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# **Harry, Hermione, Ron and Neville— Portraits of American Teenagers’ Extracurricular Involvement, and Implications for Educational Interventions**

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Young people today use their out-of-school time<sup>2</sup> very differently from their predecessors. In particular, the ways in which teens use their leisure time<sup>3</sup> has changed drastically. For instance, they are dramatically less likely to read a print newspaper or to physically visit friends than youth were 20 years ago, but today's 12<sup>th</sup> graders spend well over 40 hours a week on electronic devices. In 1991, few adolescents were involved exclusively in arts groups, and many student leaders also played sports. Today, a considerable subset of young people is involved mainly in artistic endeavors, and youth leaders no longer overlap with athletes. In other words, contemporary teenagers' activities appear to be "specialized" and tailored to their areas of interest. These changes are not all good or bad for civic education and engagement, but they fundamentally shift the settings in which young people learn to be citizens.

Furthermore, young people's extracurricular experiences vary greatly depending on their social class and the financial resources their parents can allocate to these enriching activities. As economic disparities among families and communities become larger, it is increasingly important that civic education efforts take into account how young people use their time and what groups they join.

## Why Should We Understand the Patterns of Extracurricular Involvement?

Understanding changes in how adolescents use their non-academic time, and how young people's backgrounds influence time-use choice, is important for several reasons. First, the pressure for young people to engage in multiple extracurricular activities has become stronger as they face competition for admission to the most prestigious colleges and universities. It is helpful to know just how much time the most engaged young people are spending on these activities, and who is left behind. Second, the emergence of online tools and technology has opened up possibilities for different activities, such as playing online games with peers or having conversations with them on social-networking sites. According to a recent survey of youth, virtually all teenagers (96%) have access to the Internet and 55% own a handheld device that connects to the Internet.<sup>i</sup> Finally, evidence indicates that opportunities for participation in organized activities are unevenly distributed by socioeconomic class,<sup>ii</sup> and economic disparities have widened in the past decades.<sup>iii</sup> It is therefore critical to understand how these gaps manifest in time use among adolescents and how these gaps might affect civic development, so that we can explore ways to narrow those gaps through research and practice.

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<sup>2</sup> I define out-of-school time as the time students spend outside of formal school hours. Therefore, along with the activities that take place outside of school and on weekends (e.g., going shopping, communicating on the Internet), activities that students engage in at school but during after-school hours (e.g., clubs and team sports) are also considered out-of-school-time activities. I also include time spent on paid work.

<sup>3</sup> I define leisure time as the time individuals spend outside of formal school hours, and not on schoolwork or paid employment.

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## Extracurricular Involvement is Associated with Positive Outcomes

Researchers have argued that involvement in extracurricular activities is beneficial in both preventing negative behaviors and promoting positive development.<sup>iv</sup> Civic theorists have long argued that joining an organized group is an important entry point into a larger civil society, and that associational membership is a part of national identity,<sup>v</sup> an opportunity to build bonding social capital,<sup>vi</sup> and an entrée to places where individuals interact with diverse people and expand networks via loose social connections.<sup>vii</sup>

Extracurricular involvement also predicts future civic engagement<sup>viii</sup> and other important outcomes such as educational aspiration, engagement, and attainment; income; and occupational status.<sup>ix,x</sup> Evidence further suggests that the benefit of extracurricular involvement might be pronounced for students in lower socioeconomic schools.

Findings from longitudinal civic and political engagement research indicate that engaging young people early and consistently has a lasting effect on later political involvement (McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Plutzer, 2002; Zaff et al., 2003).<sup>xi</sup> A recent study by the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge (2013) found that extracurricular group involvement in high school is linked to civic and political engagement later on, especially if the group deals with social and political issues.

Furthermore, extracurricular activities can provide youth with opportunities for developing competencies that are relevant to their own future civic engagement. For example, some extracurricular settings promote youth voice and autonomy, which may help them develop agency (Larson & Angus, 2011).<sup>xii</sup> In the modern context of competitive and demanding extracurricular activities (such as sports teams), youth may develop what an *Atlantic* writer called “Competitive Kid Capital,” consisting of life skills such as competitiveness, learning from losses, performing under pressure, managing their time, and adapting to changes.<sup>xiii</sup>

Extracurricular activities might also afford a chance for students who do not excel in academics to shine and develop a healthy sense of efficacy and self-worth. Barber, Eccles, and Stone found that students who were involved in pro-social extracurricular activities had higher self-esteem than those who were not.<sup>xiv</sup>

## Extracurricular Involvement and Social Class

Research so far suggests a wide variation of after-school time use based on social disparities: three out of ten children in low-income households do not participate in any organized activities, while just one out of ten middle-class or wealthy children do not.<sup>xv</sup> Not surprisingly, affordability of extracurricular involvement varies greatly by income level.<sup>xvi</sup> Furthermore, parents of different socioeconomic backgrounds may view priorities in time use differently.<sup>xvii</sup> Income disparity and residential and school segregation by income have gotten progressively worse over the last few decades, as did investment in extracurricular activities by parents' income level.<sup>xviii</sup> This paper will explore how extracurricular involvement profiles relate to social class and other factors.

## Current Study

This paper aims to explore how patterns of extracurricular involvement have changed for high school seniors over time, using recent data that include use of online technologies. It also explores how youth might cluster into different groups, each displaying a recognizable pattern of time use, and how these patterns relate to social class and other factors.

In this paper, I describe findings from a new analysis of data from the Monitoring the Future (MTF) study, a federally funded annual survey of secondary and post-secondary school students in the United States. The MTF, which has run consecutively since 1975, asks questions about extracurricular activities (see Bachman, O'Malley, Johnston, & Schulenberg, 2010<sup>xix</sup> for detailed procedures). Findings here draw on the 12<sup>th</sup> grade data, with a sample size of over 14,000 students from more than 120 schools.<sup>xx</sup> The MTF asks two different types of questions related to time use during non-academic hours. One set of questions is about the extent of involvement in five different types of school-sponsored clubs. The other set of questions covers how respondents spend their time on non-school-based activities such as watching television, visiting friends, working on household chores, reading, playing sports, and performing music. Starting in the mid-2000s, the MTF added questions about use of cell phones, texting, social-networking sites, and video games.

As noted above, several studies have linked extracurricular activities to positive developmental outcomes and civic engagement in early adulthood. Some studies have simply described the types of activities youth engage in, while others look at the breadth of participation.<sup>xxi</sup> Still others asked young people to self-identify their social clique and explored how self-identification related to outcomes later on.<sup>xxii</sup> To my knowledge, this is the first study that explores extracurricular involvement among youth by clusters of organized and unstructured activities, and asks how these clusters relate to social class. I also used 2011 data, which includes social media and other electronic device use, and provides a fuller context for understanding adolescents' time use.

