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What Do They Usually Do After School?

A Comparative Analysis of Fourth-Grade Children in Bulgaria, Taiwan, and the United States

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The activities and self-direction allowed after school provide children in different countries with distinct developmental opportunities that promote culturally valued orientations and outcomes. Fourth-grade children in Bulgaria, Taiwan, and the United States (countries with contrasting social values and expectations) reported their usual activities during each after-school hour on 2 weekdays and 1 weekend day. The children also reported whether the activities were self-chosen or chosen by an adult. There were considerable differences in the reported activity patterns, with particular contrast between the American and the Taiwanese children. Compared to American children, Taiwanese reported spending more time in academic and extracurricular pursuits and less time in playing, reading for fun, in sports, or in self-chosen activities. There was substantial agreement in the gender-based participation differences across countries. Girls reported less time spent in free play or computer games and more time in reading, extracurricular activities, routines, and adult-chosen activities.

Keywords: *after-school activities; early adolescence; cross-cultural psychology; autonomy; gender differences*

The activities in which children participate after school provide a variety of developmental and socialization opportunities (Carpenter, Huston, & Spera, 1989; Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Larson & Verma, 1999) and can influence the extent to which children experience self-direction and autonomy. As noted by Larson and Verma, different activities afford different opportunities for psychosocial growth and the development of competencies and dispositions. Previous studies have shown, however, that children in various countries differ in the amount of time they spend in a range of activities (Alsaker & Flammer, 1999; Chen & Stevenson, 1989) and that the patterns of activities for boys and girls are often distinct (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Literature also indicates that there are country and gender variations in the extent to which parents encourage their children's autonomy and self-determination (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Leaper, 2002; Olsen et al., 2002), which would affect the choice of after-school activities and the psychosocial or developmental benefits to be derived. Also, cross-cultural dissimilarities in children's discretionary activity patterns reflect differing cultural values and socialization goals held by adults in different countries (Triandis, 1995). In this study, we will examine the time spent and choice experienced in various after-school activities by preadolescent girls and boys in three countries that vary on important dimensions. Such exploration of children's after-school activities from a cross-cultural perspective will augment our understanding of how specific cultural contexts operate in shaping child development.

In their review of cross-cultural comparisons of after-school activities, Larson and Verma (1999) conceptualized the various contexts in which children spend time as experiential niches and argued that each experiential niche is a distinct learning environment with its specific "rules, scripts and goals . . . emotional and motivational experiences" (p. 702). The amount of time involved in an activity or experiential niche "provides a rough index of children's degree of exposure to, engagement with, and absorption of those experiences" (Larson & Verma, 1999, p. 702). Time spent in self-chosen rather than adult-chosen activities provides practice in self-direction, whereas time spent after school under adult supervision can provide training and skill building in a variety of valued areas. Thus, time differences eventuate in children's competence and psychosocial differences.

Cultural Influences on Children's Activities and Autonomy

Children's developmental pathways are shaped by the ecocultural context in which they live and that determines what is appropriate and acceptable for

them (Göncü, 1999; Weisner, 2005). Because it contributes to children's developmental outcomes, children's use of time is molded by childrearing agents according to the characteristics, expectations, and values of the culture. Of course, mundane factors such as availability of transportation, family finances, and parental work schedules, as well as the child's temperament and other characteristics, may have influence on the type and duration of activities. Factors such as these, which are likely to vary between cultures, may hinder the extent to which parents can implement their cultural values and facilitate the activities they would prefer for their children. Nevertheless, despite these possible barriers, it may be assumed that all societies attempt to shape childrearing to foster particular achievements and the social values of the culture; children's discretionary time provides a socialization opportunity. The experiences, demands, and choices provided by after-school activities contribute to children's socialization to become mature members of their own culture.

Although considerable individual differences within cultures are likely, there are many societal factors that may influence the culture's attitude to children and their discretionary time use. Position on the individualistic or collectivist dimension (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1994) is one such factor that has received considerable attention although not specifically in regard to after-school activities. In an individualistic type of culture, the individual's autonomy is emphasized, and achievement of personal goals is valued. By contrast in collectivist cultures, family and community membership are stressed, and responsibility to group norms and goals is emphasized (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1997). Thus, in individualistic cultures, childrearing will emphasize training in self-determination so that children learn to negotiate the choices that will be made available to them throughout their life; parents will expect more independence from their children. On the other hand, in more collectivist cultures, childrearing will emphasize conformity to the group practices and values of the adult establishment so that children learn the roles and skills that are important to that group; parents will expect more obedience and attention to adult guidance (Triandis, 1995). Children's discretionary time usage is one means by which socialization toward the individualistic or collectivist orientation of the community, and the community's model of preferred social and generational relationships, is achieved (Rogoff, 2003). Socialization practices, including the encouragement and degree of adult supervision of particular activities, reflect the relative emphasis on autonomy which has been conceptualized as the ability to select, self-direct and regulate one's own behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985). American parents have been found to value autonomy, independence, and

self-reliance in their children (Alwin, 2001), consistent with the individualistic orientation of the American culture (Triandis, 1995). It has also been suggested that autonomy might be less valued and encouraged in Eastern cultures compared to cultures sharing Western values (Olsen et al., 2002; Quoss & Zhao, 1995). The burgeoning literature on parenting across cultures shows that parents in Eastern cultures are more likely to expect obedience to established rules, as is required to socialize the children to the shared values of collectivist cultures. For example, Chinese parents tend to place more emphasis on obedience and coercion in their socialization practices and are more controlling compared to American parents (Chao, 1994; Chao & Tseng, 2002; Wu et al., 2002). This literature has not been applied to children's activity choice, but it follows that activities which are self-chosen and/or allow children to be independent provide less opportunity for adults to direct development or ensure that children are accruing adult-valued developmental skills. On the other hand, such developmental contexts provide more practice in independence and allow children to find or create developmental niches that are a good fit for their own interests, personal characteristics, and developmental stage. They help prepare children for life in a society dominated by an individualistic ethic.

