

Differing Profiles of Developmental Experiences Across Types of Organized Youth Activities

Reed W. Larson and David M. Hansen
University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign

Giovanni Moneta
London Metropolitan University

This study inventoried the types of developmental and negative experiences that youth encounter in different categories of extracurricular and community-based organized activities. A representative sample of 2,280 11th graders from 19 diverse high schools responded to a computer-administered protocol. Youth in faith-based activities reported higher rates of experiences related to identity, emotional regulation, and interpersonal development in comparison with other activities. Sports and arts programs stood out as providing more experiences related to development of initiative, although sports were also related to high stress. Service activities were associated with experiences related to development of teamwork, positive relationships, and social capital. Youth reported all of these positive developmental experiences to occur significantly more often in youth programs than during school classes.

Keywords: organized activities, positive development, adolescence

Ecological theory suggests that people should view the different settings in young people's lives as distinct learning environments that provide differing structures of opportunity for development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner, 2002; Whiting, 1980). Organized youth activities, including extracurricular school activities and community-based programs, are settings that provide favorable conditions for adolescents to actively engage in psychosocial growth (Larson, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003b). Indeed, controlled longitudinal studies have shown that participation in organized activities is associated with positive outcomes on general developmental indicators, such as school completion, adult employment, and adult civic participation (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2002). Research provides limited information, however, on the specific developmental processes that take place in organized activities and on how these might differ across the wide range of activities, from sports to arts to service (Mahoney, Larson, Eccles, & Lord, 2005; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2002). Different activities engage youth in distinct normative systems, goals, role relationships, and historically evolved organizational cultures (Rogoff, Baker-Sennet, Lacasa, & Goldsmith,

1995; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997), which may provide somewhat different developmental opportunities. To understand the potentials of these settings and to provide useful information for policy and practice, it is essential to differentiate the specific processes of development that occur across organized activities.

As a step toward this goal, this study inventories the types of developmental experiences that a large, representative sample of high school youth reported in different categories of activities. Given evidence that organized activities are settings in which youth are active agents of their own development (Larson, 2000; Yates & Youniss, 1996), we argue that youth's reports on their experiences are a valuable source of information on the developmental processes that occur. Youth in the study were surveyed about experiences related to six domains of positive development and five domains of negative processes that have been theorized in the literature to take place in organized activities at this age level.

The first objective of this research is to compare rates of these developmental and negative experiences among categories of organized activities, with the goal of identifying the average profiles associated with each. The second objective is to compare experiences in these activities with three other major activities in youth's lives (school classes, leisure with friends, and working at a job) to gauge the opportunities in organized activities in relation to meaningful benchmarks. This study takes several important steps beyond a prior study that used the same inventory to make these comparisons for students in one high school (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003). First, it uses a much larger sample of youth: 11th graders from 19 representative urban, suburban, and rural communities. Second, data were collected via computer administration, which allowed for systematic selection of two activities that were inventoried for each youth. This permits evaluation of differences between activities by within-person rather than between-persons comparisons, thus greatly reducing confounds related to self-selection, which have been a major obstacle to research on organized activities (Dubas & Snider, 1993; Quinn, 1999).

Reed W. Larson and David M. Hansen, Department of Human and Community Development, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign; Giovanni Moneta, Department of Psychology, London Metropolitan University, London, England.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Reed W. Larson, Department of Human and Community Development, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 904 West Nevada Street, Urbana, IL 61801. E-mail: larsonr@ad.uiuc.edu

Profiles of Developmental Experiences in Different Types of Organized Activities

Existing literature provides clues about the differing developmental opportunities that various organized activities may provide adolescents.

Sports

The literature on youth sports suggests that athletic participation is associated with both positive and negative developmental experiences. On the positive side, researchers have argued that organized sports provide opportunities for development of goal setting, persistence, problem solving, teamwork, managing emotions, and managing time (Danish, Taylor, & Fazio, 2003). Many of these skills deal with learning to organize and manage effort and fit under the heading of what Larson (2000) has called *initiative*. In this vein, sports researchers frequently have used theoretical models focused on task orientation and goal achievement to conceptualize the developmental processes in sport participation (Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001; Duda & Ntoumimis, 2005; Roberts, Treasure, & Kavussanu, 1997). The thesis that sports foster youth's capacity for initiative and goal achievement may help explain the positive associations found between athletic participation and increased academic achievement (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Marsh & Klieitman, 2002; McNeal, 1995). The focus on goal achievement, however, is also likely to account for the frequent experiences of stress found in sports (Scanlan, Babkes, & Scanlan, 2005). Evidence suggests that other negative experiences may also be prevalent in sports. Research documents the occurrence of negative peer dynamics among youth and inappropriate behavior by coaches on some sports teams (Brustad, 1993; Brustad et al., 2001; N. J. Smith, Smith, & Smoll, 1985). One longitudinal study also found an association between sports participation and alcohol use (Eccles & Barber, 1999), suggesting that the peer culture in some sports contexts can encourage risky behavior.

What is not known, however, is whether these different types of experiences are more frequent in youth sports than in other organized activities—or than in other areas of adolescents' lives. It is possible that the types of developmental and negative experiences described in sports occur in other organized activities but have not received notice because there has been less research on these other activities. In Hansen et al.'s (2003) survey of one high school, youth in sports did not report more initiative experiences (including goal setting, effort, problem solving, and time management) than youth reported in other organized activities, but sports participation was associated with more experiences related to emotional development as well as more experiences of inappropriate adult behavior and negative peer interactions.

Performance and Fine Arts

The literature on organized arts activities (e.g., music, dance, drama, arts clubs) suggests that they are a frequent venue for identity exploration and development. The empirical evidence, primarily cross-sectional and qualitative, connects participation in arts activities with youth's engagement in identity work (Fredricks et al., 2002; Hansen et al., 2003; O'Neill, 2005). Other research suggests that arts activities may help youth develop initiative and

interpersonal skills (Heath, 2001; Soep, 1996). Again, however, the field lacks systematic research that compares experiences in the arts with other activities.

Academic Clubs and Organizations

In this category we include school-based activities that have an educational focus (e.g., science club); a student government or leadership focus; or a cultural, social, or honorary focus. Research on these activities suggests that participation provides opportunities for development of academic dispositions and skills. In longitudinal research, Eccles and Barber (1999) found that students who participated in academic clubs or in school-involvement activities (e.g., pep club, student government) in 10th grade had higher grade point averages at the end of high school and were more likely to be enrolled in college at age 21. Similarly, a controlled longitudinal study by Marsh and Klieitman (2002) found participation in academic clubs in the early years of high school to be related to academic performance in 12th grade and subsequent years of college completion. Little attention has been given, however, to other developmental experiences in these activities. In the Hansen et al. (2003) survey, academic clubs and organizations were not distinguished as a setting for developmental experiences beyond the academic domain.

Community-Oriented Activities

We have grouped together activities aimed at connecting youth to community adults, institutions, and careers. In this group we include community-based youth programs (e.g., Young Men's Christian Association, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts) and school-based career and technical clubs (e.g., Future Farmers of America, Future Business Leaders of America). A limited literature suggests that these programs provide youth opportunities to learn prosocial norms and develop social capital. Dubas and Snider (1993) argued that community-based youth programs such as 4-H and Scouts develop leadership skills and connect youth to resource-bearing adults in the community. Research on career and technical clubs suggests associations with positive general indicators (Plank, 2001; but see Marsh & Klieitman, 2002). Consistent with these findings, in the prior survey, youth in community-oriented programs reported comparatively high rates of experiences related to leadership, prosocial norms, and the development of linkages to the community (Hansen et al., 2003).

