# Boredom, Stress and Social Control in the Daily Activities of Adolescents

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This paper examines the experiences of boredom, time stress and lack of choice (lack of control) in the daily lives of adolescents, and especially in their free time activities. Both quantitative and qualitative data are used from a survey ($n = 73$) and interview ($n = 20$) study of grade 10 students from Ontario, Canada. The findings indicate that while free time activities were common everyday occurrences, many of the students (especially females) reported high levels of time stress, which affected out-of-school as well as in-school situations. A large number of students also reported a considerable amount of boredom in their daily activities. Boredom related not only to lack of options, but also to participation in adult-structured activities. In addition, some students (especially females) reported that at times they participated in leisure activities to please others rather than to please themselves. These findings are discussed in terms of social control theory, with particular attention to the degree to which adolescent free time is controlled or structured by the dominant adult culture. The analysis leads to the suggestions that social control mechanisms do affect the free time activities of adolescents, and that these mechanisms have a stronger influence on the lives of female compared to male adolescents.

KEYWORDS: *adolescence, boredom, stress, social control*

## Introduction

Research on adolescent leisure has for the most part utilized an individual psychological perspective. Thus attention has been given to meanings and experiential aspects of leisure (Csikszentmihayli & Larson, 1984; Kleiber, Caldwell, & Shaw, 1993; Mobily, 1989), as well as to individual choice, participation, boredom, and constraints (Ellis & Rademacher, 1987; Garton & Pratt, 1987; Hultsman, 1993; Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1987). Another focus has been on the personal benefits derived from leisure participation, such as identity development (Kleiber & Rickards, 1985; Kleiber, 1991) and improved physical and mental health (Caldwell, Smith, & Weissinger, 1992; Winefield, Tiggemann, & Winefield, 1992). Relatively little attention has been paid to societal factors or to structural aspects of free time such as social control.

Largely separate from the leisure literature, research in the area of criminology and delinquency has included discussions of adolescent free time use from a social control perspective. Specifically, one long-standing belief is that participation in organized recreation activities by adolescents has positive benefits for society since it reduces the amount of time available for delinquent or anti-social acts (Hirschi, 1969). Recent interest in "at-risk" youth has led to research which has further investigated this relationship between leisure participation and delinquent behavior (Robertson, 1993). Researchers have also suggested that involvement in paid work activities means not only reduced free time for adolescents, but also participation in a conventional "adult" activity (Tanner & Krahn, 1991). Thus paid work, as well as organized recreation, is thought to be beneficial in terms of controlling and reducing adolescent delinquent behaviors.

Traditional social control theory tends to ignore the issue of leisure itself and how free time (or other) activities are actually experienced by adolescents. An off-shoot of control theory is the idea that delinquency is related to the general exclusion of adolescents from the adult world (Greenberg, 1977). This line of thinking suggests that adolescent time use is structured by the dominant adult culture and that adolescent experiences and behaviors can be seen as a response to, reaction to, or in some cases alienation from, these adult structures. Thus, this perspective allows for the incorporation of experiential information about how free time activities are actually perceived by individuals within a broader sociological perspective including ideas related to social structure and social control.

This paper examines perceptions of time stress, boredom and lack of control or lack of choice over daily life activities, with particular reference to free time activities. The purpose of focusing on these aspects of adolescent free time is to provide some insights into the ways in which adolescent daily lives are structured by the dominant adult culture, and to determine the extent to which adolescent activity might be seen as a response to, or a reaction to, such structuring.

Adolescent stress has been a concern to researchers because it has been shown to have a number of negative consequences, such as poor school performance and low self esteem (Young, Rathge, Mullis, & Mullis, 1990). The relationship between stress and free time activities is most clearly evident with respect to perceived time stress (or the feeling of having too many things to do and not enough time to do them all) because this situation clearly reduces opportunities for leisure. The feeling of being "rushed" or "busy" may be due to high time demands on a day to day basis, or it may be a response to high, but intermittent and occasional time demands, or it may be associated with a lack of control over what activities are required. Given that time stress and work stress seem to be increasing in adult society, especially for women (Schor, 1991; Shaw, 1990; Zuzanek & Smale, 1994), and that stress-related diseases are also on the increase, time stress among adolescents may reflect these dominant cultural patterns. For adolescents, time stress may be due to demands associated with school and school work (McGuire & Mitic, 1987; Jones, 1993), as well as with the demands of paid

work and expectations from parents about contributions to household chores (Blair, 1992a). In addition, participation in recreational and home-based or family activities may reduce the time available for other types of free time activities. This constellation of time demands on adolescents, some of which are adult imposed, can be seen as one type of social control over adolescent time use.

