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MASTER OF ARTS

High School Dropouts and the Theory of Economic Incentive

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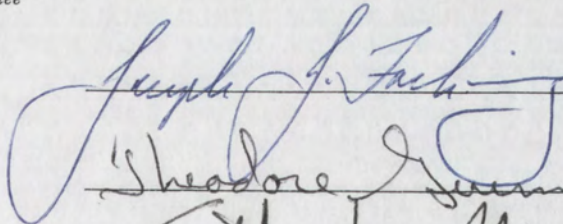
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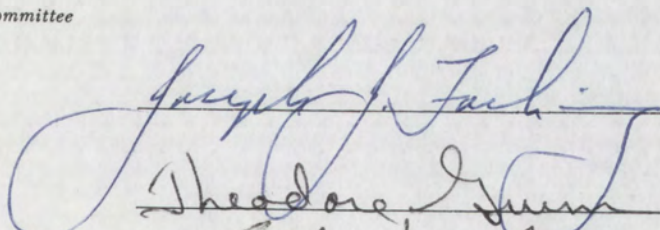
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HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS AND THE THEORY OF ECONOMIC INCENTIVE

BY

JANIE M. BURCART

B.A., University of Sussex, 1969

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Sociology

in the Graduate School of  
The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico



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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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## Abstract

Over the past ten years much has been written and researched about what sociologists and educators alike regard as a vast social problem, the increasing number of youths who withdraw prematurely from high school. Dr. Robert Strom<sup>1</sup> called the phenomenon of high school dropouts "The Tragic Migration," and James Bryant Conant<sup>2</sup> regarded it as "social dynamite."

Many factors have been suggested to be related to the tendency to drop out of high school, and these will be reviewed in this thesis. However, it seems that each factor in itself is associated with one major problem, and that is the phenomenon of the poverty cycle. This thesis examines the proposition that the financial aspects of poverty, rather than other factors, lead directly to dropping out.

The problem is studied in the graduate and dropout populations of two Albuquerque high schools of differing ethnic and social composition. Both the pull of the job market and conditions relating to family financial need are examined in an effort to determine whether economic aspects of poverty lead directly to dropping out.

## Footnotes

1. Robert D. Strom, The Tragic Migration, (National Educational Association, Department of Home Economics, Washington, D. C., 1964).
2. James Bryant Conant, Slums and Suburbs, (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1961).



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## CHAPTER 1

## Theoretical Framework

Hollingshead,<sup>1</sup> among others, has pointed out that 8 out of 9 dropouts come from the nation's lowest income bracket. A Department of Health, Education and Welfare pamphlet by Bowman and Matthews<sup>2</sup> concludes that 88 percent of today's dropouts are members of lower class homes. As Cervantes puts it, the milieu of the dropout is poverty.<sup>3</sup>

Poverty may affect the student's chances of obtaining the high school diploma in many ways; the inability to pay the "hidden costs of schooling,"<sup>4</sup> in dues, fees and text books and equipment; the lack of clothing and breakfast;<sup>5</sup> the prevalence of sickness and therefore absenteeism; the lack of an educational headstart given to middle-class children via books, papers and educational toys, and the socializing skills of communication; the lack of a sound self-concept; the irrelevance and ignorance of a curriculum based on unknown and unobtainable middle-class life-styles; the reality of chances for higher education or a middle-class job; and the necessity for time-off or withdrawal to earn money. Loretan and Umans sum up this hopelessness which faces the poverty student:

"To many a youth from a disadvantaged environment, schooling is one long obstacle course; all along the way are signs with arrows pointing to the nearest exit. To resist these directional signs requires almost superhuman willpower; the obstacles are too massive."<sup>6</sup>

Although there are various ways in which a student from a poverty home may be affected so as to induce withdrawal from high school, this thesis will focus upon financial necessity and economic incentive. In order to clarify this issue, some alternate hypotheses will be examined first.



One major factor may be that the youth is from a minority group, and that as a result he suffers from a cultural handicap, or even a language problem, as in the case of the Chicano, which draws a barrier between himself and the teachers and school, in terms of language, concepts, and general life-style. This is most obvious in inner cities, and where there are large groupings of non-Anglos, such as in the Southwest.

"He (the Spanish-speaking child) suddenly finds himself not only with the pressuring need to master an alien tongue, but at the same time, to make immediate use of it in order to function as a pupil. His parents, to whom he has always looked for protection and aid, can be of no help at all to him in his perplexity. Moreover, as a result of cultural and economic differences between Spanish-speaking and the English-speaking communities, many of the objects, social relationships and cultural attitudes presented to him in lessons, though perfectly familiar to an Anglo youngster, lie without the Latin-American home experience. Accordingly, the problems of learning English are for him enormously increased by his infamiliarity with what objects and situations the no less unfamiliar words and phrases stand for."<sup>7</sup>

There is also the theory that some cultures do not prepare a child for education as we know it, and that it is the job of the school to try to re-socialize the child, who very often will resent and resist this, and thus drop out to a more familiar world.

\* "Most of the authors of contemporary literature on this subject and certainly most of the school people interviewed in the course of this study would agree with the following definition (Johnson, 1966, p. 9). 'The disadvantaged is anyone who cannot participate in the dominant culture.' Another definition is 'one who is handicapped in the task of growing up to live a competent and satisfying life in American society.' A definition from the viewpoint of the teacher is 'the child who has difficulty achieving in school because of his background' In other words, the disadvantaged child - or the deprived child - is one whose home background and experiential base are substantially different from those of the middle-class child. The strong implication is that these differences are the prime cause of the disadvantaged child's lack of success in school."<sup>8</sup>



Home stability also is a usual cause cited for dropping out. The psychological damage a student can suffer seeing his parents argue or fight, or going through the processes of a divorce, may seriously affect his will to work and succeed, or his desire to obey these fighting parents. Cervantes investigated the family situations of his dropout and graduate samples and found a great divergence between the home setups.

"Each of the interview questions that reflected the climate of primary relations within the home distinguished the dropouts from the graduates at the highest level of significance (.001)... ..for instance, when asked "Would you say that your whole family both understands and accepts each other?", more than 4 out of 5 of the dropouts implicitly replied "little" or "very little," and more than 4 out of 5 of the graduates maintained just the opposite."<sup>9</sup>

Wages, Thomas and Kuvlesky found that three-quarters of the dropouts in their poor, rural Mexican-American survey lived with both parents, but that two-thirds of the fathers were under or unemployed. Strom places great weight on the need for a stable family life, (as does Moynihan) and his recommendations for reducing the dropout rate center around the role of the home economist and improvement in home relationships.

"It cannot be denied that where the so-called culture of poverty exists, there are familial tendencies inducing conditions that foster drop out. Here one finds a higher proportion of disrupted and broken homes where the father is often absent and in which an emotional distance between parents results in dilution of affection for the young. Where no father is present during the evening, there is usually no organized meal, no organized opportunity for language exchange, no real interaction. A common result is cumulative deficit in the language component of a child's development. Since this deficit is qualitative and not quantitative it is erroneous to believe that these children are characteristically non-verbal."<sup>11</sup>



Then there is the self-fulfilling prophecy. Coming from a lower class, or minority, home the youth bears a stigma and this may affect his self-concept sufficiently to prevent him from doing adequate work in school. Dropping out is the pre-ordained and easy answer.