Service Activities

A central mission of service activities is typically to foster youth's development of an altruistic and civic ethos. Consistent with this, research documents a connection between participation in service and the development of social responsibility and moral and political identity (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988; McIntosh, Metz, & Youniss, 2005; Yates & Youniss, 1996). Longitudinal research has shown associations between participation in voluntary service activities, on the one hand, and strengthened intrinsic work values and greater commitment to community activities as an adult, on the other (Flanagan, 2004; Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer, & Snyder, 1998). There is also evidence that participation in service can reduce prejudice and increase youth's appreciation of diversity

(Flanagan, 2004). These findings suggest that service provides rich experiences in the domains of identity and positive prosocial relationships.

Faith-Based Youth Groups

A growing literature shows that many adolescents experience religion as an important part of their lives (McKinney, 1999; Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006; C. Smith, 2005); however, little research has focused specifically on the role of faith-based youth groups. A handful of studies suggest that religious youth groups integrate young people into a community of youth and adults (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Regnerus, 2000; C. Smith, 2003) and provide opportunities for identity development (Markstrom, 1999).

Research Limitations

These profiles of the developmental opportunities in different organized activities, although suggestive, come almost entirely from research that focused on single activities. Few studies have compared organized activities with each other or with other activities in teens' lives. Even when comparisons have been made, they have involved comparisons between different youth (Hansen et al., 2003; Kahne et al., 2001), leaving open the possibility that differences between the people joining each type of activity (e.g., differences in personality, temperament, or response set), rather than the activities themselves, account for the findings.

This Research: Surveying Developmental Experiences

The goal of this research is to systematically compare teenagers' developmental experiences in organized youth activities with each other and with other major contexts in youth's lives. We decided to focus on 11th graders, reasoning, first, that these students had the greatest likelihood of being at their peak involvement in high-school-level programs and, second, that they are at a stage of cognitive maturity at which they should be able to make discriminating judgments on diverse types of developmental experiences.

Domains of Developmental and Negative Experiences

The Youth Experiences Survey (YES), used in this research, was designed to obtain reports on developmental experiences hypothesized to occur in organized activities at the high school age level (Hansen & Larson, 2005; Hansen et al., 2003). It focuses on domains of socioemotional development that, first, have been discussed in the literature (as we have summarized) and, second, involve processes in which youth are active and conscious agents of their own development (and that thus should be more accessible to youth's self-report). Following a subdivision that has been suggested in this literature (Larson, 1994; Youniss, Yates, & Su, 1997), the YES inventories experiences in domains of personal and interpersonal development. The domains of personal development include identity work, initiative, and emotional regulation. The domains of interpersonal development include teamwork and social skills, positive relationships (acquiring prosocial norms and diverse peer relationships), and development of adult networks and social capital. In addition, the YES inventories five domains of negative experiences that have been discussed in the literature and

emerged from a focus group study (Dworkin & Larson, 2004). These include experiencing stress, encountering inappropriate adult behavior, being subject to negative peer influence or pressure, experiencing social exclusion, and encountering negative peer group dynamics.

Comparing Activities

The first objective of this research is to compare youth's rates of these experiences across categories of organized activities. It is not likely that one kind of youth program can support high rates of development in all domains (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003a). Rather, we expect sports, faith-based, and community activities to be associated with higher rates for different types of developmental experiences. Our goal is to identify the profile of average experiences in each activity as an important reconnaissance step toward more focused research on the developmental processes in those contexts. For simplicity and clarity, we chose to define the profile for each activity in relation to the average experience for all organized activities.

The second objective is to compare youth's rates of experiences in organized activities with rates of these experiences in other major activities that occupy their time. We selected three activities to serve as benchmarks. As in the study by Hansen et al. (2003), we chose school classes and leisure with friends as comparison activities because they represent the largest obligatory and leisure contexts of time use for American adolescents (Larson & Verma, 1999). We added work at a job as a third comparison activity because, for some high school youth, it consumes substantial amounts of time (Mortimer, 2003) and may compete for time with organized activities (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).

Computer administration of the survey allowed us to strengthen these two sets of comparisons in several key ways. First, the computer system was able to control the selection of two target activities for each youth to report on, so that less frequent activities, such as service, could be oversampled. This selection was structured to obtain representation across all possible combinations of two activities, which provided for a more robust set of comparisons. Second, because each youth reported on two activities, we were able to test comparisons between activities using within-person contrasts. Use of hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) for these analyses allows us to model and control for effects at the levels of activity, person, and school.

Method

Sample

The sample for this study included 2,280 eleventh grade students (51% female, 49% male) from 19 Illinois high schools. The selection of the 19 schools was stratified to obtain representation across economic strata, urban and rural communities, and ethnicities. Ten of the schools were located in communities below the state's 2000 median household income, and nine of the schools were located in communities above the state's median household income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Within each of these two economic strata, schools were selected to represent the distribution of Illinois's population among urban, suburban, small city, and rural communities. Thirty-one percent of youth in the resulting sample were urban, 38% were suburban, 15% were from a small city, and 16% were

rural. The ethnicity of the sample was 63% European American, 13% African American, 10% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 1% Pacific Islander and Native American, and 6% who reported multiple ethnicities. These demographic figures approximate those for the population of youth in Illinois and in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Students were selected in each of the 19 schools to represent a cross-section of the school's 11th graders. The survey was completed during classes (most often during physical education or health, both of which are required of all students in Illinois). In schools with fewer than 150 eleventh graders, all were surveyed. In larger schools, the school's administration identified a subset of classes that enlisted the participation of 50% of the juniors and provided representation of the junior student body across gender, ethnicity, and college- versus noncollege-oriented students.

Nearly all (98.8%) students who were present in these classes on the day of the survey completed it. Twenty-eight students declined to participate, and five parents had indicated that they did not want their child to participate. We attribute this high rate of participation to both the novelty of taking the survey on laptop computers and an interesting survey format (e.g., short animations appeared between every fourth or fifth screen). After the data collection, we excluded the data from 44 students because their pattern of responses suggested that they did not take the survey seriously. Thus, the final sample of 2,280 students represents a participation rate of 96.8%.

Procedures

The survey was administered in each class via a mobile computer laboratory with 35 battery-operated wireless laptops connected to a server. Two weeks prior to the scheduled date for data collection, letters were given to all potential participants explaining the study and procedures. We also sent parents letters to provide them the opportunity to ask questions about the study and decline their child's participation if they desired. On the day of the scheduled administration, we provided preliminary instructions, then asked the students to read the consent form on the computer screen in front of them and indicate whether they agreed to participate by selecting the *yes* or *no* button. Students who selected the *no* option (the 28 who declined) were shown a final screen that thanked them for their time. Students who selected the *yes* option were presented with the first computer screen of the survey.