Another factor with potential effects on children's after-school activities is the attitude of the culture toward education and resulting educational practices. Educational systems of different countries vary considerably (Beaton et al., 1996; Schmidt et al., 2001) both in their characteristics, the manner they contribute to socialization goals, and the parental expectations they both reflect and engender. The general availability of education, prestige of academic achievement, diversity and challenge of the curricula, status of examinations, and progressive selection for higher levels of education all exert influence on childhood experiences and sanctioned activities. For example, if quality education is not widely available in a particular culture, academic preparation of children will probably be stressed to enable them to compete for the scarce educational openings. Children in such cultural situations would be less likely to spend time in leisure activities such as free play; they will be socialized to distribute their time differently and likely to be given less choice about that time distribution. Cultural differences in parental expectations and aspirations for their children have been found (Chao & Tseng, 2002), and these differences in expectations have been shown to account for the commonly found higher educational achievement of Asian children compared to those from other cultural groups (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Kao, 1995). It is likely that differing parental expectations for academic achievement will influence the type of activities allowed or encouraged for children after school.

Because of cultural influences such as these, investigation of the after-school activity patterns of children elucidates one aspect of cultural socialization in action, as it clarifies the developmental niches made available to the children, and the demands and structure placed on them. Such investigation also allows testing of expectations based on the existing literature base.

Cross-cultural differences in exposure to different developmental niches have been reported regarding a number of activities and have been reviewed by Larson and Verma (1999). Many of the comparisons concern children in East Asia (particularly Taiwan) and Western countries (particularly the United States). Certain cross-cultural activity comparisons are prominent in the literature. In particular, East Asian children have been found consistently to devote more time to out-of-school (or "extra") academics (Chen & Stevenson, 1989; Fuligni & Stevenson, 1995; Larson & Verma, 1999; Leone & Richards, 1989; Stevenson & Lee, 1990) and less time to leisure or play (Larson & Verma, 1999; Stevenson & Lee, 1990). American children have been found to engage in sports more than children from Asia and almost all European countries (Alsaker & Flammer, 1999; Larson & Verma, 1999). Findings regarding television viewing have been inconsistent (Juster & Stafford, 1991; Stevenson & Lee, 1990). Further investigation of the activity time usage by children in different countries will contribute to understanding of socialization differences between countries.

Gender Difference in After-School Activities and Autonomy

As well as being embedded in the overall cultural context of a particular society, the types of activities, self-choice in regard to them, and socializing experiences provided in a particular country may also vary with children's gender. The literature suggests that parents, teachers, and society as a whole hold different expectations and goals for boys and girls. Different activities, and different degrees of self-choice, are likely to be encouraged for boys and girls who will as a result have different experiential niches during their childhoods (Crouter & Head, 2002; Lott & Maluso, 1993). Based on their review across six cultures, Whiting and Edwards (1988) concluded that in middle childhood, girls spend more time in household chores. Girls have also been found to spend more time on homework (Chen & Stevenson, 1989; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). In many separate studies in different countries, girls in Britain (Newson & Newson, 1976), New Zealand (Clay & Oates, 1984), the former Soviet Union (Zuzanek, 1980), and the United States (Larson, 1989; McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 2001; Robinson & Bianchi, 1997) were found to read more than

boys. American boys aged 9 to 12 years use the computer more than girls of the same age (Hofferth & Sandberg, 1998). Several studies in various European countries and the United States (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997; Carpenter et al., 1989) have found that boys watch more television (but McHale et al. found that American boys and girls watched the same amount of television). Girls in the United States (McHale et al., 2001) were also found to spend more time with hobbies including extracurricular activities such as music and dance clubs and in outdoor play. Across several cultures, boys participate in sports more than girls do (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001; Larson & Verma, 1999).

A consistent gender difference has been reported in the adult structure provided for children's activities in both the United States and Britain. Carpenter et al. (1989) found that American boys spent more time in activities organized by themselves rather than supervised by adults, and Ryan and Lynch (1989) found that American parents granted less autonomy to adolescent girls than boys, although this may be limited to families with mothers who have traditional gender roles (Bumpus, Crouter, & McHale, 2001). Similarly, Newson and Newson (1976) reported that 7-year-old girls in the United Kingdom were supervised more by adults than was the case for boys. These findings suggest that girls in these countries are being socialized to a more restricted and established role. We might expect that the gender differences in both activities and autonomy regarding the activities might be greater in collectivist countries where adherence to traditional patterns is more emphasized, and in fact, particularly strong gender differentiation has been reported for Asian families (Chao & Tseng, 2002).

The Present Study

Following Larson and Verma's (1999) recommendations for more descriptive studies aimed at creating comprehensive profiles of different cultures, the purpose of the present investigation is to examine the whole spectrum of experiential niches to which girls and boys from three contrasting countries are exposed after school, describing component activity patterns and self-direction in regard to those patterns. Additionally, a set of predictions derived from theoretical assumptions and the findings of previous research will be tested. Findings will be discussed with reference to two selected cultural influences that seem particularly relevant to after-school activity variations, namely, individualistic versus collectivist orientation, and characteristics of the educational system. It should be noted that we did not measure empirically the participants' attitudes, values, or beliefs in

regard to these cultural factors; rather we used these cultural characteristics as a theoretical justification for the study. We also acknowledge that specific aspects of a child's circumstances will affect the extent to which cultural values can be implemented. Moreover, Larson and Verma note that the previously observed cross-cultural differences in the allocation of time for different activities should be cautiously interpreted because of the variability in the methodologies used in the research. That is, the primary studies included in these authors' review were not entirely comparable vis-à-vis time sampling, coding procedures, seasonal variations in the time sampled, and comprehensiveness of the hours of the day covered. In the current study, we carefully maintain the same procedures, timing, and measurement instruments in the three targeted countries.

