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Social capital or group style? Rescuing Tocqueville's insights on civic engagement

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Abstract Social capital has become the preeminent concept for studying civic relationships, yet it will not help us assess their meanings, institution-like qualities, or potential for social capacity. Alexis de Tocqueville's insights on these three features of civic relationships continue to be highly influential, and the popular social capital concept claims a strongly Tocquevillian heritage while systematically missing what a Tocquevillian imagination illuminates. Scenes from volunteer group settings in a midwestern US city show how a concept of group style apprehends the varying meanings, routines, and social capacities of civic ties. Group style also illuminates the process by which civic groups create "bridging" ties beyond the group. Without rejecting the social capital concept entirely, I highlight research questions and findings that social capital would ignore or misapprehend. A concluding discussion draws out implications for democratic theory, and sketches an agenda for future research on civic group style that makes good on Tocquevillian insights while moving beyond Tocqueville's own limits.

A difficult marriage

In just 13 years, political scientist Robert Putnam's version of the social capital concept has generated a hefty edifice of research on civic engagement, many columns' worth of social commentary, and a steady stream of penetrating criticisms. References to social capital have diffused phenomenally, as researchers continue to argue that the troika of social capital's components – social networks, norms of reciprocity and trust – empower social activism, boost local

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volunteering, and help diverse people work together for public goods.[1] The great outpouring of studies boosts the notion that civic engagement and perhaps democracy itself depend on solid stocks of social capital. At the same time, commentators continue to take sharp aim at the social capital concept's own logical consequences, its potential for circularity or internal incoherence.[2] Others say the concept too easily deflects inconvenient moral or political questions, or that it is an ideological "Trojan horse" poised to overtake critical thinking about civic engagement with the ultimate weapon – a market metaphor.[3] A third camp has debated Putnam's widely circulated argument that social capital in the United States drained away as voluntary association memberships declined after the late 1960s.[4] And others criticize the implications in Putnam's

[1] For Putnam's early reference to social capital, see Robert Putnam, *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); for a later work that popularized a similar definition of social capital, see Robert Putnam, *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). In the study of religious groups alone – the subject of this paper – Putnam's social capital concept has spread widely. On the consequences of social capital for churches and religious community groups, see for instance Nancy Ammerman, *Congregation and community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); John Bartkowski and Helen Regis, *Charitable choices: Religion, race and poverty in the post-welfare era* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Penny Edgell Becker and Pawan H. Dhingra, "Religious involvement and volunteering: Implications for civil society," *Sociology of Religion* 62 (2001): 315–335; J. Z. Park and Christian Smith, "To whom much has been given...: Religious capital and community voluntarism among churchgoing protestants," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39 (2000):272–286; Mark Chaves, Helen Giesel, and William Tsitsos, "Religious variations in public presence: Evidence from the National Congregations Study," 108–128, in Robert Wuthnow and John Evans, editors, *The quiet hand of God: Faith-based activism and the public role of mainline Protestantism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Ram A. Cnaan with Stephanie C. Boddie, Femida Handy, Caynor Yancey, and Richard Schneider, *The invisible caring hand: American congregations and the provision of welfare* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Mark R. Warren, *Dry bones rattling: Community building to revitalize American democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Corwin Smidt (Ed.), *Religion as social capital* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003); Richard Wood, *Faith in action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); "Religious culture and political action," *Sociological Theory* 17 (1999): 307–332.

[2] On circular reasoning in the social capital framework, see John Wilson, "Dr. Putnam's Social Lubricant," *Contemporary Sociology* 30 (2001): 225–227; Alejandro Portes, "Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998):1–24. Robert Fishman observed that social capital may be operationalized in diffuse, varied ways yet connotes a conceptual whole. See Robert Fishman, *Democracy's voices* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[3] On the missing moral questions, see Amitai Etzioni, "Is bowling together sociologically lite?" *Contemporary Sociology* 30 (2001): 223–224. On the political inadequacy of the social capital framework, see Robert Edwards and Michael Foley, "Much ado about social capital," *Contemporary Sociology* 30 (2001): 227–230. See Stephen Smith and Jessica Kulynych, "It may be social, but why is it capital? The social construction of social capital and the politics of language," *Politics and Society* 30 (2002): 149–186, for the same criticism of social capital that capitalism's most famous critic made of capitalism: It imposes a falsely universalizing logic on relationships – political ones in this case – and it distorts our understanding of the social world. For the view that social capital is a metaphorical Trojan horse bearing neoliberal assumptions, see Margaret Somers, "Beware trojan horses bearing social capital: How privatization turned solidarity into a bowling team," 233–274, in George Steinmetz (Ed.), *The politics of method in the human sciences* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

[4] For the debate about those figures, see Jean Cohen, "American civil society talk," 55–85, in Robert Fullinwider (Ed.), *Civil society, democracy, and civic renewal* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); Bob Edwards and Michael Foley (Eds.), *American Behavioral Scientist* 40, special issue on "Social capital, civil society and contemporary democracy" (March–April 1997); Robert Wuthnow, *Loose connections: Joining together in America's fragmented communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1998); Robert Fullinwider (Ed.), *Civil society, democracy, and civic Renewal* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield,1999); Andrew Greeley, "Coleman revisited: Religious structures as a source of social capital," *American Behavioral Scientist* 40 (1997): 587–594; Michael Schudson, *The good citizen: A history of American civic life* (New York: Martin Kessler Books, 1998); Theda Skocpol, "Unraveling from above," *American Prospect* 25 (March–April 1996); Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina, (Ed.), *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* (Washington D.C. and New York: Brookings Institution and Russsell Sage,1999); Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton, *Habits of the heart: individualism and commitment in American life*, updated edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

work that civic groups often cultivate the democratic sensibilities that count as social capital to begin with.[5]

Informed by this critical discussion yet alive to the value of research that has used Putnam's social capital concept, my inquiry goes in a different direction. I ask what purchase we get on civic engagement with the social capital concept. Is it what civic engagement scholars intended to buy? To address this question we need to bring back into the conversation the theorist invoked most frequently as the inspiration for this notion of social capital – Alexis de Tocqueville. After all the critiques, we still need to find out if this version of the concept can capture the features of civic association that would matter most in the Tocquevillian imagination. Is the marriage of Tocquevillian thinking and Putnam's social capital concept basically sound, even if it has given birth to a gaggle of logical, empirical, and ideological issues?

I argue it is not. My discussion treats only Putnam's version of social capital, since James Coleman's older formulation and Pierre Bourdieu's quite different notion have had less direct influence to date on the recent upsurge of civic engagement studies.[6] Putnam's social capital tries to turn a qualitative, Tocquevillian argument about meaningful, dynamic relationships into a quantifiable argument about the density of groups, individual acts, attitudes and behaviors. Yet, the qualitative argument slips in the back door of Putnam's research on US civic life. We ought to unhitch Tocqueville from Putnam's social capital concept and choose an alternative concept that can do the work that social capital tries to do but cannot.

Why even make the case? Why not allow the social capital concept a harmless rhetorical flourish? It is not because Tocqueville's own concepts are adequate to investigating modern civic life, and certainly not that his claims always ring true either for his own time or ours.[7]

[5] These works, though, usually do not critique the social capital concept itself. See Michael Young, "Tocqueville's America: A critical reappraisal of voluntary associations before the civil war," paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association, Anaheim, CA, 2001, for an argument that some of the most important civic associations in the US antebellum period were aggressive cultural warriors, trying to impose their vision of social organization across American civic life. See Hyeong-Ki Kwon, "Associations, civic norms, and democracy: Revisiting the Italian case," *Theory and Society* 33 (2004):135–166, for evidence that the Italian fascist movement rose rapidly in those regions of Italy shown as having had a dense associational life in Putnam, *Making democracy work*. For a critical view of German civic associations of the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, see Sheri Berman, "Civil society and the collapse of the Weimar Republic," *World Politics* 49 (1997): 401–429. For a study of entrenched social and cultural differences in nineteenth century American social clubs and mutual aid societies, see Jason Kaufman, *For the Common good? American civic life and the golden age of fraternity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Kaufman deduces "a stark challenge to the argument that associationalism can [join] disparate populations together in fellowship and solidarity" (p. 8), the argument he ascribed to Robert Putnam.

[6] A review of social capital concepts stretches beyond the bounds of this article. For a good discussion of the different concepts, see Nan Lin, *Social capital: A theory of social structure and action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); on the differences between Bourdieu's concept and Coleman's, which more obviously influences Putnam, see Smith and Kulynych, "It may be social, but why is it capital?". For a view of civic engagement that does prefer Coleman's concept to Putnam's, see Greeley, "Coleman revisited." For an extensive inventory of social capital studies, especially outside the field of civic engagement, see Michael Woolcock, "Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework," *Theory and Society* 27 (1998): 151–208.

[7] Regarding Tocqueville's own time, see Michael Young, "Tocqueville's America," "Confessional Protest: The religious birth of US national social movements," *American Sociological Review* 67 (2002): 660–688. Students of contemporary US civic life often affirm the suggestion in Tocqueville's writings that civic groups cultivate broad social ties, but this claim too is challenged in recent research. See Omar McRoberts, *Streets of glory: Church and community in a black urban district* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Robert Wuthnow, "Mobilizing civic engagement: The changing impact of religious involvement," 331–363, in Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina (Ed.), *Civic engagement in American democracy* (New York: Russell Sage, 1999), "Bridging the privileged and the marginalized?" 59–102, in Robert Putnam (Ed.), *Democracies in flux: The evolution of social capital in contemporary society* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Paul Lichterman, *Elusive togetherness: Church groups trying to bridge America's divisions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

It is partly because, for many social researchers, Tocqueville's writings are more than decorative rhetoric. As political theorist Mark Warren observes,[8] Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* established the conceptual channels for much of the subsequent scholarship on civic associations, including studies using the social capital concept. Many writers both sympathetic to and skeptical of Tocqueville justify their attention to civic groups by reference to Tocqueville's claims about these groups' society-building potentials.[9] Whether we affirm, dispute, or are indifferent to Tocqueville's famous claims, they are a fair gauge for assessing the social capital concept on its own terms. Aware of the distance between Tocquevillian claims and the social capital concept's ability to grasp them, we can make more careful, self-conscious analytic choices. We may decide whether we want to retrieve Tocquevillian questions and insights that disappear inside the social capital concept instead of assuming that by studying social capital we already have addressed them. One reason for unhitching Tocqueville from social capital, then, is to make our use of Tocqueville more clear and consistent. Another important reason is to advance our empirical grasp of civic engagement. Unhitching Tocqueville, we may make Tocqueville's empirical claims more accountable on their own terms once they no longer suffer a rough translation into the language of social capital.

One of Tocqueville's most famous empirical claims had to do with the power of civic interaction. If social capital is a good modern proxy for Tocqueville's sometimes vague and normative pronouncements about the process inside civic groups, then the concept should grasp what would be the most salient outcomes of that process in the Tocquevillian imagination. Only a study that investigates everyday interaction and its outcomes closely can access this dimension of Tocqueville's sprawling argument, and tell us whether the social capital concept tracks Tocquevillian insights adequately.

For over 3 years, I listened closely to interaction in nine, religiously sponsored community service groups and projects, and observed their efforts to create ties beyond the group, in the midwestern, mid-sized city of Lakeburg.[10] Church-based service networks initiated the Lakeburg groups and projects as responses to the welfare policy reforms of 1996. I watched to see how churchgoers would define their roles and relationships in a newly uncertain institutional environment. Local church-sponsored, county-assisted volunteering is an appropriate field for investigating Putnam's neo-Tocquevillian version of the social capital concept up close. In cultural terms, volunteering is one of the modal forms of local civic engagement in the contemporary United States. While 50 years ago many Americans would have associated civic involvement with the diffuse, long-term, local boosterism of the "club woman" and the "organization man," the dominant meaning of civic involvement today is embodied in the "volunteer" who carries out specific, short-term tasks for a particular issue or charitable campaign, often under the direction of a non-profit

[8] Mark E. Warren, *Democracy and association* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[9] For a representative sample of works on civic engagement that invoke Tocqueville, affirmingly or critically, see Berman, "Civil society and the collapse of the Weimar Republic"; Harry Boyte and Sara M. Evans, *Free spaces: The sources of democratic change in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986); Nina Eliasoph, *Avoiding politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Kaufman, *For the common good?*; Skocpol and Fiorina, *Civic engagement in American democracy*; Mark E. Warren, *Democracy and association*; Mark R. Warren, *Dry bones rattling*; Wood, *Faith in action*; Wuthnow, *Loose connections*; *Acts of compassion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Young, "Tocqueville's America."