The experience of boredom is often thought of as the opposite of time stress in that it represents too much "time on one's hands" and too few activities to occupy that time. Psychologists have conceptualized boredom as a state of understimulation, underarousal, lack of momentum, or a lack of psychological involvement associated with dissatisfaction in the task situation (Brissett & Snow, 1993; Larson & Richards, 1991; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993). Research evidence shows that adolescents report high levels of bore-dom, especially in school, but also in out-of-school and leisure situations (Caldwell, Smith, & Weissinger, 1992; Csikszentmihayli & Larson, 1984; Lar-son & Richards, 1991). Further, boredom has been shown to be related to detrimental behaviors such as delinquency, extreme sensation seeking and alcohol and drug abuse (Caldwell & Smith, 1995).

From a social control perspective it is excess free time, or unobligated time, that is thought to provide the opportunity for delinquent behavior, while evidence that delinquent acts are often fun and enjoyable also suggests reasons why boredom may be associated with delinquency (Willier & Aguilar, 1991; Robertson & Carpenter, 1996). Nevertheless, boredom may also be related to broader social structures and to the exclusion of adolescents from the adult world. Brissett and Snow (1993) have suggested that certain fea-tures of contemporary society facilitate the experience and communication of boredom, while Larson and Richards (1991) and others have shown that boredom in adolescence is associated not only with individual dispositions, but also with organizational structures in schools (Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White, 1988). Moreover, it has also been argued that expressions of bore-dom may be evidence of resistance to adult and school authority (Caldwell & Smith, 1995), and this may particularly be the case among working class adolescents resisting socialization into the dominant class ideology (Giroux, 1983). Thus boredom, too, at least for some adolescents, may result from an alienation from, or a rejection of, adult or adult-sanctioned free time activ-ities.

Linking both time stress and boredom is the question of choice or con-trol over activities. Social control of free time activities may be reflected in the extent to which adolescents perceive these activities to be freely chosen or controlled by others. While most school activities and paid work activities are clearly structured and determined by adults, it is possible that "free time" activities (i.e., non-school, non-work activities) may have elements of obli-gation or control as well. Research by Csikszentmihayli and Larson (1984), for example, has shown that adolescents do not necessarily feel a high sense of control when involved in activities with their friends. Further, adolescents may be under pressure from others to participate or not to participate in certain activities (Hultsman, 1993). This kind of pressure may well come

from adults (notably parents or teachers) although it may also come from other adolescents (i.e., friends or peers) as well (Farrell et al., 1988).

The extent and influence of time stress, boredom and choice or control in free time activities may well be different for male and female adolescents. This expectation of a gender effect is consistent with research that has looked at the social control mechanisms affecting women's leisure behavior (Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1990). It is also consistent with previous research on gender differences among adolescents showing females to experience higher levers of academic stress (Jones, 1993), and higher participation in household chores (Blair, 1992b), while males typically report higher levels of boredom (Sundberg, Latkin, Farmer, & Saoud, 1991). Accordingly, this study incorporated the notion of gender and explored possible gender differences.

The following research questions were addressed. First, to what extent do adolescents experience stress, boredom and control (lack of choice) during their free time and in school? Second, do these experiences vary by gender? Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to answer these questions, and the findings were interpreted using social control theory as an underlying framework.

## Method

The data for this paper came from a survey and interview study of high school students from Ontario, Canada. The study was originally designed to look at the role of leisure in the identity development of adolescents (see Shaw, Kleiber, & Caldwell, 1995). However, the inclusion of survey questions about time stress, choice and boredom, and the discussion in the interviews of both stress and boredom, allowed for further analysis of the same data set focusing on social control aspects of adolescents' lives.

### Sample Selection and Procedures

The study was conducted in a medium-sized high school in a primarily working class town in southwestern Ontario. The survey part of the study was conducted first, and involved a time use survey with students enrolled in Grade 10 English classes. Since English is a compulsory subject, this sample selection procedure was chosen to ensure a representative sample of grade 10 students. The school worked on a semester system under which only half the students (randomly assigned) were enrolled in English classes at any one time. With the permission of the English teachers and the head of department, research assistants visited each English class running at the time of the survey. This included three advanced level (academic) classes and one general level class. The research assistants distributed the questionnaires to all students present, explained the procedures and purpose of the study, waited while the surveys were completed and then collected them back in.

