

The Association between Hometowns and Joining Clubs in College

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Introduction

According to the 2000 United States Department of Transportation Census Statistics, seventy-nine percent of Americans live in urban areas or clusters, compared to the twenty-one percent who live in rural areas (2000). Some homogenous rural communities are spread across several miles, whereas other heterogeneous communities burgeon with new immigrants living in crowded cities. With that in mind, how does growing up in these distinct living conditions shape people? How does one's environment influence the decisions he or she makes in the future? More specifically, does rural versus urban living influence college students' participation in clubs and organizations during their undergraduate experience? Perhaps where a student grew up could be a variable in determining the nature of his or her involvement in school.

Previous research has focused on similar topics, including how urban and rural living conditions differ in terms of the social networks formed in these communities, as well as the independent or interdependent disposition of community members (Hofferth and Iceland 1998; Yoshihisa et al. 2004). In their meta-analysis of social capital in both urban and rural communities, Hofferth and Iceland (1998) point out that the heterogeneity of cities could increase individuals' awareness of other social groups, and perhaps encourage them to immerse themselves in a more diverse environment when they come to college. In addition, it is understood that residents of rural communities have stronger social networks with their kin, whereas urbanites may have weaker social ties, but are more likely to have ties with people outside of their family or friend group (Hofferth and Iceland 1998).

Aside from the family, the community is the primary location for social contact, and thus plays a role in developing concepts of association with others and individual expression (Wilkinson 1972, as cited in Summers, 1986). With that said, variances in the structure and characteristics of a community, such as size and ethnic and religious diversity, can influence individuals in different ways. To examine this idea, a psychology experiment by Kashima et al. (2004), identified the impact of different-sized cities on a person's development of individual, relational, and collective selves. Findings showed that rural individuals tend to be more interdependent and collectivist whereas urban individuals tend to be more individualistic (Kashima et al. 2004). Consequently, urban students' ability to form weaker ties can allow them to participate in many distinct organizations on campus, as they more regularly branch

out to new people. In another study, researchers found that social networks are stronger and smaller among family versus friends, and more educationally, religiously, and racially similar in rural communities as compared to those in urban communities (Beggs, Haines, and Hurlbert 1996). If these trends pervade the college environment, then perhaps rural students will join fewer clubs or join clubs with friends in order to maintain a small social network.

Researcher Alexander Astin highlights that participating in collegiate clubs is one of the most beneficial social outlets for students (1993). Indeed, spending time with peers in clubs and organizations allows students the opportunity to strengthen their personal development and learning skills, thereby encouraging them to be productive and sociable. Distinctions between interdependence and independence may expose the motivations behind individuals' desires (or lack thereof) to join certain types of clubs. In addition, social networks can also play an important role in creating certain peer groups. For these reasons, it is worth examining the motivations for joining clubs to see if there is an environmental basis for participation.

This research intends to shed light on the demographics of the students involved in organizations on the University of Michigan campus and the reasons behind their choices to join. Furthermore, this study examines the correlation between students' previous living environments and their involvement in clubs around campus. Knowing this information can enlighten the college community and student affairs provosts to create programs to get more students involved in clubs, regardless of their backgrounds.

Based on previous research on hometowns, social networks, and participation in collegiate clubs, I predicted that students who were raised in an urban environment would be more likely to join clubs and organizations in college. Urban students may be more individualistic and thus will want to branch out and meet people from many different groups, rather than limiting themselves to familiar faces. Along these lines, since the University of Michigan is a state university, with around 65% of the students coming from the state of Michigan, the majority of students go to school with students from their town or high school (Lichterman 2010). Thus, it is likely that students raised in the rural areas of Michigan brought their social networks from home to the university, so they do not need to branch out as extensively to make a new peer group through clubs. I predicted that rural students will participate in fewer clubs and will be more likely to join clubs with friends, or to join clubs that

are familiar to them, such as those that existed in their high school.

This study also looked at gender differences in the number of clubs joined and whether participants joined clubs with or without friends. The literature on club participation suggests that participation in clubs may be influenced by the gender of the student, where women are more likely to join clubs than men (Astin 1993). Therefore, I predicted that at the University of Michigan, women would join a greater number of clubs than men.

This study also assessed the role of extraversion and introversion, as these characteristics may be another reason why students do or do not choose to join clubs in college. Extraverts are not only more social, but may seek out environments that breed sociability. In this manner, extraverts may want to make more friends by joining clubs, whereas introverts may not have the same desire to be social in an extracurricular setting.

