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The Effects of Formal Group and Extracurricular Involvement on College Students'
Self-Esteem

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of college students' engagement in formal group activities on self-esteem levels. Youth and adolescent extracurricular involvement was also taken into account to help determine influence on college participation. Hypotheses suggested that group affiliation would positively affect self-esteem and that extracurricularly motivated children would be more likely to join formal activities in college. A sample of 149 Oberlin College students completed a survey that included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and nine of these subjects were selected for in-depth interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative data results indicated that formal group members' self-esteem levels were not distinct from their non-group participant peers. Early group involvement, however, predicted later engagement, and athletic team membership during middle and high school often led to varsity athletic participation at Oberlin. The relationship between athletic team participation and self-esteem proved significant in the survey data, though interviewees' self-esteem levels did not necessarily reflect higher trends.

INTRODUCTION

Formal group and extracurricular involvement can influence the way people perceive their sense of self. In particular, groups offer a secure environment where members can develop their social identity while gaining a degree of social status. Individuals have been known to form a general and moral sense of self based on the values that their groups impose on them. When a person's beliefs are synonymous with those of the group, he or she will gain a sense of purpose. Research reveals that positive group affiliation impacts social well-being and self-esteem.

Formal groups benefit members because they provide support, goal direction and structure by stressing the importance of social bonds (Moos, 2004). Group

members not only receive social support, but give support to their friends in return, which enables them to feel a sense of purpose and responsibility toward a community in which they are an active member (Moos, 2004).

Formal groups can comprise a large part of a college student's life, serving to unify people and prevent social isolation; identities form within groups that cannot form elsewhere. Through this research, I study the relationship between formal group involvement and college students' self-esteem levels, utilizing survey and interview data. The goal is to discover whether a significant correlation between structural group involvement and self-esteem exists. I also seek to understand how students come to be part of their given groups and how groups benefit members. Research suggests that in order to enter a formal group at the college level, a student must often have experience and knowledge in a given area. What does it take to acquire this skill? I will look at whether the practice of concerted cultivation contributes to this skill development and whether involvement in extracurricular activities as a child ultimately leads students to enter into formal groups in college. Indicators suggest that economic inequalities affect a child's chances of getting involved in extracurricular activities and groups, which in turn can impact participation in college.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current research supports the overall tenet that a positive association exists between engagement in organized extracurricular activities and well-being, as measured by self-esteem (Eccles & Fredricks, 2005). Organized extracurricular

involvement is defined by student and adult participation in activities outside of school and work routines, and entails an affiliation with a formal group. A formal group is one that encompasses a hierarchical structure of power, regular meetings, explicit rules, and specific goals held in common by each member (Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2002). Previous research confirms that group identification can enhance members' self-esteem, which in turn promotes well-being (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes & Haslam, 2009). For the purpose of this research, well-being refers to general life satisfaction, with self-esteem serving as a promoter of this state. Self-esteem refers to a person's impression of his or her worthiness: a high sense of worth reflects a positive self-image and respect for the self, while a low sense of worth promotes dissatisfaction and lack of respect for the self (Kort-Butler & Hageman, 2010).

Engagement in formal groups provides members with social camaraderie, emotional support, security and an opportunity for shared learning, all of which promote self-esteem and well-being (Haslam et al., 2009). Involvement in a specific group can depend on an individual's total social environment, and can either begin during early childhood, when parents sign their children up for afterschool activities, or when adolescents and adults choose to participate within certain group activities. A good deal of literature pertaining to the effects of involvement in extracurricular and formal groups on self-esteem focuses on children and adolescents. However, there is almost no literature about the effects of group participation on college students. This research attempts to fill this gap by determining how personal experiences as children and adolescents may influence

the college student's decision to become involved in organized activities, and how college group membership can affect a student's self-esteem and well-being through promoting solidarity, support and security.

GROUP THEORY

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory contends that people form a sense of self in relation to group affiliation (Haslam et al., 2009). We aim to gain or maintain a positive social identity in order to enhance our well-being. Social identities formed within groups play a key role in establishing self-esteem (Crabtree, Haslam, Postmes & Haslam, 2010). We evaluate ourselves through the comparison of our in-groups with other groups. A large part of establishing our identity stems from comparison: we want to be better than our reference group. Intergroup discrimination, or favoring an in-group over an out-group, is associated with an increase in a positive sense of self (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). We improve our self-esteem through group glorification concept, or in-group bias, because we highlight the strengths of our groups and ignore their weaknesses and the criticisms of others (Amiot & Sansfaçon, 2011). If we base our social identities on our group membership by viewing our groups as paramount, group affiliation can strengthen us.

Some research, however, argues that self-esteem is a by-product of discrimination rather than an effect of group involvement (Brown, 2000). Social identity theory's self-esteem hypothesis, or the idea that we expect members of stigmatized groups to bolster their social identities through portrayals of in-group

favoritism at the same time that we expect low-status groups to have low rates of group identification, is riddled with conflicting empirical findings (Ellemers, Kortekaas, Ouwerkerk, 1999). A difference exists between stigmatized and non-stigmatized groups when it comes to self-esteem. Crabtree et al. (2010) argue that identifying with a stigmatized group has concurrent negative and positive effects on group members' self worth (2010). Members of stigmatized groups can experience stereotype threat: stereotypes reflecting a group's competencies can cause members of the group to perform poorly in comparison to members of non-stereotyped groups. In their 2009 study, Newman et al. found that "identification with one's group places targets of stereotypes in a delicate balance: self-esteem is protected, but performance is impaired" (705). Group members who highly identify with in-groups are more likely to experience stereotype threat than their less involved counterparts, but they are also more likely to benefit from collective coping strategies (Crabtree et al., 2010). Those members of stigmatized groups who distance themselves from their group tend to have lower self-esteem because their group does not protect them from outside threats (Newman, Keough & Lee, 2009). Previous literature has not established a finite conclusion pertaining to these contradictions.

Theory of Concerted Cultivation and Natural Child Growth

Not everyone is created equal as far as having access to membership in groups is concerned, and rejection can start at an early age. In her book *Unequal Childhoods* (2003), Annette Lareau argues that parents of different socioeconomic

statuses do not all raise their children the same way. Through observational research, Lareau has observed that a disparity exists between middle- and lower-class children in school, and that economics affect extracurricular participation. Middle-class parents engage in concerted cultivation by seeking to enrich their children through extracurricular participation (Lareau, 2003). These children gain experience through participating within group activities guided by parents, coaches, and teachers. Working class children, on the other hand, are more likely to experience natural child growth. These children decide for themselves what they do with their free time. Because their parents lack both opportunity and economic means, they do not sign them up for extracurricular activities (Lareau, 2003). Lareau argues that working-class children who do not participate in extracurricular activities with their peers and who receive little guidance from adults early on in childhood develop a sense of constraint. Their middle-class counterparts, on the other hand, benefit from their organized activities and gain a sense of entitlement (Lareau, 2003). Where working class children do not have the resources to develop their abilities, middle-class children join formal groups early on, allowing them to develop particular skills that will help them succeed later in life. Lareau asserts that because middle-class children have an economic advantage, they are given the opportunity to benefit from culture and society in a way lower-class children are not. Group participation leads to an acquisition of what is termed cultural capital.

Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu defines cultural capital as the possession of symbolic goods that are valued by the dominant ideology or culture of a given society (Lareau, 2003, 275). These “goods” refer to skills middle-class children develop through higher education, communication with adults and group participation that help them to eventually manipulate institutions. Cultural capital is reproduced through socialization; a child who comes from a family who already possess cultural capital is likely to be rewarded by the education system, while a child who comes from a family who possess little or no cultural capital will be penalized. To further this argument, Bourdieu asserts that socialization early on in life provides children with a particular habitus, or a set of partially unconscious informal skills that affect children’s behavior and reflect their cultural capital. Even small children learn the skills necessary to become members of groups later on. In their 2005 study, Eccles et al. found that middle-school children who participated in formal, high quality group activities tended to form and maintain relationships with a diverse array of peers and adults. This increased their social capital, and their level of self-esteem (2005). Lareau’s observations and Bourdieu’s theory help to show that starting at an early age, children have different advantages based on their backgrounds. Lower-class children are not socialized in the same way as their middle-class counterparts, and do not develop the same skills that can be used to manipulate institutions later on in life.

EXTRACURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT

Impact on Youth and Adolescence

As we have seen, formal group involvement is an important way to develop skills that lead to cultural capital. In turn, cultural capital fosters self-esteem. Researchers tend to study the impacts of formal group involvement on self-esteem during adolescence, because this is a time during which boys and girls undergo life changes in their physical, emotional and social identities (Eccles & Fredricks, 2006). During this transitional period, students often experience feelings of alienation, boredom and disengagement from school. Extracurricular activities prove to be a rewarding and important use of leisure time, and children who participate in them demonstrate higher feelings of self worth and less depression (Eccles et al., 2006). Formal group activity provides teenagers with a setting in which they can “act out developmental tasks of adolescence, at both the personal and interpersonal levels” (Kort-Butler et al., 2010, 569). Within group settings, self-esteem is both challenged and stimulated as young adults participate in skill building and gain emotional support from adults and their peers (Kort-Butler et al., 2010). Group involvement encourages them to organize their sense of self, which contributes to a positive identity. Having a positive self-image allows adolescents to be resilient during times of change and to overcome stressful situations (Kort-Butler et al., 2010).

In their 2006 study, Eccles et al. discovered that across their sample of eleventh grade students, sport team and school club membership led to higher levels of psychological adjustment and self-esteem than non-members (2006). Eccles et al. furthered their research by testing whether the duration of

extracurricular participation affects the relationship between group involvement and self-esteem (2006). They discovered that longer membership within a given group is likely to tighten social bonds and to produce higher levels of comfort amongst in-group peers. These results indicate that students involved in organized groups for longer periods of time tend to develop greater self worth. The oldest members of formal groups within the study were the most likely to have heightened self-esteem (Eccles et al., 2006). As students age, their specific role within an extracurricular group becomes more important. Having moved up the hierarchical tree, they take on more responsibility and can impart what they have learned from being a long-time member of the group to others. Captains and leaders of high school sports teams and clubs, for example, have developed leadership skills that they can apply toward guiding the rest of the group (Eccles et al., 2006). These leadership skills, propelled by self-esteem, eventually lead to the manipulation of institutions.

If group involvement promotes self-esteem, one could ask whether the number of extracurricular activities students engage in affects levels of self-confidence. Kort-Butler et al. (2010) argue that participation in a number of formal group activities provides adolescents with the possibility to translate positive effects obtained from one activity into another (596). If students succeed in one extracurricular, their self-satisfaction is likely to “carry over into other domains which can potentially compensate for negative self-appraisals” in other areas (Kort-Butler et al., 2010, 570). Within this same longitudinal study, Kort-Butler et al. (2010) measured whether self-esteem changed over time (580). In general, results

indicate that high school students experienced a growth in self-esteem over a period of five years, regardless of extracurricular participation (Kort-Butler et al., 2010). Subjects who participated in a number of diverse extracurricular activities had the highest initial self-esteem, while those who did not had the lowest initial self-esteem. Those who did not participate in any formal group involvement showed the most growth in self-esteem, probably because they started with the lowest amount and had the most potential for growth (Kort-Butler et al., 2010). So although group involvement can lead to a positive sense of self, non-participants do not necessarily suffer from a lack of self-esteem in the long run.

