

The Effects of Youth Organizations on High School Graduation

William P. Williams

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Ellsworth Fuhrman, Co-Chair

Michael Hughes, Co-Chair

Jill Kiecolt

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(ABSTRACT)

Organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts of America, church groups, community recreation sports, high school sports, and other youth organizations provide educational, recreational, and social interaction opportunities for many adolescents in the United States. As sociologists we can ask, what kind of impact do they have on participants? The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of participation in one or more of these youth organizations on completing high school. Previous research is lacking in this specific area, though there is research that addresses other positive aspects, and some negative, of these organizations. The hypothesis of this study is that youth who participate in extracurricular activities or youth organizations have a greater likelihood of graduating from high school than those who do not participate in extracurricular activities. The data were taken from the National Longitudinal Survey. A logistical regression was conducted to see if there is an association between participation in these youth organizations and high school graduation.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	Introduction	1
Chapter 2	Section 1: The Review of the Literature	3
	The Extent of Dropping Out of School and Possible Consequences	3
	Predictors for People Who Drop Out	4
	Effects of Participating in Youth Organizations	7
	Explanation of Effects of Youth Organizations	12
	Section 2: Formation of Objectives	15
Chapter 3	Methods	16
Chapter 4	Results	20
Chapter 5	Discussion	30
Chapter 6	Conclusion	35
References		38
Vita		

List of Tables

Table 1	Means and Standard Deviations for Variables	21
Table 2	Estimated Odds Ratios of Control Variables for Predicting High School Graduation	22
Table 3	Estimated Odds Ratios of Control Variables for Predicting High School Graduation	23
Table 4	Estimated Odds Ratio for Organization Category (Number of Activities Participated In) With Control Variables and With Significant Activities	25
Table 5	Estimated Odds Ratios for Activities With Controls for Blacks and Whites	26
Table 6	Estimated Odds Ratio for Black and White Cases With Controls and Organization Categories and Also With Significant Activities	28
Table 7	Estimated Odds Ratios for Activities and Controls for Parents' Education	29
Table 8	Estimated Odds Ratios for Parents' Education of 12 Years or Less and More Than 12 Years Cases With Controls and Organization Categories and Also With Significant Activities	31

Chapter 1 Introduction

The end of spring brings flowers, proms, awards ceremonies, and high school graduation. Graduation from high school is an occasion that most people enjoy and remember for a lifetime. Each year, at class reunions, people gather together and rekindle old friendships and revive the experiences they shared at an earlier stage of their lives. Most people in the United States graduate from high school, but many do not. Graduation from high school allows one the opportunity to pursue various routes such as college, vocational school, or work. Without a high school diploma a person is left with limited choices.

There are several reasons why people quit school without graduating, but what keeps people in school? Do people stay in school to better their chances of a decent income? Do they stay in school because their parents require it of them? Is there nothing better to do? Are teenagers afraid of work? Do extra curricular activities help keep students in school, or is it something outside of school that keeps them interested in staying in school? What about membership and involvement in groups such as the Boy Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts of America, or other organizations, or participation in sports? Do these organizations help promote graduation from high school?

There are as many possibilities as to why students drop out of high school, as there are reasons why they may stay and graduate. The teenage years seem to be the worst possible time to enclose several people together to read poetry, multiply fractions, read about a bunch of dead people, watch fruit flies mate, and develop an appreciation for being physically fit. These requirements and tasks could possibly justify the decision to drop out to some. Others may discover the advantages of having one's own income and choose to pursue further hours of employment instead of an education. Still others may find the demands of taking care of their parents, siblings, or other family members encroaching on their educational opportunities. Some may even choose what they believe is a life of leisure. Others may not have the parental support that it sometimes takes to stay in school. Understanding why students drop out of high school may be difficult since it is no longer the norm.

Graduating from high school used to be something that only a small part of the population accomplished. In 1950, 50% of students entering the first grade subsequently graduated from high school. The authors do not report whether the cut-off for this measure was 2, 3, 4, or more years. By 1980, 75% of all citizens age 18 to 19 were high school graduates (Bickel et al. 1988). These rates have since reversed as the "dropout rate nationally began rising soon after it reached its low point of 25%" (Bickel et al. 1988). The data used in the present study shows a 70% high school graduation rate, which is on time graduation and not those who received a GED. With this increase in the national dropout rate there is a need to find a way to help increase the number of people graduating from high school. The purpose of this study is to see if participation in extracurricular activities and youth organizations increases the chance that a youth might graduate from high school.

There are two arguments for the importance of research on the impact of youth organizations on dropout rates. First, it makes a unique contribution. There is little research on these organizations' impact on a youth's decision to complete a high school diploma. Other studies look at ways these organizations help socialize youth, but their influence on an individual's decision to graduate from high school is rarely, if ever, addressed.

Second, research on whether these youth organizations increase the chance that a youth will graduate from high school has some very practical implications. First, if these organizations do have an impact, then further research could be undertaken to discover how these organizations influence youth. Second, if there is a positive relationship between membership in one of these organizations and high school graduation, we can identify geographical areas where there are high dropout rates and encourage the establishment or continuation of one, or more, of these organizations in that area. Another possible implication of this research is that it involves a significant portion of the population. As these organizations consistently have many members, it would be beneficial to know some of the advantages of belonging to one of these organizations. In 1988, 1.2 million boys and girls were served by the Boys' and Girls' Clubs of America (Schmaltz 1988) and in 1982, more than 20 million young men and women were part of scouting organizations (Austere 1985). Finally, if membership in these

organizations increases one's chances of graduating from high school we give additional leverage to these organizations in their pursuit of financial support.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature:

The Extent of Dropping Out of School and Possible Consequences

One of the major issues plaguing schools today is that of students dropping out of school. Not only does this phenomenon affect schools, but it affects communities, families, and the individual. Having once taught high school in a community where students could drop out of school and go to work making \$10 to \$20 an hour, I have seen some of the results. These students believe that their income is substantial, and it is, but they overlook the fact that they have no health care, no job security, and limited chance for advancement. High pregnancy rates among teenagers make the lack of health care a major issue for this community. Lack of job security is evident when there is a layoff, and some of the students attempt to reenter the educational system. Lack of advancement opportunities is less noticeable to these eager-to-earn individuals. The U.S. Bureau of Census (1985) shows that dropout rates have fallen over the past forty years for people age 25 to 29 (Wells 1990). In *Keeping Students in School* (1987), Margaret Orr asserts that for the past twenty years dropout rates have remained unchanged. No matter what the dropout rate, there should be great concern when students do not graduate.

Our concern as a society should be to try to keep these individuals in school. The educator Eliot Wigginton, in his book *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience*, laments that:

...of the seventeen million students in junior and senior high schools in 1980, it was predicted, based on past experience, that over four million would not graduate. Four million. That's twice the size of Atlanta, Georgia-and Atlanta's a big town. Of those who graduate, it was predicted that over half would not go on to any form of higher education. In other words, the school systems of this country were poised in 1980 to have their last shot at about ten million of those seventeen million students. Sure, many of those will go through some type of employee training program or some sort of instruction in the armed services, and many of them will do fine without us (Col. Harlan Sanders dropped out of public school in the sixth grade), but their exposure to much of the subject matter that public schools offer, except in cursory ways, ends with us.

The people who drop out miss their chance for an education, but why can't the schools do something about this growing problem?