Measures

Youth Activity Inventory

The survey began by inventorying all organized activities in which a student currently participated. Students were presented with a list of 67 activities, grouped into the six categories we have identified (sports, arts, etc.), and they were asked to check all activities that they had been in within the last 3 months. The list was based on our prior research and similar lists in the research literature (e.g., Eccles & Barber, 1999; Elder & Conger, 2000). Each of the six categories also contained an *other* category in which students could type in the name of an activity if it was not listed. Of the total sample, 12.3% ($n = 281$) reported not participating in any organized activity, 17.4% ($n = 396$) reported participating in only one activity, and 70.3% ($n = 1,603$) reported participating in two or more activities. Table 1 shows how often different activities were checked. Students were also asked to indicate whether they participated in two of the comparison activities: academic class (specifically math and English) and a part-time job. Nearly all youth (92.8%; $n = 2,116$) reported having a current math or English class, which are both required of 11th graders in Illinois, and 50.5% ($n = 1,152$) reported having a part-time job. We assumed that everyone spent leisure time with friends, so we did not ask about participation in this activity.

The computer next presented each student with the set of activities he or she had just checked and asked him or her to rate the frequency of

participation in each listed organized activity and the comparison activities. Leisure time with friends was included in this list: We used the term "hanging out with friends," which we had found to be an effective colloquial label. Ratings of frequency of activity participation were made on a 5-point scale, where 0 = *not at all* and 4 = *more than once a week*.

At this point, the server selected two target activities to use for the student to report on in depth. The objective of the selection algorithm was to equalize sampling of all possible combinations of activities from the six organized activity categories and the three comparison activities (a total of 36 possible pairs). The algorithm kept count in a tabulation matrix of the target activity pairs that had already been used by other male and female students at that school. The algorithm was programmed to select the pair of that student's activities that was currently least represented in the data matrix for her or his gender at that school. When there was a tie among several possible choices, the server chose one at random. In cases in which class was selected as the target activity and a student reported both, the algorithm randomly selected either math or English class. Because we found minimal differences in the data for these two classes, we combined them for all analyses into a single category, class. At each new school, the counts in the tabulation matrix were reset to zero so that activity selection from schools earlier in the data collection would not bias selection of activities in that school.

Table 2 displays the final frequencies obtained for all target activity pairs. For 800 students, the two selected target activities were both organized activities, and we identify these students as Subsample A for the analyses. For 1,022 students, the target activities included one organized activity and one comparison activity; these compose Subsample B. The 386 students whose target activities were both comparison activities and the 82 students who reported only one target activity were not included in the analyses.

Because selection was limited by the activities that each student participated in, the selection procedure was only partly successful in achieving equal representation of students for all pairs of activities. Nonetheless, the selection procedure did substantially reduce differences in the distributions. Thus, whereas sports accounted for 38% of the organized activities that students participated in at least once per month, it accounted for only 23% of the activities reported on in Subsample A. Conversely, the percentage of community-oriented activities was 7% in the whole sample and was 11% in Subsample A.¹

The YES, Version 2.0

Following the selection of target activities, students were administered the YES 2.0, which inventoried their experiences in each of the two selected activities. The YES 2.0 contains 70 items asking about six domains of personal and interpersonal developmental experiences and five domains of negative experiences. Hansen and Larson (2005; Hansen et al., 2003) identified these domains during the process of instrument development by drawing on multiple sources, including a review of the literature, consultation with youth development experts, and focus groups with adolescents. They chose domains that these different sources suggested were salient to high-school-aged youth's conscious developmental experiences in organized activities.

For each item, respondents rate whether they have had a given experience during their recent involvement on a 4-point gradient from *not at all* (1) to *yes, definitely* (4). Scale scores are computed as averages; thus, scale values range from 1 to 4, with 4 representing the highest possible rate of

¹ A matrix showing the naturally occurring frequency of all pairs of activities in the sample is available from Reed W. Larson.

Table 1
 Number of Students Reporting Current Participation in Organized Activities ($N = 2,280$)

Activity category (%) ^a	Activity names (no. of youth reporting each activity)
Sports (62.1%)	
Team	Basketball (342), football (213), soccer (198), baseball (181), softball (151), volleyball (128), cheerleading (73), drill team (42), hockey (40), lacrosse (14), majorettes (15), water polo (4), other (4)
Individual	Bowling (231), aerobics (188), track (176), tennis (122), golf (102), wrestling (80), martial arts (77), swim team (54), cross-country (50), gymnastics (42), skating (25), ski team (19), diving team (13), racquetball (21), pep (22), other (11)
Performance and fine arts (45.4%)	
Musical	Band (315), choir (275), orchestra (88), other (2)
Performance	Dance (236), drama (209)
Arts clubs	Art club (227), creative writing club (107), other (48)
Academic clubs and organizations (30.1%)	
Educational	Foreign language (190), math club (63), chess club (46), science club (41), computer club (37), quiz bowl (33), speech club (30), debate (24), history club (24), psy. club (10), book club (5), other (6)
Student government and leadership	Prom (178), student council (148), homecoming (112), yearbook (99), literary magazine (31), other (9)
Cultural, social, and honorary	Ethnic clubs (29), NHS (16), letterman club (5), Kcor rock club (2), lifesavers (2), youth and government (2), TriM (2), other (7)
Community oriented (17.3%)	
Community organizations	YMCA (73), Big Brother/Sister (63), Scouts (61), Boys/Girls Club (43), 4H (37), other (6)
Career and technical organizations	FFA (65), FBLA (49), Junior Achievers (32), FCCLA (3), JETS (2), ROTC (2), other (8)
Service (27.1%)	
Community	Community service (176), volunteering (112), faith-based service (100), Key Club (82), American Field (17), civic club (7), Interact (6), environmental club (4), Knight Buddies (2), other (8)
Peer	Tutoring (213), peer counseling (70), writing center (1)
Faith-based youth groups (19.3%)	Youth group (398), FCA (82), religious program (54)

Note. Psy. = psychology; NHS = National Honor Society; TriM = Tri Music Honor Society; YMCA = Young Men's Christian Association; FFA = The National FFA Organization; FBLA = Future Business Leaders of America; FCCLA = Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America; JETS = Junior Engineering Technical Society; ROTC = Reserve Officers' Training Corps; FCA = Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

^a Percentage of youth reporting at least one activity in this category.

occurrence.² The means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alphas, and intercorrelations for these scales are reported in Table 3.

Personal and interpersonal developmental experiences. Personal development experiences are represented by three scales on the YES. The Identity Work scale consists of 6 items, with 3 items asking about experiences related to identity exploration in the activity (e.g., "Tried doing new things") and 3 asking about reflection experiences (e.g., "This activity got me thinking about who I am"). The Initiative scale consists of 12 items, including 3 items each asking about experiences related to goal setting (e.g., "I set goals for myself in this activity"), exertion of effort (e.g., "I put all my effort into this activity"), problem solving (e.g., "Observed how others solved problems and learned from them"), and time management (e.g., "Learned about setting priorities"). The Emotional Regulation scale consists of 4 items (e.g., "Learned that my emotions affect how I perform").

