

LEISURE RESOURCEFULNESS AS A PREDICTOR OF LEVEL OF AFFLUENCE AND LIFE SATISFACTION: HAVING MORE OR DOING WITH LESS

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Abstract.—This research examines the role of affluence in guiding lifestyle orientation in contemporary society. The term “affluenza” is used to denote a lifestyle of consumption and materialism to achieve life satisfaction. The counter to affluenza is quality of life as manifested in self-improvement, community centeredness, and environmental stewardship. Leisure resourcefulness is knowing how and being able to make a meaningful life for oneself within the individual, cultural, and environmental constraints. Measures of affluenza, leisure resourcefulness, and life satisfaction are examined for their interrelationships and implications for individual lifestyles and quality of life.

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1800s, the primary guiding principle of the recreation movement has been to promote the welfare of individuals through participation in wholesome recreation activities. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) acquired the rights to use the slogan “Life. Be in it” from Australian Limited, a nonprofit health and fitness organization, and used the slogan from 1978 through 1985 to encourage participation in active lifestyles (Bill Beckner, NRPA Research Manager, personal communication, 14 December 2009). The NRPA also works to promote environmental awareness, community wellness, cultural understanding, and self-empowerment.

Leisure, however, has become a casualty of prosperity as many citizens of industrialized nations, and Americans in particular, are caught up in a culture of materialism and consumerism. Instead of offering time off for a job well done, employers often offer more money (bonuses), which can be used to acquire yet more material possessions. A work ethic guided by the nobility of work, social recognition via promotions at work, and displays of wealth by conspicuous consumption is reinforced by

more work and more consumption. The leisure ethic of seeking free-time experiences that include high-quality environmental settings, cultural enhancement, and self-enrichment is relegated to secondary status. Shor (1991) advocated adopting a non-consumptive mentality—that is, doing with less.

DeGraaf and colleagues (2005) state that American society is infected with a socially accepted virus called “affluenza,” defined as “a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more” (p. 2). The authors go on to say that affluenza is a bloated, sluggish, and unfulfilled feeling that results from efforts to keep up with the Joneses; it is an epidemic of stress, overwork, waste, and indebtedness caused by the pursuit of the American Dream, an unsustainable addiction to economic growth.

The term was popularized in the United States in 1997 by the television documentary titled, “Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic,” produced by John DeGraaf and broadcast by KTCS and Oregon Public Broadcasting. The analysis includes such questions as, “What choices did we make as a society (between free time and ‘stuff,’ for example) that deepened our infection?” (DeGraaf et al. 2005, p.5). To cope with the epidemic, the authors encourage a “new frugality and voluntary simplicity” (DeGraaf et al. 2005, p. 6) or doing with less—that is, choosing time instead of more money. The authors state that shopping has become a national pastime; 93 percent of teenage American girls state that shopping is their favorite recreation activity (DeGraaf et al. 2005, p. 15). Shopping at malls is accompanied by shopping by catalog, by TV, or online, usually with one of 6.5 credit cards, the average number of credit cards owned by Americans (DeGraaf et al. 2005, p. 19). The result of this consumption frenzy is material overload, debt, a shortage of time for nurturing human relationships (a harried leisure class), a lengthening work schedule, stress from overload and anxiety, lack of sleep, obesity, depression, a decrease in social capital that binds

communities together, and a decline in public investment in public spaces as parks.

The newest target of spreading affluenza is children, who are bombarded with commercials and then either make their own purchases or influence their parents' purchases. "The more Americans fill their lives with things, the more they tell psychiatrists, pastors, friends, and family members that they feel 'empty' inside. The more toys our kids have to play with, the more they complain of boredom" (DeGraaf et al. 2005, p. 74). The lack of connectiveness with others in the community, absence of community service, and disconnect from environmental issues, coupled with standardized work and materialism, provide little opportunity for finding meaning, creativity, and association. The authors assert that vitality results from service to others, relationships with friends and family, connections with nature, and work of intrinsic moral value, for example, rejuvenating an historic building, removing pollutants from a stream, or saving wildlife habitat (DeGraaf et al. 2005, p. 82).