[10] See Lichterman, *Elusive togetherness*. This and all group names and personal names are pseudonyms.

professional specialist who organizes volunteer time-slots.[11] By the numbers, too, local church-based volunteering is a good candidate for this inquiry. Roughly half of Americans' volunteering takes place in a religious context and almost half of Americans' association memberships are church related.[12] Volunteering also is one of the few forms of civic engagement that increased between the 1970s and the 1990s,[13] and probably for that reason Putnam put some of his own hopes for American civic life in a new volunteerism that might be animating young adults today.

Here, I re-conceptualize ethnographic material and treat much previously unanalyzed field-note evidence on two of the volunteer projects and one ongoing volunteer group.[14] I show that a focus on group style helps us grasp systematically the meanings and patterns of everyday interaction that would matter in the Tocquevillian imagination but elude the neo-Tocquevillian social capital concept. If we study group style instead of social capital, we discover why at least one extremely common form of civic engagement in the United States, plug-in style volunteering, often may not measure up well to Tocqueville's vision of civic process. Plug-in style volunteering may even stunt the social ties that the social capital concept aims to count.

To be very clear at the outset: This is no argument against the value of quantitative evidence for studying civic engagement. It is a matter of measuring well what we claim to measure. Social capital researchers deserve credit for trying to make Tocqueville's vague arguments empirically tractable, applicable to contemporary civic life. For present purposes, any distance between Tocquevillian intentions and the measures of social capital matter mainly if Putnam's concept really carries those intentions, and if measures of social capital really do miss features of civic engagement that a Tocquevillian imagination could grasp – features that matter greatly to contemporary researchers. I show that both are true. The social capital concept does not need Tocqueville's heritage to do work for social science.[15] For the sake of both the Tocquevillian imagination and Putnam's social capital concept, a divorce would be the best thing.

Following a brief, selective review of Tocqueville's own, well-trod argument on the social power of civic process, I unpack the Tocquevillian influences on Putnam's social capital concept and show how the concept tries to operationalize Tocqueville's insights. Succeeding sections attend closely to group style in local volunteer activity in order to pinpoint the social capital concept's inconsistencies and silences. Rather than simply reject the social capital concept, I compare it with group style to highlight research questions and findings that social capital cannot grasp but that would matter to many scholars of civic life. The neo-Tocquevillian social capital concept still has its uses, but it undercuts its Tocquevillian aspirations. A concluding discussion suggests some implications of my argument for democratic theory and sketches an agenda for future research on group styles that moves beyond the limits in both the social capital concept and Tocqueville's own claims about American civic groups.

[11] Wuthnow, *Loose connections*.

[12] Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 66, and chapter 4 in general.

[13] Ibid., 128.

[14] For details on the larger study, see Lichterman, *Elusive Togetherness*.

[15] See, for instance, Woolcock, "Social capital and economic development," but see also the global critique of the concept in Somers, "Beware Trojan horses bearing social capital."

From civic community to social capital

The spirit of Tocqueville: Meaningful relationships, instituted action, and social capacity

Communitarians, liberal political theorists, pragmatists, and radical democrats read Tocqueville in different ways,[16] but all converge on one sentence from *Democracy in America* that lauds the process inside civic groups: "Feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another."[17] In Tocqueville's view, civic groups did more than introduce individuals to new ideas or help them accomplish goals that would be hard to pursue individually – important as these were. He thought they would teach citizens how to do things together with a widening circle of others, heightening their sense of membership in and responsibility for a larger social world. Broadening members' horizons of collaboration, civic groups would empower citizens as knowledgeable, skilled, and sometimes wary partners in a social contract that might otherwise grant too much de facto power to the state. While other social theorists in the past hundred years have made a parallel argument,[18] Tocqueville still is the most prominent single theoretical muse for social capital; Robert Putnam called him the "patron saint" of social capitalists.[19] It helps to identify three features in the Tocquevillian imagination of civic life before scanning their influence on the social capital concept.

First, Tocqueville emphasized *meaningful* relationships that people develop and transform in the course of interaction in civic groups. Through "the reciprocal action of men one upon another" people's imaginations would grow bigger. Through that process, civic relationships would take on new definitions and purposes. The mores of narrowly self-interested action would expand into "self-interest properly understood."[20] It is not that civic

[16] A review of these different readings of Tocqueville goes beyond my purposes here. Radical democratic thinkers who affirm some aspects of Tocqueville's legacy include Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, "Secondary associations and democratic governance," *Politics and Society* 20 (1992): 393–472; Archon Fung and Erik O. Wright, "Thinking about empowered participatory governance," 3–44, in Archon Fung and Erik O. Wright (Eds.), *Deepening democracy: Institutional innovations in empowered participatory governance* (London: Verso, 2003); Eliasoph, *Avoiding politics*. For communitarians who cite Tocqueville approvingly, see Amitai Etzioni, *The new golden rule: Community and morality in a democratic society* (New York: Basic, 1996); Francis Fukuyama, *The great disruption: Human nature and the reconstitution of social order* (New York: Free, 1999). For liberal political theorists who name Tocqueville among their reference points, see John A. Hall (Ed.), *Civil society: Theory, history, comparison* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995); Amy Gutmann, *Freedom of association* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). Pragmatist thinker John Dewey referred to Tocqueville in *The Public and its problems* (Denver: Allan Swallow, 1927).

[17] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969[1835]), 515.

[18] Emile Durkheim wrote that a healthy society hosts a congeries of "secondary groups" that drag individuals "into the general torrent of social life." See *The division of labor in society* (New York: Free, 1933[1902]), 28. Civic and professional associations would generate in their members a sense of the greater social good and prepare their representatives to deliberate in large assemblies; see *Professional ethics and civic morals* (Glencoe, IL: Free, 1957). In a quite different tradition, social philosopher John Dewey wrote that a national, "great community" could come into being when local civic groups helped citizens discover their place in the bigger picture. Dewey put his democratic faith in civic groups as a counterweight to the corporate power that already loomed menacingly in his picture of America's still inchoate national community. See Dewey, *The public and its problems*. Putnam affirms a Deweyan sensibility behind his attention to voluntary associations and refers to Dewey's democratic distinction between "doing with" and "doing for." See *Bowling alone*, 337, 116. Still Putnam associates his inquiry into American civic engagement most strongly with Tocqueville.

[19] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

[20] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 513.

relationships would start out meaningless and then acquire meaning. It is that they would come to mean something *different*, and that those meanings mattered; mere contacts or physical co-presence was not enough. Relationships would come to be "properly understood" as responsibilities that produce benefits for others and ultimately for oneself. Tocqueville discussed the meaning of civic ties in the context of a contrast between aristocratic societies' hierarchical chain of belonging and the individualism of democratic societies that "breaks the chain."[21] Read in this context, Tocqueville was saying civic groups might generate a new kind of interdependence, build chains of newly styled relationships that are meaningful in a democratic, individualistic society. In commerce-driven America, "each citizen isolate[s] himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw[s] into the circle of family and friends... he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself."[22] But civic relationships would pull people out of small insular circles and cultivate in them a greater sense of collective responsibility. They would offer "a thousand continual reminders to every citizen that he lives in society."[23] Americans would experience an ongoing tug-of-war between civic cultivation and the seductions of egalitarian striving, not an ennobling moral makeover. Still it is fair to say Tocqueville imagined that civic groups would expand peoples' understandings of the meaning of relationships themselves.

A second feature of Tocqueville's imagination for civic life, implicit in the first, is the importance of instituted action. Ideally, Americans would engage *routinely* in civic relationships over time, not merely sporadically. That is how self-interest slowly would evolve into self-interest properly understood. Only as an everyday institution would civic action cultivate its virtuous influence, by becoming a "habit of the heart," as one of Tocqueville's most well-known formulations puts it.[24]

The third feature is that civic relationships at least potentially would cultivate what I will call *social capacity*. By social capacity I mean people's ability to work together organizing public relationships rather than ceding those relationships entirely to market exchange or administrative fiats of the state.[25] It mattered to Tocqueville that Americans might develop a stronger sense of collective responsibility and stronger habits of working together, because not only could they beat back the short-sighted temptations of private material striving but also do together what central authorities might do for them otherwise. In this way Tocqueville viewed civic process as an institution in an older sociological sense of the

[21] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 508.

[22] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 506.

[23] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 512.

[24] This is thanks in large part to the Tocqueville-inspired study by Bellah et al., *Habits of the heart*.

[25] I use social capacity in the spirit of social capital critics Smith and Kulynych's usage in "It may be social, but why is it capital?," though I derive it from Tocqueville's own arguments rather than from writings on social capital. My notion of social capacity also is informed by the "social control" tradition in twentieth-century US sociology; see Robert Sampson, "What 'community' supplies," 241–292, in R. Fegruson and W. Dickens Eds., *Urban problems and community development* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1999). As Morris Janowitz pointed out, earlier US sociologists used the perhaps unfortunate term "social control" to mean voluntary, problem-solving communication between groups dedicated to collective ends. Social control denotes society's capacity to control and organize itself, in contrast with both coercive control and the idea that individual interests could accumulate into a collective order without planning at all – the invisible hand notion of classical economics. See Morris Janowitz, "Sociological theory and social control," *American Journal of Sociology* 81 (1975): 82–108, see especially 86–87, 93. Groups that cultivate social capacity can "control" their relations with other groups and institutionalize those relations through intentional communication.

term,[26] a component of societal organization: Civic activity ideally contributed to a balance of institutional powers. If the balance tipped and centralized administration expanded, "the more will individuals lose the idea of forming associations and need the government to come to their help."[27] Civic groups would not necessarily work against or in place of the power of a central government, as some neoconservatives read Tocqueville today.[28] But habitual relationships – *association* – and not individual acts in the aggregate would produce an institutional counterbalance to central authority. Social capacity would be shared, co-produced in association and in ongoing relation to the market and state forces in citizens' lives. The notion of social capacity bids us understand the power of civic ties in relation to other institutional realms rather than imagining those ties in isolation. This relational, institutional dimension of civic life eludes the social capital concept.

The spirit of Tocqueville in social capital

Taking its lead from Tocqueville's oft-cited, hopeful comments, Putnam's influential and fascinating study of Italian civic life, *Making Democracy Work*, stated that civil associations cultivate in their members "habits of cooperation, solidarity, and public-spiritedness." Members of a civic community participate actively in public affairs, not solely to pursue private ends but to advance the public good. They trust and respect one another even when they disagree.[29] The subsequent study of American civic engagement, *Bowling Alone*, reiterated these themes nearly verbatim, noting Tocqueville's laudatory comments on the joining habits of Americans and affirming Tocqueville's statements on the horizon-broadening qualities of civic interaction.[30] As a preview article put it, civic engagement encourages citizens to broaden their self-understandings, "developing the 'I' into the 'we.'"[31]

It is not just the phraseology but the three big conceptual features of Tocqueville's civic imagination that echo in these contemporary studies of civic life: meaningful relationships, instituted action, and social capacity. Social capital works to the good of the larger community because within relationships that constitute social capital, people come to widen their "awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked," and they develop a "broader conception of politics and democracy than merely the advocacy of narrow interests."[32] The relationships that constitute social capital sustain a "regular connection

[26] For an influential map of the distinctions between old and new institutionalisms in sociology, see Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell, "Introduction," 1–38, in Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio (Eds.), *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); for other accounts, see W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995); Arthur Stinchcombe, "On the virtues of the old institutionalism," *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 1–18.

[27] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 515.

[28] For Tocqueville's view that civil associations might operate in concert with governmental authorities to provide for social welfare, see Chad Goldberg, "Social citizenship and a reconstructed Tocqueville," *American Sociological Review* 66 (2001): 289–315. For a more common, neoconservative reading of Tocqueville's view on civic groups and the state, see Peter Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus, *To empower people: From state to civil society* (Washington, D.C.: AEI, 1977).

[29] Putnam, *Making democracy work*, 88–91.

[30] Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 48, 65, 337–338.

[31] Robert Putnam, "Bowling alone: America's declining social capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (1995): 65–78.

[32] Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 288, 343.

among individuals at the grassroots."[33] Just as in Tocqueville's scenario, then, broadened meanings and habitual civic relating would work together. Regular connections in a group, in Putnam's view, cultivate new understandings of relationships beyond as well as inside the group. And following Tocqueville, Putnam is interested in civic groups' ability to cultivate social capacity. Social capital by definition is composed of relationships in which people are "doing with" others, rather than "doing for" others. Putnam argued that collaboration among citizens, "doing with," strengthens citizens' ability to monitor government's performance.[34] Conversely, a "politics without social capital"[35] would suffer from a lack of social capacity. There is little other way to understand the comment that "a politics without face-to-face socializing and organizing might take the form of a Perot-style electronic town hall.... Many opinions would be heard, but only as a muddle...neither engaging with one another nor offering much guidance to decision makers." From this viewpoint, the "explosion of staff-led, professionalized, Washington-based advocacy organizations" is less desirable than a politics that depends on citizens participating and working *collaboratively* to influence either local or national affairs.[36] In the larger institutional context, civic community would counterbalance and perhaps enhance the goods that governmental agencies or non-profit professional experts offer citizens.

