A Community of Scholars: Examining Trajectories of SRCD Membership

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Bowling Alone

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by Angela Lukowski and Jonathan Santo

In a previous issue of Developments, Lonnie Sherrod discussed his perspectives on civic engagement, indicating that involvement in democratic organizations is important in promoting their vibrancy and success. We found it important to revisit this issue again, given that societies such as SRCD are democratic organizations, and some scholars may view membership in the Society as one area where money can be saved as funds available to support research are reduced. We also wanted to emphasize the importance of joining the Society for members who may question the importance of society memberships, given that some benefits of joining, such as access to journals and networking opportunities, can be obtained in other ways. For SRCD to remain vibrant and successfully contribute to the field, it, like all democratic organizations, needs an active membership.

The Society has had approximately 5000 members since 2004, and many members and non-members alike choose to attend the biennial conference. Nevertheless, there seems to be a transition in American society away from participating in organized societies. In his book “Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,” Robert Putnam discusses how the transition away from joining organized societies may relate to our current cultural climate. Over time, Americans have become less involved in community-based organizations relative to earlier generations. In particular, Putnam describes how Americans now spend less time interacting with friends and family, they engage less in political organizations, and they are even bowling alone. Putnam points out that there has not been a reduction in the number of individual bowlers, however. Currently, bowlers tend to engage in this activity alone instead of joining formalized leagues as they had in generations past. But what does this mean for SRCD?

Putnam indicates that membership in societies and organizations is important in that such membership builds two kinds of social capital, namely bonding and bridging capital. Bonding capital develops when people interact with others who have similar perspectives to their own, whereas bridging capital develops when individuals engage with and learn from others who have different perspectives. Both of these types of social capital develop in the context of the biennial meeting; however, for this bonding and bridging capital to extend to the development of the society at large, individuals who attend the meeting also need join the society and actively participate in its governance.

Although budgets are tight across the country, scholars must remember that the SRCD meeting lasts for four days every two years, whereas membership allows for engagement in the society year-round. Membership is not only about reduced fees for conference attendance or free access to society publications: membership must be maintained in order to promote the excellence of SRCD, as members have the unique opportunity to actively shape the field through their involvement on committees and councils at the forefront of child development - even SECC and early career members are able to become involved in the society and contribute to its success! Be sure to go to www.srcd.org to renew your membership when it expires and encourage relevant colleagues to join as well... and while you are at it, why not join a bowling league, too?

We want to hear from you! Are there any changes that you would like to see to the newsletter? Join the discussion on SRCD Exchange, we look forward to hearing from you!