Adolescent and Adult Leisure Patterns: A Reassessment

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Using data drawn from a panel study of persons originally surveyed in 1947, this research note updates findings reported in a previous analysis (Scott & Willits, 1989) concerning the linkages between adolescent leisure participation and involvement in similar activities later in life. We previously reported that the leisure activities people engaged in as high school sophomores were predictive of the same kinds of leisure activities they pursued in 1984 when the respondents were in their fifties. The present analysis examined these relationships using data from the same subjects collected in 1992. Adolescent leisure participation continued to be predictive of the leisure choices of these people in their early sixties as well. Moreover, adolescent leisure participation was among the better predictors of adult leisure involvement at both points in these adults' lives. Together, these findings support the continuing long-term impact of youthful leisure involvement.

KEYWORDS: Leisure socialization, continuity across the life span, adolescent leisure, adult leisure, gender differences, longitudinal analysis, panel study

Introduction

Leisure patterns, like other aspects of human behavior, are believed to exhibit both change and continuity across the life span (Iso-Ahola, 1980; Kelly, 1974, 1977). As individuals age, their changing physical, psychological, and social circumstances impact on the ways they use their free time. However, theories of social development and folk wisdom alike suggest that there is also continuity in behavior and that youthful experiences will continue to affect adult patterns across time despite the ever present changes in life circumstances. In this paper, we examine the linkages between adolescent leisure participation and involvement in these activities 45 years later.

Literature Review

Our understanding of aging has been facilitated by life span and life course models (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Life span models are generally "psychological" in nature and tend to emphasize those biological and psychological issues or challenges faced by individuals at different stages of life

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(Erickson, 1963; Havighurst, 1972). Life course models, in contrast, are more "sociological" in scope and examine how individuals behave in light of agerelated expectations and norms (Neugarten, 1977). Life course models also tend to examine how individuals act as a result of life events or unique turning points that occur during their lives (Brim, 1980). Although life span and life course models are grounded in very different disciplines, proponents of each seek to understand leisure in light of the various changes people incur as they age.

Changes during later life include, but are not limited to, diminished physical abilities, launching children, retirement, the birth of a grandchild, widowhood, divorce, changes in finances, and dependency. These changes, according to Atchley (1988, 1989), lead people to make adaptations in their internal and external worlds. One adaptation strategy is continuity. A central tenet of continuity theory "is that, in making adaptive choices, middle-aged and older adults attempt to preserve and maintain existing internal and external structures and they prefer to accomplish this objective by . . . applying familiar strategies in familiar arenas of life" (Atchley, 1989, p. 183). Internal continuity refers to the persistence of mental structures about who we are, as reflected in our ideas, temperaments, perceived skills, preferences, and tastes; external continuity, on the other hand, is defined in terms of persistence of activities, environments, roles and relationships (Atchley, 1989; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1996).

To date, research suggests that there is some continuity in leisure behavior over time (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). What is less well-known is the extent to which leisure behaviors people learn during youth persist into adulthood. Several studies have concluded that youthful activities are reflected in adult leisure choices (Burch, 1969; Buse & Enosh, 1977; Christensen & Yoesting, 1973, 1976; Greendorfer, 1983; Laakso, 1980; Kelly, 1974,1977; Sofranko & Nolan, 1972; Spreitzer & Snyder, 1976; Yoesting & Burkhead, 1973). However, most of these studies have dealt with only a few types of leisure activities and have used adults' recall to determine the nature of their childhood activities If people are most likely to recall activities that continue to be salient to them, any analysis using these data would be likely to overestimate the linkages between youth and adult patterns.

Longitudinal data on the same persons across time avoids the possibly biased nature of recall information, but only a handful of relevant panel studies have been carried out and most of these have examined leisure patterns only during the adult years (LaPage & Ragan, 1974; Crawford, Godbey, & Crouter, 1986; Schmitz-Scherzer & Thomas, 1983; Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Smale & Dupuis, 1995). Lindsay (1984) did report a relationship between participation in school activities and adult social participation seven years later, using panel data, but no other types of leisure activities were included in that analysis.

