The Civic and Political Participation of Collaborative Philanthropists: Evidence from Giving Circles in the United States and United Kingdom

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1. Abstract

This research examines if participation in new forms of philanthropic voluntary association—giving circles—lead to civic and political engagement? Giving circles involve individuals pooling resources to support organizations and individuals of mutual interest. They also include social, educational and engagement opportunities. The research draws on data gathered in the U.S. and the U.K. through surveys of members and past members of giving circles and donors not in giving circles. The findings suggest giving circles have a positive impact on giving, volunteering and civic participation, but much less impact on political participation.

2. Introduction

The New River Valley Change Network, a group of about 12 individuals with varying backgrounds and experiences, meets once a month in members' homes and offices in Blacksburg, Virginia to give away money they contribute to a fund held at the local community foundation. Each member donates about $10 a month or $100 a year. Members decide together, through a consensus decision-making process, where to give their money. The group occasionally invites community experts and activists to their meetings to find out about projects or organizations in need of funding. They prefer to fund small organizations and endeavors that might lead to social change.

BeyondMe started in 2011, facilitating the creation of small teams made up of young professionals; each team is housed at a major businesses or corporation such as Deloitte or KMPG. Members of the team select a charity or social enterprise to support for one year after reviewing brief proposals, often using a "Dragon's Den" or "Shark's Tank" pitch model for the selection, and then, on average, donating £4,000 and 150 volunteer hours to the chosen organization. Teams support a variety of beneficiary organisations that have included helping jobless young offenders, homeless youth, and women who have experienced abuse and sexual exploitation. BeyondMe's growing staff and most teams are based in London.

The groups described above—called giving circles—are examples of a growing movement emerging across the U.S., UK and elsewhere. They are voluntary associations that involve individuals pooling resources to support organizations and individuals of mutual interest. They also include social, educational and engagement opportunities for members, connecting participants to charities, communities, and to one another. While giving circles come in a range of sizes and foci, the key and defining attributes of these groups are that they involve individuals who together decide on support for organizations (and sometimes individuals) through giving money (and sometimes time). They informally or formally educate members about philanthropy, charities, and issues in the community; include a social dimension; engage members in grant making and running the group; and typically maintain independence from any one charity or social enterprise (Eikenberry, 2006, 2009, 2010). Hundreds of giving circles have been identified across the U.S., the UK, and elsewhere (Bearman, 2007; Eikenberry, 2009; Eikenberry & Breeze, 2015; John, Tan, & Ito, 2013; Rockefeller, 2009; Rutnik & Bearman, 2005)

Giving circles represent a transformation in the way ordinary people are attempting to address community problems through giving and volunteering manifested in the "new philanthropy" environment. They demystify the philanthropic process and enable individuals to do something charitable, in their own way

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(Eikenberry, 2009). This is a response to and reflection of larger changes taking place in a society that is increasingly individualized and where traditional federated associations are losing their grassroots natures (Hustinx, 2010; Lorentzen & Hustinx, 2007; Painter & Paxton, 2014).

As the review below describes, debate continues about the degree to which voluntary associations cause greater civic and political engagement or attract people already prone to such engagement. However, the existing research mainly focuses on traditional associations and large-scale data sets that make it difficult to unpack the "conditions needed to encourage people… to develop civic virtues and skills and get involved in politics" (Dekker, 2014, p. 56) and they tend to put little focus on philanthropy, which is inherently a political act but not often acknowledged as such (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2013). This is important because we increasingly look to philanthropy and nongovernmental institutions to address community problems (Henriksen, Rathgeb Smith, & Zimmer, 2012; Pharoah, 2011). Studying giving circles enables us to address some of these issues by asking the question: Does participation in these new forms of philanthropic voluntary association lead members to increase their civic and political engagement? Following previous research (van der Meer & van Ingen, 2009; Keeter et al., 2002), indicators of civic and political engagement include: giving, volunteering, participation in efforts to address problems in the community and change government policy, and participation in other civic and political activities such as voting and contacting public officials. To examine the research question, I draw on data gathered in the U.S. and the U.K. through surveys of members and past members of various types of giving circles and control groups of donors not in giving circles.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: First is an overview of the relevant literature pertaining to the research focus, starting with a discussion of voluntary associations and their relationship to civic and political engagement, then the changing social and philanthropic environment, and finally, about giving circles. Second, an overview of the methodology is outlined. Third, findings are presented, focused on the effect of giving circles on civic and political engagement. The paper ends with discussion and conclusions.