It is no secret that schools do more than just educate children, so why should we expect schools to be the only institution to shoulder the burden of lowering dropout rates when it is an issue for our entire society? Research shows that schools should not be the only institution attempting to address this crisis, but schools can accept some of the responsibility. In their study, "Secondary School Tracking and Educational Inequality: Compensation, Reinforcement, or Neutrality," Adam Gamoran and Robert Mare examine the effects of high school tracking on various groups of individuals. They find that graduation rates of those placed in the college-track are "10 percentage points higher than for non-college-track students" (Gamoran and Mare 1989:1172). As the authors state, "all students would be more likely to graduate if they enrolled in the college track" (Gamoran 1989). Maybe schools could use this information to their advantage, and place more students in the college-track, or they could encourage more research into why the college-track generates more graduates and transfer that information to the broader education system.

Predictors for People Who Drop Out

It appears obvious that graduating from high school is more beneficial than dropping out. In one study it is reported that "high school graduates earned \$60 a week more than those who quit" (Natriello 6). Because of the practicality of staying in school, the various reasons adolescents give for dropping out, and some of the demographics associated with those who drop out, it is less accurate to say that those who drop out only do so because, 'They're lazy,' 'Kids drop out because they don't fit in,' 'They're all on drugs,' '...having babies,' '...hanging out,' and so forth" (6).

Research demonstrates that there are certain demographic features that are more salient with respect to who drops out, and that there are also some possible explanations for why adolescents drop out. Southern high schools "have half the holding power of northern high schools", and black rates of dropping out are "40 percent higher than white rates while

Hispanic rates are 250 percent higher than white rates” (7). Whether attracted by the lure of having money, which can negatively impact an already precarious situation for at-risk individuals, or the need to aid in their family’s financial situation, “work-related reasons for leaving school are cited by 21 percent of the boys and 9 percent of the girls.” In addition, “both males and females are more likely to drop out if they work longer hours” (6). Females tend to drop out more frequently than males for family reasons. One study shows that 2.7 million young women dropped out of American high schools between 1979 and 1982. The study points out that “one million of that group did so for family reasons: 45 percent left because they were pregnant, 37 percent because they got married, 18 percent because of home care responsibilities, especially for siblings” (6). Beyond these demographics and explanations there are also ways that schools can “push out” adolescents.

“Pushouts” are defined as those whom the school failed to teach (Natriello 1987:5).

“Pushouts could even be taken further to mean that those who were placed in the “at-risk” group by the school system. One way schools place individuals in the “at-risk” group is by placing them in the vocational track. It has been noted that, “Vocational programs have a higher dropout rate than academic programs” (Natriello 1987:4). Schools also may increase the likelihood that individuals will drop out of school is by retaining them; “being retained one grade increases the risk of dropping out later by 40-50 percent, two grades by 90 percent” (Natriello 1987:4). The track in which a student is placed and whether they are retained can greatly effect how that student experiences school. This experience can determine whether a person drops out, as one study demonstrates, where “fifty-one percent of male but only 33 percent of females who drop out do so because they ‘dislike school’” (Natriello 1987:4-5). Schools can make a difference in the way adolescents experience their education, but more is needed to correct this problem of dropping out.

We can expect the education system to do its part in conquering this problem, but we must also consider the fact that this is a societal issue. Robert Bickel, in his article "Opportunity and High School Completion," examines some reasons people may choose to drop out of high school. Bickel believes that some students’ decisions to dropout could be a rational

decision based on "a response to an imbalance between rising costs of staying in school and declining returns for that investment of time, effort, and deference" (Bickel 1989). Based on his findings, Bickel believes, "it is unrealistic to expect schools alone to achieve more than limited success in reducing dropout rates" (Bickel 1989). Before we look at which institutions should be dealing with dropout rates we need to look at what is needed by these individuals that are dropping out of high school.

Several studies examine what is lacking in the individual who drops out. There is strong evidence that shows how one views oneself is an important factor in whether or not a person drops out of school. In *Alternatives to Delinquency*, the Boys' Club of America explores some of the needs of children, by examining *Delinquency Prevention Through Youth Development*, a publication put out by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in which they describe "four especially significant components of legitimate identity." These components are:

- (1) a sense of competence, being able to do something well, particularly in relation to work and play;
- (2) a sense of usefulness, an opportunity to do something of value for people, such as community service, taking care of family or work;
- (3) a sense of belonging, in the family, in school, in a Boys' Club and other settings where an individual knows he has a place, where he knows he "fits," and
- (4) a sense of influence, wanting to be heard, listened to and cared about

(Boys' Club of America 1975, p. 8).

If these needs are not fulfilled the child or adolescent will experience poor self-concept and low self-esteem which are characteristics dropouts tend to possess; also, "they feel they have less control over their lives than do other students" (Wells 1990). Various types of instruments have been developed that identify at-risk students. Several of these instruments have been developed in places such as: Los Angeles, California; Pontiac, Michigan; and Granville, North Carolina. Several of these instruments have as criteria for being considered at-risk such characteristics as: lack of social interaction, lack of motivation, poor self-concept, and lack of participation in extracurricular and other activities (Wells 1990). If schools are not expected to deal with this crisis on their own, then what do we need?

One possibility for dealing with this crisis is to find other associations that children and adolescents can be involved with that can provide the tools they need that will keep them in school. In their book, *Youth Participation for Early Adolescents: Learning and Serving in the Community*, Joan Schine and Diane Harrington state,

Youth Participation offers numerous possibilities for meeting the specific needs of early adolescents. Programs of Youth Participation allow young adolescents opportunities to make significant decisions, to try out new roles, to test new skills, to form new moral and ethical attitudes and opinions, and to experience the consequences of their decisions in the "real" world.

(Schine and Harrington 1982 p. 15)

Hechinger (1992) also believes that youth participation is a valuable experience; he asserts, "What is obvious today is that youth organizations are no longer a luxury. Without them, large numbers of adolescents could fall into traps of dangerous and harmful behavior" (1992 p. 191). In his study of sixth through twelfth-graders from "single-parent homes, or in families with a history of abuse or parental addiction," Hechinger found that, "those who participated in religious organizations, extracurricular school activities, or community clubs and youth organizations were significantly less likely to engage in at-risk behavior" (Hechinger 1992). What this research seems to be saying is that youth who are at-risk, and I would include potential dropouts in this category, need to participate in some form of organization or activity, and that if these groups provide a positive self image, positive self-concept, and seek and encourage participation these youth will have less likelihood of dropping out of school.

Effects of Participation in Youth Organizations

Activities that could meet the needs of potential dropouts include the Boy Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts of America, church youth groups, sports teams, and other extracurricular activities. The research on these groups is somewhat limited, and research on the impact that these organizations have on graduation rates is practically non-existent. Research "on after-school activities has focused primarily on organized youth sports", and, "scholars have differed dramatically over the socializing influences of such adult-dominated activities, with some emphasizing the positive dimensions and others fearing its outcomes" (Adler and Adler

1998:99). Some people believe that various activities run by adults, such as sports teams, lose sight of the children's goals and instead attempt to satisfy the adults' own needs for recognition (226). In contrast, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts have patrol systems, which allow youth the opportunity to take on some responsibility, and thereby keeping the leaders and adult organizers aware of the goals of the younger participants. As Lord Baden-Powell pointed out in reference to the Boy Scouts, "The main objective of the patrol system is to give real responsibility to as many boys as possible." He goes on to state, "It leads each boy to see that he has some individual responsibility for the good of his patrol" (Parenti 1993). The research on these different organizations moves beyond looking at whether the youth participants' or coaches' goals are being met.

