Parents' Messages about the Role of Extracurricular and Unstructured Leisure Activities: Adolescents' Perceptions

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Parents are important sources of leisure learning, helping to develop their children's leisure values, attitudes, and behaviours. The purpose of this study was to understand the messages that adolescents perceive are communicated by their parents about the role of structured and unstructured leisure in their lives. Ten male and ten female Grade 12 students involved in various extracurricular school activities were interviewed. Adolescents received the following types of messages from parents: leisure plays an important restorative role, some leisure pursuits are more valuable than others, leisure is a means to various ends that can benefit individuals personally, and the role of leisure changes with one's stage of life. The findings suggest that parents and adolescents may focus on the functional aspects of leisure, particularly extracurricular activities, rather than viewing leisure including unstructured activities as an opportunity for pleasure and enjoyment.

KEYWORDS: *Adolescents, leisure, extracurricular activities, unstructured leisure, parents.*

Introduction

Various socialization theories point to the family as a key socializing agent and most influential during early childhood (Kiecolt & Acock, 1988). Throughout childhood and early adolescence, children usually rely on their mothers and fathers as well as other family members (i.e., siblings, grandparents) for guidance in many aspects of life (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000; Peterson & Hann, 1999) including leisure. Parents are one of the most significant socialization agents responsible for the leisure interests and values that their children develop (Barnett & Chick, 1986; Kelly, 1983; Kleiber, 1999). This influence that parents have during childhood continues to have an effect on an individual as an adult. For example, researchers have demonstrated that leisure interests developed at a young age are carried through into adulthood (Scott & Willits, 1989, 1998; Shannon, 2003; Sofranko & Nolan, 1972; Yoesting & Burkhead, 1973).

Although the parent-child relationship as it relates to leisure is important, the influence of parents on children's leisure behaviour has not been widely examined. Existing research has focused mainly on the influence of parents on interests and/or activities without addressing leisure values and attitudes. Therefore, little is known about how parents influence their chil-

dren's valuation of leisure, attitudes toward leisure, or understanding of the role that leisure plays in their lives. Furthering knowledge about these influences is important because values and attitudes motivate behaviour (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001) including leisure activity choices and behaviours (Ajzen & Driver, 1991; 1992).

Adolescents have considerable amounts of discretionary time with many opportunities to make leisure-related choices. A significant body of literature has been developed that identifies the leisure choices that adolescents make during their discretionary time (e.g., Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson & Kleiber, 1993) and the outcomes that are associated with participation in various activities (e.g., Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003). The choices and outcomes exist along a continuum of positive to negative. For example, Larson (2000) identified that leisure provided adolescents with opportunities for positive self-development. At the other end of the continuum, some youth choose to engage in criminal activity during their leisure time, which can have negative effects on the community as well as lead to an adolescent's early introduction to the justice system (Robertson, 1993). Other youth, however, make choices that are perceived or judged by many adults as negative even though the activities being chosen have the potential to produce positive outcomes (Kloep & Hendry, 2003). For example, a group of young people hanging out at the mall with friends is often perceived as a problem by shoppers and business owners. Using discretionary time in this manner does, however, provide opportunities for social interaction and a sense of belonging—both of which are considered to be positive outcomes of leisure.

Understanding the range of choices and outcomes that can result from and are accessible through adolescents' leisure participation has prompted researcher interest in what influences or motivates leisure time use and leisure choices during adolescence (e.g., Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Fredricks, Alfeld-Liro, Hruda, Eccles, Patrick, & Ryan, 2002; Hutchinson, Baldwin, & Caldwell, 2003). During adolescence, peers begin to exert more influence on leisure time use and choices (Fredricks et al.; Kleiber, 1999), but parents are still significant in guiding and directing adolescent time use. Important research on parenting styles and parental disciplinary practices has provided insight into the manner in which parents influence adolescent behavior (e.g., Collins et al., 2000; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Hutchinson et al.) including the ways in which parents act and communicate with their adolescents and the effect that may result. This line of research, however, has not addressed *what* parents communicate or rather, *how* adolescents perceive the messages parents communicate. Furthering the research on parental influences is important in continuing the development of knowledge related to how parents can guide and support their children's positive and healthy leisure functioning.

This study was part of a larger research project investigating the process by which parents and peers influence adolescent leisure values, attitudes, and behaviors. The purpose of this component of the research was to focus on parents as one factor that influences how adolescents perceive the role of

leisure in their lives. Because the voices or perspectives of parents have tended to dominate the understanding of parent-child leisure interaction (Freysinger, 1997), the goal was to gain and describe adolescent perspectives on what parents communicate about extracurricular and unstructured leisure participation and how this informed adolescent understanding of leisure's role in one's life.

Literature Review

Adolescent Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Researchers within leisure studies, sociology, psychology, and education have investigated the effect that participation in extracurricular activities has on different aspects of a young person's life. Participation in extracurricular activities is generally viewed as beneficial (Bartko & Eccles, 1998; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Jessor, Turbin, & Costa, 1998; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000) although the potential for negative experiences and outcomes does exist (Carr, Kennedy, Dimick, 1990; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson & Seepersad, 2003). The understanding that extracurricular activities are connected to positive, developmental outcomes has encouraged researchers to investigate factors that motivate adolescents' participation. Fredricks et al. (2002) interviewed 41 adolescents to understand what influenced their involvement in athletics or the arts. The researchers identified that a combination of psychological, contextual, and identity factors affected participation. Some adolescents participated because they enjoyed the activity, they were good at the particular activity, and/or because their friends were involved. They also considered the context of the activity, such as whether there was enough challenge associated with the activity and whether the benefits of participation (e.g., improving skills, accessing enjoyment) outweighed the costs (e.g., hard work, lack of time for other things).

The identification of peers as playing a significant role in influencing adolescents' motivation to participate in leisure activities is not surprising and is supported by other research. Mannell and Kleiber (1997), in their discussion on socialization influences, indicated that as children grow older, their peers come to play a greater role in influencing leisure choices and behaviors. Relationships with peers become increasingly important and peers significantly influence social activities during adolescence (Robertson & Shannon, 2002; Sebald, 1986). Peers can influence engagement in socially unacceptable or risky behaviours such as substance abuse (Allen, Donohue, Griffin, Ryan, & Turner, 2003; Borden, Donnermeyer, Scheer, 2001; Jenkins, 1996), but they also serve as valuable positive role models (Berndt, 1996; Moore & Boldero, 1991). For example, Hoff and Ellis (1992) showed that peers play a particularly influential role for both adolescent boys and girls as socialization agents for sport participation.

Fredricks et al.'s (2002) study did not discuss the role of parents in motivating or influencing adolescent extracurricular participation. Although peers were important sources of influence during adolescence, emotional

ties with parents remain strong (Steinberg, 1990). Other studies recognized parents' important role and focused on how parents motivated and shaped adolescent extracurricular choices. Hultsman (1993) found parents to be a strong influencing factor in why adolescents did not join activities in which they were interested. Fletcher, Elder, and Mekos (2000) identified the behavior model set by parents and parents' explicit reinforcement of their children's interests and involvement in activities meaningfully influenced adolescents' participation in school and community extracurricular activities.

Howard and Madrigal (1990) sought to determine the role of parents and children in the decision-making process related to the purchase of recreation services. The child was perceived by parents to have some influence on the final purchase decision. Parents, however, had greater influence. Further, mothers were perceived as having the greatest influence in both the information gathering and final decision stages of the decision-making process that led to the purchase of services. The researchers concluded that it was "mom" who exercised the greatest influence over her child's involvement in organized recreation activities and, therefore, was key in shaping her child's leisure participation patterns.

Although these studies provide some insight into what influences extracurricular involvement and the role parents may play in their child's involvement in such leisure activities, little is known about the ways in which adolescents perceive the messages parents communicate about extracurricular involvement. Given the powerful influence of parents on their children's leisure, research is needed that seeks to understand how adolescents experience and react to their parents' influence related to extracurricular involvement. The first set of research questions was developed to address this need: How do adolescents perceive the role of extracurricular activities in their lives? In what ways do parents influence adolescents' understanding of the role of extracurricular activities in their lives? Are adolescents being actively encouraged by their parents to participate in extracurricular activities or are they simply being supported if they express an interest in participating?

Adolescent Participation in Unstructured Leisure

Not all youth participate in organized, extracurricular activities. Even those youth who do participate in such activities also engage in unstructured leisure. Although considerable attention has been given to structured, organized leisure experiences, scholars have also investigated adolescent experiences with unstructured activities. Adolescents identify enjoying unstructured social activities (Kleiber, Caldwell, & Shaw, 1993; Kloep & Hendry, 2003) and these activities also provide opportunities for skill and identity development (Thomson, 2000). Unfortunately, adults generally do not value adolescent behaviors that involve unstructured social activities such as "hanging out" (Kloep & Hendry) and have not provided settings and spaces for adolescents to engage in less-organized and less-regulated leisure activities (Hendry, Kloep, Glendinning, Ingebrigtsen, Espnes, & Wood, 2002; Thom-

son). The lack of resources (e.g., space) devoted to such activities may be connected to research evidence suggesting participation in unstructured activities does not produce the *same degree* of positive development outcomes as structured activities (Bartko & Eccles, 2003). Although researchers have demonstrated the value of extracurricular activities in relation to unstructured leisure pursuits, it is not clear what values and attitudes parents hold related to unstructured activities such as "hanging out."

Family leisure is one specific context within which unstructured adolescent leisure may occur. Shaw and Dawson's (2001) analysis of parental discourses related to family leisure determined that parents were thoughtful and intentional in choosing activities that would provide extrinsic benefits to their children including those that would promote healthy lifestyles and the adoption of moral values. This research did not, however, explore how children experienced their parents' messages. For example, it is not known whether or not the children were aware that their parents had an agenda or what children learned about the role of unstructured leisure in their lives based on their family leisure experiences.

The potential to expand research related to parental influence on adolescent unstructured leisure participation resulted in the development of the second set of research questions: How do adolescents perceive the role of unstructured leisure activities in their lives? In what ways do parents influence adolescent understanding of the role of unstructured leisure participation? Do parents encourage, discourage, or simply monitor participation in unstructured leisure pursuits?

Parents Messages about Leisure

Parents communicate norms and values to their children through what they say and what they do. They may talk to their children specifically about why leisure time is important or why some behaviors are more acceptable than others (Ennet, Bauman, & Foshee, 2001; Wood, Read, & Mitchell, 2004). Sharing stories of their own experiences with leisure activities allows parents to communicate with their children about the role of leisure in one's life (Shakib & Dunbar, 2004). Parents' own behaviors can also be models that help to shape leisure behaviors, attitudes, and values that children develop (Higginson, 1985; Shannon, 2003). In addition, reinforcing or discouraging certain behaviors using rewards and punishments convey parents' values and expectations related to free time use (Fletcher et al., 2000; Greendorfer, 1987; Hutchinson et al., 2003) and can effect adolescent leisure choices.

