LEISURE SATISFACTION AND HAPPINESS AS A FUNCTION OF LEISURE ACTIVITY

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114 subjects rated their happiness, leisure satisfaction, and several dimensions of leisure activity at two points in time. Some personality differences were found between those choosing different kinds of leisure, e.g. self-esteem and voluntary work, cooperativeness and clubs, neuroticism and hobbies rather than sports. Sixty-eight percent of respondents reported being committed to a leisure activity; they found their leisure to be more absorbing, more under control, and more challenging as well as more stressful than those who were not committed to a leisure activity; and they also had greater leisure satisfaction. Leisure satisfaction correlated with happiness, and social aspects of leisure satisfaction predicted happiness in longitudinal analysis.

Key words: committed leisure, leisure satisfaction, happiness


Personality and leisure choice

Why do people choose different kinds of leisure? Partly because different kinds of people find different leisure activities satisfying. Furnham(1) found that extraverts chose social and physical leisure activities more than introverts did. In a previous study we found that extraverts spend more time with teams and clubs, and at noisy parties and dances, and that this makes them happy(2). We found that some people are cooperative in that they enjoy group leisure activities, and that this makes them happy (3). In another paper(4) we reported that if people are asked to talk about recent happy events, extraverts talked most about social events and sport, while introverts talked about solitary events, and “parasocial” activities like watching soap operas. Zuckerman(5) has found that individuals who are high on “sensation seeking” choose situations which are exciting, involving speed or danger.

Abilities are also important. People do not enjoy leisure activities unless they are reasonably good at them: being good is necessary in order to enjoy using the skill, produce positive results and receive the approval of others. Gardening is not very satisfying if nothing grows, nor is tennis if you always miss the ball or it goes into the net. Several studies have found that perceived ability is a strong predictor of taking up a leisure activity(6). Social skills are important here. Women who are socially competent are more likely to take up volunteer work and go to evening classes; those who are less competent are more likely to do sewing, knitting and crosswords(7).

We know that choice of leisure activities varies a lot with age, sex and social class(8), but this can perhaps be explained partly in terms of differences in personality.

Therefore, our first research question in the present study is: does personality affect choice of leisure activity? More specifically, we expected that extraversion may lead to choice of social leisure and sport, cooperativeness to team and club activities, neuroticism to solitary forms of leisure, and self-esteem to competitive leisure activities.

The experience of leisure

Different leisure activities have a different subjective quality. For example, Csikszentmihá-
lyi and Kubey asked people to fill in a number of mood rating scales while engaged in different leisure activities. They found that while watching most TV programmes people were generally found to be relaxed, cheerful and sociable; they were more drowsy, weak and passive than for reading or any other activity, for instance, work, other leisure, eating or talking. Other kinds of leisure produce quite different subjective experiences. For example sport and exercise can produce a feeling of well-being mainly through their physiological effects, such as release of endorphins and other neurotransmitters, and later relaxation. There are psychological effects, such as regulating arousal, time out from routine activities, and self-esteem from successful performance. Sport can also produce feelings of euphoria during peak performance, when the performer has feelings of unusual power and control, and becomes aware of his or her surroundings, the body seeming to perform on its own.

Social leisure, like dancing and parties can produce a quite different experience, of fun and joy. Serious and committed forms of leisure may produce another quality of experience of satisfaction, challenge and absorption.

Therefore, our second research question is: do different kinds of leisure relate to different kinds of subjective experience?

There is evidence that different leisure activities generate different levels of satisfaction. For example Robinson found that "great satisfaction" was reported with reading by 32% of his sample, with sports or games by 26%, and TV by 17%. Csikszenmihalyi has found that highly absorbing activities, where skills are used and peak levels of performance needed, are the most deeply satisfying. On the other hand, a lot of leisure is directed to relaxation rather than arousal. Iso-Ahola proposed that people seek an optimal level of motivation. Several have argued that freedom of choice, and perceived competence are important for leisure satisfaction.

Intrinsic job satisfaction is partly a function of autonomy, but also of task identity (i.e. completing meaningful pieces of work), task significance (i.e. having an impact on the lives of others), use of varied skills, and feedback on effectiveness. We suspect that intrinsic leisure satisfaction may have similar components.

Therefore, our third research question is: does having a committed leisure generate the greatest leisure satisfaction? Potential reasons for this may include freedom of choice, and engaging in activities requiring the use of skills, hence leading to recognition by others.

