Social Reproduction and Student Development in College Extracurricular Spaces

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Abstract

Extracurricular participation is a widely understudied facet of college education which shapes campuses by prompting the formation of student social groups, upholding a unique relationship with social inequalities and largely swaying student long term identity formation and career attainment. This qualitative, interview based, research aims to utilize individual student experiences to uncover the role extracurricular participation plays in student development and its impact on campus climate. The project largely highlights existing gaps between extracurricular groups; the reproduction and dismantling of social inequalities within said groups; the correlation between participation and career building and trends of like mindedness, comfort, and mutual questioning of social structures within extracurricular spaces. It can in turn be used to foster greater intergroup dialogue on college campuses, help to decrease the presence of inequalities within college groups, incentivize colleges to recognize extracurriculars as safe spaces for students and to diversify resources toward the extracurricular realm given its role in career acquisition. This research contributes to the field of campus climate research.

Methods

Research Question: how does extracurricular participation on college campuses sway student development (i.e. identity formation, career advancement, breaking down of inequalities etc.) and the formation of social groups?

Methodology: 9 qualitative interviews with current Wheaton students

Process:
- interviews averaged 45 minutes and were conducted in person.

Questions:
- divided into seven categories: demographics, self fulfillment and social inclusion on campus, athletic history, internship and career building history, barriers to entry and mobilization within extracurriculars, personality traits and campus extracurricular climate.

Analysis:
- comprised of coding for positive answers to interview questions and tracking the number of respondents for each. Once the questions with the highest number of positive responses were accounted for the type of activities the respondents participate in and their individual demographics were reviewed and analyzed according to existing theory.

Key Theoretical Models

Adolescent Socialization

- Dunning (1999) theorizes that adolescents socialize with individuals who contain attributes they find within themselves.

- Kelman (2006) argues there are several levels at which individuals navigate their social systems, one of which is the "compliance" level. This level includes consistent questioning of said system.

Social Reproduction

- Collins' (2009) definition of social reproduction asserts that there is an infiltration of social inequalities into school settings.

- Mier and Larson (2018) and Snellman and Frederick 2014) respectively theorize that students with college educated parents and from upper middle//high income households have higher rates of extracurricular participation.

Capital Acquisition

- Ralph McNeal theorizes that extracurricular participation expands one's social and human capital.

References

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Findings

### Theme 1: Extracurricular History and Gaps Between Extracurricular Groups

- 8 participants noted the largest gap between extracurricular spaces on campus: as between athletics and other clubs.

- 5 participants argued that hosting more collaborations between groups on campus could work to bridge the extracurricular gap

- 50% of total participants began their extracurricular careers with athletics and tapered away over time.

- 2 participants specifically noted they moved from athletics to extracurriculars that would better benefit their career.

- 1 participant noted that "teams hangout with teams" as the reason for the extracurricular divide. Another noted the division as a systemic issue rather than a lack of interest or drive on behalf of athletes to branch out. They noted that athletes are inherently funneled toward one another through college run programming, such as athletic orientation.

- **Key Quote:** [discussing gaps between extracurricular groups at Wheaton]

  - **"Being an involved student athlete is a rarity"**

Theme 2: Like Mindedness and Security

- A general sense of like mindedness, comfortability & support within extracurriculars was uncovered.

- 6 of the 9 participants noted that their extracurricular peers shared similar questions about society and social structure, enforcing Kelman's theory of compliance level social navigation.

- 3 participants noted the tendency of extracurriculars to act as safe spaces, 2 noted a sense of support and 1 noted a sense of comfortability in their extracurricular spaces.

- Extracurriculars acting as safe spaces was brought up in specific reference to activist groups and theme houses.

- 2 participants noted the importance of being surrounded by individuals like themselves. And, the need to be surrounded by like minded people was mentioned by 1 participant.

- **Key Quote**: [discussing comfortability in extracurricular spaces]

  - **"[My activist space is] one in which I do not need to brush off racist experiences as 'funny' and can simply discuss them."**
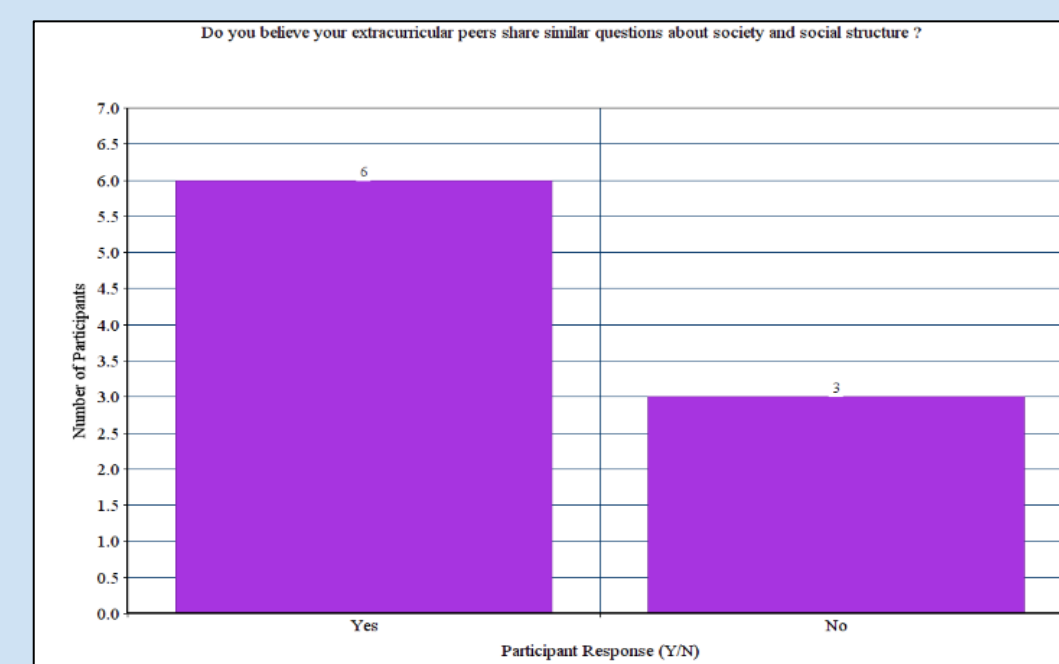
Theme 3: Extracurricular Participation and Career Attainment