3. **Literature Review**

Voluntary associations have long been viewed as important mechanisms for promoting democracy, often attributed to Alexis de Tocqueville's (1835/2000) observations during his tour of America in the early 19th century. Tocqueville believed that through engagement in voluntary associations, citizens learned civic virtues and skills, participated directly in governance, and improved the quality and equality of representation in governance (Fung, 2003; Lichterman, 2006). Building on Tocqueville's observations, several see voluntary associations as a means for citizens to achieve the virtues necessary for democratic citizenship: trust, moderation, compromise, reciprocity, and skills of democratic discussion and organization (Newton, 1997; Warren, 2001). Almond and Verba (1963/1989), in their comparative analysis of political culture in five countries, showed that voluntary association membership has a positive impact on civic and political competence. Putnam (1993, 2000) also suggested members of voluntary associations display more political sophistication, social trust and civic and political participation than others. Further, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) found voluntary associations of all types provide opportunities for "the acquisition of politically relevant resources and the enhancement of a sense of psychological engagement with politics" (p. 4). They note that even when individuals pursue activities with no direct political content, such as chairing a committee to arrange a fundraising event, they have opportunities to develop organizational and communication skills that are relevant for politics and learn to tolerate and to deal with diverging opinions. McLeod et al. (1996) contend voluntary associations can provide exposure to political cues, social contact, and recruitment networks that facilitate civic and political participation and Musick and Wilson (2008) write that engagement in voluntary associations can make people more aware of what is happening in their community and the structural nature of social problems and the need for political solutions.

Many have questioned and tested the validity of these claims and the degree of cause and effect between voluntary association membership and civic and political participation (e.g. Decker, 2014; Dekker & van den Broek 1998; Howard and Gilbert 2008; Jeong 2013; Newton & Montero 2007; Parry et al. 1992; Schultz & Bailer 2012; van

der Meer and van Ingen 2009; van Deth 1997), generally finding positive relationships with some exceptions and variations by level and length of participation and type of association. In particular, there is disagreement in the literature on the importance of intensity of participation and connection to civic and political participation. Putnam (1993, 2000), for example, highlighted the importance of active (face-to-face) versus passive (check-writing) involvement in associations' impact on social capital and participation. Others have found intensity to have little or no significant effect (Almond & Verba, 1963/1989; van der Meer & van Ingen, 2009; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Wollebæk & Selle, 2003). However, Wollebæk and Selle (2003) found in relation to social capital a cumulative effect of participation when the member belongs to several associations simultaneously.

There is also debate about the *socialization* effect of voluntary associations—that associations make citizens civically and politically active—versus a *selection* effect—that certain personality traits stimulate citizens to join voluntary associations and engage in political activities at the same time, without a causal relation between the two (Armingeon, 2007). van der Meer and van Ingen (2009) found, based on their study of 17 European countries, the additional effects of *active* participation were marginal and the correlation between associational involvement and political action was not explained by the accumulation of civic skills and civic mindedness through the association. The conclusion they reached is that "voluntary associations are not the schools of democracy they are proclaimed to be, but rather *pools* of democracy" (p. 281, emphasis added); that is, "voluntary associations do not make citizens politically active, but bring politically active citizens together" (p. 303). Dekker (2014) surmised based on his analyses of more than a dozen countries' voluntary association participation data that for some people, involvement in voluntary associations and voluntary work are stepping stones towards politics, while for others it offers an opportunity of doing something for the community *without* getting involved in politics (see also Eliasoph, 1998). In other words, participation in associations has different effects depending on the person. Thus, within the literature on the connection between voluntary associations and civic and political participation, there is need for more work to "unpack the conditions" that lead people to get involved in community affairs and politics (Dekker, 2014, p. 56).