A great many youth participate in high school sports; one study puts the number of participants for the 1989-1990 school year at 3.40 million (Melnick 1992). With this many youth involved in sports there should be at least some interest in the effects of this type of participation. Some research on sports participation suggests, "that there are some immediate social and academic benefits associated with participation in high school sports that should not go unnoticed" (Melnick 1992). One such positive outcome is that sports participation deters delinquency (Spreitzer 370). One study, that relates directly to the topic at hand, shows that, "athletic participation was significantly related to lower dropout rates for two of the six gender/school location subgroups, namely, Hispanic males in suburban schools and Hispanic females in rural schools" (Melnick 1992). Various positive outcomes of participating in youth sports can at some point be transformed into negative outcomes due to the interference of others.

Some studies show that sports and other activities provide opportunities for perseverance and that it "is an essential element of serious leisure because it results in pride and a sense of achievement" (Siegenthaler 1997). These studies also point out that, "when perseverance is demanded by a coach or parent rather than practiced willingly by the child, the benefits decrease". When this "forced perseverance" occurs, the youth participating in the sport may view what they are doing as work rather than an enjoyable activity. This decline in the

benefits of perseverance, which is brought about by the excessive demands of the coach, is only one example of the negative outcomes which some of these organizations provide.

Though little research has found negative effects of participating in sports, some research shows there is little or no effect of participating in sports. The assumption is that sports participation “builds character, discipline, self-esteem, and other achievement-related qualities and results in deferred gratification,” however, “the social scientific literature provides little support for this conventional wisdom; in fact, it has often been noted that sports can develop characters as well as character” (Spreitzer 1994). One would tend to believe that due to the focus on fitness of most types of athletic participation there would be less of a tendency of those who participate to engage in behavior that can be physically harmful, however, one study shows “that athletic participation is generally a weaker predictor of alcohol consumption than are the other demographic and social psychological variables” (Spreitzer 1994). Youth sports are just one of the possible activities that youth may participate in during their adolescent years, and scouting is another.

Scouting research tends to focus more on the Boy Scouts than on the Girl Scouts. The recent research on the Boy Scouts finds both negative and positive effects of scouting. Scouting reaches a wide range of individuals. There are 4.15 million members in the Boy Scouts of America and 1.1 million adult volunteers. Approximately "half of all American boys try Cub Scouting and about one in five becomes a Boy Scout" (Donohue 1994). A study of scouting in inner cities is an excellent example of what scouting can do; Mark Parenti, author of "Scouts 'n the Hood" states, "Scout leaders are taking many children out of the city for the first time and teaching them how to pitch a tent and cook over a open fire. The Boy Scouts gives these boys- many abandoned by their fathers- their first lessons in self-discipline, loyalty, and personal honor" (Parenti 1993). These inner-city scouts, and the numerous other scouts, share their membership in Scouting with presidents John F. Kennedy and Gerald Ford, about 60 percent of members of Congress, and more than 100 of the 172 astronauts selected since 1959 (1993).

Scouting offers various opportunities to develop a positive self-concept. As was pointed out earlier, scout troops are broken down into different patrols that develop troop activities. Scouting founder, Lord Baden-Powell believed, "The main object of the patrol system is to give real responsibility to as many boys as possible" (1993). This appears to be one way of building a youth's self-concept. Another could be to show positive role models. A Scout troop in Harlem invites graduate students and businessmen to talk to the scouts with the objective being "to show the scouts that drug dealing and crime are not what happens to every black person in America" (1993).

The Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts both have laws, which they expect their members to follow. Part of the Girl Scout law reads, "I will do my best to show respect for myself and others through my words and actions" (Auster 1985). This law requires members to articulate that they will strive to have a positive self-concept. Scouting seems to attempt to develop a positive self-concept within its members; however, some research investigates aspects of scouting that are not that flattering to the organizations.

In his article "Culture Wars Against the Boy Scouts" William Donohue (1994) addresses the major critiques of the Boy Scouts of America. The Boy Scouts have been under fire for their exclusion of homosexuals, atheists, and girls, for several years, and this seems to be the major focus of much written about the Boy Scouts today. In his article Donohue points out that the Boy Scouts of America is a private organization and not a "public accommodation", which would prohibit the organization from discriminating on the basis of sex or religion (1994). Some studies tend to examine the Boy Scouts as a mechanism of coercion. Some researchers believe that "General Robert Baden-Powell founded the Boy Scouts in the hope of developing docile workers and soldiers" (Magrass 1986). A similar view is that Scouting "and similar institutions, are designed to prepare individuals to accept authority" (1986). These topics do have their place in the literature; however, there is still a need for something that will help discourage students from quitting school. Scouting may be that something. The Boys' and Girls' Clubs of America could be another alternative.

The Boys' and Girls' Clubs of America offer a refuge for children who are considered "at-risk." The "Boys' and Girls' Clubs provide a nonschool atmosphere where youths voluntarily congregate for athletic activities, games, and interaction with positive adult role models. The organization, which according to its motto is 'the Club that beats the streets,' has traditionally served disadvantaged youths" (St. Pierre et al. 1992). The "Boys' and Girls' Clubs of America reports that 51 percent of its membership consists of minorities, and 66 percent are classified as low income" (Hechinger 1992). In their study "Drug Prevention in a Community Setting: A Longitudinal Study of the Relative Effectiveness of a Three-Year Primary Prevention Program in Boys' & Girls' Clubs Across the Nation," St. Pierre et al. (1992) gathered information from the Boys' and Girls' Clubs that showed that "members' families had higher than national average percentages of welfare recipients (37%), female-headed households (44%), unemployment (18%), and incomes below the poverty level (36%)." The Boys' and Girls' Clubs seem to provide support to at-risk youth, who also are at-risk for dropping out of school. In St. Pierre et al., the researchers found that the effectiveness of the prevention program in the Clubs provided "encouraging empirical support for offering prevention programming in community youth-serving organizations" (1992). In the early seventies, the Boys' and Girls' Clubs set forth to develop objectives to make their program more effective. One of the strategies that they developed was to "be strong spokesmen for youth and address ourselves to those dysfunctional systems and conditions in our community that impede the development of youth" (Boys Club 1975). Besides trying to fix systems within the community they also believe that they are "in a key position to provide leadership in their communities", and they believe that,

Most Clubs are strategically located to serve the most stressful neighborhoods and boys (and of course now girls) of greatest need. Their open-door policy, low dues and fees, and basic acceptance of all boys (and now girls) as unique human beings, places them in the forefront as an organization offering love, encouragement and a place for opportunity.

(Boys' Club 1975:9).

Boys' and Girls' Clubs are geographically located in areas that tend to have youth who are at-risk, and who in turn have a greater than normal likelihood of dropping out of high school. Because of where these Clubs are located, and because of the need for adolescents to have

positive self-concepts, and the need for adolescents to engage in activities, the Boys' and Girls' Clubs seem to offer an activity, along with Scouting, that will provide a positive self-concept and increase the likelihood that an individual will stay in school.

