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Jane Addams' Forgotten Legacy: Recreation and Sport

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The intersection of social work and sport have a rich, yet largely undocumented history. In the early days of the profession, one of its founders, Jane Addams, in addition to many roles, served her community as a defacto athletic director. This commentary provides an historical overview discussing the intersection of social work in sport-based environments and community practice with American immigrants. Highlighted are details concerning populations served, the physical spaces created for sport and recreation, and the program influences generated by Addams. The author's intent is to provide an impetus to expand the profession of social work in sport-based environments, carrying on the legacy of early social work.

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Contemporary social work scholars have urged professional social workers to engage in work with athletes (Dean & Rowan, 2014; Gill, 2008; Hanna, 1993; Moore, 2015). However, little has been documented regarding the history of the intersection between social work, recreation, and sport within social work literature (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2000). After a review of journal and newspaper articles and books from other disciplines, one can observe that social work made notable contributions to development of recreation and sport in the United States. In addition, recreation and sport did much to advance the social work profession in a community-practice oriented context. Social work pioneer, Jane Addams, spearheaded the role of social work in recreation and sport (Azzarito, Solomon, & Monroe, 2004; Riess, 1991, 1998). Addams facilitated programs that emphasized free play and physically vigorous activity on playgrounds and gymnasiums (Gems, Borish, & Pfister, 2008, 2017). There is also evidence Addams sponsored a plethora of sports programs in which young immigrants participated in athletic competitions at the Hull House community center and throughout the city of Chicago (Addams, 1910; Gems, Borish, & Pfister, 2008; Glowacki & Hendry, 2004; Riess, 1991). This paper explores Addams' efforts at the Hull House, the populations served, the physical spaces where such interventions took place, and the programs which emerged from early social work recreation and sport-based interventions.

People, physical spaces, and programs simultaneously impacted who was served by recreation and sport at Hull House. Recreation and sport programming represented a divergent path to reach the vulnerable immigrants of her time. Prior social work intervention efforts from other pioneers such as Mary Richmond (1917) relied more on the medical model and case management. Richmond and the charity organizational movement's approach to social welfare was reticent to engage immigrants (Reisch, 2009). However, there were some commonalities. Within the context of both Richmond and Addams, social work has relied upon the person-in-environment perspective to shape its service delivery (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The person-in-environment perspective has been expanded by Kondrat (2002), whose structuration theory argued that the person and the environment are equally influential and recursive. Accordingly, Addams sport-based interventions facilitated interactions between people, physical spaces, and programs to address social issues of the American city and immigrant.

Hull House, which was part of the larger settlement house movement and founded by Addams was situated in the middle of ethnic neighborhoods, Addams geared much of her work towards integrating these citizens into American society (Addams, 1910; Gems, Borish, & Pfister, 2008, 2017). Youth participation in community activities allowed both Addams and Hull House to reap mutual benefits. Recreation and sport program was viewed as a pathway for children to participate in wholesome activities away from street gangs and inner city troubles (Addams, 1910; Azzarito, Solomon, & Munro, 2004; Vincent, 1994). In her own writing, Addams (1910) remarked that sport and recreation could "guard from disaster these young people who walk so carelessly on the edge of the pit" (p. 351). Hull House's recreation and sport efforts extended beyond the walls of Hull House. As documented in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1906, Hull House hosted a panel of speakers to address truancy where it was suggested that truancy could be reduced through increasing the presence of playgrounds and places for children to play ("Give Causes of Truancy", 1906). This is just one example of programming that

influenced social work and represented a shift in priorities from individual casework to more community-based interventions (Reisch, 2009).

Before establishing Hull House in the late 1880s, Addams spent time overseas learning about social work interventions. Addams was often inspired by what she witnessed in London at Toynbee Hall. In 1884, while at Toynbee Hall, she witnessed an effective community center which addressed the needs of marginalized residents (Begum, 2012). Addams adapted ideas from Toynbee Hall to Chicago and utilized her social position to advance the common good of immigrants. During her time at Toynbee, Addams also interfaced with Pierre de Coubertin, who founded the modern Olympic movement. Important at Toynbee Hall was the availability of recreational programming (Begum, 2012). Lessons learned in London were carried by Addams to Chicago.

There is evidence to support Addams engaging young people in a plethora of recreation and sport programs at Hull House. Saturdays represented the pinnacle of competitive activities for the Hull House Boys Club. The Hull House Boys Club had approximately 1,500 members who embraced the recreational and sport-based competitions opportunities at Hull House which included, but were not limited to billiards, bowling, and gymnastics as documented by Addams (1910). The Hull House gymnasium opened in 1893 and as early as 1896, Hull House sponsored both girls and boys basketball teams (Schwendener, 2001). Scholars too have noted that Hull House developed an extensive basketball program that competed with some of the top athletic clubs in the city. Basketball founder, Dr. James Naismith, remarked that basketball at Hull House had magnetic appeal because of the sport's instrumental role in keeping young people off of the streets (Vincent, 1994). The Hull House also sponsored an indoor baseball team for men that played against another city team ("Hull House Men's Club Organized", 1893). Other examples of sporting programs with larger social aims included boxing. A 1932 article in *The Chicago Tribune*, highlighted how Hull House served as a training facility of a boxing program for homeless boys. The program sought to use boxing as a tool to lift young men out of poverty ("Jobless Boys Punch Their Troubles Away", 1932, p. A). These brief snippets are examples of the range of recreation and sport programs offered at Hull House.