To study the meaningful relationships, instituted action and social capacity that create what Putnam called civic community, the Italy and US studies both constructed indexes of social capital. In the study of Italian civic life, these included figures on voting behavior, newspaper readership, and the density of cultural and sports clubs throughout Italy's regions, as well as figures on associational memberships, voting behavior, party strength, and associational longevity between 1860 and 1920.[37] The *Bowling Alone* study also translated a Tocquevillian imagination into an index of social capital, this time based mostly on quantities of groups, civic behavior or individual orientations. The index tapped social capital's conceptual troika, including measures of organizational density and rates of membership ("networks"), frequency of individual civic behaviors ("norms"), and survey data on how respondents perceive other people ("trust").[38]

To retain its Tocquevillian moorings, an index of social capital would have to count groups or behaviors that plausibly could meet Tocquevillian expectations. The indices of social capital excluded mass-membership interest groups such as the American Association of Retired Persons or professional non-profit groups that develop global food policy or advocate civil rights in developing countries, because in Putnam's view, these "tertiary" groups do not create routine, cooperative relationships. A member pays dues, receives a quarterly update, and perhaps signs an e-mail petition. A member may do good deeds for unseen beneficiaries, at least indirectly, but does not work together *with* other group members over time. "Doing good for other people, however laudable, is not part of the definition of social capital"[39]; "doing for" would not cultivate social capacity. Virtual civic interaction does not count in the inventory either, for the same reason. "Perot-style electronic town hall meetings," in Putnam's view, are sorry substitutes for real civic community.

If barring "tertiary organizations" and highly exclusive groups was sufficient to produce a good index of social capital, then we could take counts of group memberships and other civic

[33] Ibid., 51, 116–117.

[34] Putnam, *Making democracy work.*

[35] Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 341.

[36] Ibid., 343–344.

[37] Putnam, *Making democracy work*, 96, 149.

[38] Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 291.

[39] Ibid., 117.

behavior as reasonable proxies for Tocquevillian relationships, routines, and capacities. Complications immediately arise, though: Some groups are more outward-reaching than others, more broadly "civic-minded" than others. *Bowling Alone* mentions urban gangs, local "NIMBY" movements, and the Ku Klux Klan as extreme examples of groups whose members may "do with" one another but do *not* intend to broaden their sense of interdependence with a wider circle of others. That is why the framework introduced a distinction between the "bonding" social capital that strengthens cohesion within a group and "bridging" social capital that helps a group connect to other individuals and groups across social differences, and proposed that civic groups may produce both kinds in varying proportions.[40] But do bonding and bridging metaphors adequately distinguish different kinds of civic relationships? Implicitly, *Bowling Alone* recognized this could be a problem, since clear "measures" of bonding and bridging capital do not exist.[41]

Ethnographic scenes below confirm these reservations. Even if we correctly characterize some groups as extremely exclusive, and even if we add the bonding/bridging distinction, counts of groups and behaviors still can undercut the Tocquevillian intentions embedded in social capital's conceptualization from the start. We need a more conceptually consistent way to find out when if at all Toquevillian thinking about civic groups is right, instead of trying to define an appropriate population of groups a priori and proceeding with the count.

An alternative to social capital

Group styles: Informal institutions of group life

Because the social capital concept has such a hard time distinguishing between types of social relationships, civic engagement scholar Robert Fishman proposes that neo-institutionalist thinking offers better tools for studying social ties.[42] I take his proposal as a good starting point for articulating Tocqueville's insights with sociological discipline: Neo-institutionalism highlights *routine* relationships made *meaningful* by cultural scripts, and it gives us a vocabulary to distinguish different kinds of "doing with," so that we get a conceptual handle on *social capacity*, too.[43] I saw in the field that important aspects of civic

[40] See, for instance, Putnam, *Bowling alone*; Robert Putnam and Kristin Goss, "Introduction," 3–20, in *Democracies in flux*; see also Ross Gittell and Avis Vidal, *Community organizing: Building social capital as a development strategy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998). Proponents of the framework are distinguishing more types of social capital beyond the "bonding" and "bridging" variants: There is formal and informal social capital, thick and thin social capital, inward-looking and outward looking social capital. See Putnam and Goss, "Introduction." Some social capital researchers realize "bridging" itself is very vague, and have suggested four different types of bridging social capital that unify people in successively broad circles of togetherness, from neighborhood to nation; on this point, see Mark R. Warren, J. Phillip Thompson, and Susan Saegert, "The role of social capital in combating poverty," 1–28, in Susan Saegert, J. Phillip Thompson, and Mark R. Warren (Eds.), *Social capital and poor communities* (New York: Russell Sage, 2001).

[41] Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 23.

[42] Robert Fishman, *Democracy's voices*.

[43] For general statements of the approach, see Powell and DiMaggio, *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*; W. Richard Scott, John W. Meyer, and John Boli, *Institutional environments and organizations: structural complexity and individualism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994). For reviews and examples of varying neoinstitutionalisms in sociology and political science, see Elizabeth Clemens and James Cook, "Politics and institutionalism: Explaining durability and change," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 441–466; Mary Brinton and Victor Nee (Eds.), *The new institutionalism in sociology* (New York: Russell Sage, 1998).

life unfold along the lines that neo-institutionalists highlight: Civic groups follow taken for granted understandings that organize patterns of action over time and that usually depend on informal social sanctions rather than authoritative intervention.[44]

Building on these insights, Eliasoph and Lichterman's concept of group style[45] pinpoints features of relationships that should matter to civic engagement scholars but disappear inside of social capital. Group style is a recurrent pattern of interaction that arises from a group's taken-for-granted understandings about how to be a good member in a group setting. Group style is how people coordinate themselves as a group; there are different ways to be together as a group, and thus different group styles. Just as neo-institutionalists argue that the same organizational forms may recur in many organizations,[46] group style need not be unique to one setting or group but potentially recurs in many settings across groups; group styles belong to broader cultural repertoires. At the same time, one organization may host more than one style in different settings of the organization.

The concept of group style also grasps qualities of interaction and group variation that neo-institutionalist concepts tend to overlook. Neo-institutionalist approaches have focused on formal organizational "myths" or implicit "schema" or "cultural models" that shape action across whole organizations or fields.[47] The group style concept in contrast focuses attention on informal, institution-like patterns carried in interaction, in specific settings. Neo-institutionalists hold that organizations adopt other organizations' ways of doing things to boost their own legitimacy or survive in a competitive environment.[48] An empirical question, this may be true in some cases, and this logic may explain why the style of plug-in volunteering pictured below so closely complements the needs of social service bureaucracies for non-paid, short-term help.[49] Yet group styles endure even when they narrow groups' legitimacy and threaten their survival. Group styles are meaningful to members even when they are inefficient or derided by surrounding groups.[50] They are customary patterns of interaction that constitute group form, rather than models used consciously to form groups.

Three dimensions of style coordinate a group in a setting. These dimensions work together; distinguishing them is a heuristic device for pinning down more securely how one setting may differ from another.[51] Here it is enough to focus on a group's style of

[44] For the source of this definition, see Ronald Jepperson, "Institutions, institutional effects, and institutionalism" in Powell and DiMaggio, *The new institutionalism inorganizational analysis*; Clemens and Cook, "Politics and institutionalism."

[45] Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman, "Culture in interaction," *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (2003): 735–794.

[46] Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell, "Introduction," 14.

[47] See Powell and DiMaggio, *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*; Elisabeth Clemens, *The people's lobby* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Penny Edgell Becker, *Congregations in conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Elizabeth Armstrong, *Forging gay identities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[48] Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell, "The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organization fields," 63–82, in Powell and DiMaggio, *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*.

[49] For longer discussions of this viewpoint, see Wuthnow, *Loose connections*; Lichterman, *Elusive togetherness*.

[50] See Lichterman, *Elusive togetherness*, for examples of styles maintained despite their ineffectiveness. For more discussion of conceptual slippage and inconsistencies in neoinstitutionalist writings, see C. Brady Potts, "Culture in organizations: Mediating rules and practice in everyday life," paper presented at the annual meetings of the Pacific Sociological Association, North Hollywood, CA, 2006.

[51] Eliasoph and Lichterman, *Culture in interaction*, 740.

maintaining *group bonds* and its style of drawing *group boundaries*. Groups have customary ways of bonding – defining members' implicit obligations to one another. And groups have customary ways of drawing boundaries on a larger "social map" of groups and institutions that are like them, not like them, or irrelevant to them. Breaches and sudden interruptions of the routine help observers discern the style that has been in play, as scenes below show.[52]

The volunteer style

In the most common, contemporary American understanding, "volunteering" means something more specific than simply voluntary action of any sort: Volunteers want to "get things done" with a "can-do" spirit, and they do so frequently under the direction of a professional who defines the tasks for them.[53] I will call this common form of volunteer activity "plug-in style volunteering." Plug-in style volunteering is not only an exchange of free labor or person-hours[54] or a natural expression of compassion,[55] but a meaningful set of group boundaries and bonds that volunteers in many organizations enact routinely. Some close-up studies investigate and criticize volunteering as activity that refuses the world of politics;[56] my purpose is different. Rather than define volunteering in relation to what sociologists or their subjects call political, I ask if plug-in style volunteering cultivates the Tocquevillian features that the social capital concept wants to project.

The following scenes compare group styles and their consequences in two volunteer projects with shifting casts of participants and one group with an ongoing core of members. Each was loosely affiliated with Lakeburg's Urban Religious Coalition (URC), which drew members and financial support from roughly fifty churches in metropolitan Lakeburg. The churches were mostly mainline Protestant, with a contingent of evangelical Protestant churches, several Catholic congregations, two Unitarian fellowships, a Friends meeting house, and a synagogue. Comparing volunteer efforts supports my contention that the group style concept illuminates meanings, routines, and social capacity better than social capital can. I investigate the Tocquevillian claim about meaningful relationships by showing how the volunteers draw boundaries, and I investigate the claim about social capacity by discovering how they sustain group bonds.

[52] Group styles may be identified with help of sensitizing questions and by playing close attention to interactions that make style suddenly explicit; these include interactional mistakes, awkwardness, and unexpected changes in the interactional routine. See Eliasoph and Lichterman, *Culture in interaction*, 746, 784–787.

[53] Wuthnow, *Loose connections*; Paul Schervish, Virginia Hodgkinson, Margaret Gates, and Associates, *Care and community in modern society* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995); Eliasoph, *Avoiding politics*; Susan Ostrander, *Women of the upper class* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984).

[54] See John Wilson and Marc Musick, "Toward an integrated theory of volunteering," *American Sociological Review* 62 (1997): 694–713.

[55] The meaning of compassionate action itself has changed greatly in western societies; see Wuthnow, *Acts of compassion*. Subcultures within the United States continue to imbue community service relationships with different, more collectivist meanings than the customary ones I just described. See for instance Susan Eckstein, "Community as gift-giving: Collectivistic roots of volunteerism," *American Sociological Review* 66 (2001): 829–851; Barbara Myerhoff, *Number our days* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).

[56] See for instance Wuthnow, *Acts of compassion*; Eliasoph, *Avoiding politics*; Janet Poppendieck, *Sweet charity? Emergency food and the end of entitlement* (New York: Penguin, 1998).

Case 1: Plug-in style volunteering

Bowling Alone counted plug-in volunteering among the indicators of social capital, so why should we not? After all, volunteers may come in contact with people they would not otherwise meet – other volunteers, the people volunteers serve, or service professionals. It is not only mayors and local television newscasters who credit volunteering with community-building potential. Some social capital research implies that casual volunteering has the potential to thrust volunteers beyond their usual social rounds, bringing different kinds of people together and building ongoing relations of reciprocity and mutual concern.[57] The following ethnographic scenes from two volunteer programs would challenge that claim. Both programs served kids. One was quite controlling, while the other worked much more loosely, but similarities between them suggest that a variety of volunteer programs may have roughly similar styles and potentials.

Fun Evenings

Inspired by a youth program launched in a big city not far away, Fun Evenings was a volunteer effort that organized drug-free, weapons-free evenings of dancing, snacking, basketball, and ping-pong for "at-risk" teenagers. Lakeburg resident and churchgoer Polly, a white woman of about 60 from an upper-middle class neighborhood, took the initiative to organize Lakeburg's first Fun Evening in the fall of 1996. The Urban Religious Coalition (URC) agreed to make Fun Evenings one of the programs it would sponsor as part of its new Humane Response Alliance, a collection of volunteer efforts and church partnerships with county social workers that the URC initiated as a "humane response" to state and national welfare reform legislation. Polly argued and URC leaders agreed that a cycle of youth violence and drug abuse could be headed Lakeburg's way, especially as more and more families had the social safety net pulled out from under them. That fall, Polly won a grant from United Way to fund her work. For the next 2 years, she organized Fun Evenings every 2 to 4 months, under URC's aegis, in high school auditoriums and community centers around town, drawing on the help of youth counselors from a county agency, and several dozen, mostly white and middle-class churchgoers, in their 50s and older, who had signed up to be in her pool of potential volunteers. After its first 2 years, Fun Evenings became a project of the Lakeburg County Youth Services agency, continuing with much of the same activities and the same style of volunteering.