The research looking at the connections between voluntary association and civic and political participation nearly all rely on large quantitative data sets and do little to account for societal shifts and changes in participation in traditional social structures. Scholars suggest we are in the midst of a social transformation from "collectivistic" to "individualistic" and "institutionalized" to "self-organized" (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003, p. 168). Social relations have changed from being close to loose, permanent to provisional, and thorough to superficial (Gundelach & Torpe, 1996, p. 12). Beck describes society as increasingly characterized by the dissolution of traditional parameters and "variation and differentiation of lifestyles and forms of life, opposing the thinking behind the traditional categories of large-group societies…" (in Ellison, 1997, pp. 711-712). In this context, traditional "voluntary associations have become optional" (Gundelach & Torpe, 1996, p. 13) and indeed active membership in such associations, at least in the U.S, appears to be in decline (Painter & Paxton, 2014; Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003).

Scholars have documented the growing use of informal, self-organized and decentralized initiatives in recent decades. The emergence of small, self-help support groups and peer-to-peer sharing (e.g. Archibald, 2007; Borkman, Karlsson, Munn-Giddings, & Smith, 2005; Schor, 2014; Wuthnow, 1994) as well as "network associations"—looser, more informal, and personal forms of association (Fung, 2003; Gundelach & Torpe, 1996; Wuthnow, 1998)—are, according to Wuthnow (1994), rooted in a breakdown of traditional support structures— neighborhoods and family—but in a continuing desire for community; they have "emerged as a serious effort to combat forces of fragmentation and anonymity in our society" (p. 40). Within these types of small and informal associations, engagement is directed toward concrete problem solving in everyday life more so than the performance of government institutions or large-scale bureaucracy. Individuals want (or have) to cope with day-to-day problems on their own terms and in their own way; they are not interested in engagement that is full-time and for life as did previous generations (Bang & Sorensen, 1999; Macduff, 2005; van der Pennen & Schreuders, 2014). Wuthnow (1998) writes "instead of cultivating lifelong ties with their neighbors, or joining organizations that

reward faithful long-term service, people come together around specific needs and to work on projects that have definite objectives" (p. 8).

Giving circles are indicative of this trend in shifting organizational structures and desire for more hands-on, member-directed engagement. A study of giving circles in the U.S. (Eikenberry, 2006) showed that many are formed of small groups and loose networks and giving through the giving circle is seen by participants as a much more proactive approach to philanthropy than has traditionally been the case. One of the most-often cited reasons people say they join giving circles is the chance to become more engaged in the giving process—to be doing more than just writing a check and also interacting directly with nonprofit organizations. Some also say they appreciate the simple, nonbureaucratic nature of the giving circle—it's fun, and a chance to be social "while doing good" (Eikenberry, 2010; Eikenberry & Breeze, 2015).

But what do these new forms of association mean for engaging individuals in civic and political areas? Based on interviews and document analysis, Eikenberry (2009) found giving circles generally provide opportunities for democratic participation within the group—they provide opportunities for agenda setting, decision-making and face-to-face deliberative discourse—and they also build the capacities of members through education about voluntary organizations, community issues and philanthropy. However, they may be limited in expanding political participation and addressing larger social outcomes. The question addressed in this current research is: Do giving circles—as new and emerging forms of philanthropic voluntary associations— increase civic and political engagement for members?

4. Methodology

The study gathered data primarily through surveys of giving circle members and control groups of donors not in giving circles in the U.S. and UK.

A survey was administered first in the U.S. and sought to understand if and how participation in a giving circle has changed members' behavior related to giving, volunteering, and civic and political engagement. In addition, it asked if and how participation in a giving circle changed members' awareness or knowledge about philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and community issues. Finally, we wanted to know if and how participation in a giving circle changed members' perceptions or attitudes about philanthropy, community issues, government and nonprofit roles and responsibilities, and political and social values. The UK survey updated and revised the U.S. version to address cultural differences as well as improve its usefulness for the giving circles that participated in the survey, while also trying to maintain questions that could be used for comparison across countries. The data reported below focuses on the findings related to civic and political behaviors.[i]

4.1. Sample

The U.S. survey was constructed and administered via paper and internet between November 2007 and April 2008.[ii] The sample included 26 giving circles, drawn from the Forum of Regional Association of Grantmakers' giving circle database, consisting of giving circles that represented various types and sizes and identity groups (e.g. women, African-American, young professionals) in order to get a broad cross-section of data. The giving circles in the sample also represented a range in terms of years of existence and geographic locations.[iii] In choosing this sample, we also took into consideration earlier studies that have been published on particular giving circles.[iv] Giving circle members and past members were recruited through giving circle leadership in each giving circle in the sample. The control group included a random sample of donors to a University Foundation supplemented with a non-random sample of public administration graduate students and alumni.