While formal group involvement correlates with heightened self-esteem, certain factors within a group can sometimes have negative impacts that generate risky behavior (Eccles et al., 2006). Studies by Eccles et al. (2006) indicate that athletes, for example, use alcohol more often than their non-athlete peers. This is because membership in groups that participate in highly competitive activities can increase stress levels (133). Extreme competition can affect a high school student's psychological adjustment in negative ways. Students who participated in extracurricular involvement with an emphasis on outperforming others also had dramatically lower achievement scores than students who participated in formal groups at a low or moderate competition level (Eccles et al., 2006). Overall, however, the benefits of formal group involvement far outweigh any negative consequences.

Impact on College Students

As noted earlier, a disparity exists between research on adolescent and college extracurricular involvement. While many studies focus on the effects of formal group involvement on teenagers' self-esteem, only a handful of articles discuss the impact on college students. Research conducted on college students tends to focus more on the importance of social identities than on formal group involvement. This is because in a large college setting social groups divide themselves racially and ethnically (Jaret et al., 2007). Still, when studying college students' identities, group involvement, well-being and sense of worth, researchers conclude that both formal and informal group involvement can enhance self-esteem (Amiot et al., 2011).

Though formal group involvement may not be considered as important in college as in high school, college students, especially those who are middle-class, often come from a long line of participation in extracurricular activities. One reason middle class students participate so extensively is to enhance their chances of getting into college. Colleges look for "well-rounded" students who not only thrive academically, but who have demonstrated the ability to manage their time and priorities, to commit to the long-term, and to meaningfully contribute to activities outside of school (Ecclest et al., 2006). It stands to reason that colleges are filled with students who are accustomed to contributing to formal group activities. I contend that these students will pursue the interests they have nurtured (unless they have simply joined groups in high school in order to get into college, but these are surely a minority).

Though researchers believe that young adults form their social, emotional and physical identities based on the social roles they conform to in high school (Kort-Butler et al., 2011), I believe that identities and social roles continue to evolve and change during college. College can be considered another transitional period in young adults' lives, and for this reason I speculate that continued group involvement can benefit a college student's sense of worth as much as it can an adolescent's.

Think of the impact on first and second year students who seek to form new identities in a new community. When students graduate from high school, they leave behind groups they were part of and join new groups in which they are not yet vested members (Iyer, Jetten, Tsibrikos, Postmes & Haslam, 2009). They can either further their interests in a particular area or invest in new ones. I hypothesize that formal group involvement for college students continues to contribute to the formation of identity because this age group's identity has not yet leveled off.

Impact of Athletics on Self-Esteem

Athletic teams comprise one of the most common formal groups that children, adolescents and college students join. Sports teams provide members with a number of positive outcomes in terms of well-being. Team players become members of an intricate social web "characterized by regular interaction with peers, coaches and health professionals." This leads them to feel a strong sense of kinship and prevent social isolation felt by some of their non-athlete counterparts (Miller & Hoffman, 338). Athletic programs foster a community in which students, faculty and alumni can celebrate school pride and individual talent (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey &

Banahi, 2004). Social recognition and prestige can bolster athletes' self-worth. The physical activity that accompanies sport team participation is also linked to positive social and mental well-being; negative body image and unhealthy lifestyles can reduce self-esteem (Greenleaf, Boyer & Petrie, 2009). Social acceptance, physical activity and positive body image can all lead to a heightened sense of self for young adults. Because students who play on sports teams experience many sources from which to gain self-satisfaction, I hypothesize that athletes at Oberlin College will have higher than average self-esteem levels than non-athletes.

FACTORING IN VARIABLE EFFECTS ON SELF-ESTEEM AND WELL-BEING

In researching the relationship between formal group involvement and well-being, several variables must be taken into consideration. These include gender, race and socioeconomic status. Many studies generalize the effects of formal group participation across gender, race and socioeconomic status, but there are some differences that must be taken into account.

In general, few differences exist between a male and a female's group participation in relation to levels of self-esteem (Eccles et al., 2005). Gender is more likely to determine what kind of formal group a person decides to join—boys are more likely than girls to participate in athletics exclusively, while girls are more likely to participate in multiple activities—but this does not affect the impact the group has on well-being (Kort-Butler et al., 2010). Girls tend to report lower rates of self-esteem in general, regardless of group participation, and this gender difference

is more pronounced with regard to white students than African-American students (McLeod & Owens, 2004).

Race impacts group involvement in different ways: white students are generally the most likely to be involved in formal groups within high schools, while Hispanics have the lowest rate of involvement (Kort-Butler et al., 2010). Eccles et al. (2005) found that African-American high school students were more likely to be leaders of school clubs than their white counterparts when the school was predominantly African-American (711). This indicates that students are more likely to lead groups that they perceive as their racial in-groups. In terms of self-esteem, some studies indicate that African-Americans are more likely than whites to report higher levels of self-esteem, where other studies report that there is little to no difference (McLeod et al., 2004). Researchers tend to agree that youth and adolescents from lower socioeconomic statuses gain the most benefit from extracurricular participation (Fredericks et al., 2008). Involvement in formal groups leads to a larger growth in self-esteem for students of lower socioeconomic status than it does for members of higher socioeconomic statuses, probably because the lower-class group started with less self-esteem to begin with (Eccles et al., 2008).

HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature I have researched, I have generated a series of seven hypotheses in my study. I contend that engagement in formal groups on the college level leads to higher self-esteem (hypothesis 1). I predict that students are more likely to become members of formal groups in college if they were involved in

extracurricular activities throughout childhood (hypothesis 2). I maintain that students who played sports in high school and middle school are more likely to be members of varsity teams at Oberlin College (hypothesis 3) and that members of varsity sports teams will report higher self-esteem levels (hypothesis 4). I suspect that women are more likely to report lower self-esteem levels than their male counterparts (hypothesis 5) and that minorities will report higher self-esteem levels than their White counterparts (hypothesis 6). Finally, based on Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods*, I contend that students with higher incomes are more likely to participate in groups during middle school and high school (hypothesis 7).

METHOD: SURVEY DATA

Subjects and Procedure

To test these hypotheses, a survey questionnaire was administered to a sample of students at Oberlin College. The questionnaire was distributed to students in a number of sociology classes and an introductory statistics class during the fall semester of the 2011 to 2012 academic year. Although it would have been preferable to administer the questionnaire through random sampling, there was insufficient time and resources to employ this sampling technique. Surveying these courses was seen as the most prudent way to reduce potential sampling bias while maximizing efficiency. The total number of students in all the classes was 194, but I only gathered 149 survey responses. Forty-five students were either absent on the

day I administered the survey, or were in several of the classes I visited and refrained from taking the survey twice.¹

Demographics

Students were asked to indicate the year in which they were born. The responses varied from 1988 to 1993, which indicated that their ages ranged from eighteen to twenty-three years old. The median year in which participants were born was 1991, and the median age was twenty. Students were asked what sex they were; eighty-four students responded female and sixty-five male.

In terms of race, students were given the option of selecting from six categories: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian American, Latino/a American, Black or African American (Non-Hispanic), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander and White (Non-Hispanic). Students were allowed to check more than one category. The majority of students (ninety-nine or 66%) indicated that they were White (Non-Hispanic). Eighteen (12%) participants were Black or African American (Non-Hispanic), ten (6.7%) were Asian American, nine (6%) were Latino or Latina American, three (2%) were both Black or African American and White, three (2%) were both Asian American and White, one (.7%) was American Indian or Alaska Native and White, one (.7%) was Asian American, Latino American and White, one

¹ To find a sample of students to complete a survey for my study, I asked permission from all professors of sociology and the professor of Introduction to Statistics at Oberlin College. The questionnaire was administered in four in order to avoid non-response bias that would otherwise result from e-mailing students at random. Four teachers agreed to my request and I conducted my survey in four different classes, one of which had two sections.

(.7%) was Latino American and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and two (1.3%) participants refrained from answering the question.

In order to measure family income as an indicator of socioeconomic status, participants were offered eleven categorical choices (Less than \$10,000, \$20,000 to \$29,000, \$30,000 to \$39,999, \$40,000 to \$49,999, \$50,000 to \$59,999, \$60,000 to \$69,999, \$70,000 to \$79,999, \$80,000 to \$89,999, \$90,000 to \$99,999, \$100,000 to \$149,999, and \$150,000 or more) to estimate their average family income during 2010. Thirty-one participants (20.8%) answered \$150,000 or more, while twenty-five students (16.7%) answered \$100,000 to \$149,000. Thus, 37.5% of students reported that their average family income in 2010 was above \$100,000. Thirty-three students (22%) answered that their average family income of 2010 was between \$80,000 to \$89,999 or 90,000 to \$99,999. Twenty-seven students (18%) answered between \$50,000 to \$79,999, and twenty (13.4%) answered between \$20,000 and \$49,999. Nine students (6%) indicated that their average family income was less than \$10,000 in the year 2010. Four students (2.7%) did not answer the question or wrote that they were unsure.

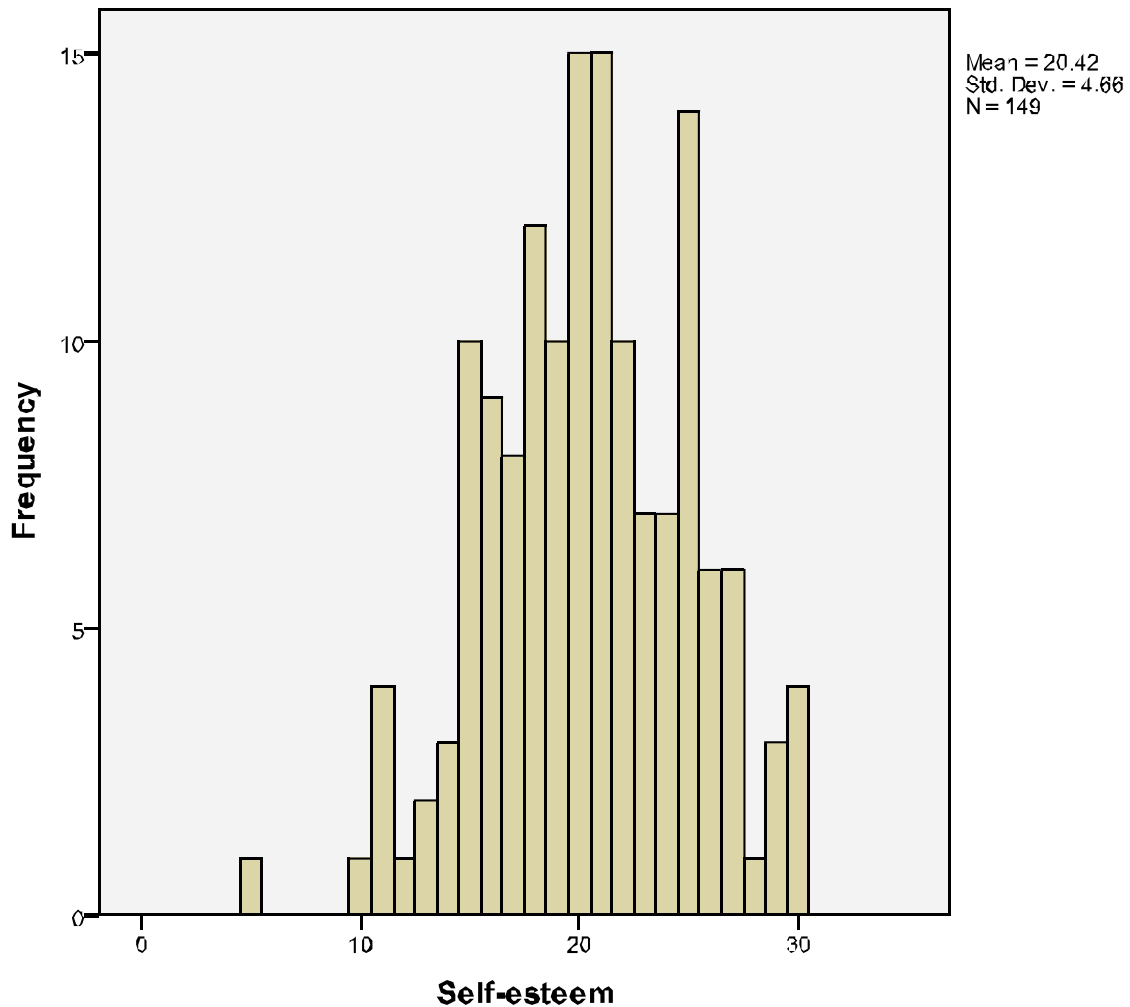
Initial Measurements and Findings

In order to measure level of self-esteem I used Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, a commonly used ten-item scale meant to assess individuals' perceived self-esteem levels (Robins, Hendin & Trzensiewski, 2001). Subjects responded to ten statements on a four point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Five of the statements were positive and five negative; positive statements

were: (1) I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others, (2) I feel that I have a number of good qualities, (3) I am able to do things as well as most other people, (4) I take a positive attitude toward myself, and (5) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. Negatively phrased questions included: (6) All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure, (7) I feel I do not have much to be proud of, (8) I wish I could have more respect for myself, (9) I certainly feel useless at times, and (10) At times I think I am no good at all. Each answer is worth a certain number of points and the total count of a subject's points comprised their self-esteem level; the more points, the higher the self-esteem level.