Targeted age. Fourth-grade (10- and 11-year-old) children were the targeted age group for the current study. Larson and Verma (1999) note that few data are available about the after-school activities of children of this age; although clear differences in time spent in numerous activities by adolescents in Asian, Western European, and North American adolescent populations have been observed, studies involving early adolescents and younger children are surprisingly lacking.

Nevertheless, the age is particularly suitable for the study of this topic, as 10- and 11-year-old children are in transition from middle childhood to early adolescence and likely to be experiencing changes in their independence from parents. In many countries, they have considerable free time. They have typically not outgrown play activities; they are old enough to take advantage of activities available in their neighborhood and community. They are mature enough to have some autonomy from their parents and exercise choice, and they are characteristically energetic and industrious. Their industry is not constrained by vocational pressures or employment. They are not yet buffeted by the external and pubertal stresses of adolescence. Thus, this age period allows considerable variation in the socialization contexts available to children after school. After-school activity contexts to be compared in the study were derived from the children's own responses and include free play, TV watching, playing video games, extra academics, other extracurricular pursuits, free reading, sports, going on outings with family, and maintenance routines. These are described more fully in the Method section. The degree to which the children chose their own activities will also be examined.

Comparison countries. The countries selected for the study were Bulgaria, Taiwan, and the United States. The three countries represent different continents

and vary in many ways. Compared to the United States, Bulgaria and Taiwan are more ethnically homogeneous societies. Degree of postindustrialization varies considerably. In regard to the social factors selected for consideration in this study, the three countries vary in both predominant individualistic-collectivist orientation and educational systems. On published analyses of international status on the individualistic-collectivist dimension (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1994), the United States is consistently named as the most individualistic country, Bulgaria at a midpoint (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998), with Taiwan considered toward the more collectivist end of the dimension (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1994). In Taiwan, Confucian attitudes of respect and obedience to authority and socialization agents "to ensure a harmonious social order" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 223) contribute to collectivist values.

Reviews made of the educational systems in place at the time of data gathering have shown similar features of the Taiwanese and Bulgarian systems. Both emphasize centralization of curriculum, competitive nationwide and local examinations on which promotion depends and which occur in the junior high school years as well as at the end of high school, and more advanced curriculum introduced at earlier grades (Beaton et al., 1996; Schmidt et al., 2001). The curriculum in schools in the United States has been described as placing fewer demands on the students (Schmidt, Houang, & Cogan, 2002; Valverde & Schmidt, 1998), and academic selection examinations do not occur until the end of high school. Despite widespread testing of the students and competition for selective colleges, postsecondary education is widely available.

Research focus and hypotheses. The current study investigates the activity contexts during the after-school hours of girls and boys in the three selected countries, focusing on the understudied age group of 10- and 11-year-olds and adding information from an Eastern European country. The study adds to the database evidence of cross-cultural and gender differences in the occurrence and self-choice of activity contexts reported by the children. By employing standardized data collection and coding procedures, the direct comparison of the after-school activities and self-direction of children in three different cultural contexts is facilitated.

A number of hypotheses, derived from previous research and consistent with the selected characteristics (attitudes and beliefs regarding collectivism-individualism and education) of each culture are listed below. No relevant research on Bulgarian children's time usage was located. This lack restricts the predictions that can be made about children from this country.

Gender-related hypotheses are offered based on research conducted in a wide range of countries, often not those included in the present study.

It is predicted that Taiwanese and Bulgarian children will report spending more time in extra academics and extracurricular activities than will American children and less time free playing, watching TV, reading for fun, and playing video games. It is predicted that American children will spend more time in organized sports than will children from Taiwan and Bulgaria. American children are predicted to report more time spent in self-chosen activities compared to Taiwanese and Bulgarian children.

With respect to gender, it is predicted that compared to boys, the preadolescent girls will report more time spent in extra academic activities, routines, reading for fun, and extracurricular activities. It is also predicted that girls will report less time spent playing organized sports, watching TV, free playing, and playing video games and less time in activities that are self-chosen.

As collectivist cultures emphasize the maintenance of traditional roles and relationships, it is predicted that greater gender differences will be evident in the reports of the Taiwanese participants than in the reports of the U.S. participants.

Method

Participants

Participants of this study were fourth-grade elementary school students from three countries; Bulgaria ($n = 287$), Taiwan ($n = 259$), and the United States ($n = 196$). The participating schools in Taiwan and Bulgaria were in urban areas and those in the United States were in suburban areas, and students in all countries were primarily from middle socioeconomic classes. The overall sample had a mean age of 10.13 years, 52% being female. Ethnicity data were not collected; demographic information on the participating schools in Bulgaria and Taiwan showed that they represented the prevailing ethnic groups in each country. School records of U.S. schools showed that only 1% of the fourth graders were of ethnic origin other than White. Information about the occupations of the children's parents was available. By using Hollingshead's (1957) classification scheme, fathers' occupations were categorized into two categories: blue-collar and white-collar; the same classification scheme was used for the mothers' occupations; however, a third category of "housewife" was added. The parental occupation data indicate that in all three countries, both parents were predominantly in white-collar occupations. The white-collar percentages in

Bulgaria, Taiwan, and the United States for fathers were 62.5, 59.4 and 63.3 and for mothers were 65.9, 40.2, and 53.6, respectively. The blue-collar percentages for the three countries were 32.6, 32.8 and 23.9 for fathers and 24.6, 19.2 and 13.2 for mothers, respectively. The percentages of mothers being housewives were 5.6, 20.6, and 20.4 in Bulgaria, Taiwan and the United States. Information was missing for 4.9% of fathers and 5.6% of mothers in Bulgaria, 7.8% of fathers and 20% of mothers in Taiwan, and 12.8% of fathers and 12.8% of mothers in the United States.

