

THE MEANING OF LEISURE: CONCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AMERICANS AND KOREANS

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Abstract: Considering the importance of diversifying the concept of leisure and expanding our scope of understanding beyond cultural borders, this study examines the conceptual differences between American and Korean understandings of the term. The results revealed that there is a significant relationship between the concept of leisure and nationality. For Americans, work relation and affect were more highly related to leisure. Perceived freedom was a better indicator for what leisure means to Koreans.

Introduction

Defining leisure as well as measuring it has long been regarded as a challenge to the development in the study of leisure. Although some observers feel that it is practically impossible to define and measure leisure accurately (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997), research has increased researchers' ability to measure and study leisure from various perspectives. However, these diverse concepts about leisure have their origins in ancient western cultures and are predominantly restricted to western industrialized countries, especially, the United States, Western Europe, and Great Britain (Godbey, 1994).

Subsequently, most researchers and scholars have defined leisure within western contexts, and research areas extending beyond the boundaries of the West have been few. This western-oriented definition of leisure, therefore, reflects not only the lack of a global vision, but also limits academic and professional growth (Burnett, Uysal, & Jamroz, 1991).

Like other areas of scholarly research, the field of leisure studies needs to adopt an international perspective. The failure to globalize leisure research can result in a biased understanding of leisure. A more meaningful understanding of leisure also needs to acknowledge the broad range of cultural differences that potentially inform the concept. Even though the study of leisure has developed mainly in western countries, there is no doubt that all cultures are familiar with the concept, however they may define it. Moreover, there are several semantic and contextual parameters within which the term 'leisure' is defined in different countries or cultures (Chick, 1998). By applying a trans-national perspective to the study of leisure,

the generalizability of definitions of leisure can be tested and validated.

Considering the importance of diversifying the concept of leisure and expanding our scope of understanding beyond cultural borders, this study examines the conceptual differences between American and Korean understandings of the term. From the 1970s, Korea has undergone rapid and intensive industrialization that has profoundly influenced the way of life of the Korean people. The rise in labor productivity, the efforts of labor unions, and the development of the economy in general, have given increasing amounts of discretionary time and income to the Korean people. This, in turn, has resulted in the redefinition of the meaning of leisure among Koreans.

Even though same English word "leisure" has begun to be used frequently in daily life and society in Korea, we assume that the concept of leisure among the Korean people would not be the same as that of Americans. A Korean-Korean dictionary defines leisure as "leisure; play; leisure industry" while an English-English dictionary defines leisure as "spare time; time free from work." As the ancient Greeks described leisure as "an essence of culture," the meaning of leisure conceived by people of different nationalities could be assumed to be different (Murphy, Niepoth, Jamieson, & Williams, 1991, p.54).

Based on these assumptions, this study sets out to (1) examine the definition of leisure in terms of work, activity, and subjective experiences, (2) compare the meaning of leisure held by Americans and Koreans. Finally, we hope that this study may serve as a guide for pursuing a cross-cultural understanding of leisure where an ethnocentric bias has been pervasive thus far.

Literature Review

1. Meaning of Leisure

Leisure has been conceptualized and defined from a number of perspectives. These different perspectives reflect historical differences in the organization of societies as well as differences in concepts of and impingement upon both freedom and pleasure. De Grazia (1962; Leitner, Leitner, & Associates, 1995) attempted to break leisure into three distinctive aspects: time, activity, and experience. A similar orientation has continued to be adopted in conceptualizing leisure. Approaches to operationalizing leisure have been objective and subjective (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Objective definitions equate leisure with certain types of activity and time. In contrast, a subjective construction of leisure is associated with the occurrence of certain types of mental states, perceptions, needs, and experiences.

In the initial stages of research, leisure was typically viewed as time off work, and "time surplus remaining after the practical necessities of life have been attended to" (Godbey, 1994). Leisure has also been defined as non-work activity participation (Weiskopf, 1982) and "serious activity without the pressure of necessity" (Godbey, 1994).

Later, there was an emerging focus on psychological attributes associated with leisure (Samdahl, 1991), and leisure was construed as a "highly desired state of mind or state of being that is realized through participation in intrinsically motivated activities" (Kraus, 1984). Later, an interest in perceived freedom and the subjective dimensions of leisure have been emphasized as significant attributes of leisure (Samdahl, 1991), with the assumption that "leisure implies being engaged in an activity as a free agent and of one's own choice" (Neulinger, 1981).

More recently, a more holistic view sees leisure and work as being so closely interrelated that the two cannot be easily separated. A study by Shaw (1986) supports the contention that elements of leisure can be found in many different aspects of life. The results indicate that leisure can be experienced in work and other obligatory activities and that not all recreation time or free time may necessarily be considered to be leisure.