Participants' self-esteem levels ranged from five to thirty. Self-esteem scores between fifteen and twenty-five are considered normal, while scores below fifteen are considered low, and above twenty-five are considered high. The mean self-esteem level was 20.4161, with a median of 20 and a standard deviation of 4.66021. The histogram displayed below (see Figure 1) seems to approach a normal curve, and is tri-modal; the most common level of self-esteem was around twenty, with peaks also around fifteen and twenty-five. Sixty-two participants (41.6%) had a self-esteem level between eighteen and twenty-two, which is said to be the average. Forty-eight students (32%) had self-esteem levels of twenty-three or higher, while twenty-two students (14.8%) had self-esteem levels of fifteen or lower. In terms of extremes, four students (2.7%) had a self-esteem level of thirty, and three (2%) had a self-esteem of twenty-nine. One student (.67%) had a self-esteem level of five, which skewed the graph slightly to the left (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Self-esteem Level vs. Frequency Histogram



Formal group involvement was measured by asking subjects: “Given that a formal group is one that encompasses a hierarchical structure of power, regular meetings, explicit rules, and specific goals held in common by each member, please list any formal group that you are a part of on Oberlin College’s campus. (Example: Lacrosse team, Plum Creek Review, etc.)” Students listed a total of ninety-six groups that fit my definition of a formal group, ranging from the Oberlin College football team to members of Oberlin Animal Rights to members of the Oberlin Comics

Collective. 19.5% of students participated in no formal groups at all, while 33.6% participated in one formal group. 26.8% of the subjects participated in two formal groups and 13.4% in three. Only 6% participated in four or five groups, and one student indicated that he participated in seven on-campus formal groups. Because most people participated in zero to three groups, I recoded the formal group variable, where one indicates that subjects were members of one group, two that students participated in two groups, and three that students participated in three or more groups. Table 1 provides the frequencies for the recoded on-campus group variable and Figure 2 displays the frequencies as a histogram. Table 2 shows a cross tabulation between group involvement and self-esteem (see Table 1 and 2 and Figure 2).

Table 1: Frequencies for On-Campus Group Variable

Number of Groups on Campus	Frequency of Participants	Percent
0	29	19.5%
1	50	33.6%
2	40	26.8%
3 or more	30	20.1%
Total	149	100%

Figure 2: On-Campus Group Involvement vs. Frequencies Histogram

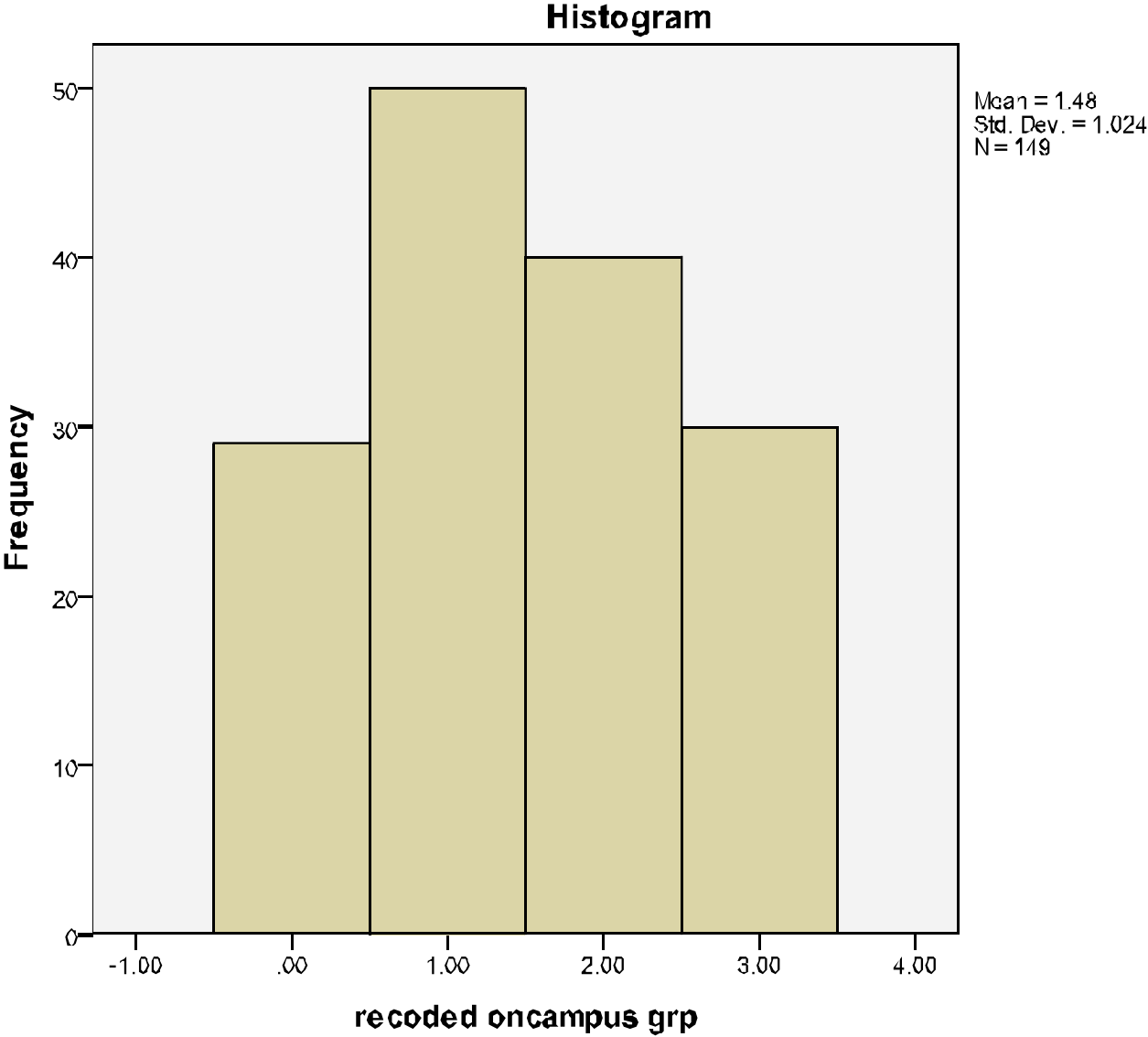


Table 2: Group Involvement vs. Self-esteem

		Number of Groups				Total
		0	1	2	3 or more	
Self-esteem Level	Very low	2	0	0	0	2
	Low	2	5	10	3	20
	Medium	13	18	13	10	54
	High	11	21	10	11	53
	Very high	1	6	7	6	20
Total (n= 149)		29	50	40	30	149

Although sport involvement on campus counts as a formal group, I also created a variable that measured varsity sport participation. Subjects in the study participated in zero to three sports. I recoded the variable because so few students were members of more than two sports teams; one meant that the student was on one varsity athletic team and two meant he or she was on two or more sports teams. Table 3 shows the frequencies for athletic involvement.

Table 3: Frequencies for Athletic Participation Variable

Number of Athletic Teams	Frequency of Participants	Percent
0	114	76.5%
1	30	20.1%
2 or more	5	3.4%
Total	149	100%

High school and middle school formal group involvement was measured by asking students to respond to a series of five questions. These included whether or not they participated on a sport team, if they were members of a band or orchestra, and if they were members of an in-school club or after school club designed for high school or middle school. If the subjects answered yes to any of these four categories, they were asked to specify which sports, instruments, and in or after school clubs they participated in. Students were offered an open-ended “other” section in which they could include formal groups that didn’t fit the four categories. Students listed a wide array of sports, instruments, clubs and other formal extracurricular activities they were involved with. The variables high school group and middle school group consisted of a count of all of the groups a student participated in during high school and middle school respectively (see Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4: Frequencies for High School Group Variable

Number of HS Groups	Frequency	Percent
0	6	4%
1 to 3	64	43%
4 to 6	63	42.3%
7 to 10	14	9.4%
11 to 13	2	1.3%
Total	149	100%

Table 5: Frequencies for Middle School Group Variable

Number of MS Groups	Frequency	Percent
0	15	10.3%
1 to 2	42	28.2%
3 to 5	76	52.1%
6 to 7	13	8.9%
Missing	3	2%
Total	146	100%

RESULTS: SURVEY DATA

In examining the survey data, I performed a series of hypothesis tests to measure the relationship amongst different variables. Due to the nature of this project and the smaller sample size, I set a larger alpha threshold of .10, where significant results were attained when $p < .10$. The null hypothesis was rejected when $p < .10$, keeping in mind that type I errors could occur.

Testing Hypothesis 1: The alternative hypothesis stated that participation in formal groups on the college level contributed to greater feelings of self worth. Recall that the quantitative variable self-esteem was comprised of a numeric self-esteem score ranging between zero and thirty (zero being extremely low, and thirty high) based on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

Formal group involvement was also a quantitative variable, in which each case was assigned a number ranging from zero to three, zero meaning the student participated in no formal extracurricular activities and three representing that the

student participated in three or more (up to seven) on-campus groups. Self-esteem level served as the dependent variable while formal group involvement was the independent variable.

The p-value of .198 indicated that there was no significant difference when comparing the mean self-esteem levels of people amongst one, two, or three or more formal groups. I rejected my hypothesis and concluded that within the model, there was no true significant relationship between the self-esteem variable and the formal group variable. Hypothesis 1 could not be confirmed based on the model (see Table 6).

Table 6: Hypothesis 1

Number of Groups	Mean (Standard Deviation) Self-Esteem Level	N
0	19.28 (4.471)	29
1	20.66 (4.331)	50
2	19.95 (5.007)	40
3	21.73 (4.756)	30
Total	20.42 (4.660)	149

*p= .198

Testing Hypothesis 2: Testing Hypothesis 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d: The general alternative hypothesis stated that students involved in extracurricular group activities during childhood and high school are more likely to get involved in formal groups at Oberlin College. To test this overarching hypothesis, I generated four sub-hypotheses. I first compared the mean number of middle-school groups to the mean

number of high-school groups amongst each participant, which led to Hypotheses 2a: It was more likely for students who participated in many middle school groups to also participate in many high school groups. I then measured the relationship between the mean number of groups subjects participated in while in middle school and compared that to the mean number of groups they participated in while in college, which led to Hypothesis 2b: Participating in many middle school groups led to greater group participation in college. I also measured the mean number of groups in high school against the mean number of groups in college and developed Hypothesis 2c: High school group participation predicted college group participation. Hypothesis 2d was meant to test the general relationship between early group involvement and later group participation. The hypothesis proposed that middle school and high school extracurricular activities combined would predict college extracurricular activity involvement.