Hutchinson et al. (2003) investigated practices parents employed to guide their adolescents' free-time use. Parents and adolescents had conversations in a variety of contexts and circumstances about leisure activities (e.g., why an activity was important to participate in, why one activity was better/more appropriate to engage in than another). Some parents made leisure decisions for their children (e.g., required their participation in an activity)

based on their own leisure values or perceptions of the benefits linked with certain activities. Parents also set limits on activity participation, redirected adolescents' leisure engagement, and provided resources to facilitate or encourage specific uses of their adolescents' free time. These conversations and behaviors reflected parents' own beliefs and expectations and, according to parents' accounts, influenced adolescents' behaviors during available free time.

Hutchinson et al.'s (2003) research provided insight into how parents' beliefs and expectations were translated into words and actions in an effort to guide adolescents' leisure. Each of the strategies parents employed to influence adolescents' time use communicated messages to their children about leisure. What remains to be understood, however, is how adolescents interpret and respond to such messages from parents regarding their time use.

Adolescents do not necessarily receive the messages that their parents communicate in the way parents intended. They also do not passively accept their parents' verbal messages, or model their own behavior solely on that of their parents (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Adolescents interpret their parents' messages and actions and form their own ideas that direct choices (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2004). Knafo and Schwartz (2003) explained that children's accurate perceptions of parental messages were due, in part, to parents' word-deed consistency—the uniformity between what parents explicitly communicate with their words and what they communicate implicitly through their actions. The possibility for conflicting messages does exist and it is important to understand what messages adolescents perceive through verbal communication with parents as well as those perceived through observing their parents' behaviors.

This body of literature highlighted the need to consider, from the perspective of adolescents, the various ways in which they learn about leisure from their parents. Therefore, the final research questions developed for this study were: How do the messages adolescents perceive their parents communicate verbally about extracurricular and unstructured leisure activities compare with the messages they perceive are communicated through parents' actions and leisure behaviors? How do adolescents react to messages from their parents related to extracurricular and unstructured leisure?

Theoretical Framework

Given that the focus of this study was on understanding what adolescents learned from their parents about leisure and how those messages influence adolescents' perceptions of leisure and the role it has in one's life, symbolic interactionism was well suited as a theoretical framework to guide the research. Symbolic interactionism serves as the model for understanding how individuals interpret people, events, and objects in their lives and how that process of interpretation leads those individuals to engage in certain behaviors in certain contexts (Blumer, 1969). Within this perspective, it is believed

that behaviour is guided by both subjective and objective elements of the self. Symbolic interactionists see the relationship between the self and "other" as crucial to the development of behavior (Wiley, 1980). George Herbert Mead's (1934) work focused on the development of self and the significance of self in social interaction. He emphasized a two-part structure to the development of the self—the "I" and the "me." Mead referred to the "me" as the self that is the object of the attitudes of others which a child comes to understand, adopt, and take on as his or her own. Mead believed that an individual's self is not merely a sum of others' attitudes, and there-fore, it is important to recognize the "I" as representing the subjective aspect of the self. The "I" represents a person's responses to the organized attitudes of others, a person's individuality. Because of the "I" component of the self, symbolic interactionism is an approach to explaining behavior that recog-nizes that an individual is not a passive consumer of what goes on around him or her. Rather, he/she is also an actor and creator of his or her own life, and the actor's definitions must be taken into account. This theoretical perspective emphasized the importance of accessing adolescent perspectives on what is being communicated to them about leisure. Acknowledging the subjective component of the self, seeking to understand how adolescents interpret the messages their communicated through their parents' leisure behaviors is critical.

Research Design and Methods

A qualitative approach was employed to obtain adolescent perspectives related to the influence of parents on their understanding of leisure's role in one's life. This approach yielded rich, in-depth descriptions (Miles & Hub-erman, 1994) in terms of the adolescents' leisure engagement, the values and attitudes they possessed related to leisure, and the ways in which they developed these values and attitudes. A qualitative method was an opportu-nity to explore adolescents' perceptions of what they learned from their parents about leisure, and how adolescents reacted and interpreted the mes-sages that they perceived were communicated.

Recruitment and Sample

Participants were recruited from a local high school. Once university ethics approval was granted, approval was sought from the school board and access was granted to twenty Grade 12 students. The school board provided a small window of opportunity to complete the study. The school board rep-resentative assigned to oversee this project requested that all data collection be completed one month prior to the start of final exams. School board approval was granted in mid-March leaving approximately five weeks to re-cruit and interview participants.

The principal of the selected school was given the criteria for partici-pation—students in Grade 12 who were involved in at least one school ex-

tracurricular activity. I made a request that students from a wide range of activities be invited to participate and that an equal number of male and female potential participants be recruited. Within a week of the initial contact, the principal had identified 20 graduating students, ten male and ten female, who fit this criteria. These students were invited to a meeting where I provided information about the study. Nineteen of the students agreed to participate. The principal then identified one additional student meeting these criteria who also agreed to participate.

All participants were involved in at least one school extracurricular activity. Of the 20 students, 12 were involved in more than one (e.g., played a varsity sport and served as class representative on student government). Of the adolescents who participated, 12 played varsity sports, eight were in the band, four were in drama, four held positions in student government, three were on the yearbook committee, three represented their school on the "Reach for the Top" team (trivia/quiz show); three were members of the Grad Class executive committee (plans social events for the graduates and is charged with the responsibility of organizing reunions), two were active in Teens Against Drinking and Driving (TADD), two were disc jockeys for the school radio station, and one wrote for the school newspaper.