Interpersonal development experiences are also represented by three scales. The Teamwork and Social Skills scale consists of 10 items, with 5 asking about group process experiences (e.g., "Learned that working together requires some compromise"), 2 related to giving and getting feedback (e.g., "I became better at giving feedback"), and 3 related to leadership and responsibility (e.g., "Others in this activity counted on me"). The Positive Relationships scale consists of 8 items: 4 dealing with interactions with diverse peers (e.g., "Got to know someone from a different ethnic group"), and 4 dealing with experiences related to learning prosocial norms (e.g., "We discussed morals and values"). The Adult Networks and Social Capital scale consists of 7 items, including 2 dealing with whether the activity facilitated relationships with the youth's family (e.g., "I had good conversations with my parents/guardians because of this activity"), 2 asking about links to the community (e.g., "Got to know people in the community"), and 3 asking about links to work and college (e.g., "This activity helped prepare me for college").

A separate validity study with 118 high school students found that youth's self-ratings for five of these six scales were significantly correlated with adult program leaders' independent reports of individual youth's experiences using the same scales, with correlations ranging from .27 to .47. Youth's ratings failed to correlate with the leaders' ratings only for the Emotional Regulation scale, possibly because this is a domain in which change is less visible to others (Hansen & Larson, 2005).

Negative experiences. The YES includes five scales dealing with negative experiences. The Stress scale has three items dealing with stress and demands in the activity (e.g., "Demands were so great that I didn't get homework done"). The Inappropriate Adult Behavior scale consists of four items asking about manipulative, morally inappropriate, or sexual behavior by the adult leaders (e.g., "Adult leaders made inappropriate sexual comments or jokes"). Because items on this scale concern adult behavior, these items were not asked of students when the target activity was hanging out with friends. The Negative Influences scale consists of four items dealing with peer pressure or influence (e.g., "Felt pressured by peers to do something I did not want to do"). The Social Exclusion scale has three items dealing with experiences of being or feeling excluded from groups or activities (e.g., "I felt left out"). The Negative Group Dynamics scale consists of three items dealing with peer dynamics involving unfairness, sexual comments, and discrimination (e.g., "I got stuck doing more than my fair share").

² A description of the YES and how its scales were developed and refined is presented in Hansen et al. (2003) and Hansen and Larson (2005). Although the instrument includes subscales in each of the six domains of positive experiences, preliminary analyses for this article indicated that we could report the findings most parsimoniously by presenting results for only the six higher order scales.

Table 2
Number of Students Who Filled Out the Youth Experiences Survey on Each Pair of Activities
(N = 2,280)

First activity	Second activity								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Subsample A (<i>n</i> = 800 youth)									
Organized activities									
1. Sports	—								
2. Performance and fine arts	114	—							
3. Academic clubs and organizations	81	75	—						
4. Community oriented	50	30	36	—					
5. Service	65	56	53	35	—				
6. Faith-based youth groups	53	45	34	29	44	—			
No. youth reporting on each category of organized activity	363	320	279	180	253	205			
Subsample B (<i>n</i> = 1,022 youth)									
Comparison activities									
7. Academic class	131	74	52	30	40	40	—		
8. Hanging out with friends	127	69	50	32	40	34	156	—	
9. Working at a job	103	60	41	30	40	29	120	110	—
No. youth reporting on each category of organized activity	361	203	143	92	120	103			

Note. Seventy-two youth who reported participation in only one activity are not included.

Control Variables

In the analyses, we controlled for several variables that the research literature indicated could potentially affect comparisons between programs, including amount of time youth spent in the program (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002) and sociodemographic variables, such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES; Denner & Griffin, 2003; Holland & Andre, 1987; Pedersen & Seidman, 2005). Different control variables were measured and controlled at the level of the target activities, the individual youth, and the school. At the activity level, we controlled for two indicators of time in the target activity. In all models, frequency of participation (which we have described) was used as a control, and in the models testing comparisons between organized activities and in those comparing organized activities and a part-time job, the number of hours per week was also

used (hours per week in class and hanging out with friends were not collected). Response categories were as follows: 1 hr, 2–4 hr, 5–9 hr, and 10 hr or more per week. At the individual level, we included students' reports on their gender and ethnicity as a control variable in all models. At the school level, we included SES of the community and geographic region. Schools were categorized as either above or below the state's median household income and as belonging to one of four geographic regions—urban, suburban, small city, and rural—which were represented with three dichotomous variables.

Analyses

The analyses for the current study used HLM (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Goldstein, 1995). For these analyses, we used the MLwiN 1.10

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for the Youth Experiences Inventory (YES) Scales

YES scales	Cronbach's α	M	SD	Scale correlations										
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Developmental experiences														
1. Identity work	.86	2.72	0.82	—										
2. Initiative	.95	2.81	0.82	.64**	—									
3. Emotional regulation	.87	2.59	0.96	.60**	.60**	—								
4. Teamwork and social skills	.94	2.87	0.82	.57**	.68**	.60**	—							
5. Positive relationships	.87	2.68	0.81	.56**	.59**	.53**	.62**	—						
6. Adult networks and social capital	.87	2.28	0.83	.58**	.55**	.50**	.51**	.56**	—					
Negative experiences														
7. Stress	.86	1.88	0.92	.11**	.13**	.17**	.11**	.12**	.18**	—				
8. Inappropriate adult behavior	.94	1.36	0.83	-.03	-.10**	.01	-.11**	.02	.18**	.46**	—			
9. Negative influences	.94	1.50	0.86	.02	-.07**	.04	-.06**	.06**	.19**	.60**	.77**	—		
10. Social exclusion	.85	1.70	0.86	-.04	-.09**	.01	-.09**	.01	.08**	.60**	.58**	.72**	—	
11. Negative group dynamics	.77	1.77	0.86	.09**	.04	.12**	.09**	.12**	.21**	.56**	.72**	.66**	.57**	—

Note. Analyses were conducted on a data set containing the information for one organized activity for every youth in Subsamples A and B (*n* = 1,822). For members of Subsample A, the one activity was selected at random for each youth.
 ** *p* < .01.

computer program (Rasbash et al., 2000). HLM allows researchers to examine relations among variables nested at different levels in a hierarchy, in this case at the three levels of target activity, student, and school. The dependent variables for these analyses were the YES scales, and separate analyses were conducted for each scale. In the first step of each analysis, we tested a model that included only the control variables as explanatory variables. In the second step, we then added a set of dichotomous contrast variables for the comparisons between activities (described separately for Objectives 1 and 2) and evaluated whether they increased the predictive power of the model. We tested the difference in variance explained by the addition of this set of explanatory variables using a large-sample chi-square statistic.

The analyses for Objective 1 used data from Subsample A, and those for Objective 2 used data from Subsample B. These two sets of analyses were structured to provide parallel and partially replicating tests of the differing profiles for the organized activities.

Objective 1

Analyses for Objective 1 evaluated whether scores for the YES scales differed among the organized activities. Five dichotomous contrast variables were created that contrasted the six organized activities, and these were tested as explanatory variables in the HLM analysis. Sport was selected as the reference category because it was the target activity for the largest number of youth (Table 2). In cases in which this set of explanatory variables significantly improved the fit of the model, we then evaluated whether the adjusted mean for each category of organized activities was higher or lower than the overall adjusted mean for all activities. We calculated confidence intervals for each activity to determine whether the adjusted mean for all activities was outside the 95th and the 99th confidence range for that activity.