Three variables measured extracurricular involvement before college, one for high school, one for middle school and one that combined both high school and middle school total group participation. The quantitative variable total high school group involvement was a count of all the groups that subjects listed they were involved in while in high school, including sports teams, in-school and after-school clubs, bands or orchestras and any other groups listed in the "other" category. The quantitative variable middle school group involvement measured the total number of groups participants listed during that time.

I first measured whether middle school group involvement predicted high school group involvement with middle school as the independent variable and high

school as the dependent variable (hypothesis 2a). I then compared the middle school variable and the high school variable against the college group involvement variable separately (hypothesis 2b and 2c respectively). Lastly, I compared the combined middle school and high school group variable against the college group participation variable (hypothesis 2d). Number of college groups was always the dependent variable and number of high school or middle school groups or both, were always independent variables.

Hypothesis 2a resulted in a p-value of .000, which showed that the relationship between middle school and high school group participation was significant. Hypothesis 2b's p-value was .076, indicating that the relationship between middle school and college group involvement was significant. Hypothesis 2c resulted in a p-value of .018 and hypothesis 2d in a p-value of .083. All four hypotheses proved to be statistically significant, and were therefore confirmed. There was a relationship between on-campus formal group involvement and middle school and high school participation (see table 7, 8, 9 and 10).

Table 7: Hypothesis 2a

Middle School Group	Mean (Standard Deviation) High School Group	N
0	1.8667 (.63994)	15
1 to 2	2.3810 (.49151)	42
3 to 5	2.7895 (.78851)	76
6 to 7	3.0769 (.75955)	13
Total	2.6027 (.76546)	146

***p= .000**

Table 8: Hypothesis 2b

Middle School Group	Mean (Standard Deviation) on Campus Group	N
0	1.0667 (1.22280)	15
1 to 2	1.4762 (1.10956)	42
3 to 5	1.4474 (.90029)	76
6 to 7	2.0769 (1.11516)	13
Total	1.4726 (1.03187)	146

***p= .076**

Table 9: Hypothesis 2c

High School Group	Mean (Standard Deviation) on Campus Group	N
0	.6667 (.81650)	6
1-3	1.2500 (.97590)	64
4-6	1.7460 (1.07716)	63
7-10	1.6429 (.74495)	14
11-13	1.5000 (.70711)	2
Total	1.4765 (1.02393)	149

***p= .018**

Table **10**: Hypothesis 2d

Combined Middle and High School Groups	Mean (Standard Deviation) on Campus Groups	N
0	.7500 (.95743)	4
1-4	1.1154 (1.07059)	26
5-8	1.5286 (1.03169)	70
9-12	1.7500 (.96732)	36
13-18	1.6000 (.69921)	10
Total	1.4932 (1.01877)	146

***p=.089**

Testing Hypothesis 3a and 3b: The alternative hypothesis 3a asserted that subjects who played on middle school sports teams were more likely to play sports in high school. The alternative hypothesis 3b maintained that high school sport participation predicted college athletic team involvement. For hypothesis 3a, the quantitative variable middle school sports involvement reflected the dependent variable and the quantitative variable high school sports involvement served as the independent variable. Hypothesis 3a had a p-value of .092, which suggested that high school sport involvement was associated with middle school sport involvement among the sample. For hypothesis 3b, a p-value of .000 allowed me to confirm that there was a relationship between high school athletics and varsity athletic participation on campus (see Table 11 and 12). This was suspected because college coaches tend to recruit high school athletes for their teams.

Table **11**: Hypothesis 3a

MS Sport	Mean (Standard Deviation) HS Sport	N
0	.77 (1.012)	39
1	1.08 (1.050)	38
2	1.64 (1.084)	33
3	2.11 (1.368)	27
4	2.00 (.943)	10
5	2.50 (.707)	2
Total	1.39 (1.206)	149

* $p = .092$ Table **12**: Hypothesis 3b

HS Sport	Mean (Standard Deviation) Sports on Campus	N
0	.0000 (.00000)	43
1	.0714 (.26066)	42
2	.4722 (.60880)	36
3	.7000 (.57124)	20
4	.8571 (.89974)	7
5	.0000 (.00000)	.1
Total	.2685 (.51506)	149

* $p = .000$

Testing Hypothesis 4: The alternative hypothesis proposed that subjects who were members of varsity athletic teams at Oberlin College were more likely to report higher self-esteem levels. The quantitative variable athletic team involvement

measured the number of varsity sport teams that subjects joined, and results ranged from zero to three, although the variable was recoded to include zero as no athletic team involvement, one as one sport team and two as two or more sport teams.

Athletic team membership was the independent variable and self-esteem level was the dependent variable within the model. The significant p-value of .048 led me to confirm hypothesis 4 (See Table 13).

Table **13**: Hypothesis 4

Athletic Group Participation	Mean (Standard Deviation) Self-esteem	N
0	19.95 (4.550)	114
1	21.60 (4.383)	30
2 or more	24.00 (6.819)	5
Total	20.42 (4.660)	149

***p= .048**

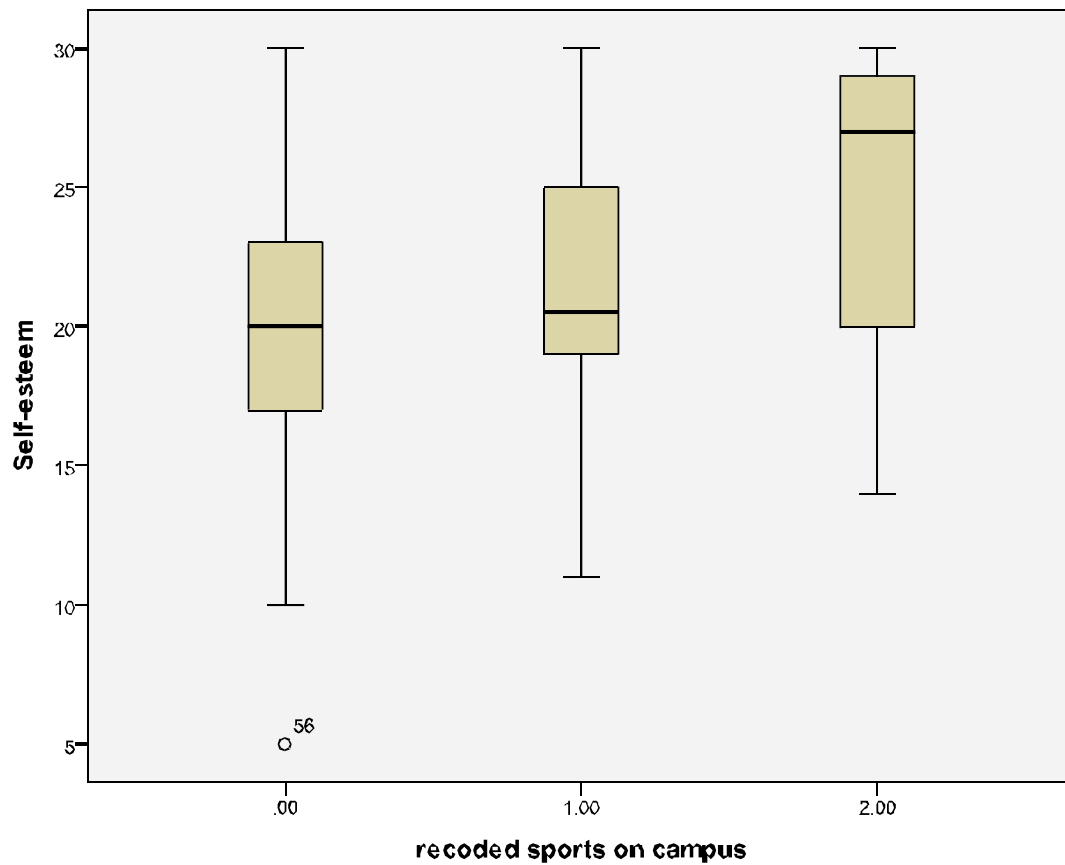
The test failed to show which groups were significant; the differences between each individual group proved to be insignificant. Because of this, I generated side-by-side boxplot to compare mean differences between self-esteem levels of members of no athletic teams, one athletic team, or two or more athletic teams (See Figure 3).

The side-by-side boxplot shows that the median self-esteem level for participants who had no varsity athletic involvement was around twenty. The upper quartile was around twenty-two, which meant that 25% of participants' self-esteem levels were above twenty-two. The lower quartile was seventeen and indicated that

25% of the data was below seventeen. The range of self-esteem levels was ten to thirty; however, there was one outlier self-esteem level of five. For students who played one sport, the median was a little over twenty. The upper quartile was slightly less than twenty-five and the lower quartile was about nineteen. This showed that students who played sports generally had higher self-esteem levels, but the medians of non-sport players and one-sport players were extremely close. The range in self-esteem level for one-sport players was eleven to thirty. While one-sport players did tend to have higher self-esteem levels on average, they were not that different than non-sport players.

Multiple sport players, however, had a median self-esteem of about twenty-four. The upper quartile was around twenty-eight and the lower quartile at twenty. The range in self-esteem level was smaller than that of non-sport or one-sport players—it ranged from fourteen to thirty and had no outliers. While the boxplot appeared promising, I kept in mind that the sample size for multiple-sport players was low, and that results may not have necessarily been accurate. Although there may not have been a tremendous difference between the self-esteem levels of non-athletes and athletes, the data does suggest that there was some significance.

Figure 3: Self-Esteem vs. Sports on Campus Side-by-Side Boxplot



Testing Hypothesis 5: The alternative hypothesis stated that women would report lower self-esteem levels than men. Sex reflected the independent variable and self-esteem the dependent variable. The p-value was .0035, which meant that the mean self-esteem score for men was higher than for women, as can be seen in table 14 (see Table 14).

Table **14**: Hypothesis 5

Sex	Mean (Standard Deviation) Self-Esteem	N
Male	21.57 (4.664)	65
Female	19.52 (4.484)	84
Total	20.42 (4.660)	149

***p= .0035**

Testing Hypothesis 6: The alternative hypothesis contended that minority students would report higher self-esteem levels than their White counterparts. I recoded the race variable into two responses: minority races comprised one group and White comprised the other. Race was the independent variable and self-esteem the dependent variable. The p-value was .689, which meant that I failed to confirm my hypothesis (see table 15).

Table **15**: Hypothesis 6

Race	Mean (Standard Deviation) Self-Esteem	N
White	20.53 (4.641)	99
Other	20.20 (4.738)	50
Total	20.42 (4.660)	149

***p= .689.**

Testing Hypothesis 7: Hypothesis 7a contended that students of higher socioeconomic status were more likely to take part in groups during middle school

and hypothesis 7b proposed that students with higher incomes were more likely to participate in high school extracurricular activities. Income served as the independent variable and middle and high school groups as the dependent variables. A p-value of .105 for hypothesis 7a and a p-value of .363 for hypothesis 7b indicated that income did not predict middle and high school group involvement (See table 16 and 17).