The UK survey was administered online between April 2014 and February 2015. Seven giving circles or networks of circles participated in the study, including those representing a diversity of types of giving circles in the UK, with an oversampling of young philanthropist groups. It was reflective of the broader landscape of giving circles in the UK since young philanthropist groups account for the largest number of circles and participants. The

control group was made up of a UK university's donors or of people who said they were just starting with a giving circle (a member for less than one month).

4.2. Respondents

For the U.S., surveys were sent to approximately 890 giving circle members and 938 individuals in the control group—a total of 1,828 people.[v] The overall response rate was estimated to be 37%. The response rate was 48% for giving circle members and 23% for the control group. Giving circle respondents in the U.S. sample were significantly more likely to be female, from diverse racial/ethnic groups, and older on average compared to the control group. In addition, giving circle members attended religious services significantly less frequently on average than the control group. Regarding political orientation, giving circle members were more significantly likely to describe themselves as liberal or middle-of-the-road compared to the control group. Finally, there was a large difference between giving circle members and the control group in the amount they say their households donated to charity over the past year. The mean for giving circle members was $7,682 compared to $4,945 for the control group. This difference was statistically significant. However, the average annual family income of giving circle members was also significantly higher than the control group: around $106,500 compared to around $90,000. There was no significant difference between giving circle members and the control group for educational level, years living in current community, marital status, and number of children.

For the UK survey, about 4,184 people were emailed the survey link (through contacts at each giving circle or network) and 507 people answered part or all of the survey—an overall response rate of 12.1%. Ultimately, there were 359 useable responses—201 giving group respondents and 158 control group respondents. The demographic characteristics of the UK giving circle and control group respondents were largely similar except for a few areas: giving circle respondents were significantly more likely to be 30 to 39 years-old, say they found it "difficult to get by on present income," and to be married. They were significantly less likely to be male, from an Asian ethnicity, retired, living in the Southeast of England, living in their community less than one year, and single. There were no significant differences for mean age, ranges in income, education or religious attendance. The UK survey did not include a question about political orientation.

4.3. Variables

Dependent variables included in the survey to measure civic and political engagement included the following (drawing on guidance from van der Meer & van Ingen, 2009; Keeter et al., 2002):
- **Giving**: measured by asking all respondents for their best estimate of the total amount they contributed during the past 12 months (U.S.) or month (U.K.). Giving circle members were also asked about the degree to which their giving had changed due to the giving circle.
- **Volunteering**: measured by asking all respondents for their best estimate of the total amount they had volunteered during the past month (U.K.). Giving circle members in the U.S. and U.K. were also asked about the degree to which the amount of time they volunteer changed due to the giving circle.
- **Efforts to address problems in the community**: measured by asking giving circle members about the degree to which their participation in efforts to address problems in the community changed due to the giving circle.
- **Efforts to change government policy**: measured by asking giving circle members about the degree to which their participation in efforts to change government policies at the local, national or international levels changed due to the giving circle.
- **Participation in civic and political activities**: measured by asking all respondents if they had participated in certain activities during the past year such as: working with others to solve a problem in the community; voting; talking to others about an election or campaign; signing a petition about a social or political issue; and other items noted in more detail below.

The above dependent variables were examine in relation to influence from four independent variables:

- **If a respondent had participated in a giving circle**: measured by asking all respondents if they belonged to a giving circle or giving group, defined in the U.S. survey as "a group of individuals who pool money and other resources and decide together where to give these away. This does not include donor recognition programs that nonprofit organizations use to honor donors." It was defined in the UK survey as: "A giving group involves individuals collectively donating money and/or time to support charitable organizations, projects or individuals. Participants in the group typically have input on how funding or other support is spent and often participate in discussions and social and educational events about philanthropy and the charitable sector."
- **Level of participation within the giving circle**: measured by asking giving circle members about the degree to which they had participated in certain activities within a giving circle in the past 12 months (U.S.) or had participated in as part of the giving group (UK), such as taking part in deciding who received funding, going on site visits, volunteering with a funding recipient; doing research, or holding leadership position(s).
- **Number of giving circles**: measured by asking giving circle members how many giving circles they currently belong to (U.S) or number of giving groups they had participated in the past five years (UK).
- **Length of time participating in a giving circle**: measured by asking giving circle members how long they had been a member of a giving circle (U.S.) or had participated in the giving group (UK). If a respondent indicated being in more than one giving circle, they were asked to answer based on the giving circle they had participated in the longest.

