudes and behaviors on participants. The values imbued on the individuals are representative of the particular sport and also of society as a whole. The sociological study of sports seeks to understand the individual and group relationships and how these dynamics interact and are manifested in society. An existing body of theory supports sports from the perspective that they have significant developmental effects on participants. Studies indicate that what is learned in sports whether it be active participation or by observing others, contributes positively or negatively to the development of one's identity and personality (Danish 2002: 49). Sports instruct participants and observers in how to deal with personal interactions as well as how to relate to a social group and confront problematic situations (Young 1986: 14).

When examined in the context of social life, patterns of interaction depict sports as an institution whose structural features represent legitimated ways of pursuing some activity (Gruneau 1983: 59). Moreover, sports can have a lasting effect on the social, emotional and intellectual development of an individual, particularly in young people. Advocates encourage youth to be involved in sports because this activity is viewed as an effective setting for learning acceptable values and for acquiring desirable character traits

(Frey and Eitzen 1991: 506). Studies have shown that sports can provide a sense of affiliation, self confidence, appreciation for one's health and fitness and the development of social bonds with other people and institutions (Ewing, Gano-Overway, Branta and Seefeldt 2002: 43).

Opposing this perspective, critics describe sports as a classist institution that has created a myth of upward social mobility and in reality reinforces social status (Washington and Karen 2001: 189). Furthermore, through the competitive and often violent nature of sports, these tendencies are perpetuated outside of the realm of sports and into society (Klein and Sorenson 2002: 197-205). Additionally, sociological study shows sports to be racially discriminatory as exemplified through player stacking and discrepancies in pay as well as gender biased shown by the lack of sporting opportunities for women (Washington and Karen 2001: 189).

Applying a materialist perspective, sports are a medium for concentrating capital in which the labor aristocracy exploits sectors of the middle class. Similarly, a cultural Marxist critique is that the commodity of sports creates an alienated and transient solidarity between social classes (Young 1986: 5-6). Functional analysis focuses on sports as a social organization and looks at how patterned behaviors are reproduced and passed on through the socialization effect of sports. Included in this focus, societal biases reflected in sports include racial and gender discrimination as well as emphases on competitiveness and teamwork among others (Washington & Karen 2001: 191-200).

Following similar reasoning, the social reproduction theory argues that sports reinforce the pre-existing hegemony of control. Institutions such as schools and sports serve to reproduce social relationships and attitudes that characterize stratified societies like the United States (Eitle and Eitle 2002: 124). Linked through consumerism and economic relationships, sports support the segregation of power relationships and class status in society (Gruneau 1983: 65-70). Finally, cultural studies seek to explain sports as representative of fundamental cultural characteristics and as a form of cultural expression. Characteristics of sports participants such as a drive for success or competitive individualism are also hallmark values in American culture and these are manifested and developed through sports (Bryant & McElroy 1997: 52-57).

The sociology of sports has generated a variety of critiques with regards to their roles in society. Relying primarily on a critical perspective, social theory demonstrates that sports may have a productive social impact. Sports have the power to socialize values into the people and so perhaps, the negative aspects such as racial and gender discrimination that accompany sports, come from underlying problems in society. There is an important distinction between macro and micro focuses of some critical ideas. Many studies differentiate between sports participation on an individual level and the institutional structure of sports, as well as professional versus amateur sports and these must be considered in the evaluation of sports on the whole. For this research project, professional and bureaucratic level analyses are not particularly relevant because the types of sporting activities that are investigated are predominately amateur and take place at a local level.



Through literature presented there are comparable characteristics between theory on sports participation and civic engagement. Civic mindedness can be socialized into the citizens through repeated involvement in societal institutions such as school and people who play sports learn values in much the same way. Individuals chose to become active and based on underlying personal values and organizational characteristics, I hypothesize that even after accounting for known factors such as education, family situation and church involvement, sports participation still has a positive influence on civic engagement. The socializing quality of sports teaches values to its participants, particularly at a young age, which can lead to an increased likelihood of active involvement in civic associations.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

To examine the hypothesis of the relation between sports participation and civic engagement I performed statistical tests using logistic regression of a longitudinal data set. To measure civic engagement, I use volunteering during young adulthood as the dependent variable. The primary independent variable in the test models was participation in team sports as an adolescent. To account for factors that have already been shown to impact civic engagement, I used a number of control variables discussed in the sociological literature.