In 1989, we published a more comprehensive and long-range report of the linkages between various adolescent recreational activities and corresponding adult leisure choices using data from a long-term panel study of rural Pennsylvanians (Scott & Willits, 1989). In that analysis the involvement of panel members in five types of leisure activities assessed in 1947 when they were high school students were positively related to the frequency of participation in these same types of activities 37 years later (in 1984) when the subjects were in their fifties. The strength of these relationships varied somewhat by type of activity and by the gender of the respondent, but, in general, the greater the involvement in a specific type of activity during adolescence, the more frequent the participation in the same type of activity at midlife. The strengths of the relationships for sports and creative/artistic activities were significantly greater for women than for men. Not only were there positive correlations between adolescent and adult leisure patterns, but adolescent participation was more predictive of midlife involvement in socializing, formal organizational participation, and for women, in creative/ artistic activities and sports than respondent's gender, health rating, education, or income.

In 1992, these same panel members were re-surveyed, and data on the frequencies of their participation in these same five types of leisure activities were assessed again. In 1992, the subjects were in their early sixties—a period of life during which adults in American society are likely to be experiencing various life changes. Although there is clearly diversity among adults in their early sixties, occupational achievements have generally peaked and retirement looms on the horizon or may already have occurred. The impending or actual loss of long-standing occupational identities and generally reduced incomes can threaten customary lifestyles, while at the same time providing freedom from earlier responsibilities. Children have probably left the parental home, giving rise to the so-called "empty-nest." Health problems are likely to increase, along with declining dexterity, coordination and reduced energy. Parents, if they are living, become increasingly dependent, requiring both physical and social care. Friends, relatives and spouses die. In such a period of change, it seems relevant to ask whether the continuity in leisure patterns observed in the previous analysis remained evident in this later stage of life.

It is also worth asking whether or not both men and women experience continuity in leisure in the same ways. Studies have shown that the relationship between various facets of leisure and other factors is different for men and women (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Scott & Jackson, 1996). These differences have been explained by the fact that developmental issues facing men and women are very different. Henderson et al. (1996), for example, have argued that many women's lives and their development are influenced by an ethic of care which stems from their dominant role as a primary care giver. Simultaneously, many women feel they are constantly "on call" and do not feel they are entitled to leisure (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991). Adaptability, thus, is a major theme in the course of women's adult experiences (Henderson et al., 1996). Men's lives, in contrast, are believed to be far more predictable. Men generally regard recreation as a right and feel relatively free in engaging in desired leisure activities (Larson & Richards, 1994). These conditions may mean that continuity across the life course is more problematic for women that men as the former may feel compelled to foresake their leisure choices in favor of others.

Purpose

The purpose of this research note was to re-examine the previously observed relationships of adolescent involvement in socializing, creative/artistic, intellectual and sports activities and in formal organizations to the frequency of adult's participation in these same types of activities some eight years after the earlier assessment and approximately 45 years after the adolescent data were compiled. Consistent with the 1984 analysis, a second purpose was to determine whether men and women differed in the extent to which constancy in leisure patterns was evidenced across the years.

Procedures

The panel study on which these analyses were based was undertaken in 1947 when 2,806 sophomores in 74 rural high schools in Pennsylvania answered questionnaires concerning their current activities and life situations. Through the years, intermittent contact was maintained with these people, including the 1984 survey. The most recent survey was in 1992 when 1,650 questionnaires were mailed to those subjects who were still living and for whom current addresses were available. A total of 1,374 persons responded to the 1992 survey (an 83% response rate). Listwise deletion of missing data for the variables used in this report reduced the analysis sample to 1,215. Of this, 518 were males (43%) and 697 were females (57%).