"Self-derogation is seen by most schoolmen as being characteristic of a disproportionate percentage of Mexican-American children, especially adolescents... to many schoolmen, the Mexican-American self-concept provides plausible explanation for all kinds of behavior."<sup>12</sup>

This low self-concept is often reinforced by the school teacher and the entire educational system with whom the dropout comes into contact.

The most straightforward consequence of poverty is the mere absence of money. To supplement the family income; to take over the role of breadwinner from an absent father; to become independent and self-sufficient; or to obtain the possessions which constitute the status symbols of teenage American society - such as hi-fi, car, new clothes - for any of these reasons the youth may choose work instead of school, perhaps taking up full-time the job he held part time while in school. He may feel that school will not benefit him in the long run, and he can earn right away. So the push from school, which never suited him anyway, combines with the pull of the job world, and the result is another dropout.

Neil Sullivan takes up this view of dropping out, and attacks the problem head-on. The poor are the ones who are being poorly educated, and not because their brains are inferior or they don't see the value of education, but simply because poverty means no money. Either the family eats or the son goes to school.




"The harsh economic realities of everyday life frequently limit what the deprived parent can do for himself and his children. As a result, he forecloses not only on himself, but on his child's future. The parent is often faced with overwhelming economic problems at home, and, despite the fact that the child will invite second-class citizenship by dropping out of school, he still makes the calamitous decision."<sup>13</sup>

It is important to note that the decision to drop out may be made in spite of the knowledge of its consequences. Cervantes criticizes as myth the view that the lower class do not value education. He questioned both dropouts and graduates in his samples of big city lower class youth on whether they would advise a friend who was contemplating dropping out to do so.

"It would be profitable to quote at length the replies of the respondents to this question were they not all practically identical. Both dropout and graduate reply in absolute terms: "He'd be a fool to quit;" "A jerk;" "He'd be nuts;" "I'd say listen, Edsel...;" "I'd tell her she was silly;" "I'd tell her she was crazy;" "Stupid;" "He's cracked, you have to have at least a high school diploma;" "To me it is just committing suicide to quit school." ...both dropout and graduate would advise friends who might be potential dropouts to stay in school. No graduate would tell his friend to drop out; the 8 percent of dropouts who would tell their best friends to withdraw from school were girls who put the question into a romantic framework - a high school girl meeting "the one and only," and being forced to choose between academics and romance."<sup>14</sup>

Kuvlesky, Wright and Juarez<sup>15</sup> in their various papers on Negro, Anglo and Mexican-American poor, rural youth found that youths in all three groups had high educational and occupational aspirations, and that few desired or had expected to quit school. Dropping out was a planned event in only a small minority of cases, and these were the exceptions who prove the rule. Differences between the groups and between dropouts and graduates occurred only in the line of job expectations, and this is rather an index of realistic appraisal of society, than a failure of ambition, as their aspirations were on a level.





The job-pull, or economic incentive, thus appears to operate in spite of high educational aspirations. It may seem relatively easy, and perhaps more sensible, to the youth to be gainfully employed in a "real job," instead of wasting time in school. If there are jobs open with "adequate" wages, which do not require a high school diploma, then there may be incentive to withdraw.

Hardis<sup>16</sup> points out that New Mexico has a critical dropout problem in relation to employability, because of the state's low level of industrialization. Norton<sup>17</sup> shows a table of 1962 graduates as a percentage of 1957-58 eighth graders, with New Mexico thirty-sixth of the fifty states, with 62.2 percent, as compared to first position Wisconsin with 92.3 percent, and last place Virginia with 51.9 percent and Georgia with 51.8 percent. It is interesting to note that officially Virginia has no dropout problem, as she has eliminated the compulsory attendance law. So although we as a state are not last of the pack, our state figure is below the national average of 70.6 percent.

Hardis' point in reference to New Mexico's employment problem suggests the advisability of following up on the dropout problem into the area of the job market. In this regard New Mexico dropouts may be in a worse position than the big city dropouts of New York or Chicago, who would seem to have a chance at employment in one of the local industries using unskilled and low-paid workers. However, there are also more dropouts looking for work there.

The overall evidence seems conclusive: dropouts are associated with poverty. However, most of the literature refers to the impact of poverty on dropouts in terms of cultural conflict, inadequate diet resulting in poor I.Q., low self-concepts and lack of motivation. It is important to note that all of these conditions are likely to be associated with



the lack of money in the family unit. Hence, it is possible that the major cause of dropouts may simply be financial pressure and job opportunity, even if the other conditions are present.

The logical task would appear to be to determine the extent to which economic incentives act directly upon students who drop out. This thesis attempts such a determination by comparing dropouts and graduates in terms of the economic situations of their families, controlling for as many other factors as possible. Job opportunities in Albuquerque will also be examined.



## Footnotes

1. A. B. Hollingshead, Elmstown's Youth, (J. Wiley & Sons, N.Y., 1949) Ch. 13, p. 340.
2. P. Bowman and C. V. Matthews, Motivations of Youth for Leaving School, (U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, Cooperative Research Project No. 200, Washington, D.C., 1960) p. 137.
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4. Neil V. Sullivan, Approaches to the School Dropout Problem, in Poverty in America, ed. Margaret S. Gordon, (Chandler Publishing Co., San Francisco, California, 1965) Ch. 12, p. 165.
5. Sullivan, *ibid.*, p. 165.
6. Joseph Loretan and Shelley Umans, Teaching the Disadvantaged, (Teachers College Press, Columbia University, N.Y., 1966) p. 1.
7. NEA-Tucson Survey, The Teaching of English to the Spanish-Speaking, The Invisible Minority.....Pero No Vencibles, (Washington, D.C., National Educational Association, Department of Rural Education, 1966) p. 17.
8. Thomas P. Carter, Mexican-Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect, (College Entrance Examination Board, N.Y., 1970) p. 36.
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10. Sherry Wages, Katheryn Thomas and William P. Kuvlesky, Mexican-American Teenage School Dropouts: Reasons for Leaving and Orientation Towards Subsequent Educational Attainment, (Paper presented at the Southwestern Sociological Association Meetings, Houston, April 1969).
11. Robert D. Strom, The Tragic Migration, (National Educational Association, Department of Home Economics, Washington, D.C., 1964) p. 5-6.
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13. Sullivan, *op.cit.* p. 164.
14. Cervantes, *op.cit.* p. 105 f.
15. William P. Kuvlesky, David E. Wright, and Rumaldo Z. Juarez, Status Projections and Ethnicity: A Comparison of Mexican-American, Negro and Anglo Youth, (Texam A&M, paper presented at the Southwestern Sociological Association Meetings, New Orleans, 1968).



16. Alvis O. Hardis, The Dropout Problem in New Mexico Schools, (State Planning Office, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1966).
17. John K. Norton, School Dropouts, in Education in the Metropolis, eds. Harry L. Miller and Marjorie B. Smiley, (Free Press of Glencoe, N.Y., 1967) p. 65.