As suggested by theories of civic engagement, sports participation could have a socializing effect on the individual. In the instance of youth, it can have a particularly

formative effect on the participant by shaping the values and behavior of the individual. Youth who participate in sports may develop character traits that persist throughout the person's life and influence what they do in the future. To examine this possibility, it is logical to take sports participation at a younger age and test if it influences civic engagement later in life. As character and personality traits are heavily influenced during youth and adolescence a comparison between sports participation at an adolescent age and civic engagement during young adulthood would indicate the degree of the socializing effect of sports over time. In addition, it is important to accommodate for the exchange theory perspective. Exchange theory supports that decisions to act are based on rational thought and one activity may occur at the expense of another. Volunteering is influenced by societal institutions and so to control for potential influences, sports must be tested during the same time period as other variables. Respondents may volunteer regardless of the presence of other factors which would support some form of exchange relationship.

I have used the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health ("Add Health") to examine the relation of sports participation and civic engagement. The Add Health study was designed to survey the characteristics of places that young people live that may shape their decisions and behaviors and the ways in which these characteristics influence them socially, economically and psychologically. As stated in the summary of the data set, "Add Health was designed to assess the health status of adolescents and explore the causes of their health related behaviors, focusing on the effects of multiple contexts or environments (both social and physical) in which they live" (Udry 1998: 2). The

research design was predicated on the idea that adolescent health has three different sources: different social environments, different health related behaviors and individual strengths and weaknesses.

The data set contains responses from over 10,000 participants and was administered in three stages over a period of several years. Respondents were sampled from across the United States but all were adolescents in 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades when they started the survey process. Wave I consisted of an in-school survey and was combined with an at home interview and a follow up parent survey. This information was collected between September, 1994 and December, 1995. Wave II consisted of a follow up in-home adolescent interview between April, 1996 and August 1996 while Wave III was conducted between August, 2001 and April, 2002.

To measure civic engagement, I use volunteering in the community at Wave III when the respondent is an adult. The variable is a dichotomous measure of whether the respondent volunteered or performed community service in the past 12 months. Identified as a general helping behavior, volunteering inherently means time is given freely to benefit another person, group or organization (Wilson 2000: 215-216). Motivation to volunteer comes from different individual and institutional sources but volunteering implies personal involvement in community associations to achieve these actions.

To test socialization models, I measure sports participation at Wave I, several years before volunteering is measured. This measure is able to account for the potential effect on the respondent through time. The intent is to test the influence sports may have on the participant and how this translates through time. Additionally, limiting the form of sports participation to that of respondents in team sports such as soccer, volleyball or basketball aids the analysis. It places the individual in a setting in which they must interact with others and thereby allows for a discussion of social factors. If the independent variable measured at a preceding Wave has a strong influence on the dependent variable measured at a subsequent Wave, the analysis might suggest a stronger causal correlation. Because civic engagement was measured after sports participation, there is no possibility that it could influence sports participation. In this fashion the analysis is able to assess the socializing effects of sports participation separately from other factors.

Sports participation was coded as continuous for how many times a week respondents participated. Given that socialization theory predicts that participation is the key factor, rather than the frequency, I recoded sports participation into a dichotomous variable (respondent did or did not participate). Treating the variable in this manner allows a comparison between respondents who did or did not participate. This tests socialization theory since those who did not participate in sports as a youth would not learn the same social lessons as participants.