In Fun Evenings, volunteers got practice creating brief, impersonal relationships with other volunteers as well as the kids who participated. Plug-in style volunteering was meaningful and customary – a culture of group life: Volunteers' comments and reactions to situations showed that they were expecting to volunteer plug-in style and could put the value of that kind of volunteering in their own words. At the same time, plug-in volunteering did not necessarily cultivate any broader, more collectively responsible meanings of how "I" am part of "we" the way social capital's Tocquevillian aspirations might imply. And rather than boosting volunteers' capacity to work interdependently, volunteering made us dependent on an organizer and a social service staff who set the parameters of the program, defined the youthful service population for the volunteers, and made themselves available to police the served if necessary; that was customary too.

[57] For instance, Putnam, *Bowling alone*; Greeley, "Coleman revisited"; Becker and Dhingra, "Religious inolvement and volunteering"; Robert Wuthnow, *Saving America? Faith-based services and the future of civil society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); *Loose connections*.

Customs of volunteering, in summary, produced a modular, limited style of civic engagement, one that arguably is widespread in the United States but does not meet the neo-Tocquevillian definition of social capital.

The meaning of relationships at Fun Evenings: A look at group boundaries

Volunteer organizers and social service professionals defined the meaning of relationships among volunteers, kids and the outside world: They defined the *group boundaries* of Fun Evenings, and as I show, volunteers mostly shared the definitions. The most salient groups on the social map here were monitorial adults, "at-risk" teens and pre-teens, and youth service coordinators, all hemmed into a small space by dangers outside, the faceless social problems of drugs and violence emphasized in Polly's presentations and brochures. Volunteers learned a particular way of relating to the kids – wary watchfulness. While the program was specific about the social problems it intended to alleviate, the kids themselves constituted a vague presence on the map. Polly's presentations never explained to volunteers exactly who were the teens and pre-teens likely to go to Fun Evenings, how they would find out about these events, or how they would get to them. Presentations frequently started with the statement that a big city not far away used to have a low murder rate, and that everyone knew this was not the case now. "We don't want to go the way of (Big City)," Polly would say. We don't want our kids to enter the cycle of violence. Polly never intimated that the teens themselves were bad kids. She implied, rather, that they were kids we should worry about. We could guess they were kids from low-income and mostly minority neighborhoods euphemistically called "challenged neighborhoods" in local news reports. Asked once at a URC board meeting if youth crime and murder rates were not declining nationally – a challenge to the purveyed social map – Polly replied that they still were high. I did not learn anything more about the kids from presentations, brochures, or other volunteers.

Volunteering over a 2-year period for Fun Evenings, I tried to be warily watchful, like the other volunteers. We learned that the most important boundary defining the kids at any single Fun Evening was the one they would cross if they stepped outside the safe space into a world of threats and enticements. Polly reminded us at each of the four Fun Evenings I attended, in the same language: "The kids aren't supposed to leave the building, and if they do they can't come back in." Comings and goings invited the risk that the teens would bring drugs or weapons into the safe space. At the very first Fun Evening, Polly told us that "if anyone comes in with booze on their breath, kick 'em right out," bouncing her thumb toward the door. At my third Fun Evening, just as at previous ones I had attended as a volunteer, Polly made a point of showing me around the building, even though I had volunteered there before, explaining where the kids could go, where they could not go. The following and all other indented passages are excerpts from field notes unless otherwise identified.

> Polly: "They don't go up there."
> PL: "They don't go up there...?"
> Polly (agitated): "What? No. They don't go in there. And we don't want them over there."

She continues explaining the "don'ts." She tells me that the kids should not go out the glass doors in back of the cafeteria. Polly thanks us at the end of the evening and asks if she can call us again. I nod and say "Sure." Suddenly she scoots over to a threesome of black teens who had walked in and were peering through the small door window into the

cafeteria. Polly: "You can't go in that way. It's closed now." They say nothing. She repeats, "We're closed." They turn now toward the admission tables and she tries to insinuate herself gingerly in front of their path, gives up quickly and glances toward us with an expression I interpret as "see, that's what they'll do." A wiry, white youth counselor with a buzz-cut stands at the admission table directly in front of one of the visitors, swaying his body to block him as he squeezes leftward and rightward to get past. The visitor soon gives up; a young black youth counselor exchanges a few calm words with him that I can't hear, and the threesome walk back out.

It became clear that we accepted Polly's map of volunteer relationships, because even though we knew little about the kids, we were trying to be good monitors and we *worried* about whether we were doing it well or not: When several boys said they needed to go outside to "get stuff" for the first Fun Evening's talent show, volunteer Mike paused a moment. He wondered what I thought about it given the rules, and then said slowly, "Oh, ok, let them out." A foursome of girls needed to go outside to direct their friend to the correct building. Mike and I hesitated for much longer this time. I asked if they could just signal to their friends from the window. Finally we let the girls out, hesitantly, warily. I had wondered to myself, what if they were up to something dangerous, what if they wanted to bring drugs or a knife into the recreation center? I felt responsible. I felt better knowing that there were muscular youth counselors around who could play bad cop if necessary and enforce the relationship that I wanted to abide by even though I was not succeeding.

Volunteers expressed no animus against the kids and some clearly got a kick out of watching them dance to hip-hop. Mostly, we *watched*, letting them engage in approved forms of fun on their own within the safe space. At meetings of URC-sponsored community service or advocacy groups, I had heard some of the volunteers talk about how they wanted to reach out to people different from them, develop a sense of responsible co-ownership of their community. One was Clarisse, who whispered to me cryptically at my second Fun Evening that she had tried to get some church volunteers involved in voter registration at a local festival sponsored by the NAACP, because she thought "lilly-white" church volunteers should have "direct contact with people of color." She criticized those church volunteers for not working well with African-American NAACP members; she thought the volunteers scared prospective black members away from the NAACP's membership drive table. Volunteers at Fun Evenings were almost entirely white and the majority of the teens appeared mostly African-American, Latino, or southeast Asian, but I did not see Clarisse conversing with the kids at all. At meetings of the URC's social justice task force, she told us about the voter registration work that she did regularly with low-income people and encouraged other members to do it too. She told me privately that the task force spent too much time working out its ideological positions on welfare policy: it was too concerned with being "politically correct"; she would rather work with people. Yet Clarisse was not just a self-serving hypocrite. By my third Fun Evening, I was getting it that relationship-*building* between volunteers and kids was not a customary part of volunteering. It did not have a clear place on the given map of meaningful relationships, even if in other contexts some of the volunteers such as Clarisse talked about and created relationships differently. The conversations I heard between other volunteers and kids were limited mostly to quick repartees that accompany ping-pong playing or else directions to the kids from volunteers.

Volunteers sustained politely distanced relationships with one another too. At Fun Evenings, being a good volunteer meant relating to other volunteers in a cordially light and detachable way, at least partly in the interest of keeping restless teens busy and the doors secure. But couldn't those meanings change? Might volunteers' quick exchanges with other volunteers slowly contribute to new, thicker civic relationships? In the logic of Putnam's

social capital argument, that is what is supposed to happen: Repeated participation in civic associations with overlapping memberships builds new civic ties, as individuals see one another in different settings and get to know one another over time, finding they can depend on one another for future projects.

While this scenario possibly might unfold under some conditions, there are good reasons to think that the routine style of a Fun Evening lessened the possibility. I was on a list with other people in Polly's pool of prospective volunteers. Dozens of others had signed up, at community service events at which Polly had introduced her program. Signing up meant being willing to receive phone requests to volunteer at Fun Evenings; it did not signify a promise to volunteer. Polly phoned us when she needed volunteers. She thanked me profusely for coming, each time, so she must have approached her volunteer pool with the hope much more than the *expectation* that people would stay active over time. I saw several but certainly not all of the same volunteers at each Fun Evening. I learned what some other volunteers did for a living and where they lived, by asking them directly, in between watching the kids from different vantage points in the cafeteria, dance room, or hallway, and carrying out requests to relieve other volunteers of their watching duties. I noticed that others did not ask me who I was or where I lived and they did not talk at length with other volunteers. At different Fun Evenings they were starting up ping-pong games, directing kids to the talent show or the dance hosted by a disc jockey, or announcing that the pizzas were ready if kids seemed to be getting restless. They were being good volunteers, working to keep kids busy and safe, carrying off wary watchfulness and cordial distance. Neither the structure of volunteer recruitment nor the meanings that shaped volunteering opened much space for sociability. Volunteers plugged in and out of volunteer shifts, and Polly was in charge of the big board. From hearing Clarisse talk at the social justice task force, I knew that she could be counted on to care about race relations, enough to have become one of the few white members of the NAACP, and that she tried putting her talk into action. Had we known each other *only* through one or even repeated Fun Evenings, it would have been very hard to guess these things and it was unlikely I would have learned them while watching warily and sustaining cordial distance.

Social capacity at Fun Evenings: A look at group bonds

The *group bonds* sustained at Fun Evenings made it difficult to develop the Tocquevillian social capacity projected by the social capital concept. First, a good member was someone who could keep busy *solo*, not someone who depended on collaborating with other volunteers to produce fun for the kids or work as equals with director Polly. My own experiences cued me in. For instance, it never occurred to me that anything I said or did would create a reputation that might influence volunteers' willingness to regard me as a good collaborator, someone who "does with." Only Polly would know if I seemed like a good volunteer or not. Comparisons with other programs in the larger study bolstered my interpretation. I noticed that I came home without the participant-observer's worries I felt after a night of field work with other community service groups I was studying. After meetings of the inter-church social safety net coalition, or the church-based education and advocacy group that opposed welfare reform, or the executive board that oversaw these groups, I worried not infrequently that I may have offended someone inadvertently, talked too much or too little. These were meetings at which I was "doing with" others at the meeting, over time. At Fun Evenings, in contrast, my worries about having looked like a dowdy representative of adult order evaporated as soon as I had left the scene.

Other volunteers shared my sense of the group bonds in play. Volunteers were depending on one another to work largely independently rather than interdependently. At my first Fun Evening, I discovered that other volunteers had wondered on their own what I was wondering: What exactly were we supposed to do *beyond* being watchful? Since directions issued from Polly, I had assumed I must have missed out on some of them, having heard only the directives regarding security. I asked Clarisse if she knew what to do as a volunteer. She mused that she "never really knows what to do at these things." She said it lightly; it did not bother her. It seemed customary. Other volunteers told me they did not really know exactly what to do either, beyond keeping kids in and drugs and weapons out, and their tone suggested that they were not worrying about it either. "Doing" did not have to mean "doing-with." They wandered around, watching, looking interested in whatever the kids were doing. The same happened at my second, third, and fourth Fun Evening. During my second Fun Evening, in a high school cafeteria, I struck up conversation with Sherry, a woman that Polly recruited for this evening from her own Episcopal church. I noticed Sherry was circling the cafeteria floor, looking busy and smiling like someone freshly amused by the things kids do these days. A few kids were swaying to the rap over the loudspeaker, others were revving up their bodies to the beat but failing to ignite in dance. I sauntered out into the hallway, and Sherry buzzed by us.

> Participant-observer: "Do you know what you're doing?"
> Sherry: "No, providing an adult – (pause) – presence, I guess. It's fun to watch, though."

As volunteers, we were "doing alongside," not doing together collaboratively. Encountering Polly while wandering through a high school hallway at the second Fun Evening, I asked if there was something else I should do; I was worried about it. "Just walk around and look like adults," she said.

Volunteering at Fun Evenings presupposed that *regular* connections between volunteers were irrelevant to the evening's work of the volunteer, whether or not volunteers happened to know each other from their churches or URC community service groups or somewhere else, whether or not they had volunteered before. We all got the same short and sketchy introduction to a Fun Evening and its zero tolerance policy whether we had volunteered for other evenings or not. We got the same introduction to the rules of Fun Evenings, the prohibitions and forbidden zones, each time. We created a loose, contingent group of self-sufficient volunteers for the duration of one Fun Evening.

Acting solo, maintaining the group bonds that might characterize a large house party, we did not have to take ownership of the event. *Someone else* could be responsible for organizing the evening, deciding who would set out the ping-pong tables, find the basketballs in storage bins, decide when the dance session with the disc jockey would begin and end, not to mention advertising the event and deciding *which* young people were appropriate invitees from the program's point of view. We were not doing that work, nor learning how; we did not ever hear exactly how kids got invited, by whom, which kids.