During the data collection process, participants were asked to identify their "most significant" extracurricular activity. Even though most participants were involved in more than one activity, there was diversity in terms of the activities with which they had the greatest or strongest affiliation/association. The following is a breakdown of their responses: varsity sports (4); music (4); drama (2); yearbook (2); Teens Against Drinking and Driving (2); Grad Class executive committee (2); student government (2); and Reach for the Top team (2). None of the students identify the school newspaper or the radio station as their most significant extracurricular activity.

Fifteen of the participants were living with both their parents. The parents of three males were divorced and each of these adolescents was living with his mother. Seventeen students were white, one was Asian, one was Black, and one was Indian. All were Canadian born.

Data Collection

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with each student at the high school during school hours. Participants scheduled the interviews themselves and received permission from their teachers to miss class. Although the interviews ranged in length from 20 to 60 minutes, fifteen of the students were engaged in discussion for between 50 and 60 minutes. Four students were interviewed for between 40 and 50 minutes. One particularly shy student provided a short interview of only 20 minutes.

The discussion focused on the leisure activities in which the adolescents were engaging including those with friends and family, how they became involved in their various activities, and what role their parents and peers have played in their participation in extracurricular and unstructured leisure

activities. Examples of specific interview questions included: What leisure activities are most significant in your life right now? Who or what was the biggest influence in you getting involved in each of those activities? How do your parents influence what you do during your free or leisure time? How do your friends influence what you do during your free or leisure time?

Knafo and Schwartz's (2003) discussion of the importance of word-deed consistency led to questions being posed that asked participants to talk more specifically about what they learned through parents' explicit messages as well as through parents' actions. Such questions included: What lessons have you learned about leisure and recreation from your parents? What have your parents told you about leisure? What do your parents say about your extra-curricular activities? What do your parents say about the other things you do in your free time? What do your parents do during their free time? Questions and follow-up probes were included that were consistent with acknowledging that adolescents are active interpreters of the messages they receive: What do you think about your parents' views on leisure time? What do you think about your parents' leisure? How are your ideas about leisure similar and different from your parents' ideas? What happens when you and your parents do not see eye to eye on something related to your leisure?

I maintained a reflective journal throughout the data collection and data analysis processes. The journal provided a context for further data analysis. It was used to acknowledge the expectations that existed first, as a result of my own experiences in high school and my own perceptions of how my parents influenced my leisure, and second, as a result of reviewing the literature on the parental influences on leisure. The memos from the reflective journal were used to help create an awareness of how values, personal experiences, and personal knowledge (e.g., the belief that leisure is important) may have influenced aspects of the research and data analysis. The reflective journal allowed me to evaluate and process perceptions and emerging thoughts throughout the analysis of the data.

Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were used to categorize the data and to identify patterns and links between those categories. Open coding was done with descriptive categories related to the types of leisure and leisure activities in which participants engaged, the types of messages participants reportedly received from parents, and the ways in which the participants spoke about their leisure, their parents' leisure, and the messages they perceived were communicated by their parents about leisure. Axial coding involved examining the initial codes and focused on consolidating the codes and locating the evidence to support emerging themes. For example, codes related to parents communicating that leisure was a way to network, secure jobs, or get scholarships were linked together to form a new category called "means to future opportunities." Selective coding was guided by the major themes that

were developed. In this pass through the data, the focus was on looking selectively for cases that exemplified or supported the themes. For example, with the theme "leisure as a means to an end," the data were examined for differences/similarities in messages from mothers and fathers about this, differences/similarities in messages perceived by the participants connected to particular extracurricular activities, or differences/similarities in perspectives between male and female participants.

The constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) assisted in the identification and clarification of themes as the codes, categories, and groups of data were continually compared with the data and the themes that developed out of the data. Data were also compared with the developing conceptualizations that were recorded in my reflective journal. For example, when comparing the accounts of two different adolescents and asking myself, "How do these two accounts or descriptions relate to each other?", I would also consider my reflective notes from conducting and coding these interviews. Making these comparisons was useful in determining whether specific ideas or conceptualizations resulting from working with the data might be useful in generating patterns or themes.

The adolescents were asked if they were interested in receiving their interview transcripts and having an opportunity to review them. Only two students expressed interest in this opportunity. These transcripts were mailed six weeks after the interview was conducted. Only one participant returned the transcript with comments that elaborated on his responses to interview questions. Participants were also asked if they would be willing to comment on the findings. Four males and six females agreed and were sent an executive summary of the themes approximately 15 weeks after they had completed the interviews. All ten responded and commented on the extent to which they believed the themes represented their experiences and what they had expressed about their leisure during their interviews. For example, Bill wrote: "I think what I've got from my parents fits in the restorative theme and the varying degrees of importance theme. My parents are involved in a lot of leisure so the "not important" theme does not fit with me." Becka[1] responded with the following comment:

> I don't think of myself as fitting in [with peers] but the summary you gave me made me think I might have more in common with others my age than I thought. I don't know if it's possible but I think I fit in all of the themes.

Findings

The first question asked of participants was to describe their leisure—what they considered to be leisure, how they spent their free time, and what their favorite leisure activities or experiences were. Participants included

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[1]The adolescents in this study chose their own pseudonyms and these are used throughout. Each adolescent is also identified with an activity—the one that each indicated as his or her "most significant" extracurricular activity.

both their extracurricular activities and unstructured pursuits in their discussion of leisure. "Free time" was generally interpreted as time available outside of their committed extracurricular activities. Care was therefore taken to ask about leisure experiences so as to ensure that students were reflecting on both extracurricular and unstructured leisure experiences.

