

Examining the Dynamic Interplay of Motivation and Friendships within a Collegiate Extracurricular Activity in the U.S.: The Case of Marching Band

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Abstract: Research links extracurricular activity (ECA) participation to developmental outcomes, yet little is known about social processes that occur within ECAs. We examine associations between motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic) and friendship processes (selection, influence) within a collegiate marching band in the US ($n=193$). Using social network analysis, we found evidence of selection, but not influence, on motivation. Selection findings differed by motivation type, such that extrinsic motivation was associated with increased friend nominations, whereas intrinsic motivation was associated with decreased nominations. Unexpected findings are explained by the context of this highly specialized ECA. Implications for supporting motivation in extended education settings are discussed.

Keywords: social network analysis, extracurricular activities, college students, friendships, motivation

Introduction

Friends are key socialization agents across the life span (Rubin et al., 2015), such that friends tend to be similar to one another on a wide range of attributes (Veenstra et al., 2013). Friend similarity is explained by two distinct processes: selection and influence. Selection is the process of choosing friends who share similar attributes, whereas influence is the process of becoming increasingly similar to friends on a given attribute (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). The peer relations literature is ripe with studies using social network analysis to distinguish selection and influence on a variety of attributes (Veenstra et al., 2013). However, the social network scholarship has predominantly focused on observable attributes (e.g., problem behaviors, Osgood et al., 2015). There is initial evidence of friend similarity on non-observable attributes, including motivation, that warrants attention (e.g., Wild & Enzle, 2002).

Friends are important for motivation, such that youth make decisions about how to spend their free time based on their friends (Arnett, 2000). Indeed, friends are a primary factor in choices about participating in extracurricular activities (ECAs) (Schaefer et al., 2011). In this study, we examine the associations between friendship processes and motivation to participate in a highly specialized ECA, namely marching band. Marching band requires technical skills and a substantial time commitment and, thus, youth must be motivated to participate (Cumberledge, 2017). We use social network analysis to test whether youth choose friends with similar motivation (selection) and whether youth socialize one another to become more similar over time (influence). We distinguish internally derived (intrinsic) and externally derived (extrinsic) motivation to participate in marching band because of their salience in ECAs (Wigfield et al., 2015). Based on initial social network research on motivation (e.g.,

Wild & Enzle, 2002), we expect both friendship processes (i. e., selection and influence) to be present in the marching band. However, given the highly specialized nature of marching band, we expect friendship processes to be stronger for intrinsic than extrinsic motivation.

Collegiate Extracurricular Activities: The Case of Marching Band

In the Western world, traditional college students (ages 18–22) often postpone the responsibilities of adulthood, such as employment and marriage, and extend the self-exploration activities that are typical of adolescence (Arnett, 2000). During college, ECAs can provide important self-exploration experiences, which vary depending on the type of ECA (Vandell et al., 2015). ECAs are often categorized in social science research into one of five broad types (Larson et al., 2006): faith-based and service, academic and leadership, performance and fine arts, community organizations and vocational clubs, and sports. Marching band is a hybrid type of ECA that has characteristics common to performance and fine arts activities (e. g., music performance), as well as athletics (e. g., physical coordination, breath control, mental focus). Participation patterns in marching band follow the general ECA participation pattern of early sampling and later specialization, such that the highest attrition occurs during the transition from high school to college. One study found that nearly 75% of high school band members did not participate in college (Mantie & Dorfman, 2014). Thus, motivation is a critical factor in retaining participation in marching band in college.

Participating in collegiate marching band involves both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors include interest and personal satisfaction. That is, students who participate in marching band in college are typically those who are interested in music, enjoy the band, and, as well, are willing to sacrifice the cost of participation in terms of their time and alternative opportunities (Mantie & Dorfman, 2014). There are also many personal benefits to participating in marching band, such as the opportunity to develop social skills, discipline, teamwork, and leadership (e. g., Garrison, 1986; Hash, 2021). The extrinsic factors involved in collegiate marching band are similar to those which characterize American sports. For example, the marching band performs at major athletics events (e. g., American football games), which offers prestige for the university (Allsup & Benedict, 2008) and entertainment for spectators (Cumberledge, 2017). Moreover, similar to sports, marching band emphasizes American cultural values of competitiveness and achievement (e. g., Allsup & Benedict, 2008), which are common extrinsic factors involved in ECA participation. Thus, decisions to continue participating in marching band in college are likely complex and involve both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

Collegiate ECAs may also be specialized contexts for friendships, which likely matters for motivation. On the one hand, as an arts activity, marching band fosters creativity and self-expression, a common foundation from which friendships are formed and reinforced (e. g., Vandell et al., 2015). However, on the other hand, marching band is highly competitive, has a limited number of positions (e. g., section leaders, members), and is segmented by section (e. g., woodwinds, brass, etc.), each of which may inhibit friendship formation or maintenance (e. g., Patrick et al., 1999). Understanding the interrelation of motivation and friendships may inform retention in marching band as well as other highly specialized ECAs.