The effects of leisure

The importance of leisure as a source of happiness has come out differently in different studies. In some of them, leisure was the most important predictor, more important than income or health, and these factors were important because of their effect on leisure. Leisure has been found to be particularly important in studies of old people, and for the unmarried. Little found that a number of aspects of "personal projects" correlated with life satisfaction - the absence of difficulty or stress, positive outcomes, time spent and being typical of the individual.

Certain kinds of leisure have specific benefits. Exercise and sport are very good for health, and also have a definite effect on positive mood, as many studies have shown. The effect appears to be partly physiological, through nor-adrenaline or the endorphins stimulating the pleasure centres.

Another popular form of leisure, TV watching is a mixed blessing. While watching soap operas regularly is related to happiness, watching a lot of TV in general has a negative bearing on the subjective well-being.

It is possible that leisure can be beneficial for well-being. Exercise may relieve depression, reduce anxiety, as well as benefitting physical health. Social leisure, such as spending time with friends and belonging to clubs, may also provide a major source of social support.

Therefore, our fourth research question is: does leisure affect overall happiness or well-being?

In summary, previous research have provided valuable insights into the four research questions raised above. However, this present study has gone further in several ways. First, this study targeted a relatively large sample of British community residents, as opposed to usual targets of college students or North American samples. Second, this study has introduced the concept of committed leisure, and has focused on comparing patterns of leisure life perception/experience and satisfaction for people with and without a committed leisure. Third, this
study has also introduced a scheme to catagorize popular leisure activities into four major groups, namely, voluntary work/social clubs, sports, hobbies/crafts, and arts/education, hence, making possible the systematic examination of relationships between personality and leisure choice. Finally, this study has incorporated both traditional personality traits, such as extraversion, neuroticism and self-esteem, and newly recognized personality characteristics such as cooperativeness, to extend previous research on the relationship between personality and leisure.

**MATERIALS AND METHOD**

**Subjects**

114 subjects from the Oxford Subject Panel took part in this study. Subjects were residents from the Oxford area who volunteered to participate in psychological studies. The standing panel is representative of the general population in Britain on all demographic variables except race. This current sample was all white and composed of 42 males and 72 females, ages ranging from 18 to 65, with a mean of 44.1. There was no age difference between the two sexes.

**Materials**

Three aspects of *leisure* were assessed:

(1) Committed Leisure. Subjects were asked whether they had a seriously committed leisure activity, and if so which one? (2) Perception of Leisure. This was measured by a set of rating scales adapted from those of Little[17]. Subjects first wrote down 10 leisure activities, and then rated each of them along twelve dimensions on a scale from 0-10. The 12 dimensions are Importance, Enjoyment, Difficulty, Social Interaction, Control, Stress, Time spent, Success, Identity, Challenge, Absorption, and Social Support. Following Little’s procedure, the average scores across all leisure activities listed on each dimension were calculated and used in analyses.

(3) Leisure Satisfaction. This was measured by the Beard and Ragheb Scale[20], which is composed of 6 subscales: Psychological, Social, Physical, Educational, Relaxation, and Aesthetic.

*Happiness* was measured by the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI)[21]. This is a 29-item questionnaire, originally based on rever-

singing the items of the Beck Depression Inventory, and adding further items. It is quite consistent over time, and correlated. 43 with judgements by friends. The baseline data on happiness was collected 6 months earlier as part of another project.

**Personality** data were also collected earlier.

(1) Self-esteem was measured by Rosenberg’s scale. This is a 10-item questionnaire, and is probably the most widely-used measure of self-esteem[22].

(2) Extraversion and Neuroticism were measured by the EPQ[23]. The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire is the most widely-used measure of these two dimensions, probably the two most important dimensions of personality.

(3) Cooperativeness was measured by a scale (The Social Inventory) developed in an earlier study[23], consisting of 36 pro- or anti-cooperation statements covering all major life domains: Leisure, Leadership, Friends, Family, Education, Clubs, Work, and Committees. This is a new measure, assessing self-reported ability, desire for, and approval of cooperation in all these areas. Different factors were found to be predictive of happiness, in the earlier study.

**Demographic Information** was also recorded. Subjects reported their sex and age. Job status was classified as “no paid job”, “part-time job”, “full-time job”, and “overtime or second job”.