None of this is to say that volunteering at a Fun Evening was a meaningless or alien activity. On the contrary, volunteers were comfortable with plug-in style volunteering most of the time and articulated its value easily in their own words. It was work for a good cause that did not require tedious planning on our part. At my first volunteer stint, for instance, my door partner Mike offered without prompting that Fun Evenings was a good program because it was about "doing" things, and came as a completed "package." Volunteers could put on a Fun Evening without a lot of discussing and planning from scratch, he said; he

contrasted Fun Evenings favorably with a community service program run by the Better Business Bureau that involved planning and assessing and made "doing" more complicated. At my third stint, a long-time URC volunteer aged 78 told me she liked the "doing" too, and she liked to "see the children." During my stints, no one ever commented on the opportunity to see or work with other volunteers or program directors. Fun Evenings were fun for volunteers for other reasons.

Solo busy-ness under a director was what volunteering was *supposed* to be like. That became even more clear when sudden interruptions to the loose choreography of solo busy-ness puzzled volunteers without prompting us to change the "dance." Occasionally, directions issued unpredictably and we, though puzzled, would follow them anyway. At my third Fun Evening, a large man came into the gym just after the African dance troupe had finished its performance, and told us we all needed to leave it immediately. Had there been a breach of security? I asked another volunteer why we needed to leave the auditorium. He did not know and sounded frankly puzzled himself. At another Fun Evening, many of the kids did not show up for the first hour and a half; their rides to Downtown Youth Center were running late. What were we to do? How could we help make this suddenly shorter evening fun for the kids? We waited for the kids, tried to make ourselves busy with the few kids already ambling about the recreation room with its rows of plaid sofas and pool tables, but did not find out what to do and did not plan to do anything different. We responded to the predicament in the style that was customary for Fun Evenings – as solo agents playing loosely choreographed roles, waiting for our leads. We did not take collective responsibility for organizing the evening.

It would be a mistake to conclude that Fun Evenings volunteers really did not constitute a group, had no group bonds, and thus is not a proper candidate for this analysis. At each Fun Evening, Polly made a point of introducing us to at least one other volunteer and pointed out the pizza, pop, and coffee that someone somewhere always made appear. The cue, if anyone needed it, was obvious: It would have been rude simply to ignore other volunteers and focus exclusively on kids. This was not "bowling alone." We were creating the relationships of a temporary, contingent group. These deserve to be understood in their own terms; they simply were not the horizontal, long-term, responsibility-generating relationships projected in Tocquevillian thinking. They offered conveniently short-term opportunities for people who wanted to be active, doing something, in relation to kids that everyone assumed were more likely than affluent kids to encounter drugs or violence. We could not know whether the assumption was correct but it defined the kids for the volunteers. Observations here suggest that relationships created at Fun Evenings, by themselves, were unlikely to broaden horizons and cultivate social capacity over time as the social capital concept invites us to assume. A volunteer who kept coming back for more Fun Evenings during the 2 years that I observed the project would have learned Polly was responsible for the program and its social map and our job was to do-alongside one another, under Polly.

A comparison case: Summer Fun

Maybe Fun Evenings did not cultivate a deeper sense of "we-ness" or strengthen social capacity among the volunteers because of an idiosyncratic emphasis on wary watchfulness. Maybe volunteers learned to be more afraid of the kids than volunteers do in other programs. A different program, Summer Fun, makes for a good comparison since it actively encouraged volunteers to relate creatively to kids and never made danger or risk into a program theme. Summer Fun was a 2-week day camp for elementary school-aged kids,

organized by Park Cluster, and assisted and directed by the Lakeburg county family services agency. Park Cluster, an alliance of mostly Protestant churches, collaborated with Park's neighborhood center and the county family services agency in sponsoring small community service and development projects for the Park neighborhood, whose six thousand, mostly low-income residents were African Americans or Laotian, Cambodian, or Spanish-speaking Americans of the first or second generation, with a small minority of Euro-Americans. The Cluster depended mostly on unpaid effort, assisted by staff people from an urban religious coalition, the URC. It recruited volunteers and organized sessions for the camp every summer. It was looser, more self-expressive and child-centered than safety-centered Fun Evenings. Comparing Summer Fun and Fun Evenings illustrates the continuities of plug-in style volunteering across programs with different idiocultures.[58]

When I arrived for my first volunteer stint, Mosley, the new family services liaison to the neighborhood and director of Summer Fun, had typed up a sheet with different age groups marked in columns, with timed activities listed down the sides, at 9:30, 10:30, and 11:30 A.M., and names in boxes. He was waiting for the woman from Lakeburg Children's Museum to finish the kaleidoscope-making activity by 10:30 so that the nature walk and the fun of walking a dog named Harriet could begin, but it was 10:40 and the kids were still inside the apartment basement room coloring in their kaleidoscopes and making eyeglasses out of mylar. The adult volunteers were standing around the picnic tables, waiting. Ken quietly set out some crayons in cardboard boxtops with pieces of paper and said to no one in particular that it was an "art project" for anyone who wanted to do it. Just as at Fun Evenings, then, the group boundaries of Summer Fun marked off a director from volunteer work-slot fillers – though Mosley the director was much easier going and much less focused on the kids' risks of getting into trouble. The kids had a somewhat more distinct place on the social map; we knew they all lived in the low-income, multi-racial Park neighborhood.

Group bonds, as in Fun Evenings, were cordial and detachable, and required that volunteers fill their roles as autonomously as possible once given their role. While Summer Fun's group bonds made volunteering into a largely solo gig, the program depended on and affirmed volunteers who could give kids an outlet for expression, who could project fun and individuality rather than security and authority. During the planning for Summer Fun at their monthly meetings, Park Cluster members had agreed that the camp was seeking volunteers who could contribute something unusual to the camp *as individuals* – an unusual instrument, a craft project, a cartoon-worthy dog to play with. No one in the overseeing Cluster and no one at Summer Fun during my participant-observation stints ever implied that good volunteers needed to be good team-workers or collaborators, though in theory a kid's program could have depended on adults collaborating with one another closely. Again, the volunteering was meaningful, not random or anomic, and volunteers put the meaning of it in their own words. While standing by one of the picnic tables, I chatted a bit with LaVerne, who told me, "I like doing it [volunteering for the camp]. I just like doing it. I think the idea is to come and share a little of yourself...." La Verne introduced herself, just as Polly at Fun Evenings always introduced volunteers or made sure they introduced themselves. These volunteers, just like the ones at Fun Evenings, constituted a *group,* of a very loose and contingent sort, for the duration of a session. With temporary, modular group bonds, volunteers tried to work happily as self-starters creating fun. Anxious to be useful rather than waiting around awkwardly, I had asked the woman leading the mylar art project if I could assist her in some way. No, she thought everything

[58] For classic descriptions and analysis of group idiocultures, see Gary A. Fine, *With the boys* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

was all set, she said, and smiled and said nothing more. Everyone was busy, or looking busy. With slack time between scheduled projects, volunteers could have struck up long conversations with one another while watching the kids, but they did not. They worked hard to stay busy, individually, with something that could involve kids. Like Polly of Fun Evenings, Mosley the director set a tone, though quite different from Polly's wary watchfulness. Once he had figured out his time-grid, Mosley joined volunteers Ken and Jack who were presiding at the crayon-drawing table; in fact it was Ken and Jack and then Mosley drawing, hoping to entice some kids into the activity, while the kids mostly clambered about and watched the adult volunteers draw. Mosley put lots of elbow-grease into his blue and green house that was so thick with crayon I expected to smell the picture from across the table. The house with its checkerboard roof drew more and more bemused trash-talk from the kids. Mosley talked back. To a girl who did take up the drawing activity, he laughed, "You're drawing a swimming pool on top of the flowers?! Look at those flowers! Why are those petals like that?" The girl answered with staged, television sitcom sarcasm: "That's how I make flower petals. Do ... you ... have ... a ... problem ... with ... that?" Mosley continued saturating his cottage with crayon, held it up and announced "Anyone who wants to live in this, see me!" Bantering with the kids was fine, part of the fun at Summer Fun.

Still it was up to each of us to be resourceful in starting up some fun on our own. No wonder volunteer Ken had called out hesitantly to no one in particular to come draw with his box of crayons. He was trying to do his bit for the morning session by starting up some fun. So was Maggie, who soon walked by with one very rotund basset hound and invited kids to go on the dog-walk with her. Maggie was a success as a volunteer.

PL: "How did you find out about Summer Fun?"
Maggie: "Well I got invited back! I did it last year."

Harriet the Basset hound had been a big hit, Maggie told me, while warning the kids not to pour water on Harriet and asking one of the boys to come back from the oak tree behind us.

As in Fun Evenings, volunteers could get frustrated at breaches of the expected routine. Frustrations and responses to them cued me in to what *was* routine, not easily malleable or just happenstance. Complaints about the program underscored the expectations that volunteers tried to act on in Summer Fun. One volunteer in a big white teeshirt, by the picnic table, was talking to another volunteer while I stood nearby. She was saying, "I asked what I could do to be helpful. They said 'come here at 10:30.'" She trailed off, then said in disappointment that nothing in particular had happened at 10:30.

PL: "So, were you helpful?"
Volunteer (skeptically): "I was a beanbag. Had about 4 kids sitting on me. I saw you were a beanbag too, over there."
PL: "Yeah, I had about two that could fit onto me."

The volunteer had expected that she would be told what to do, and be able to be busy doing it on her own at the appointed time. That would have been customary.

Volunteers with experience from previous Summer Fun camps shared the woman's irritation. I asked Ken, a Park Cluster member, what he thought of this year's camp. He paused a noticeably long, awkwardly long time, said it was "relaxed," and different from other years' camps in that way. Volunteer Ned agreed with him that it felt more "relaxed," he said with a pause, and said with more resolve that "if they do it again," he would do it

more the way a URC organizer had done it several years ago. Ken commented "age groups got mixed" this year, and he thought that if the older kids were kept more separate, "they could get further." Ken, Ned, and the volunteer bean-bag all were depending on someone – Mosley the social worker – to orchestrate the camp and follow through, while they fulfilled their duty to play their mostly solo roles well. The camp fell short of their expectations for acting as self-starting volunteers *under* clear direction and they felt frustrated or awkward as a result.

In neither Summer Fun nor Fun Evenings did I see volunteers using their frustrations as spring-boards to planning things *together* to do with the kids. Interaction in each program ratified that volunteers were individual agents pursuing their tasks, while someone else remained responsible for defining the relationships of the program. These were sites of civic engagement, and volunteering in these sites counts in indices of social capital – but by social capital's neo-Tocquevillian definition it is not clear why this kind of volunteering counts.

Plug-in style volunteering produces other goods, including the good of giving kids a fun or safe time. But the social capital framework cannot identify the gap between the Tocquevillian vision and the realities of plug-in style volunteering on the ground. Summer Fun's parent group, Park Cluster, did develop in a Tocquevillian direction, even if its summer camp did not. The contrasts as well as continuities between Park Cluster and the two volunteer projects strengthen the case for studying group style and its consequences, rather than resting content with the social capital concept as a proxy for Tocquevillian arguments.

Case 2: Clashing styles and the silence of social capital

Volunteering in Park Cluster

Park Cluster, unlike the Summer Fun and Fun Evenings projects, sustained regular connections between members over time as the social capital concept projects. The entirely white, mostly professional middle-class core of roughly twelve Cluster members had monthly meetings, subcommittee meetings, and attended several neighborhood events every year. Unlike Summer Fun or Fun Evenings, Park Cluster over time instituted deeper meanings for civic relationships and much stronger social capacity. At the *end* of my time observing that process, it could make sense to say that Park Cluster had developed new "bridging social capital." Social capital theorists reasonably might propose that, rather than trying to discern group style, we simply need better distinctions between ongoing groups and loose gatherings of shifting participants. In that case, Putnam's "regular connections" still would be an adequate criterion for counting social capital and a fair indicator of the Tocquevillian civic imagination. "Count more carefully" could be the retort to this article's critique. The case of Park Cluster illustrates why regular connections, at best, makes an extremely imprecise indicator of what social capital wants to mean.

During the first 9 months of my research, Park Cluster members often enacted the same group style as Summer Fun and Fun Evenings, with largely the same consequences – even though the Cluster was a regularly meeting group of core members, not a congeries of shifting participants. The Cluster put the county family services agency, Family Friends, and its sponsor, the URC, in the center of its own social map and adopted the county agency's definitions of needs in the neighborhood, unreflectively. It positioned itself as a helpful adjunct. I heard members sustaining group bonds that, like those in Summer Fun

and Fun Evenings, depended on self-starting, charitable volunteers. The Cluster scaled up its civic projects and started working with, sometimes challenging, institutional actors *after* it shifted toward a different style that was alive but less evident in the group towards the start. The shift quickened and emerged loudly at a crisis meeting described below. Only after that point did networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust – the three terms of social capital—change noticeably over a period of regular connections.