Instrument

An after-school activity questionnaire, "What I usually do," developed by the researchers, asked children to recall the activity they generally engaged in during each given 1-hr time period on designated days. Sample activities (music lesson, soccer, TV, eating, homework, reading, and playing with friends) were provided to facilitate children's response generation. Two weekdays, Thursday and Friday, and a weekend day, Saturday, were selected to represent the weekly schedule of the children. Prior testing of the procedures indicated that responding about all 7 days challenged children's concentration and consumed too much class time. Children reported their activities from the time school was dismissed until 22:00 for weekdays, and from 10:00 to 22:00 for the weekend day. For each hour, children also indicated if the activity was chosen by themselves, or selected by an adult. Children were not allowed to nominate both, but there was no indication that this forced choice caused any difficulty.

The English version of the questionnaire was translated into Bulgarian and Chinese by the second and fourth authors, respectively. To ensure the accuracy of the translation, the two translated versions were back translated into English by two independent native speakers of Bulgarian and Chinese who were highly proficient in English. Any observed discrepancies in the translations were reconciled between the two translators involved for each language until an agreement about the most appropriate word choice was reached.

Procedure

Prior approval for the study was gained from local agents in each country and the institutional review board at the University at Albany. For the U.S. sample, the response rate for the parent consent and child assent forms was 49.5%. Because teachers acted *in loco parentis* in Bulgaria and Taiwan, the questionnaire was administered to every child in the participating classrooms. All children in the three countries completed the questionnaires on their after-school activities unvaryingly in the week before their schools went on summer

vacation. Questionnaires were group administered in the children's usual classroom settings during a school day by researchers or trained personnel.

Data Analysis

The "What I usually do" questionnaire asked children to name their usual activity for each given hour slot on 3 days. Native speakers of each country coded children's self-generated responses to open-ended questions into activity categories constructed by the researchers: (a) TV watching, (b) reading for fun, (c) play (e.g., riding bicycle, playing with friends, playing outside, personal hobbies: listening to music, dancing, drawing, painting, writing), (d) extra academics (e.g., homework, extra study, tutor, and cram school), (e) outings with family (e.g., family gatherings, going to church, movie or other event, visiting relatives, watching siblings' sports), (f) organized sports, (g) extracurricular activities (e.g., organized after-school non-sport programs, clubs, dance and music lessons), (h) routines (e.g., eat, sleep, chores, personal care, and travel), and (i) video/computer game usage. Interrater reliability as measured by the percentage of hourly categories for which there was agreement between two coders was .96 in Bulgaria and .83 in Taiwan (in both cases using randomly selected 10% of the country's total questionnaires), and .90 in the United States (using 20% of randomly selected questionnaires). Each time period was also categorized as either self-chosen or adult chosen.

Because of the fact that school dismissal times were different in the three countries and hence available after-school hours differed, proportion of available time spent for each activity and choice category was used in all analyses rather than actual time spent. The number of available hours was 30 for Bulgaria, 24 for Taiwan, and 26 for the United States.

Any participant with missing data in any activity period was eliminated from the dataset. By applying this stringent rule to the three samples, eight cases (3%) were excluded from the Bulgarian dataset, seven cases (3%) from the Taiwanese data set, and one case (less than 1%) was excluded from the U.S. data set. Detailed gender distributions of the resulting samples for each country are presented in Table 1.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the means and the standard deviations of the percentage of after-school time spent in the nine categories of activities by country and

Table 1
Gender Distribution in Each Country

	Bulgaria		Taiwan		United States		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Male	143	51.3	129	51.2	83	42.6	355	48.9
Female	136	48.7	123	48.8	112	57.4	371	51.1
Total	279	100	252	100	195	100	726	100

gender. As shown, Bulgarian children spent most of their after-school time playing (26.49%), followed by routines (24.72%), watching TV (20.11%), and extra academics (15.53%). Taiwanese children spent their after-school time mostly in routines (29.99%), extra academics (22.22%), watching TV (20.54%), playing (10.88%), and extracurricular activities (7.45%). Routines (31.85%), playing (28.8%), and watching TV (19.1%) represent the most substantial proportions of the after-school time for American children.

Table 2 also shows the percentage of time periods that activities were adult chosen, rather than chosen by the children themselves. It can be seen that children in Bulgaria, Taiwan, and the United States reported spending 21.43%, 37.40%, and 31.69%, respectively, of the time in adult-chosen activities.

