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The Impact of Marital Status and Gender on Leisure Values of Older Adults

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The ability to provide leisure programming in senior living environments is critical to older adults’ quality of life and successful aging. In this cross-sectional study, using social behavior theory as a foundation, 128 older adults who reside in a senior living environment completed a survey to identify leisure values with a focus on marital status and gender. An independent t-test found that older men and women of all marital statuses value leisure for physiological and aesthetic reasons. In addition, older women and widows value leisure for social reasons more than men and other marital statuses. Implications for designing leisure programs are discussed.

KEYWORDS aging, gender, leisure, leisure values, marital status, older adults

INTRODUCTION

Leisure plays a significant role in the life of an older adult. As the population ages and life expectancy increases, the number of individuals residing in senior living facilities continues to grow (Browdie, 2010). Given
this reality, it is important for residents to have programs and activities that reflect their leisure values which in turn provide meaning in their lives. Based on projections from the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of Americans aged 65 and older is expected to reach 88.5 million by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Today’s older adult population combines two distinct cohorts—baby boomers born from 1946–1964, and seniors born before 1946. Retirement, coupled with the process of aging, provides many older adults an increase in unobligated time and various opportunities such as social interaction, new challenges, education, improved mood, and increased independence (Jopp & Hertzog, 2010). The distinct characteristics of these two generations provide a focus in the future of leisure programming on a population that will be driven by their values (Cochran, Rothschadl, & Rudick, 2009).

Successful aging can be defined as “multi-dimensional, incorporate the perspectives of older adults, and be thought of as a continuous rather than dichotomous construct” (Ferri, James, & Pruchno, 2009, p. 380). Ferri et al. go on to explain that successful aging is important to understand as it occurs during a time when older adults may be suffering from illnesses and depending on others. Older adults participate in certain leisure activities for various reasons, which are often reflective of how successful aging affects their lives (Cochran et al., 2009). To the recreation professional in a residential living environment, understanding what older adults desire in terms of leisure activities is imperative to developing new programs that honor these values that may help improve successful aging.

The Problem

Much of the research on leisure values of older adults has focused greatly on older adulthood as a single population, rather than investigating different populations of older adults (McKenna, Broome, & Liddle, 2007). Populations of older adults can be divided by many variables, such as age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational level, community dwelling, institutional dwelling, health status, and cognitive abilities. This gap in research about different populations of older adults has opened up many questions as to how older adults with different backgrounds, supports, stressors, and life events might benefit from or value leisure. Gender and marital status are two important factors that relate to leisure values.

Service providers beyond recreation programmers should also be motivated to understand how gender and marital status impact leisure values in older adults for a number of reasons. Regarding gender, men and women have different needs concerning socialization and peer support (Son & Yarnal, 2011), and providers should explore leisure opportunities that allow for different levels of socialization or independence and time alone to meet these needs. Marital status can affect whether or not older adults would want
to meet new people, increase socialization, find more leisure to involve family, or provide time away from spouses (e.g., in a caregiving role) (Shiovitz-Ezra & Leitsch, 2010; Wang, Luo, Dai, Legace, & Morrison, 2011). It would be irresponsible to assume older men and women, as well as married, widowed, single, or divorced elders, would have the same interests or leisure values simply because they are older adults. It is critical to understand why these different populations of older adults value their leisure so that appropriate recreational and educational planning can be developed to meet their needs. This will also help providers better comprehend the needs and roles of social support and family involvement in leisure.

The purpose of this study was to identify the leisure values of older adults who reside in a senior living environment. Specifically, the study compared and contrasted values by classification of marital status and gender. In this investigation, social behavioral perspective framed the study about how gender and marital status impact leisure values in older adults within a senior living environment. Social behavioral theory discusses how human behavior is shaped by different stimuli in the environment (Hutchison, 2008). Because of the environmental changes that are associated with aging, this theory will help explain why men and women value leisure differently as they age, as well as why those who are widowed, divorced, or single may have leisure values that are different than that of someone who is married.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leisure Values

Leisure values relate specifically to leisure or leisure activities as a basis of one’s personal values of worth. Kretchmar (2004) defines leisure values as those things that are important to someone or may be valued by someone. For example, some people place value on feelings of competition, perceptual freedom, individualism, or others place value on learning new skills (Cochran, 2005). Everyone has different leisure values, which can be impacted based on age, gender, marital status, culture, and education (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). Leisure values have recently received a great deal of attention and research in order to better understand successful aging in older adults (Jopp & Hertzog, 2010).

