FLYING FUN: AN EXPLORATORY EXAMINATION OF SERIOUS LEISURE

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Abstract: In recent years the serious side of leisure has gained attention in research. This study included participants of experimental light aircrafts and remote control model airplanes in an exploratory examination of Stebbins' (1992) notion of serious leisure. Most of Stebbins' (1992) serious leisure characteristics were supported by the results of the study. Additionally, it was discovered that participants' experiences of serious leisure vary in terms of years of participation, frequency of participation, club membership, equipment value, and age.

Introduction

A long time ago, Dumazedier (1974) had pointed out that many people place a high priority on recreation and leisure in their lives. The devotion to leisure can lead to personal growth and cultural development such as arts and scientific discoveries. To many people, a hobby is more than just a pastime, but an earnest pursuit. Their attitudes are serious, and their behaviors hard core. Stebbins (1992) identified six characteristics of serious leisure: perseverance, personal effort, career, self-identity with the activity, unique ethos, and durable benefits. Stebbins (1992) suggested that hobbyists, amateurs and volunteers exhibited serious leisure traits. Subsquent research has associated serious leisure with fishing (Yoder 1997), wildlife viewing (Cole & Scott 1999, Scott, Baker & Kim 1999), the game of bridge (Scott & Godbey 1994), and college football games (Gibson, Willming & Holdnak 2002). It is possible that many other recreational activities possess qualities of serious leisure, and there is still much to be learned about the construct and meaning of serious leisure.

It was the purpose of the study to verify the characteristics of serious leisure proposed by Stebbins (1992). Specifically, there were two research questions: (1) which characteristics of serious leisure can be supported, and (2) if experiences of serious leisure vary among participants.

Table 1. — Description of the Sample

		Mean	Freq.	%
Years of participation		9.4		
Annual frequency:	1-5 times		53	29.6
	6-10 times		14	7.8
	More than 10 times		112	62.6
Activity duration:	less than 1 hour		41	21.9
	1 – 3 hours		56	29.9
	3 – 5 hours		54	28.9
	5 – 7 hours		24	12.8
	more than 7 hours		12	6.4
Travel distance:	less than 100 km		177	94.7
	100-199 km		2	1.1
	200-299 km		3	1.6
	300-399 km		3	1.6
	400km or more		2	1.1
Company:	family (1)		3	1.6
	Friends, colleagues (2)		22	11.8
	other hobbyists,			
	members (3)		83	44.4
	other (4)		5	2.7
	(1+2)		13	7.0
	(1+3)		15	8.0
	(2+3)		42	22.5
	(1+2+3+4)		4	2.1
Club membership:	yes		158	84.0
	No		29	15.4
Equipment value:	less than 10k $300		16	8.6
10-50k	$300-1,500		27	4.5
50-100k	$1,500- 3,000		25	8.1
100-150k	$3,000- 4,500		21	11.3
150-200k	$4,500- 6,000		19	10.2
200-500k	$6,000-15,000		33	17.7
500-1,000k	$15,000-30,000		26	14.0
over 1,000k	over $30,000		29	15.6
Gender:	male		178	97.3
	Female		5	2.7
Age:	under 20		5	2.7
	20-29		29	15.4
	30-39		75	39.9
	40-49		47	25.0
	50-59		23	12.2
	60 or higher		9	4.8

Method

A focus group meeting was conducted to obtain initial insights into the world of flying and to aid the development of a questionnaire. This was followed by a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was developed from Stebbins' (1992)

description of serious leisure. There were 27 serious leisure characteristics, ranging from natural conditions being important to the activity to personal satisfaction. A seven-point rating scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, was used to obtain responses. Personal history of activity participation and demographic background, such as years of participation and frequency of participation, were also included in the questionnaire as participant variables. Flying was the theme of this study, including flying experimental light aircrafts and flying remote control model airplanes. Data were collected during a two-day convention event of experimental aircrafts where 52 questionnaires were completed on site. Additionally, the questionnaire was mailed to members of flying clubs. A total of 91 questionnaires (80% return rate) returned from pilots of experimental aircrafts, and 100 (49% return rate) returned from enthusiasts of remote control airplanes.