To account for previous research on both exchange and socialization factors, I use a number of control variables in the analysis. Exchange theory predicts that individuals will be engaged civically in society if its benefits are greater than the costs of involvement. From this perspective, additional commitments would increase the cost of civic engagement and could potentially discourage a person from volunteering. Consequently, I use a number of variable measures as controls for volunteering at Wave III. Factors controlled include: whether the respondent was currently employed, whether the respondent was married and whether the respondent had children who lived with them. In each of these examples, the continuously coded models had to be recoded as dichotomous to properly account for other factors in the testing. Additionally, I include continuous measures for the number of miles the respondent travels to work, which provides the approximate commuting time, and the number of hours a week the respondent spends watching television. The concept of socialization theorizes that learned values and attitudes influence the decision to be engaged civically. To account for socialization factors of volunteering, I use the dichotomous measures of whether the respondent attends church regularly (at least once a week) and whether the respondent's current school enrollment, which may signal ongoing socialization and the possibility of greater influence on volunteering. Additionally, the continuous variable for the highest level of education achieved may suggest a greater likelihood for volunteering through more years of schooling. Finally, the total household income in dollars is also included as a continuous but it was divided by 1000 (and is logged to correct for skewing) to be more manageable in the context of the analysis.

## **FINDINGS AND RESULTS:**

In this section, I present the data analysis about the relation between sports participation and volunteering. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the independent and control variables included in the analysis. Using the mean values from the descriptive statistics, 30% of respondents volunteered at Wave III and 71% of respondents participated in sports at Wave I.

### *RESULTS:*

Table 2 shows the coefficients and the standard errors for variables in five nested logit models that predict the likelihood of volunteering in young adulthood. Model 1 one simply tests the original hypothesis that there is a bivariate correlation between sports participation of adolescents and volunteering in young adulthood. The results of the logistic regression for sports participation demonstrate a positive coefficient that is statistically significant but cannot be held to prove anything without controlling additional variables.

[SEE TABLE 2]

The results of Model 2 yield a more comprehensive view of volunteering than the bivariate model. Model 2 consists of control variables for whether the respondent has children and if the respondent is currently enrolled in school, both of which have already been established to have effects on civic participation. Examining the model reveals interesting findings. First, when compared to the initial model the impact of sports participation is reduced to less than half of its previous value and becomes statistically

insignificant, suggesting that the initial relation may be spurious. Second, of the control variables in Model 2, whether the respondent was currently enrolled in school (coefficient of 0.866) clearly impacts volunteering. The control for education in particular has a strong influence on civic engagement and this corresponds with the literature on the subject. Based on the age of the respondents in Wave III, the school in which they are enrolled is most likely to be a form of higher education such as a college or university. Following socialization theory, one can speculate that the academic environment of the institution or the fact that the respondent is involved in classes and other activities may be possible explanations for this association.

Another influence on civic engagement is whether the respondent has a child (coefficient of -0.761). This presence of a child in the lives of the respondents produces a strong negative influence on their likelihood to volunteer. It is consistent with exchange theory to conclude that volunteering is not a priority and is reduced by the involvement in other activities that are connected to the child. Similarly, the variable for hours spent watching television presents another subject in exchange theory. Logically, television watching seems to oppose volunteering in that the time spent on in front of the TV is time not spent out in the community.

Though other control variables in Model 2 may have a positive impact, they do not significantly explain volunteering. For instance, if the respondent was currently married and had a job have positive effects for explaining volunteering. A somewhat surprising output is from the variable for current employment. Work serves as a place to

form social networks and develop relationships with other people. Often coworkers participate in similar recreational activities or become involved in associations regardless if they are or are not promoted by the employer. Similar to the situation for parents spending time on their children, workers may be involved in other forms of civic associations and perhaps not volunteer activities. In the model it appears that distance to work and the total income do not have a significant influence. Though Putnam attributes isolation of communities through suburban development for decreasing social capital, it appears that it is not significant on volunteering.

Building from the previous model, Model 3 adds the control of whether the respondent is actively involved in religious services. A substantial body of work considers the role of religion in relation to civic engagement, and including the variable of church attendance in the regression model further improves the overall fit. Church attendance is statistically significant in the model and the relatively large coefficient accounts for a high degree of explanation for community engagement. Religious organizations are known to have a strong emphasis on service as part of their ministry and a wealth of information links church groups with a variety of civic activities such as volunteering (Wuthnow 1999: 331). Furthermore, an interesting trend arises with the addition of a measure for church attendance. Two of the strongest influences on civic engagement are attending religious services and currently being enrolled in school; both being larger social groups. These findings suggest that for young adults, organizational involvement may shape volunteering. Also, in Model 3 it is important to note that the coefficient for sports participation has increased slightly to .159. Although it is still not



significant, the change indicates with the addition of church attendance, there may be some influence of sports participation.