Explanations of Effects of Youth Organizations

A possible explanation as to why organizations that youth participate in may keep them from dropping out of high school can be found in Mead's (1934) work on the self. Mead believed that, "the organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called 'the generalized other'" (154). This "generalized other" allows the individual "to develop a self in the fullest sense," but this must be done not only by taking the attitudes "of other human individuals toward himself and one another," but by taking "their attitudes toward the various phases or aspects of the common social activity or set of social undertakings in which, as members of an organized society or social group, they are all engaged". These "phases" or "aspects of the common social activity" or "set of social undertakings" can include graduating from high school.

In taking on the attitudes of others towards "various phases or aspects of the common social activity or set of social undertakings" youth will develop shared values and goals, thus connecting them to a larger community. In later adolescence, loyalty and commitment become more observed "often replacing the importance of shared activities, especially among working-class youth" (Corsaro and Eder 1995:435). This loyalty and commitment can be directed towards the shared values and goals of adolescents. Organizations like the Boy Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts of America, the Boys and Girls Clubs, 4-H, and other youth organizations can foster and help develop values and goals, and loyalty and commitment towards those values and goals. Research (Corsaro and Eder 1995:442) shows that being involved in several activities at the high school level "is more likely to bring high status than participation in a single activity", but even by being involved in just one activity "many students gain a sense of being part of a meaningful social group and develop new social competencies." It is very likely that educational attainment can be of value to a

“meaningful social group” or the outcome of the development of certain “social competencies”, which can find their place in various aspects of our society.

The “generalized other” is developed through various after school activities, which can impact the individual in different ways. Adler and Adler (1998), in their research on extracurricular activities, found that these organizations help “socialize young people to the corporate work values of American culture”, what they call the “corporate other” (309). They also believe that after school activities “are instrumental in defining the developing identities of participating youth”. They also point out that “the child’s self becomes differentiated and integrated through play”. In the process of being integrated the child internalizes the goals and values of the organization. These goals and values may include the completion of high school.

Besides taking on the “corporate other”, through activities and organizations youth are provided with opportunities that are not always found in the traditional classroom. In their study of "The Educational and Personal Consequences of Adolescent Employment," Schoenhals, Tienda, and Schneider (1998) found that there have been blue ribbon commissions that believed that early employment experience provided youth with the chance “to work with adults, to exercise responsibility, and to learn skills not taught in school (including cooperation)” (Schoenhals, Tienda, and Schneider 1998:725). Youth organizations and activities also provide these things. Scout masters, coaches, directors, and other leaders provide youth with ample opportunity to work with adults. As mentioned earlier, patrols in the scouting organizations provide opportunities for youth to take on various levels of responsibility (Parenti 1993). And, youth learn skills that are not normally taught in schools when they participate in these organizations.

Even though scouting, sports, and other activities that youth participate in may lead them to graduate from high school, there may be a difference in the effect these organizations have on youth graduating from high school. As was noted, there is somewhat conflicting research on all these organizations; however, the research seems less conflicting as to the impact scouting

has on youth. There seems to be fewer questions as to the effects of scouting as compared to the effects of sports. In my opinion, without any data to support it, one possible explanation for this could be that scouting provides more structure and a creed, oath, law, or something to follow.

As mentioned earlier, The Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts both have laws, oaths, and rules, which they expect their members to follow. The Boy Scout oath requires boys to state, "On my honor I will do my best to God and my country..." while the Girl Scout law reads, "I will do my best to show respect for myself and others through my words and actions" (Auster 1985). These oaths and laws require certain behaviors from the youth that participate in the organizations that utilize them, and they require the youth to hold themselves accountable. Because these organizations and activities have these laws or oaths, they may contribute to the likelihood of participants graduating even more than those organizations without laws or oaths.

Another possible reason there may be a difference in the effect of these organizations is that scouting, 4H, and others, as opposed to sports teams, require more responsibility from their members. As was mentioned earlier, one of the positive outcomes of adolescent employment is that it allows the adolescent to "exercise responsibility" and take on the role of the "corporate other" (Schoenhals 1998). The 4H club also requires responsibility when participants are taking care of livestock for various fairs and presentations. Also discussed earlier was the fact that Lord Baden-Powell believed, "The main object of the patrol system is to give real responsibility to as many boys as possible" (Parenti 1993). This combined with the fact that some believe that the Boy Scouts were founded "in the hope of developing docile workers and soldiers", or that Scouting "and similar institutions, are designed to prepare individuals to accept authority" (Magrass 1986) could demonstrate that the Boy Scouts, and possibly other similar organizations, do require a certain amount of responsibility, whether perceived positively or negatively. The responsibility required from these organizations could influence whether individuals graduate.

Formation of Objectives:

As the literature illustrates, high school dropout rates have remained the same for some time; however, dropout rates should be as low as possible. The literature also shows that individuals, mainly adolescents, have certain needs that must be met. If these needs are not met, especially in "at-risk" youths, these individuals may drop out of school. Youth organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts of America, church youth groups, community recreational sports, high school sports, and other extracurricular activities can possibly meet various needs of "at-risk" individuals. If these organizations are able to meet these needs the individuals may be able to stay in school and eventually graduate. This research explores the relationship between participation in these organizations and high school dropout rates.

In the course of this research a positivist approach was utilized. The purpose of this research was to see if participation in various types of youth organizations and activities influences graduation rates. Even though this study is from a positivist perspective it is possible to view it as also being applied, if only because the information gathered from this study can be used to decrease dropout rates. The objectivity of the evaluation of association is yet another reason to view this research as positivist research.

Besides being positivist, this research is also explanatory and presents the relationship between the variables with little elucidation as to why participation in a youth organization leads an individual to graduate from high school. If an association were found between the variables a call for further research would be appropriate in order to uncover key factors in influencing youth to stay in school.

The null hypothesis is:

There is no relationship between belonging to youth organizations and graduation from high school.

The hypothesized relationship is:

Individuals who are involved in youth organizations or extracurricular activities, during their high school years, have a greater likelihood of graduating from high school than those who are not involved in such organizations. Some variables such as race, gender, school curriculum/track, or class, defined by parents' education level, may have an effect on whether or not an individual graduates from high school. These variables were controlled in the analysis, and it was believed that even after controlling for these variables there would still be a relationship between participation in youth activities and high school graduation.

The second hypothesis is:

If a relationship does appear to exist between participation in a youth organization or extracurricular activity and high school graduation there would be a difference in the effect that scouting organizations, 4H, and church groups have on high school graduation as compared to the effect sports participation has on high school graduation. In effect, those individuals who do not participate in any activities or organizations will have the lowest high school graduation rates, those who participate in sports will have higher graduation rates, and finally, those who participate in scouting, 4H, and church groups, which all have some kind of creed, motto, law, or oath, will have the highest graduation rates.

Chapter 3 Description of Methods:

The data set used for this research is from The National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) (Center for Human Resource Research The Ohio State University 1995). The Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, sponsors this secondary source of data. The NLS has gathered information at various points in time on five groups of American men and women. Each of the groups consists of 5,000 or more members. The group of data that this research is concerned with is the information found in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). The year in which there seemed to be adequate data for measuring the variable of youth participation is 1984; however, other years were utilized in order to obtain other variables.