4.4. Analysis

To analyze the survey data, after cleaning and formatting, frequencies and percentages were calculated for all items and means were calculated when applicable. Descriptive statistics were created based on all respondents, comparing giving group respondents to control group respondents, and comparing across giving groups. Crosstabs were then created using SPSS Custom Tables for questions that contained at least one nominal response field. t-tests were performed to determine whether means were statistically significantly different between the giving circle and control group responses. Pearson Correlation was calculated to measure the strength of the relationship between level of engagement and dependent variables. The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences between continuous numeric variables, as was the case with length of engagement and number of giving circles, and dependent variables.

5. **Findings**

The findings below present data from surveys to examine the impact of participation in giving circles on members' civic and political engagement (see a summary of the results in Table 1).

5.3. Giving

People in giving circles in the U.S. donated more on an annual basis than people who were not in giving circles. The mean for giving circle members was $7,681, compared to $4,944 for the control group. This difference was statistically significant. However, because the average annual family income of giving circle members was also higher than the control group, there was no statistically significant difference for average household contributions between these two groups when controlling for income. Nonetheless, two-thirds (67%) of giving circle members indicated the total amount they contributed each year had increased due to giving circle participation. Kahn (2007)

and Moody (2008) had similar findings with their studies of Social Venture Partners. This may mean, then, that giving circle members said giving increased when it did not, the increased amount was not big enough to make a statistically significant difference, or they gave less before and are now more like the control group.

In the UK, giving circle respondents gave *significantly* more per month on average than the control group (£253 vs. £108 per month), even when controlling for income. This difference, however, is largely due to giving by those with household incomes of £75,001 or above, where giving group respondents gave significantly more than control group respondents, on average £353 compared to £103 per month. Nonetheless, three-quarter (77%) of giving circle participants said the giving group caused them to increase or substantially increase the amount they give each year. Similarly, reports on impact done by UK-based The Funding Network (TFN) in 2012 found that 66% of TFN members said they give more to charity as a result of their participation in TFN.

Table 1: Giving Circle Impact on Civic and Political Engagement—U.S. & U.K.

	Giving Circle Members Compared to Control Group		Level of Engagement in Giving Circle		Length of Engagement in Giving Circle		Number of Giving Circles Participated	
	t	p-value	r	p-value	F	p-value	F	p-value
Amount of household giving								
U.S. – per year	2.52	.006*	0.0381	.490	0.186	.028*	0.205	.0002**
U.K. – per month	2.374	.018*	0.059	.442	2.109	.067	1.272	.283
Amount of Volunteering								
U.S. – per year	NA	NA	0.360	.000*	0.1701	.0022*	0.1093	.0504
U.K. – per month	1.619	.107	0.276	.001**	7.243	.000*	1.114	.331
Participation to Address Problems in the Community								
U.S.	NA	NA	0.251	.000*	0.1323	.0168*	0.0443	.4259
U.K.	NA	NA	0.220	.008**	1.114	.356	0.163	.850
Involvement in Changing Government Policy								
U.S.	NA	NA	0.281	.000*	0.0644	.2480	0.1605	.0038*
U.K.	NA	NA	0.041	.626	0.642	.668	0.350	.705
Civic & Political Activities								
U.S.	5.78	.000*	0.2505	.000*	0.3316	.000*	0.0783	.1707
U.K.	1.954	.052	0.172	.022*	4.872	.000*	7.160	.001*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

We further examined the effect of giving circle participation on members' giving by looking at association with level and length of engagement in the group, and number of groups in which members engaged. The findings for the U.S. show levels of engagement within the giving circle were not significantly associated with total amount contributed. However, total contributions significantly increased as the length of time in the giving circle increased, even when accounting for income. In addition, people in more than one giving circle donated significantly more than other members, with an average of $13,400 compared to $6,834 for members in one giving circle and $4,945 for people in no giving circles. The association between number of giving circle memberships and the total amount given was highly significant and remained so when controlling for income. This suggests, then, that given enough time or participation in several groups, giving circles influence members to give more. However, in the UK, amount given per month was not significantly associated with level or length of engagement, nor number of giving groups in which a member participated.

