

A Study on Comparison of Leisure Experiences among International HPER Students and Non-international HPER Students: A Qualitative Approach

以定性分析法探討海外留學生與本土大學生 在閒暇經驗的異同

CHAN Ping-Cheung, Patrick

Assistant Professor

Department of Physical Education

Hong Kong Baptist University

陳炳祥

香港浸會大學體育系助理教授

摘 要

大部份在閒暇(休閒)滿足感與對閒暇態度之研究,均採用定量分析(Quantitative Analysis)方法,而採納定性分析(Qualitative Analysis)方法來探討上述課題的研究卻極之罕有。此外,探討不同種族及文化背景對閒暇經歷之影響的研究亦頗為缺乏。本文目的乃採取定性分析法來探討海外留學生與非海外大學生於閒暇經驗的異同。

ABSTRACT

Most of the previous studies in leisure satisfaction and attitudes towards leisure have been implemented through quantitative inquiries; however, studies on these aspects via qualitative approach are uncommon. The idea of researching ethnicity and cultural beliefs in leisure experiences has not been pursued. This study aims at comparing the leisure experiences of international students with those of non-international students through qualitative analysis.

Introduction

In the past, leisure was commonly defined as being free from work and other obligations. But, researchers are now asking whether this definition is adequate.

Does the simple definition of free time account for activities that occur within the scope of an individual's work? Is there really any free time? Are not most of our lives constrained in some way? Both Neulinger (1974, 1981) and Csikszentmihalyi (1975) defined leisure as a state of mind where satisfaction would be experienced as a result of an activity performed by an individual's own choice and intrinsic motivation. Although Parker (1983) adopted a sociological perspective to define leisure, his position on leisure is

identified at the freedom end of the constraint-freedom scale which need not be restricted to non-working time (i.e., if you are free to do what you want to, doesn't that mean you probably aren't working?)

Most of the studies in leisure satisfaction and attitudes towards leisure have been implemented through quantitative inquiries. According to Allison (1988), the idea of researching ethnicity and cultural beliefs in leisure experiences has not been pursued. Allison (1988) further suggested that the research methodology may need to be qualitative in order to really understand the feelings of people. Qualitative research stressed on how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, it would be desirable to conduct a qualitative research project to compare the leisure experiences of students from different ethnicities and cultures.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine: (a) types of activities which the subjects regard as leisure experiences, (b) those leisure experiences which provide subjects the greatest satisfaction, and (c) constraints that obstruct the subjects' leisure experiences.

Methods

In order to compare the leisure experiences of international students (i.e. Non-American students) with those of non-international students (i.e. American students), the study took an ethnographic approach. Six female graduate students (3 non-American students, and 3 American students, ranging in age from 24 to 29 years old) from the School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (HPER) at Indiana University were interviewed. The subjects have all been studying at

Indiana University for at least 10 months, but not more than 24 months. The length of the interviews ranged from 20 to 55 minutes. The conversations were tape-recorded and notes were taken during the interview. Open ended questions (What types of leisure activity do you usually pursue on your own ? What types of leisure activity do you usually pursue with other people ? In what ways are these leisure experiences satisfying ? What are the constraints that obstruct your accomplishing greater satisfaction in leisure activities ?) were used to encourage subjects to speak freely about their personal preferences about their leisure activities and expressions.

Statements of similar manner were categorized into the same unit. Based on the responses collected from the subjects, the following categories were created: individual activities, group activities, attributes of leisure experiences, constraints on leisure experiences, and related factors.

By building upon responses and relating attitudes and perceptions of all the subjects, the researcher could better discern the leisure patterns of non-American students and American students. This analysis methodology allowed the researcher to more fully explore the relationship of culture to leisure experiences.

Findings

The findings have been organized into three sections: (a) types of leisure activity, (b) attributes of leisure activities, and (c) constraints on leisure experiences.

(a) Types of Leisure Activity

The types of leisure activity in which the subjects engaged or desired to engage were diverse and covered a wide range of interests. The activity types can be subdivided into individual and group activities. Individual activities were composed of sport-oriented activities such as fishing, walking, jogging, yoga, swimming, and weight training. The more sedentary individual activities were watching movies, reading, watching videos, writing, watching television, writing articles and letters, listening to music, and Bible study. Other individual activities were shopping, cooking, and cleaning. Watching television and videos were the most common individual leisure activities. International students had a higher preference for swimming, whereas non-international students had a higher preference for walking, and pleasure reading. International students did not keep a fixed schedule for leisure activities; the time

that they spent on individual leisure activities was the time left over from studying, or time when they were not in the mood to study. Non-international students, on the other hand, scheduled time for leisure, at least four to five days a week.

Group activities were also composed of sport-oriented activities such as walking, volleyball, basketball, and badminton. Other less physically demanding group leisure activities, included dining out, board games, watching movies and videos, Bible study, visiting, parties, going to church, going to bars, talking with friends, travel, shopping, and dancing. Dining out, watching movies, and travel were the most common group activities. Basically, the sport-oriented group activities were identical among international and non-international students. The major difference in types of group activities between international students and American students was that American students had a wider variety of group activity, which included visiting family members and friends, parties, and going to bars. However, there was no difference in the time allotment for pursuing group activities. All of the subjects spent time in group leisure activities on weekends and occasionally on weekdays. They preferred to pursue these activities with their boyfriends or close friends.

