What does bowling have to do with democracy? This apparently idiosyncratic question, inspired by Putnam’s (1995, 2000) influential “bowling alone” thesis, actually goes to the heart of scholarly research about civic engagement and civil society. What counts as civic? Does organized recreation really matter for civil society? Most scholarship on civic engagement assumes that we know what makes one action civic and another not. Membership in associations, attending a town hall meeting, and volunteering at a soup kitchen are ideal-typical forms; but what about buying organic food (Rao 2009), displaying a pink ribbon on one’s car to support breast cancer research (King 2006), or resisting corporate capitalism through “culture jamming” (Klein 2000)?

The phenomenon of civic recreation, a type of nonprofit fund-raiser that combines a leisure activity with a public cause, underscores the necessity of a theory of civic production. I draw from social movement theory and from ethnographic data from one fitness fund-raiser to illustrate some of the key processes and outcomes for which a theory of civic production must account.

Keywords
civil society, civic engagement, fund-raisers, nonprofit organizations, social movements, HIV/AIDS, bicycling
Existing theories of the civic bracket the problem of analyzing whether and how the civic is produced by a given action. Civil society theorists, civic engagement theorists, and civic culture theorists primarily identify the civic with a particular venue, type, or motivation for action (respectively), regardless of its outcome. I argue that a theory of *civic production* better accounts for the “porousness” (Wuthnow 1998) and contingency of the civic, while embracing, rather than avoiding (Lichterman and Potts 2009), the normative concerns that are at the heart of this analytic category. I conceive of the civic as a variable, contingent outcome of social action that is produced through micro- and mesolevel processes by individual and organizational actors engaged in a “contentious performance” (Tilly 2008). The civic does not just exist; it must be produced.

In this article, I first discuss the problems of conceptualizing the civic. Second, I show how the phenomenon of civic recreation underscores the shortcomings of conventional theories and the necessity of a theory of civic production. Third, I draw from social movement theory and ethnographic data from one fitness fund-raiser to illustrate some of the processes by which actors attempt to produce civic outcomes. Specifically, I show how event organizers use micromobilization and framing processes, the combination of recreational and political elements in a performance, and processes of symbolic meaning making in an effort to distill civic outcomes from a leisure activity. Finally, I offer some preliminary remarks on what distinguishes civic from noncivic outcomes and on the dynamics of civic repertoires over time.

**POROUSNESS AND THE CHANGING CIVIC REPERTOIRE**

Robert Putnam’s (1995, 2000) widely cited thesis that civic engagement in the United States has been declining since the 1950s sparked a great deal of controversy and a flood of research assessing its merits. In the wake of the debate, a consensus emerged that the American civic repertoire is changing along with notions of citizenship and larger political and economic structures (Jacobs 2003; Kaufman 2002; Schudson 1998; Sirianni and Friedland 2001; Skocpol 2003; Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Wuthnow 1998).

Wuthnow’s (1998) theory of civic change is worthy of attention, both because it shows how the civic repertoire is changing and because it illustrates the fundamental difficulty of conceptualizing the civic. Wuthnow attributes changes in American civic engagement to the increasing “porousness” of social institutions. He argues that the boundaries separating one social institution from another—such as that between work and leisure—have become less rigid and/or more permeable. The increasing porosity of institutions has made it “harder for many established civic organizations to function effectively, but new groups, networks, and innovative forms of volunteering are filling up the space” (Wuthnow 1998:81). While memberships in Parent-Teacher Associations and Lions Clubs across the country are declining, there is an increasing number of people involved in social movements, who volunteer once a month at the local soup kitchen, or who consider their jobs to be a kind of civic engagement.

Wuthnow’s (1998) account of civic change is limited, however, because it reifies the institutions whose porosity he describes, especially the central institution of his study: civic engagement. It neglects the processes by which individuals and organizations actually produce the civic and the fact that the boundaries separating civic engagement from other forms of social action are themselves porous. Wuthnow’s definition of civic involvement—“participation in social activities that either mediate between citizens and government or provide ways for citizens to pursue common objectives with or without the help of government” (Wuthnow 1998:7)—just as easily describes social movement activism or free-market consumerism. Indeed, the voluntary associations of Tocqueville (1966) and Putnam (2000), the free-market capitalism of Smith (1993) and Marx (Marx, Engels, and Tucker 1978), the fundamental rights of Cohen and Arato (1992), and the public discourse of Habermas (1989) and Alexander (2006) have all been featured as the iconic institutions of various theories of civil society. Historically, the concepts of civil society and civic engagement have morphed to assume different meanings and explanatory roles in response to changing historical-philosophical contexts and changing normative visions of a good, just society (Ehrenberg 1999; Seligman 1992; Somers 1995a, 1995b).
Thus, Wuthnow’s (1998) concept of porousness, like the entire debate on civic decline, exposes a significant problem in political theory: how to distinguish the civic from other forms and realms of social action. The three most common conceptions of the civic today are revealed by the nouns that civic modifies: civil society, civic engagement, and civic culture. All suffer from the problem of porousness. To complement existing theories, I offer a fourth conception of the civic—a theory of civic production.

FOUR CONCEPTIONS OF THE CIVIC

First, theories of civil society or the civil sphere conceive of the civic as a specific domain or venue of action, distinguished spatially and functionally, in relation to other spheres, and institutionally according to the dominant form of action that occurs within its boundaries. Spatially, civil society is conceptually situated in between the state and market or in between purely public and purely private realms (Cohen and Arato 1992). Functionally, civil society is alternately conceived as a medium through which people, speech, and influence from different spheres flow or as an autonomous realm, distinct from “noncivil spheres,” with boundaries of its own (Alexander 2006). Scholars then theorize civil society according to inputs and outputs and according to the expansion and contraction of its influence. Influence from other spheres on the civil sphere is described in disapproving terms of intrusion and colonization, while influence from the civil sphere on other spheres is believed to be normatively desirable. Institutionally, scholars identify various institutions as the preeminent or ideal-typical institution of that sphere: nonprofit organizations of the “third sector” (Van Til 2008), the communications media of the “public sphere” (Habermas 1989), the fundamental rights of association in “civil society” (Cohen and Arato 1992), and discourse of the “civil sphere” (Alexander 2006).