In responding to various questions throughout the interviews, adolescents described receiving a wide range of messages from their parents about the role that leisure has in one's life. These messages are represented by four themes: leisure as restorative; leisure as having differential importance; leisure as a means to an end; and do as I say, not as I do. Each of the themes and supporting data are presented.

Leisure as Restoration

The adolescents explained that leisure was an important part of their lives. This finding is not surprising, given that all participants were involved in at least one school extracurricular activity. Interestingly, when asked to explain why leisure was an important part of their lives, participants identified mainly the restorative functions that come from engaging in leisure such as helping to relieve stress, providing an opportunity to relax, and offering a break from schoolwork. They also reported that their parents highlighted the functional aspects of leisure.

Many reported being told by parents that being involved in leisure activities was important because it provided balance in the adolescents' lives. Interestingly, both male and female participants described their mothers as the parent sending the "balance" message. Mothers were cited as expressing the importance of having activities that could serve as a break from schoolwork or employment, reduce stress, and promote physical and mental well-being. Gemima and Becka explained their mothers' influence on their valuing leisure:

> Leisure is important for your health . . . like getting exercise, and for your mental health you need to take breaks from homework. My mother tells me that all the time so that's one of the reasons that my leisure is important to me. (Gemima—Sport)

> My mother really worries that I work too hard. She'll offer to get a movie for us to watch or we'll go to [local hangout] for an ice cream. A couple of times we've gone to [bookstore] on a school night when I've had a ton of homework and just browsed around.
> [Why do you think she does those things?]
> Oh, she wants me to learn to get some balance—like, that it's important to spend time with your family and to do things you like, things that are fun. I usually feel better after I do stuff like that so it's good for your brain to have a rest. (Becka—TADD)

Fathers also played a role in communicating the important restorative functions that could be achieved through leisure. While none of the participants identified their fathers as talking to them directly about the impor-

tance of leisure for reducing stress, maintaining their health, or providing balance, when they described their fathers' leisure, it was clear that many of the participants understood or observed their fathers as experiencing these benefits.

> My father runs at lunch with a group. He does it to relieve stress and it helps him be more productive at work in the afternoon. (Shrubbery—Band)
> Landscaping is my dad's thing. He loves getting on his mower or pulling weeds in our garden. He works out a lot of frustrations that way. It helps him unwind and relax. (John—Drama)

These excerpts indicate that both direct and indirect messages extracted from parents or experienced by adolescents contributed to the adolescents' understanding of leisure's potential role. For this group of participants, mothers were perceived as talking directly about the benefits of leisure while fathers were described as demonstrating, through their behavior, the value of the restorative component of leisure.

Leisure as Having Differential Importance

Participants were not asked directly whether their parents supported some activities and not others. Throughout the discussions, however, it became evident that some of the participants' parents had a set of criteria that they used in evaluating their children's leisure that, in turn, determined the degree of importance that parents attached to activities. Initially, the adolescents described lack of money or transportation as constraints to participating in certain leisure activities they would like to engage in. Upon probing further, however, many clarified that this was the case for some activities, but for other activities, it was their parents' own attitudes or perceptions about the value and appropriateness of activities that was at the root of the constraints they experienced. Even though many parents were perceived as communicating the message that balance was important in life and that having leisure helped in achieving this balance, adolescents believed that support for leisure was sometimes conditional on whether parents' viewed the activity as having value:

> There are some days when I get home from school and I want to just do nothing. Veg out in front of Oprah [laughs], you know? My parents let me do that for a while, but then they want me to do something, you know, a bit more [pause] . . . I don't know . . . involved? It doesn't matter what—read a book, play some music, ICQ my friends—but I can't waste all my time vegging out doing nothing. That's a good thing I suppose. (Gary—Reach for the Top)

Specific activities that were considered to be important by some parents were not considered to be important by others. For example, some adolescents explained that their parents encouraged and were very supportive of them taking time to hang out with their friends. Some parents offered up their homes or cottages as gathering places. Other parents, however, were described as not always willing to support "hanging out" activities:

> My parents don't want me hanging out. They want me to be doing something
> at school or taking lessons for something and that's why they don't mind paying
> for me to take dance or my "Y" membership. (Keegan—Student Council)
> I live a ways out of town and I don't have a car and that's a problem sometimes
> because if I want to go to the mall or hang out at someone's house to play
> video games or something like that, my parents won't make a trip in to get me.
> If I have to stay at school for band or volleyball practice or something to do
> with production like a rehearsal or meeting, they have no problem with that.
> It's the same for my sister. They have ideas about what is worth a trip into town
> and that pretty much influences our activities. Or maybe where our house is
> influences our activities [laughs]. (Fred—Band)

Later in the interview, Fred explained that sometimes there were activities
or events he wanted to attend, but did not bother asking his parents. He
"knew" they would say no because they do not see those activities as impor-
tant. School social functions, such as dances, were given as examples.

Many parents' values related to leisure activities, as understood and ex-
perienced by adolescents, appeared to have influenced the adolescents' own
attitudes about what types of leisure or leisure activities were important or
had value. This influence on attitude was particularly evident when partici-
pants were asked to talk about the leisure activities in which others their age
participated. Bill explained that he got the message, from a young age, that
television was not a good use of free time. He now holds a strong opinion
himself about television viewing as a leisure activity:

> We don't have a TV in our house because my parents did not want to kill off
> brain cells, but I know so many kids that waste their time watching stupid stuff.
> It's a boring waste of time. There are better things to do with my time. (Bill—
> Student Council)

One student spoke about how her parents valued the outdoors, which led
to many outdoor family leisure activities including orienteering, camping,
walking in the park, and walking on community trails. Other students spoke
specifically about their parents' concerns about drinking and drugs. Many
conversations had taken place about the inappropriateness of underage
drinking and the dangers of drug use. These adolescents indicated adopting
values and attitudes related to having a healthy body and lifestyle and they
described leisure behaviors that were consistent with these values and atti-
tudes.

While some parental values were adopted, the adolescents who partici-
pated in the study did not adopt or agree with *all* of their parents' attitudes
and values related to leisure or leisure activities. A number of adolescents
explained why their parents were "wrong" about particular activities (e.g.,
skateboarding, hanging out). Parents were cited as "not understanding" how
important or enjoyable some activities were or were considered to be "old
fashioned" in their thinking. Phil, a student in band, explained lying to his
parents about going skateboarding with friends after school because they did
not approve or understand how important the activity was to him:

> They don't get it. A lot of my friends skateboard. It's the one thing I'm good at that gets me out of being labeled a band geek. It's good exercise, like you have to have strong legs and stuff to be good. But they just think of skateboarders as losers so I keep my skateboard at [friend's] house and do it around there. (Phil—Band)

These adolescents were clearly thinking about their parents' attitudes, actively evaluating their own leisure activities and experiences or ones that were of interest, and making decisions about whether or not their parents' attitudes were appropriate.

Leisure as a Means to an End

Adolescents were aware of the contributions that leisure could make to their personal development and their parents were discussed as key forces in creating that awareness. Leadership, team building, communication, organization, time management, and social skills were mentioned by these youth as critical skills their parents suggested could be acquired through participation in extracurricular activities:

> I have definitely learned the idea that [leisure] gives me skills and that sort of ties in with the resume. Everything I do in my recreation has to tie into my resume somehow because it's very competitive out there. (Doug—Grad Class)

Parents were also cited as explaining that involvement in leisure could create future opportunities. Participation could lead to scholarships, employment (e.g., coaching, teaching music), or leadership roles in an organization. In some cases, the verbal message was reinforced with an example from parents' own leisure during adolescence or young adulthood. Participants related stories of their parents benefiting from extracurricular involvement:

> My parents both volunteered for [organization]. That's how they met and my dad got his first job out of university from someone who worked for a company that sponsored an event that he helped to organize. (Elizabeth—Student Council) My dad got a scholarship to play hockey when he went to university so I knew that if you're good, you can have that. And he helped me with my training and he would remind me, when I didn't feel like training, about the scholarship thing. (Gemima—Sport).

The messages these youth believed were communicated by their parents were focused on the functional or instrumental aspects of leisure activities and the positive outcomes that could result from those functions. Adolescents did not perceive that the value of engaging in leisure for fun, pleasure, and enjoyment was something their parents emphasized.

Interestingly, fathers were often described as communicating this message in terms of achievement. Participants described their mothers as promoting the opportunities for friendship. Fathers' verbal messages were perceived to focus more on leisure's role in developing networking skills. Mothers were viewed as wanted their children to engage in some form of

productive leisure activity. Fathers were identified as the ones who provided more input into what specific activities should be chosen that would lead to scholarships or future opportunities. Angela describes the differences between what her parents communicate to her about leisure's role as a means to an end:

> My mother is more worried about my health and wants me to have some fun, you know, that my leisure should help me relax. Dad wants me to have fun too, but . . . I think he . . . he is the one that helps me pick activities that will get me jobs and scholarships. (Angela—Yearbook)

Keegan, at different points in the interviewed, talked about each of her parents as volunteers. She described different reasons her parents give their time. "My mom volunteers for [organization] because she likes the people she helps out." "My dad encouraged me to do student council because it would benefit me down the road for jobs and stuff . . . he's been a role model for that because he's the president of [organization] which helped him make partner [in his law firm]."

A few of the adolescents spoke specifically about how the messages from parents related to the value of being involved in extracurricular activities could create future opportunities were reinforced as these adolescents completed high school. Two of the students received scholarships for postsecondary education programs in music. Three students received athletic scholarships—one of them to attend a university in the United States. Three other students explained that their involvement in their extracurricular activity had qualified them to apply for certain scholarships. For example, Becka's involvement in TADD and Mothers Against Driving Drunk, she believed, contributed to her being able to secure a special scholarship to enter a political science program. Becka expressed feeling gratitude toward her parents for encouraging her to make "good use" of her leisure time.

The "means to an end" message was focused on the individual benefits. The adolescents in the study were aware of what their leisure could do for them personally. However, only a few spoke about how their leisure made a contribution to other individuals, their school, or to their communities. Four students spoke about volunteering in their communities, but their conversations about why they were doing it were focused on how the experience was of benefit to them rather than how it was benefiting the agency with which they were volunteering or the individuals who were recipients of their service efforts. These "ends" were not as important as the personal development "end."