Table **16**: Hypothesis 7a

Income	Mean (Standard Deviation) Middle School Group	N
Less than \$10,000	1.1111 (1.16667)	9
\$40,000 to \$49,999	1.5000 (.75593)	8
\$50,000 to \$59,999	1.5000 (.84984)	10
\$60,000 to \$69,999	1.3750 (.74402)	8
\$70,000 to \$79,999	1.4444 (.72648)	9
\$80,000 to \$89,999	1.7647 (.83137)	17
\$90,000 to \$99,999	2.1333 (.51640)	15
\$100,000 to \$149,999	1.5833 (.77553)	24
\$150,000 or more	1.6452 (.60819)	31
Total	1.6183 (.76920)	131

***p= .105**

Table 17: Hypothesis 7b

Income	Mean (Standard Deviation) High School Group	N
Less than \$10,000	2.0000 (1.32288)	9
\$40,000 to \$49,999	2.6250 (.74402)	8
\$50,000 to \$59,999	2.9000 (.99443)	10
\$60,000 to \$69,999	2.3750 (.51755)	8
\$70,000 to \$79,999	2.8889 (.60093)	9
\$80,000 to \$89,999	2.4706 (1.00733)	17
\$90,000 to \$99,999	2.3125 (.87321)	16
\$100,000 to \$149,999	2.6800 (.90000)	25
\$150,000 or more	2.5806 (.71992)	31
Total	2.5489 (.87444)	133

* $p = .363$

METHOD: INTERVIEW DATA

In order to shed light on the statistical analysis and to gain greater insight into the factors impacting formal group affiliation and self-esteem, I chose to conduct several in-depth interviews with a select number of respondents. In order to choose students for interviews, I asked subjects to give their Oberlin College mailbox number on a completely voluntary basis after they finished the survey. A total of fifty-six participants volunteered their mailbox numbers and ten of them were randomly selected to participate in a phone or in-person interview, depending on their preference. Of the first ten who were randomly selected, only two people responded and were interviewed. Of the next ten who were randomly selected, one person responded. After this, I approached people I knew had taken the survey and

asked them personally if they would be willing to participate in an interview. This process elicited a total of nine interviews. To ensure anonymity, the pseudonyms below were given for each respondent: Jane, Lisa, Isabelle, Olivia, Noah, Jacob, William, Abby and Daniel.

Of the nine interviewees, four were men and five were women. Four students identified as White, one as Black, one as Black and White, one as Asian American and White and one refrained from answering the question. Income levels for the year 2010 ranged from less than \$10,000 to \$150,000 or more. The students' self-esteem levels ranged from twelve to thirty. Four of the interviewees participated on varsity athletic teams (See Figure 18).

Figure **18**: Distribution of Interviewee Self-esteem Levels, Income Levels and Reported Race

Interviewee	Self-esteem Level	2010 Income Level	Reported Race
Jane	30	\$150,000 or more	White
Lisa	17	\$80,000 to \$89,999	White
Olivia	18	\$80,000 to \$89,999	White
Noah	20	Less than \$10,000	Black
Jacob	18	Less than \$10,000	White
William	12	\$150,000 or more	Asian American and White
Abby	13	\$50,000 to \$59,999	N/A
Daniel	20	\$60,000-\$69,999	Black and White
Isabelle	25	\$90,000 to \$99,999	White

Interviews were semi-structured and conversational; I generated a series of questions before the interviews began, but did not refrain from asking other questions that were not pre-planned. Interviews lasted between ten and twenty minutes and covered topics such as extracurricular involvement on campus, reasons for joining formal extracurricular activities, feelings and attitudes toward groups, group identities, and high school, middle-school and elementary school participation. All interviews were recorded with permission from the subjects.

RESULTS: INTERVIEW DATA

EARLY GROUP INVOLVEMENT

Concerted Cultivation vs. Natural Child Growth

The question: “what extracurricular activities did you participate in as a child” aimed to gauge whether interviewees experienced concerted cultivation or natural child growth when they were young. Children raised through concerted cultivation experience participation in an array of activities as a child, while those raised through natural child growth are exposed to non-structured, leisurely play rather than extracurricular engagement.

When interviewees Jane, Olivia and Lisa recounted their childhood stories, they seemed to fit both concerted cultivation and natural child growth models, or fall somewhere in between. Isabelle, Abby and Daniel fit the concerted cultivation standard, while William was the only interviewee who reported no extracurricular involvement as a young child, and solidly fit the natural child growth model. Though

Noah and Jacob did not come from families who practiced concerted cultivation, they nonetheless signed themselves up for free extracurricular activities at their schools, and were therefore able to take advantage of the social and cultural benefits that organized activities can offer.

In discussing their childhoods, most students spoke of heavy extracurricular participation as normative. Participation in activities was taken for granted. Isabelle, one of the interviewees whose childhood was influenced by concerted cultivation explained: "I was always playing sports with the other kids because that's what like, everyone did when they were little." In the past twenty years, middle class parents have begun to sign their kids up for as many activities as possible; it has simply become a widespread social trend. In describing the parents of her classmates in elementary and middle school, Jane summed up this concerted cultivation social trend: "The parents were very wealthy, you know, typical parents who sign up their kids for a ton of things." Concerted cultivation among middle class families has become the norm, and the idea of natural child growth frowned upon.

Daniel and Abby also had parents who were a part of the concerted cultivation craze. Daniel explained: "My dad used to sign us up for everything. He worked as a counselor at the local recreational center, so he would just kind of [be like] "oh, there's an activity? I'll just throw my kids in there, I won't have to get a babysitter that night."" Similarly, Abby's parents signed her up for a variety of activities. She reported: "I was forced to do everything for a year at least before I was able to quit it. So I did like, swimming, basketball, soccer, flag football, gymnastics, ballet..." Daniel and Abby, along with Isabelle, fit the concerted

cultivation model because they were signed up for many activities as children. They all reported positive feelings toward their upbringings and said that even if they did not necessarily enjoy the activities at the time, they were happy for the opportunity to engage in them.

Noah and Jacob, whose parents did not practice concerted cultivation but who engaged in a lot of activities that they chose themselves, also reflected back on their childhoods in positive ways. Noah, who took part in basketball, track, the math club and student council throughout elementary and middle school said: "I never liked free time, I just loved being able to do things, so that's why I did it. I was never forced to do anything, it was always my decision to do it." Jacob had an experience similar to Noah's; he signed himself up for sports and activities because as a child he would rather be busy than sit at home during his free time.

Jane, Olivia and Lisa all experienced a blend of concerted cultivation and natural child growth during elementary and middle schools, or something that fell between the two models. Because of this, they all reported feelings of abnormality. When I asked Jane about her childhood afterschool involvement, she explained that she was a member of an intensive youth choir, and that she had dabbled in ice-skating, piano lessons and soccer. She went on to say that her parents were "very unconventional," and that she would "just kind of hang out and go to the library" and "[play] outside everyday" with her four sisters. In classifying her parents as unconventional because they signed her up for only a few activities, Jane exemplifies the expectation of concerted cultivation within middle class families. Olivia, who

also experienced both concerted cultivation and natural child growth echoed Jane when she said:

Recently there has been a craze, like, parents sign their kids up for so many things to do, which is great also, but when I was younger I was really into like reading, and playing in my back yard. I mean I was kind of like, an introverted kid, which I think is partially why.

Olivia reported playing t-ball and being a member of both a basketball and an art club, but said she also enjoyed spending her leisure time on her own. Similarly, Lisa participated in hip-hop and tennis lessons now and then, but for the most part her time was unstructured. She admitted feeling disappointed because she did not have enough extracurriculars:

I feel like that's one thing I really look back on in my childhood... I wish that my mom had signed me up for more extracurriculars... I just remember missing out, like I was just really bored always. Like I made my own play dates in kindergarten, but yeah, I was just always so bored and I would like go home and do nothing.

"Missing out" was a trend that echoed throughout a number of interviews.

Isabelle explained her reason for participating in childhood activities as "not wanting to get left out of anything." Jane also expressed: "When I was little I felt really left out. Like, I wished I did a lot of activities like all my friends did... my family was really different than the other families at [my] school." Jane, and Lisa wished that they had experienced more group activities because this was what other kids were doing. However, neither of them reported that their lack of group activities as children impacted their high school and college group participation.

William represented the only interviewee who grew up with no structured afterschool schedule at all. He admitted having trouble remembering what he did as a young child, but recalled that in middle school, he participated in no group

involvement whatsoever. He attributed this in part to the state of his middle school when he explained: “There were no student organizations because it was a rough ass school. There were no resources for school programs and there were no real groups.” When I asked him to describe his daily afterschool schedule, William said: “I was just trying to go to someone’s house, you know, it was kind of just like, we’d go around and roam the streets, act like a fool and harass people and you know, play video games, but there was no real structure.” When I asked him if he felt left out of structured activities, he simply stated, “No, I really didn’t.” Because he went to a school with few resources and no extracurricular opportunities, and none of his classmates participated in groups, William did not feel excluded from the concerted cultivation craze.

Often, concerted cultivation and natural child growth experiences reflect socioeconomic status. Of the small sample of interviewees, this did not always hold true. Noah and Jacob, whose families did not practice concerted cultivation, reported their 2010 annual family income as less than \$10,000, which fits the theory that families with lower income levels do not practice concerted cultivation. Isabelle, Abby and Daniel reported their 2010 annual family income levels as \$90,000 to \$99,999, \$50,000 to \$59,999 and \$60,000 to \$69,999 respectively. Their parents were heavily involved in concerted cultivation and their middle to high annual income levels reflect this. William, whose parents practiced natural child growth, reported his 2010 annual family income as \$150,000 or more, which does not reflect the purported connection between parenting style and economic status. Many reasons could account for this, ranging from lower family income levels when

William was a child, to cultural differences, to logistics. Olivia, Lisa, and Jane, whose parents incorporated both concerted cultivation and natural child growth models, shed light on some financial and logistical difficulties that accompany decision-making as it relates to formal group involvement in childhood. Both Olivia and Lisa reported their annual family income as \$80,000 to \$89,999, while Jane reported her annual family income as \$150,000 or more. Jane and Lisa both discussed money issues and practical problems having impacted their group involvement. As Lisa explained: "Everything was just so... expensive, and it was also really hard [in terms of] transport... my mom couldn't drive me to these places and pick me up... she was really busy and it wasn't her top priority as a parent to sign me up for extracurriculars." This helps explain why Lisa's mother did not practice concerted cultivation; her family could afford to place her in some activities, but logistics prevented her from becoming an "overactive" child. Similarly, Jane described her family as less "well-off" than the other families at her school even though her family's income level was in the highest bracket, and pointed out that family size also contributed to her lack of heavy group involvement: if Jane participated in a given activity, it would only be fair that her four sisters be given the same opportunity, and it is expensive to pay for five children. Jane and Lisa's special situations help explain their family income levels in relation to parenting styles. Olivia, who reported being an "introverted" child who enjoyed leisure time suggested that her parents were more relaxed about signing her up for activities because they understood that she could use her free time to her advantage.

Explanations such as these help clarify why income levels do not necessarily predict group participation, as confirmed by the results of the survey data.

High School Extracurricular Participation

All interviewees affirmed that they had intensive high school extracurricular schedules except for William. This largely parallels elementary and middle school participation trends, though some parents who had originally been less invested in concerted cultivation tended to become more so as their children got older. In response to the question: “What activities did you participate in throughout high school and why?” many students’ first inclination was to mention the lack of time constraints they felt as adolescents. Olivia explained: “I was a lot more involved in extracurriculars because of time,” and Isabelle similarly stated: “It’s high school and you don’t have to work hard [so] you can do a lot more.” Similarly, Daniel explained that he did “everything” in high school because “there [was] a lot of time to kill,” and Lisa agreed that her sport involvement was “a great way to spend [her] afternoons.” Abby, Noah and Jacob also all reported being heavily involved in activities as high school students, from playing sports to being senior peer leaders. Abby’s reference to her high school experience epitomizes the extracurricularly motivated adolescent: “I was definitely one of those extremely overactive kids in high school and I did a lot of extracurriculars in one semester...” By referring to herself as one of “those” students, Abby implies that the overactive adolescent is a familiar social phenomenon.