Conceptually, the spatial, functional, and institutional identifiers do the important theoretical work of guiding analytical minds and refining research agendas, but empirically, the conception of civil society falls short because the location metaphor is just that: a metaphor. The boundaries separating civil society from other social spheres, if they exist at all, are highly porous. Forms of action and interaction are portable across venues, and individuals, groups, and organizations routinely transgress boundaries separating one sphere from another. There is no form of social action that goes on in civil society that is not just as easily described as occurring elsewhere. The notion of civil society or a civil sphere may be theoretically evocative, but it is empirically superfluous.

Second, theories of civic engagement are action centered rather than place centered. This conception classifies as civic all instances of specific types of action—such as voting, association membership, or volunteering—regardless of their outcomes. Other types of action, such as shopping and paid labor, are not civic, regardless of their consequences. This approach is fundamentally inspired by Tocqueville’s (1966) account of practices that sustain democracy. Practices such as attending town hall meetings, reading newspapers, and engaging in political speech combat individualism and sustain democratic institutions. Putnam’s scholarship on institutional performance and social capital derives from this approach (Putnam 2000; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993), and much of the debate about civic decline concerned what types of action count as civic (e.g., Schudson 1996).

This approach is advantageous for the quantitative analysis that it enables, but there are two major problems with it. First, civic engagement functions as a folk category that scholars have inherited, defined according to the Tocquevillian common sense about practices that sustain democracy without threatening the status quo. For example, Sampson, McAdam, and their colleagues differentiate “civic” from “protest” events by their “traditional forms” (Sampson et al. 2005:685) and their lack of any specific “change-oriented claim” (McAdam et al. 2005:6). To define the civic according to tradition or conventional wisdom and to assume that all instances of that form of action are equally civic may be necessary for quantitative analysis, but it blinds us to instances of civic engagement that do not fit our preconceived notions or that emerge as society changes over time (Schudson 2009).
The second problem with this approach is that the vital normative question—to what extent those practices advance the common good—is assumed a priori rather than subjected to critical analysis. Civic engagement and social capital are morally ambiguous (Fiorina 1999; Kaufman 2002; Putnam 2000; Rosenblum 1998), so any failure to analyze the extent to which the common good is actually promoted inadvertently empties the enterprise of its warrant. Trust, civility, universal solidarity, equality, altruism, reason, and some sense of moral order are inherent in the idea of the civic (Alexander 2006; Cohen and Arato 1992; Seligman 1992); if our analysis cannot distinguish practices that improve these qualities of a society from those that undermine them, then why bother studying civic practices at all?

A possible solution might be found in a third conception of the civic, advanced by civic culture theorists. This approach is cultural and social psychological in that it assumes that practices are civic only when they are supported by proper attitudes, motivations, mores, and “habits of the heart” (Almond and Verba 1963; Bellah et al. 1985). This theory presumes a dichotomy of motivation, between individualism and altruism, or between private and public interest, that is easily recognizable in spatial conceptions that juxtapose the realm of universal, general interest with noncivil spheres of narrow, private interests. Alternatively, some scholars have identified voluntarism or freedom, as opposed to coercion, as a key signifier of the civic (Alexander 2006; Lichterman and Potts 2009; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995).

The face validity of this theory is its strength: It is intuitively true that this dichotomy of motivation is consequential for any functioning democracy or normative vision of a good society. However, its weaknesses are formidable. On a theoretical level, rational-choice theorists have questioned the very existence of altruism; even Tocqueville (1966) himself describes altruism as “self-interest properly understood” (p. 525). Moreover, the notion of purely voluntary action is incompatible with sociological theory, as some degree of coercion, or limit to individual freedom, is implied by the concept of social structure. Empirically, valid measures of an individual’s motivations are difficult to obtain, and scholars have routinely undermined the dichotomy on which the theory is premised with findings that individualism can facilitate civic engagement (Fine and Harrington 2004; Lichterman 1996; Lois 1999).

These three conceptions of the civic are not mutually exclusive, but even theories that combine all three are incomplete because they fail to take into account the consequences of action. To remove the sense of location, of action, or of motivation entirely from notions of the civic is crippling; they are necessary, but not sufficient, considerations. What is missing is the sense of contingency, of variability of outcome due to the disparate efforts of interacting actors in different social contexts.

Thus, I offer a fourth conception of the civic—a theory of civic production—not as a substitute for the other three but as a crucial dimension of any comprehensive theory of the civic. The production metaphor implies that the civic is an outcome of social processes, an accomplishment of social actors engaging in a contentious performance. The civic is ultimately defined by the extent to which it is actually produced by some action undertaken in some location for some reason; it is a contingent outcome of a performance, not an inherent feature of it. What is required, therefore, is a theory of how the civic is produced through different processes and to varying degrees by individual and organizational actors in a given social context.

The theory of civic production overcomes the problem of porousness because the assumption of variable outcomes relieves other conceptions of the civic of the burden of differentiation between civic and noncivic. Because the boundaries distinguishing civil society, civic engagement, and civic culture from their noncivic counterparts are porous, the location, type, and motivation for action cannot serve as a priori markers of the civic. Distinctions of the civic from the noncivic are most defensibly made according to the extent to which it is produced.

The theory of civic production also embraces the inherent normativity of the civic because it requires an analysis of the extent to which good or bad, positive or negative, consequences result from a particular action. In Western political thought, notions of the civic have been inextricably bound up with normative concerns of democracy, equality, trust, justice, and the public good. As scholars have shown, we cannot assume that the civic will always be unequivocally good (Fiorina 1999; Kaufman 2002; Putnam 2000; Rosenblum 1998); but we also cannot abandon entirely the normative dimension of the concept because it
empties the research agenda of its primary warrant. The theory of civic production aims to account for how
different actions variously and simultaneously produce outcomes that may be judged normatively positive
and negative according to some criteria.

CIVIC RECREATION

The case of civic recreation illustrates the limitations inherent in current theories of the civic and the neces-
sity of a theory of civic production. I define civic recreation as a type of political action that (successfully)
uses a leisure activity for the purpose of raising money, awareness, or some other benefit for some non-
profit organization or public cause. Known in the nonprofit sector as “special events fund-raising,” the
variety of “special events” that fall under the category of civic recreation is wide, including charity auc-
tions, bake sales, walk-a-thons, and benefit dinners.¹ Such events are well-established “mobilization tech-
nologies” for groups in civil society (Oliver and Marwell 1992), and they have long been part of American
civic life.