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth “is a nationally representative sample of 12,686 young men and women who were 14 to 22 years of age when they were first surveyed in 1979” (Center for Human Resource Research The Ohio State University 1995:11). From 1979 through 1994 the NLSY respondents were interviewed. Data was gathered from all periods of time in the 1979-1994 span. Since the data for youth participation was most available for 1984, that date was also used as a cut off for the measure of graduation from high school*.

The dependent variable for this research was operationalized as “Graduation from High School”. There was one indicator of my dependent variable. Those who have graduated were coded “1”. All others were coded “0”. Within the NLSY several questions throughout the various years ask about high school graduation. One such question is, “Does R have high school diploma or equivalent?” Because the survey began in 1979 when respondents who were 14 to 18 had probably not graduated from high school, I focused my attention on graduation data from 1984, when all respondents would have had the opportunity to graduate from high school.

The independent variable was operationalized as “Participation in Youth Organization”. Respondents were told to look at a card containing “vocational or industrial organizations and clubs” and to tell the interviewer which they belonged to while in high school. The respondent was then shown another card with “other types of organizations” on it and told to tell the interviewer, which of those organizations they belonged to (Center for Human Resource Research The Ohio State University 1995: Deck 7). There are several questions on the NLSY that have to do with the activities that the respondent participated in that were either school related or outside of school; therefore, the independent variable will have multiple indicators. Participation in any of the activities were coded as “1”, and all others were coded as “0”. The following questions were treated as variables that fall under the heading “Participation in Youth Organization”:

* In this analysis there will be those who are 14 and will be 19 at the time of measurement for high school graduation and those all the way up to 22 at the beginning of the analysis who will be 27 when the measurement takes place for high school graduation.

Participated in High School Vocational Clubs- American Industrial Arts Association

Participated in High School Vocational Clubs- Distributive Education Clubs of America

Participated in High School Vocational Clubs- Future Business Leaders of America

Participated in High School Vocational Clubs- Future Farmers of America

Participated in High School Vocational Clubs- Future Homemakers of America

Participated in High School Vocational Clubs- Home Economics Related Occupations

Participated in High School Vocational Clubs- Health Occupations Student Association

Participated in High School Vocational Clubs- Office Education Association

Participated in High School Vocational Clubs- Vocations Industrial Club of America

Participated in High School Vocational Clubs- Other

Participated in Other Type of High School Clubs- Community Youth Organization (The hand card for this question read, "Please look at this card and tell me which of these other types of organizations you belonged to when you were in high school. Community youth organization such as Scouts, Y, Junior Achievement.)

Participated in Other Type of High School Clubs- School Sponsored Hobby or Subject Matter Clubs such as Photography, History

Participated in Other Type of High School Clubs- Student Council, Government

Participated in Other Type of High School Clubs- Staff of Year Books, School Newspapers, Magazines

Participated in Other Type of High School Clubs- Athletics, Cheerleading, Pep Clubs

Participated in Other Type of High School Clubs- Performing Arts, including Band, Drama, Orchestra

Participated in Other Type of High School Clubs- National Honor Society, Scholastic Achievement Club

Participated in Other Type of High School Clubs- Other

Because there may have been a spurious relationship between the variables, I controlled for other variables in the equation. One variable that I controlled for was the sex of the respondent. Males were coded as "0" and females were coded as "1". Another variable that I controlled was the education level of the parents. Parents' education level was labeled either

Some High School, High School (either twelve years of school or graduated from high school), Some College (between twelve and sixteen years of education), and College (sixteen years of education or more). These labels were determined by the highest number of years of education of the parent with the most education, or only one parent's education level in cases where there is only one parent. Other variables to control for, and that are available in the data are race of respondent, income level of the respondent's family, and high school curriculum track. For race blacks were coded as "1" and whites and Hispanics as "0" and then Hispanics were coded as "1" and whites and blacks as "0". The average of the family income of the respondent while they were in high school created the income variable. The income category was then broken into five categories so that the different income levels could be controlled. High school curriculum track was determined and categorized so that it could also be controlled. All of these variables could influence both whether or not the respondent participated in youth organizations and whether or not they graduated from high school.

In my analysis I used logistic regression. High school graduation was the log odds of a dichotomy and the independent and control variables were dichotomies and multicategory dummy variables. The logistic regression is similar to a linear, additive multiple regression equation, in that the odds ratio indicates by how much the log of the dependent variable's (high school graduation) odds change when the corresponding independent variable changes by one unit (Bohrstedt and Knoke 1994). The relationship between the dependent variable, high school graduation, and the independent variable, participation in youth organization, were measured controlling for the variables mentioned above using a logistic regression analysis.

This analysis should show whether or not youth that participate in youth organizations are more likely to graduate from high school. If, even after the control variables are added in, there is a relationship between my two variables, it would possibly show that these organizations are positive things that help keep youth in school.

Chapter 4 Results

Table 1 displays the means and standard deviations for the variables in this study. Table 2 displays the estimated odds ratio of the control variables for predicting high school graduation.

Table 3 shows the estimated odds ratio of activities, both with and without controls, for predicting high school graduation. Without controlling variables, all but three activities seem to have a positive effect on the chance that one will graduate from high school. When the control variables are added the same effect is achieved, but to a slightly lesser degree. While youth who participate in the significant activities are about 2 times more likely to graduate from high school than if they had not participated in that activity, those who participate in Student Government are 3.1 times more likely to graduate from high school and those who are in a Honor Society are 5.1 times more likely to graduate from high school. Students who participate in the Health Occupations Club (1.09), Home Economics Club (.89), or Future Farmers of America (1.13), which are considered to be vocational clubs, are shown as to not have a greater likelihood of graduating from high school. Though other vocational clubs have an effect on the likelihood that a student will graduate from high school, the effect tends to be lower than that of the other clubs in which students participate. There is less of an effect in the vocational clubs than in the extra curricular activities. Most of the activities have an effect, but the effect of the extra curricular activities is higher. No matter what the content of these clubs and organizations, they seem to help graduation rates.

TABLE 1 Means and Standard Deviations for Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
High School Graduate	.7019	.4575
Female	.4953	.5000
Black	.2502	.4331
Hispanic	.1578	.3646
Income		
Income 2	.2026	.4020
Income 3	.2356	.4244
Income 4	.2455	.4304
Income 5	.1409	.3479
Parents' Education		
Some High School	.1867	.3897
12 Years School or High School Grad.	.3957	.4890
Some College	.2084	.4062
College Degree and Beyond	6.094E-02	.2392
Curriculum		
Vocational	.1331	.3397
Commercial	2.733E-02	.1630
College Prep	.2939	.4556
Activities		
Club Other	3.73E-02	.19
National Honor Society	.11	.32
Performing Arts	.19	.39
Athletics and Pep	.38	.48
Yearbook/Paper Staff	.12	.32
Student Government	.11	.32
School-Sponsored Hobby	9.93E-02	.30
Community Youth Organization	.10	.31
Vocational Club Other	2.40E-02	.15
Vocational Industry Club	3.81E-02	.19
Office Education Club	2.37E-02	.15
Health Occupations Club	2.03E-02	.14
Home Economics Club	4.96E-02	0.22
Future Homemakers of America	7.49E-02	.26
Future Farmers of America	5.44E-02	.23
Future Business Leaders Club	3.68E-02	.19
Distribution Education Club	3.42E-02	.18
Industry Arts Club	1.90E-02	.14

TABLE 2 **Estimated Odds Ratios of Control Variables for Predicting High School Graduation**