## High School Seniors Less Involved in School-Sponsored Clubs Now than 20 Years Ago; Class Gap Remains

I begin by describing how young people's level of engagement in various activities has changed in the past few decades. While there are some exceptions, the overall rates of participation in traditional extracurricular and leisure-time activities have declined over time, especially in the last decade. Students' school-club involvement has declined by a modest degree since 1991, but the three most popular activities remain unchanged: athletic clubs/teams, performance arts, and academic clubs.

*Table 1: School Club Involvement among High School Seniors, 1991-2011*

At least moderately <sup>4</sup> involved in...	1991	2001	2011
Academic clubs (e.g., science, math, language)	23.5%	25.6%	22.5%

<sup>4</sup> For the club involvement questions, the response options were “not at all,” “slightly,” “moderately,” “considerably,” and “great extent.”

Athletic club (at school)	49.7%	47.8%	44.1%
Performance arts (e.g., drama, orchestra)	32.4%	32.4%	29.1%
School publications (e.g., newspaper)	16.9%	15.0%	13.4%
Student government	18.0%	16.1%	16.0%
Other school clubs/activities	54.2%	53.3%	49.4%

Source: *Monitoring the Future Survey, 1991, 2001, 2011, 12<sup>th</sup> grade data*

Consistent with the pattern of slow decline in each type of club, the number of clubs that students engage in at any given time has also decreased slightly. In 1991, 12<sup>th</sup> graders participated in an average of 1.34 clubs at a “considerable” or higher level. In 2011, that average was 1.27. A social class gap already existed in 1991, and the size of the gap generally remained stable in the last 20 years.

### **Out-of-School Time Use Changed Drastically in the Last Three Decades**

The time-use data (covering engagement in activities other than school clubs) have been available since 1975, and we analyzed data from 1981, 1991, 2001, and 2011 for this report. For each activity, we selected a cut-off for frequency that seemed typical for the specific activity (e.g., daily for television and weekly for a music performance).

When activities other than clubs are included, data show that patterns of time use by high school seniors have changed drastically over the past three decades, with the most notable changes occurring in the past decade. Consumption of traditional entertainment and media, including television, movies, books, magazines, and newspapers, has declined. The most notable decline is in the readership of print media. The percentage of youth who read a newspaper nearly every day was 7.3% in 2011, down from 35.5% in 1991. Likewise, 54.3% of youth read magazines at least weekly in 1991, but only 20.5% did so in 2011.

Overall, adolescents spend less time (physically) visiting friends or doing tasks around the house today than they did in past decades, choosing instead to connect with their peers through social-networking platforms such as Facebook. In 1981, 49.0% of youth visited friends almost daily but, in 2011, 38.4% of youth did. Use of social-networking websites has increased rapidly each year, and by 2011, 70.1% of youth visited a social-networking site nearly every day. Youth also report spending a significant amount of time texting and surfing the Internet. In 2011, 58.4% spent six or more hours a week texting, and 22.5% spent 40 or more hours doing so. Meanwhile, 47.1% spent six or more hours weekly on the Internet, and 16.4% spent 20 or more hours. Our calculation suggests that a typical 12<sup>th</sup> grader now spends well over 40 hours a week on electronic devices, chiefly texting, surfing the Internet, and online gaming. The Pew Research Center found that a typical teen sent 100 text messages per day in 2011, up from 80 in 2009.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Table 2: Changes in Leisure-time Use among 12<sup>th</sup> Graders, 1981-2011

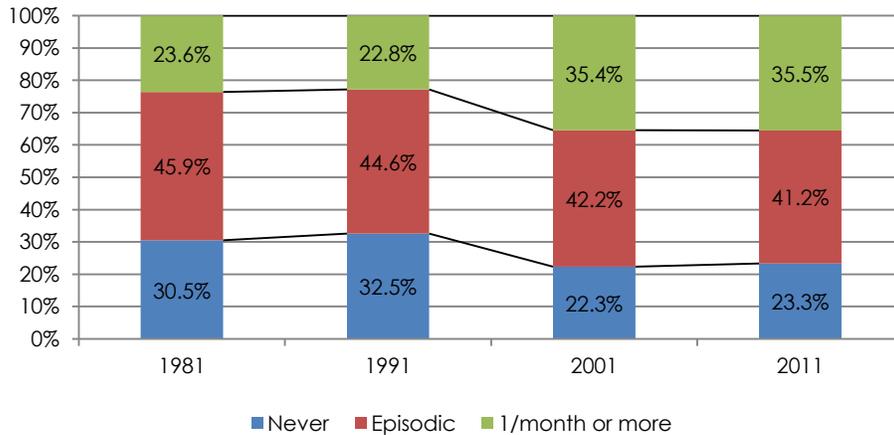
How many 12 <sup>th</sup> graders...	1981	1991	2001	2011	General Trend
Watch TV daily or nearly daily	72.1%	72.2%	67.7%	63.2%	↓
Go to the movies at least once a month	63.6%	65.2%	65.8%	49.9%	↓
Go for a ride for fun at least once a week	65.9%	66.9%	64.4%	52.8%	↓
Participate in community affairs or volunteer at least once a month	23.6%	23.7%	33.8%	34.9%	↑
Play musical instruments or sing at least weekly	46.6%	36.4%	44.2%	43.7%	--
Engage in creative writing at least monthly	36.1%	44.1%	42.6%	34.4%	↓
Actively participate in sports, athletics, or exercises at least weekly	73.0%	68.6%	65.1%	70.6%	Mixed
Do art or craft work at least once a month	44.2%	42.0%	43.7%	45.6%	--
Work around the house, yard, garden, car, etc. at least once a week	78.9%	69.8%	64.2%	60.1%	↓
Informally get together with friends almost everyday	49.0%	47.3%	46.5%	38.4%	↓
Spend at least an hour of leisure time alone almost everyday	43.6%	42.2%	40.8%	48.1%	↑
Read books, magazines, or newspapers at least weekly	84.6%	79.3%	72.6%	55.6%	↓
Read magazines at least weekly	N/A	54.3%	45.8%	20.5%	↓
Read the newspaper nearly everyday	N/A	35.5%	20.7%	7.3%	↓
Ever go to a bar	58.3%	50.8%	57.2%	39.1%	↓
Go shopping/go to a mall <sup>5</sup> at least monthly	81.8%	82.5%	82.3%	69.7%	N/A
Go to a party at least monthly	72.3%	72.0%	71.6%	63.1%	↓
Work more than 16 hours a week for pay during the school year	44.1%	43.6%	48.0%	25.2%	↓

<sup>5</sup> MTF asked about going shopping for the 1981, 1991, and 2001 survey but changed the question to “going to the mall” by 2011. Because the question changed, no comment about the change over time can be made.

Visit social-networking website like MySpace and Facebook nearly daily <sup>6</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	70.2%	--
Estimated cumulative hours spent on electronic devices (computers, games, and cell phones) outside of school, per week (mean/median)	N/A	N/A	N/A	53.3/44.0	

Consistent with existing research, more youth today engage in volunteering or community affairs on a regular basis than in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1981 and 1991, less than a quarter of high school seniors engaged in volunteering and community affairs at least monthly.<sup>xxiv</sup> In 2001 and 2011 over one-third did so, while the portion of youth who were not involved in volunteering at all declined.