## CHAPTER II

## Hypotheses and Method

Poverty, or a lack of money, being a primary contributing factor to high school withdrawal, the variables presented will all be indicative of a low income. It is thus hypothesized that the fathers of dropouts are more likely than the fathers of graduates to be absent. They are, if present also more likely to be unemployed or employed in a low-paying, blue-collar job. The graduate is more likely than the dropout to come from a home where the income is adequate and the father's job secure. The presence or absence of the father may be a vital factor in the psychological make-up of the child, but this thesis is not concerned with the father's presence as a stabilizer or socializer of society's values, but purely as a breadwinner. The middle-class family is more likely to consist of fewer children than the lower class family, so it is also hypothesized that dropouts are more likely than graduates to come from large families.

Because it is the female head-of-household families who are among the poorest of the poor, home living situations will also be investigated, hypothesizing that dropouts will tend more than graduates to live with one parent or less.

Although race has always been considered to be a major factor in the tendency to withdraw from high school - minority group members having a greater tendency to drop out than Anglos - it is hypothesized that there will be no difference in terms of race in the tendency to withdraw. It is clear that in a given city minority group members are over-represented among dropouts, but they are also over-represented



among the poor. This study tests the proposition that it is poverty and not cultural difference which largely accounts for a greater tendency to drop out among minority group members than among Anglos. This can be ascertained by using a group of relatively financially stable minority group members (such as Chicanos who attend Sandia), and a group of relatively poor Anglos (such as attend West Mesa). If the theory of financial necessity is viable, the poor Anglos should drop out in greater numbers than either the middle-class Anglos or the middle-class Chicanos.

The hypothesis that dropouts withdraw for financial reasons leads to the necessity of an investigation of job possibilities for dropouts. The actual fact of withdrawal will save money, in that the school itself involves frequent expenses, but this tends to ignore the major question of economic incentive. Although it is generally believed that employment without a high school diploma is difficult, significant numbers of students still drop out of high school. It is therefore hypothesized that dropouts do not concern themselves with the long-range view of employment, but satisfy their needs or desires with income from unskilled labor. Initial employment of dropouts is possibly high, but will decrease rapidly as they become older and in need of higher wages.

The final hypothesis concerns the job market itself. It is hypothesized that there is an incentive to withdraw from high school in the presence of available jobs, requiring no skills or educational qualifications. This leads into the realm of certain businesses "reserving" certain jobs for youths, which the dropout can take. It is possible to show that certain businesses reserve jobs for women, because they cannot afford, or do not want, to pay male labor. Along these lines it is surmised that jobs which could be adequately performed by a teenager will be reserved



for those who are willing to accept low wages, through need, or because jobs are so difficult to find. The dropout population, like the migrant workers, provides a pool of cheap labor which can be used to keep down wage costs. For the dropout this may be useful at first, but the job is unlikely to be long-lasting. The economic and educational system thus insure that the dropout and his future employment are mutually supportive. Dropouts can buttress a depressed labor market, and conversely the market may provide ready employment for the dropout, especially where minimum wage laws do not apply.

#### Method

In determining reasons for high school withdrawal, it was found necessary to limit the study to two high schools within the Albuquerque area. The two schools first selected, Albuquerque High and Sandia High, were chosen on the basis of racial breakdown. A large percentage of Spanish surnames appeared to relate directly to lower educational standards and poorer equipment and buildings. Albuquerque High, the original high school of the town, has the highest percentage of Spanish surnames enrolled. It also relates to the district of town where the school is situated. The site of Albuquerque High is the corner of Central and Broadway, on the edge of downtown Albuquerque, whereas Sandia is in the Northeast Heights, one of the two main centers of middle-class residential habitation. As a result, Albuquerque High has an enrollment which is 72.8 percent Spanish surname, and Sandia's is only 8.2 percent, the lowest in the city.

In order to look through the files at the schools it was necessary to gain permission for my project from the Albuquerque Public Schools



Administration. This was received, but permission was also necessary from the principal of each school. Sandia High School Principal gave permission immediately, and research was begun, but Albuquerque High refused permission, through a secretary. Permission was also denied at Rio Grande High, the school with the second highest enrollment of Spanish surnames (55.9 percent). West Mesa, third in the city in terms of Spanish surname enrollment (53.9 percent) agreed to permit research in the school.

The twenty-day absence lists from both schools (West Mesa and Sandia) were checked for dropouts, and the names of those who could not be classified as dropout were removed. This included those who had returned to school after receiving the principal's permission; those who had left the state or city to attend another high school; those registered as Home Bound due to an illness, with a tutor schooling them. Those absent for twenty days are recorded as W-2. If no explanation is given, they are assigned to W-1, and thus become dropouts.

Those names which remained were checked with the cumulative files in the respective schools, which contained the following details on most students:

Figure 1: Data Obtained from Students School Reports

Name	Address	Telephone number
Age	Grade	
Father's name	Occupation	Whether living at home
Mother's name	Occupation	Whether living at home
Birthdate	Birthplace	
Church attended	Schools attended	
No. of children in family		G.P.A.
Disciplinary history, including date and reason for withdrawal		

A control group was taken from each school, composed of June 1970 graduates, selected on a random basis, according to the number of dropouts from that school. Graduates were selected as the control, as presently enrolled students could be potential dropouts, and selection of only



those presently enrolled who were unlikely to drop out would bias the sample. Information for the control group was elicited in the same manner as for the dropouts.

Several students were interviewed for purposes of illustration and to illumine unclear points in the data. Statistics on employment of dropouts was gathered from agencies and businesses in the city.



## CHAPTER III

## Employment Data and Analysis

In order to discover the level of job potential in Albuquerque for dropouts, statistics on job placements were obtained from the Employment Security Commission of New Mexico, by education qualifications required for the job. The educational classifications were as follows:

Figure 2: Educational Classifications of  
Employment Security Commission of New Mexico

- 0 - 8 years education necessary
- 9 - 11 years education necessary
- 12 - 15 years education necessary
- 16 and over years education necessary

These records were collectively for the Santa Fe and Albuquerque offices, omitting placements made for domestic and casual labor, as these were not computed with the other placements, as their turnover is so rapid.

Figure 3: Breakdown of Placements made by the Security Commission of  
New Mexico by Academic Qualifications Necessary. 1970.

	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Mean
0- 8 yrs. of education	47	37	72	48	47	92	57.2
9-11 yrs. of education	177	97	150	103	135	132	132.3
12-15 yrs. of education	218	145	244	223	250	236	219.7
16+ yrs. of education	8	8	13	20	9	10	11.3
Total Placements	450	287	479	394	441	470	420.5



Thus, an average of 189.5 placements a month were made, over the six-month period of 1970 shown above, for those without a high school diploma. This represents 45.1 percent of the total mean placements made for that period.

A breakdown of educational requirements for domestic labor, cleaning within private homes, is shown for the sample month of October 1970.

Figure 4: Domestic Labor Placements: Sample month of October 1970

no educational qualifications necessary	56
reading and writing required	141
6th grade education	3
8th grade education	1
9th grade education	3
10th grade education	2
11th grade education	1
High school graduates	12
	<hr/>
Total	219

To the 189.5 monthly placements made for those without a high school diploma must be added these 207 placements made of domestic laborers also lacking a high school diploma, giving a monthly total of approximately 396.5. To this must also be added placements made in the field of casual labor, categorized by the Employment Security Commission of New Mexico as falling into the lowest educational classification (0-8 years).