Reasons for high school group involvement other than filling time ranged from resume building to love of the chosen activity. Two of the interviewees, Olivia and Jane, stressed the pressure they felt about being accepted into college. In fact, many high school students feel compelled to join as many extracurricular activities as possible unless they are especially talented in a given activity, because college admissions offices often look for “well-rounded” students.” Several interviewees discussed the direct link between their formal group involvement and their resumes. Olivia for instance said:

This is going to sound awful, but with student council, it wasn't that interesting, and with community service too. It was really fun when we ran races... but I think partially it's because you want to get into college and everyone is so extracurricular [that] you have to do them if you want to get into college and you have to do like six of them in like six different areas, and so that was definitely part of my motivation.

It is clear that students feel pressure to participate in many different groups in order to improve their chances of getting into college.

Jane's parents, who juxtaposed both concerted cultivation and natural child growth when Jane was younger, took on concerted cultivation in full swing once Jane entered high school. Jane did not always make her own decisions to join groups, as she pointed out: “My parents made me [join debate], I didn't choose to do that (laughs). But then I stayed [in the group] anyways just for college purposes and I did like it and I did well.” At least Jane benefited from her experience on the debate team, but her example demonstrates the extreme parents will go to in order to make sure their children have their best shot at getting into college.

Abby also mentioned that she remained consistent in one of her groups, another aspect of extracurricular involvement that colleges pay attention to. She told me:

[...I also] joined a literacy facilitation team and we basically taught adults how to read and write... And I think that was one of the things that I spent like four years of my life doing instead of changing every year.

Abby explained that she developed a genuine interest in literary facilitation and began to have a clearer understanding of her “privilege” through her teaching.

Both Olivia and Lisa also said that they joined their sports teams out of genuine interest, as well as a desire to “get active.” Lisa stressed the importance of staying active when she proclaimed: “When I didn’t have practice, I would just go home and watch TV and eat and [I] wouldn’t start my [homework] until later... I would just procrastinate, so sports were a really good outlet for me.” Judging from what the interviewees reported, sports in high school tend to serve a different purpose than other extracurricular activities. Noah explained that students usually play sports for fun: “I joined the sports team because I love sports so I joined football, basketball and track because I just wanted to play.” Motivation in joining athletic groups in high school is different from motivation in joining other groups.

William represented the only interviewee who really deviated from the norm in terms of formal group participation in his high school. He described joining only one group during his senior year “because of the pretty girls” in it. He explained that he lived several hours away from his school, and that it was academically rigorous. When school was over, he went straight home to start his homework. When I asked him if he ever felt left out, he explained, “Not really, I guess in high school groups

were never really serious.” William is unique because he did not feel pressure to join groups for any reason at all and did not feel different because he was raised through the natural child growth model.

THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF JOINING GROUPS IN COLLEGE

On the subject of joining groups in college, I first asked participants what extracurricular group activities they participated in on campus and why they had decided to become members. Each interviewee said that he or she was a member of at least one formal group at some point throughout his or her Oberlin College experience. Interviewees suggested a wide range of reasons for initial group involvement, from genuine interest to meeting pretty girls, though the most frequent response to the question “how did you become a member of your formal group?” was for friendship.

When I asked fourth year Jane why she joined Oberlin Young Educators, she replied, “I actually joined because I have friends in the group.” Noah, a third year, reiterated this point when he said, “for [the dance group], um, my friends (pause), a lot of my friends do it and it seemed like they were having so much fun... so I auditioned and I made it!” Second year Isabelle had a similar experience when she explained her reason for hosting a radio show [freshman year]: “...it was the beginning of my freshman year and one of my friends from high school was like, hey [Isabelle] let’s do a radio show, so I just joined in with them.” Similarly, when he

described his inclination to join a specific formal group his freshman year, fourth year William stated:

Well I was unsure about [the group] but I knew a lot of people who were very much influenced [by the topics it covered], so I wanted to understand it a bit more and then I did more research and I guess that was just [a social choice] because you're very much informed by the people you're close to. I wanted to learn more about issues that my friends care about.

Rather than seek out formal groups on their own, college students often become extracurricularly motivated through friendship. They either consult friends who have similar interests, or join groups to further friendships already in place.

Students with friends in formal groups are often inclined to become members of the same groups. Social ties are as important as specific interest in an activity, if not more so.

Other social aspects of college life impacted the decisions of the students I interviewed to join groups. Jacob, a second year, demonstrated that peer pressure can play a role in relation to becoming a member of a group when he said, "I think like, the kind of cool-people seeking, social climbing shit definitely affects my life." In this statement, Jacob suggests that joining groups enables students to gain social status. Other interviewees also expressed that they wanted to find people they could relate to, and that formal groups often offered them this prospect. Freshmen in particular want to fit into their new environment, and interviewees often joined groups to make new friends. William, for instance, explained:

I would definitely say [the first group I joined] was... that was a social choice. I was on north campus and I felt really isolated from people who kind of had like, similar backgrounds as me and [the group I joined] was a welcoming place and I got to meet a lot of people that I felt comfortable around, that kind of had like, a similar social

experience and similar tastes, and it was nice being a part of a social group because I was feeling isolated.

William was able to find a community within his group. Jacob also came to the realization at one point that “all these people are out there for me to hang out with, and just like... I’ll be with this group for a while and see what happens.” Groups offer the opportunity to meet and bond with new friends. Groups also unify people and prevent social isolation.

However, becoming a member of an already established group could prove to be intimidating as well as welcoming unless friends were already members, and some students who joined groups in which they did not already know people (aside from athletic teams) expressed initial feelings of discomfort. In discussing her debate team membership, Jane explained: “It’s hard for me, if like, I go into a group where a lot of people know each other, I can get very easily intimidated and I can withdraw from the group.” Feeling out of place ultimately motivated her to leave the debate team after two years: “[I wasn’t able to] show my true personality and connect with people that well. So I think that contributed to me not being that invested...” Abby, a second year student, who joined several formal groups her first year because she “really wanted to see a community,” also reported that she left her groups because they were “too hierarchical and closed.” Group membership does not always lead to friendship if you do not find solidarity, support and security within your group.

Abby was ultimately successful in finding the community she was looking for, however, when she joined two performing arts groups sophomore year. She described one group as being “... a safe space and a place to just be creative and be

yourself and not be judged... a little corner of the social sphere where I have support.” Although she found a best friend in this group, Abby also explained that she did not actually spend time with other members outside of official meeting times: “I guess some of them have become my friends, but not really,” she told me. Abby ended up finding her main community of friends within her co-op (Oberlin’s alternative living and dining set-up in which students living in a dorm cook and clean themselves), which can be considered a sort of alternative formal group within the college community.

Oddly, however, although they found acceptance within a group community, Abby and William reported a self-esteem level of thirteen and twelve respectively, which are considered below average. Jane’s level of self-esteem, on the other hand, was a whopping thirty, the highest possible level. It seems as though having a positive social experience in a group does not necessarily lead to self-esteem, while failing to find social acceptance does not necessarily impact self-esteem in a negative way. I found several explanations for this phenomenon when I investigated it.

Jane joined two formal groups as a first year to “boost [her] resume,” and because one of the groups, the debate team, involved an activity she had participated in throughout high school. She remained in the groups during her first two years of college and then chose to drop them. It is interesting to note that Jane, who thrived from being a member of the debate team in high school, did not feel comfortable on the team in college. Aside from not relating to the members, her leaving could be attributed to the fact that as a college freshman, she was once again

at the bottom of the hierarchy, where in high school she had been at the top. Perhaps she experienced lower self-esteem during her early college years because she found the transition from being leader to follower hard. Maybe she also joined the groups for the wrong reasons. Now a fourth year, Jane reflected on her experience and explained: "When I think about my life and my accomplishments, I really don't do that much, but at the same time I really don't care that much. But like, socially it doesn't affect me in any way." Her thinking seems to have changed: where initially she wanted to bolster her resume, now she is not as invested in proving herself. In addition, she asserts that not participating in formal groups after her sophomore year did not affect her socially. This is because, as she went on to explain, her personal friend group is tightly knit and supportive. Jane also told me: "I've been much more involved with my job at home, like I'm really into it and I really excel at that job and I really stand out." Jane's job has become her formal group and her ability to be a prominent player within it has no doubt contributed to her self-esteem level. She was able to find alternatives to a formal group in college to establish her social identity and to feel a sense of well-being.

Why did William and Abby report low self-esteem levels at the same time that they described finding communities they related to within their formal groups? William, a fourth year, said at one point that one of his groups "has given me a support group with struggles I've had to deal with." This suggests that William is struggling with issues he did not refer to in the interview. He reported "feeling marginalized" in reference to another group when he did not agree with the group's political ideas. Perhaps William might have a tendency to feel marginalized in

general. There are probably not many students at Oberlin who were raised through the natural child growth model, and William may feel an underlying sense of constraint not experienced by the rest of the Oberlin population. There are other factors, outside of formal groups that contribute to levels of self-esteem. Unlike William, Abby stated very clearly that she felt different from the general student population at Oberlin: she comes from a diverse pre-college community and finds the Oberlin environment to be “homogenous.” She did not expect such a big change when she arrived on campus. When reality does not meet expectations, it can hurt well-being. Ultimately, however, Abby seems to have found satisfaction within her formal groups, though she is still working on fitting into the community as a whole. Abby explained that she “[prioritizes] creativity and [extracurricular] involvement over [her] homework,” and plans to experiment with many more formal groups. This may help her to develop her social identity within the Oberlin community and to bolster her self-esteem.

It was evident throughout each interview that social camaraderie obtained through groups have positive effects on members, and that social skills developed through extracurricular participation provide members with cultural capital, even though these benefits might not by themselves determine levels of self-esteem. Abby pointed to the positives of formal group involvement when she said:

“[extracurricular activities] have given me the chance to... become more social. And also, you know that you can do something. You may not necessarily be good at it, [but you learn that] you can just jump into things.” Although second year Jacob bounced around in his college groups without committing to any one in particular,

he has met friends and formed social bonds through them and is “happy with that.” His reported self-esteem level is an average eighteen. In response to the question: How do you think your group(s) impact you as an individual? Third year Daniel said that joining groups, especially his freshman year, was a “positive thing.” He described his teammates on an intramural team as “a good group of people [who were] a lot of fun to be around.” He also mentioned that group involvement contributed to his social skills when he said: “[My groups have] made me a lot more outgoing than I used to be when I was younger and just overall I’m better at dealing with people.” Groups can give people a set of social skills that they may not find elsewhere, and this contributes to cultural capital. Daniel reported an average self-esteem level of twenty. Noah also discussed positive outcomes of group involvement when he explained that his two extracurricular activities gave him a “different dynamic.” Previous research supports the idea that multiple group involvement can foster well-being because skills learned in one group can be translated over to the other (Kort-Butler et al., 2010). In reference to his groups, Noah went on to say, “I get so many memories and form relationships with people that I will have for the rest of my life.” Noah found his best friends in his groups, and he clearly believes that these friendships will be lasting. Social satisfaction can bolster well-being because friendships are self-validating. Like Daniel, Noah reported his self-esteem level to be twenty. Judging from the positive comments of the four interviewees, I would have expected their self-esteem levels to be a bit higher. Nonetheless, these levels reflect the results of the survey data.