An additional set of analyses was conducted for Objective 1 to evaluate interactions between category of activity and the control variables. These analyses were performed separately for each of the time variables (frequency and hours per week) and each of the sociodemographic variables (gender, SES, ethnicity, and geographic region of the school). We computed interaction terms by multiplying the five activity contrast variables by the control variables (the latter included multiple dichotomous variables for ethnicity and region). We first tested an HLM model that included the activity contrasts and the control variables, then added the interaction terms. The difference in variance explained by addition of the interaction terms was evaluated with a chi-square statistic.

Objective 2

For Objective 2, we tested a set of explanatory variables that provided contrasts between each comparison activity and the six organized activities. Separate analyses were run for each comparison activity; thus, six contrasts were tested at a time. When addition of these contrasts significantly improved the fit of the model, we examined the unstandardized regression coefficients (*B*) to determine which organized activities differed from the comparison activity. We have chosen to report unstandardized coefficients so that the activity effect sizes reported in all tables use the metric of the original 1–4 scale.

Results

Objective 1: Comparisons Between Organized Activities Differences in Rates of Developmental Experiences

The first objective was to compare students' rates of experiences among the six categories of organized activities. The overall chi-square tests for these contrasts were found to be significant for all

six developmental scales, indicating that the activities differed from each other on all the developmental domains (Table 4). We therefore evaluated the adjusted means for the organized activities to identify which activities differed from the overall adjusted mean for each scale.

Sports. Youth's reports of their developmental experiences for the six YES scales were found to be either significantly higher or significantly lower in sports, compared with the average for organized activities (Table 4). Students reported significantly higher rates of initiative, emotional regulation, and teamwork experiences compared with overall rates for organized activities. Within initiative experiences, for example, 61% of students in sports endorsed the item "Learned to push myself," compared with 36% for this experience in all other organized activities.³ They also reported higher rates of learning about regulating emotional states. Thus, 56% of students endorsed the item "Learned that my emotions affect how I perform" in sports, compared with 41% for all other organized activities.

Students in sports also reported significantly lower rates of identity work, positive relationship, and adult network experiences than students in other organized activities. The magnitude of these difference scores ranged between -0.03 and -0.10 , which is modest given that the scales had a potential range from 1 to 4. Inspection of the item frequencies for positive relations suggested that much of the difference for this scale was attributable to an item that asked about opportunities for interaction with the other gender. Thirty-seven percent of students in sports reported having the experience "Made friends with someone of the opposite gender," compared with 54% of students for all other organized activities.

Performance and fine arts. Students in arts activities reported significantly higher rates of initiative experiences compared with other activities but lower rates of teamwork, positive relationship, and adult network experiences. The strongest difference was for positive relationship experiences, with a deviation from the overall adjusted mean of -0.11 . For example, 35% of students in arts endorsed the item "Learned about helping others," compared with 51% for all other organized activities. The magnitude of the difference for adult network experiences was -0.10 , with the trend attributable to lower rates of experience for all seven items in this domain.

Academic clubs and organizations. Students reported significantly lower scores for all six scales of developmental experiences in academic clubs than in other activities. The magnitude of these differences ranged from -0.12 to -0.34 . The largest deviation from the overall mean was for emotional regulation experiences. For example, only 19% of students in academic activities reported having "learned about controlling my temper," compared with 34% of students across all other organized activities. Similar differences occurred for the items "Learned to deal with fear and anxiety" and "Learned that my emotions affect how I perform."

Community-oriented activities. Students in community-oriented activities reported higher rates of adult network experiences but lower rates of emotional regulation and teamwork ex-

³ The percentages given for this and subsequent items represent the rate at which youth reported *yes, definitely* that they had had the specified experience. We selected illustrative items that showed the largest differences.

Table 4
Differences in Developmental Experiences Among Organized Activities

Youth Experiences Survey scale	Variance explained (%)			Category of organized activity ^b						Overall adjusted <i>M</i>
	Controls ^a	Organized activities	$\Delta\chi^2$ (<i>df</i> = 5)	Sports	Arts	Academic	Community	Service	Faith	
Personal development										
Identity Work	8.9	5.0	88**	-0.07*	0.02	-0.23**	-0.01	0.03	0.36**	2.78
Initiative	17.7	1.2	22**	0.13**	0.04*	-0.24**	-0.04	0.00	0.07*	2.81
Emotional Regulation	10.8	3.5	62**	0.15**	0.02	-0.34**	-0.07*	-0.07*	0.30**	2.73
Interpersonal development										
Teamwork and Social Skills	10.3	1.2	19**	0.05*	-0.05*	-0.12**	-0.09**	0.09**	0.13**	2.93
Positive Relationships	9.6	7.1	118**	-0.10**	-0.11**	-0.14**	0.02	0.10**	0.39**	2.52
Adult Networks and Social Capital	5.0	4.4	82**	-0.03*	-0.10**	-0.21**	0.05*	0.07**	0.36**	2.38

^a All models included frequency of participation, hours per week, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and region as controls. ^b Values in the table are means for the specific activity in relation to the overall adjusted mean.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

periences. Although these differences were significant, they were small in magnitude. The deviation score was 0.05 for adult networks, -0.07 for emotional regulation, and -0.09 for teamwork.

Service activities. Students in service activities reported significantly lower rates of emotional regulation experiences but higher rates for all three scales of interpersonal development: teamwork, positive relationships, and adult networks. The magnitude of these differences ranged from 0.07 to 0.10. The largest difference was for an item in the domain of positive relationships: Thirty-nine percent of students in service activities reported having the experience that "I was able to change my school or community for the better," compared with 20% of students for all other organized activities.

Faith-based youth groups. Students in faith-based youth groups reported significantly higher rates for all six domains of developmental experiences. The magnitude of these differences was largest for identity work, emotional regulation, positive relationships, and adult networks, with deviation scores ranging from 0.30 to 0.39. The difference for the identity scale is exemplified by the finding that 66% of students in faith-based activities endorsed the item "This activity got me thinking about who I am," compared with 33% of students in other organized activities. In the domain

of positive relationships, the differences were most attributable to items that dealt with opportunities to acquire prosocial norms. For example, 75% of students in faith-based activities reported that "We discussed morals and values," compared with 24% of students for other organized activities. Last, in the domain of adult networks, the difference was attributable to items that dealt with strengthening family connections (e.g., "This activity improved my relationships with my parents/guardians"; 46% in faith-based activities vs. 21% for other activities) and forming connections with other adults (e.g., "Got to know people in the community"; 40% for faith-based activities vs. 20% for other activities). Overall, then, students in faith-based activities reported high rates of development experiences across multiple domains.

Differences in Rates of Negative Experiences

Parallel analyses for the five scales of negative experiences showed much less difference among organized activities. The addition of the organized activity contrasts significantly improved the fit of the model for only two of the five scales of negative experiences: stress and social exclusion (Table 5). The rates of negative experiences that students reported tended to be low for all

Table 5
Difference in Negative Experiences Among Organized Activities

Youth Experiences Survey scale	Variance explained (%)			Category of organized activity ^b						Overall adjusted <i>M</i>
	Controls ^a	Organized activities	$\Delta\chi^2$ (<i>df</i> = 5)	Sports	Arts	Academic	Community	Service	Faith	
Negative experiences										
Stress	11.8	2.4	54**	0.30**	0.04	-0.11**	-0.03	-0.19**	-0.17**	1.95
Inappropriate Adult Behavior	17.9	0.0	8	0.08	-0.05	-0.06	0.10	-0.08	0.01	1.65
Negative Influences	19.7	0.0	8	0.08	0.00	0.01	0.02	-0.12	-0.02	1.64
Social Exclusion	14.4	1.0	13*	0.09**	-0.01	-0.01	0.03	-0.14**	0.02	1.92
Negative Group Dynamics	12.1	0.0	7	0.12	-0.01	-0.05	0.03	-0.07	-0.05	1.81

^a All models included frequency of participation, hours per week, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and region as controls. ^b Values in the table are means for the specific activity in relation to the overall adjusted mean.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

scales, as indicated by overall adjusted means below 2.00 on the 1–4 scale.