An exemplar of plug-in style volunteering in Park Cluster was Ned, whom we met already at Summer Fun. When he discussed the Cluster with me, he liked referring to it as "this group we're tangled up in," but that did not stop him from working tirelessly and autonomously: I did not run into any Cluster member more often than Ned when I made fieldworker's visits to Park. The food pantry needed new shelves; the Southeast Asian festival needed people to serve dinner and clean up; a woman down the block with diabetes needed someone to run errands for her. Ned met these needs. Ned articulated the group's bonds well when he said spontaneously amidst one meeting's conversation that each of us ought to be able to go back to our churches and collect quickly one hundred diapers, or a bunch of winter coats, if that is what the neighborhood social worker said she needed for her clients. We *ought* to be able to do it; he was implying group bonds depended on individual members' resourcefulness in the interests of charity. Cluster members enacted those bonds when they rounded up volunteers to staff activities and make sandwiches just in time for Summer Fun's first day, or when they worked to come through with big enough financial commitments from their individual churches to pay another several month's salary to the public health nurse that the Cluster co-sponsored. As treasurer, Ned made a point of telling the group, more than once, that there was a man in Lakeburg who always made an annual contribution of $45 to the Cluster. It was not the Cluster's biggest donation, but he was proud of that man, honoring him for his individual, charitable initiative. The man did his bit to help out. Ned called it all "helping out," and he helped a great deal.

At the start, the Cluster's social capacity was shaped mostly by this "helping out" definition of civic relationships. Members served meals at neighborhood celebrations initiated by Family Friends social workers, tutored kids in an after-school program at the neighborhood center, or got their churches to donate wrapped presents for Park kids, distributed at an annual neighborhood Christmas party organized by Family Friends and the county Probation and Parole department. They helped out in the way that Fun Evenings volunteers were helping out Polly. Group members depended on the liaison person from the URC to write up the Cluster meeting agenda every month. The Park neighborhood social worker together with the paid URC liaison to the group supplied well over half of the agenda's items in the first 9 months of Cluster meetings I attended. As the social worker told me in an interview, "I gave them things to do."

A Tocquevillian outcome

One group but two sets of customs. Sometimes the Cluster's social horizons would broaden, members would expect more from their sponsoring churches, and they would ponder or complain rather than report and decide. Sometimes Cluster members sounded as if they thought their churches should be something in addition to resource banks and aggregates of volunteer time. At one meeting, for instance, Dora sounded frustrated at her own congregation's engagement with the Cluster – even though hers was one of the core congregations. "I'm still here, still motivated by that original vision [of building the community], even if my church – (pause), well, they give presents at Christmas, but." At

another meeting, members quipped bitterly about their own relations with their congregations:

> Steven, warily: "Maybe we want to bounce these (proposals) off our faith communities."
>
> Martha (sardonically): "Some of us *don't* bounce with our faith-based communities!"
>
> Betty: "We bounce but we don't meld!"

They never complained that their churches did not offer up enough volunteers. It was more that they felt their churches were not part of a *collective* effort, but acted as aggregates of individual effort instead. They wanted the support of stronger bonds.

Sometimes members imagined the Cluster on a social map that included much more than the Family Friends social worker or the URC liaison, surrounded by aggregates of individual volunteer effort. At one meeting, for instance, Kendra the Family Friends social worker had forgotten to bring a list of local elementary schools for the Cluster to use in planning neighborhood-based academic support programs. But Cluster member Mary knew which churches and synagogues were close to which elementary schools and thus convenient for congregation-sponsored tutoring programs. She led a lively discussion on the topic and continued it with me in her car afterwards. Conversations about the public health nurse also elicited a larger and more detailed map, even at my first meeting. Having just finished a 15-minute discussion on the need for more jam to go with the peanut butter that the Cluster-run food pantry was giving out to hungry people, members abruptly shifted to a discussion that brought many other actors onto the map, picturing them in specific detail rather than casting them as needy in general. Who was going to co-sponsor the nurse? What did Lutheran Home have to say this month? Would the nurse be culturally sensitive to the Hmong and Hispanic as well as African-American neighborhood constituencies? Would there be more government grant money for the nurse if she promised to do alcohol and drug abuse intake work with her clients? The answers were never definitive. That seemed not to matter a lot, at least for a number of months, while members assumed the URC liaison would figure it all out.

Yet the liaison did not figure it out. In my first few months of participant-observation, the URC liaison would try to explain how much of the nurse's salary the churches would pay, when, and for how long. At one meeting, the liaison said she thought the nurse could begin work as soon as the following month. Members had kept asking the same questions about the nurse for several more meetings, and the questions revealed that no one around the table understood how much money their churches really needed to put up, when, and how much they needed to pay for benefits. They asked when Genesis, the community development corporation attached to a local Black Baptist congregation, would start counting on the churches' contributions, and asked who exactly Genesis was; one member kept calling the corporation Exodus. Could the nurse begin work without the churches' financial contributions? After 3 months of the same questions in the same words, I gathered that the URC liaison was a central reference point on these matters. It was customary to assume that she would inform the Cluster and members would listen. On this map of group boundaries, the URC liaison actually was more *real* than the nurse and the other community organizations to which Cluster churches were in fact financially obligated.

Having wandered into the parish nurse project, with the nurse about to start her work in the neighborhood, Cluster members suddenly started to sound very unsettled about the group, 9 months into my study. At a crisis meeting, the same month that the nurse was to start her rounds, Cluster members complained like never before, sounding like people with

a lot of pent-up frustrations. Their criticisms of the group seemed too specific, too formed, to have been thought up de novo that day. Putting together the previous meeting's call for a new organizational structure with the earlier instances of stretching horizons and sharpening tongues, I gathered that members were torn between two different styles of togetherness. What had seemed like organizational flexibility now seemed like a clash between the volunteer style and a different group style that I call "partnership."

Crisis and a shift in style. At the crisis meeting, volunteer-style group bonds came in for intense criticism. Martha was pushing for a new finance committee. Betty agreed. Mary liked the idea, too: "We've taken on the financial responsibility [of the parish nurse] and need the structure to carry it out," she reasoned. For 2 years, including the period when the Cluster planned and revisited and revisited again the nurse project, members had gotten along with a loose group structure. They had relied on the URC liaison to take up the slack, and take care of administrative details between meetings. For a lot of members, it now was no longer enough to be handy, self-starting volunteers who could rely on the URC liaison or the Family Friends professional to keep track of things. Members were saying in effect that a good group was one that met its increasing outside obligations by symbolizing members' bonds to one another more formally and predictably. Loose, informal ties inside the group were not enough for good members any more. This interpretation helped me understand why the Cluster kept combining conversations about its relations to other groups and conversations about its own structure: The previous month, Mary had asked the Cluster to "consider [our] relations to URC, to our congregations, to the neighborhood center, to JFF – and maybe something about our structure, our identity." Now, at the crisis meeting, Dora blurted out "we're such a loose organization that we're not sure who's doing what!" A more formal structure would not only make Cluster members feel more comfortable about their risky responsibilities, but would signal to others on its map that it meant to be a trustworthy partner in the neighborhood. Favoring formality is not simply common sense, not a universal sign of a group that means business.[59] In Park Cluster, members needed to depend on each other in a new way, and symbolized the new interdependence with the formal positions of presiding director, secretary, and treasurer.

Practically speaking, these positions did not require of their occupants many new tasks beyond ones Cluster members had already been sharing, or doing in an ad hoc way. Ned always kept the books; now he was the treasurer. Someone always took notes at meetings; now there was a secretary. The presiding director was responsible for approving a meeting agenda, and communicating with the URC and other outside groups. The URC liaison originally had these responsibilities. The new structure, in other words, mattered most by symbolizing a changed sense of group bonds, and by making the Cluster more autonomous from the URC.

The Cluster ratified different group boundaries at that meeting too – they defined a different meaning of relationship to the wider world. On the new map, the Cluster would be a "partner," not a benevolent giver who knew what was best for the served. After the

[59] In some social movement groups and other civic organizations, being "serious" or "deeply committed" means eschewing formal positions. These groups encourage intensive participation by all members and rotate leadership positions frequently. See for instance Barbara Epstein, *Political protest and cultural revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Paul Lichterman, *The search for political community: American activists reinventing commitment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Wini Breines, *Community and organization in the new left* (South Hadley, MA: J.F. Bergin, 1982).

crescendo of self-criticism from around the table, Betty gave a capsule history of the Cluster and articulated its mission:

> We worked as a conduit for volunteers, to go back to churches. Amidst that, we took on the parish nurse and eviction prevention...
> From around the table: "Yes, yes."
> Betty: " ... 'Fools walk in where angels fear to tread!' .... We took on things without the structure to carry out.... Those of you doing hands-on work – with kids, the after school program ... in the perception of the people you're working with, we are not givers and receivers but partners. We become *not* [emphasis hers] givers of the community but partners of the community – that we be perceived not as directors but partners."

Evidently the point mattered enough for Betty to say it three times in the last sentence. Even when doing "hands on" or "direct" service, Cluster members needed to keep in mind that these one-to-one volunteer stints should be meaningful as part of a broader effort at community-building. Most but not all Cluster members agreed heartily with Betty.

Cluster members already had imagined themselves on this broader social map of "partnership" when they discussed the parish nurse. The nurse project took planning and envisioning, and a sense of responsibility to ask critical questions, beyond carrying out volunteer tasks. Cluster members imagined the nurse in relation to culturally distinct populations and they tried to figure out how co-sponsorship would work with partner agencies. Many months of planning for the nurse had resulted, finally, in a real nurse who needed to be paid. As it came to fruition the nurse project tipped the Cluster definitively toward partnership as its predominant style, away from the volunteer style. Of course it would take close comparison cases to determine why the Cluster sometimes acted as a partner to begin with, why members imagined the nurse as a focus for responsible partnerships rather than task-oriented fundraising or helping-out. But given that initial, shared imagination, the nurse precipitated a crisis that we can narrate with the help of neo-institutionalists' insights into why an organization's routine patterns of action ever change: When an organization hosts different institutionalized routines, the practical consequences of one routine may diminish the possibilities for keeping other routines going.[60] In this case, the Cluster's volunteer style ultimately could not accommodate the consequences of action the Cluster had initiated as a partnering group rather than a volunteer group. Tensions over who to be and how to do things together had begun to threaten the group's basic sense of its place. The small but emotional social drama[61] at this meeting ratified the group's move toward the partnership and came to a climax with Betty's poignant mission statement.

Broadened meanings, new social capacity. After the crisis meeting, then, the dominant understanding of civic relationship in the Cluster broadened in a Tocquevillian direction: Betty was saying Cluster members should be part of a larger, local "we," rather than "servers" whose own fortunes do not depend on those of the "served." Good civic relationships now required paying attention to other groups, becoming more a pro-active member of the larger civic world, such that Cluster members would depend less on

[60] See Clemens and Cook, "Politics and institutionalism."

[61] Victor Turner, *Dramas, fields and metaphors: Symbolic action in human society*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974). See Myerhoff's use of the concept in *Number our days*.

supervising social workers to work out those relationships for them. More routinely now, members asked whether a proposed project was a county services project or a Cluster project; the distinction was a more meaningful one now. They asked what neighborhood residents thought about a proposed new neighborhood elementary school instead of assuming they already knew. Relating to the neighborhood signified collaboration more strongly now, rather than a simple "doing good." It became more routine to ask and to explore rather than only report, assign, or wait for answers from the URC liaison.

The Cluster's social capacity increased noticeably too. Members increasingly got involved in projects different from collecting money, coats, canned vegetables, or sandwich bread, and other forms of helping out. Rather than working as representatives of aggregate individual volunteer hours and donations, they carried out collective projects that required a thicker sense of interdependence between members, and a willingness to challenge institutional leaders: They organized a project to canvass Park neighborhood, in order to discover residents' own opinions about the newly proposed neighborhood school. They organized a forum to enable residents to speak directly to the school board about the plan, held conveniently in the neighborhood center basement. Cluster members celebrated an invitation from the neighborhood center director to send representatives to a weekly neighborhood forum with Park residents. The invitation would have made less sense to self-starting, task-oriented volunteers with less of a collectivity to represent and less of a collective "ear" to listen. But now, as partners, they could discover residents' concerns, as residents themselves stated them, instead of assuming the Cluster knew or that Family Friends social workers knew what residents wanted. And only now, after the crisis meeting, did I hear Cluster members *arguing* with the Park neighborhood social worker. They disagreed with her over the administration of an "eviction prevention fund" that was supposed to help residents short of their monthly rent to make the payment and avoid all the disruption of a forced move. They were treating the social worker as a "partner." She was surprised and argued back that she was the expert. Overall, the Cluster's social capacity increased as it acted on new definitions of ties and a different sense of group bonds that connected responsibility inside the group with responsibility to a variety of outside actors. The Cluster was *doing things together with a wider circle of citizens* than previously, depending less weightily on the Family Friends social worker for direction.