None of the students (nor the parents of the students) refused to participate, and on the date when the survey data were collected all students present filled out the survey instrument. This resulted in a sample size of 74.

A number of students were absent from the school on the data collection day, and thus were excluded from the study. In addition, one questionnaire was unreadable, so this was also excluded from the analyses. The final survey sample of 73 included 38 male students and 35 female students, aged 15 through 16 years.

At the end of the survey instrument there was a separate card for students to fill out if they were willing to participate in a later interview. Twenty students (12 females and 8 males) filled out the card and individual interviews were arranged with each of these. The interviews were conducted at school (during recess, lunch break or free periods) as soon as possible after the surveys had been completed. All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed for analysis purposes. Identification numbers were used so that the interview transcripts could be linked to the individual student's survey questionnaire for analysis purposes.

### The Survey

The survey instrument included questions on the students' time use patterns. Students were asked to provide time estimates (i.e., hours and minutes per day) of the time they spent on different pre-determined categories of obligatory and non-obligatory activities. The obligatory activities listed were time spent at school, doing school work after school, home chores, and paid work (employment). The non-obligatory, or leisure, activity categories were sports and other physical activities, watching television, spending time with friends, and other free time activities. Students reported time estimates for each category of activity for "yesterday," "a typical weekday" and "a typical weekend day."

The survey also measured various attitudes toward time, work and leisure, including two 5-point Likert-type questions on time stress ("I often feel I don't have enough time to do all the things I have to do" and "Much of the time I feel rushed"), one question on excess time or boredom ("Time often lies heavy on my hands") and two questions relating to the degree of choice or lack of choice in everyday activities ("Much of the day I can choose the way in which I carry out my tasks" and "I have to do what other people want a lot of the time"). For each of these questions students were asked to respond twice; first, thinking about situations at school; and second, thinking about situations outside school. These attitude questions were originally developed for use in a study of leisure and flow experiences in the lives of English high school students (Haworth, 1993).

### The Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured in nature and lasted approximately one hour. An interview guide was used which included a list of questions with prompts (probing questions) designed to facilitate discussion and to elicit detailed information. The first part of each interview focused on the

kinds of activities, especially free time activities, that the student participated in. The questions and categories from the time use survey were used as a framework for this discussion. At a later point in the interviews, students were asked about their feelings and experiences with regard to time stress, boredom and choice in their daily activities. For example, the list of questions in the interview guide included: "How often do you feel rushed or stressed?" and "Are there particular situations that make you feel rushed or stressed?"; "How about having too much time on your hands? How often do you feel bored (in school and not in school)?"; "Do you sometimes take part in leisure activities that you don't really want to do? If so, what kinds of activities?" Prompts were used to ensure that discussion included experiences of school and work situations as well as leisure situations.

*The Analysis*

The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The extent to which time stress, boredom and lack of control were experienced was assessed by looking at the percentage of students who agreed with the relevant Likert items ("strongly agreed" or "agreed") compared to those who were neutral or disagreed. Because these questions were not originally designed or used as scale items, analysis was done with each item separately. Gender differences in responses to these questions for both in-school and out-of-school situations were analyzed using the chi-square statistic. In addition, intercorrelations between these items were calculated for both females and males.

The qualitative data were used to further describe and explore the initial concepts of stress, boredom and control. First, all the interview data were sorted according to these three themes. Commonalities within themes were explored, and interview transcripts were compared to each individual's survey responses. Further analysis was then conducted to seek other emerging concepts that might help to explain the three themes of stress, boredom or control, to look at the relationships between these themes, and to determine if there were other relevant factors or themes evident in the data. These analyses were conducted using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), for example, comparing individual responses with theme-related categories, and comparing initial concepts with emerging themes. Particular attention was paid to possible gender-related effects.

## Findings and Discussion

As reported elsewhere (see Shaw et al., 1995) the students in this study spent approximately half of their waking time in obligatory activities and the other half of their time in "non-obligatory" or free time activities. Overall, the female students spent more time in obligatory activities than did the male students ($F = 6.57$, $n = 73$, $p < .05$), including more time at school, doing school work at home and doing home chores. The male students, on

the other hand, spent more time in paid work activities ($F = 6.40$, $n = 73$, $p < .05$).

The most common category of non-obligatory activity for both males and females was social activities with friends, including "hanging out" and talking on the phone as well as parties (Shaw et al., 1995). Television was the second most frequent free time activity, while sports and physical activities (including informal casual participation as well as organized sports activities) ranked third. Other free time activities included listening to music, participating in music activities (e.g., choir or band), and playing various games such as video or board games.

*Time Stress*

Despite the extensive participation in free time activities, the survey data indicated that approximately half of the students reported that they often felt rushed or did not have enough time to do all the things they had to do while at school (48.6% rushed and 58.0% not enough time, $n = 73$) (see Table 1). As expected, reported time stress was lower out of school, although nearly half the students (49.3%, $n = 73$) reported not having enough time out of school and approximately one quarter (25.8%, $n = 73$) reported feeling rushed much of the time out of school. Time stress, then, was not something experienced only at school for these adolescents.

Although there was little gender difference in terms of at-school stress, the female students tended to experience more time stress than the male students out of school. The gender difference was significant for the question about feeling rushed in out of school situations ($X^2 = 3.9$, $df = 2$, $n = 73$, $p < .05$). This finding is consistent with the previously reported time use data showing that the females spent more time than the males in obligatory activities.

The interview data supported the survey findings that the young men were less likely than the young women to experience time stress in their day-to-day lives. Five of the 7 male students interviewed said that there was not much time stress or feeling of being rushed in their lives. This was despite the fact that most of them had part-time paid jobs. Typical responses included:

> I'm not rushed. After school I work and then go home, play with my guitar, listen to music, go out with my friends, go to bed, whatever. So I think it's good for me (#09).

> I just go with the flow, you know. I don't schedule or anything like that. I just do what I do (#60).

One of the male students reported feeling rushed at times and this was associated with deadlines for school projects, assignments and tests:

> . . . if there is a project or something I usually leave it until the last minutes and that's when I start getting rushed . . . like when I have a project or something they'll give me say two weeks to do it and I'll always leave it to the last

TABLE 1
*Time Stress, Boredom and Lack of Control in In-School and Out-of-School Situations for Females and Males*

| | Percentage in agreement | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Females (n = 35) | Males (n = 38) | Total (n = 73) | $X^2$ |
| **In-school** | | | | |
| Time stress | | | | |
| I often feel I don't have enough time to do all the things I have to do | 59.4 | 56.8 | 58.0 | .04 |
| Much of the time I feel rushed | 44.1 | 52.6 | 48.6 | .50 |
| Boredom | | | | |
| Time often lies heavy on my hands | 24.2 | 38.9 | 31.9 | .30 |
| Lack of control | | | | |
| Much of the day I can choose the way in which I carry out my tasks (reverse scored, i.e., % in disagreement) | 45.5 | 43.2 | 44.3 | .03 |
| I have to do what others want a lot of the time | 45.5 | 63.2 | 54.9 | 3.1* |
| **Out-of-school** | | | | |
| Time stress | | | | |
| I often feel I don't have enough time to do all the things I have to do | 55.9 | 42.9 | 49.3 | 1.7 |
| Much of the time I feel rushed | 34.4 | 17.6 | 25.8 | 3.9* |
| Boredom | | | | |
| Time often lies heavy on my hands | 20.6 | 38.9 | 30.0 | 1.67 |
| Lack of control | | | | |
| Much of the day I can choose the way in which I carry out my tasks (reverse scored, i.e., % in disagreement) | 28.6 | 14.3 | 21.4 | 3.5* |
| I have to do what others want a lot of the time | 42.9 | 29.4 | 36.2 | 1.7 |

*$p < .05$

day and I'll have my parents, my mother will be going to the library to get me books and I'll be up way late to get all my stuff done and I get really stressed out then (#52).

Only one of the male students reported frequent time stress. He was heavily involved with soccer and wanted to be a professional soccer player. He was also the only male student who talked about doing chores at home and helping out his mother,

. . . for example, I usually have soccer every day after school and after that I have to get all my homework done and usually my mom wants me to do something else for her. That kind of ties in together and I have to figure out a certain limit that I'm going to put in my homework and then sometimes I go overboard with that limit and I feel that I don't have as much time. For example, my mom . . . I don't have as much time for her any more than from what I think I should, and I think that's kind of stressful for me (#15).

By contrast, less than half of the young women interviewed reported little or no time stress. For some of those who did report some stress this, again, was associated with school work and school assignments, and also, for many of the female students, with home chores as well. As one student said, when asked if there were particular situations that made her feel rushed or stressed,

. . . when I save my homework for the last minute and I have to hurry and get it done. . (Do you feel stressed when you have too many things to do?) . . . like . . . somedays I have a lot of chores to do and I have a hard time doing them before I go to school and stuff, so it's hard (#06).

Apart from those students who reported time stress on certain occasions or certain days, 4 of the 12 female students interviewed also talked about experiencing high levels of time stress. What was evident from the interviews with these four female adolescents was that school and (for some) paid work caused some time stress, but it was also related to participation in a number of organized or scheduled activities as well and to expectations from parents about helping out with home chores including baby sitting younger siblings. For example,

(How often during the week do you feel rushed or stressed?) Probably during the whole week because I have to work during the whole week and I go to army cadets and I have gymnastics and to babysit and do my homework . . . Sometimes I feel like I am going to have a nervous breakdown but I don't. That's about it. I try not to have too many things to do (#34).

My parents come in late. And then once they come in it's so hectic . . . it's rush, rush, rush, do this, do that, do this, do that, go here, go there, and you can't get anything done (#39).

. . . generally I feel a bit rushed. I never have too much time on my hands. I always have something to do. I don't know, that's it . . . When I have to be at school at 7:30 in the morning for band and things like that. I have to get up really early and I . . . after a few mornings of that you start to get pretty tired

and things like that . . . when a project is due the next day and . . . finishing something the night before it's due . . . Homework. Practice the piano. I have a horse and I feel obligated to go and see him, four or five times a week (#51).

Thus, while not all students reported time stress, when this kind of stress was experienced it was more likely to occur among female than male students. Moreover, time stress seemed to be related to the demands of adult structured activities and especially expectations from teachers about school work and from parents about contributions to household tasks. This expectation for participation in home chores, consistent with earlier research (e.g., Blair, 1992b), seemed to be considerably higher for the female than for the male students. Paid work and structured or organized recreational activities (such as choir or band practices or gymnastics and various sports activities) also played a role in increasing and maintaining time stress for some students. The impression gained from the interviews with the highly stressed students was that they felt little sense of control over many of their daily activities, but rather were responding to the demands of adults or of their regular structured activities. One student, who seemed to have gained some control over her time use and reduced her level of time stress, had done this by giving up playing basketball (which she called her favorite leisure time activity). As she said:

There's never enough time. Well, lately . . . That was before I guess. Now, timewise I've been pretty good . . . I work during the week, so that's . . . time's kind of, well I still have time for work, homework and stuff. So it is alright I guess. Before I used to play basketball so time was like, I was always rushed. It is alright I guess now (#27).

### Boredom

About thirty percent of the students surveyed agreed with the statement "time often lies heavy on my hands," which was used as an indication of boredom. The numbers who reported boredom in school (31.9%, $n = 73$) were very similar to the numbers who reported boredom out of school (30.0%, $n = 73$) (see Table 2). There was a tendency for the male students to report boredom more often than the female students, both in school and out of school, although these gender differences were not found to be statistically significant. Consistent with earlier research (Larson & Richards, 1991), those students who reported boredom in school were also more likely to report boredom out of school ($r = .46$, $n = 73$, $p < .05$). This relationship was statistically significant for the males ($r = .55$, $n = 38$, $p < .05$), but not for the females ($r = .31$, $n = 35$, n.s.).

The interviews provided further insight into the meaning and experience of boredom in the lives of these students. While 6 of the 19 students interviewed said they did not experience boredom much at all (4 males and 2 females), most of the students (the remaining 14) reported at least some instances of boredom both in school and out of school.

## TABLE 2
### Intercorrelations between Time Stress, Boredom and Lack of Control for Females and Males

| Subscale | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Females ($n = 35$) | | | |
| 1. I often feel I don't have enough time to do all the things I have to do | .66* | .13 | .14 | .43* |
| 2. Much of the time I feel rushed | — | .14 | .26 | .23 |
| 3. Time often lies heavy on my hands | | — | .16 | .17 |
| 4. Much of the day I can choose the way in which I carry out my tasks (reverse scored) | | | — | .29 |
| 5. I have to do what others want a lot of the time | | | | — |
| | Males ($n = 38$) | | | |
| 1. I often feel I don't have enough time to do all the things I have to do | .24 | .41* | .18 | .43* |
| 2. Much of the time I feel rushed | — | .59* | .61* | .24 |
| 3. Time often lies heavy on my hands | | — | .30 | .31 |
| 4. Much of the day I can choose the way in which I carry out my tasks (reverse scored) | | | — | .32 |
| 5. I have to do what others want a lot of the time | | | | — |

*$p < .05$

In school, boredom was associated with certain classes. History was mentioned most often as "boring," while English and Math were also frequently mentioned. Reasons for finding certain classes boring seemed to be partly related to teaching style and partly to content—especially when the content seemed, from the point of view of the students, to be unrelated to their lives.

Apart from a certain degree of alienation from the content matter of some subjects, 2 students (1 male and 1 female) talked about boredom in relation to alienation or annoyance with the school or with certain teachers. For example, one male student said,

> . . . I only get bored when I get in arguments with teachers and I tend to slack off in that class and it gets boring. But if you do your work, time flies by, I think (#09).

And one female student, talking about her English teacher, said,

> It's very boring. He doesn't . . . he teaches everything, that's his job, but the way he does it is not fun and I'm not the only one that feels this way . . . And he always talks so there is nothing really to do. (So you don't feel as though you are participating?) Yeh, and when you do, you don't. He puts you down, so it would be like I'll answer a question and I mean I'm not very smart in English, and I'll say something and then he'll change my answer to make me look like a total idiot and that's why then I don't bother to participate (#27).

These last two examples may be instances of boredom as resistance to adult structures, or as alienation with adult control and authority. Rather than an active challenge or resistance to authority, though, they seem to be passive non-participation in adult-controlled activities, and the non-participation then leads to understimulation and to boredom.

In terms of boredom out of school, Sundays were mentioned most often as "boring," and this was associated with having nothing to do, no friends around and nowhere to go, or a lack of transportation to visit friends.

> Sundays there is nothing to do (#33, female).

> Usually Sundays. There's nothing to do on Sundays 'cause everything is closed and buses don't run or anything like that and so there is nothing to do (#34, female).

> The weekend mostly. Um, I get bored and if I don't have anything to do and, ah, that can, ah, I can get stressed from that 'cause I am really bored and I want to do something, go somewhere, and there is really nothing, nothing going on (#25, male).

Evenings during the week were also mentioned as times that could be boring, and the activities or situations most often perceived as boring were sitting at home and watching television. As one student said,

> . . I like to go out and do something, to get out of the house. I don't like sitting around, I like getting out. . . . I really have the need to get out, because if I stay home more than two hours, two or three hours just sitting there doing nothing watching TV, I can't do that, my eyes get hurt, start to hurt watching TV, so I go out, usually, so it's really important to me (#09, male).

There is not much direct evidence from these interviews that boredom is a rejection of adult control or adult authority in non-school settings. However, boredom does seem to be related to a rejection of being at home and of taking part in "adult" leisure activities such as watching television and spending time with adults (parents) and other family members. This suggests that few of the families of these adolescents were able to provide an "auto-telic family context" (Rathunde, 1988) that might facilitate optimal experiences for this age group. Those adolescents who reported less boredom, or were able to overcome boredom, seemed to accomplish this by "getting out of the house" and having somewhere else to go, or having friends to spend time with outside the home.

> I can always find something to do. I'm hardly ever at home, like I'm always out. But if I am at home, I can watch TV, talk on the phone so I never get bored (#60, male).

> I get bored sitting at home, too, so I like to get out and enjoy myself (#17, female).

> I'm not really bored. . . . Sometimes I feel bored if I am not outside. Like I can't just sit inside and watch TV, because I don't like watching TV. And talking on the phone really isn't that great (#13, male).

Interestingly, high levels of reported time stress did not mean a lack of boredom for many adolescents. Correlation analyses showed that, for the females, there was virtually no relationship between being busy (not having enough time) and boredom ($r = .13$, $n = 35$, n.s.) in out of school situations, nor between feeling rushed and boredom ($r = .14$, $n = 35$, n.s.) (see Table 2).

For the males there was a significant relationship between time stress and boredom, but this was a positive relationship (for feeling busy and boredom $r = .41$, $n = 38$, $p < .05$; for feeling rushed and boredom $r = .59$, $n = 38$, $p < .05$; see Table 2) rather than a negative one. In other words, those who reported time stress were also more likely to report frequent boredom as well. For example, one young man who reported both time stress and often feeling bored on the survey, talked during the interview about feeling rushed over school work and stressed over homework deadlines. However, when asked about boredom he also said,

> Yeh, like if I have nothing to do, like I am sitting at home and there's nothing to do, I phone up one of my friends and we go out and can't find nothing to do we usually just walk around. It gets really boring (#52).

Boredom and time stress, then, can exist side by side in the lives of some adolescents. Stress over school expectations and demands can switch rapidly to boredom at times when such demands do not exist and when there seems to be nothing positive to fill the void of sitting at home with nothing to do.

This finding is similar to Farrell et al.'s (1988) conclusion that school pressure and boredom could go hand in hand, and that students with low expectations of self-efficacy sometimes used attitudes of boredom as a way of dropping out of school mentally. It is also consistent with Mikulas and Vod-

anovich's (1993) contention that frustration over constraints is often correlated with boredom, and may be a primary cause of remaining bored. Thus it is possible that both boredom and stress are associated with situations controlled by others rather than with situations that are self-controlled. Moreover, this explanation is further supported by research indicating that loss of control over attention by adolescents is associated with participation in activities that are "other-controlled" (Larson & Kleiber, 1993).

*Lack of Choice or Control*

As is to be expected from earlier research (Csikszentmihayli & Larson, 1984), the lack of choice and the amount of perceived control by others was higher in school situations than in non-school situations. Over half of the students (54.9%, $n = 73$) felt that they had to do what others wanted a lot of the time in school, and 44.3% ($n = 73$) felt that much of the day they could not choose the way they carried out their tasks in school. While there was very little gender difference in terms of lack of choice in school situations, males were significantly more likely than females to report that they have to do what others want while at school. This may be because they were more likely to dislike the control by school authorities and/or because they were disciplined more frequently.

Focusing on the out of school situations, fewer of the adolescents reported lack of choice (21.4%, $n = 73$) or control by others (36.2%, $n = 73$). However, outside the school setting it tended to be the female rather than the male students who perceived less choice and more control by others (lack of choice, females = 28.6%, males = 14.2%, $X^2 = 3.5$, $df = 2$, $n = 73$, $p <$ .05; control by others, females = 42.9%, males = 29.4%, $X^2 = 1.7$, df = 2, $n = 73$, n.s.).

The interview data indicated that lack of choice in free time activities was often due to pressure from friends or from fitting in with friends' wishes. The kinds of situations in which the male adolescents experienced pressure from friends were most frequently related to sports and the kinds of sports activities that the group (usually a group of male friends) decided to do. For those male students who talked about these situations as ones in which they participated in activities that they did not really want to do, it did not seem to be a significant or difficult issue in their minds. Rather it seemed to reflect a fairly mutual give-and-take relationship among peers:

> . . . sometimes when my friends want to go out and play a sport that I don't like, like basketball, I like that, but not as much as hockey, but if everybody wants to play it, I'll play it too. It doesn't bother me. I'll do what the group's doing (#58).

> . . . like if my friend asks me to play hockey. I don't really like hockey, but I'll play. I don't care. I know he'll play baseball with me if he was around. So I'd just do it for him (#13).

For the female students, the kinds of activities they did because of pressure from friends were different and included going to parties, going shop-

ping and going downtown. The females, also, were generally more explicit about going along with certain activities in order not to hurt their friends' feelings, and were less likely to talk about it as a mutual exchange situation. This is consistent with Lever's (1978) research on children's games which showed that girls are more likely to emphasize and try to preserve the social relationships involved in games, while boys are more likely to try to preserve the game structure. Examples of this from the interviews with female students included:

> (What sort of things or activities do your friends do that you go along with but you are not so keen on?) Usually going downtown because there is nothing down there, and we always go down there and it is not very exciting. . . you just like smile and pretend you are having fun or something. I don't know.
>
> (And why do you do that?)
>
> I don't know, so they think you are having fun so you don't hurt their feelings or something. Because if you suggest that you are not having fun, then they will feel bad because you are not having fun and they suggested it and things like that (#33).
>
> Maybe going places with friends that I don't want to go to. Like "well, let's go to the mall", and I don't like going to the mall, but I just go anyway . . . Well, I'll go somewhere that I don't want to, like if my best friend wants to do something and I don't want to do it I'll say "Well, fine I'll go with you just to make you happy" (#31).

For the females, too, there were also a couple of instances where activities were done to please boyfriends. One was a case of going to watch hockey because her friend's boyfriend was playing:

> Well, ok, at the beginning of winter my friend wanted to go see a hockey game because her boyfriend was playing, and I didn't want to go because I didn't enjoy hockey that much, and after the first couple of times that we went I started to enjoy it (#73).