1.1 Leisure Resourcefulness

Leisure resourcefulness is a term used by the Rapoport (1975) to describe a person's ability to make a meaningful life for him/herself within the realities of his/her own existence. Leisure resources include knowledge of leisure, time, space, skill, companions, equipment, money, and one's attitude toward leisure. Each person must develop these resources over time, and bring them, in varying combinations, into activity spheres to satisfy one's preoccupations or mental absorptions at each life-cycle stage. As individuals' needs change at different life-cycle stages, changes also occur in lifestyle, adaptive abilities, personality, and environment. An individual who is highly resourceful is also highly adaptable to change and presumably also experiences higher life satisfaction as he/she is able to fulfill biological, physical, and mental needs at any point in time.

2.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Although there is a growing body of research in the area of lifestyles and consumerism, little research has been conducted on the relationship between consumerism and leisure. The objective of this research was to examine

lifestyles relative to aspirations for affluence and its relationship to life satisfaction and leisure resourcefulness.

2.1 Data Collection and Sample

Commuter students enrolled in university recreation courses collected the data. These students were residents of a large metropolitan area. Each student received five questionnaires with instructions to provide one questionnaire per household to a family member, friend, or acquaintance who was age 18 years or older. The sample size was 192 respondents.

The data collection instrument was a self-administered questionnaire. The title, "Life Style Orientation Study," was followed by a short paragraph asking the respondent to participate in the study, estimating the time it would take to complete the questionnaire, describing the purpose of the study, and offering a promise of confidentiality. The first page of the questionnaire contained the Affluenza Self-diagnostic Test, followed by the Life Satisfaction Scale and the Leisure Resourcefulness Scale. The instrument concluded with questions on the respondent's background and a note of thanks for participating in the study.

2.2 Research Scales

The Affluenza Self-diagnostic Test is a 50-item test designed to measure one's level of addiction to affluenza from De Graaf et al. (2005), pp. 174-176. Respondents provide a "yes" or "no" response to a variety of questions related to consumption and affluence (Table 1). The authors describe the test as an "unscientific, but we think useful, means of determining whether you've got affluenza..." (p. 174). This research used a modified 4-point Likert-type scale for assessing responses for the Affluenza Test: always, sometimes, seldom, never. Reliability test for the Affluenza Scale using Cronbach's alpha was .807.

The Life Satisfaction Index is a standardized scale consisting of 12 items that measures one's perception of his/her life at a point in time (Table 2).

Table 3 lists the scale items in the Leisure Resourcefulness Scale. This scale has five dimensions:

Table 1.—Affluenza self-diagnostic test***Scale Items**

- 1 Do you get bored unless you have something to consume (goods, food, media)?
- 2 Do you try to impress your friends with what you own, or where you vacation?
- 3 Do you ever use shopping as “therapy”?
- 4 Do you sometimes go to the mall just to look around, with nothing specific to buy?
- 5 Do you buy home improvement products in a large chain store rather than the neighborhood hardware store?
- 6 Have you ever gone on a vacation primarily to shop?
- 7 In general, do you think about things more than you think about people?
- 8 When you pay utility bills, do you ignore the amount of resource consumed?
- 9 Given the choice between a slight pay raise and a shorter work week, would you choose the money?
- 10 Do you personally fill more than one large trash bag in a single week?
- 11 Have you ever lied to a family member about the amount you spent for a product?
- 12 Do you frequently argue with family members about money?
- 13 Do you volunteer your time less than 5 hours a week to help other people?
- 14 Do you routinely compare the appearance of your lawn and/or home with others in your neighborhood?
- 15 Do you routinely gamble or buy lottery tickets?
- 16 Do you check your investments at least once a day?
- 17 Are any of your credit cards “maxed out”?
- 18 Do worries about debt cause you physical symptoms like headaches or indigestion?
- 19 Do you spend more time shopping every week than you do with your family?
- 20 Do you frequently think about changing jobs?
- 21 Have you had cosmetic surgery to improve your appearance?
- 22 Do your conversations often gravitate toward things you want to buy?
- 23 Are you sometimes ashamed about how much money you spend on fast food?
- 24 Do you sometimes weave back and forth in traffic to get somewhere faster?
- 25 Have you ever experienced road rage?
- 26 Do you feel like you’re always in a hurry?
- 27 Do you often throw away recyclable materials rather than take the time to recycle them?
- 28 Do you spend less than an hour a day outside?
- 29 Can you identify more than three wildflowers that are native to your area?
- 30 Do you replace sports equipment before it’s worn out to have the latest styles?
- 31 Does each member of your family have his or her own TV?
- 32 Is the price of a product more important to you than how well it was made?
- 33 Has one of your credit cards ever been rejected by a salesperson because you were over the limit?
- 34 Do you receive more than five mail-order catalogs a week?
- 35 Are you one of those consumers who almost never take a reusable bag to the grocery store?
- 36 Do you ignore the miles per gallon of gasoline your car gets?
- 37 Did you choose the most recent car you bought partly because it enhanced your self-image?
- 38 Do you have more than five active credit cards?
- 39 When you get a raise at work, do you immediately think about how you can spend it?
- 40 Do you drink more soft drink, by volume, than tap water?
- 41 Did you work more this year than last year?
- 42 Do you have doubts that you’ll be able to reach your financial goals?
- 43 Do you feel “used-up” at the end of your workday?
- 44 Do you usually make just the minimum payment on credit card bills?
- 45 When you shop, do you often feel a rush of euphoria followed by anxiety?
- 46 Do you sometimes feel like your personal expenses are so demanding that you can’t afford public expenses like schools, parks, and transit?
- 47 Do you have more stuff than you can store in your house?
- 48 Do you watch TV more than 2 hours a day?
- 49 Do you eat meat nearly every day?

Each item was measured on a 4-point scale: 1=Always, 2=Sometimes, 3= Seldom, 4=Never.

Item #15 in the original scale was omitted in this research due to a clerical error: “Does each person in your house or apartment occupy more than 500 square feet of personal space?”

Item #21 was changed from “Have you had cosmetic surgery to improve your appearance?” to “Do you think about cosmetic surgery to improve your appearance?” to accommodate the change in scale responses from a 2- to a 4- point scale.

*Scale used with permission of Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco.

Table 2.—Life satisfaction scale items and reliability score

1	As I grow older, things seem better than I thought.
2	I have gotten more of the breaks in life than most.
3	I am just as happy as when I was younger.
4	These are the best years of my life.
5	*Most of the things I do are boring.
6	I expect some pleasant things to happen to me.
7	The things I do are as interesting to me as they ever were.
8	*I feel old and somewhat tired.
9	As I look back on life, I am fairly well satisfied.
10	I have made plans for things I'll be doing a month from now.
11	*When I think back over my life, I didn't get most of the important things I wanted.
12	*Compared to other people, I get down in the dumps too often.

Cronbach's alpha=.803

Adapted from Havinghurst et al. 1961.

Scale items were measured on a five point scale: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree.

*Items were reverse coded for internal consistency.

Table 3.—Leisure resourcefulness scales and scale items**Leisure Attitude**

Leisure is a necessary part of my life.

I know why leisure is important to me.

Leisure Companions

I have friends to do most anything I want to do in leisure.

My friends know a lot of leisure activities.

Leisure Equipment

I know how to use my leisure equipment.

I know where to purchase equipment I need.

Leisure Knowledge

I have taught this activity to others.

I know leisure opportunities when I see them.

I know places to go for leisure.

Leisure Time

Leisure time is for enjoyment.

Leisure time is doing things I like to do.

I value my free time.

Scale items are measured from 1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree.

leisure attitude, leisure companions, leisure equipment, leisure knowledge, and leisure time. The original 10 items in each scale were reduced to a two- or three-item scale by factor analysis (Ricciardo 2004).

RESULTS

3.1 Description of the Sample Population

Forty-five percent of the respondents were male. Eighty-three percent were Caucasian and 7 percent were African American. Respondents' ages ranged from 17 to 62 with an average age of 34.5. Forty-four percent were married and 47 percent were single. Thirty-eight percent

had graduated from high school or a technical school, or had completed some college. Fifty-nine percent had graduated from college, attended graduate school, or had an advanced degree. The annual household income of 68 percent of the sample was less than \$50,000, 18 percent earned between \$50,000 and \$90,000, and 13 percent had gross incomes above \$90,000. The occupations of 33 percent of the sample were professional/technical, 21 percent were managers/officials/proprietors, 11 percent were in sales/clerical work, and the remainder (35 percent) were craftspeople, machinery operators, students, laborers, or service workers. Ninety-two percent

reported their health as excellent or good. Seventy percent of the respondents reported living at their current address less than 6 years. Sixty-six percent lived alone or with their spouse. The remainder of the respondents lived with friends, parents, or other family members. Ninety-one percent resided in southeast Michigan communities.