5.4. Volunteering

In the U.S., a little fewer than half (46%) of giving circle members reported that participation in a giving circle increased the amount of time they volunteered due the giving circle. Thus, it may be that for some, there is

an impact on increasing volunteering but for many they were already active before joining the group. Studies of SVP found that 63% to 68% of respondents noted an increase in their volunteerism after joining SVP (Kahn, 2007; Moody, 2008). This higher amount might be explained by the fact that SVP focuses much more on member volunteering than many other giving circles. It may also be that volunteering increases with engagement level and over time.

In the UK, while giving circle members did volunteer on average at a higher rate per month than the control group respondents (7.15 vs 6.30 hours per month), there was no significant difference between giving circle members and the control group. In addition, only 43% of giving circle respondents said the giving group helped to increase or substantially increase the amount of time they volunteer each year. The impact report on TFN done in 2012 also found that 29% of respondents said they volunteered more or had become a trustee to an organisation they had met through TFN.

The U.S. and U.K. data show members' were more likely to say their total time volunteering significantly increased as their level of engagement and length of participation in a giving circle increased. They also said their volunteer time increased as participation in number of giving circles increased, but the association was not significant for either country. Thus, overall, while people may already come to the giving circle having already been active as a volunteer, as they are more involved in the giving circle and for a longer period of time, they seem to increase their rate of volunteering.

5.5. Participation in Efforts to Address Problems in the Community

Two-thirds (64%) of U.S. giving circle members said the giving circle led them to increase their participation in efforts to address problems in the community. In the UK, 53% said the giving group caused them to increase or substantially increase their participation in efforts to address problems in the community while 47% said participation had not changed in this area. As level of engagement and length of engagement increased, U.S. giving circle respondents were significantly more likely to say they increased their participation in efforts to address problems in the community. This increased for number of giving circles as well, but it was not significant. In the U.K., giving circle respondents were significantly more likely to say they increased their participation in efforts to address problems in the community as their level of engagement in the giving circle increased. There was no significant association when it came to length of engagement or number of giving groups. It seems in this area, then, level of engagement in both countries, and length of engagement in the U.S. have some kind of effect on increasing members' participation on addressing problems in the community.

5.6. Involvement in Efforts to Change Government Policy

Only one-third (34%) of U.S. giving circle respondents said they increased their involvement in changing government policy due to the giving circle; however, as level of engagement within the giving circle increased and number of giving circles increased, respondents were significantly more likely to say they increased their participation in efforts to address problems in the community. There was also a positive but not significant association between length of participation and involvement in changing government policy. In the UK, only 14% of giving group respondents said the giving group caused them to increase or substantially increase their involvement in changing government policies. There was no significant association when it came to level or length of engagement, or number of giving groups. In this area, giving circles seem to have little effect in members' participation in changing government policy; although in the U.S. these efforts do seem to increase with level of engagement in the giving circle and when participating in multiple giving circles.

5.7. Civic and Political Activities

In both surveys, we created an index to show degree of overall civic and political engagement based on a number of activities in which people might participate (there were a total of 14 activities in the U.S. survey and a

total of 9 in the UK survey).[vi] The index average for U.S. giving circle members was 8.8 compared with 7.3 for the control group. This difference was statistically significant. However, further analysis showed that only some income groups showed a statistically significant difference between giving circle and control group respondents: incomes of $25,000 to $34,999 and $50,000 to $149,999. SVPI also found in their survey of partners that 70% of respondents indicated SVP had some, significant, or a primary impact on their community involvement as well (Kahn, 2007). In the U.K., the index average was 4.2 for giving circle members and 3.8 for the control group. The difference was not significant. The only significant difference was that a higher portion of giving group respondents indicated they had worked together with someone or a group to discuss or address a problem in the community.