The variance explained by differences among activities was greatest for stress. Reports of stress experiences were higher than the overall mean in sports and somewhat lower in academic, service, and faith-based activities. For sports, the magnitude of the difference was substantial. For example, 17% of students reported that “This activity stressed me out” for sports, compared with 10% for all other organized activities. The variance explained by differences among activities was smaller for the Social Exclusion scale (only 1.0%). Students in sports reported significantly but only slightly higher rates of social exclusion, and students in service activities reported significantly and moderately lower rates of social exclusion experiences.

Moderators of Developmental Experiences

We next evaluated whether these differences in development experiences among activities interacted with the control variables. For example, might a particular type of program have more impact for youth in lower SES schools? These analyses involved testing whether addition of interaction terms (Activity Type \times Control Variable) would increase the amount of variance explained, beyond that accounted for in the models just tested. To begin with, we tested sets of interaction terms for each of the two time variables (frequency and hours). We evaluated these two sets for each of the six developmental and five negative YES scales (we added each set separately to the model represented in each of the rows of Tables 4 and 5). For none of these 22 tests did addition of the interaction terms account for a significant increase in the variance explained.

Next, we evaluated whether sets of interactions terms for each of the sociodemographic variables (gender, SES, ethnicity, and geographic region) increased the amount of variance explained for the YES scales. Again, we tested separate sets of interaction terms for each sociodemographic variable and for each developmental scale. For the six scales dealing with positive developmental experiences, only 3 (of 66) interaction tests were significant below $p < .05$, and there was no consistent pattern among those that were significant. For the five YES scales dealing with negative experiences, only 3 (of 55) interactions were significant, and there was no pattern among these three. This low rate of significant findings suggests that girls and boys, urban and rural students, and youth with different ethnicities reported similar profiles of both positive and negative experience across the different organized activities.

Objective 2: Organized Activities Versus Comparison Activities

Differences in Rates of Developmental Experiences

The second objective of the study was to evaluate whether students reported higher rates of developmental experiences in organized activities than in the three comparison activities: academic class, hanging out with friends, and working at a job. As we have described in the *Analyses* section, we created six dichotomous independent variables that contrasted each organized activity with each comparison activity. We then entered these contrast variables as predictors for each of the YES developmental scales.

In all cases, the chi-square test showed that the inclusion of the six contrasts fit the data significantly better than the base model with only the control variables (Table 6). We next evaluated the regression coefficients to determine which organized activities differed from the comparison activities. A positive coefficient indicates that the organized activity had a higher score than the comparison activity.

The most striking finding was that the different organized activities exceeded classes for all developmental experiences covered by the YES scales. The students in each category of organized activity reported significantly higher rates for all of these experiences relative to what they reported for their academic classes. The differences from the other comparison activities, spending time with friends and working at a job, were not as consistent.

Sports. Sports stood out from all three comparison activities as a context for experiences related to the development of initiative (Table 6). The magnitude of these differences was modest to large, with regression coefficients ranging from 0.19 to 0.53. Within initiative experiences, students in sports reported particularly high rates of experiences related to sustaining effort and setting goals. For example, 67% of students in sports endorsed the item “Learned to push myself” with respect to their activity, as compared with 23% in an academic class, 26% with friends, and 48% at a job. Students did not report significantly higher rates for any other developmental experience in sports than they did hanging out with friends or working at their job. Students reported significantly lower rates of identity and positive relationship experiences in sports compared with leisure with friends.

Performance and fine arts. Unlike with sports, there was not a domain of developmental experience for which students in arts activities reported significantly higher rates than in all three comparison activities. The rates of initiative experiences were significantly higher in arts activities than in class and with friends, with regression coefficients of 0.43 and 0.14, respectively. Compared with hanging out with friends and working a part-time job, students in arts activities reported fewer teamwork experiences, with regression coefficients of -0.16 and -0.24 , respectively. Students in arts also reported significantly higher rates of identity work experiences compared with being in class and working at a job but reported slightly lower rates of identity work compared with hanging out with friends.

Academic clubs and organizations. Youth in organized academic activities reported significantly higher rates of developmental experiences only in relation to class (with regression coefficients ranging from 0.20 to 0.50). Compared with hanging out with friends, students in academic activities reported lower rates of identity work, emotional regulation, teamwork, and positive relationship experiences. Academic activities were only significantly lower than youth’s jobs on emotional regulation experiences.

Community-oriented activities. Community-oriented activities were significantly higher on adult network and social capital experiences than all three comparison activities. These differences were large ($B = 0.37$ – 0.89). Among the other developmental domains, students in community-oriented activities reported higher rates of initiative experiences than when hanging out with friends. Students’ reports of identity work and positive relationship experiences in community-oriented activities were higher than at their job ($B_s = 0.32$ and 0.25 , respectively). Community-oriented

Table 6
Differences in Developmental Experiences in Organized Activities Versus Comparison Activities

Youth Experiences Survey scale	Reference category	Variance explained (%)		$\Delta\chi^2$ (df = 6)	Category of organized activity ^b					
		Controls ^a	Organized activities		Sports	Arts	Academic	Community	Service	Faith
Personal development Identity Work	Class	6.7	9.9	139**	0.52**	0.67**	0.43**	0.83**	0.65**	1.05**
	Friends	10.7	4.2	64**	-0.27**	-0.12*	-0.36**	0.06	-0.14	0.24**
	Job	9.8	3.8	53**	0.10	0.21**	-0.02	0.32**	0.18*	0.56**
Initiative	Class	15.3	5.2	81**	0.53**	0.43**	0.20**	0.55**	0.34**	0.52**
	Friends	14.9	2.1	30**	0.22**	0.14*	-0.08	0.23**	0.03	0.20**
	Job	18.1	1.4	23**	0.19**	0.04	-0.13	0.06	-0.06	0.09
Emotional Regulation	Class	6.6	9.4	136**	0.83**	0.66**	0.33**	0.83**	0.71**	0.96**
	Friends	10.4	3.0	42**	-0.02	-0.19**	-0.54**	0.04	-0.17	0.04
	Job	10.1	3.2	41**	0.13	-0.09	-0.40**	0.04	-0.05	0.17
Interpersonal development Teamwork and Social Skills	Class	9.6	6.6	109**	0.62**	0.54**	0.50**	0.74**	0.63**	0.86**
	Friends	11.5	1.0	18**	-0.11	-0.16*	-0.22**	0.01	-0.09	0.10
	Job	14.8	1.0	16**	0.09	-0.24**	-0.06	0.14	0.09	0.27**
Positive Relationships	Class	12.0	3.5	71**	0.30**	0.34**	0.33**	0.63**	0.53**	0.61**
	Friends	13.7	1.6	62**	-0.30**	-0.28**	-0.32**	0.04	-0.11	0.00
	Job	13.4	1.0	23**	0.02	0.03	-0.00	0.25**	0.21**	0.29**
Adult Networks and Social Capital	Class	6.9	7.6	106**	0.42**	0.37**	0.45**	0.89**	0.58**	0.75**
	Friends	8.3	3.2	40**	0.02	-0.01	0.00	0.47**	0.20**	0.31**
	Job	9.0	2.1	31**	0.08	-0.03	0.03	0.37**	0.19*	0.33**

^a All models included frequency of participation, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and region as controls. Hours per week was a control as well in models comparing with job. ^b Values in cells are unstandardized regression coefficients.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

activities were not significantly lower than the comparison activities on any of the self-reported developmental experiences.