Athletes reported the most gain from involvement in their groups, which are, specifically, teams. Athletes acquire positive feelings not only through social camaraderie and a particular set of skills, but through personally identifying with their sport and feeling enormous support from their coaches. Because involvement in athletics is more complex than involvement in other groups, it must be discussed separately.

THE ATHLETIC ADVANTAGE

When I interviewed athletes, I noticed that they talk about camaraderie and social identity in a different way than non-athletes. Being a member of a sports team seems to impact students in a drastically different manner than other formal group membership. As a result, according to the survey data, athletes in general at Oberlin tend to have a slightly higher sense of self worth than their non-athletic counterparts.

Social Camaraderie Within Varsity Athletics

Athletes at Oberlin spend more time with each other than do members of other formal groups. This is due to their practice schedule, which generally consists of two to three hour practices four to six days a week, and one to two games a week during the season. Outside the season, athletes continue to participate in practice sessions. Second year Isabelle, who played a spring sport, explained her off-season to me:

... So how it works is, you're allowed to have sixteen out of season practices with the coach, and so come September, before the weather gets bad, you have three practices a week until you hit sixteen practices. So usually all of September into like mid-October. And then from October through finals of that semester you have captains practices two or three days a week and then you have to, like, do your lifting schedule during that too. And we came back a week early during winter break and did three a days for that. And then now we're into lifting from 7:00 am to like 8:30 am in the mornings on Tuesday, Thursdays, Saturday, or the one on Saturday isn't at 7:00 am. But, lifting three days a week and then practicing six days a week for a couple of hours. So it's definitely like a pretty big time commitment all year.

Athletes at Oberlin spend copious amounts of time together, whether they are in or out of season because varsity sports are a yearlong commitment. When people spend that much time together, they tend to form strong relationships.

The interviewees all emphasized the importance of social camaraderie within their athletic teams in relation to feelings of self-satisfaction. Two of the athletes indicated that some of their best friends were on their sport team, though they also told me that they had other social groups. Two others said that their sport team *was* their social group. The athletes whose team did not necessarily comprise their core social group explained why, and also indicated that they saw their situation as veering from the norm. Fourth year Lisa explained: "I've met like, a couple of my good friends on the team definitely, and I feel really close to everyone but, no, it's not my core social group." Lisa attributed this to the fact that her team is unusually small, consisting of only ten girls, and that they all belong to other social groups beyond the team. Maybe one reason they are not so close is that her teammates do not interact with one another as a group while they are playing; each player faces a single opponent in her game. Perhaps if her team had been more interactive the players would have felt more integrated, and Lisa would have felt a

greater sense of connectedness. This might have benefited her since she did not report any other formal group membership. Alternatively, third year Noah, whose core social group stemmed from the performing arts group he joined before his athletic group, explained that: "...when I started practicing I just met so many great people who were so supportive and the coaches and everything, and that just made me want to stay." Noah met his best friend on the team and felt a sense of camaraderie with the others. Noah's self-esteem level of twenty, normal to high, reflects his social standing within his groups.

The other two athletes, Isabelle and Olivia, represent what I believe is the norm for athletes at Oberlin college. In terms of her sport influencing social camaraderie, Isabelle said:

Basically because I'm an athlete, I came in freshman year and during freshman orientation when like no one else knew anyone I was just picked up in this team and we had practices and I made all my friends through [my sport]... And even my best guy friends too, a lot of them are on the [men's version of my sport team], because we did so much together and like all this practice kind of next to each other and knew each other.

When I asked Isabelle if she felt that other teams were as tightly knit as hers, she cited another example:

When [athletes' whose sports have preseason] come in as freshmen and they're on campus for three weeks before everyone else, they become friends with [their teammates] and for the rest of the four years, like those are their closest friends a lot of the time... Sometimes it's a good thing and sometimes it's a bad thing. Like I always joke with [my teammate] that I don't have any friends besides athletes and like, it's kind of true. But it's not necessarily a good thing, I just like don't have time to go out and meet other people.

When athletes come to Oberlin as freshman the first people they encounter and spend time with are their teammates; bonding with the first people you meet who share a common interest happens naturally for the majority of athletes, and shapes

their entire four years at school. Isabelle indicated that this was “not necessarily a good thing,” but gauging from her tone of voice, it did not seem to bother her. Where other students join non-athletic groups in search of social camaraderie, athletes join a team because they are recruited and have had experience with a sport as middle and high schoolers. Camaraderie often falls naturally into place with team membership.

Throughout the interviews it became evident that “teammate” meant something beyond “group-mate.” Third year Olivia pointed out the difference in the two entities when she asserted:

There’s something about having a teammate. Like, a lot of the people on the team, even if they’re not like my best friends outside of [my sport] or outside of practice, there’s still a different connection with them almost. Like, you’ve seen them cry, like you’ve competed with them, you’ve like, I don’t know, you have to do crazy stuff together and like physically exert yourself together and it can get very emotional and I think that on the whole it’s been very positive...

Olivia suggests that teammates are exposed to more intense experiences with each other than members of other formal groups might be. Ups and downs in sport participation helps explain the tightly knit nature of athletic teams in terms of social camaraderie because members must be empathetic toward one another.

Social Identity Theory

When I asked students to comment on how their formal groups impact their identities, athletes were the only ones who responded that they defined themselves based on their group membership. Other interviewees asserted that they were “proud” to identify with their groups, but did not say that their membership defined

who they were. When I asked Olivia how she thought her sport team contributed to her identity, she responded:

In high school [my sport] wasn't really a big part of my life, and I wouldn't [have] defined myself as a [sport] player... but at Oberlin it's probably one of the biggest ways I define myself... I don't know what I'd be doing right now if I wasn't on [my sport] team... [it] has made me appreciate myself a lot more.

Lisa, a member of a different sports team, reiterated Olivia's exact words when she said "[my sport team has] made me appreciate myself a lot more." Isabelle, on the same team as Olivia proclaimed: "my group *is* my [sport team]," meaning that she defined herself in terms of being an athlete. Her comment almost parallels Descarte's famous statement, "I think, therefore I am." She might as well have said, "I play, therefore I am." In no other group outside athletics did interviewees make such extreme remarks about how their group reflected their identities.

Coincidentally, all three female athletes are team captains. When I asked Isabelle how being captain impacted her, she explained, "there's not really that much pressure," because she is one of four captains (one for each year; first, second, third and fourth) and her main responsibility is to effectively communicate with the rest of the players in her year. Being named captain as a second year student surely bolstered Isabelle's self-esteem, which she reported as a healthy twenty-five. It stands to reason that when a team nominates a player to be captain, it will heighten that player's sense of self because she feels both self-validation and team acceptance. At the same time, she is at the top of the hierarchical ladder. Third year Olivia, on the same team as Isabelle, expressed similar sentiments about feeling valued by her leadership position. She expressed how her teammates influenced the

way she feels when she said: “I really appreciate my teammates, like, they’re such beautiful, strong, confident women... and it’s really an honor to play at college with people like that.” In spite of acquiring such evident feelings of satisfaction from team participation, Olivia reported her self-esteem level as eighteen, which I expected to be higher. Fourth year Lisa explained that her role as a captain pushed her to work harder: “I feel like it makes you have to step up and be a role model and be really positive to, and I think it’s not, like, forced me, but has made me more positive about academics, social experiences and a lot of other things... and [my sport].” As captain, Lisa not only gives her teammates social support, but also challenges herself more than she would if she weren’t a team leader. Although she described how leadership contributed to a more positive outlook on many aspects of her life, Lisa reported a self-esteem level of seventeen, which, again, I expected to be higher.

Two other elements that contribute to well-being through investment in athletic identity include recruitment and competition. In order to be recruited, each athlete interviewee had played his or her sport throughout high school. Recruitment benefited Olivia, who recounted her feelings when the Oberlin College coach called her: “I think part of [my reason for continuing my sport] was [kind of] the novelty of getting the call and being like, “oh we want to recruit you,” and I was like, that’s so weird but kinda cool.” Recruitment can bolster feelings of self worth because athletes feel that they are selected for their special skills. College athletic teams are filled with students who are honing interests they have nurtured in high school.

When they come together as a group in college, athletes find that they have things in common: they were socialized as athletes at an early age, they have

identified with the label “athlete” throughout most of their lives, and they were recruited into a “special club.” They know what it is like to take time out of their schedules for organized sports and they have learned how to manage their time. Because of this, all athletes at Oberlin share a mutual understanding. As Isabelle put it: “At Oberlin, the athletes definitely have something in common... I’d say (pause), more normal.” It is interesting to note that Isabelle finds athletes at Oberlin more “normative” students when compared to the rest of the college population. This feeling may apply specifically because of the college’s reputation for being alternative and accepting of differences. Isabelle used the word “normal” in a positive sense, to convey that athletes share preconditioned commonalities. She also implies that athletes find social acceptance amongst themselves. Fitting in and feeling a sense of comfort and acceptance within a community can be extremely beneficial.

Competition can also have positive consequences. According to the social identity theory, members of a group evaluate their sense of self through in-group comparison (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Athletic teams compete with a series of other colleges, which gives them other groups to constantly compare themselves with. When the home team wins, a sense of school pride erupts and athletes are congratulated for their teamwork and individual talent. Everyone feels that they are the best and the team celebrates together and with friends. But even if a team loses a game, it can reap benefits from the loss because it can criticize the other team in order to feel a sense of worth. Criticizing a group of people that you don’t know or care about facilitates in-group favoritism. In this way, something negative can be

turned into something positive and bolster self-esteem. Where athletes have an array of groups full of strangers whom they can put down, other on-campus groups do not have this advantage. (Though group glorification and bias exist in other groups, it is not nearly as pronounced or extreme as on athletic teams). Self-validation through comparison is readily available to athletes whether or not they win. In this way competition provides another benefit that athletes have over non-athletes.

Other Benefits of Varsity Athletics

Varsity athletes at Oberlin College enjoy other advantages. Many sport players I interviewed mentioned the importance of devoting part of their days to physical activity, and described how that was beneficial. Olivia, for example, said: “A lot of it is definitely the physical part because you’re like getting exercise and it’s hard to make time for that at Oberlin because of academics and it kind of makes you like stay active which is obviously really good for your physical and mental health.” Similarly, Lisa explained that she didn’t know what she would do if two hour practices weren’t built into her schedule. Noah joined his sport team because he “really wanted to get back into running.” Previous research indicates that physical activity is a great way to cope with stress, and athletes understand that they benefit from their workouts (Nguyen-Michel, 2006). It stands to reason that an ability to cope with stress can have positive consequences.

Athletics at Oberlin offer another boost because they can open up other formal group involvement opportunities that sport players might not otherwise

have realized were available. For example, both Olivia and Isabelle began writing for the school newspaper because of their athlete identities. Olivia explained:

...We get these all-athlete e-mails and [the head of athletics] e-mailed [all athletes] at the beginning of last semester saying that they needed more sports writers for the [newspaper] and they were looking for athletes, or just like any writer, and they thought athletes may be more willing to do it, so [my friend] and I volunteered to do it because we needed an extra credit and then this semester they asked me to be the editor.

Athletes are part of a social network that includes an all-athlete e-mail thread, and their community advertises certain opportunities specifically designed for them.

This advantage exposes them to experiences they might not have thought of otherwise. Being an athlete at Oberlin College leads to automatic membership into an exclusive and supportive community that can also lead to pursuing the development of other skills.