Perhaps because this sort of fund-raising is so mundane, it has been relatively understudied. Most of the
literature on special events fund-raising takes the form of practical manuals for fund-raising professionals
(e.g., Freedman and Feldman 1998; Greenfield 2002; Wendroff 1999). The bottom line for these events is
to make money: “A charity event should operate just like any other business, and just as in business, the
goal is to make money” (Freedman and Feldman 1998:16). However, special events are also intended to
generate publicity and support for the beneficiary: “A nonprofit special event is a unique fund-raising
program that strengthens the nonprofit’s image in the community and recruits and involves volunteers; it
raises money as well as friends” (Wendroff 1999:2).

The types of activities that could be classified as a special event are established by the Internal Revenue
Service (IRS), which requires all nonprofit 501(c) organizations to report revenues and expenses from
special events. In the official definition, the IRS says,

These activities only incidentally accomplish an exempt purpose. Their sole or primary purpose is to
raise funds that are other than contributions to finance the organization’s exempt activities. This is
done by offering goods or services . . . for a payment that is more than the direct cost of those goods
or services. (IRS 2007:30)

Thus, precisely what distinguishes special events from other sources of revenue is that the fund-raising
activity is unrelated to the tax-exempt purpose for which those funds will eventually be used.

In recent decades, an increasing number of civic recreational opportunities have taken the form of fit-
ness fund-raisers, in which an individual performs some athletic feat, such as running, walking, or bike
riding, to raise money for a charitable cause. Fitness fund-raisers pose significant analytical challenges for
scholars because the events are simultaneously political and recreational, they attract participants for both
self-indulgent and altruistic reasons, they adhere to both market and nonmarket logics, and they have the
potential to produce outcomes that range from hedonistic self-glorification to public-interested reformism
to revolutionary social change.

Like civic recreation generally, fitness fund-raisers have generally escaped scholarly attention, but the
different perspectives illustrated in the three most prominent studies of these events illustrate the normative
and theoretical ambiguity that these events present to scholars. First, Klawiter’s (1999) study of breast
cancer activism in San Francisco uses a social movement perspective to study how activists use three dif-
ferent walking events as claims-making tactics and to construct cultural meanings through bodily action.
Klawiter argues that each event constitutes a distinct “culture of action” that frames the problems and
solutions associated with breast cancer differently and targets different opponents. Like most civic recrea-
tion events, these breast cancer walks are about raising awareness and inducing participants to action;
however, they varied in the extent to which they challenge existing social structures of gender, power, and
inequality. In other words, the extent to which the outcomes of these events might be described as recreational, civic, and political will vary.

In addition to the social movement perspective, civic recreation can also be understood in the context of larger trends in public funding for nonprofit organizations. King (2001, 2006) critically analyzes breast cancer politics as it is manifested in the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation’s Race for the Cure. She contextualizes her study in relation to the growth of corporate “strategic philanthropy,” cause-related marketing, and the commodification of citizenship. In the 1980s, in the wake of shrinking federal funding for the voluntary sector, nonprofit organizations increasingly turned to marketing and commercial activity to maintain steady flows of revenue (Froelich 1999; Gronbjerg 2001; Skloot 1987). Like these nonprofit commercial activities, civic recreation blurs the boundary between market and nonmarket logics in that it entails the exchange of money for some good, service, or experience (Gronbjerg 1993). Whether an individual participates in the Race for the Cure or purchases pink merchandise from the corporate partners of the foundation, King argues that the activity throws into question the distinction between nonprofit and for-profit sectors, creates conflicts within organizations, and promotes individualism and consumerism as norms of citizenship.

Last, Nettleton and Hardey’s (2006) study of charity marathons in the United Kingdom illustrates how notions of social fitness and the social significance of the body are implicated in civic recreation. They emphasize how fitness fund-raisers promote an individualized, embodied citizenship through the construction of “charitable bodies.” Civic recreation resonates within a larger system of cultural meanings in which the social symbolism of the physical fitness of individual bodies is crucial. The rise of fitness fund-raisers corresponds to the “fitness boom” in the United States, a period in the 1970s and 1980s in which a multibillion-dollar health and fitness industry emerged, elevating concerns with individual fitness to a form of conspicuous consumption (Maguire 2002). With the rise of consumer culture, outward displays of fitness through diet and exercise became symbolic of both inner moral virtue and middle-class status (Featherstone 1991).

This semiotic relationship between an individual’s physical fitness and his or her moral virtue is embedded within a larger web of cultural meanings connecting individual bodies, sports, and social structures. Because of the ways in which individual bodies are symbolic of the social body (Bourdieu 1984; Foucault 1977) and the ways in which sports and leisure exhibit a larger complex of social norms and values (Elias and Dunning 1986), individual fitness signifies a multifaceted social fitness that validates capitalist inequalities, valorizes consumerism and self-discipline, and promotes individual responsibility for eliminating social ills (Featherstone 1991; Nettleton and Hardey 2006; Turner 1991). Suffering in the social body must be fought and cured by exertion of the individual body, and dedication to the activity called for by civic recreation symbolizes determination to fight illness in the social body.

In sum, these three studies illustrate how civic recreation exposes the porous boundaries between types of political action, between civil and noncivil realms, and between individualistic and altruistic motivations. Participating in a fitness fund-raiser can potentially commodify citizenship or radically challenge dominant structures of inequality; it can promote democratic virtues or conspicuous consumption; it can contribute to solving an important social problem or simply give participants a chance to do their favorite leisure activity. Because of the ambiguities inherent in this form of action, scholars must pay attention to how, and the conditions under which, particular outcomes are produced.

CIVIC PRODUCTION PROCESSES

If a theory of civic production is necessary, then what are the processes by which the civic is produced? And what distinguishes civic from noncivic outcomes? In the remainder of this article, I address these two questions, using social movement theory and ethnographic data from one fitness fund-raiser as guides.

Because social movement and civic engagement researchers share many of the same units of analysis, theoretical and empirical problems, and normative commitments, social movement theory offers a number of conceptual tools for building a theory of civic production. Political sociologists have begun to theorize
the porousness of the boundaries between social movement activism and civic engagement (Baiocchi 2005; Mische 2008; Sampson et al. 2005). Moreover, civil society theorists have identified social movements as key engines for the expansion of democracy, liberty, and justice in civil society (Alexander 2006; Cohen and Arato 1992). Empirically, examples of actions that are typically thought of as civic, such as holding public meetings, fit under most operational definitions of “protest events” used by social movement scholars (McAdam et al. 2005; Soule and Earl 2005; Tarrow 1989; Tilly 2008). Thus, in the case study below, I interpret the collective action of civically engaged actors in the language of social movement theory in order to illustrate how processes of civic production may be analyzed.