Between Country and Gender Differences in After-School Time Usage

To test whether there were statistically significant country, gender differences, and interaction effects in the proportion of time spent in the nine types of categories between the children from the three countries, a series of two-way between-subjects analyses of variance (ANOVA) was performed. The proportions of time spent in routines, watching TV, playing, extra academics, extracurricular activities, sports, reading for fun, outings, and computer/video game usage were the dependent variables, and country and gender served as grouping variables in the nine ANOVAs. A separate ANOVA looked at the effects of country and gender on the proportions of time spent in adult-chosen activities. The software SPSS 12.00 was used for the analyses with listwise deletion of missing data. To control for Type I error rates, a Bonferroni adjustment to the alpha level was made. A country,

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations of Percentage of Time Spent in Nine After-School Activities
and Percentage of Adult-Chosen Activities by Country and Gender

Activity	Bulgaria						Taiwan						United States					
	Male		Female		Total	\bar{X}	Male		Female		Total	\bar{X}	Male		Female		Total	
	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	SD		\bar{X}	SD	SD	\bar{X}	SD		SD	\bar{X}	SD	SD	\bar{X}	SD
Routines	22.51	11.14	27.13	12.09	24.72	11.81	28.14	12.31	32.02	13.17	29.99	12.85	27.42	11.72	35.13	13.26	31.85	13.16
TV	20.40	12.97	19.79	10.72	20.11	11.93	20.16	13.29	20.95	11.83	20.54	12.60	19.39	10.55	18.89	9.60	19.10	9.98
Play	29.66	17.62	23.03	15.38	26.49	16.89	12.62	14.95	8.97	10.75	10.88	13.22	30.72	15.29	27.37	13.78	28.80	14.50
Extra academics	14.71	9.86	16.43	10.08	15.53	9.99	22.56	13.69	21.84	12.92	22.22	13.31	4.64	3.88	3.78	3.14	4.15	3.50
Video games	6.65	7.23	2.21	3.81	4.48	6.22	6.74	9.66	2.22	5.03	4.58	8.11	5.11	6.13	2.99	5.02	3.89	5.61
Extracurricular	1.25	2.76	3.19	6.67	2.18	5.11	5.61	7.99	9.46	.15	7.45	.12	2.50	5.84	2.99	4.81	2.78	5.26
Sports	1.41	3.93	1.76	6.19	1.58	5.12	.81	3.40	.43	1.44	.62	2.66	5.33	7.52	3.02	5.25	4.01	6.40
Reading for fun	1.88	3.99	3.48	4.77	2.64	4.44	.91	.30	.85	.22	.88	.25	2.18	5.03	3.81	5.78	3.12	5.52
Outings	1.63	3.40	2.97	4.84	2.27	4.20	2.46	5.82	3.26	7.56	2.84	6.71	2.70	5.26	2.03	3.90	2.31	4.53
Adult-chosen activities	18.52	17.71	24.59	19.75	21.43	18.93	36.49	25.08	38.38	29.90	37.40	25.95	30.01	16.38	32.94	16.59	31.69	16.52

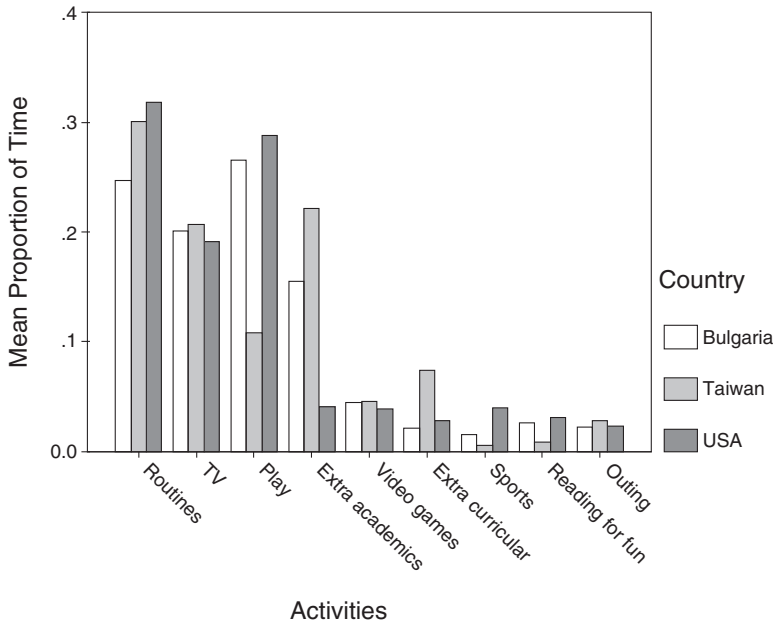
Note: Bulgaria, $N = 279$; Taiwan, $N = 252$; United States, $N = 195$.

gender, and interaction effect was declared significant only if the p value associated with the F statistic was less than .006 (.05/9).

Country differences. The country effects on activities are illustrated in Figure 1. Of the nine ANOVAs performed, three did not yield significant country effects. The children from the three countries did not differ significantly with respect to proportion of time spent in watching TV, $F(2, 720) = 1.587, p = .2, \eta^2 = .00$ outings $F(2, 720) = 1.661, p = .19, \eta^2 = .00$ and playing video/computer games, $F(2, 720) = .261, p = .77, \eta^2 = .00$. Significant country differences were found in all other activities, namely the proportion of time spent in extra academics, $F(2, 720) = 171.45, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31$; reading for fun, $F(2, 720) = 17.57, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$; playing, $F(2, 720) = 115.726, p < .001, \eta^2 = .23$; extracurricular activities, $F(2, 720) = 36.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$; sports, $F(2, 720) = 34.45, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$; and routines $F(2, 720) = 17.98, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$.

