



# Social Contract, Social Construction: Children's Participation in Extra Curricular Activities and its Implications for Public Policy

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## Project Motivation

Many policies over the past twenty years have been premised on the assumption that youth participation in extra curricular activities is an effective preventative measure against social ills. Furthermore, proven participation in extra curricular activities is widely used as a gateway to economic stability and success given the role that they play in the college and university admission process, as well as in many entry level employment opportunities. If the creation of opportunities for participation is to be used as a policy lever for social improvement, an effective public policy intervention requires a sufficient understanding of the causal or correlative relationships between social condition and social involvement.

## Guiding Research Question

1) What conditions of a child's environment tend to influence their participation in extracurricular activities?

## Methodology

- Utilized data from the National Survey of America's Families 1999 Focal Child survey
- Exploratory study designed to generate descriptive information about the observed behavior of children and youth
- Use of descriptive statistics (including cross-tabulations), tests for differences of means (Chi-Square and t-test) and logistic regression analysis

## Literature Review

- ❖ Children's involvement in extracurricular activities has been connected to positive youth development both academically and socially (Eccles & Gottman, 2003; Mahoney, 2000; McNeal, 1999).
- ❖ Eccles et al (2003) found a correlation between participation in extracurricular activities and a reduction in youth high-risk behaviors.
- ❖ Shown to encourage peer interaction, to promote cooperation, to build student-adult relationships, to provide structure and challenge, and to connect students to school (Holloway, 2002; Mahoney, 2000).
- ❖ Higher socioeconomic status is positively related to participation in extracurricular activities (Huebner & Mancini, 2003; Raymore, 1994; McNeal, 1999).
- ❖ Huebner and Mancini (2003) and McNeal (1999) found that children from divorced families were less involved in extracurricular activities, specifically volunteer and religious oriented activities. They believed this might be due to the fact that transportation was not as easily accessed for the child or that the divorced parents were not as involved in religious activities post-divorce.
- ❖ McNeal's (1999) study indicated that a school's climate has an effect on a student's participation in extracurricular activities.
- ❖ Fletcher, Elder and Mekos (2000) found that parental warmth and support influenced whether children were involved in extracurricular activities. The more children received positive reinforcement the more likely they were to become involved in extracurricular activities. They also showed that children's participation is more likely when the parents themselves are engaged in community activities
- ❖ The research has varied findings when it comes to the link between ethnicity and extracurricular participation based on the research focus. For example, McNeal (1998) showed that minorities were at least as involved as white students in some activities, except vocational activities. In his later study observing the impact of the school's involvement on extracurricular activity participation, McNeal (1999) found that minority students showed less involvement in all extracurricular activities except sports.

## Model 1

$$Y = .334 + .237X1 - .088X2 - .210X3 - 231X4$$

(F=343.578, p<.0001)

Y= dependent variable  
 X1=child's family income (t=35.719)  
 X2=child's race (t=-4.428)  
 X3=Single parent home (t=-11.205)  
 X4=No parent (t=-5.851)

R<sup>2</sup>=.037

## Model 2

$$Y = -.107 + .237X1 - .087X2 + .213X3$$

(F=458.020, p<.0001)

Y= dependent variable  
 X1=child's family income (t=25.728)  
 X2=child's race (t=-4.408)  
 X3= Two-parent home (t=11.783)

R<sup>2</sup>=.037

## Results

- Family income positively related to involvement in extracurricular activities
- Race had a negative relationship to participation in extracurricular activities
- Single-parent and no parent homes had an indirect relationship while two-parent homes had a direct relationship with involvement in extracurricular activities

## Next Steps

- Run analysis separating dependent variable by types of activities (sports, arts, volunteer, etc)
- Increase number of independent variables (housing, welfare receipt, etc)
- Explore parental involvement aspect