Data in this article come from ethnographic research on a fitness fund-raiser called ACT II (AIDS Network Cycles Together II), a six-day, 400-mile bicycle ride through southwestern Wisconsin to raise money for AIDS Network, the HIV/AIDS service provider for the area. Each of the 122 cyclists had to raise $1,500 in donations in order to participate in the event. To support the bike riders, there were 84 volunteer “crew” members, who carried out all of the essential logistical tasks of the ride (e.g., transporting gear, providing food and water) and the motivational work of providing encouragement to the cyclists during the long days of riding.

ACT II took place over the course of six days, but for most riders, the experience was much longer: There was a months-long period of fund-raising and physical training before the beginning of the ride. In order to facilitate my participant observation and to gain a more thorough understanding of the fund-raiser, I participated in a number of events before and after ACT II. During orientation sessions and training rides beforehand, I was able to get to know other riders and crew members, prepare myself physically for the ride, and observe how participants were socialized to become ACT riders. At social events after ACT II, I was able to observe participants’ collective reflection about the event. In all, I wrote field notes during 37 days of activity.

The original goal of the study was to explore how publics are created through interaction in civil society. Participating in the event allowed me to gain insight into what other riders were experiencing physically and emotionally. Since the event was so physically demanding, my own bodily participation became a “vector of knowledge” (Wacquant 2004). As the data will show, the physical experience of spending 6 to 10 hours each day riding one’s bicycle (with the concomitant pain that it caused many riders) and the emotions that organizers and volunteers attempted to elicit became central to the significance of the event. Thus, my own physical and emotional experiences take on sociological significance as consciously constructed features of the fund-raiser.

The case of ACT II illustrates how the civic can be produced through social interaction during an otherwise mundane recreational activity. From beginning to end, ACT II combined serious elements of a nonprofit fund-raiser with a fun, summer camp–like vacation experience. It was simultaneously recreational and political, appealed to participants for both individualistic and altruistic reasons, and had consequences that are both public and private. As in any special event, the activity of cycling has nothing at all to do with the tax-exempt mission of the beneficiary: providing HIV prevention services and legal and social services for people with HIV/AIDS. To make this civic recreation event successful therefore required calculated and continuous work by organizers and participants to make ACT II simultaneously about and not about HIV/AIDS. The contingent production of the civic through a recreational activity can be seen in the micromobilization of participants, in the combination of political and recreational elements in the performance, and in the symbolic meanings that organizers attached to it.

**Micromobilization and Framing Processes**

The production of the civic in a given performance is contingent, first and foremost, upon the recruitment and mobilization of participants to engage in some action that is framed as civic. Micromobilization and framing processes are essential for social movement and nonprofit organizations that need to recruit participants for some contentious performance. Organizations must identify and target potential participants,
overcome various barriers to participation (Klandermans and Oegema 1987), and engage in frame alignment processes in an effort to establish resonance between the meaning of the performance and the participant’s belief system (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988).

In the case of civic recreation, the framing and micromobilization processes combine appeals that are political and other oriented with appeals that are apolitical and self-interested. In practice, this is a delicate balancing act, in that the mobilization attempt must justify the linkage of a recreational opportunity with a political or altruistic cause without reducing either one to the other. At the same time, the primary benefit of making simultaneous recreational and political appeals is that a larger proportion of the public, ranging from those primarily interested in the leisure component to those primarily interested in the political component, are part of the mobilization potential (Klandermans and Oegema 1987).

ACT II illustrates both the dual framing of the performance and its openness to a wide variety of participants. At orientation sessions, organizers promoted the event as simultaneously a fun vacation and an opportunity to do something for an important cause. Each orientation session included a standardized presentation with questions and answers, and two orientation sessions I attended included a party afterward, to which other past and current participants were invited. Each presenter began by emphasizing the fun, recreational aspects of the ride and ended with facts and stories about the seriousness of HIV/AIDS and the urgent need for action. These two distinct types of appeals—to one’s selfish desire to have a fun vacation and to one’s sense of compassion for others—were inextricably linked by framing ACT II as a “life-changing experience,” as being part of “something bigger than you could possibly imagine” that would show “the way the world ought to be” (March 14, 2004; May 22, 2004).

On one hand, ACT II was portrayed as a fun vacation, “the best week of your life,” where you could enjoy six full days of nothing to worry about except riding your bike from one group of cheering spectators to another. As one orientation leader, Dan, put it, all you do is “pedal, eat, pedal, rest, pedal, ask the cute boy or girl next to you for a massage, pedal” (May 22, 2004). In an effort to lessen apprehensions, orientation leaders emphasized that riding 400 miles and raising $1,500 would be easier than it sounded because of the support that would be provided and the fun that participants would have.

On the other hand, orientation leaders emphasized the importance of HIV/AIDS prevention and service by offering an array of sobering statistics: that the number of new HIV infections in Wisconsin rose 16 percent last year and that a monument to the number of AIDS “victims” would be seven times the size of the Vietnam Memorial. At one orientation, the cause was personified by Tim, a 21-year survivor of HIV who spoke to the prospective participants. His speech was emotionally powerful, as much for its content as for how he appeared. Tim looked strong, the very pinnacle of manhood: His broad shoulders and muscular, tattooed frame were complemented by large earrings, heavy studded bracelets, silver rings on his fingers, a shaved head, and a stern face. But he spoke only of his weakness: his dependency on antiretroviral drugs to stay alive, the help he has received from AIDS Network, and the emotional support he gets from events like ACT II. I recorded my first encounter with him this way:

He peered out sincerely through his small eyeglasses, and his massive, metallic silver-covered hands quivered as he spoke of so many of his friends that have died over the years, and of a friend (a survivor of 17 years) who recently committed suicide—because the physical effects of AIDS are hard, and if they don’t get you, the emotional hardships that come from confronting your mortality will. He urged people to do the ride, to sign up today. (March 14, 2004)

Tim thus highlighted the persistence of HIV/AIDS as a social problem as an important reason to participate.

