HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY STUDIES

DISSERTATION DEFENSE

FOR

IAN LAM

TITLE: TIME USE AS A CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Daily activities are both a cause and a consequence of youth development: As a cause, they constitute important contexts that reinforce close relationships and establish individual competence; as a consequence, they reflect the affordances and constraints in the environments that structure the everyday routines of youths. Most prior studies on youths’ time use have relied on cross-sectional designs and focused on between-person differences, and have been limited in their ability to capture longitudinal changes and within-person variation. Using a multilevel modeling strategy to take advantage of a data set with long-term, longitudinal data collected from two siblings from each of about 200 families, the three studies in this dissertation examined the development of youths’ time with parents, time with peers, and time spent on leisure-time physical activity (LTPA) from middle childhood
through adolescence and the within-person associations between these time use measures and youth outcomes and family processes.

Studies 1 and 2 focused on the contextual dimension of time use. Study 1 examined the developmental course and adjustment correlates of parent-child social (parent, child, and others present) and dyadic time (only parent and child present) from age 8 to 18. The results showed that social time with parents declined across adolescence, but dyadic time with mothers and fathers peaked in early and middle adolescence, respectively. Moreover, secondborns’ social time with parents declined more slowly than firstborns’, and gendered time use patterns (i.e., spending more time with same-sex and less time with opposite-sex parents) were more pronounced in boys and in opposite-sex sibling dyads. Finally, youths who spent more dyadic time with their fathers, on average, had higher general self-worth, and changes (i.e., within-person variation) in social time with fathers were positively linked to changes in youths’ social competence.

Study 2 examined the developmental course and adjustment correlates of time with another important group of companions – opposite- and same-sex peers – from age 8 to 18. The results indicated that girls’ time with opposite-sex peers increased beginning in middle childhood, but boys’ time with opposite-sex peers increased beginning in early adolescence. Moreover, for both girls and boys, time with same-sex peers peaked in mid-adolescence and then declined. Finally, changes in unsupervised (without the presence of an adult) time with opposite-sex peers positively predicted changes in youths’ problem behaviors and depressive symptoms by the following year, and changes in supervised (with the presence of an adult) time with opposite-sex peers positively predicted changes in youths’ school performance by the following year.

Study 3 focused on the content dimension of youths’ time use. Specifically, it examined how time spent on LTPA changed from middle childhood through adolescence and whether changes in the proportions of mother- and father-youth joint involvement in LTPA were linked to changes in youths’ overall involvement in LTPA. Multilevel models revealed that youth LTPA followed a quadratic pattern of change, increasing during middle childhood and then declining across adolescence, and that the decline in adolescent LTPA was more pronounced for girls than for boys. Moreover, on occasions when mothers and fathers spent proportionally more time on sports and outdoor activities with youths than usual, youths also spent more total time on these activities than usual.

In sum, the overarching goal of this dissertation was to examine daily activities as both a cause and a consequence of youth development. The first two studies illustrated that, depending on the larger embedding social context, involvement with parents and with peers may afford different social experiences and learning opportunities that may favorably or adversely affect youth adjustment, pointing to the importance of contextualizing the study of youth development. The third study treated time spent on sports and outdoor activities as a result of parental socialization. Its focus on the behavioral aspect of parental influences had important implications for interventions aimed at promoting the physical health and psychological well-being of youths.