Progressing from Model 3, Model 4 adds another sociologically significant variable to the regression formula: the highest level of education reached for the respondent. The highest level of education attained by the respondent is not as influential as the variable of church attendance, but the coefficient is positive and statistically significant (coefficient 0.216) and helps to explain civic engagement. To understand this, it is helpful to assume that the higher level of education received, the more extensive and comprehensive knowledge an individual gains about the society in which they live. The greater awareness could encourage the individual to become more involved and translate to action. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the effects of whether the respondent has a child and if the respondent is currently enrolled in school both decrease. Thus indicating that the highest level of education reached impacts how children and currently being in school help to explain volunteering.

In Model 4, team sport participation once again became significant, with a positive association with volunteering. The progression of the effect of sports participation demonstrates that not accounting for education or religious involvement suppresses the effect of sports participation. Essentially, the effect of sports participation increases after accounting for church attendance and the level of education. These findings are interesting in that the suppression of church attendance and level of education suggests that participating in sports may be a unique manner through which

individuals become civically engaged. Based on the logistic regression of the variables in the data set, even when all the other known factors are taken into consideration, sports participation is still relevant. Tolerance statistics for Model 4 do not indicate any serious conflicts of collinearity with the lowest tolerance values of .756 for the variables. These values are significantly greater than the lowest acceptable value of 0.200 for statistical tolerance.

The regression coefficients for sports participation in Model 4 (.191) are interpreted more clearly by computing the predicted probabilities of volunteering. Using two hypothetical individuals, identical in all respects save for having participated in sports, I calculated the predicted probability by substituting mean values on all continuous variables and modal values on all dichotomous variables. The predicted probability of volunteering during young adulthood for the individual who participated in sports as an adolescent is 16% higher than the individual who did not participate (.242 versus .209).

Model 5 adds an interesting element to the regression analysis. The variable of whether the respondent played on a team sport at Wave III is added to the equation to test if sports participation did have a lasting effect on the individual. If the results of the model were still statistically significant with a relatively large coefficient for sports participation at Wave I, it would indicate that the independent variable truly did have direct and lasting influence on civic engagement. However, this did not prove to be the case. Rather, the output of the test shows that with the addition of sports participation at

Wave III, the coefficient for sports participation at Wave I reduces by half (.191 to .094) and is not statistically significant. Instead, the coefficient for sports participation at Wave III is great (.550) and statistically significant which indicates that it has a strong influence on volunteering. According to the analysis, it seems the more useful explanation in terms of sports participation is that involvement with team is far more influential on volunteering if they take place at the same time.

Further analysis of the output shows that the inclusion of sports participation at Wave III does not drastically alter the coefficients for the other control variables. For instance, the coefficients for the number of hours spent a week watching TV and if the respondent is currently in school only changed by .001 and the highest level of education changed by .005. Though the change is not particularly great it is interesting to note that for the controls of whether the respondent has children and if they attend church, the influence on volunteering is reduced. The greatest change from Model 4 to Model 5 is sports participation at Wave I.<sup>1</sup>

Table 3 provides important information to understanding the interaction of sports participation at Wave I and sports participation at Wave III and how it translates to