McKenna et al. (2007) report that many studies have not included older adults when assessing leisure values and life satisfaction, or they have lumped all older adults as a single age group of those 65 years and older. This has resulted in a limited understanding of how the diversity of lifestyle can impact leisure values in older adults. Jopp and Hertzog (2010) further report that their study could not take into account different populations and lifestyles among older adults, such as the difference between boomers and seniors, and that future research should address specific subgroups of older adults.
Gender and Leisure Values

By nature, men and women often participate in different leisure activities. As a result, women will have different leisure values as well as different constraints and benefits in leisure than do men (Cochran et al., 2009). Son and Yarnal (2011) support this through discussion of how leisure can allow women to increase their social support in later life. It is important for women to be able to express themselves and to redefine their roles in life as they age. Women also valued the social aspects that leisure allowed them, which helped to improve self-esteem. Wang et al. (2011) found that women value leisure as it helps them to handle stress. Further, women might value leisure as it helps them to meet new people and spend time with their friends.

Fitzpatrick (2009) found that many older adult women value leisure as it helps to promote physical health, which in turn helps to improve their mental health. Because older adults can face many physical limitations and health problems, older women have identified that leisure helps them to stay healthy. Fitzpatrick's study found that women who reported leisure values that included physical activity suffered from fewer physical health problems, such as hip fractures and osteoporosis, while reporting improved cognition. By not enduring chronic illnesses and physical problems, women reported higher life satisfaction and less depression. Fitzpatrick's study suggests that older adult women may value leisure activities for physical and mental health benefits.

Before retirement, men often focus much of their time and energy on work and their gender role often defines them as being financially responsible for their families (Son & Yarnal, 2011; Steinkamp & Kelly, 1985). Therefore, after retirement, men are becoming more attuned to spending time with family, and many leisure activities have a strong family focus for men (Steinkamp & Kelly, 1985). This role change can be difficult for some men; leisure can help them to be with their families during this transition (Scranton & Holland, 2006).

Similar to older adult women, men value physical exercise as a way to improve physical health, thus leading to increased independence. Moore, Mitchell, Beets, and Bartholomew (2012) further explain that physical activity helps to increase positive self-esteem, overall well-being, and satisfaction with life. This can help to maintain independence and reduce the risk of men relying on family members for activity of daily living (ADL) support. Therefore, older adult males may also value leisure for physical health benefits.

McKenna et al. (2007) found that community-dwelling older adult men often value more independent and passive leisure activities, such as watching television, reading, and listening to the radio. Although some studies have shown that older adult men value leisure to spend time with family, it also appears that spending time alone to complete activities of choice is an
important factor as well. Since older adult men typically serve as the primary provider for their families, retirement and aging may result in the loss of some social networks and contacts. McKenna et al. further state that this can result in reduced social engagement, explaining why older men might prefer to participate in more isolated leisure.

Based on these findings, older adult men and women have similar leisure values concerning physical health and overall well-being. Both men and women want to maintain their independence (Fitzpatrick, 2009; Moore et al., 2012), and participation in leisure helps to improve self-esteem and health. Men and women are also finding role changes as they age (Son & Yarnal, 2011; Steinkamp & Kelly, 1985); yet how they value leisure during these changes is different. Women tend to value socialization and social support, and while men value spending time with family post-retirement, it appears that as they continue to age they value more independent leisure (McKenna et al., 2007; Son & Yarnal, 2011). However, despite the difference in choice of leisure, it does appear that both men and women value leisure simply for the sake of pleasure (Counihan, 2008; Kracker, Kearns, Keir, & Christensen, 2011 McKenna et al., 2007).

