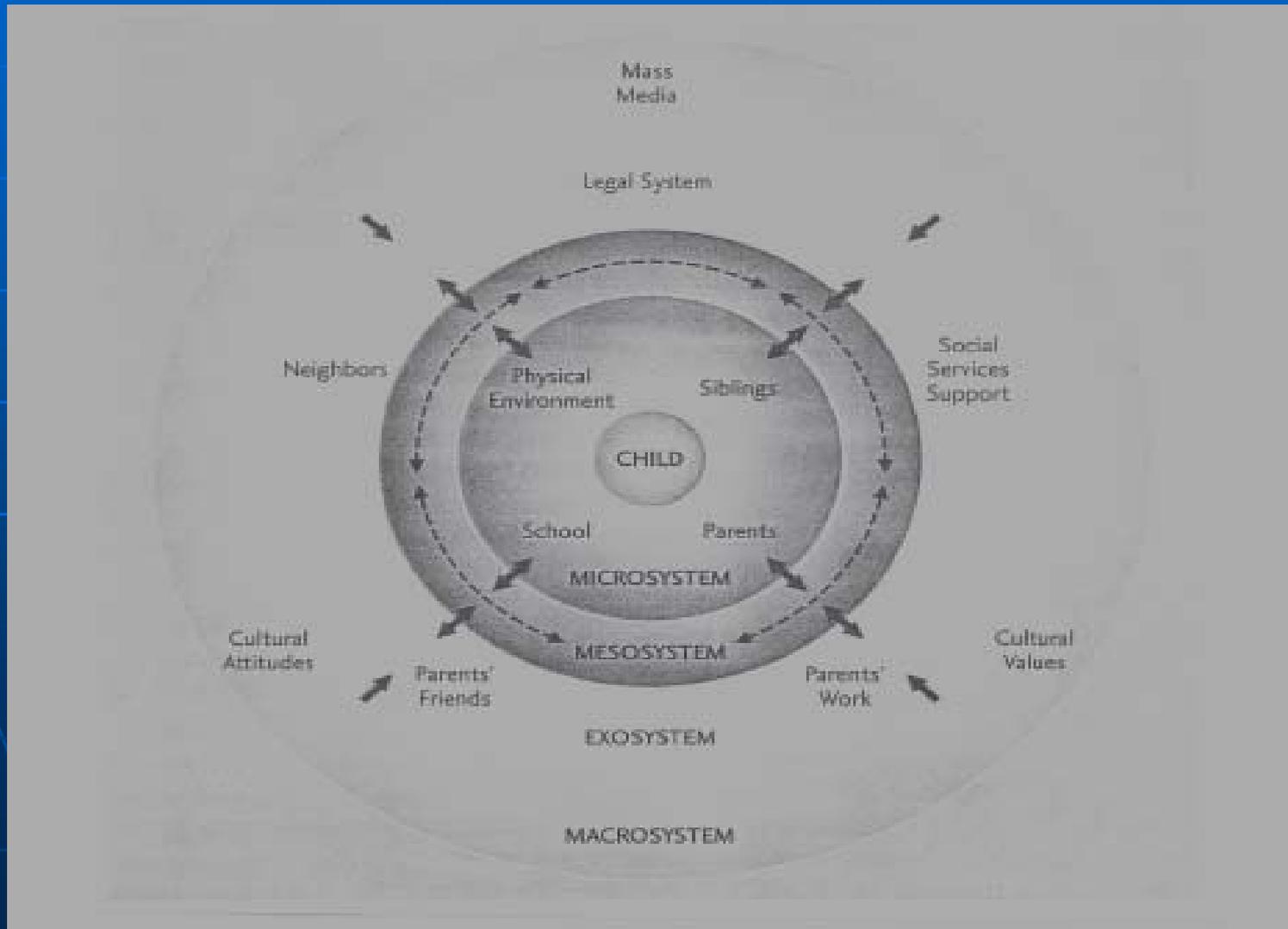


An Ecological Approach to Studying Youth and the Media

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Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model