Control Variable	Odds Ratio
Female	1.5260***
Black	1.0073
Hispanic	0.7485***
Income	
Income 2	1.1337
Income 3	1.3849***
Income 4	1.9243***
Income 5	3.0029***
Parents' Education	
Some High School	1.0093
12 Years School or High School Grad.	1.8785***
Some College	2.3429***
College Degree and Beyond	4.2538***
Curriculum	
Vocational	1.8479***
Commercial	1.6642***
College Prep	3.8511***

*** p < .05

TABLE 3 Estimated Odds Ratios of Control Variables for Predicting High School Graduation

Youth Activity	Odds Ratio for Single Activity	Odds Ratio for Single Activity And Controls
National Honor Society	11.3087***	5.1489***
Performing Arts	3.1790***	1.8776***
Athletics and Pep	3.3682***	2.3518***
Yearbook/Paper Staff	4.5761***	2.5931***
Student Government	5.2957***	3.1088***
School-Sponsored Hobby	3.9277***	2.1353***
Community Youth Organization	2.2661***	1.3725***
Vocational Club Other	2.3612***	2.0699***
Vocational Industry Club	1.7215***	1.7475***
Office Education Club	1.9252***	1.8137***
Health Occupations Club	1.1213	1.0923
Home Economics Club	0.7971***	0.8959
Future Homemakers of America	1.7642***	1.8500***
Future Farmers of America	0.9152	1.1376
Future Business Leaders Club	3.2142***	2.4864***
Distribution Education Club	3.2818***	2.8833***
Industry Arts Club	0.5071***	0.6984***
Other Club	3.1975***	2.0657***

*** p < .05

Table 4 depicts the estimated odds ratio of youth organization categories, which are the number of activities (ORG CAT 1 = one activity; ORG CAT 2 = two or three activities; ORG CAT 3 = 4 or more activities that the youth participates in), participated in by the student, with control variables and then adding significant activities. The organization categories denote the number of organizations a student participates in. When only the control variables and the number of organizations a student participates in are used, a student who is in one organization is 1.89 times more likely to graduate from high school. A student in two or three activities is 2.88 times more likely to graduate, while a student involved in four or more activities is 6.36 times more likely to graduate from high school. The second column of the table consists of the odds ratios of the organization categories with the control variables and the activities that are significant. The effect found in the first column, before the activities that are significant were added, is eliminated once the significant activities are controlled for. Though at first it appears that the more involved in high school activities the greater the likelihood a student will graduate, it becomes apparent this is not the case. As shown in Table 4, it is not the number of activities participated in, but the activity itself that increases the likelihood of a student graduating from high school.

Table 5 consists of the odds ratios for activities and controls for blacks and whites. Hispanics were not included in the analysis because there was not enough of a sample. Overall there is no real difference between the effects of the various activities for blacks as compared to whites, but there are two exceptions. Belonging to a National Honor Society makes it 8.5 times more likely that a black student will graduate from high school, whereas a white student who belongs to the National Honors Society is only 4.5 times more likely to graduate from high school. Students who belong to the Distribution Education Club and are black are 4.6 times more likely to graduate from high school, while students who are white are only 2.4 times more likely to graduate from high school. Besides those two examples, the effects of the activities on one's chance of graduating is about the same for both blacks and whites, so race is not much of a moderator.

TABLE 4 Estimated Odds Ratio for Organization Category (Number of Activities Participated In) With Control Variables and With Significant Activities

Activities	With Control Variables Only	With Control Variables and Activities That are Significant
National Honor Society	_____	3.0814***
Performing Arts	_____	1.2147
Athletics and Pep	_____	1.6394***
Yearbook/Paper Staff	_____	1.4813***
Student Government	_____	1.7804***
School-Sponsored Hobby	_____	1.3165***
Community Youth Organization	_____	0.9289***
Vocational Club Other	_____	1.4994
Vocational Industry Club	_____	1.4152***
Office Education Club	_____	1.3729
Health Occupations Club		
Home Economics Club		
Future Homemakers of America	_____	1.2351
Future Farmers of America		
Future Business Leaders Club	_____	1.5554***
Distribution Education Club	_____	2.2202***
Industry Arts Club	_____	0.5361***
Participated in 1 Activity	1.8943***	1.3581***
Participated in 2 or 3 Activities	2.8806***	1.3703***
Participated in 4 or More Activities	6.3695***	1.3783
Other Club	_____	1.6079***

*** p < .05

TABLE 5 Estimated Odds Ratios for Activities With Controls for Blacks and Whites

Youth Activity	Odds Ratio for Single Activity And Controls For Blacks	Odds Ratio for Single Activity And Controls For Whites
National Honor Society	8.5715***	4.5873***
Performing Arts	1.4007***	2.1904***
Athletics and Pep	2.3974***	2.3568***
Yearbook/Paper Staff	2.7891***	2.5973***
Student Government	3.3249***	3.0077***
School-Sponsored Hobby	1.9621***	2.0604***
Community Youth Organization	1.6279***	1.2777***
Vocational Club Other	2.2059***	1.8518***
Vocational Industry Club	2.0318***	1.6882***
Office Education Club	1.4804	2.0433***
Health Occupations Club	1.4033	1.1800
Home Economics Club	0.9069	0.7262
Future Homemakers of America	1.9077***	1.8116***
Future Farmers of America	1.2095	1.0842
Future Business Leaders Club	3.3452***	2.0925***
Distribution Education Club	4.6441***	2.4449***
Industry Arts Club	0.6794	0.7319
Other Club	2.7932***	1.5487***

*** p < .05

Table 6 displays the estimated odds ratios for black and white cases with controls and organization categories with and without significant activities. For blacks, when controls are used, but significant activities are not controlled for, it is 1.8 times more likely that blacks that participate in one activity will graduate from high school. Moreover, it is 2.66 times more likely that blacks will graduate if they belong to two or three organizations, and 7 times more likely for them to graduate when they are involved in four or more activities. When significant activities are controlled for in the analysis the effect of belonging to more organizations disappears. The same outcome occurs with whites. Those who participate in one activity, when not controlling for significant activities, are 1.8 times more likely to graduate, while it is 2.9 and 6.1 times more likely that they will graduate from high school if they are in two or three activities or four or more activities, respectively. This effect also is eliminated when significant activities are controlled for. These results suggest that it is not the number of participated activities but rather the content of the activities, that increases the likelihood that they will graduate from high school.