Group style or social capital?

The logic of the social capital concept, at bottom, would suggest that the Cluster evolved in a "Tocquevillian" direction, toward more broadly defined civic relations and greater social capacity, because of regular connections in the group.[62] The capital metaphor induces us to turn styles of relationship, kinds of civic projects – qualities – into quantities: older

[62] See Putnam, *Bowling alone*, especially 288–290; Fukuyama, *The great disruption*. This logic would be harder to apply to groups strong in bonding social capital. The bonding/bridging distinction is not fully integrated into the larger Tocquevillian sensibility informing the framework, though Putnam holds that most civic groups have a combination of bonding and bridging capital, so that most groups have at least some potential for the Tocquevillian spiral outward. In the present case, Park Cluster members all wanted to "bridge" outward beyond the group, so it is appropriate at the outset to investigate the consequences of regular connections. For a discussion of competing explanations of the Cluster's evolution, see Lichterman, *Elusive togetherness*.

connections, more trust, bigger risks, "scaled-up" projects. While in the Cluster's case, a longer period of "regular connections" did precede a change in the networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust that define Putnam's social capital, the social capital concept by itself does not help us appreciate the meanings that helped produce the change and set its timing. Assessing Park Cluster in terms of social capital's three components strengthens the case for the conceptual alternative.

Networks and norms of reciprocity

Before the crisis meeting, regular contacts and liaisons from outside the Cluster had changed little. In the year after the crisis meeting, new people started attending Cluster meetings regularly: These included a social worker from the Lakeburg school district, a former school district employee, a businesswoman with real estate experience and ties to Lakeburg municipal leaders, a Park neighborhood resident with neighborhood organizing experience, other neighborhood residents including one who became the group's convener, and – most striking of all – the Park neighborhood center director, who had been wary of white church volunteers in her minority neighborhood from the start. Why did the Cluster acquire these new and potentially valuable ties only after the crisis meeting, even though it had been meeting regularly for many months?

At the crisis meeting, the Cluster ratified a set of customs that changed its official *self-definition* in relation to the Park neighborhood, its *definition* of reciprocity. Changes in the length and substance of monthly meetings signified the change in customs. After the crisis meeting, monthly meetings kept running over time, until they were officially lengthened by a half hour, and still each meeting produced discussion items that needed to wait for the next month's discussion: There was more to ponder and question, in a group that now defined itself as intentionally constructing its relations to "partners" inside and beyond the neighborhood. Neighborhood canvassing and school board politics were longer-term concerns that took more time, and more meetings, than organizing volunteers to make sandwiches for the summer camp and pack Thanksgiving holiday baskets. The Cluster intensified its efforts to make Park residents part of its agenda-setting, and discussed at several meetings I attended how to make its meetings more appealing, accessible, useful, to residents. As Betty said to general agreement, "our mission is not met until we have people from the neighborhood around the table."

In the mode of plug-in volunteering, Cluster members had acted more dependent on the county social worker and URC liaison, and less collectively responsible themselves for arranging their ties to the outside world – including the neighborhood world just outside the Cluster's meeting space. Reciprocity with anyone other than the URC or the family services agency had not been very salient. Until partnership became the routine, consistent, dominant understanding of the group, there would be relatively little reason for members to develop relations with a variety of outside leaders, no matter how regularly the Cluster met, if the volunteers' main mission was to carry out short-term tasks in the neighborhood. The presence of school district or other municipal leaders at a meeting would not necessarily affect the volunteer work of collecting Christmas presents or stocking and staffing the food pantry. Later in the study, an active URC liaison still attended Cluster meetings but member Liz was suggesting that the Cluster "leave home" and become autonomous from the URC. It would have been hard to contemplate such a move earlier, when the URC liaison still was providing over half the items on what were much shorter monthly meeting agendas.

The Cluster's sense of reciprocity had changed as it developed stronger, more autonomous obligations to its other "partners" in Park neighborhood. In the months after

the crisis meeting, it made much more sense to the Cluster to welcome a real estate expert or a school district administrator when, as partners, the Cluster had let itself become involved in a campaign to build a new community center, and had begun carving out a role as bridge-builder between the neighborhood and the school district when the district considered building a Park neighborhood school. By then, a new URC liaison could goad the group into staying involved with school board politics by reminding them at the start of her pitch that "this group has a reputation for being involved with Park neighborhood." The comment would have made little sense early in my study, when an autonomous reputation for the Cluster was much less developed and mattered less. In all, different meanings shaped opportunities for expanding the Cluster's networks, and making new kinds of contact with pre-existing associates.

Lingering resistance to those meanings made their role in the Cluster's outward-bound civic spiral all the more obvious. Ned continued to prefer plug-in style volunteering. Ned's form of "regular connection" would threaten or even cut off other regular connections that the social capital concept aims to count. Later in the study, Ned's style was like a small subculture within the group, characterizing the preferences of only 3 of the 12 core members, though the others understood the style and could enact it when they signed up to serve meals at the southeast Asian festival or run activities at the neighborhood's Christmas party. To Ned, the whole effort spent developing stronger and more self-conscious ties with the neighborhood center and its director was a waste of time, even after the Cluster received an invitation to join two of the center's advisory boards – two new opportunities for expanding the Cluster's network. Ned told me the Cluster ought to have been about "helping out" and getting things done in the neighborhood without getting wrapped up in difficult relationships with a difficult neighborhood center director, or expensive relationships with a parish nurse project. These, he strongly implied, were not good ways to "help out" as volunteers. Unprompted, he said on another occasion that the Cluster was "all tangled up in the [planning for a] community center. Very few people are interested in doing this [Summer Fun volunteering] – the day-to-day work here." To Ned, new ties with the neighborhood center director or real estate professionals were distractions from the real work, the day to day work of volunteering, too.

When others in the group such as Betty and Liz asked the Cluster to clarify how it related to the neighborhood center director and the other projects in the Park neighborhood, Ned retorted at one meeting,

> My vision in the early days was: a couple of people coming and meeting and helping out. And for me it's become way too mechanical. I don't think the Center had a vision back then, it just existed.....I'd just as soon step back and let the Center tell me what it needs. I question the need for this group.

Given the opportunity to work on more regular connections with a wider range of outside parties, Ned's customary understanding of good volunteering made him question the need for regular ties at all. Were it up to him, the Cluster would have forgone new ties and would have contracted its circle of reciprocity.

Trust

It would be misleading to say that Park Cluster's networks and responsibilities expanded because members' trust of one another "grew" through regular connections, as social capital thinking would have it. There are different kinds of trust, based on norms for qualitatively

different kinds of relationships.[63] Park Cluster ran on at least two different kinds of trust, instantiated in different sets of customs, and each kind would support a group with somewhat different priorities. The partnership form of trust meant mutual responsibility inside a group for the sake of outside parties. Partnership trust was what Mary wanted to build in the group when she argued at the crisis meeting that, having taken on the financial responsibility of the parish nurse, the group needed the structure to carry it out. But there was another kind of trust that Ned increasingly *lacked* in the group the longer it was in existence: It was trust that one's fellow group members could carry out pre-defined tasks and get the job done. Ned questioned the need for the Cluster altogether, more than once – hardly a statement of trust in group members – and told me he thought he would bow out of the Cluster and go work with the Family Friends county service agency because they had "more of a handle" on what people needed in the neighborhood. Regular connections would not cultivate trust in people who customarily had different ways of defining valuable ties and valuable exchanges. Ned's tone of voice made him sound deeply let down by the group, his *trust* in the group further weakened, when he complained that very few Cluster members were volunteering in Summer Fun. When I wondered if there were more Cluster members doing volunteer work on other days, he frowned and said no quickly – as if waving off the very possibility. He did not trust them to carry out the tasks that seemed so obviously valuable to him.

Of course, it also is the case that regular connections with the Cluster increased Ned's trust – in the Family Friends agency. Cultivating trust in state agencies is not what Tocqueville had in mind for civic groups, though, and it is not what the social capital concept projects. Social capital is supposed to ease citizens' abilities to "do with," not give them a taste for "doing for" as adjuncts to county social workers.

Silencing meaning, freezing dynamics

The social capital concept simplifies civic engagement by treating civic groups as static wholes suitable for indexing. The concept grasps variation in the ties within or between these static wholes with the generic, intuitively plausible distinction between "bonding" and "bridging" capital. The benefit of simplifying in these ways is that we may attempt huge comparisons of civic groups across regions or nations. But we pay a huge price for social capital.

First, we lose meanings. As scenes from the field in Lakeburg already show, group "bonds" can mean quite different things to group members, and so can "bridges." Ned and Betty of Park Cluster both wanted to build bridges to the Park neighborhood. Ned spent more time in the neighborhood and developed more regular contacts than Betty did during this study, but it may not make much sense to say Ned had more bridging social capital. Each defined bridge-building differently. Betty's definition was closer to the one that social capital wants to honor, but to find that out we had to listen to how Betty and Ned talked about the Cluster and what its relations meant to them. Group style sensitizes us to these definitions, where social capital is silent. It is an irony worthy of Theodor Adorno that social capital has become the preeminent concept for studying civic engagement, and yet is deaf to the core activity of civic life: *talk*.[64]

[63] See Robert Wuthnow, "Trust as an aspect of social structure," 145–167, in Jeffrey Alexander, Gary Marx, and Christine Williams (Eds.), *Self, social structure, and beliefs: Explorations in sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Vivianna Zelizer, "Circuits of commerce," 122–144, in Alexander, Marx, and Williams, *Self, social structure, and beliefs*.

[64] As Mark E. Warren put it, "[I]n contrast to markets and bureaucracies, association is the form of social organization that thrives on talk." See Warren, *Democracy and association*, 39.

Second, we lose dynamics, especially if we think of bridges or bonds simply as appendages to already existing groups. Bridges as well as bonds continually *create* groups as members are relating to one another and the outside world, and the continual action of maintaining a group opens at least hypothetical possibilities for change. Park Cluster's crisis was about what the group should be, in relation to whom; it was a crisis in the *meanings* of bridges and bonds. The group resolved the crisis by communicating about it at the crisis meeting. Members dared to remark on what they considered their group's own shortcomings: Not only did they criticize their own loose group structure, but Dora said with contrition that the Cluster had been operating with "racial biases" when dealing with the Park neighborhood center's African American director. Even group dissident Ned agreed with her and, with his characteristic regard for individual responsibility he promised "studious efforts to avoid that in the future." At a dramatic moment, Betty put forth a distinct vision of the group. The group style concept highlights ongoing group-building, attunes us to interaction, and alerts us to the possibility of clashing styles of building a group. Social capital, in contrast, freezes groups, obscuring conflicting tendencies, and can even push the analyst into circular reasoning about how bonding and bridging capital explain a group's trajectory after the fact.[65]

The conceptual problems multiply when we remember that group style may vary by setting. These differences matter especially if we want to understand the conditions that facilitate or diminish citizens' social capacity in relation to the state or other institutions. The contrast between Park Cluster and Summer Fun camp is instructive here. Summer Fun camp was sponsored by Park Cluster in conjunction with county social workers who attended Cluster meetings, yet it cultivated styles of relationship quite different from those the Cluster practiced increasingly at its monthly meetings. Camp sessions and Cluster meetings were analytically as well as substantively very different settings. Cluster members such as Ken *lost* the characteristics that match the intended, Tocquevillian definition of social capital when they were volunteering at Summer Fun, or attending the social workers' meetings that were part of my larger study. At Summer Fun, Ken described Cluster members as "service providers" in relation to the camp and the kids and that is how he acted at the camp, too. He borrowed the customary social map of a plug-in volunteer, imagining the volunteers subordinate to county social worker Mosley, helping others "do for" a service population. He talked as a member of a volunteer-style group, in other words. Yet at Cluster meetings, Ken talked about "synergy" – doing *with* neighborhood residents – and worked hard to build partner-style relationships that honored Park residents' own opinions. Similar to Ken at Summer Fun, Cluster members who attended monthly social workers' meetings down the street from the neighborhood center went along with the role that social workers cast them on social workers' own turf: They were valuable, plug-in style volunteers who could help assemble Thanksgiving food baskets for needy families, or staff the food pantry. Cluster members I observed *at these meetings* never suggested that the Cluster had other major roles too, though clearly the Cluster cultivated more social capacity on its own time, as members planned and pondered and argued and re-drew the map of their relationships. The differences between settings would disappear in a survey of social capital in Park Cluster or the Park neighborhood.