Casual labor is defined as work which falls into any of the following categories: material handling, construction work, unloading, yardwork, and grounds-keeping. For the month of October there were 503 placements



made, and no educational qualifications were necessary. A mean monthly total is therefore obtained of over 900 placements of those without a high school diploma.

Interviews were conducted with employment agencies and businesses to discover where the dropout applied for work and where he obtained it. The first of these was conducted at Snelling and Snelling, the largest employment agency in town.

Little hope was displayed by either the receptionist or the head counselor for prospective clients who do not have a high school diploma. They recommended such persons to either return to high school, an unlikely action as most dropouts who return are much older than the students still enrolled, and as one dropout put it, "There was a bunch of Junior High kids there.", or to take the G.E.D. test. This seemed to be a viable alternative, and the author was shown the files on several dropouts who had been found decent jobs by the agency once they had passed the G.E.D. test. However, as recorded later (p. 43) none of the dropout sample had attempted to take this test, while a couple had never heard of it. The G.E.D. seems to appeal more to the older applicant; mothers trying to get a job once their children are all in school. On the whole this agency served those seeking white collar jobs, with a minimal amount of skills, but in possession of a high school diploma or its equivalent. The coaching given by the agency to clients who go out on job interviews gives the key to the tone of this agency; middle-class, white clients who are upwardly mobile, and very unlike the average dropout in this sample, even from Sandia. The agency takes a cut from the wages of those for whom it finds employment, and this too might prevent dropouts who desperately need money from joining this agency. Few dropouts even apply



there, but for the dropout who wishes to work behind a desk, and is willing to take the G.E.D. test, the agency is very friendly and helpful, and as a branch office of the largest agency in the country, is able to place a large percentage of its applicants in their desired occupations.

Both Kelly Services and Construction Services Inc. purport to serve the clientele below that served by Snelling and Snelling. However, the head of Kelly Services in Albuquerque explained that since the summer of 1969, the agency had changed its name to Kelly Girls, as they had discontinued the labor side of the agency. This was due in part to the loss of government contracts by Sandia Corporation. Also, the agency had discovered that men were unreliable when sent out by the agency on assignments. With fewer jobs available and the unreliability of the applicants, Kelly Labor closed down. Kelly Girls supplies typists, clerks and stenographers to companies on a temporary basis, which is supposed to be the joy of working for the agency - never dull, because you never work in the same place. Pay, by the agency depends on skill, such as speed and accuracy of typing and shorthand, and this is tested by the agency, but every applicant must have a high school diploma, or the G.E.D., which cuts out possibilities for most dropouts.

Construction Services Inc., suggested by Snelling and Snelling as the agency to whom they send their unplaceables, supplies skilled workmen, welders, roofers, carpenters, ditch-diggers on demand from a pool of reliable labor, few of whom are under 30. Only their relevant skills are recorded, and not educational attainment. However, I was informed that the agency never used dropouts, "They can't be relied on, they don't show; I don't know if you're aware of this, Hun?"

It thus appears that there is no agency in town, apart from the state service, which will deal with job-seeking dropouts. No female



can be placed and to qualify at Construction Inc. you must keep your dropout status a secret. The G.E.D. seems to be the only answer, and if you fail that, there is always welfare.

Private agencies are loathe to exclusively serve unskilled labor, and the state carries the burden of this work. This is because the effort is unprofitable. When an agency takes its profits from the pay packages of those whom it places, it needs to place applicants in as high a paying job as possible. Unskilled labor wages are low, and so the agencies profits are low also. The wages of laborers do not allow for profit in the white-collar world of business. Perhaps it might be better to raise labor wages to a level where not only can the workman just survive, but where he is on a comparable level with the rest of the world of commerce.

Faced with these alternatives, the pay, security and "man's life" serving your country seem more appealing. It is possible for a male dropout to join any one of the four armed services once he has attained the age of 17. At this age parental permission is necessary, but at 18 he can join without this and "see the world," if he passes the admittance test. Few fail the Army test, but that for the Air Force and Navy are slightly stricter.

The Navy will not be accepting dropouts after June 30. It is true that within the services the more education one has the greater the choice of job opportunities, but at least the lack of a diploma does not prevent admittance into three of the branches of the Service. The Army recruiting officer estimated that 40-45 percent of their volunteers are dropouts. Of course, the dropouts are very vulnerable to the draft, so this minimizes the figure. Marine volunteers are estimated to be 25 percent dropouts at the end of the school year, and during the "slow months," i.e., when most young men are in school, dropouts constitute



50-60 percent of volunteers. The Navy and Air Force are dependent solely on volunteers, and for the year July 1, 1970 to June 30, 1971 the Navy recruited 270 youths between the ages of 17 and 21, of whom 50 (or 18.5%) were dropouts. For this period the Air Force volunteers were approximately 7 percent dropout. All these figures are for the Armed Services area which covers New Mexico and west Texas.

For female dropouts it is another story. No girl can volunteer until she is 18, and until 21 she must have parental permission. Most important of all, no high school dropouts are accepted, unless they have the G.E.D. None of the recruiting officers could explain this anti-female bias, and two seemed genuinely surprised to discover this regulation. It seemed to occur to none of them that they were discriminating against females. With the Armed Services out as an option, the female dropout has her choice of employment limited to what the state can offer in the way of domestic labor, waitressing, and dubious "modelling." Even Kelly Girls, whose positions rise no higher than slave-secretary, will not accept dropouts. It seems that again "the system" is forcing women into the role of wife and mother by insuring that at least one section of the female population, dropouts, cannot find a decent paying job.

Other places of employment searched were the police force, who only accept those with a high school diploma, after the age of 21, and restaurants and snack bars. No hotel will employ anyone under 21, due to the liquor laws. Of the restaurants and snack bars contacted, only 30 percent said that they hired dropouts, and these were mainly during the tourist season only.<sup>1</sup> Although 70 percent of the businesses contacted said that they did not employ dropouts, all hired both full and part time help under 21. Their staffs ranged from 100 percent to 10 percent youths, and though some knew the educational status of their employees, others had



no idea whether any of their staff were presently attending school. It seems possible that those under 21 employed full-time and even some part-time workers could be dropouts. It seems possible also that some of the businesses were wary of the questions and did not reveal the whole truth, particularly when one drive-in snack bar reported that they only employed "straight A high school students." Independent study among friends and acquaintances would lead to the belief that many dropouts are employed by such businesses.

The Employment Security Commission and the want advertisements in the newspaper are thus the only means of finding employment for some. The state places monthly approximately 900 dropouts as compared to 243 placements made for persons having a high school diploma, and thus bears the burden of finding employment for those who do not complete high school.



## Footnote

1. La Placita, in Old Town, hired none because their staff came from a special program in which they were involved with the Albuquerque Association for Mentally Handicapped Children. This program enables handicapped students to graduate after successful completion of one year's employment, and La Placita annually handles approximately 45 such students.



