The peer relations of dropouts: a comparative study of at-risk and not at-risk youths*

STEPHEN ELLENBOGEN AND CLAIRE CHAMBERLAND

Little research has been devoted to exploring the relationship between high school disengagement and friendship network changes. In this study, the characteristics of friends, the environments of the friendship network and the nature of peer relations of students at-risk and not at-risk of dropping out of high school were compared. A questionnaire was given to 191 high school students (109 males, 82 females) from a middle class environment at the beginning and end of the school year. Results indicated that at-risk students had more dropout friends, more working friends, fewer school friends and fewer same-sex friends. Sex differences were discovered in several areas. Findings are discussed in relation to research and theories pertaining to dropouts and adolescent development.

© 1997 The Association for Professionals in Services for Adolescents

Introduction

In recent years, the problem of high school attrition has concerned school professionals and researchers alike. Lack of success in school not only places severe limits on the career options and earning potential of a young person; there are also potential social and psychological repercussions from failing at something so highly regarded in conventional society, and these may affect the growth of an individual long before they leave school. In this study, the peer relations of students at-risk and not at-risk of dropping out were followed over the course of a school year, in the hope of gaining a better understanding of the social aspects of the process that leads young people to leave school before obtaining a high school diploma.

The possibility that the peer group plays a role in the school disengagement process has been debated (Elliott and Voss, 1974; Newman and Newman, 1976; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Valverde, 1987; Finan II, 1991; Kelly 1993). Due to the relative paucity of research in this area, the present authors have expanded their literature review to include studies of actual dropouts, future dropouts (students who were followed until they either graduated from or dropped out of high school), as well as students at-risk of dropping out. Research can be categorized into three trends.

The first has demonstrated that actual dropouts (Alpert and Dunhan, 1986; Finan II, 1991) and future dropouts (Elliott and Voss, 1974; Horwich, 1980) tend to have more dropout friends. The difficulty rests in interpreting this association. It may be that lack of success at school predisposes one to seek friendships with similar others, thus the discovery

Reprint requests and correspondence should be addressed to C. Chamberland, Ecole de Service Social, Université de Montréal, C.P. 6120, Succ. Centre-Ville, Montréal, Quebec, Canada, H3C 3J7.


0140-1971/97/040355+$13/$25.00/0/ad970092© 1997 The Association for Professionals in Services for Adolescents
of an association between dropping out and having dropout friends is of little importance to
the fundamental question of why youths choose to quit school. Conversely, it could be that
having a social network of friends where school is not valued accelerates or consolidates the
disengagement process. The peer group may reinforce attitudes or behaviour not conducive
to success at school.

The second trend illustrated that future dropouts tended to have been rejected by their
school peers (Parker and Asher, 1987; Kupersmidt et al., 1990). Again, this may be a
contributing factor to the disengagement process or simply a byproduct of it.

A third and related trend of research suggested a lack of integration into the social
network of school on the part of the dropout. Ekstrom et al. (1986) discovered that future
dropouts tend to feel less popular at school, and that their friends are less popular as well. In
an ethnographic study, Valverde (1987) determined that actual dropouts tend to lack
naturally formed mutual support groups to assist in their studies and sense a
 disconnectedness with school.

In a field study of high schools which cater to school returnees and potential dropouts,
Kelly (1993) identified numerous ways in which the peer group may be involved in the
disengagement process. Citing student testimonials, she recorded instances of (a) conflicts
with other students leading to expulsion, (b) disassociative feelings with the crowd at
school motivating a quiet withdrawal from that environment, and (c) relationship and
pregnancy domains taking precedence over school.

Taken together, the literature indicates that the friendship networks of future dropouts
tend to include a greater proportion of young people of similar orientation and fewer school
friends. Furthermore, it is possible that an active rejection of these future dropouts by their
school peers may be contributing to these tendencies.

Much remains to be explored of the characteristics of the friendship network of students
who leave school prematurely. Firstly, there is little research into when this process of
affiliation with other dropouts emerges. Second, there has been little examination of
other characteristics of the friends of future dropouts and at-risk students, such as their work
status. Though there are several indications that future dropouts tend to have few school
friends, the environments of their friendship network has never been subjected to detailed
examination using mapping techniques. A recent study (Claes and Simard, 1992)
employing such techniques to examine the social networks of delinquents, a group known
to have a high dropout rate (Elliott and Voss, 1974), revealed a high concentration of out of
school friends.

The characteristics of the friendship network of future dropouts and at-risk students, and
the characteristics of the relationship to their friends remains largely unexplored. The peer
rejection studies suggest conflictual or precarious peer relations, but Parker and Asher
(1987) questioned whether rejected youths make up for their lack of popularity at school
with a larger out of school friendship network.

There are indications that students at-risk of early departure from school may be more
open to peer influence (Leaseberg et al., 1990). Radford and King (1989) found that actual
dropouts tended to have sexual relations at an earlier age, while Ekstrom et al. (1986)
discovered that future dropouts tended to go out on dates more often. The quality of social
relations of delinquents has received considerably more attention, but findings have not
always been consistent. There appears to be a trend for delinquents to have a smaller
network of close friends, more opposite sex friends (Claes and Simard, 1992) and a greater
vulnerability to peer influence (Giordano et al., 1986). The latter authors also found a
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات