The Pleasures of Youth: Parent and Peer Compliance Toward Discretionary Time

Francis P. Noe¹ and Kirk W. Elifson²

Received August 15, 1975

In the past, research into an adolescent’s leisure time has almost exclusively focused on furnishing a record or checklist of activities. This investigation evaluates attitudinal dimensions of leisure, peer identification, and parental accommodation as it relates to patterns of leisure present in an affluent adolescent subculture. Two factors emerged from the attitudinal study, representing achievement and egalitarian dispositions. Patterns of peer and parental compliance were measured against these dispositions. Parental and peer influences were found to affect the outcome of an adolescent’s attitudes. Differences between sexes and between early and late adolescence were also discovered to influence levels of compliance with parents and peers, thereby affecting an adolescent’s leisure attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Parent and peer influence has repeatedly been identified as an important determinant of a youth’s orientation, but the reaction of youth to either peer or parent referent is not automatic. Many social factors serve to control compliance

¹National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, National Space Technology Laboratories, Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. Received Ph.D. in sociology from State University of New York at Buffalo, where he specialized in the study of leisure and recreation. Currently, as a research sociologist, pursues studies in attitudes toward wilderness among youth and investigates patterns of association in leisure and outdoor recreation. A monograph on the adolescent and leisure is planned which will have a cross-cultural and comparative perspective.

²Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia. Received Ph.D. in sociology from Vanderbilt University. Current interests include the study of relationships between religious attitudes and drug usage among adolescents and is currently completing a monograph on serpent-handling religions.
of a youth's reaction to referent roles. The course of this inquiry is specifically directed to defining the influence of parents and peers in structuring a young person's leisure attitudes to determine if they are attitudinally structured as an instrument of achievement among youth. Rather than employing a strategy of contrived situations about immediate or future decisions judged by parent or peer compliance, we will follow a course of action suggested by Larson (1972, p. 72). First, compliance with parent and peer influences will be measured on such issues as authority or giving assistance to youth. Second, orientations to leisure will be measured to determine the influence of parent or peer on a youth, and, third, the relationship between leisure and the value of achievement orientation will be considered.

Patterns of conduct by parents help determine an adolescent's orientations. Independence training, authority relationships, and parental dominance result in behavior by parents that inhibits or accelerates socialization. In trying to understand the adolescent, Bachman (1970, p. 1) stresses that "family background is a powerful force — or more accurately, a cluster of powerful forces — shaping an individual's capacities and accomplishments throughout his life." The educational and occupational attainments of parents, the physical resources of the home, the personal relationships between parents and children — these factors and many more are what social scientists mean by family background. Researchers have attempted to find umbrella concepts to reflect a more theoretically parsimonious view of the adolescent-parent relationship, and two variables, parental power and support, have frequently been employed (Bowerman and Bahr, 1973, p. 363). Various dimensions of the power relationship have been tested for their effectiveness on adolescent behavior by Smith (1970). This study is important in that both the conflict approach (Davis, 1940; Coleman, 1961) and the social influence approach (Kandel and Lesser, 1969) are incorporated into the same design by the concept of power.

Parental power processes assume a major role in shaping adolescent behavior. Specific sources of influence have been identified for parents; among them is the variable of paternal and maternal outcome control of resources. The variable measures the parent's influences in deciding how much money an adolescent receives, evaluates the parent's influence in deciding how and when things are done in the household, and assesses the adolescent's perception of the parent's ability to influence the actions of others. In Smith's (1970, p. 869) analysis of the foundations of parental influence on the adolescent, he found that "parental power resource accounts for far more of the variance in parental influence upon adolescents than either adolescence dependencies or alternatives." A parent's ability to control resources defines a key factor in the power process.

Whether parental control of resources specifically affects an adolescent's response to his discretionary time and the organization of his free time is yet another question. Paternal and maternal influence has been shown to operate in intensifying educational aspirations and molding heterosexual responses to life (Smith, 1970); however, it is not altogether clear if activities of a more voluntary