(b) Attributes of Leisure Experiences

Several positive attributes of leisure were indicated, especially if the subjects had experienced an inner feeling of peace and contemplation. One non-international subject stated: It's really a good time for me, because I get stress during the school year, and it's the time of night when no one else is going to bother me. I am too tired to study, but I am not like I am awake enough for myself. I really like it. It's the time for me, to either relax or escape.

Freedom of choice significantly affected the degree of satisfaction that a subject reported for a given leisure activity. At the same time, most of the subjects perceived sport-oriented individual activities as relaxation and stress management activities or an effective way to keep themselves in good physical health. Some of them even perceived sport-oriented individual activities as an obligation. For group activities, the type of activity was also not the factor that determined the individual's degree of satisfaction with the activity. Instead, the time that subjects could spend with boyfriends, family members, or close friends was the most crucial factor. One subject revealed: When I am involved in activities with the

people that are close to me, it gives me a sense of caring, makes me feel good and is much more fun.

Further, it was common that those subjects who participated in the activities with close friends from churches felt more satisfied than other group activities. On the other hand, international students indicated a higher desire to travel around the United States than did American students.

(c) Constraints of Leisure Experiences

Several constraints concerning leisure experiences were expressed by the subjects. All subjects expressed feeling that they did not have as much leisure time as they desired. All of them indicated that they engaged in more leisure activities before they were admitted to graduate school. The most frequent constraints cited included heavy loads of school work, stress from boyfriends, language difficulties (for international students), lack of money, poor skills on pursuing certain leisure activities, new environment (the University) and poor attitudes towards leisure.

Heavy course work loads that consume large amounts of time mean that not much time is left for other obligations and leisure activities. Stress from boyfriends mainly from the fact that less time for pursuing individual activities, boyfriend could not get along with other friends, and from differences in preferred leisure activities. One subject pointed out that: A little bit of constraint in a couple of different ways. I am looking forward to him coming, and I think it will work out well. I anticipate it being stressful making the transition and I anticipate it will be a little bit stressful for me try to figure out like when do we go out with our friends, when do we go out on our own. I am hoping that my friends and he can get along. If they don't, that's going to affect my leisure a lot. The other part of that, is he likes to going out to loud-smoky bars and I really don't enjoy that.

International student's language problems hindered their study and diminished the time available to them for leisure activities. As a whole, international students felt that they had more constraints, when compared to non-international students, in accomplishing their leisure experience.

Discussion

It appeared that both individual and group leisure activity involvement for the international and non-

international students have some similarities and, at the same time, some differences. For the types of individual leisure activities, both international and non-international students showed more or less the same preferences, with the exception that international students had a higher preference for swimming, whereas non-international students had a higher preference for walking and reading. Such differences are probably best explained by the fact that two out of the three international students in this study used to be swimmers and swimming coaches. Due to language difficulties and also differences in self-expectations, international students are used to take relatively longer hours for studying, therefore, they try to stay away from books during their limited amount of leisure time.

American students engaged in a wider variety of group activities than international students. Such differences can be explained by the fact that the non-international students are residents of Indiana, Illinois and Ohio, so that it is not unusual for them to spend time visiting family and friends.

Those leisure experiences that provide the greatest satisfaction for the subjects are consistent with the literature. Satisfaction will be experienced as a result of an individual's freedom of choice and intrinsic motivation. The leisure satisfaction from individual and group activities varies according to individual's perception. However, it appears that perceived freedom of choice, relaxation, and a feeling of peace are the major components of accomplishing satisfaction for individual leisure activities. Interestingly, although the subjects also expressed that their academic work gave them satisfaction, they perceived that as life satisfaction rather than leisure satisfaction. It also appeared that people-orientation is the key component of accomplishing satisfaction for group leisure activities.

Regarding the constraints of leisure experience, heavy school work and the new environment of the University are the common constraints of leisure experiences. Usually after one semester, most of the students could adapt to the new environment. Language problems in accomplishing school work seem to be the common constraint for international students; because of these language problems, they experience more stress and time restrictions in pursuing leisure activities. It appeared that poor time management, and relationships with boyfriends was correlated to constraints on leisure experiences. It also

appeared that the more controlled by mood a person was, the less leisure satisfaction she felt.

Conclusion

Data from this study indicated that there are some similarities and differences in the types of individual and group leisure activities among international and non-international students. The degree of leisure satisfaction proved to be affected by the individual's freedom of choice and intrinsic motivation. However, there was no

indication that cultural difference has a great impact on leisure satisfaction. The constraints were also partly affected by the individual's perceptions. A proactive approach and a positive perception of leisure would help the students to overcome these barriers.

Due to the limited size and scope of this study, further research must be conducted to arrive at more substantive conclusions. A more diverse and larger group of subjects will also be desirable.

REFERENCES

- Allison, M.T. (1988). Breaking boundaries and barriers: Future directions in cross-cultural research. *Leisure Sciences*, 10, 247-259.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond boredom and anxiety*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Marshall C., & Rossman, G.B. (1991). *Designing qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Neulinger, J. (1981). *Psychology of leisure*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Neulinger, J. (1974). *The psychology of leisure: Research approaches to the study of leisure*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas.
- Parker, S.R. (1983). *Leisure & work*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Spradley, J.P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. Fort Worth, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