**Figure 1: Frequency of Volunteering Among High School Seniors 1981-2011**

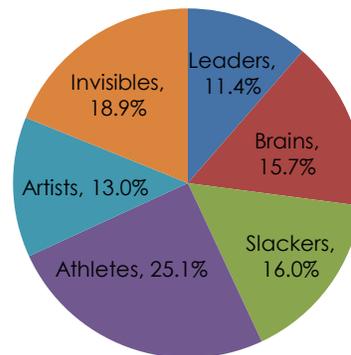


**Students’ Time Use Profiles Show a Big Divide among Modern American Teens**

I then conducted a cluster analysis to identify sets of activities that tended to go together by looking at patterns of time use across multiple domains. The resulting clusters represent sets of activities that share an evident characteristic and help describe the nature of a typical person who is in the group. These clusters were termed “cliques” and they had distinguishable demographic backgrounds and other characteristics.

Twelfth graders’ time use broke into six coherent patterns. Because of the types of activities they emphasized, these patterns—or cliques—were labeled “**Leaders,**” “**Brains,**” “**Slackers,**” “**Athletes,**” “**Artists,**” and “**Invisibles.**” These cliques not only differ in what the students do, but also how many structured activities they engage in. However, readers should note that these clusters are profiles representing trends and notable characteristics of groups, rather than comprehensive descriptions of individuals.

<sup>6</sup> The MTF survey has tracked social-networking site use since 2008. In 2008, 51.2% visited such sites nearly every day. In 2009, the rate went up to 52.5% and to 62.8% in 2010.

**Figure 2: Activities Cliques among 12th Graders (2011)**

### Profiles of the Cliques

**“Leaders”:** Teens in this cluster represent a small group of predominantly female students who are best characterized as committed leaders. Most notably, they take a leadership role in school by being part of the student government and engaging in volunteering or community organizations. They are highly engaged at school; virtually all of them (98.1%) are involved in at least one school activity at a “considerable” level, and they are involved in an average of 4.4 school activities (out of five) in some way. Leaders tend to say that they enjoy school, and are among the most academically competent and ambitious (see Figures AI and All in Appendix).

**“Brains”:** Teens in this clique focus on academically-oriented activities such as academic clubs and school newspapers, but are not involved in student government. They also participate in clubs that do not fall into major categories like sports and music, suggesting that this group might enjoy a wide range of interests and pursuits. This group is also the most likely to volunteer in the community. Overall, Brains are less likely to spend time on “unstructured” activities such as going for a ride or to a party. Their academic aspiration and performance rival that of the Leaders.

**“Slackers”:** Students in this group spend little time on organized activities such as clubs or music lessons. They report “slight” involvement in an average of 0.98 school-sponsored organizations, and just 22.3% are involved in one or more clubs at a “considerable” level. Instead, many of them spend a lot of their time on social activities like visiting with friends, going to the mall, and going for a ride. Most of them do not volunteer in the community, play sports, or spend leisure time alone. However, this group is also the most likely to spend a significant number of hours on paid employment.

**“Athletes”:** Students in this group make up both the largest (25.1%) and most male-dominated clique. They spend time playing sports or doing other physical activities, both through school teams/clubs and outside of school. They also tend to be social, visiting friends quite frequently, which may point to strong social ties with their teammates. Their interests tend to focus on sports and socializing, and do not expand to other activities.

**“Artists”:** Teens in this group focus on a variety of artistic activities, including performing arts, music clubs, attending concerts, and performing music outside of school. Like the

Athletes, Artists focus on the arts and are unlikely to spend time on other types of activities. Artists do not generally engage in high-risk behaviors and they show good school attendance. However, they tend to value independence and adventure.

**“Invisibles”:** These are the least engaged of all students. Invisibles do not participate in school-sponsored clubs or social activities outside of school. They show significant signs of low self-esteem, and possibly general dissatisfaction with life. For instance, Invisibles report the lowest level of positive self-regard and are most likely to say that they are “often bored.” Though not quite as low as the Slackers, Invisibles rate their intellectual capacity relatively poorly and report low GPA, though they are not skipping class or engaging in otherwise high-risk behaviors.

### **Beyond the Stereotypes - Harry, Hermione, Ron, and Neville**

The clusters above were generated based on reported extracurricular involvement. Further analysis revealed, not surprisingly, that the teens within each cluster varied in ways apart from their extracurricular activities. While each cluster was diverse, cluster membership was predictive of various academic, psychological, and risk-taking patterns, as well as of socioeconomic status. This suggests that perhaps preexisting circumstances, personality, and behavioral factors contribute to the choice of extracurricular activities, while extracurricular activities influence future decisions and aspirations, due partly to peer influence.

To reveal what teens in each cluster are like more holistically, I combined the clusters of extracurricular activities with additional data, including important indicators of success such as academic engagement and positive concept of self. This additional analysis produced a fuller picture of the students in each clique. As a way to provide some context and a familiar frame of reference—and with a nod to Eccles and Barber, who borrowed labels for teenagers from the 1985 film *The Breakfast Club*<sup>xxv</sup>—I matched each cluster with a major character from the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling. Like characters in fine fiction, real teenagers are whole people—not reducible to a few metrics—and their futures are unpredictable. A high school student who appears highly disengaged, for example, can suddenly find a valuable path. The following vignettes draw on Rowling's characters to indicate the complexity of the clusters defined earlier.

**Harry Potter** himself exemplifies the Leaders, who appear to be the busiest of all adolescents. They not only take leadership roles and join many clubs at school, but also volunteer in the community. At the same time, the Leaders appear to have a healthy social life, enjoy school, maintain good grades, and hold the most positive view of self among all clusters while generally avoiding high-risk behaviors (Appendix Figure A-IV).