---

<sup>1</sup> To better develop the relationship of sports participation at Wave I and sports participation at Wave III, another test was performed to measure the interaction between the two. The test for interaction of sports participation at Waves I and III, essentially indicates whether there is some special aggregate effect of playing sports at both times. Using a dummy variable that has been reconfigured as sports participation at Wave I multiplied by sports participation at Wave III, results can potentially reveal if the combination of sports participation is greater, less or approximately equal to the sum of the components. In non-statistical terms, if there is something extra that encourages, that particularly discourages or that doesn't cause any change in likelihood to participate in sports. The results from the test, however, were not significant. [0]

explain civic engagement at Wave III. Table 3 shows the output of a logistic regression model in which the dependent variable is sports participation at Wave III, the key independent variable is sports participation at Wave I and the other control variables are maintained from Table 2. Some variables such as attending church have a positive effect but the overwhelming influence, with a coefficient of 1.418, on sports participation at Wave III is sports participation at Wave I. With such a strong correlation, it suggests that sports participation at Wave I predicts sports participation at Wave III. The explanation that playing sports when the respondent is younger makes them more likely to play sports when they are older may not seem surprising but it is significant to the analysis. The explanation of sports participation at Wave III ultimately reveals an indirect relationship from sports participation at Wave I to volunteering at Wave III. Referring back to Table 2, the coefficient for sports participation at Wave III (.550) is such that it helps provide a strong statistical explanation for volunteering. This fact, combined with the information from Table 3, allows for the interpretation that there is an indirect explanation for volunteering at Wave III in terms of sports participation at Wave I. Granted, there are other factors that should be considered for volunteering but, as illustrated by Tables 2 and 3, sports participation at Wave I have a tangible influence.

[SEE TABLE 3]

Clearly sports participation at Wave I stands as the strongest factor in explaining sports participation at Wave III. As adolescents, something occurred with respondents while playing team sports that resonated with them and influenced them to participate several years later. This suggests that they gained something be it a value, knowledge or

a feeling through the experience that encouraged them to be involved again. In turn, the participation in sports during the same time period translated to a positive explanation for volunteering. Thus, in an indirect manner there is logical connection, supported by a statistical correlation as to how sports participation as an adolescent can help to explain civic engagement in the form of volunteering as a young adult.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The fundamental question to the investigation is whether team sports participation influences civic engagement in the form of volunteering. Sociologists have theorized that individuals may engage in civic activities because they have been socialized through a variety of sources to do so. Or, the person consciously weighs the costs and benefits of their involvement. Using the hypothesis that sports participation positively influences civic engagement, this project has tested the possible connection that sports may have on volunteering.

When compared, participating in a sports team and being involved in a civic association are not that dissimilar. Through participation in team sports, players must interact with others in meaningful ways to accomplish their objective. Through this interaction players feel connected to the team and their teammates and are able to gain satisfaction through collective achievements rather than individual success. Similarly, involvement in civic associations has positive effects for the individual participant and for society as a whole. The individual feels good about themselves for being part of a

group that helps the community and consequently the community benefits from the contributions of the individuals.

The focus of this research project revolved around the fundamental question of whether a positive correlation can be made linking sports participation and civic engagement. A working hypothesis that a positive connection exists emerged after reviewing many sociological works on the two topics. To test the hypothesis a logistic regression model was set up using the Add Health database. The data set was a longitudinal study of adolescents around the country that surveyed the respondents in three separate waves over a course of eight year. Selecting the dependent variable of unpaid volunteer community service over the past year during Wave III and the independent variable of participation in team sports during Wave I along with control and dummy variables, it was explained through a regression analysis that indeed there was an indirect yet positive correlation between sports participation and civic engagement.

The effects of sports participation on civic engagement are not as large as the effects of education, family conditions and religiosity, but the findings demonstrate that sports participation during adolescence indirectly influences civic engagement as a young adult. The influence of adolescent sports participation on volunteering is non-significant when controlling for adult sports participation. However, the greatest influence on adult sports participation is adolescent sports participation and thus, establishes an indirect link between adolescent sports and civic engagement later in life. These findings are particularly interesting considering the time difference for the independent and control

variables. Sports participation was measured at Wave I when the respondent was between the ages of 14-18 and the other covariates were measured at Wave III during the young adulthood of the respondents. There are several years separating the samplings and sports are still shown to be significant and thereby, suggesting that sports have a lasting effect on the participant.