## CHAPTER IV

## Presentation of High School Data and Analysis

Data will now be presented which were gathered from the records at the two schools on all dropouts and a sample of graduates, numerically equal to the dropouts from each school. For purposes of analysis, the sample of graduates was assumed to be a reasonably accurate reflection of the graduate populations. In order to facilitate comparison with the population of dropouts, the graduate sample figures were multiplied proportionally in order to reflect accurately the ratio of graduates to dropouts. Although this might lead to some distortion of the actual frequency distribution of variables in question, we are assuming that such distortion will be comparatively minor, given the size and random nature of the sample.

The adjusted figures and details of these are given in the following tables.

Table 1: West Mesa Dropouts and Graduates by Sex.

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Male	93	228	321
Female	77	292	369
Total	170	520	N = 690

$$X^2 = 17.4$$

P is less than .001

$$Q = .22$$

Table 2: Sandia Dropouts and Graduates by Sex.

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Male	51	308	359
Female	22	484	506
Total	73	792	N = 865

$$X^2 = 26.3$$

P is less than .001

$$Q = .57$$



Sandia has only 8.4 percent dropouts in the school population to West Mesa's 24.6 percent. Sandia has many more graduates and far fewer dropouts than West Mesa.

There are also substantial differences between the sexes. 88.7 percent of females graduate, compared to 78.8 percent of males.

Table 3: Dropouts and Graduates  
from both Schools by Sex

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Male	144	536	680
Female	99	776	875
Total	243	1312	N = 1555

$$\chi^2 = 28.2$$

P is less than .001

$$Q = .36$$

At West Mesa 79.1 percent of female students graduate, and 71.0 percent of males do. At Sandia, again more girls graduate, proportionally than boys (95.7 percent to 85.8 percent). Thus, more females graduate and less drop out than do males (see Tables 1 and 2).

The differences between the schools and the sexes are in line with the hypothesis that dropouts withdraw from school through a financial need to work. West Mesa, due to its location, has a greater proportion of working and lower class students than Sandia, located in a middle-class residential area. West Mesa will therefore tend to have more students in financial need.

Due to cultural patterns of Western society, it is the male members of a family who feel that they must bear the burden of the family support. In a poor family where a member must go out and work, it is the son who will be more likely than the daughter to drop out of school and work.



The son will also be more likely to find employment and earn higher wages than would his sister. It is surmised that a girl from a poor family is as likely to disentangle herself from the situation by marrying away from the family. Males in poor families may also drop out of school for less altruistic reasons. Their poor home will not be able to provide them with the status symbols that they may feel they need, most particularly an automobile. Dropping out of school to work will help them obtain these possessions to compete in the teenage society. A teenage male's expenses are likely to be higher than a female's; it is not necessary for her to have a car in order to compete.

The first variable tested is whether the father of the dropout is present and employed. The presence or absence of the father as a psychological factor and its possible concomitant damage to the student is regarded as secondary in this thesis. What we regard as fundamental is his absence leaving the family without its traditional breadwinner. Female heads-of-households are possibly the poorest of the poor, and a father's absence may be the factor which prompts a student, more especially a male, to leave school and work to support himself and/or his family. Included in the absent/unemployed category are families where the father is present but is out of work, either through age, lack of skills, or lack of a market for his skills. Families where the father is retired, say from the Armed Forces, and receives a pension are not included. They fall into the present and employed category, as though the father no longer works, he still financially supports the household. It was clear from the school records whether the father was a retired serviceman and where he was simply too old to work and therefore was laid off, unable to support his family.



Table 4: Dropouts and Graduates from both Schools,  
by Presence of an Employed Father

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Absent or Unemployed	121	230	351
Present & Employed	121	1078	1199
Totals	242	1308	N = 1550

$$\chi^2 = 217.7$$

P is less than .001

$$Q = .65$$

Table 4 shows that 50 percent of the dropouts come from families where the father is either absent or unemployed; however, only 17.5 percent of graduates come from such families. This lends support to the theory of economic incentive for withdrawal. Dropouts constitute 34.4 percent of students from homes without a working father, whereas they are only 10.8 percent of the total of students from homes where the father is present and working. Dropouts are also only 15.6 percent of the total student population, so they are very over-represented among poor students, i.e., those living in families without a working father.

It is believed that there would be a difference between the two schools in terms of family income, and this was the rationale for selecting the two. West Mesa, largely Chicano, was believed to have a much greater percentage of poor families than Sandia. Therefore, separate tables are presented on the breakdown of father's presence and employment.



Table 5: West Mesa Dropouts and Graduates,  
by Presence of an Employed Father

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Absent or Unemployed	92	120	212
Present & Employed	77	396	473
Totals	169	516	N = 685

$$X^2 = 57.9$$

P is less than .001

$$Q = .60$$

Table 6: Sandia Dropouts and Graduates,  
by Presence of an Employed Father

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Absent or Unemployed	29	110	139
Present & Employed	44	682	726
Totals	73	792	N = 865

$$X^2 = 33.3$$

P is less than .001

$$Q = .61$$

These tables show that there is a greater percentage of working and lower class families at West Mesa than at Sandia. 24.6 percent of families at West Mesa are without working fathers, and only 8.4 percent at Sandia. As might be expected from this, a larger percentage of West Mesa dropouts come from families without working fathers than do at Sandia: 54.4 percent as against 39.7 percent.



At both schools, however, a significantly greater percentage of dropouts come from families without working fathers than do graduates (23.3 percent to 13.9 percent). Only at West Mesa do more dropouts come from families without a working father than from families with. Again, it is students who come from poorer families, those deprived of the traditional breadwinner, who are most likely to be dropouts.

To further investigate the financial backgrounds of dropouts and graduates, those students who had absent or unemployed fathers were omitted from the sample, and the remainder were broken down by the status of their father's occupation. The first category used is white-collar worker, and this includes professionals, the self-employed, salesmen and those in the Armed Services. The other category used is blue-collar worker, including manual laborers, mechanics, truck drivers, and construction workers. It is suggested that the white-collar designation entails non-manual labor, higher wages, and more job security.

Table 7: Dropouts and Graduates from both Schools,  
by Status of Father's Occupation

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
White collar	53	1012	1065
Blue collar	74	359	433
Total	127	1371	N = 1498

$$\chi^2 = 58.2 \quad Q = 60$$

58.3 percent of dropouts have fathers who are blue-collar workers, as opposed to only 35.5 percent of graduates who do. Dropouts constitute 17.1 percent of students having blue-collar fathers, but only 5.0 percent of those with white-collar fathers.



Table 8: West Mesa Dropouts and Graduates, by Status of Father's Occupation

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
White collar	33	176	209
Blue collar	49	216	265
Total	82	392	N = 474

$$\chi^2 = 0.6$$

Not significant

$$Q = .10$$

Table 9: Sandia Dropouts and Graduates, by Status of Father's Occupation

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
White collar	20	836	856
Blue collar	25	143	168
Total	45	979	N = 1024

$$\chi^2 = 52.4$$

P is less than .001

$$Q = .76$$

At West Mesa 55.9 percent of all students whose fathers are employed and present are blue-collar workers, as compared to only 16.4 percent at Sandia. Thus, not only are there more unemployed and absent fathers at West Mesa, but over half of those working are manual laborers. 59.8 percent of West Mesa's dropouts have fathers who are blue-collar workers, and 55.1 percent of graduates do also. At Sandia, 55.6 percent of dropouts have fathers who are blue-collar workers, as compared to only 14.6 percent of graduates. West Mesa, being a generally working class school shows only a small difference between dropouts and graduates in terms of the status of father's occupation, but at the largely middle-class school, Sandia, the job status is clearly an important factor. Here 14.9 percent of students whose fathers are manual laborers are dropouts, whereas dropouts constitute only 2.3 percent of those with white-collar fathers.