The current data set is limited to a single cohort of men and women who spent at least part of their lives in rural Pennsylvania. The sample members were fairly homogeneous in regard to age, childhood residence, and race (virtually all were white). The extent to which the findings are applicable to other age cohorts or other populations is unclear. Moreover, less than half of the original panel members participated in the most recent study. Some had died in the intervening 45 years, others were not located or failed to return their survey forms. The effects of this sample attrition on the current analysis is likewise unknown. However, the availability of information on those panel members who remain provides an unusual opportunity to examine the continuity of leisure activities from adolescence to middle age of a substantial number of individuals.

Adolescent leisure involvements had been assessed in 1947 by asking subjects to indicate whether they participated in each of 74 activities. From this list, items were selected that provided indicators of involvement in four types of activities (Table 1): (1) socializing activities, taken as those that emphasized peer group recreation in which visiting and being together were paramount; (2) creative or artistic activities, including singing, playing an instrument, painting, creative writing, sewing or knitting, and public speaking; (3) intellectual activities, such as reading stories, studying history, sci-

Leisure Activity Type	Items	Chronbach's Alpha
Socializing activities	Go to dances	.69
	Go to parties	
	Go to church socials	
	Go riding with others	
	Belong to a gang	
	Go to parks	
	Belong to a club	
	Go to movies	
Creative/artistic activities	Draw or paint	.63
	Sing	
	Play a piano	
	Keep a diary	
	Write poem	
	Speak pieces	
	Play an instrument	
	Sew or knit	
Intellectual activities	Read stories	.73
	Work problems	
	Study history	
	Study science	
	Study literature	
Sports activities	Play tennis	.67
	Play baseball	
	Play pingpong	
	Engage in sports	
	Ride a bicycle	
	Skate	
	Climb or hike	
Participation in formal organizations	Total number of school and- community memberships	-

TABLE 1 Adolescent Leisure Indices

ence, or literature, and working problems; and (4) sports activities, which focused on athletics and physically active sports. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each grouping to assess the reliability of the derived scales. The following coefficients were obtained: socializing activity, alpha = .69; creative/artistic activities, alpha = .63; intellectual activities, alpha = .73; and sports activities, alpha = .67. The extent of participation in each type of activity was indexed by counting the number of items in which the individual indicated current participation. In addition, respondents were asked to list the school clubs and community organizations to which they belonged. The number of reported memberships was used as a measure of involvement in formal organizations.

In 1992, subjects were asked to indicate how often they participated in each of the following activities:

(1) Socializing with friends or relatives

(2) Participating in creative or artistic efforts such as painting, writing, playing an instrument, or the like

(3) Reading or studying

(4) Participating in sports such as golf, swimming, jogging, tennis, and the like

(5) Participating in fraternal or community organizations.

For each type of activity, the response categories of "frequently", "sometimes", "rarely", and "never", were scored from 4 to 1 respectively. These were the same items used to measure of leisure participation in the 1984 survey. Although these response categories did not provide data on the actual number of hours per week for each activity, they did indicate the relative extent to which subjects perceived themselves participating in the various pastimes.

Consistent with our previous report (Scott & Willits, 1989), gender, health, education, and income were included as control variables. All of these measures were derived from the 1992 data set. Health rating was measured by the subjects' self reports of their health status as very good (5), good (4), fair (3), poor (2), or very poor (1). Total family income was indexed in terms of 8 categories from 1 (low) to 8 (high). Education was scored from 1 to 4 with: 1 = less than high school graduate, 2 = high school graduate, no further formal schooling, 3 = some college, but not a 4-year college graduate, and <math>4 = 4-year college graduate or more. Gender was dummy coded, with 1 = men, 0 = women.

Correlation-regression analysis was used to test the significance of the relationships of involvement in each of the types of leisure in 1947 to the respondents' participation in the corresponding activity in 1992. To assess the differences, if any, between men and women in regard to these relationships, the statistical interactions of gender and adolescent participation were tested for significance. This was done by calculating the product of the relevant variables and introducing these multiplicative terms into the regression equations. A test of the significance of the regression coefficient for the interaction term, partialled for the main effect of its component variables, assessed the statistical significance of the interaction (Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

Results

For all five types of activities, the relationships of adolescent to adult participation were positive and statistically significant (Table 2). This was true in the bivariate analyses and when the effects of gender, health rating, education, education, and income were controlled. Not only was adolescent participation a significant predictor of adult involvement, but the strength