Scheffe post hoc comparisons allowed hypothesized differences between particular countries to be tested. These comparisons revealed, as predicted, that compared to their American counterparts, Taiwanese children spent a significantly greater proportion of after-school time in extra academics ($p < .001, \eta = .44$) and extracurricular activities ($p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$), and a significantly smaller proportion of after-school time in the leisure pursuits of playing ($p < .001, \eta^2 = .26$) and reading for fun ($p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$). Also as predicted, American children reported more time doing sports ($p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$). There were statistically significant differences found between Taiwanese and Bulgarian children in regard to some activities. Compared to Bulgarian children, Taiwanese children reported more time spent in extra academics ($p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$), extracurricular activities ($p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$), and routines ($p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$); Bulgarian children, on the other hand, reported more time spent in playing ($p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$) and reading for fun ($p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$). Taiwanese and American children had an approximately equal proportion of time spent in routines ($p = .13, \eta^2 = .01$). Bulgarian and Taiwanese did not differ in the proportion of time spent playing sports ($p = .052, \eta^2 = .02$), but as predicted, this was significantly less than the proportion of time spent by American children ($p < .001$). Contrary to prediction, Bulgarian and American children did not differ with respect to proportion of time spent playing ($p = .243, \eta^2 = .00$), doing extracurricular activities ($p = .91, \eta^2 = .00$), and reading ($p = .42, \eta^2 = .00$). However, compared to the American children, the Bulgarian children spent a significantly greater proportion of time in extra academics ($p < .001, \eta^2 = .32$), as was predicted.

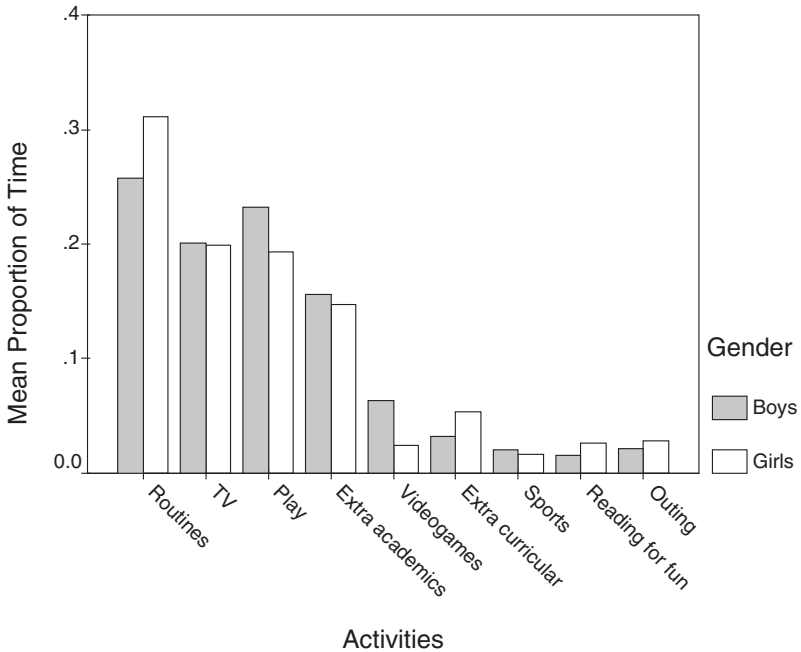
Figure 1
Mean Country Differences in Proportion of Time
Spent in Nine After-School Activities



Analysis of the data in Table 2 shows that the percentage of time spent by children in each country doing adult-chosen activities differed significantly, $F(2, 773) = 41.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$. Pairwise comparisons showed that, as hypothesized, Taiwanese children reported significantly more time in such activities than American children ($p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$). Bulgarian children reported even less adult-chosen time ($p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$).

Gender differences. Figure 2 presents the average proportion of time spent in the nine after-school activities by gender. The ANOVAs did not reveal the predicted gender differences in watching TV, $F(1, 720) = .184$, $p = .69$, $\eta^2 = .00$; playing sports, $F(1, 720) = 3.74$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = .01$; and extra academics, $F(1, 720) = .009$, $p = .89$, $\eta^2 = .00$. There were also no gender differences in outings, $F(1, 720) = 1.66$, $p > .21$, $\eta^2 = .00$. However,

Figure 2
Mean Gender Differences in Proportion of Time Spent
in Nine After-School Activities



compared to boys and as predicted, girls spent a greater proportion of time in reading, $F(1, 720) = 12.30, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$; extracurricular activities, $F(1, 720) = 13.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$; routines, $F(1, 720) = 33.98, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$; and a smaller proportion of time playing, $F(1, 720) = 51.474, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$, and playing video/computer games, $F(1, 720) = 57.495, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$.

Consistent with the study's hypothesis, a gender difference was also found in the proportion of time spent in adult-selected activities, $F(1, 773) = 5.39, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$. Irrespective of country, girls reported significantly more time spent in such activities ($\bar{X} = .32, SD = .23$) than did boys ($\bar{X} = .28, SD = .22$).

Country by gender interaction effects. Contrary to prediction, gender differences in activities and choice were not more marked in Taiwan than

in the United States. No interaction between country and gender was observed, $F(2, 773) = .75, p > .47, \eta^2 = .00$, in regard to the data on proportion of time spent in adult-selected activities. The only significant interaction effect was observed in the ANOVA with sports as a dependent measure, $F(2, 720) = 5.29, p = .005, \eta^2 = .01$. Whereas in Bulgaria, $t(278) = .67, p = .50, \eta^2 = .00$, and Taiwan, $t(251) = .59, p = .55, \eta^2 = .00$, boys and girls spent approximately the same proportion of time in sports, this was not the case in the United States where boys spent almost twice as much time as girls playing sports, $t(194) = 2.58, p = .011, \eta^2 = .03$.

Discussion

Although there were considerable differences between the autonomy and activity patterns of these early adolescent children in Bulgaria, Taiwan, and the United States (and most of these were consistent with our predictions derived from previous literature), there was substantial agreement in the gender-based participation differences in the three countries. It can be concluded that the three countries provide different developmental contexts for their children's discretionary time, but that gender operates in a similar fashion within these contexts in each country.