Methods

Participants

There were 29 participants in total, 38% male (n=11) and 62% female (n=18). 55% (n=16) of the participants were from a city (population of 50,000+) whereas 45% (n=13) of the participants were from a rural small town (population of less than 10,000). All 29 participants were undergraduates at the University of Michigan, and range from first year to fourth year students. Participants were excluded if they were not from the United States and if they were not an undergraduate student. Also, if during their lifetimes, participants moved to a hometown of a different size or type (i.e. rural to urban, or vice versa), they were excluded from the data.

Measures

Participants were asked to report their gender, age, year in school, nationality, type of hometown (urban, suburban, or rural) where they grew up, whether they seek out opportunities to make new friends, and if they prefer to hang out with new or old friends.

To assess the strength of participants' social network in terms of their weak and strong social ties, participants were asked if they felt closer to family or friends. To measure club participation, participants were asked whether they joined clubs on campus, and if so, how many they have joined. In addition, participants were also asked about the types of clubs joined and if they are new or similar to those in high school. Extraversion and introversion is measured by participants' self-reported rating of agreeability, and whether they seek out opportunities to make new friends or if they socialize with their existing group of friends.

Procedure

Participants were selected by utilizing a convenience and non-probability stratified sample. I sent out the survey to several club list serves and to many friends who may not be involved in clubs, and I also posted a link to the survey onto Facebook in the hopes that both involved and uninvolved students came across the link. Thus, the population consisted of all undergraduate students at the University of Michigan, using a cross-sectional study for the analysis. Additionally, both purposive as well as snowball samples were employed, as I asked friends to send the link to their social networks, so the survey snowballed to other groups on campus. I wanted to compare subgroups (urban vs. rural students) in the population, so using a stratified sample best helped achieve this target group.

Results

Sub-Analysis 1

The literature revealed that because of weaker but more abundant social ties, students from urban communities may be more likely to participate in clubs than those students with a rural background, who have stronger, but fewer, social ties (Kashima et al. 2004). The data supports this hypothesis, to some extent. Seventy-one percent (n=10) of urban students participated in three or more clubs, compared to 23% (n=3) of rural students. In contrast, 46%

Table 1. Distribution Between Number of Clubs Joined in College with a Student's Hometown and Gender

Hometown		Number of clubs joined					Total
		1	2	3	4	5+	
Urban	Male	25% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	25% (n=1)	50% (n=2)	0% (n=0)	n=4
	Female	10% (n=1)	20% (n=2)	50% (n=5)	0% (n=0)	20% (n=2)	n=10
Rural/ Small Town	Male	57% (n=4)	43% (n=3)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	n=7
	Female	33.3% (n=2)	17% (n=1)	17% (n=1)	33.3% (n=2)	0% (n=0)	n=6
Total		n=8	n=6	n=7	n=4	n=2	n=27

Source: Hometown and Clubs Survey, Qualtrics

(n=6) of rural students participated in only one club, which differed from the 14% (n=2) for urban students. These results indicate that the participants from an urban hometown participated in a greater number of clubs than the participants from rural hometowns, and thus there is an association between the size of a student’s hometown and the number of clubs in which they participate.

Table 1 displays the relationship between hometown, number of clubs joined, and gender. Due to the literature on women’s increased sociability and city dwellers’ increased social networks, I expected that urban females would participate in the most clubs, and rural or small town males would participate in the fewest number of clubs (Astin 1993; Beggs, Haines, and Hulbert 1996). Indeed, the survey results supported this hypothesis. 100% (n=7) of men from small towns only participated in 1-2 clubs and no males from a small town or rural area participated in more than 2 clubs. In contrast, 20% (n=2) of females from urban hometowns participated in 5 or more clubs, providing support for my first hypothesis that females and students raised in urban areas are more likely to join a greater number of clubs. Furthermore, a higher proportion of females (62.5%) participate in 3 or more clubs compared to their male counterparts (27%), regardless of their hometown. On the other hand, males (73%) were more likely to join 1-2 clubs compared to females (37.5%).

Sub-Analysis 2

This analysis focuses on the second hypothesis, which looks at the relationship between rural students’ social ties and if they joined familiar clubs with friends. I also examined the effects of gender. Of the 27 participants, 56% (n=15) of participants clas-

sified themselves as having high sociability. With that said, 40% (n=6) of the “highly sociable” respondents still chose to join familiar clubs with friends, compared to the 20% (n=3) who chose to join unfamiliar clubs without their friends. The “low sociability” respondents were equally distributed (33.3%) amongst every category except joining familiar clubs without friends. These results indicate that there is not a strong relationship (if any) between one’s sociability and the types of clubs one joins. However, this association should be further researched using a larger sample and more accurate measures of sociability.

Results in Table 3 show that men are more than four times as likely (27% compared to 6%) to join unfamiliar clubs without friends than females. In contrast, 44% (n=7) of women choose to join familiar clubs with friends compared to only 9% (n=1) of men. Furthermore, 50% of women (n=8) join unfamiliar clubs with friends compared to 55% of men (n=6). These results support the notion that females like to be with their friends more, regardless if they were existing friends, whereas men are more likely to join clubs without friends.