I. Focus on the Contexts of Development

- Individual is nested within layered (increasingly distal) contexts
 - BUT: Individuals play a role in their own development (e.g., by their choices; by the meanings they attribute to their experiences)
- Contexts are not entities; rather contexts mark influence processes
 - Contexts afford opportunities and set constraints on activities, behaviors, experiences

II. Focus on Molar Activities

- Molar activities are significant developmental phenomena (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)
 - Daily activities are both causes and consequences of development
 - Activities reflect choices and predilections of the individual and opportunities and constraints within the environment

Study of Activity Settings

- Activity settings are the forum within which “culture is instantiated” (Weisner, 1989, p. 14)
- Characteristics of activity settings include:
 - Nature of the “task”
 - “Personnel” present
 - “Cultural scripts,” e.g., who initiates the activity, who directs the activity, the social exchanges that characterize the activity
 - “Goal requirements” of the activity, especially, socialization goals

From an ecological perspective, *what* activities individuals undertake, *who* participates, *how* an activity is carried out and *why* an activity is undertaken are important elements in its implications for development.

Theoretical Perspectives on Links between Daily Activities and Youth Development

- Multi-disciplinary approach to studying youth development (developmental psychology, cultural anthropology, sociology, economics)
- Range of causal processes proposed
- Focus of activity research has been on links between activities and “outcomes”; causal processes most often inferred rather than tested

How do Daily Activities Influence Youth Development?

- Opportunity for knowledge and skill acquisition
- Opportunity for self expression and identity development
- Opportunity to build social ties
- Opportunity to develop affiliation with social institutions
- Time is finite; daily activities reflect roads not taken

Empirical Examples of Youth Activities in their Family Contexts

- The Penn State Family Relationships Project (R01-R01-HD29409 and R01-HD32336, A.C. Crouter and S.M. McHale co-principal investigators)
- Juntos (“Together”) (R01-HD39666, K.A. Updegraff, Principal Investigator)

- 200 central Pennsylvania, European-American families (10 year study begun in 1995)
- 200 African American families living in Philadelphia-Baltimore area (3 year study begun in 2002)
- 245 Mexican American families in Phoenix, AZ (two year study begun in 2000)
- Families in each study:
 - Two parent, working-middle class families
 - Include at least two children in middle childhood and adolescence

- Home interviews with mothers, fathers and with older and younger siblings
- Telephone interviews with parents and youth (modified time diary)
 - 7 calls (5 weekdays, 2 weekend days)
 - Cued recall
 - High levels of inter-reporter reliability

How are Daily Activities Linked to Youth Development?

1. Activities provide opportunities for knowledge/skill development

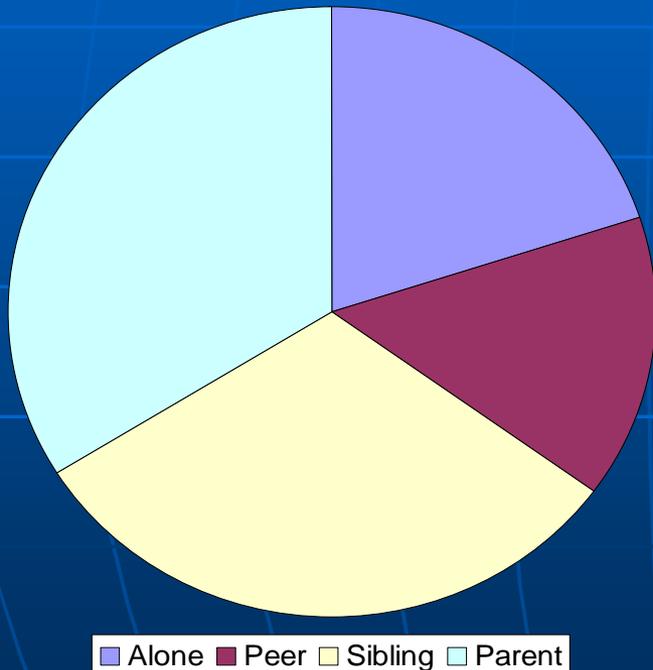
- Time spent in hobbies linked to school grades in European American families
 - E.g., more time spent playing musical instruments at age 10 predicts relative increases in math grades for boys
- Time spent with parents linked to school grades in European American families
 - E.g., time with fathers predicts relative increases in girls' math grades and time spent with mothers predicts relative increases in girls' language arts grades from age 10 to 12
- McHale, S.M., Kim, J.Y., Whiteman, S.D., & Crouter, A.C. (2004). Links between sex-typed activities in middle childhood and gender development in early adolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 40, 868-881.