Do as I say, Not as I Do

Adolescents interpreted some of the messages that their parents communicated about the importance and role of leisure as inconsistent. In fact, one of the messages that these young people described was in direct contradiction with the other messages they described. For example, parents were described as suggesting to their children that leisure was important. When

looking at their parents' own choices and behaviors, however, some of the participants indicated that their parents did not make leisure a priority in their own lives or work toward establishing balance:

[What have you learned about leisure from your parents?]
Not very much because they don't have very much of it. I mean obviously like I said they support me, but that's what you do with your kids, right? They know it's good for me, but if you are asking what I've learned about leisure like for the rest of my life then I think what I see them do . . . how they spend their time and I'd say it isn't a priority. (Allan—Drama)
[What do your parents think about leisure?]
Well that's sort of an interesting question because they think different things . . . They will tell me that I need to stop studying if I've been doing homework all weekend; that I have to relax. But my mom, she just goes, goes, goes. No one can tell her to relax or stop and my dad's the same with his work . . . He's a workaholic. They are kind of like hypocrites. (Christine—Grad Class)

The adolescents who identified inconsistent messages tried to reconcile contradictions by comparing their lives to those of their parents. They justified why the verbal messages their parents communicated about leisure being important might be different than their parents' actual behavior. When I followed up on Christine's comment about her parents being hypocrites and asked how she made sense of the different messages she responded with, "I'll probably be a hypocrite too when I'm a mother with a job. It's different when you get to be a parent because other things are more important." A couple of the adolescents viewed their parents' busy lives as adults as a good reason to take advantage of opportunities for leisure they had while they were relatively free of responsibilities:

I look at my parents and I am happy that I am involved in sports and music now because when I get out of university and get a job, I'll have to give up a lot of things.
[You think so?]
Oh yeah. They don't really have time for anything much because of work and kids . . . well, we do stuff as a family so there is still time for leisure, but they don't just do whatever they want and they tell me to enjoy my free time now while I have it so I do. (Charlie—Sports)

Those adolescents who noticed inconsistencies did not view them as real contradictions. The verbal messages communicated by parents were related to the adolescents' lives as teenagers in high school. The messages they perceived through observing their parents' leisure behaviors were related to life as an adult when priorities change. Adolescents interpreted the differences between what their parents said and what parents did related to leisure as a result of their different stages in life.

Discussion

There are two important conclusions from this study. First, parents influenced the adolescent participants' leisure activity choices, leisure values,

and their ideas about roles that leisure time and activities play throughout
their lives. Second, it appeared to be the adolescents' responses to parents'
verbal leisure-related messages as well as the adolescents' observation and
interpretation of parents' leisure behaviors that shaped adolescents' leisure
values, behaviors and conceptualizations of what their leisure lives might look
like once they become adults.

Adolescents' valuation of leisure was focused on personal functional out-
comes that could be and were achieved through leisure participation. Simple
enjoyment and having fun were not identified as primary purposes for en-
couraging adolescents' participation in extracurricular activities. Having fun
was not a primary purpose for participation, nor was it perceived as strongly
communicated by parents as a goal of participation in extracurricular activ-
ities. Adolescents also experienced a hierarchical valuing of leisure activities.
Except for leisure's ability to be restorative and provide balance to the ad-
olescents' lives, unstructured leisure activities were perceived as not able to
produce as many positive outcomes as extracurricular activities, and there-
fore played a less significant role in adolescents' lives. In some instances,
parents were described as devaluing specific unstructured activities (e.g.,
skateboarding, spending time at the mall) and influenced adolescents' lei-
sure through the provision of support, or lack thereof, (e.g., money, trans-
portation) in facilitating participation in these activities.

The perceptions and described experiences of the adolescents in this
study reinforced previous research that suggested parents influence their
children's leisure choices (Robertson & Shannon, 2002; Scott & Willits, 1989;
1998; Shannon, 2003). However, the findings also extend the existing re-
search by demonstrating that parents not only influenced activity choices,
but also the values and attitudes that their children hold about the role of
leisure time and leisure activities. As suggested by Kleiber (1999), parental
messages shaped the values that the adolescents held related to leisure ac-
tivities and influenced at least some of their leisure activity choices. The
outcomes, as understood by the adolescents, influenced many of them in
choosing to engage in leisure that was perceived as an investment in their
future which appeared to motivate their interest in and valuing of extracur-
ricular activities.

Parents' not valuing or holding negative attitudes toward activities or
pursuits in which adolescents were interested served as a constraint and
therefore influenced adolescents' leisure choices. Initially, adolescents iden-
tified structural constraints such lack of transportation or lack of money as
factors hindering their participation in some unstructured activities in which
they were interested. However, on further probing, it was discovered that
these resources were often available to most of the adolescents in this study.
Parents were portrayed as controlling the resources and parents' decisions
to allocate these resources were based on perceptions of the value or wor-
thiness of the proposed activity. Parental control was perceived as a signifi-
cant constraint, particularly for unstructured leisure activities. This supports
Hultsman's (1993) finding that parents influence the activities in which their

children do not participate just as they can influence those activities in which children do participate. This finding also raises some of dilemmas discussed by Kloep and Hendry (2003) related to parental control of adolescent leisure. Parental control of leisure can result in adolescents missing out on the opportunity to "discover entertaining, social, intellectual, exciting, and emotional and personally satisfying challenges away from adult influence" (p. 33). Without this opportunity, adolescents' understanding of the role of leisure in their lives may be limited to functional aspects.