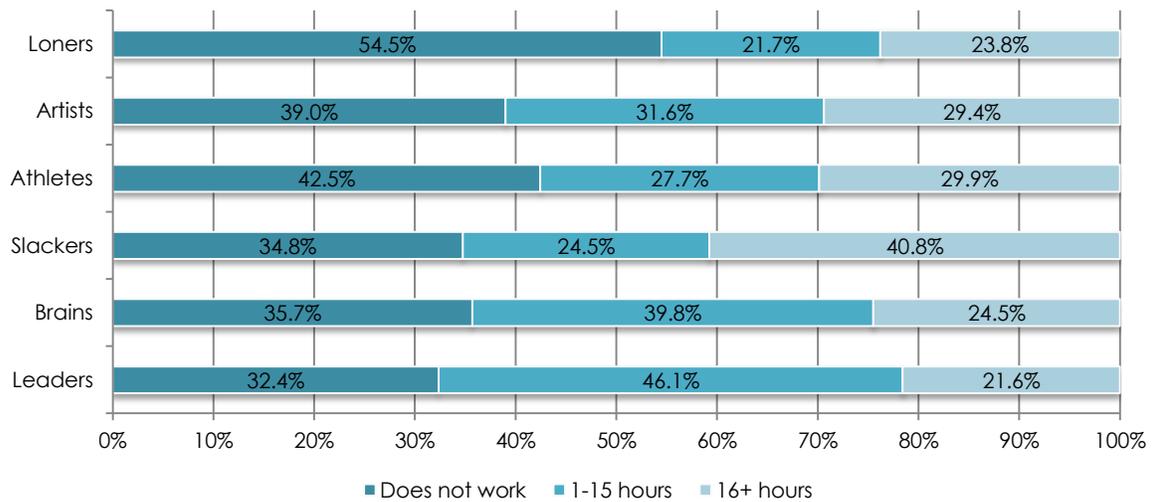
Harry easily fits into this cluster in most respects. Harry is not academically exceptional, but he is a fairly strong student who feels a deep attachment to his Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and has an ambitious professional aspiration: becoming a dark-wizard fighting Auror. He founds and leads Dumbledore's Army and joins the Order of the Phoenix, the *Potter* world's versions of a student government and a community organization. He is also represents his entire school at the Triwizard Tournament, a competition that tests knowledge, skill, and courage. Harry plays sports, has an active social life, and seems to “have it all” as the Leaders do. Unlike Harry, Leaders are not known for being risk-takers, but they do seem to enjoy certain level of thrill and adventure, especially compared to the Brains and Invisibles.

The bookish **Hermione Granger** is the quintessential Brain, and may represent today's academically ambitious teenagers who carefully choose their activities to maximize their competitive edge. Among all clusters, Brains are most likely to assess their intellectual ability as "far above average" (Appendix Figure A-III), and they perform as well at school as the Leaders (Appendix Figure A-I). Unlike Leaders, Brains do not appear to engage in activities that lack evident goals, such as going to the mall, visiting friends, or going for a ride. Despite their academic achievement, Brains report lower levels of self-regard and life-satisfaction than Leaders, Athletes, and Artists.

Hermione may be the character who fits most seamlessly into a cluster. She is a constant presence in the school library, values academics above all else, and is frequently described as Hogwarts' most accomplished student. In Hermione, who one year uses a time-travel device so that her schedule can accommodate more classes, we see the pressure to succeed and overachieving nature that also leads her to eschew many social activities. Her founding of the Society for the Protection of Elfish Welfare and general concern for the downtrodden reveal a commitment to social causes also characteristic of the Brains, as is her less-than-stellar self-esteem when it comes to anything outside the scholarly.

The **Weasley twins** (Fred and George) represent the Slackers, an interesting and complex group. On one hand, they are generally disengaged from organized activities and report high-risk behaviors, along with signs of academic problems like not getting work done and skipping school. These teens may be labeled as "troublemakers." At the same time, at least some of them work very hard for pay during the school year, and a majority of them lead a healthy social life. These two aspects could make up for some of what these teens miss out on from extracurriculars: a workplace with the right structure can offer positive developmental opportunities, and healthy peer relations can develop a sense of collective efficacy and teach teens about navigating relationships and conflicts. At least some of the teens in this group should follow a generally positive developmental path, though it may not include going to college. Slackers' families are more likely than other groups to be working-class: their parents tend to be less educated and their households tend to be supported by one parent.

The fact that many of them come from working-class backgrounds may contribute to a demanding work schedule, which in turn could limit participation in organized, out-of-school activities because of challenges like lack of access to transportation and neighborhood safety. In fact, the Slackers' overall lack of engagement in organized activities is at least partly due to their high number of work hours (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Weekly Work Hours by Clusters**

Fred and George Weasley certainly exemplify these characteristics. As the fourth and fifth of seven children in a decidedly working-class family, their domestic circumstances resemble that of many Slackers. Known more for their love of pranks, mischief, and an active social life than for their academic pursuits, the twins are definitely viewed as troublemakers at school. In fact, they eventually 'drop out' of Hogwarts, but nevertheless find an unconventional path to success: opening a successful business that sells the many joke gadgets they perfected during their unstructured time.

**Ron Weasley** is the Athlete, a teenager whose primary interests are sports and socializing. Athletes rarely engage in other types of activities, and are second only to the Slackers when it comes to risk-taking activities such as skipping school, seeking thrills, and preferring unpredictable friends. Athletes' academic performance is "average" – below Brains and Leaders but above Slackers and Invisibles. However, they are generally happy and enjoy life. In fact, Athletes' self-esteem and sense of well-being are above those of Brains.

That certainly describes the good-natured Ron. While perhaps not a stereotypical "jock," his interests at Hogwarts mainly revolve around the Gryffindor quidditch team and enjoying a good time with his friends. As Harry's sidekick, he is certainly no stranger to unpredictable situations, and embraces risky thrills like taking a flying car out for a spin. Ron is not really interested in school but he does fairly well in class — even if it is with quite a bit of help from brainy Hermione. Just as she derives much of her identity and positive self-regard through her academic achievements, Ron's self-esteem and social status in school is heavily dependent on his exploits on the quidditch field.

The peculiar **Luna Lovegood** is one of the Artists, teens who have found their passion and spend most of their time focusing on the arts and music-related activities. Like Athletes, Artists' academic performance is average but their self-regard is higher than that of the Brains. Artists have independent minds and do not seem to worry about what others think. They are most likely to say, for example, that "people should do their own thing, even if others think it's strange" or "I like to explore strange places."

Those statements seem straight out of Luna's mouth. Despite the lack of traditional art or music classes at Hogwarts, Luna always finds ways to showcase her individuality; whether through her unique fashion sense or somnambulist explorations of the castle. She is always as cheerful as she is quirky, clearly marching to the beat of her own drum and unconcerned with her peers who think she is "Loony." In the final book of the series we also see a concrete glimpse of her artistic tendencies, as Harry, Ron, and Hermione find her bedroom decorated with colorful paintings of all her friends.

It is worth noting that this kind of singular focus on artistic endeavors was not possible 20 years ago, when the choice of activities outside of school was more limited. It may not have been possible, for example, to participate in a music club at school, take private lessons three times a week, and also be part of a band while going to a music concert on the weekend. Today, it is much more feasible for teenagers to so fully immerse themselves in what they enjoy. Since this appears to be a relatively new phenomenon, the developmental consequences of this narrow activity choice are unknown.

**Neville Longbottom**, particularly in the earlier books and films, is one of the Invisibles. The general profile of students in this group paints a troubling picture of American teens who stay in school until 12th grade but have been largely invisible to adults, peers, and institutions. Invisibles show some of the same warning signs as the Slackers, such as little engagement in organized activities, lower GPA, and low academic self-esteem (Appendix Figure A-I and A-II). Furthermore, like the Slackers' parents, the Invisibles' parents are among the least educated, and they are less likely to be living with both parents than teens in most clusters. This suggests that they may experience various constraints that prevent engagement in extracurricular activities.

However, that is where the similarities end. Unlike Slackers, Invisibles have little social life, do not work (thus not interacting with adults), and have low self-regard (Appendix Figure A-IV). In short, they lack any sort of meaningful engagement and are therefore not getting the developmental opportunities they need to transition successfully to adulthood; they are neither academically ambitious nor ready for the workforce.