TABLE 2

Adult Leisure Activity Type	Independent Variables						
	Adolescent Participation	Gender	Health Rating	Education	Household Income	Constant	Mulitple R
Socializing							
Bivariate r	.138***	132***	.092***	.021	.000		
b-value	.029***	127**	.061**	.015	.000	2.97	.191***
β	.103	110	.081	.023	001		
Creative/artistic							
Bivariate r	.237***	179***	.021	.160***	.015		
b-value	.088***	244***	016	.193***	.003	1.13	.295***
β	.166	121	013	.165	.006		
Intellectual							
Bivariate r	.114***	169***	.078 **	.148***	002		
b-value	.036*	260***	.056*	.142***	010	2.49	.259***
β	.069	177	.059	.165	025		
Sports							
Bivariate r	.175***	.151***	.126***	.212***	.208***		
b-value	.074***	.220***	.107 **	.171***	.072***	0.67	.319***
β	.128	.103	.077	.138	.119		
Formal organizations							
Bivariate r	.108***	.049	.099***	.136***	.033		
b-value	.044**	.099	.112**	.123***	015	1.38	.184***
β	.088	.049	.086	.105	026		

Multiple Regression Analysis for the Relationships of Adult Participation in Different Types of Leisure Activities to Adolescent Participation in Similar Activities, Gender, Adult Heath Rating, Education, and Household Income

p < .05; p < .01; p < .01; p < .001

of the bivariate and net associations rivaled those for the control variables in every case. Education was somewhat more closely related to adult involvement in intellectual activities, sports and formal organizations and the net effect of gender on socialization participation was slightly stronger than was true for adolescent involvement. Overall, however, youthful participation compared favorably with the often used factors of gender, health rating, education, and income in predicting the frequency of adult leisure involvement in these areas.

To explore whether adolescent pastimes were more likely to explain the adult leisure choices of men or women, all two-way interactions involving each of the adolescent measures and gender were assessed. Only one, that involving the gender by adolescent involvement in socializing activities, was found to be statistically significant (p = .001). This interaction is shown in Table 3. For the males, there was no evidence that adolescent involvement in socializing was related to the frequency of socializing with friends and relatives during the later middle years. However, for females, this relationship was positive and statistically significant.

TABLE 3

Socializing Activities to Adolescent Participation in Similar Activities, Adult Health Rating, Education, and Household Income, for Males and Females								
Independent Variables								
Gender and Adult	Adolescent	Health	Household	Multiple				

Education

.085*

.053

.079

.005

-.018

-.026

Income

.025

.001

.002

.032

.001

.002

Constant

3.13

2.93

R

.092

.216 ***

Rating

.039

.019

.025

.136***

.092***

.126

Participation

.032

.006

.024

.176***

.049***

.168

Multiple Regression Analysis for the Relationship of Adult Participation in

*p < .05; ***p < .001

Leisure Activity Type

b-value

b-value

ß

FEMALES Socializing Bivariate r

β

MALES Socializing Bivariate r

Discussion

Using data from a long-term panel study of a cohort of persons from rural Pennsylvania, this research note supports and extends findings reported previously (Scott & Willits, 1989). This earlier analysis found that the leisure activities these people engaged in as high school sophomores were predictive of their participation in similar activities when they were in their early fifties. The present analysis found that adolescent leisure involvement was also associated with what these same people did in their early sixties. Moreover, youthful participation rivalled gender, health rating, education, and income as a predictor of leisure involvement at both points in these adults' lives. Together, these findings indicate that youthful leisure involvement continued to have an impact on the leisure participation of these people through the later middle years. Additional studies will reveal whether or not it continues to impact at still later stages of life.