The term "leisure," therefore, has come to have many shades of meaning, some of which are almost entirely distinct from others. Further, some aspects of the concept of leisure may not be universally applicable. If we think of the previous definitions of leisure from the standpoint of application, it becomes apparent that research has focused on western society and people in developed countries. According to Burdge and Beckers (1984), leisure researchers are well informed about developments in the United States, but they are extremely internally oriented—the one-way-mirror problem. Therefore, it is important to question whether these objective and subjective definitions of leisure can be applied to the experiences of members of non-western societies, and researchers should bring into play various perspectives and definitions of leisure (Chick, 1998).

2. *Measurement of Leisure*

Even though the field of leisure research has lacked an empirical method to discover the determinants of definitions of leisure, several studies have attempted to address the conceptualization of leisure and its measurement. Researchers have suggested two measurement approaches using external or internal definitional vantage points (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). If an internal definitional vantage point is adopted, the meaning of leisure is based on the perception or construal of the participants. By using the individual's own definition of leisure, a more accurate picture of how much leisure people feel they have and what is meaningful to them can be addressed. On the other hand, the external definitional vantage point is based on the viewpoints of researchers. Researchers predetermine or impose a definition of leisure on the people and this measurement is based on what people in a social group actually agree to be leisure.

In the earlier stages of leisure research, Kelly (1972) developed a sociological conceptualization of leisure. According to him, one's definition of leisure is determined by two underlying factors: work-relation and

constraint/freedom. The model suggests that leisure is best represented when persons participate in an activity without constraints (freely) and when the activity is independent of work.

Another theoretical model developed by Neulinger provides a psychological conceptualization of leisure (Iso-Ahola, 1979). A person's definition of leisure was determined by three factors: perceived freedom, motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic), and goal orientation (final or instrumental). The model suggests that leisure exists when a person perceives his freedom as being high and participates in an activity for intrinsic reasons.

The above two models were modified, by Iso-Ahola (1979), to develop the determinants of leisure. His study sought to determine the relative contributions of perceived freedom, motivation, and work-relation. The results revealed that each factor had a significant effect on the subjects' definition of leisure. More importantly, this study disclosed the interaction of freedom and work-relation.

Samdahl (1991) addressed subjective experiences—as a determinant of leisure—using the Experiential Sampling Method (EMS). The causal model of this study indicated that perceived freedom and self-expression have a significant effect on leisure but self-consciousness of leisure did not fully influence the meaning of leisure. Even though the lack of an independent effect of affect on leisure was found, a strong correlation between leisure and affect confirms that these variables are associated with one another.

Shaw's study (1984) also explored meanings of leisure and the subjective factors associated with leisure experiences. Through in-depth interviews and the diary method, determinants of leisure were chosen, including enjoyment, motivation, relaxation, and freedom of choice. These subjective factors were found significantly related to leisure experiences.

In the light of the theory and research on the nature of leisure reported in the past, the most centrally agreed upon set of attributes associated with leisure are: objective determinants (work-relation and activity) and subjective determinants (perceived freedom, self-expression, and affect). These factors were used to address the attributes of the model for this study.

Research Questions

In view of the increasing importance of transnational leisure research and considering the lack of research on the definition and measurement of leisure, this study addresses the following questions:

1. Are there distinct dimensions of the definition of leisure?
2. Is there a significant relationship between nationality and the dimensions of the definition of leisure?
3. Is there a significant relationship between

demography and the dimensions of the definition of leisure?

Method

Selection of Subjects. The individuals who participated in this study were 18 years and older. Questionnaires were given to 226 individuals, 116 were Americans and 110 were Koreans. Data collection was conducted between April 16-19, 1999 at the main campus of Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania. If individuals agreed to participate, a two-page questionnaire written in English or Korean was given. These versions of the questionnaire were translated back and forth into English-Korean several times by the researchers (graduate students in the Leisure Studies Department). This approach was adopted to help reduce the use of idiomatic phrases open to multiple interpretations. To acquire a representative sample of the individuals, the variations in days and times (afternoon, evening, and night) were incorporated into the sampling plan.

Instrumentation. A self-administered questionnaire was developed by the researchers and included four sections. In the first section, respondents were asked to provide demographic information (gender, age, and marital status). In the second section, respondents were asked to provide their own definition of the term "leisure" in a word, phrase, or sentence. The third section collected more information regarding the definition. The leisure definition scale was adopted from an earlier study that was reported by Samdahl (1991) and Iso-Ahola (1979). Respondents utilized a seven-point Likert scale to rate their agreement/disagreement with each definitional item: 1=

strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree.

Analysis. Analysis consisted of four steps. First, descriptive statistics were used to profile the sample. Second, the 15 leisure definition statements were factor analyzed, using a varimax rotation procedure, to obtain reliability coefficients for delineated factors. In the third step, two groups of individuals—American individuals ($n = 116$; 51.3%) and Korean individuals ($n = 110$; 48.7%)—were formed as independent variables. The two independent variables were examined with respect to delineated leisure definition factor groupings and individual demographic information. A t-test was conducted to examine whether differences existed between the two independent variables (American and Korean). Also, t-test was used for continuous variable to examine the relationship between socio-demographic variables (gender, marital status, age) and four leisure definition dimensions. Finally, t-test was used to examine the relationship of nationality and socio-demographic characteristics to leisure definition. In addition, qualitative methods were employed to analyze the second section of the questionnaire: the open-ended questions.