As a result of the multiple types of appeals, participants decided to do the ride for many different reasons. Though we cannot know their true motivations, people’s justifications for participating typically included both self- and cause-oriented statements. When getting to know each other, riders frequently began conversations by asking why they chose to participate in the ride. At one orientation in May, I met Rebecca, a
middle-aged woman whose short graying hair and faint wrinkles on her face made her appear to be about 50. With plates of hors d’oeuvres in our hands, she asked with a small laugh, “So, how’d you get roped into this?” I responded with my own justifications, which had to do with both a longtime love of cycling and belief in the cause. I told her that I had seen ads for the previous year’s ride and that I had always wanted to do a bike ride like this. When I returned the query, she rattled off a long list of reasons for participating: She knew someone through her husband who had died from AIDS, she knew someone in California who had done a number of AIDS rides, she knew someone at work who had signed up for ACT II, and she figured it would be a good way to get in shape. This combination of self- and other-oriented justifications was typical.

Given the relative centrality of the cause and the sport in the participants’ speech and actions, one can classify ACT II riders into at least three distinct types. One might expect that a bike ride requiring someone to ride 400 miles would primarily attract young, physically fit cycling enthusiasts; and indeed, this first type of participant rode the route each day to maximize his or her cycling performance. However, there was surprising diversity among participants in terms of age, physical fitness, and cycling experience.

A second type of participant had very little cycling experience and struggled every day to finish the route. People of this type ranged from high school students to senior citizens, and their primary reasons for participating seemed to have little to do with cycling. For example, on the fifth day of the ride, I rode with two women, Nicole and Carey, who typically were near the back of the group. Both women appeared to be around 40 years old and were riding hybrid bicycles, relatively inexpensive bicycles designed for comfort. While we rode, we talked about all sorts of things, from work to movies to our experiences so far on the ride. But conversations stopped on the hills, as the three of us worked to climb to the top, only exchanging words of encouragement periodically. Carey occasionally got off her bike and walked up the hills, while Nicole just kept pedaling steadily until she got to the top. Both women appeared to struggle on the hills and were no doubt tired from four days of riding. The previous day, a 93-mile route, had been so difficult that some riders, including a disappointed Nicole, had to be driven the final 15 miles or so by a support vehicle (August 6, 2004).

Finally, the third type of rider consisted of cycling enthusiasts, like the first group, who intentionally rode more slowly than they otherwise would have because of the other-oriented framing of the event. Though they were experienced cyclists, they rode with slower and more inexperienced participants because they thought that the purpose of the ride was to be helpful and supportive toward others. Spencer was one such rider: a man who appeared to be in his 40s who rode a quality racing bike and who I usually saw riding casually with a small group of people. He had participated in the previous ACT ride, and after we finished riding the last day, I asked him how he liked this one compared to the first. “It was different,” he said. He explained that during his first ACT ride, he was totally focused on riding because of the physical challenge and excitement of the event and because he did not really know anyone personally who had been affected by HIV/AIDS. By contrast, this year, having gotten to know people whose lives had been changed by HIV/AIDS, he felt that he should ride near the back of the group. He felt that the true purpose of the ride was to help people who were struggling. ACT II was not just an ordinary bike ride but a chance to be part of a caring community (August 7, 2004).

Notably, it was difficult for some participants to balance the conflict between their personal desire to go fast and the social pressures to slow down and be part of the “community.” On the third day of the ride, I asked Fred, a cyclist who was always one of the first to finish training rides, how things were at the front of the pack. His response was tinged with guilt. He expressed regret that he had not taken time to ride with people toward the back, and he said he planned to slow down the next day. Two days later, when I talked to him again, he confessed, “I haven’t really done it, I can’t seem to go slow. I don’t really know why, I just . . . .” At this point, I cut him off, empathetically agreeing: “Well, you just gotta ride, you know” (August 6, 2004). As a cyclist, he was used to riding in order to maximize his performance; but as a participant in ACT II, he felt a social pressure, created intentionally by event organizers, to do things differently.

The fact that organizers used different types of appeals to attract different types of participants shows one of the important features of civic recreation: that the mobilization potential can include people who are
primarily interested in having a good time. The organization does not have to rely simply on those who feel passionately about the cause for successful fund-raising—even selfish egoists can be induced into doing something that benefits others. Conversely, even longtime donors or activists get something in return for their donation, like a T-shirt or a memorable experience. Each participant in civic recreation is acting both selfishly and selflessly, regardless of their intentions.

Elements of the Contentious Performance

Second, the combination of actions or tactics that constitute the contentious performance itself shows that the civic is a contingent outcome, not an inherent property of certain forms of action. While certain actions may be ideal-typical as social movement tactics (strikes, sit-ins) or as civic engagement (voting, volunteering), tactics are modular and adaptable to contexts that differ from that of its original creation (Tarrow 1993). Voting for one’s political representatives and voting for one’s favorite American Idol contestant have fundamentally different consequences, though the action is the same. Thus, the extent to which a performance produces the civic depends upon both the form of the action and the particular context in which it occurs.

The combination of elements that made up ACT II demonstrates how an ordinary leisure activity, like a bike ride, can be adapted to a political purpose. It was a peculiar combination of leisure and politics: While most of the ride was characterized by rituals of body maintenance and celebration of individual athletic feats, organizers distinguished this event from other bike rides by infusing it with continual reminders of HIV/AIDS.

The ride began at a local park with the “Opening Ceremonies,” a public recognition of the importance of the journey upon which participants were about to embark. The assembled riders, friends, family members, and journalists listened to a number of speakers talk about the importance of fighting HIV/AIDS. The speakers praised the dedication of the riders, and there were moments of silence for those with AIDS who had died. The rhetoric, combined with the cheers of bystanders and volunteers as the cyclists slowly and ceremoniously began the 400 mile trek, made me feel as though we were heroes about to embark on a noble quest. The “Closing Ceremonies” at the end of the ride was a similar tribute to the cause.

The emotionally charged atmosphere of the ceremonies contrasted starkly with the sounds that dominated most of the ride: the quiet whir of bicycles tires on pavement, the clicking of chains switching gears, and wind rushing by our ears. There was an eerie quiet that descended on the riders as they pedaled their first mile, as the reality of riding 73 miles on the first day took over. Though riders typically rode in small groups and made conversation with one another during the ride, the major focus of the cyclists during each of the six days of ACT II was on their own bodies: how to move the muscles in one’s legs enough to propel one’s body from one end of the route to the other and how to take in enough calories and water to sustain the energy. Taking care of one’s body also included multiple applications of sunscreen, “butt balm” for saddle soreness, and pills for pain relief. Organizers and support crew consistently reminded riders to drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration and a trip to the hospital (and a potential lawsuit).