I do not mean to suggest that the social capital concept has offered nothing for studies of civic engagement. It depends on what we want to know. The best response to these and previous criticisms of the social capital concept may be to approach research with a strong,

[65] See Wilson, "Dr. Putnam's social lubricant"; Portes, "Social capital."

Table 1 Comparing social capital and group style as approaches to civic engagement

	Social capital	Group style
Focus of observation	groups, memberships, individual behaviors and attitudes	communication in relationships, in specific settings
Efficacy for civic action	frequency or density of interpersonal or inter-group contacts; frequency of behaviors or attitudes	definitions of relationships
Mechanisms of change	high accumulation of contacts, groups, or attitudes; length of relationships	redefinition or conflict over meanings; external pressures and inducements
Suitable research questions (examples)	Why do some people participate more than others? Why do some groups recruit more people than others? Which group contacts or ties create broad alliances between groups?	How do civic relationships develop over time? How do civic relationships produce goods? Why do civic groups prefer some goals to others? How do civic groups succeed or fail in meeting their own goals?

nuanced sense of the concept's limits alongside a *realpolitik* appreciation that the concept already has propelled a lot of informative work. Tocquevillian questions slip through social capital's large cracks, but the concept is a worthwhile tool for other questions that important studies have asked about the conditions for building diverse social movements or recruiting volunteers successfully.[66] It is useful to know that some kinds of social ties or contacts, in general, advance collective action more than others, and in those cases social capital is a sensitive enough concept. We simply ought not to restrict our questions to the ones that the social capital concept is fit to address. Table 1 compares Putnam's version of social capital and group style as conceptual tools for studying civic engagement.

Sometimes the broad-brushstroke metaphor of social capital is sufficient. Still, social capital imagery silences and freezes the meanings, relationships, and communication that matter for many research questions whether or not they are inspired by Tocquevillian insights. Different group styles cultivate different goods, some more Tocquevillian than others. It is not clear that we could deduce a criterion for knowing which groups to count and which to exclude from an inventory of social capital in its neo-Tocquevillian definition. It took ethnographic work to suggest that plug-in style volunteering makes a poor indicator; ethnographic studies that compare particular group styles with Putnam's social capital concept are only now starting to come in from the field.[67] The scenes in this article by no

[66] On movement-building, see for instance Richard Wood, *Faith in action*; Mark R. Warren, *Dry bones rattling*; Saegert, Thompson, and Warren, *Social capital in low-income communities*. On volunteer recruitment, see Becker and Dhingra, "Religious involvement and volunteering"; John Wilson, "Volunteering," *Annual review of sociology* 26 (2000): 215–240.

[67] See for instance, Ricca Edmondson, "Studying civic culture ethnographically and what it tells us about social capital: Communities in the west of Ireland," 59–72, in Paul Dekker and Eric Uslaner (Eds.), *Social capital and participation in everyday life* (London: Routledge, 2001).

means represent all the group styles available in US civic culture.[68] At least until we have much more research on group styles and their consequences, we do best by unhitching Tocqueville from the social capital concept.

Group style and democratic social capacities: Beyond Tocqueville

Although Tocqueville valued civil associations for their potential to enhance citizens' social capacity, it is unlikely he would have recognized plug-in style volunteering within his democratic vision. We need a concept of group style to recognize the gaps between Tocquevillian expectations, popular rhetoric about the value of volunteering, and real practices in volunteer settings. Beyond what it illuminates about volunteering, group style also helps us assess Tocqueville's insights on civic process while avoiding the traps of his normatively toned argument: Tocqueville proposed, and many contemporary commentators claim too, that in civic groups people *change*, their horizons broaden, their circles of concern expand. But if civic groups take on enduring styles, that means they tend to cultivate a shared, normative social map – consistent horizons over time – which may change relatively rarely and only under special conditions. *Democracy in America* affirmed the civic-minded habits of civil associations in general, contrasting them with the privatizing tendencies of material striving. Probing group style enables us to describe different modes of association and then assess empirically the goods these different modes produce, rather than relying on either Tocqueville's sunny and vague projections or else indices of ties, behaviors, and attitudes that miss some of the goods and liabilities that matter in the Tocquevillian imagination.

Like Tocqueville, many democratic theorists across the political spectrum have valued civil associations for their potential to cultivate social capacity. With social capital now a nearly commonsense term for discussing civic groups and social capacity, it has become too easy for contemporary writers to equate all three and use them interchangeably, sometimes in Tocqueville's name. Some conservative and neoliberal visions of democracy celebrate the virtues of local, non-political civic groups because they expect such groups to be effective agents of social capacity – translated in a facile way as social capital. To critical observers, conservatives and neoliberals make civic groups an all too simple answer to economic and social problems wrought by voracious markets and shrinking states. In the critical view, social capital comes to look like little more than a foil for the ravages of global capitalism and social capacity like the misguided concern of people who hope bowling leagues and local faith-based groups will provide the social support that the state no longer offers.[69]

A different vision would distinguish subject-matter (civic groups), theoretical lens (social capacity), and empirical measure (social capital). It is sound sociology to ask how civic initiatives of any sort can fill institutional gaps that grow when guaranteed welfare and other rights and expenditures shrink. It is sound sociology, too, to investigate social capacity by avoiding simple equations, treating civic groups dispassionately, and measuring their goods and consequences carefully. We need not assimilate social capacity to social capital. If social capital silences and freezes whatever it touches, that means it obscures a

[68] For examples of other customs likely to be common across US civic life, see Lichterman, *Elusive togetherness*; *The search for political community*; Becker, *Congregations in conflict*; Nina Eliasoph, *Avoiding politics*.

[69] See Somers, "Beware Trojan horses bearing social capital."

variety of civic styles and relationships, not all of which are as moralizing or anti-state as the "thousand points of light" celebrated in conservative rhetoric and savaged in the critique of neoliberalism. Civic groups play a role in civil society-centered and state-centered visions of democracy and the group style concept can illuminate citizens' potentials to exercise social capacity in either.

Both classic and contemporary theorists have privileged civil society as the ultimate guarantor of real democracy, a counter-balance to the administrative logics and elite interests attributed to state actors. Because many of today's community service organizations do fashion coalitions with state agencies, hardly always on the politically conservative terms of the "faith-based initiative," it is good to ask how civic groups and state agencies coordinate their work together. To move beyond the simpler imagery of *Democracy in America*, how much if at all do those arrangements cultivate social capacity? A focus on group style is illuminating. Civic groups may construct different kinds of working relationships with state agencies; the formal structure of state-sponsored social service may influence but does not necessarily dictate the terms of collaboration with citizen groups.[70] In Park Cluster, "partnership" made the eviction prevention fund, for instance, into a different project than it would have been had the Cluster stuck with a plug-in volunteer style. As plug-in volunteers, Cluster members would have concentrated on collecting church donations and would have trusted the family services agency to know what was best for the neighborhood, instead of standing with neighborhood leaders and challenging the agency's way of administering the fund. This small example pictures what may look like a relatively small space for leeway in relations between civic groups and state agencies, but people may cultivate social capacity in just such spaces.

Research on citizen-led efforts to expand democracy already has shown that social capital can make the difference between effective pressure on the state and self-marginalizing protest. The case of faith-based community organizing in the United States illustrates what group style can add to the picture. Religious congregations are rich nodes of social connections – social capital – that community organizers draw on for political ends.[71] It is worth asking how organizers and their constituencies construct the boundaries and bonds that corral that "capital." Community organizers sometimes promote a stark we-versus-them map of social relationships that limits as well as energizes social capacity: When Industrial Areas Foundation leaders proposed a community organizing initiative for Lakeburg during this study, a local Lutheran pastor with community organizing experience acknowledged that it was difficult to keep rank and file community activists involved, come "Monday morning" after a successful pressure campaign: In *practice*, community organizing campaigns may define a good group as one that is united for a "win" against adversaries, more than one that thrives on civic interchange for its own goods. It is an empirical question how common that practice is. In any event, group style has practical consequences for enduring social capacity, even for groups that, in theory, value democratic participation as a good in itself.[72]

[70] For an argument that volunteer service has evolved to fit the structure of social service bureaucracies, see Wuthnow, *Loose connections*.

[71] Wood, *Faith in action*; Warren; *Dry bones rattling*.

[72] In theory, community organizing in the Saul Alinsky tradition cultivates active citizenship as an end in itself and not only a means to local political victories. See Stephen Hart, *The cultural dilemmas of progressive politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Harry Boyte, *CommonWealth: A return to citizen politics* (New York: Free, 1989).

Other recent studies envision a larger, more pro-active role for the state in expanding democracy, and some of these too are influenced by the recent attention to social capital.[73] Some of these studies investigate experiments in participatory governance around the globe, including participatory municipal budget-writing in Brazil and citizen oversight boards for schools and police forces in the United States.[74] Others observe hybrid organizations that combine state sponsorship and community initiative to serve distinct local populations such as lesbian and gay people with AIDS, or "at-risk" youth from low-income families.[75] In these different examples, the state is sponsoring social capacity, giving ordinary people resources and room to define the public relationships they want to have with others, including the state itself. Group style is likely to shape outcomes in any of these cases.

Studies of participatory governance focus hopes for broader and deeper civic participation on innovative institutional design. It still is an open question whether institutional design can guarantee democratic, empowering results over the long haul, as these authors already note. Even if legislation grants citizens new, formal decision-making positions in assemblies funded with tax money, there is no guarantee that all citizens will adopt the same style of participation. Democratic design does not necessarily make group style into a constant. Group style clearly mattered in the case of participatory budgeting in Brazil, for example, as citizens harbored sometimes surprising assumptions about what budget meetings were for; some turned these hearings into freewheeling "town hall" discussions or opportunities to make community announcements.[76] In the case of hybrid organizations it may be even less clear who is adapting to whose initiative, when civic and state actors co-create projects from the very start. The group style concept enables us to compare relationships and identities across the (shifting) lines between civil society and state, offering a "relational" understanding of citizenship[77] that saves us from reifying civic and state "sectors" and assuming that whatever happens inside one sector must be inherently different, or more or less empowering, from what happens inside the other.

If group styles potentially shape and sometimes limit social capacity over time, then what of the Tocquevillian hope that civic participation would expand relationships in public-spirited, empowering ways? Park Cluster did change, its horizons expanded, but the more Tocquevillian partnership style was already alive in the group, if subordinate, from the start. So with apologies to Hegel we might ask: To be a good citizen, must one be a member of a group already blessed with a good style? It is both an empirical and theoretical question for further work but not necessarily a cause for resignation among those with hopes for democratic civic life. The case of Park Cluster along with writings on community organizing offer some clues: People sometimes do reflect critically on the group routines

[73] See Fung and Wright, "Thinking about empowered participatory governance."

[74] Gianpaolo Baiocchi, "Participation, activism, and politics: The Porto Alegre experiment," 45–76, in Fung and Wright (Eds.), *Deepening democracy*; "Emergent public spheres: Talking politics in participatory governance," *American Sociological Review* 68 (2003): 52–74; Archon Fung, "Deliberative democracy, Chicago style: Grass-roots governance in policing and public education," 111–143, in Fung and Wright (Eds.), *Deepening democracy.*

[75] Michael P. Brown, *Replacing citizenship* (New York: Guilford, 1997); Nina Eliasoph, *Scrambled moral worlds: The case of U.S. youth civic engagement groups* (book manuscript, Department of Sociology, University of Southern California, 2006); Nicole Marwell, "Privatizing the welfare state: Nonprofit community-based organizations as political actors," *American Sociological Review* 69 (2004): 265–291.

[76] Gianpaolo Baiocchi, *Militants and citizens* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

[77] See Margaret Somers, "Citizenship and the place of the public sphere: Law, community, and political culture in the transition to democracy," *American Sociological Review* 58: 587–620; Baiocchi, *Militants and citizens*.

they have taken for granted or put up with in half-conscious dissatisfaction, the way Dora and Betty endured Park Cluster's earlier style. American community advocates teach grassroots activists to distinguish between private and more communal forms of interest, between patronage and more democratically accountable forms of exchange.[78] To the extent these workshops of democracy teach their lessons effectively, they are cultivating citizens' abilities to reflect critically on group boundaries and bonds, and change the ways they go about public life. To grasp these possibilities for critical self-reflection and change in theoretical terms we do well to move beyond Tocqueville and borrow from the pragmatist imaginations of John Dewey and Jane Addams.[79] Still a signal, Tocquevillian contribution shines through: Citizens' democratic aspirations and government's ambivalent tendencies all are subject to the customs of group life. Democratic political theory remains an incomplete, misleading guide to practice without this inconvenient and salutary insight.

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[78] See for instance Harry Boyte, *CommonWealth*.

[79] See Lichterman, *Elusive togetherness*; John Dewey, *The public and its problems*; Jane Addams, *Democracy and social ethics,* with an introduction by Charlene H. Seigfried (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002 [1902]).