A three-way table examined the relationship between joining certain clubs, types of sociability, and gender. I had originally predicted that females would be more interested in branching out and making new friends. 100% (n=9) of highly sociable women indicated that they would join familiar clubs with friends, compared to 33% (n=2) of highly sociable men. In actuality, 94% (n=15) of the 16 responses for females reported joining familiar clubs with friends. Along these lines, 64% (n=7) of the 11 men fell under this category as well. However, 50% (n=3) of males with high sociabil-

Table 2. Distribution Between Rural Student’s Participation in Familiar Clubs with Friends and Types of Sociability

Sociability	Types of clubs joined				Total
	Familiar clubs with friends	Familiar clubs without friends	Unfamiliar clubs with friends	Unfamiliar clubs without friends	
High Sociability	40% (n=6)	7% (n=1)	33% (n=5)	20% (n=3)	n=15
Medium Sociability	11% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	89% (n=8)	0% (n=0)	n=9
Low Sociability	33.3% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	33.3% (n=1)	33.3% (n=1)	n=3
Total	n=8	n=1	n=14	n=4	

Source: Hometown and Clubs Survey, Qualtrics

Table 3. Distribution Between Rural Students’ Participation in Familiar Clubs with Friends and Gender

Gender	Type of Clubs Joined				Total
	Familiar clubs with friends	Familiar clubs without friends	Unfamiliar clubs with friends	Unfamiliar clubs without friends	
Male	9% (n=1)	9% (n=1)	55% (n=6)	27% (n=3)	n=11
Female	44% (n=7)	0% (n=0)	50% (n=8)	6% (n=1)	n=16
Total	n=8	n=1	n=14	n=4	n=27

Source: Hometown and Clubs Survey, Qualtrics

ity were willing to join familiar clubs without friends, compared to 0% of females surveyed. These results show that both genders prefer to join familiar clubs with friends, yet males tend to be more willing to branch out and join clubs without friends compared to women. This finding did not support my hypothesis, which predicted that females, on the basis of being more social, would join any type of club, regardless of their friends' actions.

Conclusion

The results discussed above indicated that urban students are in fact more likely to join clubs on campus than rural students. In addition, females from both types of hometowns joined more clubs than their male counterparts. Even though results showed that females are more sociable, sociability minimally impacted results, as males were four times more likely to join unfamiliar clubs than females.

This study differs from previous work, mainly on the basis that no one has investigated the link between where one grew up and clubs joined in college. The biggest limitation in the study was the small number of participants. The results therefore are not generalizable to the University of Michigan undergraduate population, or to rural and urban residents across America. However, despite the small sample size, the data obtained is fairly evenly distributed between the number of participants from urban and rural hometowns, which adds validity to the results.

In addition, it is important that future research in this same area defines the variable of hometown more specifically so that there is no confusion over what constitutes the suburbs, city, or a small/rural town. Many participants inaccurately categorized their hometown in this study, which is why there is a sparse sample size. Another study limitation is that there was selection bias because the sample was taken solely from University of Michigan students. Because of the competitive campus environment at UM, students may participate in clubs because they are pressured to fit in or need to bolster up their resumes, not because their hometown environments shaped them to join certain types of clubs.

In addition to the surveys, this study would also benefit from collecting data through open-ended interviews. Such interviews would provide a more thorough analysis of students' motivations for joining clubs, the extent of their involvement in these clubs, and how they select which clubs to join. Additionally, an interview would clarify the social network question on the survey to elicit a more specific response, which would provide a richer analysis on the second hypothesis, which links sociability to types of clubs joined.

My research has shown that, in this sample, the type of setting – rural, or urban – where someone grew up does have a correlation to both the number and types of clubs joined in college. Implications of this knowledge can help student affairs directors in numerous ways. Most importantly, they can better understand reasons for student involvement, and either increase funding for clubs that are

more active, or create more incentives for people to join clubs in the first place. For example, if students received credit for clubs joined, perhaps students would be more motivated to put their free time into a productive activity instead of into potentially harmful ones. In a broader sense, the results have helped to shed light on the behavioral pattern of urban and rural students, which may or may not stay with them in their post-college years. Better understanding people's motives and behaviors in college could enable researchers to potentially predict behavioral patterns in the future.

With that said, future directions could include a longitudinal study to see where active club members get jobs and pursue their professional career. It would be interesting to see if there is a correlation between the number or types of clubs joined and success in the job market or even marriage. If researchers had the answers to these questions then perhaps it would provide students with enough motivation to join clubs in their undergraduate career.

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