The long days in the saddle were punctuated by pit stops every 10 to 15 miles. Each stop was staffed by a crew of volunteers who provided food, beverages, and encouragement in the form of cheering and clapping as riders arrived. At pit stops, riders could rest, chat with one another, and refill their stores of water and energy. At some pit stops, volunteers would provide entertainment for riders. At the afternoon pit stop on the first day, for example, there was a celebratory atmosphere provided by the volunteers, who had organized games with water balloons and a watermelon seed-spitting contest. Thus, during each day, attention was focused on the individual participant and his or her recreational experience.

Overall, with the bicycle riding, the pit stops, the cheering volunteers, and the occasionally festive atmosphere, the event felt like a summer camp. However, mixed in throughout the event were reminders of HIV/AIDS, such as the ubiquitous red ribbons and events that focused on political education. At the public schools where riders spent each night, the after-dinner period in the cafeteria was called “the Evening News,” and it was hosted by a local African American television personality, who used the forum to
talk about issues related to HIV/AIDS. The first two evenings, for example, he addressed the “lily-white” participants, reminding us of the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on minorities and its global impact in Africa. He spoke of his own trip to South Africa to do AIDS education and spoke eloquently about hope for a better future. He reminded us that we were riding our bikes not only for the people of Wisconsin but for people all around the world who are in need of antiretroviral drugs, family planning, and hope. After the Evening News, there were organized evening activities that ranged from the purely fun (e.g., bingo games) to the educational (e.g., a documentary film about Tim’s daily struggles with living with HIV).

Thus, the recreational experience of ACT II was bounded on each end by public ceremonies and punctuated by periodic reminders of the altruistic cause, or as organizers put it, “the reason why we ride.” Though the primary action in the performance was recreational, organizers manipulated the structure and context in which the performance was embedded. It was the combination of political and recreational elements that shows how organizers attempted to produce civic outcomes.

**Symbolic Meaning Making**

Finally, the production of the civic is contingent upon the cultural meanings of the action that are constructed by organizers, participants, and broader publics. The symbolic dimension of political action crucially shapes the outcome of the performance. Social movement scholars have traditionally emphasized framing, discourse, and identity as critical determinants of movement dynamics (Bernstein 1997; Ellingson 1995; Ferree 2003; J. Gamson 1996; W. A. Gamson 1992; Snow et al. 1986). Similarly, civic engagement scholars have emphasized the qualities of talk and deliberation that facilitate or hinder civic participation (Eliasoph 1998; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). The extent to which a given performance results in civic outcomes depends upon the symbolic work done by actors to define the performance as civic.

Much of the work done by organizers and participants to make ACT II a political performance was symbolic. Just as the use of national anthems and flags frames the Olympics as more than a mere athletic contest, so does the use of symbols allow organizers to frame a bike ride as more than a mere leisure opportunity. Symbolic work, the attachment of new meanings to cultural objects or practices that do not inherently carry those meanings, was essential in uniting the recreational and political aspects of ACT II. In particular, organizers used metaphors and symbols invoking the cultural values of fitness, bodily labor, and suffering in order to transform the individual’s participation in the ride into an act of larger, public significance.

First, organizers and volunteers symbolically connected the recreational activity with the public cause by making the ride a metaphor for the struggle against HIV/AIDS. The metaphor appeared in several different forms. In one form, the struggles and suffering that riders experienced on the ride, through the ups and downs and twists and turns, represent the struggles and suffering that people with HIV/AIDS live with daily. The most common way in which this metaphor was invoked was that the uphills and downhills that one encountered during the ride would give the riders some sense, however slight, of what it is like to go through the ups and downs of living with HIV/AIDS. The metaphor centers on narratives of suffering and determination in ways similar to athletes struggling to come to terms with illness (Nettleton and Hardey 2006; Seale 2001).

This metaphor first appeared during orientation, as in Tim’s quote above, and it was invoked throughout the ride in order to draw the connection between HIV/AIDS and the personal difficulties that participants encountered on their bicycles. After the end of ACT II, I got the chance to talk to Tim about the metaphor. I expressed my disbelief that cycling had anything to do with HIV/AIDS. But to my surprise, he emphatically affirmed that the physical challenge of cycling is at least slightly indicative of what it is like to live with HIV. Invoking the steepest, longest hill on the ride, he said,

You can’t *not* climb that hill and tell me there’s no connection about pain and determination, pushing yourself when you think you can’t. I can’t think of a better metaphor for living with HIV than those hills. You go up those hills, you struggle to do it and you think you can’t, but you have to do it
anyway. There’s no way around it. You can’t just sit at the bottom of the hill and cry there. You’ve got to go up it. And then there’s those super-fast downhills, and everything is fucking great. That’s how it is. Ups and downs, and you’ve got to do it. (August 7, 2004)

Other riders reported feeling an emotional connection between physical suffering on the bicycle and the cause of HIV/AIDS. One rider told me about witnessing another rider crying as she struggled to climb a steep hill.  

A second manifestation of the metaphor was that the long and arduous ride itself represented the long and arduous struggle that would be the fight against HIV/AIDS. Just as the riders exhibited persistent determination to finish the 400-mile route, so must we all exhibit persistent determination to win the struggle against HIV/AIDS. On the fourth morning of the ride, as I was climbing on my bicycle, I was struck by the message that another rider, Leslie, had written on two long bandages taped vertically on the back of her calves: “THESE LEGS FIGHT AIDS.” Those four simple words captured the essence of the event. Literally, those legs were not fighting AIDS; they were helping to raise money for an organization that tries to prevent HIV/AIDS. But symbolically, Leslie’s choice to ride those 400 miles was a statement that fighting AIDS was an important cause, worthy of her time, money, and energy.