2. Activities Provide Opportunities to Build Social Ties

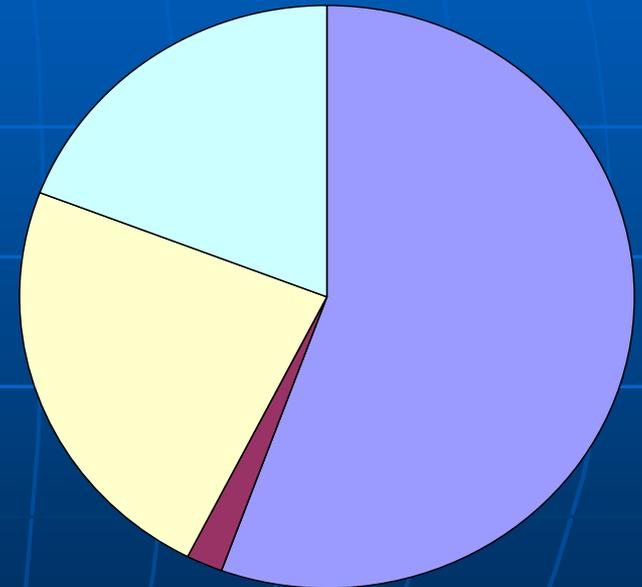
- *Family time* linked to more positive marital and parent-child relationship evaluations in European-American families
 - Crouter, A.C., Head, M.R., & McHale, S.M. (2004). Family time and the psychosocial adjustment of adolescent siblings and their parents. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*, 147-162.
- *Parental time with the sibling dyad* linked to more positive and less conflictual sibling relationships in European American families
 - McHale, S. M., Updegraff, K. A., Tucker, C. J., & Crouter, A. C. (2000). Step in or Stay out? Parents' roles in adolescent siblings' relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62*, 746-762.