Athlete-coach relations comprise a final benefit to athletes. At first, I did not consider bringing up the subject of coaches in athlete interviews. However, when I asked Lisa about how athletics impacted her, one of the things she said was: "... I have a really good relationship with my coach, and I love that aspect." When I probed Lisa about her relationship with her coach, she explained:

It's been...a really positive part of my college experience. Um, I mean, I can't imagine having a coach that like, I didn't respect or enjoy being around. Um, yeah, I think [with my sport], I think I probably wouldn't have played honestly. He's been a really positive influence and you know I think, [in] thinking about my teachers... (pause), I don't feel like I have such a strong relationship with my advisors or with previous, well I've definitely always felt comfortable with my teachers, but it hasn't been over the course of four years, a strong relationship. My coach is the first person I go to.

Isabelle echoed Lisa's points when she said:

My coach and my assistant coach definitely have my back. If I have a problem or like just need to talk I can definitely come to them. And even if it's like a touchy subject, assistant coaches are great for that because there really is no one else, like no other adult in Oberlin. I like my professors and I go to their office hours but it's not the same relationship at all. Like coaches are really looking out for you and I don't think most people at Oberlin have that.

Olivia had a similar point to make:

...Last year I got sick and had to go to student health so my coach drove me there, um which was really nice. And, like, if you like need to go to the airport in an emergency, like there is someone you can call. And I mean it's not just like convenient things like that, like if you, like need advice, yeah, they're definitely like a parent, well not a parent figure but like someone who is older who has more experience than you, who has more experience than your friends you might know and who like isn't as formal as a professor.

Lisa, Isabelle and Olivia all stress the value of athlete-coach relations, and make it clear that coaches can offer both practical and emotional support in times of need. Coaches can impart wisdom and provide mentorship. Most other college students do not have figureheads like this to depend on, or form such a special bond with a caring adult.

A FEW NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF GROUP INVOLVEMENT

While interviewees mostly reported positive formal group experiences, they also mentioned several negative aspects. The most commonly reported negative side of formal group involvement was stress. For example, one of Jacob's groups (mandatory to fulfill a scholarship requirement) requires meetings once a week in the evenings. When I asked him how he felt about this he explained:

They're only negative in so far as they can be pretty long and boring and they don't add that much to the enjoyment of my week, and [they] don't give me that much more information that I need... That's also taking it from the standpoint of like, me last semester going to all of those meetings and being really stressed out by my classes and not looking at it as a social occasion to just hang out with people and just seeing it as a work obligation.

It is not necessarily the meetings themselves that stress Jacob out, but rather the time they take away from his homework time and other aspects of his schedule.

Conversely, Abby reported that homework stood in the way of pursuing other activities, and she added that this semester she purposely took one less class so that she could make more time for extracurricular groups, which she described as "a little lovely way of having your own life outside of school."

Athletes were the interviewees who reported the most problems with time constraints. Because they practice every day, Isabelle said, athletes have to have "much better time management" skills than their non-athletic counterparts. Athlete interviewees complained of having to miss out on weekend and other events because of practice and games. Isabelle pushed this point when she said: "It sucks because you have to give up things for [your sport] and... by not going out with your friends on Friday night, its not like "oh good for you," it's like, that was expected of you...you had to do that." Aside from having to give up certain things for sports, Noah said that he got stressed because his formal group meeting times sometimes overlap. He added: "[If] I have a test the next day [it can be stressful], ... but usually when I talk to... the people in charge, it works out fine for me." Having to carefully manage time can lead to stressful situations, but as long as they're handled with care, scheduling problems can usually be worked out. Stressful conditions tend to

last for brief periods of time, and students learn ways to manage them. When students use successful coping strategies, their ability to deal with stress can enhance their well-being and contribute to cultural capital. In this way, time constraints can end up being positive rather than negative.

DISCUSSION

Almost all the students I interviewed had a long history of participating in multiple extracurricular activities. Filling time and building resumes were the most common reasons interviewees gave for joining groups in high school. Eight of the nine reported heavy group involvement in high school, and having had at least some extracurriculars in elementary and middle school. Concerted cultivation parenting styles overwhelmed natural child growth, as only one interviewee truly took part in no formal groups until his senior year of high school. At an expensive liberal arts college like Oberlin, it comes as no surprise that a large portion of the student population experienced a “typical” middle-class upbringing that involved participation in at least some form of organized activity. While individuality remains a core value of North American culture, society emphasizes the importance of group work on personal growth and achievement. College admissions offices do consider a student’s ability to balance academics and extracurricular activities, and see this as a necessary and basic skill. While resume building poses a shallow reason to join groups, it can often foster interest in a particular area. Students who reported heavy involvement in activities throughout high school were more likely to continue as members of at least several groups in college. Students involved in a particular sport

or sports at an advanced level in high school were likely to pursue those same sports in college.

But college is different from high school. Arriving on a new campus knowing no one can be daunting, and non-athlete students often choose to join groups in order to meet new friends, to cement friendships with recently met friends, or to join friends from high school who had also come to Oberlin. Along with interest in a specific area, strengthening social relationships was the underlying reason for choosing groups in college. Since college students typically have a heavy academic workload, time constraints often prevent them from getting involved in too many groups. Unlike in high school, where students have more free time, college students must focus on fewer outside activities if they want to get their homework done and (in certain instances), balance a job. Certain college groups like the performing arts and athletics require an extraordinary amount of time and dedication. By the time they have spent a year or so in college, most students seek to hone their skills in particular areas of interest. For these reasons, students are more likely to commit to one or two main activities in which they invest a lot of time and energy. This was true for most of the students I interviewed. Lisa concentrated on her one sport team, while Olivia and Isabelle focused on their teams and occasionally wrote articles for the Oberlin Review. Noah and Abby both found two groups in which they invested themselves, while Daniel and William also pursued the two groups they joined. Jane joined several groups early on but eventually dropped them because they did not provide her with social satisfaction. Jacob tended to bounce from group to group, which nonetheless provided him with social satisfaction. All the students, except for

Jane, identified positively with the groups they chose to pursue, and most of them extolled their benefits. These included finding support, solidarity and security within groups, gaining social status, developing social skills and attaining social satisfaction. In addition, all the athletes described how their teams contributed to their social identities. Olivia and Lisa also expressed that their teamwork enhanced their self-appreciation, and Lisa specifically explained how receiving and giving support added to her sense of purpose and responsibility.

So why, except for Isabelle and Jane, did my interviewees not report higher self-esteem levels? I have explained why I think Abby and William reported lower than average levels, but I am surprised that the athletes (except for Isabelle) did not report higher levels. Interviews demonstrated that athletes have an advantage over non-athletes because their teams constantly provide them with a tightly knit and supportive community that involves adults as well as peers. The most successful formal groups are those in which members share common goals, and find social camaraderie and a support system (Haslam et al., 2009). Sports teams offer all three of these attributes in abundance. In addition, athletes who play on a college level know that they are good enough to have made it this far; having a particular set of skills bolsters self-esteem. Formal groups that also serve as core social groups, like athletics, prove to be more beneficial than other groups. I must conclude that the positive reinforcement my interviewees received from their athletic groups was not enough to send their self-esteem levels soaring. Formal groups are only one of several aspects of a person's life that contribute to self-esteem, and when measuring self-esteem through group involvement, it is difficult to control for other variables

that may have a serious impact on a person's sense of self. Someone who finds little satisfaction in formal groups might derive an enormous amount of self-esteem from another source, such as excelling in academics or at a job, as in the case of Jane. Conversely, another person might find solidarity, security and support in formal groups but may report lower self-esteem for other reasons, like Abby. On a social level, feeling liked and accepted by your peers in college is the key to bolstering self-esteem, and a positive (or negative) sense of self can emerge from environments within or outside of formal groups.

CONCLUSION

There is much more research to be done on the impacts of formal group involvement on college students' self-esteem. While my data left me with intriguing and significant information, my overarching hypothesis was not confirmed by the survey or interview data; it cannot be said that there is a significant relationship between formal group involvement and college students' levels of self-esteem. The interview data suggested that a lack of early group involvement can be detrimental to self-esteem, which is consistent with the theory that children raised through natural child growth develop a sense of constraint. Survey data also pushed the idea that athletes develop higher levels of self-esteem than their non-athletic counterparts, although based on what my interviewees told me about the positive effects of team membership, I thought their levels should be higher.

It is possible that certain aspects of my project may have impacted its overall outcomes. First, self-esteem remains a complicated variable to measure because it is

self-reported and subjective; different people have different definitions of what constitutes high, low and average self-esteem. While one person who feels good about herself might report a self-esteem level of twenty, another who may feel very similarly might describe her level as twenty-five. It is hard to attach numbers to feelings. In addition, I gave out my survey right before final examination period, which may have skewed results. Participants may have been feeling higher levels of stress during this time, and may have rushed through the survey, resulting in some inaccuracy. Students also may have reported lower or higher self-esteem than normal during such a time, based on how they felt about their grades and final examinations. Another problem may have arisen from handing out the survey in a series of sociology classes, which could have produced a biased sample that was not representative of the college population at large. Also, time restraints prevented me from interviewing more students. The nine interviewees might not necessarily be representative of the college community. Far more students should have been interviewed and surveyed to complete the study. In particular, I would have liked to speak with more students of lower socioeconomic status or who had experienced natural child growth as children. I would also have liked to interview athletes who participate in more than one team sport, as my data report indicates that this group shows a significant rise in level of self-esteem.

In future studies, researchers should aim to survey a much larger and diverse sample of college students and should attempt to control for other variables, such as social satisfaction or dissatisfaction outside of formal groups that may impact self-esteem levels. Surveys should be given during neutral times of the semester, rather

than toward final examination period. Researchers should consider longitudinal studies in which they measure participants' group involvement and self-esteem levels over the years. In my interviews, some students admitted to forgetting certain aspects of their childhood, which could have impacted results. Overall, my data aimed to fill the gap in the literature by looking at the impact of formal group involvement on college students' self-esteem. Though my results were inconclusive, I continue to argue that there is more to be discovered on this topic and larger studies need to be undertaken in order to produce more conclusive results.

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Honors Survey

Please Answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. What is your sex? Please circle one answer.

Male Female

2. In what year were you born? _____

Please respond to the next ten statements by indicating whether you Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree or Strongly Disagree by circling the appropriate word.

3. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. At times, I think I am no good at all.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. I certainly feel useless at times.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. What is your best estimate of your family's total household income for the year 2010? Please check one category.

- Less than \$10,000 \$20,000 to \$29,999 \$30,000 to \$39,999
- \$40,000 to \$49,999 \$50,000 to \$59,999 \$60,000 to \$69,999
- \$70,000 to \$79,999 \$80,000 to \$89,999 \$90,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$149,999 \$150,000 or more

14. Please specify your race. Please check category/ies

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian American
- Latino/a American
- Black or African American (Non-Hispanic)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White (Non-Hispanic)

15. Given that a formal group is one that encompasses a hierarchical structure of power, regular meetings, explicit rules, and specific goals held in common by each member, please list any formal group that you are a part of on Oberlin College's campus. (Example: Lacrosse team, Plum Creek Review, etc.):

e. Other (please list):

17. Please circle yes or no in response to the formal groups that you participated in during elementary and middle-school.

f. Sport YES NO

If yes, please list the sport(s):

g. Band or Orchestra YES NO

If yes, please list if this was in school, after school or both:

If yes, what instrument?

h. School club YES NO

If yes, please list the club(s):

i. Afterschool club YES NO

If yes, please list the club(s):

j. Other (please list):

Thank you for completing the survey. If you are willing to partake in a 10 to 20 minute interview on the same subject, please write your OCMR number here: _____