Neville was certainly close to invisible during his first years at Hogwarts. He did not excel in school, was not involved in sports or other activities, and was treated by most as a punching bag and a social pariah. His problematic family situation—his parents long dead, he is under the care of his grandmother—also fits right in with that of many teenagers in the Invisibles cluster. Neville's character arc also suggests how these young people's lives may be turned around. A teacher helps him identify and nurture a particular academic strength: Herbology. He eventually joins the Dumbledore's Army student organization and strengthens his social ties. By the final books of the series, Neville has become a confident young man who is highly valued by his peers and contributes to his school.

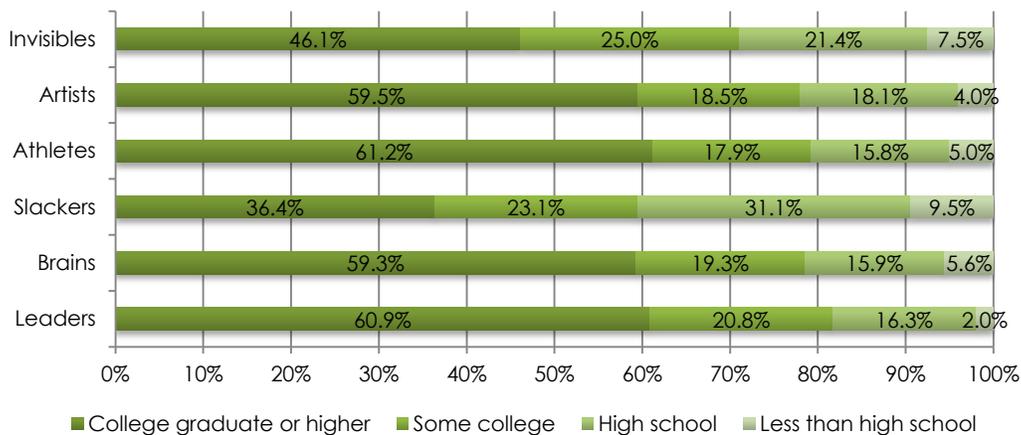
Investing early in these Invisibles through targeted outreach and mentoring, or by offering a wide range of activities in the school or the community, would be extremely valuable. These efforts may help these youth find their passion, meet friends with shared interests, and develop a set of skills and a healthy identity that prepare them for adulthood to come.<sup>xxvi</sup>

**Increased Specialization and Divide in Teens' Extracurricular Involvement as a Manifestation of Social Disparity**

Analysis of the MTF 1991 data suggests that teenagers' activities were not as "specialized" then as they are now. Instead, there was a group of youth who were in all types of activities, including athletics and student government, while other groups were far less differentiated. There was no distinguishable group of teens who engaged in a series of music and arts related activities, and in 1991 the Athletes were also Leaders. This change in patterns of engagement may point to the notion that after-school activities have now become another expression of social class disparity.

Some teens use out-of-school time for building skills and credentials for their college application. An ever-expanding selection of activities is available for youth whose families have the means to afford them, or youth who live in communities that offer a variety of free, safe, and accessible activities. Renowned sociologist Annette Lareau (2003) made a strong case that children from wealthy families experience a childhood that is very different from that of children from working-class families, and our findings are consistent with Lareau's careful observations. As shown in the figure below, parents of Invisibles and Slackers are less educated than parents of students in other clusters (Figure 4). The Invisibles and Slackers were also more likely to live in single-parent households.

**Figure 4: Parental Educational Attainment by Cluster**



**DISCUSSION**

The analysis of the MTF data from four different decades showed that American teens' time use during the after-school hours have changed drastically in many ways over the past three decades. Part of this change is inevitable given the technological advances that have made previously non-existent activities, such as online social-networking, possible. At the same time, the six specific patterns of time use from 2011 indicate that American teens are increasingly divided in the activities they pursue, and that some of them are largely neglected by key social institutions like school, workplaces, and peer groups.

## Why Does Extracurricular Involvement Vary by Social Class?

Extant research suggests that there are three major reasons for this class divide, and importantly, there are advantages and disadvantages to each pattern of engagement. These reasons can be described as “cultural-moral,” “family social class,” and “community resources/conditions.” Each reason is explained in more detail below.

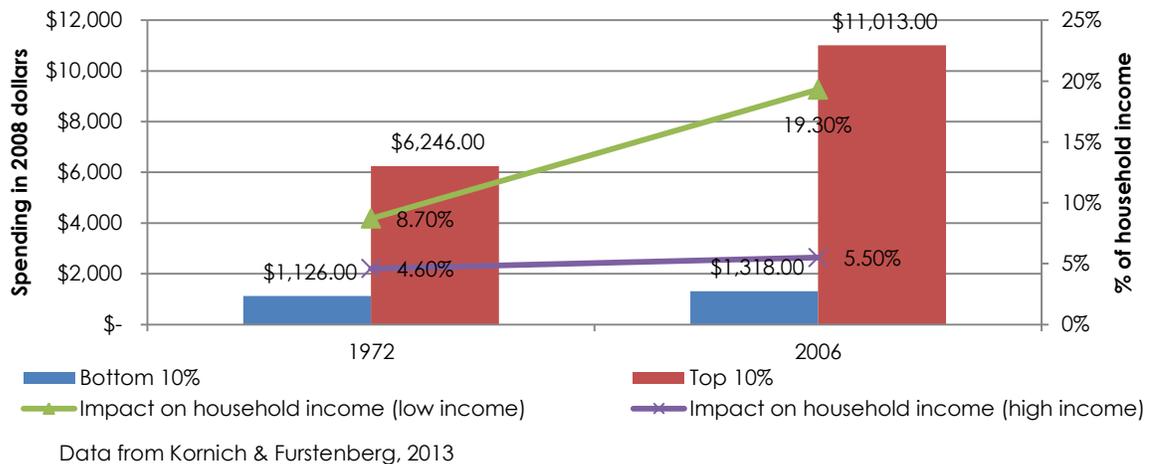
### *I. Different social classes hold different views of afterschool hours*

Lareau's study and our findings both suggest that less advantaged students tend to be far less engaged in organized activities both at school and outside of school. According to Lareau's case observations, working-class parents often perceive the non-structured hours as cherished time that teens will have to give up as they transition into life as working adults or parents. Furthermore, Lareau notes that some working-class parents have difficulty navigating the school system and do not receive information about school activities from other parents, resulting in feelings of disempowerment and resentment towards the school. As a result, working-class children might be involved in relatively few structured, adult-monitored activities, but are instead engaged in less structured activities that would allow them to “learn how to be members of informal peer groups.”<sup>xxvii</sup> On the other hand, middle-class parents learn about and pay for a multitude of opportunities that their children are interested in, because these parents feel that enrichment activities will help them do well in life.