Furthermore, in the U.S., as level of engagement in the giving circle increased, so did the civic and political engagement index significantly increased. The survey also showed that length of time in a giving circle and number of giving groups were positively but insignificantly associated with the index of civic and political engagement. In the UK, the civic and political activities was significantly higher as level of engagement in the giving circle, length of engagement in the giving circle, and number of giving groups increased. This suggests then that level of engagement in the giving circle may especially have an effect on increasing other types of civic and political engagement.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In this study, we set out to understand if giving circles—as new and emerging forms of philanthropic voluntary associations in the U.S.—increase civic and political engagement for members and if level and length of engagement in a giving circle make a difference in increasing civic and political engagement. We cannot say definitely what the *causal* relationship is between participation in a giving circle and civic and political engagement; however, the findings show that:

- amount of giving increases significantly with length of engagement and number of giving circles in the U.S.
- amount of volunteering significantly increases with level of engagement and length of engagement in both countries.
- participation in addressing problems in the community due to the giving circle or group significantly increases with level of engagement in both countries and length of engagement in the U.S.
- involvement in changing government policy due to the giving circle or group significantly increases with level of engagement and number of giving circles in the U.S.
- participation in various civic and political activities are positively associated with being in a giving circle, and these significantly increase with level and length of engagement in both countries and with number of giving groups in the UK.

Overall, level and length of engagement in the giving circle seem to have a largely significant effect on most areas, except for involvement in changing government policy.

The findings on the relationship between participation in these voluntary associations and civic and political participation, then, seems to align the findings from previous studies on this relationship—that it is positive. It also finds that impact varies by areas (Dekker, 2014). What does this say about the debate about voluntary associations as schools or pools of democracy? In general, in line with Putnam (1993, 2000) and Wollebæk and Selle (2003), the findings indicate that more active engagement (measured in this study by level and length of engagement in the giving circle and number of giving circles) can make a difference in impact on level of civic and political engagement. That is, active and sustained participation in the association seem to have greatest impact on civic and political engagement, supporting a "schools" thesis. Yet, the data also show that impact varies by member and some people indicated they are already highly engaged civically and politically in various activities and the giving circle provides another opportunity for them to extend this engagement, supporting the "pools" or "selection" thesis (Armingeon, 2007; van der Meer & van Ingen, 2009).

This study also provides insight into the effect of newer types of voluntary associations emerging in the today's environment. As opposed to traditional, more bureaucratic voluntary associations, giving circles tend to be less formal smaller groups and looser networks. The findings indicate that these structures lead to a positive impact on civic and political engagement; perhaps more so for giving, volunteering and participation in efforts to address problems in the community, and various civic and political activities; less so on changing government policy. This suggests, in line with Davies (2014), that a choice doesn't have to necessarily be made between individualized action (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003)/Everyday Making (Bang & Sorensen, 2009) and more broad-based systemic change. But, future research will need to examine more closely what particular *aspects* of participation in the giving circle might lead to increased civic and political participation.

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[i] See a copy of the U.S. survey here: https://www.academia.edu/12175637/The_Impact_of_Giving_Together_Full_Report. For a copy of the UK survey, go to: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0D7zXPukqEQbHliY2EzNkRjNjQ/view?usp=sharing.

[ii] Except for one question that was inadvertently dropped from the web-based version of the survey, questions in both formats were identical.

[iii] Giving circles in the sample ranged from a year or less in operations to the oldest group starting in 2001. They were located in various locations across the U.S.

[iv] For instance, Social Venture Partners has already done extensive research on its membership and so a good deal of data is available on this giving circle model. We also thought it was important to try to include more diverse groups beyond those examined in earlier studies (which were mainly white, women's groups).

[v] This number is based on what was reported to us by the lead member of each group, who distributed the surveys for us.

[vi] Civic engagement indicators were created based on the index used by CIRCLE: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: http://www.civicyouth.org/practitioners/Core_Indicators_Page.htm#1. These include: working with others to solve a problem in the community; volunteering; belonging to a group or association; donating money; voting; talking to others about an election or campaign; contacting public officials; contacting a media outlet to express an opinion on a social or political issue; protest, march or demonstrate; sign a petition about a social or political issue; and either buy something or not buy something because of the social or political values of a company. The UK survey used a revised and trimmed down version that included: Took part in a protest, march, or demonstration; Contacted a newspaper or other media to express your opinion about a political or social issue; Helped raise money for a charitable cause; Contacted or visited a public or elected official to express your opinion; Belonged to a voluntary group or association, either locally or nationally. (For example trade union, professional association, political or social group, sports or youth group); Signed a petition about a political or social issue; Voted in a local, national, or European election; Worked together with someone or a group to discuss or address a problem in the community; Bought or not bought something because of the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it.