Because of variations in the nature of the activities studied, and the age groups of the participants, it is difficult to compare directly our findings to those of others. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that our results confirm those of many, but not all, earlier studies, as well as extend previous findings. In particular, we add information about children in Bulgaria, about whom we found no previous relevant information. We also add to the literature information about the degree of self-choice compared to adult choice of the activities of the children.

Country Differences in After-School Activities and Autonomy

Overall, our results show the greatest contrast between the after-school activity patterns of the Taiwanese and the American children, as predicted because of previous research findings and specified and contrasting characteristics of the cultures. The reports of the children in the two countries differed mostly in terms of play, extra academics, and extracurricular activities. Taiwanese children were distinguished by time spent in extra academics and extracurricular activities, whereas American children were distinguished by the amount of time they spent in free play and in sports. These differing experiential niches (Larson & Verma, 1999) are consistent with the

differing emphases on education that writers (Schmidt et al., 2001) claim are placed on preadolescent children in the two countries. Moreover, it should be noted that the Taiwanese children had less time available after school, as they spent more hours in school.

Children from the United States also reported that more of their time was self-chosen, as was consistent with the predominant socialization predicted for children in an individualistic country such as the United States. Whereas American children are given more opportunity after school to select activities in accordance with their individual interests and goals, the Taiwanese children are more often directed to do activities that their elders deem appropriate and are socialized in this way to the respectful roles required for maintenance of the collectivist culture. Thus, based on the children's own reports of their after-school activities and whether they were self-chosen, our data also provide support for previous writers (Chao, 1994; Chao & Tseng, 2002; Wu et al., 2002) who have proposed that Chinese parents are more likely to control their children and allow them less autonomy than American parents. Moreover, the Taiwanese children reported after-school childhoods that appear more structured to promote the development of formal skills. As was predicted from knowledge of the educational emphasis of the culture, their free-play time was substantially replaced by time spent doing extra academics (such as home study or attending cram schools) or participating in extracurricular activities (typically lessons in the development of some skill). Little time was devoted to reading for fun. Nevertheless, contrary to expectation, Taiwanese children watched equivalent amounts of TV as children in the other two countries, an activity that may promote relaxation.

The Bulgarian children reported engaging in activities that reflect a pattern between those of the other two countries. Apparently, Bulgarian children devote their free time to both play and extra academic activities, and they reported the greatest proportion of self-chosen activities. The findings in regard to Bulgaria are worthy of further investigation and validation, as they may indicate a balanced set of experiential niches that promotes academics as well as self-choice and autonomy in the preadolescents. Further research is needed to show how this is compatible with the greater collectivist orientation of the Bulgarian culture compared to that of the United States (Suh et al., 1998).

Despite the general agreement of our results with those of previous studies, there are some points of discrepancy. Some discrepancies may have arisen from variations in the source of the data; parental reports seem more likely to express the values of the culture, whereas children's reports of what

they actually do may reflect situations where cultural values have been sacrificed because of practical exigencies. Our finding regarding the greater time spent in sport by the American children than the Asian children is consistent with the findings of Larson and Verma (1999), except that we found this was especially the case for American boys. It has been suggested (Messner, 1992) that in America, boys are particularly encouraged to participate in sports to express masculinity, but this does not explain why this pressure is not evident for boys in the other two countries. The data of the current study do not provide information as to why participation in sports is emphasized to this extent for American boys, but the prestige and publicity concerning participation in school teams is likely to be an associated factor.

Other studies (Juster & Stafford, 1991) have found, as we did, that children in various countries do not differ in the amount of TV watched, yet Stevenson and Lee (1990) found that Taiwanese children watched less than American children. It is possible that the different methodology of the studies accounts for the differences. In Stevenson and Lee's study (unlike in our study), mothers provided the information, and TV watching may have been less consistent with the educational and achievement aspirations of Taiwanese mothers. Although television is an important source of information, concerns have been raised that watching TV leads to physical and cognitive inactivity (Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linerbarger, & Wright, 2001; Davison, Marshall, & Birch, 2006) and lower achievement test scores (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). We found that children from Taiwan spent less time reading for fun than did children from the United States (and Bulgaria), whereas Stevenson and Lee reported no differences in such reading for children from the two countries. Again, the difference in the source of the information may have resulted in this finding, with Taiwanese mothers reluctant to report that their children spent time in a nonacademic pastime. Such an interpretation of the cultural differences requires further investigation with information derived from the same source in each culture. Our findings are also inconsistent with those of other authors regarding time spent in extracurricular activities. Taiwanese children in the current study reported more time spent in these pursuits than did children in the United States and Bulgaria, whereas previous studies (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Hyung-Joong, 1989; Lee, 1994) found that Asian students devoted less time to nonathletic organized activities than American and European children. It may be that differences in the age of the children in the samples account for the differing findings. Our participants were young adolescents, whereas those in these other studies were middle and high school students who may have experienced more competing academic demands.

Gender Differences in After-School Activities and Autonomy

As well as documenting after-school activity differences between the countries, the current study showed that in all three countries, the manner in which the activities for the two genders were differentiated was remarkably similar. Observed gender differences were largely consistent with predictions derived from the findings of previous studies. Although there is cultural input to gender roles, our data show that within the context of after-school activities, the three countries operationalize gender roles in a very similar fashion. According to their self-reports and as predicted, in all three countries, girls do extracurricular activities (McHale et al., 2001), read (Clay & Oates, 1984; Larson, 1989), and engage in routines more than do boys, whereas they report less leisure spent in free playing (McHale et al., 2001) and in video and computer game playing than boys (Hofferth & Sandberg, 1998). The prediction that girls would devote more time to academics and TV watching was not confirmed. As routines include household chores, girls are likely to be responsible for more chores than are boys (Larson & Verma, 1999; Whiting & Edwards, 1988), but we did not have sufficient data on this activity to test the expectation. In addition, in all three countries, girls reported that more of their time was spent in activities chosen for them by adults. Thus, both by this direct report, and by the activities that predominate for them (routines, organized extracurricular activities, and reading) and by experiencing less free play, it is suggested that girls in all three countries remain closer to adults in their free time and experience less autonomy.