### *II. Family financial resources dictate the number and types of activities*

The financial and human resources that go along with social class often dictate which activities families can offer to their children.<sup>xxviii</sup> Parental resources (both time and income) play a powerful role in the entire ecosystem of child development, and extracurricular activities are no exception.

The large social-class related disparity in teens' engagement in organized activities reflects the widening parental investment gap starting in early childhood. Since the 1970s, parents' financial investment in their children's education and activities has increased, as have income-based disparities.<sup>xxix</sup> Parents who have the means invest in their children more and earlier, while parents without the financial means have not been able to do so, mostly because their functional income has decreased.<sup>xxx</sup> As illustrated in Figure 5, for low-income families, the same amount of money spent on organized activities now represents a much larger portion of household income than it did for a similar family in the 1970s. On the other hand, high-income families spend nearly twice as much on organized activities as a similar family in the '70s did, but the impact on the overall household income has not changed. At the same time, the income disparity got far worse: in 1972, the top quintile families made 10.5 times as much as the bottom quintile families. In 2006, that figure was 26.6 times.<sup>xxxi</sup> Parents of all income levels feel the pressure to invest in their children, but the parents with less means are simply not able to spend as much as affluent parents can, even when they spend a larger portion of their income on their children.

**Figure 5: Class Disparity in Organized Activity Spending (1972 - 2006)**

### III. Community-wide poverty and lack of adult support can limit youth-centered activities at and out of school.

In addition to disparities in available resources at the individual and family levels, American teens are separated by what their neighborhoods and communities can offer, and how easily and safely they can access community-based resources. Today, families of different social classes not only invest differently in extracurricular and other enriching activities, but also live in different neighborhoods with different resources, activities, and schools.<sup>xxxii</sup> In almost all metropolitan areas, families are now far more segregated by income than they were in the 1970s.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Such divisions have negative consequences on how many community assets children can access.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

For example, parents living in affluent neighborhoods might organize a playgroup in which they exchange key information about good programs, good schools, and get advice on what to read to children and how to get them into the best school in the city. On the other hand, parents in poor neighborhoods might not have the time or resources to organize a playgroup, and if they do, there might not be as many parents in the group who are “in the know.” Even when parents in poor neighborhoods want to invest in high-quality extracurricular activities, the variety and quality of the activities offered in the neighborhood may be limited, compared to what parents in an affluent neighborhood might find.

Although there has been a significant investment in after-school programs in low-income neighborhoods, through initiatives such as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Centers, research continues to show that neighborhood threats (Daring et al., 2009), lack of information (Chaskin & Baker, 2006), and transportation (Rubin et al., 2001)<sup>xxxv</sup> remain barriers to participation.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In addition to the limited resources in the community, the availability of supportive adults seems to matter. A condition called “youth bulge” also affects the availability of extracurricular and civic opportunities for youth in that community.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Furthermore, geographical communities differ dramatically in their children/adult ratio. Affluent communities with many children are favorable contexts because the families are able to

attract and support a wide range of youth-focused activities. However, a community that is both poor and saturated with youth is not able to accommodate all the young people who want to become active in the community. Since the parents living in these communities are not likely to be able to afford sending their children to other towns with available extracurricular activities, youth in these communities may have to compete to gain access. In that context, the kind of high-level engagement seen among the Harrys and Hermiones of the world might not be attainable.

### **More is Not Always Better – Different Engagement, Different Benefits**

This social class divide in patterns of adolescent engagement has implications for civic and political development, but more is not necessarily better. Teens who are engaged in many organized activities are more likely to learn skills and develop talents that will put them at an advantage in the future. However, I argue that young people who are not engaged in organized clubs or out-of-school activities can and do use their time to learn important life and civic skills. Whether it is students like Harry who developed leadership skills in school, or perceived Slackers like the Weasley twins who successfully combined their interests with an entrepreneurial spirit, both types of teens should be able to develop into productive adulthood. Ideally, our schools, communities, and society should provide different and equally viable pathways for our youth to grow into competent and happy adults, even if that path does not include organized activities.

These different patterns of extracurricular engagement have clear implications for civic development. Middle-class children may learn to be excellent self-advocates through participation in organized activities that occur in settings (e.g., neighborhoods, schools, and organizations) that function smoothly and are supported by encouraging adults. These youth learn that organizations (and institutions) can and need to be responsive to their individual needs. Middle-class youth also learn key life-skills such as adaptability, time-management, and working under pressure.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Middle-class parents hope their children acquire life skills as well as specialized abilities that can improve their chances of succeeding in the future. The students who actively engage in extracurricular activities indeed show better life and civic outcomes as young adults.<sup>xxxix</sup>

However, this pattern of high engagement may have some disadvantages for certain aspects of civic development. One possible disadvantage may be that children become accustomed to having their activities organized by someone else and therefore lack skills in working with others to initiate and plan something based on a real need in their community. Collective community-action requires these abilities. Another possible drawback may be that these teens are largely sheltered from dysfunctional settings because their developmental ecosystem is filled with caring adults and effective organizations, all of which want youth to succeed. As a result, they may not build resilience and could have a hard time responding to unpredictable challenges and systems that do not function as they are supposed to. For example, these youth may be somewhat easily discouraged when faced with disagreements, dysfunctional systems, or daunting situations, all of which are common in civic work.

In short, middle-class youth learn their rights. They know how to understand professionals and institutions and get the most out of them. They exchange information with one another. However, they are less experienced in organizing collective action and will usually respond to dissatisfaction by simply leaving an institution, which is not always an ideal solution.

Working-class and poor students who are in fewer organized activities and with less adult guidance are instead engaged in unstructured activities that allow them to be members of informal peer groups.<sup>xi</sup> It is also possible that these young people learn to experiment more freely with different strategies to solve problems in the community. With little adult supervision, these teens are also likely to have more opportunities to tackle challenges with peers, preparing them well for collaborative problem-solving in the future. On the other hand, working-class youth who are less engaged would miss out on some critical opportunities for civic development, such as learning to follow organizations' rules and how "to pressure an organization to be responsive to individualized needs."<sup>xii</sup>

Furthermore, research makes a strong case for the benefits of adult support and of specific types of program structure (e.g., program-arc, youth ownership of the project, and real-world relevance) in the development of agency, which is necessary for "working toward goals in real-world contexts."<sup>xiii</sup> While adult-supported programs can be fully youth-centered, youth in an unstructured setting would have difficulty accessing the resources and supportive adults that are important for this type of civic development.

Working-class youth in self-organized peer groups may also miss an opportunity to build trust in institutions and adults in general because they lack an opportunity to interact with positive adult role models (e.g., coaches, youth workers at community organizations, mentors) through organized activities. In fact, a longitudinal analysis of the MTF data found that the gap in trust between middle-class teens and working-class teens has expanded in the last 15 years.<sup>xiii</sup> In short, working-class teens learn how to self-organize and mediate conflicts. However, they have low expectations of institutions and may not learn how to navigate or change them. One may think, for example, of the Weasley twins' decision to leave school when they become disenchanted with it, while more engaged students choose to stay and try to improve the institution from within.