One major difference between the findings reported here and those derived using the 1984 data (Scott & Willits, 1989) pertains to the interactive effects of gender and adolescent leisure participation. In the earlier analysis, the relationship of adolescent participation to adult participation in creative/artistic activities and sport activities differed for males and females. These two interactions were not statistically significant in the 1992 data, although one other interaction was significant. Adolescent participation in social activities was positively related to the frequency of socializing activities for women in their sixties, but not for men. The failure to find consistencies in significant interactions across the two studies raises some question about whether they should be treated as anything other than random occurrences.

On the other hand, these data may reflect a slackening of various roles acquired during middle adulthood. Some researchers (e.g., Gutmann, 1964) have theorized that beginning in middle life many women begin to feel less guilty about pursuing activities that are personally meaningful. Women who no longer have children at home may feel more free to express themselves in the context of leisure (Henderson, et al., 1996).

Future research needs to continue exploring the possibility that not only gender but other factors may alter the strength of the influences youthful experiences have on adult leisure choices. Preliminary analysis of the data revealed that the relationship between adolescent and adult leisure participation, at the time of this assessment, did not vary across the other control variables included in this study (health, level of education, and household income). However, it seems likely that as the subjects continue to age, health concerns may moderate the relationship between adolescent and adult leisure involvement. Other life course events, such as the illness or death of a spouse or other family member, remarriage, even changing residence may alter the nature of leisure involvement and the continuity or discontinuity with earlier patterns (Brim, 1980; Elder, 1986; Patterson & Carpenter, 1994).

While not a stated objective of this study, it was interesting to note that the effects of health, education, and income on adult leisure participation remained relatively constant over time. Health was significantly related to frequency of socializing, sports participation, and involvement in formal organizations in both 1984 and 1992. [It could also be that participation in leisure activities had beneficial consequences for health (Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993).] Income was a relatively poor predictor of participation at both points in time, while education was a fairly strong predictor across time for all forms of adult participation except socializing. The continuing effects of education on adult leisure time is consistent with a recent study reported by Freysinger & Ray (1994).

The finding that youthful recreational pastimes were reflected in the leisure choices of adults and that these linkages were evidenced at least into the later middle years of life is consistent with the views of theorists who suggest that individuals are likely to seek internal and external continuity in their lives (Atchley, 1989). Consistency lends a coherence to life that is believed to be both satisfying to the individual and facilitative of day-to-day action. As such, continuity choices are seen as adaptive strategies that allow the person to adjust to changing physical, psychological and social circumstances, including those associated with aging. Thus, for example, continuity in leisure participation can come to be linked with the individual's self concept and contribute to a sense of competency and positive self esteem (Atchley, 1989). Continuing relationships with significant others may be reinforced through the sharing of leisure activities. Moreover, participation in leisure activities in later life can contribute to life satisfaction, well-being, and offset some of the negative physical and mental changes of aging (Cutler Riddick, 1993). Thus, it is perhaps understandable that older persons tend to evidence "a great deal of continuity over time in skills, activities, environments,

roles, and relationships" (Atchley, 1989, p. 188). The current research report suggests that the roots of this continuity may date back to childhood.

Although adult leisure behavior is shaped by many factors, the results of this and our previous study (Scott & Willits, 1989) affirm the salience of adolescent leisure involvement and education in shaping leisure participation in later life. These findings, though based only on extent or frequency of participation, should have implications for parents, leisure service practitioners, and educators. Specifically, since the activities and skills children and adolescents learn and practice may continue to be carried over into late adulthood, it is important to ask questions about the quality of leisure opportunities that we provide young people. First, we must make value judgements about the worthiness of some activities over others. Television watching is one activity worth evaluating. Excessive television watching during childhood and adolescence may displace time spent participating in more beneficial activities, including reading, creative and artistic activities, and imaginative play (Neuman, 1988). Given the predominance of television watching in children's lives, we must determine whether television watching undermines participation in other, more beneficial activities in later life. Second, not having access to low cost park and recreation services at an early age may inhibit the development of leisure skills that can be carried over into adulthood. Without further research, however, these ideas are merely speculative. Additional research, using other populations and incorporating longitudinal designs, will broaden our understanding of how experiences acquired during childhood and adolescents influence participation in leisure activities later in life.

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