The other instance was one in which the boyfriend seemed to make the decision about what to do while the girlfriend acquiesced:

> Well, a lot of time I always try to please my boyfriend before I please myself. And he says that and tells me to stop it, but I still do. It's just a thing that he wants me to be happy and I want him to be happy and you can't always have that . . . when my boyfriend does other things with other friends I am sort of like "hum, what am I going to do?" so I call my friends up and then when they are not doing anything it's like "hum, now what?" so I watch TV . . . it depends on whenever he decides to do something . . . (Later in the same interview) . . . what I realized too was that I run my life around him and I shouldn't (#35).

In general, the female adolescents seemed to experience somewhat more pressure from friends to participate in activities which they did not really want to do (compared to the pressure experienced by the males). Apart from this peer pressure, though, the interviews also indicated that pressure could come from parents as well. Here the gender difference was even more evident, with the females being more likely than the males to talk

about instances of participating in free time activities in order to please parents or to satisfy parental demands. For example:

> . . . some days there will be like a weekend or something where they'll say we are going to have a family day, and even if I already had something planned then I have to do it because they are my family (#73, female).

> . . . if my parents want me to do something and I don't want to do it, and they'll say, "Well, I think you should do this," and I do it just so they'll be happy and they won't bug me any more (#31, female).

> Going out with them. When they want to go to the movies. I hate going to the movies with my parents. I don't like going, but I have to go because they think I am embarrassed to go with them, but it is not that. I just don't want to go with them, because you don't go to the movies with your parents when you are a teenager. You don't do that (#34, female).

Moreover, although there is pressure from friends and some degree of lack of choice because of that, the pressure from parents appeared to be qualitatively different. As one young woman said,

> I do things to please my parents because they will get mad at me if I don't, so I do it anyways, and I just get mad for it, and they know I'm mad but they make me do it anyways. With my friends if I don't want to do it I just tell them I don't want to do it (#34).

It seemed to be adult control or pressure over discretionary activities that is disliked more, or resented more, than peer pressure.

## Conclusion

The findings from this study need to be treated with some caution, both because of the difficulty of generalizing from this sample, and because of the use of single item measures of boredom, stress and control. Nevertheless, the findings do indicate that a considerable number of students in this study experienced time stress and boredom and, at times, a lack of choice, with regard to discretionary activities and non-school situations (as well as in-school settings). While overt control of adolescents' free time by adults was not evident, some of the boredom and stress experienced seemed to be related to adolescent responses to adult structures, including adult expectations (in the school, at home and in organized recreational activities) and adult or family free time activities (family activities, social interaction at home and watching television). Moreover, the fact that time stress and boredom were positively (at least for the males) rather than negatively associated suggests that these experiences were not simply a matter of too much to do or too little to do, but were associated in a more complex way with the social construction of adolescence and its relationship to the wider adult culture. Adolescents who experience high levels of both time stress and boredom may be particularly likely to resist or feel alienated from the dominant adult culture. The study also showed that some of the adolescents felt a degree of lack of choice in discretionary activities because of pressure from adults (in

this case parents) as well as friends, and that adult pressure is thought of more negatively than peer pressure.

While there was evidence of time stress, boredom and lack of choice among both female and male students, some gender differences did emerge. The females were more likely than the males to experience time stress, and this seemed to be related to more involvement in school work and in organized school activities, and to higher expectations from parents about participation in home chores. The females also reported less choice in their discretionary activities, with more evidence of pressure to participate in certain types of activities from parents, and, to some extent, from friends and boyfriends as well. These gender differences in stress and choice/control again can be seen to reflect the impact on adolescents of adult structures, including the structure of gender relations in the dominant adult culture.

Overall, the study provides evidence that social control mechanisms do affect the free time and leisure of at least some adolescents. The analysis of adolescent leisure simply in terms of activity participation, or even in terms of experiential aspects of leisure, then, is limited in that it is unlikely to recognize the influence of social control in the everyday lives of adolescents. This study also suggests that the social control mechanisms affecting adolescent leisure are gendered. The lives of the young adolescent women were shown to be particularly subject to social control restrictions both indirectly, through gender-related societal structures, and directly, through parents and friends. This is consistent with previous theoretical works, linking social control of women with their relative lack of power on both a macro societal level and on a micro interactional level (e.g., Hanmer & Maynard, 1989).

It should be noted that the study included adolescents from one high school only, located in a primarily working class Ontario town. Moreover, the sample for this study, and especially the interview sample, was relatively small. Further research is needed to determine whether these findings are generalizable to adolescents from different social class and cultural backgrounds.

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