Existing sociological evidence suggests that large families are more characteristic of lower-class households than middle-class. On the basis of this, and the hypothesis that dropouts come from poor families, the



relationship of dropping out to family size may shed further light on the central problem of the relationship of withdrawal to economic incentive. Added to this is the fact that a large family may be financially secure while the father is present and working, but if he leaves or loses his job, the size of the family may pull it below the poverty line. Families with over three children are here designated as large, three being the average number of children in the American family, and the approximate midpoint of the distribution.

Table 10: Dropouts and Graduates  
from both Schools by Size of Family

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Small	69	727	796
Large	99	522	621
Total	168	1249	1417

$$X^2 = 17.7 \quad P \text{ is less than } .001 \quad Q = .33$$

58.8 percent of dropouts come from large families, as against 41.8 percent of graduates. 15.9 of students coming from larger families are dropouts, but they constitute only 8.7 percent of students from small families. Again, because of differences in the school populations, separate tables will be presented.

Table 11: West Mesa Dropouts  
and Graduates, by Family Size

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Small	30	100	130
Large	69	368	437
Total	99	468	N = 567

$$X^2 = 3.6 \quad \text{Not significant}$$

$$Q = .23$$

Table 12: Sandia Dropouts and  
Graduates, by Family Size

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Small	39	627	666
Large	30	154	184
Total	69	781	N = 850

$$X^2 = 512.0 \quad P \text{ is less than } .001$$

$$Q = .61$$



At Sandia the difference between dropouts and graduates in terms of family size is made even more clear than when the school populations were combined. At Sandia, 43.5 percent of the dropouts are from large families, but only 19.7 percent of graduates are. Dropouts constitute 16.3 percent of students from large families at Sandia, although they are only 8.1 percent of the school sample, and 5.9 percent of students from small families. Here, then, the hypothesis linking family size to withdrawal seems to be supported.

However, at West Mesa the link was not significant. 77.1 percent of all students come from large families, so that the dropouts who come from large families are not proportionally greater than the graduates who do. Again, this may be due to the general level of poverty prevalent at West Mesa. Both poverty and large families are unusual at Sandia, but where they occur they are in concurrence with the phenomena of dropping out. At West Mesa both poverty and large families are more common and, therefore, tend to occur frequently among both dropouts and graduates. Also, West Mesa, being largely Chicano, most students come from Catholic families, where many children are more common. A large family at West Mesa may be less a sign of poverty than of adherence to tradition and the Church.

To clarify the relationship between presence of a working father, as indicative of financial status, and family size, a table for the two schools combined is shown, with family size as the dependent variable, partialled for presence of a working father.



Table 13: Dropouts and Graduates from both Schools,  
by Family Size and Presence of a Working Father

		Dropout	Graduate	Total	
Present and	Large	39	420	459	Q = .22
Working	Small	37	618	655	
Absent or	Large	42	102	144	Q = .37
Unemployed	Small	20	105	125	
	Totals	138	1245	N = 1383	

$$\chi^2 = 78.6 \quad P \text{ is less than } .001$$

30.4 percent of dropouts come from large families where there is no working father. 49.6 percent of graduates come from small families where the father is present and working. 29.2 percent of students from large families where there is no working father are dropouts although dropouts are only 10.0 percent of the population. The two extremes thus contain the majority of the two types of student. It would be profitable to present the two schools separately now.

Table 14: West Mesa Dropouts and Graduates,  
by Family Size and Presence of a Working Father

		Dropout	Graduate	Total	
Present and	Large	19	288	307	Q = .69
Employed	Small	13	68	81	
Absent or	Large	31	80	111	Q = .37
Unemployed	Small	5	28	33	
	Total	68	464	N = 532	

$$\chi^2 = 35.7 \quad P \text{ is less than } .001$$



Table 15: Sandia Dropouts and Graduates,  
by Family Size and Presence of a Working Father

		Dropout	Graduate	Total	
Present and	Large	20	132	152	Q = .55
Employed	Small	24	550	574	
Absent or	Large	11	22	33	Q = .44
Unemployed	Small	15	77	92	
	Total	70	781	N = 851	

$$\chi^2 = 52.9 \quad P \text{ is less than } .001$$

At West Mesa 45.6 percent of dropouts come from large families where there is no working father, and 62.1 percent of graduates from large families, but where the father is present and working. The presence of a working father seems, therefore, to be the deciding factor at West Mesa.

Dropouts at Sandia constitute 33.3 percent of students from large families where there is no working father, and only 4.4 percent of those from small families where the father is present and employed, the most common family situation for graduates. Dropouts constitute a greater percentage among those from small families where there is no working father (16.3) than among those from large families where the father is present and employed (13.2 percent).

It would seem therefore that at both schools the variable of family size constitutes a further dimension of poverty for the family, but alone is a less reliable index of dropout potential than the absence of a working father.

It is well known that households with female heads constitute the hard core of poverty families. Therefore, data will now be presented



Table 19: Dropouts and Graduates  
from both Schools, by Race

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Chicano and Indian	89	397	486
Anglo	154	915	1069
Total	243	1312	N = 1555
$X^2 = 3.9$ P is less than .05 Q = .14			

The belief that Chicanos are more likely to drop out is supported by Table 19, but the differences between the races are not very great; they are barely significant at the .05 level, and the number in the population is high. Since it is known that the proportion of the races at the two schools is so different it would be profitable to dichotomise by school.

Table 20: West Mesa Dropouts and  
Graduates, by Race

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Chicano and Indian	81	320	401
Anglo	89	200	289
Totals	170	520	N = 690

$X^2 = 10.6$  P is less than .01 Q = .28

Table 21: Sandia Dropouts and  
Graduates, by Race

	Dropouts	Graduate	Total
Chicano	8	77	85
Anglo	65	715	780
Total	73	792	N = 865

$X^2 = 0.1$  not significant Q = .07

36.6 percent of dropouts are Chicano or Indian, and they constitute 31.3 percent of the total school populations, and 30.3 percent of the graduates. They are thus very slightly over-represented among dropouts, and under-represented among graduates. The reverse is, of course, true of Anglos.



At Sandia, there is no significant difference between the percentage of Chicanos among dropouts and among graduates. Race, alone, therefore, appears to have little effect upon withdrawal from high school.

However, at West Mesa, 47.6 percent of dropouts are Chicano or Indian, while they constitute 58.1 percent of the total school population, and 61.5 percent of the graduates. It is, therefore, clearly, the Anglos who are over-represented among dropouts and under-represented among graduates. At West Mesa, a dropout is more likely to be an Anglo than a Chicano and a Chicano is more likely to be a graduate than a dropout. 30.8 percent of Anglos drop out, whereas only 20.2 percent of Chicanos do.