Service activities. The pattern for service activities was similar to that for community-oriented activities—youth reported significantly higher rates of adult network and social capital experiences than in all three comparison activities. These differences were large for the class comparison ($B = 0.58$) and modest for friends ($B = 0.20$) and job ($B = 0.19$). There were no significant differences between student reports in service activities and hanging out with friends on any other developmental experience. Compared with working at a job, students in service activities reported significantly higher rates of identity work and positive relationship experiences.

Faith-based activities. Compared with class, friends, and a job, faith-based activities had higher rates of experiences related both to identity work and to adult networks and social capital. These regression coefficients ranged from 0.24 to 1.05. For the Social Capital scale, 32% of youth reported that they “came to feel more supported by the community” in their faith-based activity, compared with 8% for class, 16% for friends, and 23% for job. Students in faith-based activities also reported higher rates of initiative experiences in this activity than hanging out with friends ($B = 0.20$). In addition, they reported higher rates of teamwork ($B = 0.27$) and positive relationship ($B = 0.29$) experiences in a faith-based activity than at a job.

Differences in Rates of Negative Experiences

We evaluated differences in negative experiences following the same procedure used in the previous section. We found that the

addition of terms for the contrasts between organized and comparison activities significantly improved the model for all comparisons involving the scales for stress, negative influence, social exclusion, and negative group dynamics (Table 7). However, the amount of variance explained was small for many of these tests.

The strongest and most consistent differences were attributable to lower scores for negative peer experiences in organized activities than with friends. Youth reported significantly lower rates of negative influences and negative group dynamics in all organized activities (except community-oriented activities) than when hanging out with their friends. For example, the number of students who endorsed the item “Youth in this activity got me into drinking alcohol or using drugs” was 10% for organized activities, as compared with 18% for friends. Rates of endorsing the item “Other youth in this activity made inappropriate sexual comments, jokes, or gestures” were 12% in organized activities and 24% with friends.

The findings also showed that youth experienced less stress in organized activities than at their job. The regression coefficients for this set of contrasts were all significant, except for sports. Twenty-one percent of youth said that their job “stressed me out,” as compared with 12% for organized activities.

Discussion

The goal of this research is to inventory the developmental experiences that high school youth report in different types of organized activities. Faith-based youth groups were found to stand out most strongly from other contexts for the set of personal, social, and negative developmental experiences that were inventoried, but sports, arts, service, and other activities were also

Table 7
Differences in Negative Experiences in Organized Activities Versus Comparison Activities

Youth Experiences Survey scale	Reference category	Variance explained (%)		$\Delta\chi^2$ (df = 6)	Category of organized activity ^b					
		Controls ^a	Organized activities		Sports	Arts	Academic	Community	Service	Faith
Personal development Stress	Class	7.1	2.6	27**	0.06	-0.11	-0.36**	-0.10	-0.24*	-0.29**
	Friends	6.3	2.5	23**	0.07	-0.04	-0.32**	-0.02	-0.15	-0.23*
	Job	10.2	2.4	47**	-0.14	-0.30**	-0.57**	-0.31**	-0.45**	-0.46**
Inappropriate Adult Behavior	Class	13.7	1.0	13*	0.10	0.04	0.08	0.33**	0.06	0.03
	Friends	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Job	14.6	0.0	11	-0.04	-0.07	-0.15	0.04	-0.14	-0.21
Negative Influences	Class	11.8	1.4	28**	0.16*	0.04	-0.02	0.36**	0.10	0.27**
	Friends	10.8	4.3	56**	-0.27**	-0.37**	-0.47**	-0.10	-0.35**	-0.24*
	Job	11.2	1.1	13*	-0.02	-0.10	-0.21*	0.09	-0.10	0.01
Social Exclusion	Class	10.0	1.0	13*	0.12	0.01	0.06	0.24*	-0.08	-0.04
	Friends	-5.6	1.1	14*	0.01	-0.04	-0.11	0.13	-0.19*	-0.15
	Job	10.3	1.0	13*	0.08	0.01	-0.04	0.16	-0.12	-0.09
Negative Group Dynamics	Class	8.0	2.2	26**	0.18*	0.06	-0.01	0.38**	0.14	0.32**
	Friends	7.7	3.2	46**	-0.18*	-0.27**	-0.42**	0.02	-0.25*	-0.09
	Job	8.2	1.4	19**	-0.03	-0.13	-0.24*	0.12	-0.08	0.09

Note. N/A = not applicable.

^a All models included frequency of participation, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and region as controls. Hours per week was a control as well in models comparing with job. ^b Values in cells are unstandardized regression coefficients.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

associated with distinct profiles of developmental experiences, which differed from each other and from other major activities in youth’s lives. It should be kept in mind that these findings come from students in the 11th grade, a point that may represent the peak of involvement in these activities for many youth. We also caution that findings reflect average patterns across a cross-section of many programs and the varied set of youth involved in each type of program. The findings should not be seen to reflect the experiences associated with any specific sports, arts, or service program nor its theoretical potentials—important limitations that we return to at the end of this article.

To facilitate discussion of the findings, we have summarized in Table 8 the developmental experiences that consistently distinguished each organized activity. Entries represent types of experiences that were significantly and consistently higher or lower than other organized activities (in Tables 4 and 5) and at least two of the three comparison activities (in Tables 6 and 7). These entries, then, reflect findings that were replicated across the two subsamples, against multiple benchmarks, and with controls for sociodemographic variables and amount of time spent in activities. Given that we found few interactions with sociodemographic variables, these patterns appear to be relatively consistent across

Table 8
Profiles of Developmental and Negative Experiences in Organized Youth Activities

Activity category	Developmental experiences		Negative experiences	
	High	Low	High	Low
Sports	Initiative			
Performance and fine arts	Initiative	Teamwork and social skills		
Academic clubs and organizations		Identity work		Stress
		Emotional regulation		
		Teamwork and social skills		
		Positive relationships		
Community-oriented activities	Adult networks and social capital			
Service activities	Positive relationships			Stress
	Adult networks			
Faith-based youth groups	Identity work			Stress
	Initiative			
	Teamwork and social skills			
	Positive relationships			
	Adult networks and social capital			

gender, ethnic group, SES, and urban versus suburban and rural contexts.