### **Looking Forward: Limitations and Future Research**

Our study, along with previous research, confirms that social class is a key consideration in understanding young people's opportunities for extracurricular engagement. This study is novel in that it incorporated data on online usage as part of the teens' time-use profile and classified teens into six distinct patterns of time use, which were then associated with other key outcomes such as academic achievement and emotional well-being. Importantly, the findings highlight how the patterns of time use merely reflect the worsening socioeconomic disparity in our society, and yet apparently "disengaged" teens can be happy and prepared to work, finding success as the Weasley twins did. Furthermore, the study illuminates the need to find ways to help youth like Neville Longbottom thrive and find success and well-being in life.

However, the current study was limited in some important ways. First, available data limited analysis to level (or quantity) of engagement, rather than the quality and characteristics of the activities themselves. The data also offered limited capacity to understand the contexts in which activities occurred. For example, emerging evidence suggests that the kinds of roles that supporting adults play may result in different youth outcomes. Larson and Angus found that directive adult assistance was associated with perseverance to achieve the original goals, while facilitative adult support (i.e., adults listen and provide feedback when asked) was related to development of strategic thinking.<sup>xiv</sup> Our data was not fine-grained enough to factor in adults' roles, but assumed that organized activities generally had more adult support than unstructured activities.

Finally, the dataset I used is not able to elucidate any causal relationship between extracurricular participation and academic and emotional well-being. The findings suggest that less engaged teens like Neville tended to report more problems than engaged teens, and other studies (e.g., Barber et al., 2001) yielded similar longitudinal findings. However, this does not mean that extracurricular participation causes academic success or emotional well-being. It is just as reasonable to infer that only successful (academically and socio-emotionally) students are able to fully engage in clubs and other organized after-school activities, possibly because less successful youth do not feel welcome in these groups and/or do not have many friends who are already participating in those activities.

In future research, it would be important to understand pathways through which youth become engaged in clubs and activities and ultimately develop strong civic identities and commitment. Lareau's, Larson's, and my work suggest that there is more than one pathway for young people to become civically engaged. One pathway might be to receive a lot of structured adult guidance and access to networks of people who can teach youth about the ways in which the systems work, tell them about their rights, and help them feel efficacious. One may think of the support, encouragement and guidance that Harry received from the adults in the Order of the Phoenix. They will learn that it is rewarding to be civically engaged in many ways, and may choose to do so as a result. Another pathway might give young people a lot of freedom but not a lot of structure. These youth might take some more time to explore their passions and face more challenges along the way because they have fewer adults supporting them. However, they may have the advantage of developing an intrinsic motivation to become civically active, one based on authentic needs to take action.

These pathways are not mutually exclusive: there can be a setting or activities where youth can feel supported and efficacious with appropriate structure, while adults are also willing to step back and play a less dominant role when it is advantageous. Some findings suggest that programs with certain structural characteristics such as program-arc (planning, feedback and revision cycle), real-world context (learning about how the world really works and connecting with activities with real-world challenges), and project-ownership, when paired with a program philosophy that emphasizes youth assets, collective efficacy, and autonomy, are more successful in helping youth develop a sense of agency and a strong civic commitment.<sup>xiv</sup>

Finally, I emphasize that strong civic identities can develop in settings other than extracurricular activities. The findings from this study revealed that a significant portion of youth are like the Weasley twins, who do not engage in clubs or structured out-of-school activities but spend many hours at work. A workplace can provide a set of opportunities that are similar to the ones youth get in an extracurricular setting, such as positive adult role models, expanded networks, and acquisition of agency and skills. In a study of urban youth, Hart and colleagues have shown that youth who live in poverty and lack opportunities for extracurricular involvement can still develop strong moral identities, so long as they receive the type of adult and community support commonly found in organized social institutions, but also through informal settings such as mentoring and the workplace.<sup>xvi</sup> It is, however, important to recognize extracurricular settings as one of the critical developmental contexts in which positive civic development can occur, and strive to find ways to offer high quality extracurricular experiences to youth of all backgrounds, regardless of their social class and residential location.