Table 22: Male Dropouts and Graduates from West Mesa, by Race

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Chicano and Indian	33	168	201
Anglo	60	60	120
Totals	93	228	N = 321

$$X^2 = 42.0 \quad P \text{ is less than } .001$$

$$Q = .67$$

Table 23: Female Dropouts from Sandia, by Race

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Chicano and Indian	48	152	200
Anglo	29	140	169
Totals	77	292	360

$$X^2 = 2.7 \quad \text{not significant} \quad Q = .21$$

Then, controlling for sex at West Mesa, it can be seen that it is the Anglo males who enlarge the expected number of Anglo dropouts. 50.0 percent of Anglo males drop out, whereas only 16.4 percent of male Chicanos and Indians do. Male Anglos constitute 64.5 percent of the male dropouts, but are only 37.4 percent of the male population, and 26.3 percent of male graduates. 35.3 percent of all West Mesa dropouts are Anglo males, but they constitute only 17.3 percent of the school population, and 11.5 percent of graduates. It is, therefore, among male Anglos at West Mesa



that the hard-core dropouts are to be found. Among females at West Mesa, racial differences between dropouts and graduates are not significant.

This lends support to the hypothesis that it is financial need which is important in dropping out, rather than cultural disadvantage. There appears to be little difference in terms of race between dropouts and graduates at Sandia, and between female dropouts and graduates at West Mesa. At Sandia it is rare to find a poverty family, but dropouts are over-represented among those poor families that do exist. However, dropouts are not over-represented among the other rarity - the Chicano family. The Chicano who attends Sandia is likely to be an upwardly mobile family, financially secure. The Northeast Heights is not a predominantly Chicano area, and the Chicanos who do live here have financially "made it." They are very unlikely to be poverty cases.

However, in the West Mesa area, predominantly Chicano, there are many poor, white families. A Chicano may not have to be suffering financially in order to live in this area - discrimination alone, and the desire for friendly, unprejudiced neighbors may be what caused them to live in a so-called low-class area. But the Anglo family who lives there, with the exception of the middle families of Corrales, may be doing so because they can afford nowhere else. The Anglo family would not be forced there by discrimination in housing, or through the desire to be with their own kind. People tend to prefer residence in an area predominated by their own racial or social groupings, so a family who lives in an area consisting largely of a racial grouping not his own - specifically an Anglo family living in an area which consists largely of minority group members - may be doing so because they have fallen below the general economic level of their own group. If this is the case at West Mesa, it is no wonder that more Anglo males than any other group drop out, following the theory



of economic incentive. Anglos who live in the area tend to be generally poorer than most of the Chicano residents - ergo - their sons drop out in greater proportion than the sons of Chicano families. More Anglo families are in need of money. This theory can be tested by dichotomising the male dropouts from West Mesa by race, and partially for presence of a working father, as an indicator of class.

Table 24: Anglo Male Dropouts and Graduates from West Mesa, by Presence of Working Father

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Present and Employed	14	31	45
Absent or Unemployed	18	11	29
Total	32	42	N = 74

$\chi^2 = 7.0$  P is less than .01 Q = .47

Table 25: Chicano and Indian Male Dropouts and Graduates, by Presence of Working Father

	Dropout	Graduate	Total
Present and Working	24	11	35
Absent or Unemployed	36	4	40
Total	60	15	N = 75

$\chi^2 = 5.4$  P is less than .02 Q = .61

60.8 percent of Chicano and Indian students (dropouts and graduates together) have fathers who are present and working, whereas only 46.7 percent of Anglo students do. 43.8 percent of Chicano and Indian dropouts have working fathers present, as do 40.0 percent of Anglo dropouts. When it is remembered that several Anglo families live in Corallles, rather than in the immediate vicinity of the school, this leaves a greater number of Anglo than Chicano or Indian families without a traditional breadwinner.

It would be useful to categorize students by the reasons for withdrawal given by their respective schools, to see whether the theory of job incentive - or financial need to work - is reflected in the official reasons for withdrawal.

The four designations used in the tables contain various reasons for withdrawal. The first covers withdrawal directly to work or to the Armed



Services, and to TVI or night school; the second is "officially" designated "unspecified," and covers a history of truancy and cutting classes, so that by the time of final withdrawal the school is relieved to drop the student, and the student is relieved to quit school. The area office of Public School Administration handles these cases, and all are "illegal" withdrawals, as none has attained their seventeenth birthday when they drop. Category three covers withdrawal because of marriage and through health reasons. These are paired together because many of the health cases are actually withdrawal due to pregnancy. These cases were once designated specifically, but since 1969 have been put in with health cases, thus considerably increasing the numbers of withdrawals for this reason. The last category is "other," covering withdrawal which is legal because the student is 17 or over, and withdrawal at the request of parents.

Table 26: Dropouts from West Mesa and Sandia,  
by Reasons for Withdrawal

	West Mesa	Sandia	Total
1	50	17	67
2	98	37	135
3	17	7	24
4	5	12	17
Totals	170	73	N = 243

$$X^2 = 14.4 \quad P \text{ is less than } .01$$

29.4 percent of West Mesa's dropouts leave school to go either directly to work or to TVI or night school, and presumably work while doing so. 23.3 percent of Sandia's dropouts do likewise. A further 10.0 percent of West Mesa's dropouts leave to get married, or for health reasons, often followed by marriage. 9.9 percent of Sandia's dropouts do also.



However, as this reason applied to females, a truer percentage can be gained by dichotomising the dropouts by sex, instead of school.

Table 27: Dropouts, by Sex, from both Schools,  
by Reasons for Withdrawal

	Female	Male	Total
1	24	63	87
2	52	63	115
3	20	4	24
4	3	14	17
Totals	99	144	N = 243

Two of the cells are too small to test for significance by  $X^2$ , but percentages can still be taken from this. 20.2 percent of female dropouts now leave to marry, or for health reasons, and 43.8 percent of male dropouts leave to work. The largest number from both schools and in both sexes, however, leave for reason 2, unspecified - illegal withdrawal after much truancy and cutting which is permitted because this does not fit the school pattern. Some light can be shed on this unspecified reason by quoting from some dropout interviews, all of which were with youths who withdrew in category 2. It is most often summed up as, "I couldn't hack it no more."

Some interviewees withdraw on their own accord, after prolonged periods of cutting and truancy. Their actual reasons for withdrawal ranged from, "...because the school didn't offer me what I wanted to do, and the system wasn't at all very good either." to "School was getting to be a bummer." Another interviewee was thrown out of school, again after much truancy, but said that he had wanted to stay in school. Another got himself into trouble with the police over "...auto theft, burglary, transport of narcotics." and spent some time in jail. Marxian analysis suggested that



the cause of most crime is economic need.<sup>1</sup> If this is so, then many dropouts who did not see themselves as leaving for financial reasons in actual fact did, because a great many were in trouble with the police over petty thievery and other crimes.

When asked whether financial necessity or a desire for a personal income prompted them to withdraw, not one of the dropouts interviewed from category 2 could answer "Yes." Each of them had, through truancy or apathy, fallen behind in their school work, and found it impossible for them to catch up. Once truancy had begun, there was no way to finish high school, and the school, student and student's parents were all relieved when the pretense of attending high school ended. There was only one case of parental retribution for withdrawal, and this was so serious that it stands out as a great rarity.