The apparent spontaneity of Leslie’s actions mimicked the more deliberate efforts of event organizers to send the same message. “Rider Zero” was the central symbol employed by AIDS Network to show the connection between the ride and the larger fight against HIV/AIDS. Rider Zero was a “riderless bike” that represented all of those who could not ride in ACT II because they are too sick or because they have died from AIDS. Initially unveiled at an orientation party (May 22, 2004), Rider Zero appeared each day of the ride—at Opening and Closing Ceremonies and at camp each night after the last riders (“the caboose”) finished the route. Each time Rider Zero appeared was an emotional one. On the fourth day of the ride, I recorded the scene:

As the last riders were coming in, they got huge cheers. A big group of women (and one man) came in shortly before the caboose, riding through a parking lot aisle lined on each side with cheering people—probably 25-30 people on each side. Everyone who came in had the biggest grins and smiles on their faces, as though it was one of the happiest moments of their lives. Many riders pumped their fists in the air or gave high fives as they rode though. The caboose came in to wild cheers . . . It was an incredibly festive moment. Then, like last night, 4 riders walked Rider Zero down the aisle. And as they went, the people on both sides fell in line behind the bike, continuing to walk down the aisle. More and more people were added onto the parade as the bike passed. Watching from a distance as we ate our taco dinners, Chad said to me, “Man, they really know how to create a moment” . . . People were clapping . . . I saw Tim crying. Elizabeth promptly embraced him. I saw others with tears in their eyes, and several more deep embraces. (August 5, 2004)

The recurring procession of the riderless bike, the symbol of the toll that HIV/AIDS has taken on so many lives, was one of the most emotionally moving experiences of the ride. As Chad’s remark illustrates, this was exactly its desired effect. This was no spontaneous occurrence; event organizers planned each appearance of the bicycle, escorted by four deliberately chosen participants, as a tangible reminder of the “real” purpose of the ride. At the same time, it helped make the ride emotionally meaningful for participants.

At the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, the procession of Rider Zero was accompanied by three participants carrying banners, reading “Courage,” “Compassion,” and “Commitment.” During those processions, the moment of silence was given a soundtrack by the mournful sounds of a lone bagpiper playing in the distance and the sniffs and muffled sobs of participants who were presumably thinking about people who had died from AIDS. The ceremonies were skillfully orchestrated by event planners to provoke exactly that emotional reaction from participants. The banners labeled three of the core values in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. Courage and commitment were required from the individual body, both to ride 400
miles and to fight the difficult fight against HIV/AIDS in the social body. Compassion is required for those who are suffering from illness, no matter what its cause.

OUTCOMES AND DISCUSSION

The contingent nature of the civic, as a variable outcome of contentious performances, is thus illustrated by the case of ACT II. There may be nothing civic about a fund-raiser if it fails to raise funds. Neither is a bike ride inherently not civic. Organizers and participants actively produced the civic in the ways that they framed the event as both a fun vacation and a noble fight against HIV/AIDS, combined leisure and political activities in a contentious performance, and deployed cultural objects and practices that semiotically linked cycling with AIDS activism. A theory of civic production requires that we analyze these and other processes through which the civic is produced. This case illustrates how scholars can draw from the rich body of social movement theory to begin to analyze civic production processes.

If the civic refers to outcomes, however, we must also be able to differentiate civic from noncivic outcomes. What are the characteristics of a civic outcome? Social movement scholars have long wrestled with how to conceptualize movement outcomes (Andrews 1997; Diani 1997; W. A. Gamson 1975), and this enterprise portends to be no easier. In the limited space here, I offer the following provisional remarks.

Differentiating civic from noncivic outcomes requires both theoretical and methodological specification. Theoretically, we must first understand the civic as historically and contextually relative: It will vary depending upon the political ideals and structures of a given society. The concept of the civic, traced to its Latin root, *civitas*, has always referred to the rights and responsibilities of the individual with respect to the social body or the polity—although not necessarily a democratic one. It is a historical artifact that academic conceptions of the civic in the West have valorized democracy. The overidentification of civil society with democracy has created a narrative, now the conventional wisdom, that authoritarian societies lack developed civil societies and that they must rediscover them in the transition to a postauthoritarian regime (e.g., Cohen and Arato 1992). However, the historical record documents the existence of both publics and civic practices that support (and oppose) even the most totalitarian regimes (Lipset 1960; Peukert 1987). To define the civic exclusively according to Western democratic standards and (implicitly or explicitly) to deny their existence in other contexts represents an erroneous validation of what Somers (1995a) calls the “metanarrative of Anglo-American citizenship theory” and a failure to recognize the unique cultural roots of our own scientific and philosophical concepts.5

In general, I define the civic as a continuously variable, multidimensional outcome of action characterized by economic, social, political, and/or cultural benefits for some public—that is, actors other than those immediately participating in the performance (Dewey 1988). Each of these four kinds of benefits must be analyzed according to the magnitude of the benefits and harms that are produced and according to the size and composition of the public that is affected. I assume here that any given action produces some mix of positive, negative, and neutral effects for both the actors themselves and for diverse publics and that these dimensions may vary independently.

In the contemporary American context of this study, the civic would be produced *politically* if the performance succeeded in opening the polity to new claims or actors or increasing the power of relatively powerless groups; such outcomes might be measured in a variety of domains, such as feelings of political efficacy, voting rates, or changes to the political opportunity structure. *Culturally*, the civic would be produced if the performance altered the symbolic meanings or status of people or practices in ways that benefit the common good; such outcomes might be measured in mass media coverage of the performances or in opinion surveys about tolerance for certain groups.

In the case of ACT II, there is no strong evidence that significant civic outcomes were produced along either dimension. While some participants felt politically empowered themselves, ACT II did not open the polity to new claims, actors, or forms of citizenship for broader publics. In fact, events like ACT II may represent a political loss for broader publics if they commodify citizenship to the extent that critics have
argued. Culturally, the semiotic association of cycling with combating HIV/AIDS is situational, not enduring; and the cultural trope of combating complex social ills with individual acts of fitness heroism is problematic, if not counterproductive.

However, ACT II did appear to produce significant economic and social benefits for broader publics. Economically, the civic is produced to the extent that the performance brings new financial resources to some population or cause. ACT II succeeded in raising about $275,000, and organizers claimed a return rate of 87.5 percent, much of which was then used for HIV/AIDS social and preventative services. Since 2003, the ACT rides have consistently been the single largest fund-raiser organized by AIDS Network, bringing in between $250,000 and $310,000 in gross revenue (between 16 and 19 percent of total revenue) each year.  

To the extent that revenues from fitness fund-raisers outweigh costs and help stabilize revenue streams in the face of diminishing public support for nonprofit organizations, such events may be considered civic. In general, however, ACT II appears to be an exception in that special events fund-raising is a relatively inefficient form of fund-raising: most special events lose money for the sponsoring organization. A 2007 study by Charity Navigator, an “independent charity evaluator,” found that nonprofit organizations spent $1.33 for every $1.00 raised by a special event, compared with $0.13 spent for each $1.00 raised in total.

