

Adolescent Activities and Family-Related Transitions

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BACKGROUND

Two theories of change surround childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood:

- Childhood and adolescence have been profoundly changed by the contemporary focus on organized and structured activities. But questions about “overscheduled” children or kids “growing up too fast” linger.
- However, demographic trends suggest a majority of young adults are staying in school longer, marrying and starting families later, and delaying entry into career-type work in an extended period of “emerging adulthood” (Arnett 2004) and the “age of independence” (Rosenfeld 2007), epitomized in the 2006 film “Failure to Launch”.

Timing of family transitions has important implications for one’s own educational attainment, career achievement, and childbearing possibilities:

- Early age at marriage is a strong predictor of divorce
- Timing of parenthood also has important implications for offspring
- Movement into some roles (early parenthood) may close or delay movement into others (full-time work)

RESEARCH QUESTION

Does participation in activities really speed up movement into adulthood – are kids involved in numerous activities literally growing up faster than their less-engaged peers?

Or are some youth more prone to instability and extended transition to adulthood because they did not build leadership skills or independence through activities?



DATA, MEASURES, AND METHODS

Data

- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health
- In-school survey, the wave 1 in-home interview (1994-1995), and the wave 3 interview (2001).
- Sample: 10,391 young adults
- Over one-third (3719) of these respondents, age 18-26 at the wave 3 interview, were married (23%) or cohabiting (14%), and over 10% had a teen birth.

Activities

- Over 30 activities:
 - » *Academic clubs:* math, science, history, French, German, Latin, Spanish
 - » *Team sports:* baseball/softball, basketball, field hockey, football, ice hockey, soccer, volleyball, and cheerleading/dance
 - » *Individual sports:* tennis, track, swimming, wrestling, or other sport
 - » *Music groups:* band, choir, orchestra
 - » *Extracurricular clubs/groups:* book club, computer club, debate team, drama club, Future Farmers of America, newspaper, honor society, student council, yearbook, or another club or organization

Controls

- Age, Race, Gender, Family Structure, Family Income, Residential Location, Parent Education

Outcome measures

- *Young adult relationship status:* married or engaged, cohabiting, dating, and single
- *Teen pregnancy* (any reported pregnancy before age 20)
- *Early marriage* (before age 24)

Methods

- Multinomial logistic regression models of young adult relationship status, with dating as the base outcome of comparison, reported as relative risk ratios.
- Discrete-time Cox proportional hazard models to measure early marriage and teen birth.
- All models control for age, race, gender, family structure, family income, residential location, and parent education.



PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2

Participation rates vary across included activities, ranging from 1% (book club) to 14% (band) for extracurricular activities and 1% (field hockey) to 22% (basketball).

86% participated in at least one school-based activity during the current school year.

- 58% are on a sports team/club
- Half are in a non-sports club or organization (49%)
- One-quarter are in music programs (24%)

Activity	Sample N or Weighted %	Sample N or Weighted %	Sample N or Weighted %
Academic Clubs	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Band	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Choir	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Chess	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Computer Club	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Debate	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Drama	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Future Farmers of America	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Honor Society	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Journalism	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Language (Spanish)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Math	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Music	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Newspaper	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Other	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Student Council	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Yearbook	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Other	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Team Sports	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
Individual Sports	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)
None	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)	1,000 (10.0%)

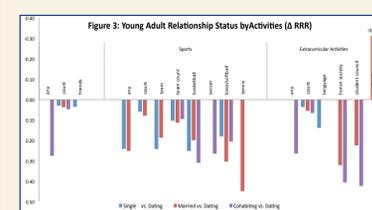
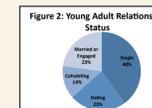
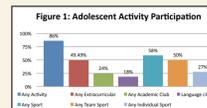


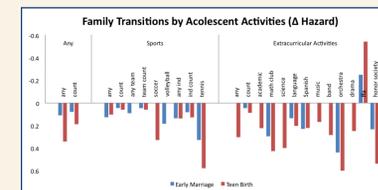
Figure 3

- Activity participation reduces the likelihood of being married or cohabiting, but also reduces the likelihood of being single, relative to dating.

- The more activities in which adolescents participate, the less likely they are to transition out of dating.
- Team sports are more significant than individual sports.
- For extracurricular activities, honor society and student council decrease the likelihood of marriage and cohabitation, while yearbook participation increases the risk of current marriage relative to dating.

Figure 4

- Participation in activities decreases the risk of early marriage or teen birth.
- Those who participate in at least one activity have 33% reduced odds of teen birth relative to those in no activities, with stronger effects for non-athletic than athletic participation.
- For early marriage, athletic participation reduces odds while the effect of other extracurricular participation on early marriage is limited to math and language (Spanish) clubs, and honor society and student council.
- Participation in FFA increases the likelihood of both early marriage and teen birth. Perhaps the culture of FFA nationally promotes family formation.



CONCLUSIONS

Adolescent activity participation matters for relationship status and family formation in young adult.

Rather than speeding up transition to marriage and family, when significant, activity participation reduces the likelihood of marriage and cohabitation relative to dating and decreases the risk of early marriage and teen birth.

Relatively consistent effects for participation in any activity, sport, or extracurricular activity suggest that it is participation in general that promotes normative and on-time transitions (as opposed to early transitions), rather than participation in any one specific activity.

Among the activities considered, honor society and student council are the strongest and most consistent predictors delaying entry into early marriage, cohabitation, and teen pregnancy.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This research is part of a larger project on changing forms of homogamy. Additional research explores couple similarity in time use and activities as possible mechanisms subverting traditional measures of homogamy.

If we consider activity participation a type of cultural capital (DiMaggio 1982, DiMaggio and Mohr 1985) than research on family formation and attainment are well-served by including adolescent activities as resources young adults bring to the marriage market.