Despite the differences in the cultures of Bulgaria, Taiwan, and the United States, and our previously noted findings of substantial cross-cultural differences in time devoted to the various activities, we did not find that gender patterns were different in the three countries. Engagement in sports was the only area in which gender patterns were different for the three countries, and this resulted from a marked gender difference in the American data with girls reporting considerably less sports time than did American boys, as discussed above.

The similarity in the three countries' gender-based activity patterns is remarkable given the geographic, educational, and cultural differences between the three countries studied. Thus the differing collectivist-individualistic orientations of the three countries do not appear to have been manifested in differing provisions of experiential niches in the after-school hours for the two genders. Whether these gender patterns remain similar in the three countries and persist into later adolescence when pressures for advanced

academic study and vocational selection become more salient and more diverse is of interest for future research.

Our finding that preadolescent girls in all three countries spend more time in activities chosen for them by adults is consistent with earlier studies in the United States (Carpenter et al., 1989; Fagot, 1978) and Britain (Newson & Newson, 1976). There could be several reasons for this, ranging from the belief that girls need more protection or supervision and receive more stringent socialization in adult skills and roles to the possibility that boys are less amenable to adult direction or more capable of taking initiative. Our data do not allow us to decide between various explanations.

Although the gender-related findings of the current study generally confirm those of previous studies (based on children in a variety of countries), not all of the findings provide support for previous research. We did not find a gender difference in time spent in extra academics, whereas this has been reported previously (Chen & Stevenson, 1989; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). In previous studies (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997; Carpenter, et al., 1989), boys were found to watch more TV than girls, whereas in the current study, this was not the case as there was no gender difference in amount of TV viewing in any country. Boys in all three countries did report playing more video and computer games, however. It is possible that video game playing was less prevalent at the time of earlier studies, and boys now spend part of their time playing video games that they once spent in viewing TV.

Unfortunately, differences in the categorization of play activities make it difficult to directly compare our findings on this activity with those of McHale et al. (2001). In this American study, girls were found to do more outdoor play but not differ from boys in time spent playing with toys and games. Our study combined both aspects of play (and also included hobbies in the play category) and found that boys played more than girls. The McHale et al. study also found that American girls spent more time than did boys on hobbies and extracurricular activities. As mentioned, we categorized hobbies as play rather than as extracurricular activities, but our findings over the three cultures agreed with those of McHale et al. that girls spent more time in extracurricular activities than did boys.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study allow speculations about the different developmental qualities of the after-school activity contexts of children in the three countries. Future research could examine the validity of such

speculations. In our after-school activity data, we note a cross-cultural difference in the tendency of the children to report spending time in freely chosen or nonstructured activities versus spending time in activities that are structured by adults and/or encourage the direct acquisition of valued skills. We have found that these differences are consistent, in part, with cultural differences in the value placed on individuality and the importance given to academic dedication. We suggest that the Taiwanese children are experiencing the latter more structured situation. The lack of free play time in the activity pattern of the Taiwanese children would seem to typify that which some authors (Elkind, 1981; Sigel, 1987) propose deprives children of the developmental benefits of childhood and places them at risk for stress. The American children on the other hand, report activities consistent with a less pressured childhood, being allowed more self-chosen, free play time. According to many developmental psychologists, play itself brings benefits to children who inadvertently practice interpersonal, practical, cognitive, and physical skills with their playmates and gain such developmental benefits as empathy and social role-taking ability (Bretherton, 1989), as well as moral (Kohlberg, 1971) and cognitive (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1966) growth. It should be noted that the free-play-oriented model of childhood in the United States appears under threat from current pressures, such as those created by the No Child Left Behind policy (Popham, 2004) and national testing initiatives, that encourage emphasis on skill building and maximum time on task (policies that we have identified above as consistent with the Taiwanese model). It may be that future studies will find that middle-class American early adolescents report that their playtime has been reduced by academic work.

It must be acknowledged that the stated conclusions must be read with certain methodological limitations of the study in mind. In each of the countries studied, the conclusions stated are dependent on the particular samples selected, the time of data gathering, and the instrumentation used. Data in the study were gathered by a modified time diary method. Participants were asked to recall and write down the activities in which they typically engaged during each after-school hour slot for 3 designated days. It is possible that responses to this memory task were biased by the current or most recent activities and thus did not provide a representative sample of typical time usage (Larson & Verma, 1999). In addition, the "Who chooses?" autonomy variable was measured by asking respondents to choose between two options: self or adult. It may be that other reasons for activity participation (e.g., both self and adult, or friends), not captured by the Forced-Choice scale used, are also likely. Furthermore, we did not know the particular circumstances of each child that may have affected the extent

to which the values of the broader culture were exhibited. Nevertheless, certain methodological precautions were taken to increase validity and allow cross-cultural comparison. All children were in the same grade level and attended schools in predominantly middle-class areas. The questionnaire was carefully translated to have equivalent meaning in all countries and targeted the children's own reports of their activities on the same 3 days of the week. Data were gathered in all countries during the same period of the school year. Although this may have influenced the type of activities engaged in and reported on, the participants were instructed to report their typical rather than their current activities, and any nonrepresentativeness would be equivalent in all three samples. Thus, the study has provided a method to allow the young adolescents in three contrasting countries to provide valid information about the developmental and socialization opportunities available to them after school.

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