“Personnel Present” is a Defining Feature of Activity Settings

Social Contexts of Television Time in Phoenix



Social Contexts of Television Time in Philadelphia/Baltimore



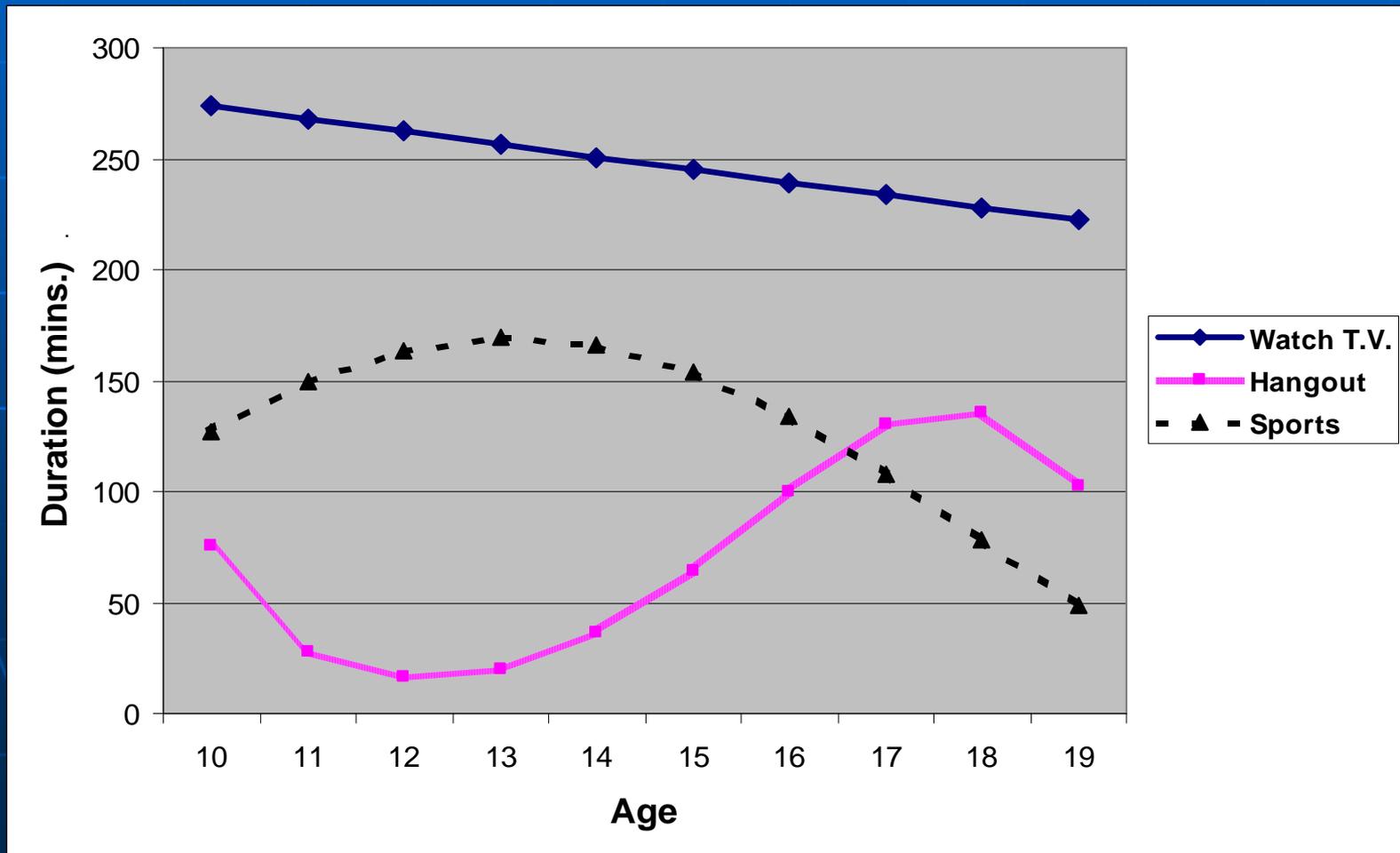
3. Activities Provide Opportunities to Build Affiliations with Social Institutions

- African American youth who spent more time in sports and other school extracurricular activities reported feeling more connected to their schools (e.g., "I feel close to people at my school;" "I am happy to be at my school.")
- Dotterer, A. (2006). The ecology of children's and adolescents' academic adjustment, *Unpublished Dissertation*, The Pennsylvania State University.

4. Time Use Reflects Roads Not Taken

Trajectories of Change in European American Youth's Activities from

Age 10 (1995/1996) to Age 19 (2004/2005)



Issues in the Study of Daily Activities and Youth Development

- Research on “influences on” youth activity participation
 - Most studies examine family background characteristics (income, parent education) and child characteristics (age, gender)
 - Selection effects often not considered
 - Main effects models predominate
 - “Social address” rather than social process focus to most research
- Directions for research

1. Problem of Selection Effects

- Activities are both cause and consequence of development
- Child adjustment at age 10 was a more consistent predictor of daily activities at age 12 than the other way around (European American sample).
 - E.g., Conduct problems at age 10 predicted relative increases in TV time by age 12, but TV time did not predict conduct problems.
 - McHale, S. M, Crouter, A. C., & Tucker, C. J. (2001). Free time activities in middle childhood Links with adjustment in early adolescence. *Child Development*, 72, 1764-1778.

2. Problem of main effect models

- “. . .in ecological research, the principal effects are likely to be interactions,” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 38).
- Person X Process X Context interactions mean that the same experiences may have different implications for youth with different characteristics, in different settings.