- High rate of internship participation by respondents (considering the majority of college students only hold one

- Theme house residents were found to be particularly active in internships. 2 participants who respectively serve as theme house presidents have held sizeable internships in government bodies and professional research laboratories. And, the participant with the highest number of internship positions held was once a theme house treasurer.

- 3 respondents noted they had gained access to their internship through someone from their extracurricular space, amongst the individuals noted were a club advisor and pose mentor.

Participant Number	Number of Extracurricular Leadership Positions Currently Held	Number of Internships Held	Was the Internship Acquired with the Help of Someone from an Extracurricular Space (Yes/No)?
Participant one	2	1	No
Participant two	2	2	No
Participant three	2	1	No
Participant four	2	2	Yes: Club Advisor
Participant five	2	1	No
Participant six	2	4	No
Participant seven	3	1	Yes: Wheaton Boss
Participant eight	6	2	Yes: Pose Mentor
Participant nine	1	4	No

Findings Continued

Theme 4: Social Reproduction

Racism, Class Division and Hyper Professionalism

- When asked about language barriers present in extracurricular spaces professional language was mentioned by 2 participants and educational assumption regarding public policy was mentioned by 1 participant.

- 1 respondent noted [and was noticeably irritated by] how they often find people asking how their executive board position is going rather than how they personally are.

- **Key Quote** [discussing extracurricular access at Wheaton]
  - **"[I find] doors opening because of race, class and manners."**

Classroom Compensation

- The concept of extracurricular spaces filling "needs not met" by the classroom was mentioned by 2 participants. 1 interviewee clarified that professors are in a constant state of catching people up to history, politics, etc. (especially those centered around marginalized communities) and therefore extracurriculars allow for deeper and expanded conversations to occur.

Conclusions and Analysis

Conclusions:

1. Over time individuals either completely transition away from athletics to another realm (activism, academic clubs, etc.) or begin to solely focus on a sport.
2. Those participating in extracurricular spaces share similar questions about society and social structure.
3. Extracurriculars can act as safe spaces for students.
4. There is a high rate of internship participation by extracurricular leaders.
5. Institutionalized racism, classism and hyper professionalism are reproduced within college extracurricular settings.
   a. Hyper professionalism, both in attitude and language, in the extracurricular realm is a barrier to entry.

Analysis:

1. Dunning (1999) asserts that adolescents socialize with individuals who contain attributes they find within themselves and McNeal theorizes that high rates of extracurricular participation expands access to social and human capital. Thus, colleges need to begin concentrating on the aforementioned transition period and better teach athletes how to balance athletic participation with campus engagement; and ensure that they do not begin to limit their attributes used for socialization to simply athleticism.
   a. Given Kelman's (2006) theory of social navigation at the compliance level, and the uncovery of this research that extracurricular spaces allow for compliance level questioning of society, colleges need to ensure that athletes can easily access other extracurricular spaces so that their means of social navigation and access to human/social capital are not limited.

1. Glanville (1999) notes that extracurricular participation contributes to higher rates of voter participation later in life. Thus, one can theorize that those who are limited to one extracurricular space may be less likely to be civically engaged; therefore colleges need to begin emphasizing the importance of civic engagement to athletes and beyond.

2. One must consider if the gravitation toward like minded individuals, suggested by both this research and Dunning (1999), will cause the initial increase in human/ social capital and impact on identity formation provided by extracurriculars, as theorized by McNeal, to eventually plato. Therefore, one can postulate the need for dialogue between various safe space groups themselves.

3. Holland and Andre (1987) argue that for high schoolers extracurricular involvement boosts educational attainment through college acceptance. This research translates their theory into the college sphere by uncovering that extracurricular involvement boosts career attainment and that extracurricular leadership can act as a precursor to job leadership.

4. It is the job of college administrations to ensure equal access to extracurricular spaces across race, class and professional experience.
   a. College administrations must ensure that they do not uphold Mier and Larson's (2018) and Snellman and Frederick's (2014) respective theories that students with college educated parents and from upper middle//high income households have higher rates of participation.
   b. Collins' (2009) theory that language barriers act as a unifier among marginalized students does not apply to professional language.
   c. Extracurricular spaces can compensate for the reproduction of social inequality in the classroom by providing a wider space for in-depth discussion.

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