Results

A total of 226 respondents comprise the sample for the analyses in this study. Socio-demographic data are presented in Table 1. The sample was unbalanced in terms of the gender groups (58.4% males and 41.6% females); about 62.8% of the respondents were single and 37.2% were married. The respondents ranged from 18-60 years in age; 41.4% were aged 18-22 and 58.6% were 23 and older.

Table 1. Socio-demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteristic Category		Number of People	Percentage
Nationality	American	116	51.3
	Korean	110	48.7
Sex	Males	132	41.4
	Females	94	58.6
Age	18 – 22	92	41.4
	23 and older	130	58.6
Marital Status	Single	142	62.8
	Married	84	37.2

A principle component analysis of 16 leisure definition items resulted in four factor groupings. Two items with less than .45 loading were removed from the study. The factors were labeled: 1) Activity, 2) Perceived freedom, 3) Affect, 4) Work relation. Labeling factors were based on the appropriateness of the individual items under each factor grouping and judgmental evaluation of the factors consistent with the literature (Samdahl, 1991). Combined, these four factor groupings accounted for almost 60.6 % of the leisure definition variance. Composite scores were obtained on each factor for every subject by calculating the

mean of the relevant item response scores. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each factor to assess the reliability ranging from 0.83 (Affect) to 0.69 (Work relation).

Table 2 provides the results of the t-tests of the four delineated leisure definition factor groupings by the two different nationalities. The study reveals that significant differences exist between Koreans and Americans with respect to three factor groupings: Perceived freedom, Affect, and Work relation. Koreans are more likely than Americans to define leisure from the Perceived freedom

factor with a mean score of 6.46. On the other hand, Americans are more likely to perceive leisure as affect and

freedom from work than Koreans.

Table 2. T-test of the Relationship between Nationality and the Definition Dimensions

	Nationality	
	American	Korean
	mean	
Activity	5.49	5.38
Perceived freedom	5.16*	6.17*
Affect	5.63*	5.27*
Work relation	5.54*	4.71*
	df = 1, n=225	

*Significant at the .05 level or higher

According to the result of the T-test of the relationship between gender and dimensions of leisure definitions, no significant relationships were found. Then T-test procedure was employed to determine if a relationship existed between the four leisure definition dimensions and socio-demographic variables (age) (see table 3). It indicated that there was a significant relationship between

age and factor 2 (perceived freedom), factor 3 (affect), and factor 4 (Work Relation). On the other hand, there was no significant relation between age and factor 1(Activity). Older people are more likely to say leisure as perceived freedom while younger people are more likely to perceive leisure as affect and work relation than elders.

Table 3. T-test of the Relationship between Definition Dimensions and Age

	Age	
	18 - 22	23 and older
	mean	
Activity	5.54	5.39
Perceived freedom	5.16*	6.02*
Affect	5.66*	5.30*
Work relation	5.50*	4.80*
	df = 1, n=220	

*Significant at the .05 level or higher

According to the results of the t-test, a significant relationship was discovered between marital status and perceived freedom and work relation. Married people were

more likely to define leisure as Perceived freedom than single people did. On the other hand, married people were less likely to define leisure as work relation (see Table 4).

Table 4. T-test of the Relationship between marital Status and Definition Dimensions

	Marital Status	
	Single	Married
	mean	
Activity	5.46	5.40
Perceived freedom	5.33*	6.20*
Affect	5.54	5.30
Work relation	5.30*	4.75*
df = 1, n=225		

*Significant at the .01 level or higher

Discussion and Conclusion

The results revealed that there is a significant relationship between the concept of leisure and nationality. The results also support the existence of a relationship between demographics (age and marital status) and definition of leisure. For Americans, work relation and affect were more highly related to leisure. Perceived freedom was a better indicator for what leisure means to Koreans. Activity was not a strong indicator to explain the different concepts of leisure definition between the two nationalities

Limitation of this study could be the methodology employed. The survey instrument of this study was designed to compare the meaning of leisure between Americans and Koreans based on the definitional attributes of leisure. Since this study is based on a comparative analysis between two nationalities, the survey had to be translated into another language: Korean. Although we went through a trial-and-error correction process regarding the questionnaire translation, there is a possibility that the accurate meaning of questions might have degenerated.

The sample selection bias potentially allowed misrepresentation of the subjects' true characteristics or opinions. Koreans who have been selected for participation in the study were mostly students who have lived in the United States and have been exposed to western culture. If the sample were collected in Korea, it might have been more representative and might have yielded different results. Future research of leisure definitions across nationality is likely to be more beneficial if it includes more specific modification for each dimension and better operationalization.

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