Example: Process X Context Interaction

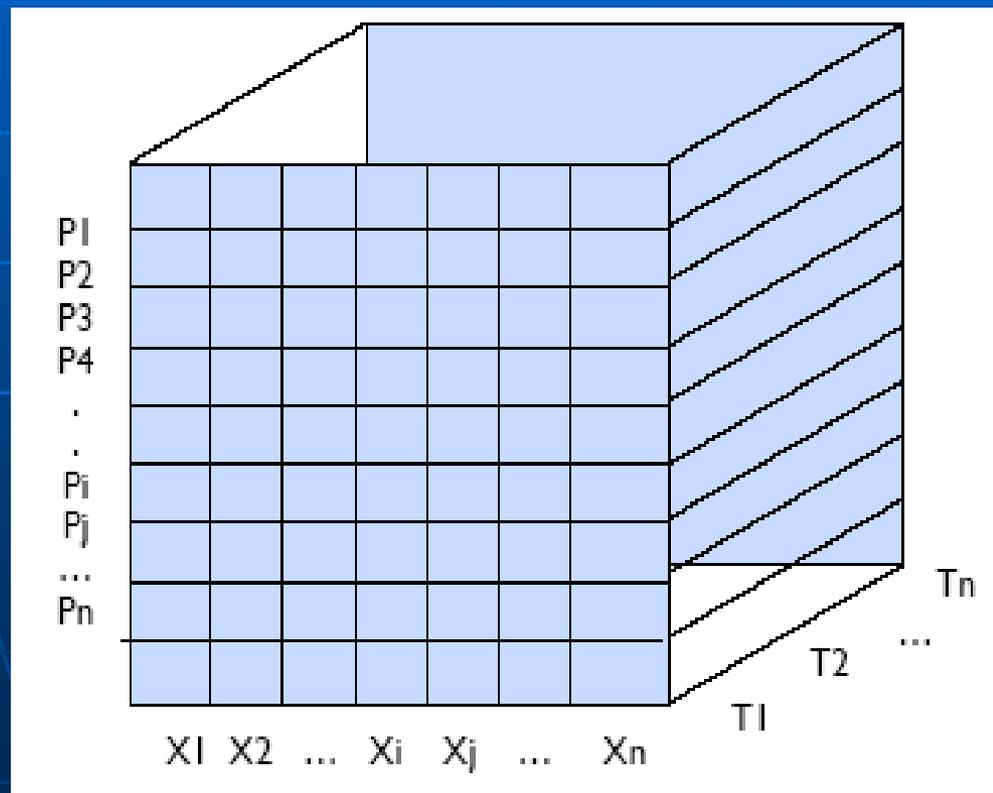
- In less acculturated Mexican American families:
 - Sisters did more housework than brothers
 - Brothers had more privileges (e.g., going out with friends) than sisters
- Differential treatment was linked to adjustment problems only when youth's familism values were not strong.
 - McHale, S.M., Updegraff, K.A., Shanahan, L., & Killoren, S.A. (2005). Culture and differential treatment in Mexican American families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 1259-1274.

3. Problem of focus on Social Address (e.g., ethnicity) rather than Social Process

- In Mexican American families, cultural orientations were linked to TV time: High familism values were linked to more TV time, and high levels of acculturation were linked to less TV time, net of family income. (The role of Spanish-language TV in maintaining cultural ties?)
- The utility of *ethnic homogeneous designs* (e.g., McLoyd, 1998)

Directions for Future Study

Cattell's (1978) Data Box: Considering the Dimensions of Persons, Variables and Occasions



Messages from the Data Box

- Large N studies provide representative sample of *persons*
- Less attention to representativeness of items used to assess constructs (i.e., *variables*)
- Snapshots of daily life → studies of temporal variation and change in individuals' (and social groups') experiences (i.e., *time*)

Measuring *Variables*

- The importance of multiple perspectives
- The importance of multiple modes of assessment
- The multi-dimensionality of important constructs (e.g., gender, ethnicity, parenting)

Measuring Within-Person Variation and Change Over *Time*

- Multi-level modeling as an analytic approach to studying change
 - Documents how changing contexts are linked to changes in individual functioning
 - Rules out stable third variables as causes for observed patterns of association between contextual and individual
- Utility of intensive within-person designs
 - “Experiments of nature”
 - If you want to understand how something works, try to change it (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Why is Youth Media Use Important and How Should it be Studied?

- Daily activities (like media use) are both causes and consequences of development;
- *With whom, how, and why* youth engage in activities, like listening to music, will have implications for development;
- Activities—like watching TV--will be linked to development in different ways for youth with different characteristics and in different settings;
- Understanding links between youth activities, like internet use, and their development and adjustment requires study of representative samples of persons, variables *and* occasions