Table 7 shows the estimated odds ratios for activities and controls for those whose parents have graduated from high school, have twelve years or less of education, and those whose parents have more than twelve years of education. Those whose parents have either graduated from high school, or have twelve years or less of education, benefit more from participating in various activities. Those whose parents have either graduated from high school or have twelve years or less of education and who participated in a National Honor Society are 8.1 times likely to graduate from high school than those who do not participate. While those who participate in the National Honor Society and whose parents have more than twelve years of education are only 2.6 times more likely to graduate from high school. Those whose parents have either graduated from high school or have twelve years or less of education and participated in Student Government, are 4 times more likely to graduate from high school while those whose parents have more than twelve years of education are only 1.7 times more likely to graduate from high school. Table 7 also shows that vocational clubs tend to have more of an effect on students whose parents have either graduated from high school or have

TABLE 6 Estimated Odds Ratio for Black and White Cases With Controls and Organization Categories and Also With Significant Activities

Activities	Blacks		Whites	
	With Controls Only	With Controls and Significant Activities	With Controls Only	With Controls and Significant Activities
National Honor Society	_____	5.2056***	_____	2.9028***
Performing Arts	_____	1.0005	_____	1.4659***
Athletics and Pep	_____	1.8760***	_____	1.7011***
Yearbook/Paper Staff	_____	1.5930	_____	1.5232***
Student Government	_____	2.0145***	_____	1.7614***
School-Sponsored Hobby	_____	1.2829	_____	1.2852
Community Youth Organization	_____	1.2250	_____	0.9019
Vocational Club Other	_____	1.4552	_____	1.5128
Vocational Industry Club	_____	1.5974	_____	1.4753
Office Education Club	_____		_____	1.7627
Health Occupations Club				
Home Economics Club				
Future Homemakers of America	_____	1.4743	_____	1.2222
Future Farmers of America				
Future Business Leaders Club	_____	2.0813***	_____	1.3489
Distribution Education Club	_____	3.7772***	_____	2.0196***
Industry Arts Club				
Participated in 1 Activity	1.8288***	1.2057	1.8419***	1.2664***
Participated in 2 or 3 Activities	2.6617***	1.0522	2.9920***	1.2880
Participated in 4 or More Activities	7.0088***	1.0757	6.1953***	1.1009
Other Club	_____	2.6036***	_____	1.2829

TABLE 7 Estimated Odds Ratios for Activities and Controls for Parents' Educations

Activities	Odds Ratio With Activity And Controls For Parents' Education- 12 Years, Graduate, Or Less	Odds Ratio With Activity And Controls For Parents' Education- More Than 12 Years
National Honor Society	8.1009***	2.6524***
Performing Arts	1.8253***	2.0581***
Athletics and Pep	2.3992***	2.1986***
Yearbook/Paper Staff	2.7481***	2.2352***
Student Government	4.0322***	1.7755***
School-Sponsored Hobby	2.2134***	1.9119***
Community Youth Organization	1.4173***	1.2612
Vocational Club Other	2.8619***	.9207
Vocational Industry Club	1.9450***	.9167
Office Education Club	2.0261***	.7663
Health Occupations Club	1.1291	.7850
Home Economics Club	.8883	.9730
Future Homemakers of America	1.8534***	1.7947
Future Farmers of America	1.1795	.9455
Future Business Leaders Club	2.3721***	3.3769***
Distribution Education Club	3.0104***	2.3068***
Industry Arts Club	.8158	.2500***
Other Club	2.2867***	1.5731

*** p < .05

twelve years or less of education than on those whose parents have more than twelve years of education.

Table 8 shows the estimated odds ratios for those who have twelve years of education or less and those who have more than twelve years of education with controls and organization categories with and without significant activities. Those with twelve years of education or less, when not controlling for significant activities are 1.8 times more likely to graduate from high school if they participate in one activity. They are 2.9 and 7.6 times more likely to graduate from high school if they are involved in two or three activities or four or more activities, respectively. When significant activities are controlled for the effect of participation in more activities disappears. This result also occurs with those who have more than twelve years of education.

With only controls and organization categories, those with more education are 2, 2.9, and 4.7 times more likely to graduate from high school if they participate in one, two or three, or four or more activities, respectively. When controlling for significant activities the effect of participating in more activities is eliminated. When not controlling for significant activities, the more organizations one belongs to the more likely they are to graduate from high school, no matter what the education level of the parents. When significant activities are controlled, the number of activities a student participates in does not increase the likelihood that they will graduate from high school, again, no matter the education level of the parents.

Chapter 5 Discussion

While participating in youth activities and organizations does seem to increase the likelihood that youth will graduate from high school, the effect is not greater for those who participate in more than one activity or one organization. It therefore appears to be the substance of the activities themselves, and not the number a youth is involved in, that increases the likelihood that the youth will graduate from high school. Also, there is no difference between those activities with laws, creeds, or oaths, such as the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, and those activities without laws, creeds, and oaths, such as sports, band, and student government. If it

TABLE 8 Estimated Odds Ratios for Parents' Education of 12 Years or Less and More Than 12 Years Cases With Controls and Organization Categories and Also With Significant Activities

Activities	12 Years or Less Parents' Education		More Than 12 Years Parents' Education	
	With Controls Only	With Controls and Significant Activities	With Controls Only	With Controls and Significant Activities
National Honor Society	_____	5.3178***	_____	1.8847***
Performing Arts	_____	1.3243***	_____	1.4868***
Athletics and Pep	_____	1.9391***	_____	1.5607***
Yearbook/Paper Staff	_____	1.6746***	_____	1.4562
Student Government	_____	2.5685***	_____	1.0491
School-Sponsored Hobby	_____	1.4201***	_____	1.3545
Community Youth Organization	_____	1.0828		
Vocational Club Other	_____	2.1608***		
Vocational Industry Club	_____	1.7345***		
Office Education Club	_____	1.6286***		
Health Occupations Club				
Home Economics Club				
Future Homemakers of America	_____	1.3145		
Future Farmers of America				
Future Business Leaders Club	_____	1.5136***	_____	2.4972
Distribution Education Club	_____	2.5759***	_____	1.9888
Industry Arts Club			_____	0.2165***
Club Other	_____	1.9699***		
Participated in 1 Activity	1.8914***	1.1794	2.0630***	1.5236***
Participated in 2 or 3 Activities	2.9300***	1.0127	2.9896***	1.5645
Participated in 4 or More Activities	7.6381***	0.8989	4.7105***	1.3102

*** p < .05

is not the number of activities a youth is involved in or the fact that the activity they are involved in has laws, creeds, or oaths, it must be something else.

A possible theoretical argument that explains why youth organizations and activities have a positive effect on high school graduation could be that youth need rules and limits and these organizations provide both rules and limits (Becker 1960; Durkheim 1964; Hughes 1999; Shoemaker 1996). If this relationship is found, the implications will be far reaching. Policy and funding could change and help these organizations create an even more educated America.

Youth who participate in various activities and clubs are more likely to graduate from high school than those who do not participate in such activities. One possible explanation can be found in the work on social bond theory, a type of control theory. Travis Hirschi, in his work *Causes of Delinquency*, notes, "Control theories assume that delinquent acts results when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken" (1969:16). The four parts of this bond are attachment, involvement, commitment, and belief. Shoemaker, in his *Theories of Delinquency*, notes that involvement "refers to participation in conventional and legitimate activity." He goes on to note, "In a school, for example, it would include extracurricular activities such as school plays, clubs, organizations, and athletic events" (1996:165). When group members are concerned with each other's opinions, control is more likely, because of the elevated psychological and emotional connections between members of the group (Shoemaker 1996). Though bond theory is meant to explain deviance, or a lack of it, it can also explain why students who participate in different activities will graduate from high school. While there is no data available, one could believe that if most of the members of a group or club believe that graduating from high school is important, then those who don't graduate from high school are seen as deviant. The participant's bond to the group to which they belong could be strong and therefore powerful in keeping them in school. Hughes notes, "Involvement in schooling controls deviant behavior not only because it takes up people's time in conventional pursuits, but also because it promotes conventional attachments, commitment, and beliefs." Hughes continues by stating that Hirschi "found that attachment to school and having positive relationships with teachers reduced the chance of delinquency"

(1999:153). The groups, activities, and clubs that young people participate in provide a social bond, which could encourage graduation from high school.

