

“Can I Get a Little Space, Please?” A Cross-Generation Comparison of Leisure Time and Mobility Patterns of Adolescents

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Comparing mobility patterns of adolescents across generations requires methods that incorporate the historicity of human activity. This study examines how adolescent use of space, in terms of leisure time and mobility patterns, has changed across generations in relation to diverse geographic and socioeconomic histories. The data collected from Nashville families includes interviews, parent oral histories, free recall maps, and teen mobility tracks gathered using a wearable Global Positioning System (GPS) device. This paper describes how changes in artifacts, and different levels of community embeddedness have shaped the ways in which today’s adolescents experience and create spaces outside of school, in comparison to their parents’ generation. I analyze how daily activity schedules reflect a division of labor in families between parents and their adolescent children, the variety and place-based structure of community learning opportunities in which adolescents participate during their leisure time (with and without parental oversight), the mutually accountable practices through which teens produce and regulate these spaces, and recurring use of cultural materials and artifacts for producing and engaging with these spaces. Observing geography, class, gender, and age constantly working in confluence in the construction of space through time, this paper further challenges the idea that children from urban working-class families experience “deficits” while participating in and making practices outside of school. While extant models of activity systems (e.g., Engestrom et al., 1999) provide considerable guidance in making sense of adolescents space-time mobility and use of community spaces in leisure time activities, there are dynamic, imaginative components of these spatial practices (de Certeau, 1984) that are not well captured by concepts of rules or divisions of labor within the already-existing community. Finally, this paper reports on a comparison of adolescent and parent/guardian (as recalled, in a map construction task) space-time mobility, where both are treated as a linked collection of activity

systems. If culturally relevant pedagogy is important for educating students and challenging institutional inequities in the future (Ladson-Billings, 1995), then we must also know what defines youth culture and learning outside of school in the present.