What are Youth Doing in Their Leisure Time?: Group Differences and Stability in Participation from Middle School through the Transition into Adulthood.

Nicole Zarrett and Sandra Simpkins, University of Michigan

Background

There is increasing evidence that youth’s participation in challenging out-of-school activities influences their behavioral, emotional, and academic adjustment. Participation in out-of-school organized activities is associated with declines in school dropout, reduced rates of criminal offending, lower rates of substance abuse, interpersonal competence, quality relationships with peers, self-concept, high school GPA, and school engagement (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Holland & Andre, 1987; Mahoney, 2000; Simpkins, Fredricks, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, under review; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1999).

Together, these studies provide convincing evidence that participating in out-of-school activities is associated with indicators of positive development. However, they tell us less about the developmental pattern of activity participation and the characteristics of youth participating. With the exception of the extensive work on gender differences in sports, little systematic research has focused on activity participation across time, various ages, transitions, and groups.

Existing research suggest the following hypothesis regarding both developmental changes and demographic differences: poor and ethnic minority youth will be less involved in structured, adult-sanctioned activities than middle class White youth (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999); participation in such activities will decline with age, particularly as children move into adolescence (Eccles & Gootman, 2002); girls will be less involved in sports than boys (Duda, 1995; Jacobs et al. 2002). This investigation extends this work by examining youth’s participation in a variety of activities from 7th grade through 3 years post high school. In addition, we focus on group differences in youth’s participation in these activities. Specifically, our study aims are:

1. Describe youth’s activity participation across adolescence and early adulthood
2. Examine the stability of youth’s participation
3. Test gender and race differences in youth’s participation

Method

The Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study
(P.I. Jacquelynne Eccles and Arnold Sameroff)

Sample

- 1,400 adolescents and their families
  - 61% African American; 35% European American
  - 49% female
  - Median annual income = 42,500-52,500

Data

- Longitudinal data were collected at 6 time points: the beginning of 7th grade (1991), in the summer and early fall following the 7th, 8th, and 11th grades and then 1 and 3 years post high school
- Youth reported on their participation in a variety of activities at each time point:
  - At 7th grade, 8th, and 11th grade:
Frequently occurring activities (e.g., TV viewing, reading, art) were measured with
  • How often they spent time on the following activities during the last one/two weeks (1=never, 6=daily, more than an hour)
Less frequently occurring activities (e.g., religious activities, community groups) were measured with
  • If they spent time on the following activities during the last 6 months or during the last year? (1=yes, 0=no).

- At 1 and 3 years post high school, youth reported:
  - How often they spent time on the following activities during a usual week (1=none, 4=4-6 hours, 8=21 or more hours)
  - Civil rights (a less frequent activity) was measured on a scale of: “the past two years” (0=never, 3=four to five times, 5=more than ten times).

- Continuous items were recoded so that any time youth reported spending time on the activity it was considered active participation in the activity

Results

**Hypothesis 1:** Activity participation was fairly stable over time for Television, Social, Religion and Reading (see Figure 1). For the remaining activities, participation varies between waves, with a decline in participation for most activities (except work and civil rights) when youth are 3 years post high school. Participation declines later than what was reported in previous research.

**Hypothesis 2:** Findings indicate stability of adolescents’ participation over time (See Figure 2). Youth are more likely to participate in an activity domain in late adolescence and early adulthood if they began participating in 7th grade. For example, of the 10% of young adults participating in formal sports in Wave 6, 41% of them were participating in 7th grade (Wave 1).

**Hypothesis 3:** Group differences of participation by the intersection of gender and race were found for the following activities: Formal and Informal Sports, Music, Art, Community Service and Reading (see Table 1).

Discussion

3 Main Implications:

- Future research needs to address reasons for declines in activity involvement during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. Likewise, it is necessary to identify methods/resources that would encourage youth to persist in an activity beyond high school

- Findings indicate the importance of early participation on later participation in activities. Based on the positive indications of activity involvement, possible intervention programs to get children involved in activities early in life would promote children’s current and later well being.

- The current investigation points to the importance of considering the intersection of race and sex when examining the trajectories of youths’ activity participation.
References


Figure 1
*The Percent of Youth Participating in Various Activities*

- **Informal Sports**
- **Religious**
- **Music**
- **Art**
- **Community**
- **Social**
- **TV**
- **Civil Rights**
- **Reading**
- **Work**
Figure 2
Stability of Participation from Wave 1 to Wave 4 and from Wave 1 to Wave 6

**Adjusted standardized residuals indicated above each bar**
Table 1
Group Differences in Activity Participation by Race and Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
<th>Wave 3</th>
<th>Wave 4</th>
<th>Wave 5</th>
<th>Wave 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Sports</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Within:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Males</td>
<td>18.76**</td>
<td>23.20***</td>
<td>16.27**</td>
<td>15.11**</td>
<td>82.54***</td>
<td>60.59***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Males</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>60.59***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Females</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Females</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Within:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Males</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>12.79**</td>
<td>9.31*</td>
<td>32.60***</td>
<td>12.01*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Males</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Females</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Females</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Service</strong></td>
<td>37.94***</td>
<td>29.66***</td>
<td>33.51***</td>
<td>32.26***</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Within:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Males</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Males</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Females</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Females</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>11.19*</td>
<td>9.81*</td>
<td>17.36**</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Within:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Males</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>77.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Males</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Females</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>84.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Females</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(df, N) (3, N=1474) (3, N=1186) (3, N=1059) (3, N=1056) (3, N=781) (3, N=573)