Among most of the dropout interviewees, however, there was an expressed desire for education per se, though not for the high school system as it now exists. Two students who are in the Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC) favorably compared it to high school, and would advise friends to quit school and get into the program. Two girls, both disliking the school system, left the choice of withdrawal or staying in to their hypothetical friends, but neither wanted to go back herself. One girl is now in Valley High School and hopes to attend Freedom High next semester, but is only in school to keep herself out of the detention home or juvenile prison. The remainder of the interviewees would advise friends to stay in, "They've got most of it licked, anyway." but none would personally return.

Each dropout realized that employment would be difficult without a diploma, and worried "a bit," but withdrew anyway. Some went straight into jobs, doing full-time the job that they had part-time while in school.



A couple of girls worked while in school, but neither carried on when withdrawn, for personal reasons. Other dropouts "did odd jobs," and a few of these later joined the NYC program. Some have not yet found jobs, which they say is very hard to do in Albuquerque.

One male and one female dropout expressed the feeling that graduation and subsequent white-collar employment were not for them, but for the "other people." Even if they could have graduated it would have made little difference to their life-styles. "Yes, its (high school diploma) worth getting if you're out to go get after it. But otherwise its that college piece of paper you people get. That's the piece of paper that counts." This interviewee would only return to school if he were paid what he is earning now, (\$100 a week). The girl worked as a waitress while in high school, as does her mother now, who supports the children alone on this wage. The girl herself now babysits and combs out hair for a few dollars, staying home each day.

"Do you think that because you haven't got a high school diploma it might make getting a job difficult for you?

Yes, it really would, as far as a secretary or something like that...but a waitress or something like that, its easy.

When you were in school did you think about what job you were going to get when you left?

No, most girls get married anyway."

Only two dropouts had never heard of the G.E.D. test, but none saw it as a viable alternative. Each had considered going back to school at some time since they left, "but didn't have enough will-power," or "thought about, but didn't think too hard on it."

Although only a quarter of the dropouts left school to go to work, and although none of those from category two who were interviewed



saw financial necessity as their reason for withdrawal, clearly dropping out occurs regularly in association with poverty. One graduate interviewed, who was one of the few students in his "gang" at West Mesa not to drop out, saw poverty as largely causal in the many cases he knew personally. A few were just too poor to afford the luxury of unemployment while in school, but most saw graduation as being no benefit to them, and most desired the usual possessions associated with the high school - college cult, which their parents could not afford to buy them. So each opted for beginning to work early, rather than stay in school, which brought them no social or economic gain, and in which they had little interest.



## Footnotes

1. George B. Vold, Theoretical Criminology, (Oxford University Press, N.Y., 1958, p.159ff) describes the theory of economic determinism, and cites it as the earliest non-individual explanation of crime theorized. See also Cyril Burt, The Young Delinquent, (Appleton, N.Y., 1925) p. 92f). Morris Ploscowe, Some Causative Factors in Criminality (Report on the causes of Crime, Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 5-161, Washington, D. C., 1931) suggests that the poverty need not be dire to encourage crime; the criminal need only have less than his neighbor.
2. Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC) is a federally funded program designed for dropouts between the ages of 16 and 18, whose parents income falls below a certain level. It involves on-the-job training combined with academic study. Some results of the program, as reported by some participants is recorded in the next chapter.



to use the results obtained as comparisons with previous research, and the theories of education which arise from this research.

One of the most common interpretations of findings in the study of dropouts is that they are the result of a culture conflict, either between a majority and minority culture or between lower and middle class culture. Many of the works cited in Chapter One deal with the dropout problem in these terms. Because the student may not value what the teacher values - particularly education as a means of social mobility - and because the student may use a different language, different terminology, or have a different home background in terms of ideas, he is of necessity in a cultural conflict, and will be prone to withdrawal from high school. This is a view sometimes held by teachers themselves, and is used as the basis for special programs for "culturally handicapped" children.

This thesis has lent support to the idea that it may not be a cultural gap between teacher and student, so much as an economic one; the teacher has an income, the student's father may not. It would seem that if the student's family is economically secure, cultural background will have little effect upon the student's propensity to drop out. For example, the average Chicano at Sandia, it seems, is not more prone to withdraw than the average Sandia Anglo. However, it must be remembered that certain cultural, or minority groups, specifically the Chicano in New Mexico, are over-represented among the poor, and therefore, through economic need, are over-represented among dropouts through the nation. However, this thesis suggests that given equal economic situations, no one race would be more prone to withdrawal than another.

[A second theory proposed is that the root of the dropout problem lies in the schools, rather than the family background of the students. It is the teachers and the educational system who turn off the students



to the joys of learning. The school may well be an intervening variable, and most dropouts interviewed for this thesis complained of the lack of understanding among their teachers. This situation may well constitute a push from the school which reinforces the economic incentive pull. However, both dropout and graduate have the same teachers and are pushed through the same educational rat-race. Yet, one leaves and the other stays, so there must be another factor involved. We suggest that it is the economic need of the student. This does not mean that no blame rests on the school, or that the educational system is perfect. Far from it. Even Robert Finch, former Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in the Nixon Administration, spoke out on the necessity for drastic and immediate reform of the nation's school system.<sup>3</sup>

However, a more immediate need is that of the youths who drop out of the system, and their need would seem to be primarily financial. Perhaps the best educational reform which could be enacted would be the establishment of a guaranteed annual income for all.

Yet, there are programs in existence which do recognize the economic needs of dropouts. One of these is a program cited in the last chapter, the NYC. This program, designed for dropouts up to the age of 18, whose family income is below a certain level, combines job training with pay and further schooling in English, Math and the Social Sciences. The student receives his high school diploma as well as being trained for a job in his chosen field, and is paid while he works (either the morning or afternoon) and while he is in the program's school. The students in this program who were interviewed all praised its understanding of their needs. With a guaranteed income they were able to concentrate on learning the skills of an occupation as well as academic skills. The teachers themselves were said to be more understanding, not setting a



general class pace. It thus has appeared to combine the improvements in classroom teaching which Holt discusses, with alleviation of the economic need which prompted high school withdrawal. And as one interviewee pointed out, it has an advantage over high school in that experience is always required when applying for a job, and from this program the students also acquire work experience.

No program can be expected to alone defeat the dropout problem, but we feel that concentration in the field of removal of economic need would better fit the pattern of high school withdrawal, than one which is based upon dropouts as cultural or psychological misfits.

Quoted in Newsweek, February 16, 1970, p. 50.



## Footnotes

1. Using the conventional descriptions for Q values, as cited in James A. Davis', Elementary Survey Analysis, (Prentice-Hall Inc., New Jersey, 1971) p.49.

Conventions for Describing Q Values

.70 or higher	A very strong association
.50 - .69	A substantial association
.30 - .49	A moderate association
.10 - .29	A low association
.01 - .09	A negligible association
.00	No association

2. Neil V. Sullivan, Approaches to the School Dropout Problem, in Poverty in America, ed. Margaret S. Gordon, (Chandler Publishing Co., San Francisco, 1965) p.170
3. Robert H. Finch, speaking at the annual convention of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, said,

"We sense intuitively that the first thoroughly televised generation in the history of the world cannot simply be passed into and through the same rigid institutional structures that its parents and even grandparents travelled."

Quoted in Newsweek, February 16, 1970, p. 56f.



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