Populations Served

Reaching a new crop of Americans was timely for Hull House. From 1880–1920, over 25 million immigrants entered the United States (Caplow, Hicks, & Wattenberg, 2009). Arriving from eastern and southern Europe and hoping to experience increased economic prosperity and political participation, they often lived on the margins as ethnic and religious minorities. During the early arrival in American cities, immigrants served by Hull House were largely confined to impoverished ghettos and unsafe environments of industrial cities. Education scholars lacked favorable outlooks for the immigrant. "Illiterate, docile, lacking in self-reliance and initiative, and not possessing the Anglo-teutonic conceptions of law, order, and government, their coming has served to dilute tremendously our national stock, and to corrupt our civic life" (Cubberley, 1909, p. 15). Cubberley (1909) also held that immigrants' attachment to their native country led them to maintain the same customs of their homeland in the new world and refuse to assimilate. Hull House recreation and sport programs welcomed those on the margins.

Hull House sought the opportunity to reach all in Addams' community, regardless of ethnicity or race. The neighborhoods surrounding Hull House had a population of around 70,000 residents and 18 major ethnic groups at its founding (Gems, Borish & Pfister, 2017). Addams

(1910) wrote, “It seemed to me that Hull-House ought to be able to devise some educational enterprise, which should build a bridge between European and American experiences in such wise as to give them both more meaning and a sense of relation” (p. 236). Through sport and recreation programs provided by social workers, youth could mitigate truancy and getting into trouble (Gems, Borish, and Pfister, 2008, 2017). Despite much supervision, recreational spaces did not always mitigate trouble.

Cultural forces within immigrant groups also impacted the reach of recreation and sport at Hull House. The Hull House playground at times was a site of turf wars. An article in *The Chicago Tribune* stated, “For occasionally rivalry over swings waxes hot, or international difficulties arise between the sons of Italy and Ireland which demand the arbitration of the law” (“Tots in gay frolic,” 1894, p. 16). In certain cultural contexts, there was much resistance to sport among adults, yet children were enthralled with sport. Riess (1998) noted that adults were unfamiliar with sport because of a lack of exposure to it in their home country. In addition, adults often thought of sport as a waste of time for not generating income nor reinforcing their particular religious teaching. Certain sporting activities though gained acceptance because they advanced cultural goals of ethnic groups in their new home. As documented by Riess (1998) boxing and prizefighting were particularly popular among Jewish residents, because they were perceived to be practical skills for young men, and were ways to prove their “bravery and manliness, protect the honor of their ethnicity, and counter old stereotypes that were meek and cowardly” (Riess, 1998, p. 66).

Addams also commented upon the influence of sport upon Greek children served by Hull House. Greek children, in the estimation of Addams (1910), had a particular affinity for the military drill and wrestling activities at Hull House. Wrestling allowed them to maintain a relationship with popular sports in their native country. Greek children also eagerly participated in military drill activities in the gymnasium. There were cultural objections to such activities, but despite her anti-war positions, Addams (1910) supported wrestling and military drill training. Addams supported assumptions in the Greek community that enlisting in the military for Greeks would be a necessity if conflict emerged in their native country (Addams, 1910).

Physical Spaces for Sport and Recreation

Addams worked tirelessly to create physical spaces such as gymnasiums, parks, and playgrounds, as she felt they were expressions of recreation and education being extended to immigrants (Addams, 1910). Addams worked in partnership with health scholars and community planners who recognized that the health and wellbeing of children was being compromised by inner city conditions. The creation of these spaces generated much enthusiasm, especially for young people in the community. The *Chicago Sunday Tribune* (1895) described the opening of the Hull House playground as follows:

A wild scene of delight accompanied the opening of Hull House playground yesterday. Long before the hour of festivities to begin, the streets were filled with an eager, clamorous throng of youngsters...some of the boys attempted to scale the fence, but three policemen kept them down. Finally, one boy conceived the idea of digging a hole under the fence, and in a jiffy, by dint of squeezing, half a dozen were inside and tackled the swings. (“Opens in jolly romp: Throngs of children besiege the Hull House playground,” 1895, p. 1)