Overall, this was a cross-sectional study, except that baseline happiness and personality factors were measured 6 months earlier.

**RESULTS**

**Personality and leisure**

Among 114 subjects, 79 (68.4%) declared that they had a committed leisure activity. These activities could be further classified into four categories: “Voluntary work/clubs”, e.g. youth work, choral society; “Sports”, e.g. keeping fit, swimming; “Hobbies/crafts”, e.g. gardening, model making; and “Arts/education”, e.g. music, reading. Percentages of people engaging in each category of leisure are shown in Fig. 1.

There was no effect of sex or job status on having a committed leisure. Similarly, there was no age difference between people who had a committed leisure and those who did not.

After coding choice of leisure as a dummy
People who were cooperative were more likely to take up voluntary work, join clubs ($r = .28$, $p < .05$), or take part in sports ($r = .28$, $p < .05$) than engage in arts or educational activities. Neurotic people were more likely to engage in hobbies or craftwork than take part in sports ($r = .27$, $p < .05$).

The experience of different kinds of leisure

Results seem to suggest that when people are committed to a leisure activity, they perceive/experience leisure life quite differently. Compared with people who did not have a committed leisure, people who had a committed leisure activity felt they were more in control ($t = 2.09$, $p < .05$). They were more absorbed in their leisure ($t = 3.02$, $p < .003$). However, they also perceived their leisure as more challenging ($t = 3.01$, $p < .003$), and more stressful ($t = 2.14$, $p < .05$). Although the link between “stressfulness” and “not in control” has been well documented in past literature, this is not the case in the present study ($r = -.014$, n.s.). Nonetheless, the observed positive relation between “stressfulness” and perception of “not in control” typically occurs in the context of negative life events, with the person concerned engaged voluntarily. In the case of committed leisure, freedom of choice is generally guaranteed, hence “in control” becomes irrelevant in this specific context. However, there is a significant correlation between “challenge” and “stressfulness” ($r = .28$, $p < .001$).

Leisure satisfaction

A multiple regression analysis was performed to predict leisure satisfaction from personality factors and perception of leisure. Having (or not having) a committed leisure as a dummy variable was also included as a potential predictor. Results of this stepwise regression are presented in Table 1.

Having a committed leisure, the rating of the leisure enjoyment, and the degree of challenge all predicted leisure satisfaction. Leisure challenge had a positive relation with leisure satisfaction. This is not surprising when we recall that people who had a committed leisure viewed their leisure life as more stressful and challenging.

Furthermore, t-tests revealed that people who had a committed leisure activity had more overall leisure satisfaction ($t = 3.15$, $p < .002$).
Leisure & happiness

Table 1. Predictors of Leisure Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>R square</th>
<th>R square change</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committed leisure</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.07**</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.03*</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>6.22***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * = p < .05, ** = P < .01, *** = p < .001

They also had more psychological satisfaction (t = 4.03, p < .001) and more social satisfaction (t = 2.25, p < .05). These results are presented in Fig. 3.

Leisure satisfaction and happiness

The zero-order correlation between leisure satisfaction and happiness was significant (r = .29, p < .001). All the other aspects of leisure satisfaction except education were also significantly correlated with happiness, their coefficients ranging from .17 to .33.

![Bar chart showing the effects of having a committed leisure on leisure satisfaction](image)

Fig. 3. Effects of having a committed leisure on leisure satisfaction.

We performed a multiple regression analysis to predict happiness from leisure satisfaction, personality and demographic variables. Age (young people), extraversion, self-esteem, and social satisfaction all predicted happiness. Taking the analysis one step further, when we controlled baseline happiness at time 1 statistically, age, extraversion and social satisfaction of leisure still predicted happiness. The results are shown in Table 2.

Ag. in treating choice of leisure as a dummy variable, the choice of sports is correlated with age (younger people), self-esteem and cooperativeness, voluntary work and social clubs by the same variables. This appears to be a kind of socially active leisure package, but extraversion is not a correlate here. The correlation between age and voluntary work seems to run in the opposite direction to that usually recorded in past research (i.e., older people are more likely to be involved in voluntary work). We examined the correlations in detail, and noticed that it was in comparison with “hobbies/craftwork”, younger people engaged more in “voluntary work”. Moreover, the “voluntary work” group is somewhat younger (mean age = 42) than the “hobbies/craftwork” group (mean age = 51).