Socially, the civic is produced in a given performance to the extent that it generates social capital and identification with some cause or group; existing measurements of social capital (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Paxton 1999) and of social-psychological motivations and outcomes of volunteering (Clary et al. 1998; Grube and Piliavin 2000) are appropriate for this dimension. These may be the most significant outcomes of civic recreation generally, since nonprofit organizations use them to raise awareness and to create social networks and identities in relation to the charitable cause (Freedman and Feldman 1998; Greenfield 2002; Wendroff 1999). As a form of volunteerism, participation in civic recreation can generate social capital and “role identities” in relation to the cause, and nonprofit organizations can utilize the contacts gained through special events to expand its base of support for future actions. Although I do not have reliable data on the extent to which ACT II produced such outcomes, it is likely that the most demanding instances of civic recreation—in terms of time, money, and physical exertion—will be more successful at producing social capital and enduring identification with the cause.

The extent to which recreation or any other form of action results in any social, economic, political, or cultural benefits for some broader public—and thus may earn the name civic—will depend upon the combination of actions in the performance, the processes of micromobilization, cultural meaning making, and a host of other variables. A theory of civic production aims to analyze precisely the ways in which performances produce civic outcomes in certain circumstances and not others. Among the most immediate challenges facing scholars of civic engagement is to refine the theories and measures of civic outcomes and the processes that shape their production.

Finally, a theory of civic production transforms the scholarly debate about civic decline into a question of how contentious repertoires change over time and with what consequences. This area of future research requires attention to both short- and long-term temporal horizons, and the potential parallels with social movement theory are striking. Concerning shorter time periods, civic engagement researchers should investigate the relationship between tactical innovation, modularization and diffusion of tactics, and cycles of collective action, as have social movement scholars (McAdam 1983; Tarrow 1994). What factors lead to tactical innovation and diffusion in the civic repertoire are likely to differ significantly from parallel analyses in social movement scholarship, given the absence of salient opposition groups in much “civic” activity. But given the competition for resources and volunteers among organizations in the nonprofit sector, it is plausible that successful innovations might spur modularization, diffusion, and an increase in the rates of civic participation in a way that resembles contentious protest.

Concerning longer time periods, civic engagement researchers should follow the lead of social movement scholars who study stability and change in contentious repertoires in relation to broader social structural conditions, innovations in claims making, and the openness of the political opportunity structure (Tarrow 1993; Tilly 2008). Accounting for the emergence of fitness fund-raisers in the civic repertoire, especially in
light of the debate about civic decline and the long history of civic recreation, is one notable challenge facing political sociologists. Fitness fund-raisers are an important tactical innovation (McAdam 1983) in what is otherwise a well-established repertoire of mobilization technologies (Oliver and Marwell 1992). Fitness fund-raisers appear to have arisen in the late 1960s and diffused across the nonprofit sector after 1980, during a period of declining federal funding for nonprofit organizations, conservative efforts to weaken the welfare state, and the “fitness revolution.” Given these changes and the rise of the rights-bearing citizen that occurred during this period (Schudson 1998), one would expect just this sort of change in the contentious repertoire (Tilly 2008). But why and how fitness fund-raisers entered the repertoire and diffused throughout the nonprofit sector in the United States in the late twentieth century is unclear, as are its broader implications.

In sum, the theory of civic production aims to complement, rather than supplant, existing theories of the civic. Theories of the civic cannot and should not eliminate considerations of venue, type, or motivation for action; but those considerations must be tempered by a recognition of the porousness of their boundaries and the inherent normativity of the theoretical enterprise. Conceptualizing the civic as a contingent outcome of a contentious performance, produced through various processes in a specific context, is vital for a robust theory of the civic.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers; David Cook-Martin; Matt Desmond; Karla Erickson; Myra Marx Ferree; the members of her writing group; Susan Ferguson; Lew Friedland; Joan Fujimura; Chad Goldberg; Kent McClelland; Pamela Oliver; Jane Piliavin; Adam Slez; members of the Politics, Culture, and Society workshop; and the staff and volunteers at AIDS Network for their invaluable contributions to this piece.

NOTES

1. I take a broad view of what counts as “political.” In this article, the political includes many forms of social action, such as fund-raising and shopping, that do not necessarily have to do with politics per se but that can be implicated in the stratification of power in society.

2. Although contentious is usually taken to mean oppositional or quarrelsome, Tilly (2008) uses the term more expansively to refer to acts of “making claims that bear on someone else’s interests” (p. 5). This need not imply opposition or disagreement; it may simply be about making a statement. For example, volunteering at a soup kitchen might be considered a contentious performance if it is a symbolic claim that food should be redistributed to the less fortunate.

3. I use the phrase civic recreation, despite its being called “special events fund-raising” in the nonprofit sector, because of the framework of political theory in which I am writing. The term special events fund-raising is meaningful to those in the nonprofit sector, who must distinguish among numerous different sources of revenue. For political theorists, the term civic recreation better captures the central idea: that the special event combines both a political cause and recreation in a single activity.

4. Despite the expectations created by the metaphor, I never observed a display of the deeply emotional connection of our physical suffering with the physical suffering due to HIV/AIDS. One HIV-positive participant described the metaphor as “a crock,” insisting that cycling has nothing to do with what life with HIV is like. Whether or not people made the connection emotionally is less important than the way the metaphor served to associate cycling with the cause of fighting HIV/AIDS.

5. This is perhaps a contentious claim, given that much of the current interest in the civic is inspired by the collapse of the Soviet Union and authoritarian regimes in eastern Europe and South America, but all regimes have constituencies of some kind that support the existing social order through various actions. I do not argue that totalitarian regimes foster civil societies and civic practices that are equal to democratic regimes or that they are normatively desirable; rather, my point is that the extent to which the civic is achieved in different circumstances is variable and should not be assumed a priori. In every case, no matter how democratic or authoritarian the society, we must analyze the extent to which the civic is voluntary or coerced and the extent to which it benefits all people or only certain groups.
REFERENCES


**BIO**

Peter Hart-Brinson is an assistant professor of sociology and communication and journalism at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. In addition to his research on everyday forms of political action, he studies social generational change and discourse about same-sex marriage.