Table 2. — Differences between Two Activities

Variables	Mean		F	Sig.
	Exp. Aircrafts	RC Airplanes		
Natural conditions	5.42	5.25	.507	.477
Beliefs & values	5.98	5.81	.889	.347
Ethics	6.46	6.40	.163	.687
Physical difficulties	5.91	5.94	.017	.897
Fatigue/injury	4.34	3.54	5.824	.017 *
Mental anxiety	4.83	4.54	.476	.491
Personal effort	6.47	6.21	3.683	.056
In control	6.09	6.06	.027	.871
Exploration	6.15	6.16	.004	.949
Accomplishment	6.25	6.26	.004	.947
Importance	6.01	5.80	1.654	.200
Speak seriously	6.16	6.14	.041	.839
Speak enthusiastic.	5.93	5.95	.014	.905
Speak frequently	5.52	5.45	.0148	.701
Speak to acquaint.	5.56	5.57	.005	.942
Favorite place	5.61	5.97	4.284	.040 *
Read magazines/books	5.86	5.91	.094	.760
Good skills	5.42	5.25	.680	.411
Know. of equip. ops	5.74	5.80	.132	.717
Know. of manufacturers	4.78	5.32	7.220	.008 *
Know. of tech.	5.28	5.38	.225	.636
Do repairs	5.01	5.26	1.508	.221
Personal expression	5.99	5.42	.877	.350
Personal identity	5.69	5.57	.627	.430
Personal image	5.28	5.18	.285	.594
Use abilities	5.88	5.98	.423	.516
Personal satisfaction	6.13	6.17	.063	.802

* $p < .05$

Table 3. — Experiences of Serious Leisure

	Exp. Airplanes		RC Airplanes		Total	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Natural conditions	89	5.42	99	5.25	188	5.33
Beliefs & values	91	5.98	98	5.81	189	5.89
Ethics	91	6.46	99	6.40	190	6.43
Physical difficulties	92	5.91	99	5.94	191	5.93
Fatigue/injury	92	4.34 *	98	3.54 *	190	3.93
Mental anxiety	90	4.83 *	98	4.54 *	188	4.46
Personal effort	92	6.47	99	6.21	191	6.34
In control	92	6.09	99	6.06	191	6.07
Exploration	92	6.15	99	6.16	191	6.16
Accomplishment	91	6.25	99	6.26	190	6.26
Importance	92	6.01	99	5.80	191	5.90
Speak seriously	85	6.16	96	6.14	181	6.15
Speak enthusiastic.	85	5.93	96	5.95	181	5.94
Speak frequently	85	5.52	96	5.45	181	5.48
Speak to acquaint.	84	5.56	96	5.57	180	5.57
Favorite place	85	5.61	95	5.97	180	5.80
Read magazines/books	85	5.86	94	5.91	179	5.89
Good skills	84	5.42	95	5.25	179	5.33
Know. of equip. ops	84	5.74	96	5.80	180	5.77
Know. of manufacturers	85	4.78 *	96	5.32	181	5.07
Know. of tech.	85	5.28	96	5.38	181	5.33
Do repairs	85	5.01	94	5.26	179	5.14
Personal expression	85	5.99	96	5.42	181	5.69
Personal identity	85	5.69	95	5.57	180	5.63
Personal image	85	5.28	95	5.18	180	5.23
Use abilities	85	5.88	96	5.98	181	5.93
Personal satisfaction	85	6.13	96	6.17	181	6.15

* mean scores < 5.0

Findings

As shown in Table 1, the sample was mostly experienced enthusiasts with an average of nine years of participation. More than half of the sample participated in the activities more than 10 times a year (63%). Travel to activity sites was mostly short distance (95% less than 100 km). Other hobbyists were the most likely type of companion (44%). Most of the participants were males (97%), middle aged (65% between ages 30 and 50) and members of a club relating to the activity (84%).

Participants of the two activities (experimental aircrafts and remote control airplane models) were compared with respect to the 27 serious leisure characteristics (Table 2). ANOVA indicated that the two sets of participants were not significantly different in 24 of the 27 items. There were significantly different in terms of experiencing physical fatigue or injury, having a favorite place for the activities, and knowledge of equipment manufactures.

Participants of the two activities showed relatively high serious leisure scores, as seen in Table 3. Participants of experimental aircrafts responded with 24 of the 27 items achieving a 5.0 mean score or higher, showing a high degree of seriousness. Three items fell below 5.0: suffering fatigue or injury, suffering mental anxiety, and knowledge of equipment manufacturers. Remote control airplane flyers rated 25 items above a 5.0 mean score, with the exception of suffering fatigue or injury and suffering mental anxiety. With these relatively high mean scores in serious leisure characteristics, the results suggested that most of the serious leisure characteristics (24 items for experimental aircrafts, 25 items for remote control airplanes) were good measurements of serious leisure, thus answering research question 1: which characteristics of serious leisure can be supported?

A series of ANOVA was performed to test differences among the sample in regard to years of participation (Table 4), frequency of participation, club membership, equipment value, and age (Tables 5). A significant difference ($p < 0.05$) was detected regarding years of participation in seven items: having a favorite activity place, reading activity related magazines or books, having good skills, being knowledgeable about equipment operations, about equipment manufacturers, about equipment technology, and doing repairs. Table 5 shows that participants were significantly different in five serious leisure characteristics regarding frequency of participation, in six characteristics regarding club membership, six characteristics in terms of equipment value, and 10 characteristics in terms of age. The results provided an answer to research question 2: if experiences of serious leisure vary among participants? i.e., participants' experiences, measured by the 27 serious leisure characteristics, varied in terms of years of participation, frequency of participation, club membership, equipment value, and age.

