Required Community Service: What Features Affect Civic Attitude Change?

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Introduction

Many private schools require community service (Farkas & Duffett, 2010). One aim of requirements is to promote positive social development. However, the experiences that young people bring to service and the experiences they have doing community service vary. Individual level factors such as reasons for doing service and propensity to do service without being required likely affect their service experiences. Also, the impact of service depends on the type of service performed (Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003) and the quality of the experience (Taylor & Pancer, 2007). Individual factors and features of service are rarely accounted for together. In the present study, we predict change in civic attitudes from amount, type, and quality of service, along with reason for service and propensity to serve among private high school students with a community service requirement.

Method

Participants and Procedures
-120 students at a private high school grades 9-11 (93% White; 50 male%)
-short term longitudinal study: 9 months, May- February
-self report of attitudes (T1 and T2) and experiences with service (T2 retrospective report of service over past 9 months)
-school required 30 hours of community service for graduation

Measures
Amount of Service- composite of weekly service hours plus one time service involvement
Types of service- working with a disadvantaged population, service for a political or social cause, and fundraising
Reasons for Service- dummy variable where 0 = personal gain/convenience reasons only and 1= a combination of reasons including helping others
Propensity to serve- dummy variable for how likely participants were to do service without a requirement (0 = less than I do now and 1 = the same or more than I do now)
Quality of Service- 19 items assessing e.g. how meaningful the experience was and how much participants enjoyed it
Civic attitudes- ten composites of civic goals and attitudes about one's community (Table 1)

Analysis
-10 sets of linear regressions predicting *change* in attitudes from amount, type, and quality of service and the interaction of amount and quality of service. Models controlled for earlier attitudes as well as gender, parental education, grade, and positive affect

**Table 1.** Number of items, descriptive statistics, reliabilities for all study variables.

Construct	# items	M (SD)	Cronbach's Alpha
Amount of service	1	48.81(70.18)	--
Type- serving disadvantaged	2	3.36(1.24)	.79
Type- political/social cause	2	2.05(1.06)	.73
Type- fundraising	1	3.06(1.37)	--
Reason	1	dummy	--
Propensity	1	dummy	--
Quality of service	19	3.63(.62)	.72
Future Volunteering	2	3.88(1.10)	.79
Community Contributions	7	3.73(.74)	.85
Social trust	6	2.80(.59)	.75
Tolerance	2	3.71 (.75)	.80
Social Responsibility	10	4.07(.59)	.83
Humanitarian	5	3.49(.73)	.76
Civic Efficacy	3	3.81(.88)	.86
Future Unconventional Involvement	3	2.52(.96)	.78
Political Influence	1	2.94(1.07)	--
Influence School rules	1	2.51(1.08)	--

Table 2. Summary of hierarchical regression results predicting 10 civic attitudes from earlier attitudes, demographics, reasons for service, propensity to do service, and hours, type, and quality of service. B and (β) presented.

	Reason for Service	Propensity to do Service	Hours of Service	Quality of Service	Hours X Quality	Serve Disadvantaged	Serve for political or social cause	Fundraising Service
Future Volunteering		.60*** (.26)	-.31+ (-.14)	.53*** (.30)				
Community Contributions				.29** (.24)				.10** (.19)
Social trust	-.31+ (-.15)							
Tolerance				.23+ (.18)		-.10+ (-.16)		.90+ (.16)
Social Responsibility		.27** (.21)	-.27** (-.19)	.15+ (.15)				
Humanitarian					.51* (.17)			.08+ (.15)
Civic Efficacy	-.45* (-.15)	.28+ (.15)		.44*** (.31)		-.10+ (-.15)		
Future Unconventional Involvement				.36** (.22)				
Political Influence				.47** (.26)	.82* (.18)		.23** (.22)	
Influence School rules							.17+ (.16)	

Notes. * p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p < .001.

Figure 1. Amount of service X quality of service for political influence
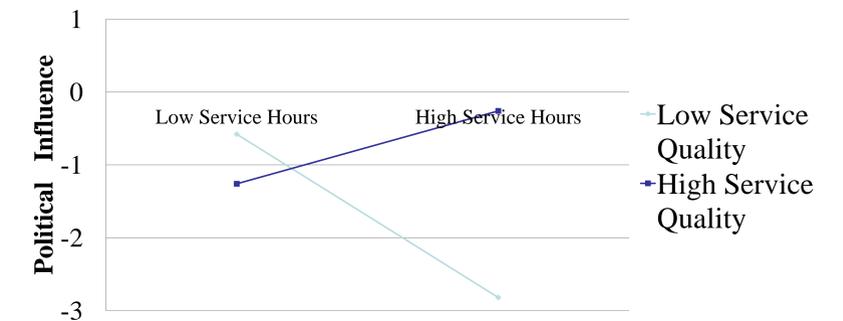
Figure 2. Amount of service X quality of service for humanitarianism
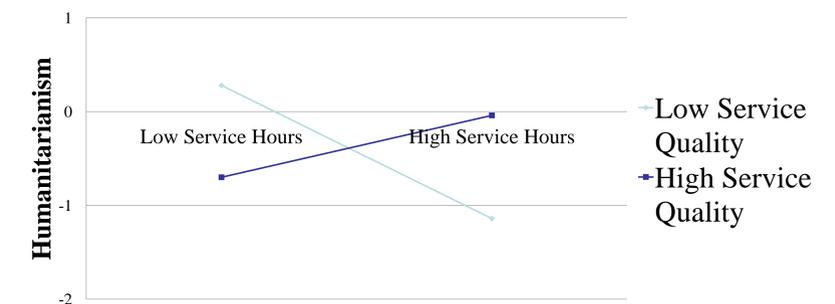
Results & Discussion

Main Findings
-civic attitudes are highly stable over time
-on top of attitude stability and controlling for some self-selection factors, high quality service experiences predicted increases in civic attitudes
-more hours of service predicted decreases in two attitudes
-interactions emerged between hours and quality of service for two of the attitudes (Figure 1).
-types of service related to attitudes somewhat differently, most notably, political/social cause service was associated with increases in the two political attitudes

Discussion
Accounting for other and self-oriented reasons that people do service and their propensity to do service without a requirement, high quality service experiences predict positive attitude development over time in high school. However, simply accumulating service hours does not and may have a negative effect of attitudes. Accumulating hours of high quality service is associated with higher political confidence and humanitarianism. Types of service (especially whether or not the service addresses a political or social cause) affect community-oriented and political attitude development differently.

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