Another possible explanation for why those who participate in extra curricular activities and clubs are more likely to graduate from high school can be found in Howard Becker's research on commitment, which is in some ways "related concepts of social sanction and social control", which ties into the discussion of social bonds. Becker says of "theories built around the related concepts of social sanction and social control", that they "propose that people act consistently because activity of some particular kind is regarded as right and proper in their society or social group and because deviations from this standard are punished" (Becker 1960:33). The activities and organizations that young people participate in are their society or social group, so the activity of graduating from high school is seen as "right and proper" and alienation and criticism can be the punishment for not graduating from high school. Becker also states, "A person sometimes finds that he has made side bets that constrain his present activity because the existence of generalized cultural expectations provides penalties for those who violate them" (1960:36). An example of this is when someone has as his or her goal to graduate from high school, and they seem to be committed to that goal. It is possible that that goal could be replaced by another goal, such as working full time to buy a new car. If that person has a side bet, such as they play a sport and the community places a lot of value in that sport and expects those who participate in that sport to continue to do so, and then that person decides to drop out of school, they will not only be abandoning their goal of graduating, but they will also be losing their side bet, which is participating in the sport that the community values and expects them to participate in. It is the added loss from the side bet that Becker believes adds to the strength of, or even creates, commitment. There are other ways besides the existence of generalized cultural expectations that people make side bets, but this example illustrates nicely Becker's idea of side bets and how they relate to commitment. Side bets also can affect one's commitment to graduate from high school when a student joins a school organization. If the student decides to drop out of school he or she will also have to drop out of the activity or organization, which means they lose the side bet,

as well as the major bet. It is perhaps this side bet, being involved in the activity, that may keep them in school.

Durkheim's work *The Division of Labor in Society* may offer yet another possible explanation as to why youth who participate in various activities and organizations have a greater likelihood of graduating from high school. Durkheim asserts, "where a group is formed, a moral discipline is formed too. But the institution of this discipline is only one of the many ways through which collective activity is manifested." Continuing with his discussion of groups he states, "From it comes a warmth which animates its members, making them intensely human, destroying their egotisms" (Durkheim 1964:26). The moral discipline that is formed when the egotisms are destroyed may be what it takes for young people to graduate from high school. Young people may find personal reasons to quit high school, but when they consider the group, or groups, to which they belong, they may reconsider what they once thought was a positive alternative. A high school student may desire to quit school in order to purchase a car, but because of his or her association with a certain group, which collectively values education, he or she may decide not to buy a car and to stay in school. Durkheim also states, "A nation can be maintained only if, between the State and the individual, there is intercalated a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individuals to attract them strongly in their sphere of action and drag them, in this way, into the general torrent of social life" (Durkheim 1964:28). These secondary groups can sway individuals to pursue a course of action that they may not have already fully committed to, and that may benefit the group or society.

An explanation that can be fused with the other possible explanations, and other explanations that have not been presented here, is that of the reference group. It is noted in Hughes (1999:108) that "Reference groups provide both normative and comparative functions. Because we would like to view ourselves as members in good standing within a certain group-or we aspire to such membership-we take on the group's norms and values." Staying in high school allows one to preserve their ties to their community, family, and friends, any one

of which could be their positive reference group, if they value education and graduating from high school.

It was hypothesized that there would be a difference, not only between those who participate and those who do not participate in activities, but also between those who are involved in sports and those involved in organizations where there is a creed, oath, motto, or law, such as in scouting, the 4H Club, and church youth groups. There was no difference in the effect these groups had on a person's likelihood of graduating from high school. It could be that just by participating in the organization young people feel a sense of commitment and responsibility, even in the absence of creeds, oaths, mottoes, and laws.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

While the audience of this work, and many of their acquaintances, take the act of graduating from high school for granted, it is not something that everyone in our society experiences. There are many reasons people leave school. Some people leave to make money, others to take care of younger siblings, while others leave because they find the system is not conducive to who they are or what they want. The current drop out rate hovers around 25% (Bickel et al., 1988). The value of a high school education may have decreased, but it is still of value, and that is why there should be some concern about any high school drop out rate.

Having taught high school, I have seen students walk away from the classroom to take on jobs that pay between \$10 and \$20 an hour with little or no benefits. I have also been aware of the limited opportunities for those who drop out of high school, as I grew up in a family where both parents had dropped out of high school. There are possible explanations as to why people drop out, but there might also be ways to keep these potential drop outs interested in staying in school. Graduation rates are 10% higher for those placed in the college track curriculum in high school (Gamoran 1989), so maybe more students should be placed in the college track. Some suggest that youth participation in activities and organizations is a valuable experience keeping youth from some of the dangers offered up by our society (Hechinger 1992). While there is a great portion of the population engaged in these activities,

it may be time to recruit others, who may need the experiences that these activities and organizations offer.

The results suggest that those who do participate in activities and organizations have a greater likelihood of graduating from high school. This effect is greater for those whose parents have twelve or fewer years of education. Those who participate in vocational clubs and whose parents have either graduated from high school or have twelve years or less of education have a greater likelihood of graduating from high school than those who participate in vocational clubs whose parents have more than twelve years of education. A possible explanation for why youth who participate in activities and organizations have a greater likelihood of graduating from high schools could be that young people in these organizations and activities feel more committed to graduating from high school, because of their attachment to a certain group. This attachment has created a bond that the youth want to preserve. This explanation is from the work of Travis Hirschi (1969), which he labeled Social Bond Theory. Most of the explanations involve some sort of commitment to a group and their norms and goals. It may be these groups that encourage young people to stay in school.

The theoretical question was answered in the affirmative. Youth who participate in clubs, activities, and organizations are more likely to graduate from high school than those who do not participate in such groups. The second question, whether or not there is a difference between the effects of groups with mottoes, laws, oaths, and creeds and sports was answered in the negative. It does not appear to make much of a difference what type of activity a youth participates in, so long as they are participating in something.

The implications for this study are twofold. First, because we want an educated society who can perform the functions that are required of this society, we should encourage anything that increases the likelihood that one will graduate from high school. This study shows that funding for clubs, sports, activities, and organizations should be made available so that individuals are given every opportunity to graduate from high school. Second, such activities need to and should be encouraged in every school and community. Space and time should be

made available so that students can create a bond to a positive group, which will have positive payoffs in the future. Maybe some of these activities and organizations should be made available during school hours, so that more students are likely to participate and benefit from them.

While this study did answer the theoretical question, there are some possible limitations. One possible limitation is that besides looking at the effects of youth participation on blacks and whites and those whose parents have different education levels, it might have been useful to examine the effects of youth participation on people from different income levels. Another possible limitation is that there was no way to measure whether or not the subjects liked school. It seems that those who participated in activities at school might like school more, and that's why they are willing to spend more time there, whereas those who do not like school are less willing to spend time there and may be the ones who drop out. It is also worth examining possible differences between different activities and organizations, such as those activities and organizations where the adult leader is present most of the time versus activities and organizations where the adult leader has little interaction with the organization. Research also needs to be done using logistic regression to study why students self-select to be part of these organizations, since we are not sure what could be causing these students to graduate and we can not control for what could be causing these youth to join these organizations. It could be because they do not feel alienated, but there are other possibilities. Even with these possible limitations and the research that needs to be done, this study offers some hope in a battle to get more youth to graduate from high school.

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