The analysis yields the finding that sports participation does have an effect strong enough on the individual to stay with them over a period of at least several years. How might this situation be explained and why does it manifest itself in the form of volunteering? Do sports values translate to social values? The longitudinal analysis indicates that something persisted with the respondent or is consistent over time and affected their likelihood to engage in volunteering. As presented previously, sociological study has revealed that civic engagement, and volunteering in particular, is a patterned behavior that reflects the values of the individual. As such, my findings offer support for the perspective that sports may have positive socializing effects on participants, particularly young people. However, it is somewhat problematic to conclude that learned values from sports provide a definite explanation for volunteering. Sports participation at the same time as volunteering is a significant influence, suggesting that there is some form exchange interaction between the two as well. It is important to note the structural constancy between variables that have strong influences on volunteering. For example, like sports, churches and schools are highly organized bodies and each have positive influences on civic engagement. This suggests that organized contexts influence learned behavior and possibly foster volunteerism in individuals.

In terms of exchange and socialization theories, it is also somewhat problematic to conclude that either one adequately explains the relationship between sports participation and civic engagement. Following socialization theory it predicts that participation at Wave I would have a strong influence on volunteering. Following the exchange theory explanation that predicts that sports participation at Wave III would not have an influence on volunteering. However, neither of these situations resulted from the statistical tests. An indirect association between sports participation and volunteering exists and as such, analysis of the information suggests the best explanation a synthesis of exchange and socialization theories. A theory that accounts for the influence of current exchange factors as well as the process of how these factors might have been socialized into the individual could be a powerful tool to further understand the relationship between sports participation and civic engagement.

As with any field in sociology, research on civic engagement and sports participation is incomplete and additional work can always advance understanding of the topics. This research project was limited by the variables available on the data set and so it could not account for all the factors that could potentially influence volunteering. The most significant factors on volunteering during young adulthood were if the respondent attended church and if they were currently in school. These findings suggest that involvement in some organization shapes the likelihood of volunteering but to better understand this, more in-depth research should be performed to examine if theoretical explanations of socialization and exchange are accurate. Perhaps other group oriented



phenomena socialize the individual in similar manners. If so, is the effect only visible in young adults or does it persist in other ages as well? Though this project presents interesting findings, it is still a preliminary study and further investigation is necessary to expand the understanding of the topics of sports participation and civic engagement.

## REFERENCES

- Berlage, Gai Ingham. 1982. "Are Children's Competitive Team Sports Socializing Agents for Corporate America?" Pg. 309-324. in *Studies in the Sociology of Sport*, edited by Dunleavy, Aidan O., Miracle, Andrew W. and Rees, Roger C. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press.
- Berry, Jeffrey M. 1999 "The Rise of Citizen Groups." Pg. 367-393 in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, edited by Skocpol, Theda and Fiorina, Morris P. Washington DC: Brookings Institute Press
- Brint, Steven and Levy, Charles S. 1999 "Professions and Civic Engagement: Trends in Rhetoric and Practice, 1875-1995." Pg. 163-210 in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, edited by Skocpol, Theda and Fiorina, Morris P. Washington DC: Brookings Institute Press
- Bryant, James E and McElroy, Mary. 1997. *Sociological Dynamics of Sport and Exercise*. Englewood, CO: Morton Publishing Company.
- Brown, Barbara K. 1982. "Female Sport Involvement: A Preliminary Conceptualization." Pg. 121-138. in *Studies in the Sociology of Sport*, edited by Dunleavy, Aidan O., Miracle, Andrew W. and Rees, Roger C. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press.
- Danish, Steven J. 2002. "Teaching Life Skills through Sport." Pg. 49-60 in *Paradoxes of Youth and Sport*, edited by Gatz, Margaret, Messner, Michael A and Ball-Rokeach, Sandra J. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Dunleavy, Aidan O., Miracle, Andrew W. and Rees, Roger C. 1982. *Studies in the Sociology of Sport*. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press.
- Eitle, Tamela McNulty and Eitle, David J. 2002. "Race, Cultural Capital, and the Educational Effects of Participation in Sports." *Sociology of Education*. Vol. 75: 123-146