Further to this, the messages adolescent in this study described receiving from parents suggest parents were aware of specific goals that can be achieved through extracurricular activities. It appears, however, the developmental opportunities associated with participation in unstructured leisure activities and experiences may not be understood as well or promoted to the same extent as organized leisure opportunities. Perhaps parents do value a variety of unstructured activities, such as family leisure (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), but not the particular activities in which their adolescents are interested. Therefore, messages communicating the value of unstructured leisure are not forthcoming. Another possibility is that these adolescents may not have been receptive to a general message that unstructured opportunities are valuable because their parents did not indicate valuing the unstructured activities in which they were interested. Parental messages that some unstructured activities are acceptable and play a role in one's life, or that unstructured activities under certain circumstances or within certain contexts (Hutchinson et al., 2003), may have been discounted. Padilla-Walker and Carlo's (2004) suggested this could be the case by explaining that adolescents' perceptions of whether parents react appropriately to situations can affect the internalization of the values communicated through the message. Research to determine parents' perceptions related to the role of both extracurricular and unstructured leisure in contributing to their children's development and lives in general is an important next step in furthering knowledge of the ways in which parental values influence adolescents' valuing of leisure and understanding its role in one's life.

Some parental values that were communicated were accepted and internalized. The adolescents judged the activity choices of those both in their peer group and outside their peer group based on a set of values and attitudes. Adolescents had adopted their parents' values and attitudes related to some unorganized leisure activities, which influenced their interest in and attitudes toward various activities. For example, some parents had communicated the message that activities such as drinking, using drugs, and watching television were not acceptable uses of leisure time and promoted other leisure opportunities as valuable. Many of the adolescents who indicated having had these messages communicated demonstrated that they had adopted attitudes similar to their parents toward these activities as they evaluated, accepted, and criticized the activity choices of other students in their high school. At the same time, many of the adolescents saw value in unstructured activities they perceived their parents as not valuing. They resisted some of

their parents' leisure attitudes and articulated quite well why those activities they enjoyed had value and meaning to them.

The adolescents whose attitudes differed from those of their parents provide evidence that young people do evaluate the leisure-related messages that parents communicate. Decisions were made about whether or not the messages were valid or appropriate. The adolescents did not passively consume and accept the messages that their parents communicated or adopt the values inherent in the messages. This is consistent with the concept of individual agency, a concept central to symbolic interactionism. For example, Mead's (1934) conceptualization of human behavior can be applied in understanding adolescents' processes of interpretation and evaluation. Mead considered the individual to be self-reflective, self-conscious, and self-controlling and, therefore, responsive to the attitudes and behaviors of others in this manner. He also argued that the "self," which is made up of both the internalized values and attitudes of others ("me") and the individual's unique responses to those values and attitudes ("I"), *continuously* reacts to the various messages received and situations that are presented.

Lack of word-deed consistency (Knafo & Schwartz, 2003) was one factor that stimulated adolescent evaluation of parents' leisure-related messages. Hearing one thing and seeing a behavior that reflected something different, prompted the adolescents to question the verbal messages that their parents were communicating. Making sense of the inconsistency required adolescents to consider the values communicated through both explicit and implicit messages and decide, for themselves, what the role of leisure was in their lives. The inconsistency, in some ways, fostered an appreciation for the stage of life the adolescents were currently enjoying—anticipating that there would be a time when various obligations would change the role in their lives. Unfortunately, the adolescents attributed the inconsistency between their parents valuing leisure for their children and not valuing it to the same extent for themselves to stage of life. Some adolescents indicated expecting their lives to mirror their parents.

The findings demonstrate that the development of leisure values is a complex process and highlight the significance of both explicit and implicit leisure-related messages. Both types of messages are open to interpretation and can be powerful in shaping leisure values and behavior. The explicit message that having fun is an important leisure goal and outcome may not be effectively communicated if parental behavioral or other implicit messages adolescents' might interpret does not support or contradicts the explicit message. Parental leisure behavior may play an important role in reinforcing expressed values and attitudes. If, however, fun and enjoyment is missing from parents' lives, it appears that it may be difficult for children to develop values and attitudes that conceptualize leisure as something one does just to have fun. A parental behavioral model that does not reinforce the explicit leisure-related message may result in an adolescent rejecting the explicit message.

This particular study has some limitations. First, gaining the perspectives of adolescents who are participating in extracurricular activities does not

provide a complete picture of messages parents communicate to their children about leisure or how parents' messages influence the values and attitudes their children hold related to leisure. Many adolescents participate in structured activities in their communities, but outside of school. Still others choose to devote their free time solely to hobbies and other unstructured, unsupervised activities. Their motivations for choosing those activities may be a result of different messages they perceive from parents about the potential role or value of those pursuits. Second, the adolescents in this study were a fairly homogeneous group. Most were white and from two-parent families with parents in professional careers. Socio-economic background, family structure, and ethnicity likely influence the messages parents send to their children about leisure. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted that target youth from different ethnic groups, as well as those who are from non-traditional families (e.g., single parent family) and who have a low family income. Finally, this study sought to determine adolescents' perspectives on the messages from parents about the role of leisure. It is difficult to determine whether the messages that adolescents' described reflect those intended by parents. Research that seeks to gain the perspective of parents related to the messages they consciously send their children about the role of leisure in their lives would be useful in evaluating whether parents are effectively communicating their intended messages about leisure. It would also provide an opportunity to understand how accurately adolescents are interpreting intended messages.

This research has provided insight into some of the types of messages adolescents perceived as communicated by their parents (i.e., leisure provides short-term personal benefits, leisure provides long-term personal benefits, leisure helps establish balance in one's life). Engaging in leisure as an end in itself or for fun was not emphasized. Many adolescents are aware of the competitive environment within which they live. Evidently, some young people perceived leisure as an avenue to achieving a competitive edge, but leisure's role in providing time and space away for fun and enjoyment was not strongly perceived.

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