Implications and Future Directions

As seen in Table 3, in both experimental aircrafts and remote control airplanes there was a relative low mean score (less than 5.0) in physical fatigue/ injury and mental anxiety. The finding indicated that these two recreation activities were not inherently risky or competitive. Other activities, such as running marathon and rock climbing, may be serious leisure and high in these areas.

Table 4. — Differences due to Years of Participation

Variables	F	Sig.
Natural conditions	1.057	.398
Beliefs & values	1.399	.095
Ethics	.830	.725
Physical difficulties	1.100	.342
Fatigue/injury	.837	.715
Mental anxiety	.783	.788
Personal effort	1.202	.231
In control	1.168	.265
Exploration	1.107	.334
Accomplishment	1.096	.348
Importance	1.412	.089
Speak seriously	1.153	.281
Speak enthusiastic.	1.180	.253
Speak frequently	1.289	.159
Speak to acquaint.	1.091	.354
Favorite place	1.645	.026 *
Read magazines/books	1.683	.021 *
Good skills	2.370	.000 *
Know. of equip. ops	2.425	.000 *
Know. of manufacturers	2.855	.000 *
Know. of tech.	2.573	.000 *
Do repairs	2.876	.000 *
Personal expression	1.392	.098
Personal identity	1.188	.245
Personal image	1.319	.139
Use abilities	1.227	.209
Personal satisfaction	1.067	.385

* $p < .05$

In Table 5, results showed that participants, across a spectrum of variables including years of participation, frequency of participation, club membership, and equipment value, were significantly different in terms of reading about the activities, perceived skills, knowledge of various subject areas, and repairs. The finding implied that there might have been a cognitive dimension of serious leisure that separated participants into those doing the activities and those not only doing but also knowing about the activities, by way of knowledge and skills.

In conclusion, results of the study verified Stebbins' (1992) notion of serious leisure. This study represented a small sample from two activities amid a near infinite number of recreation pursuits each may be a medium of serious leisure. There is much more to be discovered about the construct and meaning of serious leisure, thus more research is needed.

Table 5. — Results of Differences at a Glance

Variables/ Significance	Years	Freq.	Member	Eq. Value	Age	Activities
Natural conditions	.398	.263	.746	.588	.147	.477
Beliefs & values	.095	.706	.534	.110	.147	.347
Ethics	.725	.181	.683	.439	.131	.687
Physical difficulties	.342	.582	.328	.110	.493	.897
Fatigue/ injury	.715	.110	.444	.766	.059	.017 *
Mental anxiety	.788	.783	.099	.142	.777	.491
Personal effort	.231	.947	.648	.750	.147	.056
In control	.265	.707	.704	.896	.820	.871
Exploration	.334	.877	.701	.794	.003 *	.949
Accomplish-ment	.348	.428	.551	.862	.045 *	.947
Importance	.089	.181	.343	.096	.026 *	.200
Speak seriously	.281	.118	.674	.228	.148	.839
Speak enthusiastic.	.253	.270	.423	.453	.269	.905
Speak frequently	.159	.610	.259	.487	.543	.701
Speak to acquaint.	.354	.669	.469	.312	.026 *	.942
Favorite place	.026*	.161	.338	.969	.402	.040 *
Read magazines/ books	.021*	.044 *	.013 *	.000 *	.027 *	.760
Good skills	.000*	.001 *	.019 *	.000 *	.252	.411
Know. of equip. ops	.000*	.000 *	.033 *	.000 *	.058	.717
Know. of manufacturers	.000*	.016 *	.019 *	.004 *	.028 *	.008 *
Know. of tech.	.000*	.099	.030 *	.017 *	.002 *	.636
Do repairs	.000*	.007 *	.041 *	.001 *	.004 *	.221
Personal expression	.098	.429	.356	.463	.711	.350
Personal identity	.245	.183	.283	.268	.006 *	.430
Personal image	.139	.699	.093	.863	.102	.594
Use abilities	.209	.473	.338	.591	.079	.516
Personal satisfaction	.385	.170	.611	.578	.028 *	.802

* $p < .05$

It was suggested that valid and reliable instruments be developed and tested for exploring various dimensions of serious leisure. Secondly, it is possible that participants of serious leisure are diverse, such as their activity participation patterns and degrees of seriousness, that a typology of participants can be constructed. Thirdly, as Stebbins (1992) pointed out that hobbyists, amateurs and volunteers were people of serious leisure, it is possible that activities can be grouped in types, so studies of in-group similarities and inter-group differences may reveal more insights into the world of serious leisure.

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