Faith-based youth groups were found to stand out as a setting in which youth reported higher rates of experiences across five of the six developmental domains (Table 8), with the strongest differences occurring for identity work, positive relationships, and connections to adults (Tables 4 and 6). Erikson (1964, 1965) theorized that religion plays an important role in helping youth forge their identities because it provides ideological and social supports. The high rates we found for other developmental experiences in faith-based groups may be attributable to this combination of supports. First, religions offer adolescents a prosocial belief system that addresses fundamental questions of meaning and that provides an ideology of human development (King & Farrow, 2004). Second, these belief systems may serve as a glue by which youth are connected to a community of peers and adults who are supportive of development in that ideological system (Benson, 2004; Furrow, King, & White, 2004; C. Smith, 2003). Faith-based youth groups may be particularly effective as developmental settings because they provide a partly separated youth peer group in which teens can experience agency and address issues of relevance to them, but this peer group is interconnected with adults (often including the youth's parents) around a shared worldview. The findings also indicate that this interconnected setting is not immune to problems that occur in other organized activities. Faith-based youth groups were not a setting for significantly lower rates of negative experiences, as might be expected with such high rates of positive experiences. Clearly, more research is needed on this neglected yet highly salient category of youth programs.

Organized sports stood out as a setting for high rates of initiative experiences (Table 8). Researchers have theorized that the challenge- and achievement-focused structure of sports facilitates youth's development of skills for persistence in the pursuit of goals (Duda & Ntoumimis, 2005; Larson & Kleiber, 1993). Consistent with this, the high rates of initiative experiences reported in sports included experiences of setting goals, applying effort, and learning time management. Relative to other organized activities, sports were also a context for developmental experiences related to emotional regulation (Table 4), which may stem from the opportunities sports create for managing the excitement and disappointments that accompany competition. However, youth reported higher rates of stress in sports than in other organized activities (Table 5). Scanlan et al. (2005) attributed this stress to the inherent achievement focus of sports and the fact that participants are subjected to public tests of their abilities, among other factors. These rates of stress, however, were not higher than those youth reported in the contexts of school classes, friends, and jobs (Table 7). It is also important to note that sports were not higher in reported rates of negative influences, negative peer dynamics, and inappropriate adult behavior. Although the sports literature has raised concern about these forms of negative experience, our findings suggest that they are not unique to sports and occur across other organized activities at comparable rates.

Other types of youth programs were associated with different average profiles of developmental experiences (Table 8). Performance and fine arts resembled sports in providing more initiative experiences, which may reflect the similar task orientation of many arts activities (Heath, 2001). However, they were not distinguished as a unique context for identity work, as has been hypothesized in

the literature. Service activities stood out from the mean for other activities in connecting youth to adult networks and providing positive relationship experiences. These findings suggest that service activities are distinguished as contexts of experiences related to interpersonal development more than personal development. A major mission of community-oriented activities is to connect youth to the community, and, indeed, these activities were associated with the development of adult networks and social capital. However, they were not distinct from other organized activities in reported rates of other developmental experiences. Finally, academic clubs and organizations were distinguished as significantly lower for four of the six domains of development. It should be kept in mind, however, that the primary goal of these activities is typically to encourage academic development, and longitudinal research suggests that participation in these activities is associated with academic achievement (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002).

These patterns for different activities are brought into focus by the comparisons the data provide with the other benchmark contexts of adolescents' lives. Organized activities stood out strongly and significantly from youth's experiences in core school classes (in particular, English and math class) for every domain of personal and interpersonal experience that youth were asked about (Table 6). On the one hand, this finding is not surprising, given the focus of school on teaching academic skills. On the other hand, the strong findings reinforce concerns expressed by blue ribbon panels about schools' neglect of essential nonacademic workforce competencies, such as teamwork, initiative, and social responsibility (Parker, Ninomiya, & Cogan, 1999; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003; Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991). Under current conditions, organized activities appear to fill an important niche in providing experiences related to development of these other competencies. Youth reported that their part-time jobs also provided experiences related to many of these nonacademic competencies. However, community-oriented, service, and faith-based programs provided significantly more experiences than youth's jobs in the domains of identity, positive relationships, and adult networks while providing less experience of stress.

A surprising finding is that organized activities did not stand out consistently from hanging out with friends in the developmental opportunities that youth reported (Table 6). These results differ markedly from our earlier study, in which organized activities exceeded friends for nearly all domains of developmental experiences (Hansen et al., 2003), but these prior findings may be attributable to a confound of self-selection.⁴ The current findings are congruent with the arguments of Piaget (1965) and Youniss (1980) that unstructured interactions with peers provide rich developmental opportunities. However, we also note that youth in the current research reported higher rates of negative influences and peer dynamics in their interactions with friends than in organized activities (Table 7), results that may be attributable to less adult supervision. These findings are consistent with longitudinal studies

⁴ In that study, a high proportion of the youth who reported on experiences with friends were not involved in any organized activity, and it is possible that this group had less positive experience with peers. Use of within-person comparison in the current study greatly reduced the potential for this type of self-selection confound.

suggesting that unsupervised interaction with peers can engender problem behaviors (Mahoney, Stattin, & Magnusson, 2001; Osgood, Wilson, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 1996). Of course, time spent with friends is likely to differ widely across youth in the activities, proximity to adults, and the types of interactions that occur. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that, on average, leisure activities with friends may be comparable to organized activities in providing certain forms of positive developmental experiences, but organized activity settings provide these opportunities with less risk of negative experiences.

These results should be considered in light of their limitations and strengths. First, they are based on self-report and are limited by the abilities of youth to accurately report on their experiences. Nonetheless, inasmuch as youth are active agents of developmental change in these settings, data on their conscious experiences are likely to be relevant. The profiles we have obtained can help focus further research on the distinct developmental processes that occur for youth in different types of youth programs. Second, although the use of within-person comparisons in this study reduced the influence on the findings of self-selection into activities, we cannot rule out the possibility that differences in personality, talent, and history of experience in who chose to join and remain in particular activities affected the results in complex ways. We certainly cannot conclude that a random set of youth placed into sports or faith-based programs would have the developmental experiences reported by the youth we have surveyed. Third, it must be kept in mind that the findings represent averages in teens' experiences across numerous youth programs and do not generalize to any specific program or set of youth. The finding that youth reported comparatively lower rates of interpersonal developmental experiences in arts, for example, does not mean that a particular arts program will be low in providing those types of experience; indeed, the research literature includes examples of arts programs that do provide them (Heath & Smyth, 1999; Larson, 2004). The profiles we found reflect current average rates of experiences across a representative sample of youth and programs; they do not necessarily reflect the potentials of programs.

To better realize these potentials, the field needs more in-depth qualitative and longitudinal research that evaluates the mediating processes responsible for differences not only between but within categories of organized activities. It should not be concluded that the patterns we report are necessarily inherent to faith-based groups, sports, and so on. As we have noted, there are likely to be specific programs in each category that provide more or fewer of the experiences we have identified. To unpack what factors account for differences among programs (e.g., are the patterns found for sports intrinsic to sports or related perhaps to the organizational culture that structures experience in many sports?), the field needs research that includes the specific program setting as a unit of measurement and analysis. Researchers also need to study characteristics of individuals and their participation in a program, such as their developmental stage, their reasons for participating, the nature of their participation, and their prior experience, to understand the variations among youth in their developmental experiences. Qualitative and quantitative research that further focuses on mediating process can provide information that can help increase

the developmental opportunities provided to diverse individuals in different types of youth programs.

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