DISCUSSION

It should be noted that this was a group of community adults who were not selected for their leisure activities, but as members of a subject panel, which means that they had some spare time, and were therefore in a position to become involved in serious leisure if they wished.

We have presumed that personality factors lead to choice of leisure activities, rather than the reverse. Although more powerful statistics, e.g. regression, could not be applied to the data, a series of correlations between per-
sonality characteristics and different types of leisure did suggest the trends. There is also some evidence in the literature which supports this interpretation of causality. After reviewing both classic and recent research on leisure, Ingham concluded that people usually select these leisure activities that portray their personal identities, "self presentation". Hence, leisure may serve to enhance a particular personal characteristic, but does not directly shape it. When a person has a serious leisure activity, often as a member of a group pursuing it, this becomes an important part of his or her life, in many cases more important and more satisfying than work.

When people are committed to a leisure activity, they view their entire leisure life in a distinct way: more under their control, more absorbing, but also more stressful and challenging. In these ways serious leisure is similar to work: it is most satisfying when it has the same properties which make work satisfying.

Having a committed leisure and certain aspects of leisure life, i.e., enjoyment and challenge, all contribute to leisure satisfaction, which in turn, contributes to happiness. However, there is no direct contribution from perception of leisure to happiness. Although most aspects of leisure perception (e.g., enjoyment and challenge) correlated with happiness, partial correlations controlling for leisure satisfaction were no longer significant. Evidently, there is no direct link between perception of leisure and happiness, but, there is an indirect passage through leisure satisfaction.

A similar story can be told of committed leisure. People who had a committed leisure were happier ($t = 2.16$, $p < .05$). Although having a committed leisure did not predict happiness directly, it did predict leisure satisfaction. Therefore, the route from committed leisure to happiness is again through leisure satisfaction. Part of the explanation may lie in belonging to the relevant leisure group. We found that these groups are sources of happiness (Argyle and Lu, 1990), and other studies have shown how they are important sources of social support, in addition to enabling leisure interests to be pursued. The individual meetings produce positive moods of a variety of kinds - church, musical groups, dancing, and sport, for example.

Finally, it is wise to recognize some limitations of this study. First, the sample size is moderate, as mentioned earlier, Second, although various predictors reached statistical significance in relation to leisure satisfaction and overall happiness respectively, their relative individual contribution was still small. Third, leisure types and participation may be influenced by cultural factors as well. Unfortunately, very few researchers have attempted any cross-cultural comparisons on leisure. Hence, examining the applicability of Western research to Chinese culture should be a focus for future study. Fourth, this study may be better represented as attempting a simplified, artificially streamlined exploration of some important concepts to lay the groundwork for further research. Indeed, leisure is a new field for psychology, and as working week becomes shorter, people retire earlier, and unemployment remains high because of automation and computers, the amount of leisure we have is increasing, and will continue to do so. It is not for social scientists to say how people should spend their spare time, but at least we can show the effects of different leisure on well-being. It is also essential that we should understand leisure -- why people need it, and what kinds of people engage in what kinds of activities, and why. Yet, psychologists have been slow in getting to grips with the subject. This study is an attempt in the direction, but

### Table 2 Predictors of Happiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>R square</th>
<th>R square change</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness (baseline)</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.43***</td>
<td>.52***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.02*</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.03*</td>
<td>-.18**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social satisfaction</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.02*</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>25.97***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$
much more is needed in the future.

REFERENCES


休閒活動對休閒生活滿意度及幸福感之影響
陸洛 Michael Argyle*

本研究調查了英國牛津地區114名社區民眾，受訪者分別報告了對休閒生活之滿意度及幸福感，並對休閒生活在幾個向度上作了評估。另外，對幸福感的測量重複了兩次，相隔6個月。研究發現不同休閒活動的選擇上存在有意義的性格差異，如高自尊的人選擇義工，高合作傾向的人選擇社團活動，神經質的人則選擇個人嗜好而非運動。受訪者中有68%的人自陳有一項認真投入的休閒活動，而他們對整體休閒生活較感投入，也有更多控制，但也感較有壓力及挑戰；同時他們的休閒滿意度也較高。在對整體樣本所做的複回歸分析中發現休閒滿意度與幸福感有相關，而社會層面的休閒滿意度更能預測幸福感。

(高雄醫誌 10:89—96, 1994)