3.2 Findings

Regression analysis identified one Leisure Resourcefulness variable that was significantly associated with affluenza: leisure attitude (Table 4). The beta weight for leisure attitude is negative—as leisure attitude increases, level of affluence decreases. The level of explained variance is low at 9 percent. Table 5 shows two Leisure Resourcefulness variables that serve as significant predictors of life satisfaction: leisure companions and leisure knowledge. The explained variance is 32 percent.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

The data show that a favorable leisure attitude was negatively associated with affluenza as a lifestyle orientation. The choice to consume is pervasive in U.S. culture. Advertisements continually encourage us to consume to improve our sense of well-being and our self-image. Product imaging, targeting, promotion, packaging, labeling, and pricing overwhelm individual resolutions not to consume. Shopping is among the top 10 recreation activities on a weekly basis in the U.S. (Cheek and Burch 1976). It is a structured social activity consisting of imaging and need creation accompanied by a frenzy of choices, labels, patterns, colors, sizes, self-imaging, and feedback to satisfy preconceived needs. Shopping consumes a significant amount of individual/group resources in planning, preparation, on-site behaviors, decision-making processes, monetary resources, time, physical and mental demands, and reflection, which results in euphoric highs and lows. Shoppers become “shopped out” only to recover and display their wares and their expertise in decision-making in pursuing the “best deals.” Leisure attitudes can influence behavior to adopt a leisure ethic versus an ethic of consumption and affluence. A leisure ethic is centered on quality of the environment, cultural enhancement, and self-enrichment through involvement in free-time experiences. To reclaim leisure, Schor (1991) states that

Table 4.—Results of multiple regression analysis of the affluenza self-diagnostic test and the leisure resourcefulness scale

Leisure Resourcefulness Scales	Average scores	Beta	t	Sign.
Leisure Attitude	1.86	-.207	-2.17	.031
Leisure Companions	2.25	.125	1.53	.127
Leisure Equipment	2.00	.001	.01	.987
Leisure Time	1.55	-.173	-1.76	.079
Leisure Knowledge	1.89	.163	1.89	.060

Model Summary

R = .309 R² = .095 F(5,186) = 3.92, p<.002

Scores for the dependent variable, Affluenza, were added for the 49-item scale for each respondent for the responses “Always” and “Never”. Responses for “Sometimes” and “Seldom” were ignored. Scale values are: 1 = Always, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Seldom, 4 = Never.

Scores for the independent variable Leisure Resourcefulness were summed and averaged for each respondent for each Leisure Resourcefulness Scale. Scale values are: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree.

Table 5.—Results of multiple regression analysis of life satisfaction and the leisure resourcefulness scale

Leisure Resourcefulness Scales	Average scores	Beta	t	Sign.
Leisure Attitude	1.86	.061	0.71	.474
Leisure Companions	2.25	.235	3.25	.001
Leisure Equipment	2.00	.095	1.22	.222
Leisure Time	1.55	.055	0.63	.528
Leisure Knowledge	1.89	.337	3.85	.001

Model Summary

R = .567 R² = .32 F(5,176) = 16.6, p < .001

Scores for the dependent variable Life Satisfaction were summed and averaged for each respondent. Scale values are: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree.

Scores for the independent variable Leisure Resourcefulness were summed and averaged for each respondent for each Leisure Resourcefulness Scale. Scale values are: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree.

Americans must adopt a nonconsumptive mentality—that is, doing with less.

In this research, life satisfaction was related to leisure companions and leisure knowledge. The social group is the major building block for social organization. Forming

bonds within a social group is a mechanism for cohesion and survival in diversified social systems, and such bonds often last a lifetime. There is safety and security in a social group of individuals that share symbols, permeable social boundaries, tastes, a social order, accepted norms, and established patterns of behavior, which ultimately provide a means to achieve life satisfaction (Cheek and Burch 1976).

Leisure resourcefulness is knowing how to—and being able to—make a meaningful life for oneself within the realities of one's own existence. In this research, leisure knowledge was a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Knowledge influences many aspects of empowerment in human behavior, including, for example, one's adaptive environment, social organization, social and cultural milieu, and choices to satisfy physical, mental, and biological needs at a point in time along the life-cycle continuum.

These research findings challenge leisure educators to develop basic leisure and recreation courses as elective courses, if not required general education courses for graduation requirements. Leisure service providers are also challenged to emphasize education for leisure as an extension of normal recreation activity and/or interpretive offerings.

7.0 CITATIONS

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