



Parent–adolescent joint projects involving leisure time and activities during the transition to high school



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A B S T R A C T

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Leisure research to date has generally overlooked planning and organizing of leisure time and activities between parents and adolescents. This investigation examined how a sample of Canadian adolescents and their parents jointly constructed and acted on goals related to adolescents' leisure time during the move from elementary to high school. Using the Qualitative Action-Project Method, data were collected over an 8–10 month period from 26 parent–adolescent dyads located in two urban sites, through video-taped conversations about leisure time, video recall interviews, and telephone monitoring interviews. Analysis of the data revealed that the joint projects of the 26 dyads could be grouped into three clusters: a) *governance transfer* or attempts to shift, from parent to adolescent, responsibility over academic demands, organizing leisure time, and safety with peers, b) *balancing extra-curricular activities with family life, academics, and social activities*, and c) *relationship adjustment or maintenance*.

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When school ends for the day, most North American students spend their time in leisure activities (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001; Larson & Verma, 1999). Some adjustments to these activities are likely when students move from elementary school to high school. High schools offer opportunities for new extra-curricular activities, the movement to a new school can change peer relationships (Bukowski, Sippola, & Newcomb, 2000; Hardy, Bukowski, & Sippola, 2002; Pellegrini & Long, 2002), and academic and social demands of high school (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999) can generate a need to reorganize scheduling of leisure time. These changes suggest the transition to high school is an important period to investigate how adolescents organize their leisure time, particularly because leisure activities have implications for adolescents' emotional and behavioral development (Bohnert & Garber, 2007; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 2001).

The reorganization of leisure time during the transition to high school likely involves parents. Most young and middle adolescents live with their parents, necessitating some coordination of family schedules. Additionally, parents are often the suppliers of financial, logistical, and social support for extra-curricular structured activities such as sports (e.g., Trost et al., 2003) or arts-based leisure pursuits (Zarrett & Eccles, 2009). However, the research literature to date has generally overlooked planning and organizing of leisure time and activities between parents and adolescents, neglecting the joint and

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coordinated efforts occurring within families. This investigation is concerned with how a sample of Canadian adolescents and their parents jointly constructed and acted on goals related to adolescents' leisure time during the move from elementary to high school.

Background literature

The bulk of the research on adolescents' leisure time focuses on their engagement in formal activities supervised by adults such as sports and school- or community-based youth programs (e.g., Feldman & Matjasko, 2007; Metzger, Crean, & Forbes-Jones, 2009) versus unsupervised activities with peers (e.g., Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Veenstra, Huitsing, Dijkstra, & Lindenberg, 2010). This emphasis on supervised versus unsupervised activities has emerged through efforts to understand how adolescents become associated with problematic peers and engage in risky or illegal behaviors (e.g., Hirschi, 1969; Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Meece, 1999). The result is that leisure activities with family members such as watching television or playing sports (Crouter, Head, McHale, & Tucker, 2004; Dubas & Gerris, 2002) and solitary activities such as listening to music or reading (Larson, 1990, 1995; Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen, 2005) receive much less attention in the research literature. We addressed this lack of information by allowing participants to define what constitutes leisure activities, broadening the scope so that we could understand how adolescents and parents organize *diverse* leisure activities.

Although planning and organization of leisure time between parents and adolescents has generally been overlooked in the research literature, there is evidence that both parents and adolescents are involved in the selection of leisure activities (Huebner & Mancini, 2003; Zarrett & Eccles, 2009). Adolescents select structured and/or adult-supervised activities on the basis of their interests and enjoyment (e.g., Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012; Feldman & Matjasko, 2007), their peers' preferences or pressure (e.g., Huebner & Mancini, 2003), and because their friends are involved (Schaefer, Simpkins, Vest, & Price, 2011). When they 'hang out' (i.e., unsupervised and unstructured activities), adolescents tend to spend most of their time with their friends (Siennick & Osgood, 2012). Parents attempt to influence their adolescents' selection and engagement in activities by acting as role models (e.g., Huebner & Mancini, 2003), criticizing (e.g., Larson, Pearce, Sullivan, & Jarrett, 2007; Luthar, Shoum, & Brown, 2006), or providing support (e.g., Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000). They also try to guide their adolescents' choice of friends they associate with during leisure time (Brown, Bakkan, Nguyen, & Von Bank, 2007; Mounts, 2000; Tilton-Weaver & Galambos, 2003; Tilton-Weaver, Burk, Kerr, & Stattin, 2013). Although a great deal of information has been generated about influences on the selection of adolescents' leisure activities, the bulk of the research has used survey techniques. Although they yield important information about what *individuals* do, surveying parents and adolescents separately provides limited insight into the ways in which parents and adolescents act in concert (Rosenbaum & Valsiner, 2011).

From developmental and relational perspectives it may be important to understand how adolescents and parents *jointly* organize adolescents' leisure time. Developmentally, the organization of activities may offer adolescents opportunities to acquire skills related to understanding and managing time and resources (Mello, Finan, & Worrel, 2013; Nurmi, 1991), as well as the expression of choices and their consequences (i.e., autonomy development; Larson et al., 2007). Parents may be adapting to their adolescents' expressions of choices (Larson et al., 2007) and adjusting their own schedules because their children require less supervision than in earlier years (Ashbourne & Daly, 2010). As adolescents and parents develop their relationships also change (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Sameroff, 2009), highlighting the importance of considering relationship dynamics in relation to the organization of adolescents' leisure time.

To investigate the ways parents and adolescents approach the organization of leisure activities, we use a contextual action theory proposed by Young, Valach, and Collin (1996, 2002). Reflecting a social-constructionist epistemology, contextual action theory is founded upon the view that behaviors are intentional, goal-directed, although not necessarily rational, actions (von Cranach, Kalbermatten, Indermühle, & Gugler, 1982). This perspective is related historically to Mead (1934) and Vygotsky (1986) and more recent approaches to understanding human development (Brandtstädter, 2006; Brandtstädter & Lerner, 1999). Contextual action theory supports the study of the ways actions are constructed between people over time. *Joint actions* can be linked or interrelated, such as a conversation between two people about what to do during leisure time. When these linked series of actions are constructed across a medium length of time, they become *joint projects* (Young et al., 2001). Joint projects can incorporate sub-projects or less salient series of actions or can occur simultaneously with other projects (e.g., Young et al., 2008). When people are engaged in multiple projects through their daily actions, there is a hierarchy of salience that can change over time (e.g., Marshall et al., 2011).

In this study we view how parents and adolescents organize leisure time and activities together as joint goal-directed actions. It is unclear from extant leisure research whether these joint goal-directed actions coalesce into joint projects across the transition to high school. However, a prior investigation of adolescents' friendships revealed parents and adolescents engaged in projects focused on balancing competing priorities (Marshall, Young, & Tilton-Weaver, 2008). As friendships are a part of leisure time, it is likely that parents and adolescents also construct joint goal-directed projects pertaining to adolescents' leisure time activities. It is also possible that there are other projects under construction at the same time. We therefore posed two research questions: What are the joint goal-directed projects of parents and adolescents, during the transition to high school, that pertain to adolescents' leisure time activities? Are there other joint projects the parents and adolescents are engaged in and, if so, how do they relate to the leisure time projects?

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