Program Influences

Addams felt settlement houses had to do more than create spaces for recreation (Addams, 1910). At Hull House, she orchestrated recreation and sport programs, managed staff who supervised these programs, and provided financial support and resources to facilitate these interventions. Children, in Addams estimation, discovered themselves through the physical vigor and fellowship “which athletics apparently afford more easily than anything else” (Addams, 1910, p. 442). Addams’ work went beyond the playground as she participated in efforts to expand recreation and sport offerings in the United States (Gems, Borish, & Pfister, 2008, 2017; Riess, 1991). As a result of the work in Chicago and established partnerships, Addams emerged as a leader in the national playground movement. Through Addams playground advocacy work, she shared her concerns about the welfare of children with nationally renowned physicians Henry Curtis and Luther Gulick. They would collaborate to form the Playground Association of America (PAA), which aimed to advance a national movement to use sport as a way to advance the civic and moral development of children (Gems, Borish, & Pfister, 2017). Curtis received his training at the YMCA and Gulick would later spur the development of the New York City Police Athletic League. Addams also relied heavily upon University of Chicago philosopher, John Dewey, who served on the Hull House board and advocated for “learning by doing” environments for children (Gems, Borish, & Pfister, 2017). Spurred by the PAA, during the first decade of the 1900s, the number of cities nationwide with publicly funded recreation facilities expanded from ten to over 500 (Riess, 1991) and the number of parks nationwide rose to over 4,000 (Azzarito, Solomon, & Munro, 2004).

Addams’ colleagues would later expand physical education and sport offerings to schools, especially as immigrants moved from the cities and into suburbs in the 1920’s. One particular Hull House employee involved in this effort was Rose Marie Gyles. She served as the Hull House gymnasium director at its opening in 1893 and introduced women’s team competitions in gymnastics and basketball around the turn of the century (Schwendener, 2001). In order to further the reach of sport, she later would become a physical education teacher at Morton High School in suburban Berwyn, IL. Gyles remained at Morton for many years and gained a reputation for not only expanding physical facilities for sport beyond the gymnasium, she also greatly expanded the sport offerings to all students at the school. Even while employed at Morton, Gyles maintained a residence at Hull House and taught evening classes to Hull House community members. In addition to reaching schools, Addams advocated for integrating recreational program training into early social work professional curriculums.

Early social work professional training incorporated recreational and sport-based programmatic training. Addams was a board member and instructor at the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy. The 1918 curriculum bulletin describes a certificate program for social work professionals who sought to work in recreational settings (Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, 1918). Technical aspects of sports (similar to the role of a modern coach) were taught at Hull House and students were required to serve in settlement houses and recreation centers throughout the city. Participants in these courses were expected to gain skills facilitating recreational programs that were simultaneously educational and enjoyable and reinforced the skills of caring for children. Students were taught to understand not just how to work children, but also stressed were the technical skills involved in running sport programs. In addition, “They (social work professionals) must be trained so as to be conscious of the responsibilities of the community toward the care of the dependent and delinquent children, toward victims of

industrial injustice, the immigrant, and all who suffer from social maladjustment” (Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, 1918, p.17). Educating social workers in sport, in the early days of social work, had an important mission that sought to reach beyond the gymnasium, park, and playground.

Implications for the Social Work Profession

Social work provides an important framework and impetus for intervention to serve vulnerable participants through sport and recreational activities. Debates continue concerning the proper way to demonstrate how sport and recreation enhances well-being remain an important topic. Scholars such as Hartmann (2003) have too provided a contemporary framework for sport as an intervention tool. Modern examples of such programming where social work professionals and schools have a strong presence include LiFE Sports at The Ohio State University, the Youth Impact Program at the University of Michigan, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and both the YMCA and YWCA. Social work scholars too have offered a blue print for youth athletic programming aimed at promoting positive youth development (Anderson-Butcher, Riley, Iachini, Wade-Mdivanian, Davis, 2011; Anderson-Butcher, Riley, Iachini, Wade-Mdivanian, Davis, Reynolds, 2016).

Drawing upon the historical activities and professional values outlined in this commentary, it is the author’s hope that a burgeoning social work movement, which connects social work and sport, will continue to grow. Dean & Rowan (2014), Gill (2008), Hanna (1993), and Lawson & Anderson-Butcher (2000), suggested that social work had a unique skill set applicable to sport-based settings. As demonstrated in this historical overview, social work professionals have a robust history in the context of recreation and sport. As arguably social work’s first female director, Addams brought recreation and sport to marginalized immigrants and recognized how recreation and sport brought people together and can function as a powerful social institution, which impacts both individuals and communities (McGerr, 2003). Recreation and sport programs were an expression of how Addams incorporated the person in environment perspective to address challenges in her community. People, physical places, and programs had mutual influence upon the well-being of those served by recreation and sport programming at Hull House.

Through sport and recreation, social work opened doors to meet community needs and advanced the goals of the profession. Through more scholarly work in this area, social work has the potential to affirm its role in modern recreation and sport programs. At present, the National Alliance of Social Workers in Sports is creating a movement to advocate for athletes and assert the role of social work in athletics. Perhaps recognition of the important intersection of social work and sport can motivate both scholars and practitioners to further explore and validate future interventions. Looking backward can inspire practitioners to advance a renewed agenda extending the early work of Addams.

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