

OLDER MEN'S LEISURE EXPERIENCES ACROSS THEIR LIFESPAN

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Canada's population is aging, and significant growth in the number of adults over age 80 is expected. Through leisure, older adults can enhance their health, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction. As more and more people live into their 80's, leisure will become increasingly important to the quality of life of both older men and women. In recent years, research has focused on women's experiences, leaving a gap in the leisure and aging literature in terms of the experiences of men. The current literature on masculinity and leisure focuses primarily on sports, and while this research is grounded in masculinity theory, research on older men and leisure has not included such a framework. The purpose of this qualitative research study is to gain an understanding of the leisure experiences of older men. The objectives of this study were: to explore the childhood leisure experiences of the participants; to explore the participants' leisure experiences in adolescence; to explore leisure experiences in young adulthood and midlife; to explore leisure experiences in later life; to gain an understanding of how past leisure influences current leisure patterns; to examine leisure experiences in terms of a framework of hegemonic masculinity.

Methods

Eight participants were recruited through seniors' centres and groups in Eastern Canada. Recruitment letters were distributed to men who attend seniors' centres with the assistance of the directors of the centres. Recruitment letters were followed up by a telephone call or meeting to ask the potential participants if they were interested in being part of the study. Interview times and locations were arranged at that time among those who agreed to participate. It was made very clear that there would be no penalty for nonparticipation.

Recruitment through seniors' centres reflected a certain proportion of the population. Data was collected through face-to-face, open ended, semi-structured oral history interviews. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide was designed to facilitate discussion regarding leisure experiences across the lifespan. The questions served as cues for guiding the interview, but were flexible in nature. Also, questions were added to the interview guide as themes began to emerge from the data. Prior to the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to give informed consent, and the details of the interview were carefully explained in order to ensure that the participant felt comfortable in participating, and to answer any questions they may have had. Participants were also asked to complete a questionnaire before starting the interview. The questionnaire was designed to collect information regarding the demographics of the sample, including age, length of time living in the province, and employment prior to retirement. Interviews were 45 - 90 minutes in length. Field notes were kept in which impressions, emotions, and other information about the interview were recorded. As well, field notes were used to record new ideas, probe questions, potential leading questions, and evaluations of the interviews (Henderson, 1991). Two of the participants agreed to review the diagram created to summarize the findings. This helped to ensure that the participants' voices were heard in the findings of the study, as

well as to make sure that my interpretation of the findings accurately reflected the experiences of the participants it was intended. These techniques were used in order to enhance the credibility of the findings. In order to gain an understanding of older men's leisure experiences, an interpretive paradigm was adopted, as well as a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity. This framework provided insight into the social realities of the participants of this study. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Reflexivity played an important role in this study, as I recognized my position and viewpoints as a young, female researcher. Through detailed, thick description of the participants' leisure experiences, a base for future research in this area was created.

Results

The participants in this study represented a group of older men between the ages of 72 and 86. Although they all belonged to a seniors' group or center, they had diverse experiences, interests, and activities, leisure and otherwise. Seven of the participants experienced some common life experiences.

The lack of money available during the Depression meant that as children, the participants had to make their own fun. They played many different sports, and enjoyed social activities. They played games like tag and hide and seek, and they enjoyed music. Those who lived in rural areas had few friends to play with, and little time for leisure as they had chores to do after school. Participants who grew up in bigger cities had more opportunities for play with other children in their neighbourhoods and at school. Four of the participants started working between the ages of 13 and 15 to make money to help support their families. As such, they had very little time for leisure because the majority of their time was spent working long hours. Those who did have time for leisure in their teen years were very active in sports, and they loved the competition and the exercise that they got from it. Social activities were also important at that time in their lives, and the participants enjoyed dancing, skating, music, and community activities. As World War II began, the participants' lives changed once again. Some of them went overseas, one served at home, others continued to work, and Jack was still a child. It was at this time that marriage became important, even though permission was needed for soldiers to get married. In some cases very little time was spent with wives before being sent overseas.

Wartime was characterized by loss of close friends who died in the war. Leisure time was limited again, because of work and the war. The opportunity to participate in sports was no longer available for the participants because there were no recreation clubs, and time was spent working instead of playing sports. Social activities were enjoyed at the time, and participants enjoyed dancing, and visiting with friends and relatives. Two of the participants discussed opportunities for leisure overseas, including traveling to take in some of the culture, and visiting with friends from home. Life after the war years continued to be characterized by work. Accomplishments through work resulted in feelings of pride and satisfaction for the participants. Again, because work was so prevalent, there was little time for leisure. What leisure there was continued to be social in nature. Getting together with friends and other couples for picnics and swimming was enjoyed, as was traveling to visit family. Two of the participants were more committed to their chosen leisure activity at that time. Leo started an orchestra and spent his leisure time practicing and playing for the public. Jack spent his leisure time going camping on weekends and vacations. After retirement, life changed again for the participants. Work,

which was a main focus in their lives, was over, and time had to be filled in other ways. The participants firmly believed in the importance of keeping both mind and body active in later life, and as such, they participated in a wide variety of activities. Some of the men volunteered, which gave them a great deal of satisfaction and enjoyment. Acting and singing, as well as watching drama were also enjoyed. Social activities, including dancing, cards, darts and bingo were popular among the participants because they gave the men an opportunity to find out about what was going on with the people around them, and provided a chance for social interaction. Solitary activities were also enjoyed because they resulted in the opportunity to accomplish goals and they gave the participants a great deal of satisfaction. The participants had some words of wisdom to pass on to other older men. They emphasized the importance of planning for retirement so that there is something to do after retirement. They also stressed the importance of keeping active, and encouraged other older men to join both social and physical activities. Finally, one participant believed in the importance of maintaining a sense of humour.

Discussion

Future research on men's leisure experiences could be grounded in masculinity theory and should continue to recognize women's experiences as different from men's. In addition to further exploration of masculinity theory and its evolution, using standpoint theory in research about men can help to give them voice while recognizing gender differences and inequality. In addition, it can be used to study men's emotions and their experiences as a group. Continued exploration of older men's leisure experiences in terms of theories of aging may be beneficial. Continuity theory (Sheldon & Datillo, 2000) could be used as a theoretical framework for research regarding older men. As well, researchers could continue to explore selective optimization with compensation (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) to help to gain an understanding of whether or not this theory does in fact better reflect older men's leisure experiences across their lifespan. Further exploration of standpoint theory to give voice to male participants in leisure and aging research is another tool that can be used in future research. By using standpoint theory as a framework for research on older men, researchers can avoid categorizing their participants' experiences in accordance with the traditional theories of aging, and leisure theories. Instead, the participants' own perspectives will become the focus of the research, rather than theories that do not accurately reflect their experiences. Standpoint theory can also be used to further explore the incongruity between men's current realities and what their realities should be.

This study has many implications for both practitioners and future research. More research is needed to thoroughly understand older men's leisure experiences, and thus develop programs that meet their needs and wants. From this study, it appears that the leisure needs of men who belong to senior's centres are currently being met through available programs. However, this may not be the case for all men of this generation, and further research is needed to explore the experiences of a diverse population of older men.

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