- Ewing, Martha E., Gano-Overway, Lori A., Branta, Crystal F. and Seefeldt, Vern D. 2002. "The Role of Sports in Youth Development" Pg. 31-47 in *Paradoxes of Youth and Sport*, edited by Gatz, Margaret, Messner, Michael A and Ball-Rokeach, Sandra J. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Figler, Stephen K. and Whitaker, Gail. 1991. *Sport & Play in American Life*. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Publishers.
- Frey, James H. and Eitzen, Stanley D. 1991. *Sport and Society*. Annual Reviews Inc. Vol. 17:503-522.
- Friedkin, Noah E. 2004. "Social Cohesion." *Annual Review Sociology*. Vol. 30: 409-425
- Gruneau, Richard. 1983. *Class, Sports and Social Development*. Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press.
- Hargreaves, John. 1986. *Sport, Power and Culture: A Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Janoski, Thomas, Musick, March and Wilson, John. 1998. "Being Volunteered? The Impact of Social Participation and Pro-Social Attitudes on Volunteering." *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 13, No. 3
- Klein, Malcom W and Sorenson, Susan B. 2002. "Contrasting Perspectives on Youthful Sports Violence." Pg. 197-206 in *Paradoxes of Youth and Sport*, edited by Gatz, Margaret, Messner, Michael A and Ball-Rokeach, Sandra J. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- McPherson, Barry D., Curtis, James E. and Loy, John W. 1989. *The Social Significance of Sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books.
- Podilichak, Walter. 1982. "Youth Sport Involvement: Impact on Informal Game Participation." Pg. 325-348. in *Studies in the Sociology of Sport*, edited by Dunleavy, Aidan O., Miracle, Andrew W. and Rees, Roger C. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press.
- Portes, Alejandro. 1998. "Social Capital: Its Origin and Application in Modern Sociology." *Annual Review Sociology*. Vol. 24:1-24.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American of Community*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America." *PS: Political Science and Politics*. Vol. 28: 664-683
- Rich, Paul. 1999. "American Voluntarism, Social Capital and Political Culture." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 565: 15-34

- Skocpol, Theda and Fiorina, Morris P. 1999. "Making Sense of the Civic Engagement Debate." Pg. 1-23 in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, edited by Skocpol, Theda and Fiorina, Morris P. Washington DC: Brookings Institute Press.
- Smith, David Horton. 1975. "Voluntary Action and Voluntary Groups." *Annual Review Sociology*. Vol. 1: 247-270
- Stolle, Dietland and Rochon, Thomas R. 2001. "Are All Associations Alike? Member Diversity, Associational Type, and the Creation of Social Capital." Pg. 143-156 in *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective*, edited by Edwards, Bob, Foley, Michael W. and Diani, Mario. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Waves I, II & III. 2002. Chapel Hill, NC: Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (producer). Los Altos, CA: Sociometrics Corporation, American Family Data Archive (producer and distributor).
- Udry, Richard J. 1998. *The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Waves I & II: A user's guide to machine-readable files and documentation*. Los Altos, CA: Sociometrics Corporation, American Family Data Archive.
- Vanreusel, B. and Renson, R. 1982. "The Social Stigma of High Risk Sport Subcultures." Pg. 183-202. in *Studies in the Sociology of Sport*, edited by Dunleavy, Aidan O., Miracle, Andrew W. and Rees, Roger C. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press.
- Washington, Robert E. and Karen, David. 2001. "Sport and Society." *Annual Review Sociology*. Vol. 27:187-212.
- Wilson, John. 2000. "Volunteering." *Annual Review Sociology*. Vol. 26:215-40.
- Wuthnow, Robert. 1999. "Mobilizing Civic Engagement: The Changing Impact of Religious Involvement." Pg. 331-363 in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, edited by Skocpol, Theda and Fiorina, Morris P. Washington DC: Brookings Institute Press.
- Young, T.R. 1986. "The Sociology of Sport: Structural Marxist and Cultural Marxist Approaches." *Sociological Perspectives*. Vol. 29: 3-28.



Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>Volunteer Service</i> (W. III) (1=Yes, 0=No)	.29	.45
<i>Sport Participation</i> (W. I) (1=Yes, 0=No)	.7127	.4526
<i>Miles to Work</i> (W. III)	9.8185	18.1992
<i>Hours Watching TV a Week</i> (W. III)	12.69	12.925
<i>Currently have a job</i> (W. III) (1=Yes, 0=No)	.75	.43
<i>Total Income</i> (W. III) (in dollars)	13218	14330
<i>Currently in school</i> (W. III) (1=Yes, 0=No)	.38	.49
<i>Married</i> (W. III) (1=Yes, 0=No)	.1687	.3745
<i>Have Children</i> (W. III) (1=Yes, 0=No)	.2106	.4078
<i>Church Attendance</i> (W. III) (1=Yes, 0=No)	.1892	.3918
<i>Highest Level of Education</i> (W. III) (grade)	13.27	1.99
<i>Sport Participation</i> (W. III) (1=Yes, 0=No)	.1903	.3926

Note: For dummy variables, the mean is the proportion of respondents who answered yes.

N = 3752

Source: National Longitudinal Study of Health

Table 2: Estimated Effects of Sports Participation on Respondent Volunteering

Dependent Variable: Volunteer or Community Service

Independent Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<i>Sport Participation</i> (W. I)	.273*** (.091)	.133* (.091)	.159* (.096)	.191* (.098)	.094 (.100)
<i>Miles to Work</i> (W. III)	--	.000 (.003)	.000 (.003)	.000 (.003)	.001 (.003)
<i>Hours Watching TV a Week</i> (W. III)	--	-.015** (.004)	-.014** (.004)	-.012** (.004)	-.013** (.004)
<i>Currently have a Job</i> (W. III)	--	.032 (.105)	.047 (.107)	-.013 (.110)	.000 (.110)
<i>Total Income</i> (W. III)	--	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)
<i>Currently in School</i> (W. III)	--	.866*** (.088)	.813*** (.089)	.591*** (.093)	.590*** (.094)
<i>Married</i> (W. III)	--	.084 (.134)	-.049 (.137)	-.077 (.140)	-.032 (.140)
<i>Have Children</i> (W. III)	--	-.761*** (.133)	-.756*** (.134)	-.550*** (.138)	-.491*** (.139)
<i>Church Attendance</i> (W. III)	--	--	.885*** (.102)	.853*** (.103)	.831*** (.104)
<i>Highest Level of Education</i> (W. III)	--	--	--	.216*** (.023)	.221*** (.023)
<i>Sport Participation</i> (W. III)	--	--	--	--	.550*** (.107)
Intercept	-1.050	-.998	-1.196	-4.038	-4.157
-2 Log Likelihood	3614.942	3398.059	3323.796	3235.436	3208.934
Model Chi-square	9.204	226.087	300.350	388.710	413.791
Degrees of Freedom	1	8	9	10	11
<u>Significance (p=)</u>	.000	.000	.000	.000	
*p<0.05    **p<0.01    ***p<0.001					

N = 2969

Source: National Longitudinal Study of Health

Table 3: Estimated Effects of Sports Participation at Wave I  
on Sports Participation at Wave III

Dependent Variable: Sports Participation in Team Sports at Wave III

Independent Variable	Model 1
<i>Sport Participation (W. I)</i>	1.418*** (.130)
<i>Miles to Work (W. III)</i>	-.002 (.003)
<i>Hours Watching TV a Week (W.III)</i>	.009** (.003)
<i>Currently have a Job (W. III)</i>	-.055 (.107)
<i>Total Income (W. III)</i>	.000** (.000)
<i>Currently in School (W. III)</i>	.143 (.097)
<i>Married (W. III)</i>	-.461 (.150)
<i>Have Children (W. III)</i>	-.685*** (.142)
<i>Church Attendance (W. III)</i>	.331** (.107)
<i>Highest Level of Education (W.III)</i>	-.032 (.024)
Intercept	-2.241
-2 Log Likelihood	3405.163
Model Chi-square	252.551
Degrees of Freedom	10
Significance (p=)	.000
*p<0.05      **p<0.01      ***p<0.001	

N = 2975

Source: National Longitudinal Study of Health