APPENDIX FOR FIGURES

Figure A-I: Distribution of self-report Grade Point Average (GPA) by clusters

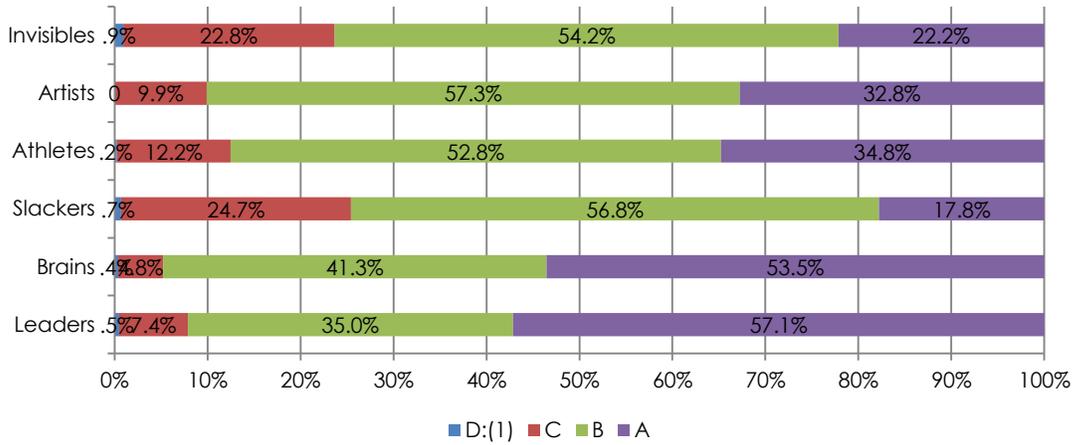
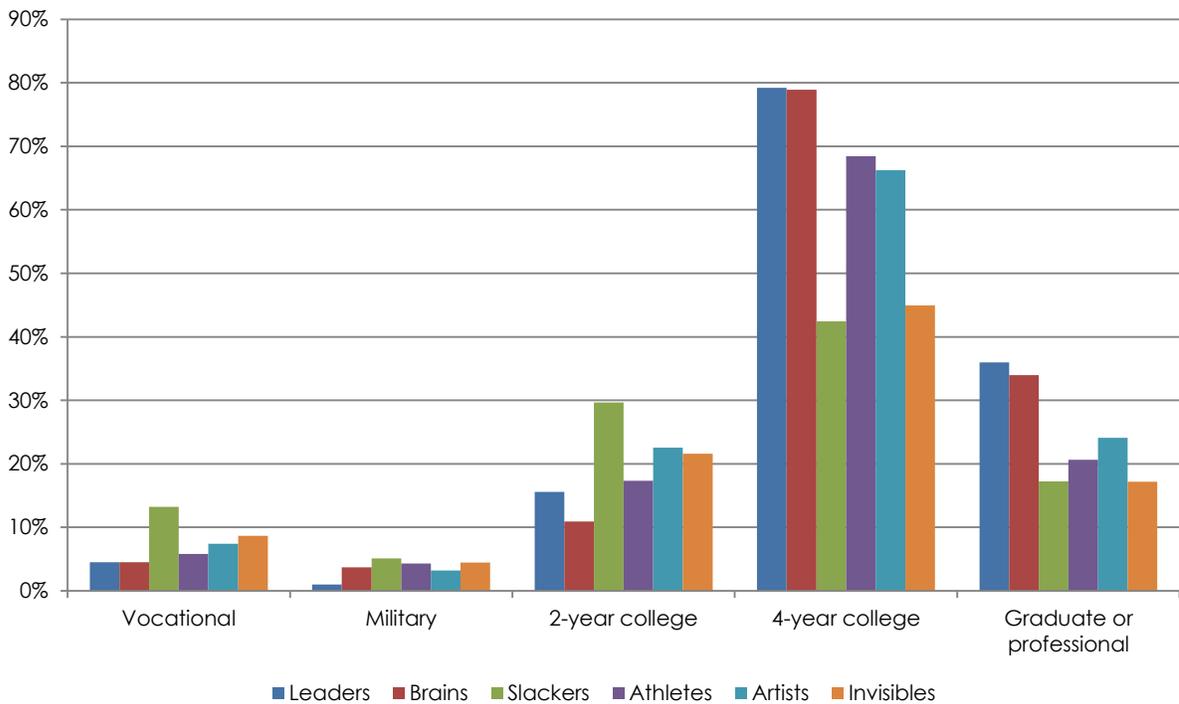
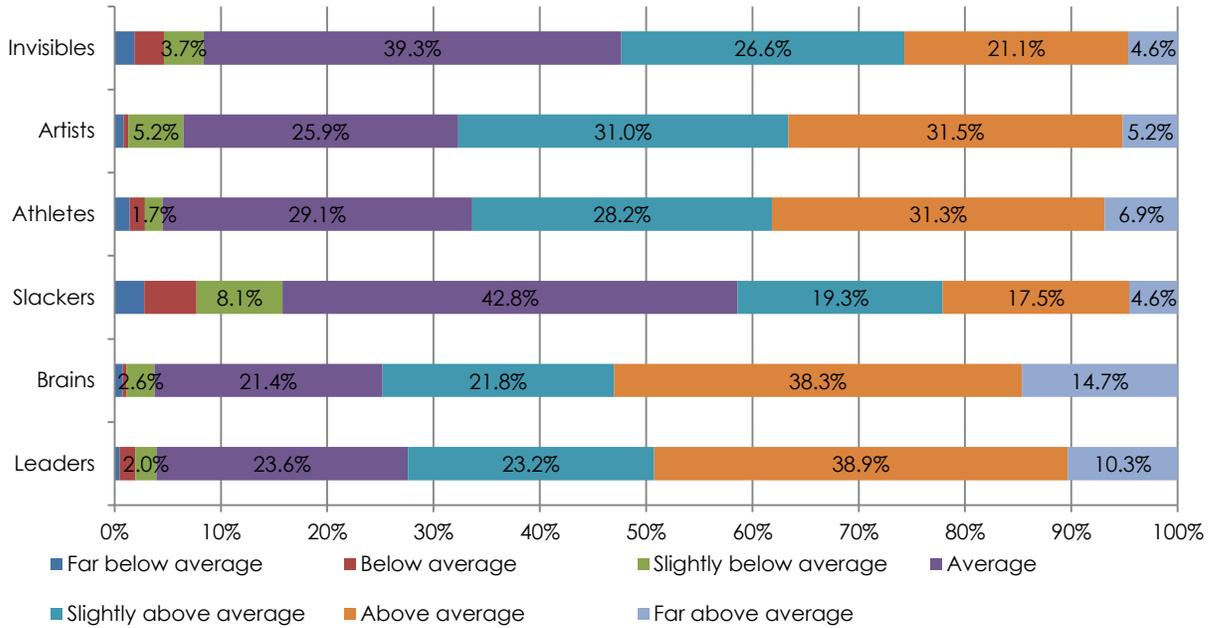


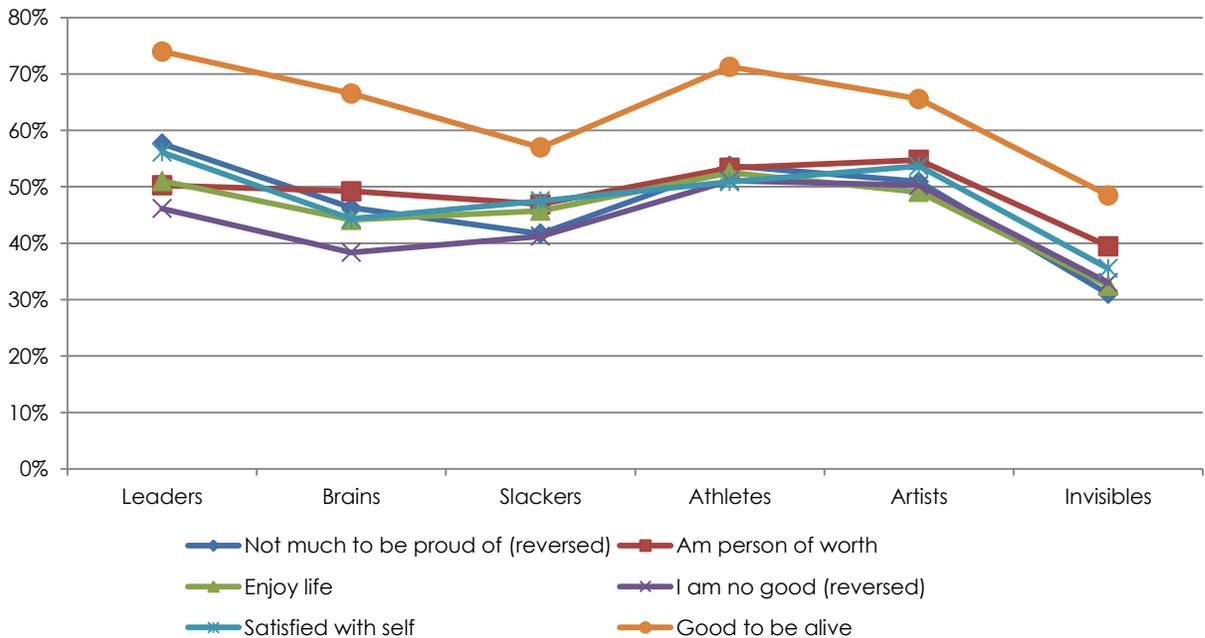
Figure A-II: Expected post-secondary plans by cluster



**Figure A-III: Self-rated intellectual ability by cluster**



**Figure A-IV: Indicators of positive self-image by cluster**



## Endnotes

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<sup>xxx</sup> Kornich & Furstenberg, 2013.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Author's calculation based on data presented in Kornrich & Furstenberg, 2013.

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CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) conducts research on civic education in schools, colleges, and community settings and on young Americans' voting and political participation, service, activism, media use, and other forms of civic engagement.

It is based at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University.