Marital Status and Leisure

Being married can offer opportunities for couples to participate in leisure together, which will generally revolve around family-oriented activities (Pinquart & Schindler, 2009). Married couples may value leisure more as it helps them to connect with each other or with their loved ones. However, when examining the leisure values of married older adults, it is important to take into consideration the relationship of the married couple and how they value their marriage (Shiovitz-Ezra & Leitsch, 2010). When older couples find that they have a supportive relationship, they tend to value leisure as it helps them to be closer to each other as well as closer to family (Shiovitz-Ezra & Leitsch, 2010). On the other hand, if the couple finds that their marriage is strained, leisure tends to provide them an opportunity to spend time away from each other and gain social support from other people or groups (Shiovitz-Ezra & Leitsch, 2010). Similarly, when an older adult is a caregiver for a spouse, leisure values may shift to finding support or increasing socialization (Stevens et al., 2004). These are surprisingly overlooked concepts when evaluating leisure values and activity preference among married older adults (Shiovitz-Ezra & Leitsch, 2010; Stevens et al., 2004).

While leisure may help married elders to connect more with family, it has also been found that single older adults report a higher level of leisure satisfaction than married elders (Pinquart & Schindler, 2009). Single older adults report that they enjoy participating in activities more for the sake of leisure, rather than for the sake of being around family or feeling required to do so. Pinquart and Schindler (2009) suggest single older adults may
have more opportunities to participate in leisure of their choice, and they only need to rely on their own interests and values when choosing leisure. Wang et al. (2011) further found that leisure needs can fluctuate if marital status changes (such as becoming a widow or widower, or getting divorced). These findings suggested that those who are divorced or widowed in later life might value leisure as a way to improve physical and mental health. When interventions were made to help promote different forms of leisure, older adults reported that participation in leisure helped them to meet new people, increase their mood, increase self-esteem, and provided enjoyment (Wang et al., 2011).

Social Behavioral Theory and Leisure Values

Social behavioral theory maintains that human behavior is learned and changes based on individuals' interaction with their environment (Hutchison, 2008). In this theory, classical conditioning suggests that behavior is learned through interaction with a naturally satisfying stimulus. This theory emphasizes two social behavioral processes that support why older adults have different values associated with leisure: human behavior is learned when a person interacts with the environment, and any behavior can be changed (Hutchison, 2008). Thus, assessing how gender and marital status affect leisure values in older adults is conceptualized in social behavioral theory as an outcome of changes in a person’s environment as one ages.

Human behavior can impact values in life, which can help explain the leisure values of older adults. In older adulthood, negative changes that may occur could surround a person’s environment, such as moving into a long-term care facility. Suffering a decrease in social supports or family interaction, which can include the loss of a spouse, is also a negative impact in an older adult’s environment (Charles & Almeida, 2007). There can be positive changes as well, such as a growing family (i.e., birth of grandchildren), increasing social activities through an adult facility, and finding more time for leisure after retirement. Because of these changes, older adults are susceptible to developing different interests, which can include why leisure values vary for men and women post-retirement (Charles & Almeida, 2007; Son & Yarnal, 2011), as well as why marital status can impact leisure values (Pinquart & Schindler, 2009; Wang et al., 2011; Yeh & Sing, 2004).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This study seeks to answer the following two questions: (1) What are the leisure values of older adults in a senior living environment? and (2) How do gender and marital status affect these values? Understanding the answers to these questions may help to better create and promote recreation activities for older adults that suit their needs and interests.
The researchers hypothesize that overall health, well-being, and pleasure will be a similar leisure value for men and women as well as older adults of all marital statuses. The researchers further hypothesize that older women who are not married will value leisure to help them to increase socialization, meet new people, and increase peer support. In contrast, men and married elders will value leisure to help them to spend more time with family, as well as spend more time alone.

METHODS

Participants

The authors of this study partnered with a large-scale community provider of independent living, assisted living, and long-term care in Rochester, New York. Four-hundred eighty older adults reside within five different independent and assisted living settings on one campus. Residents were informed of the survey through informational fliers and through a monthly newsletter. The survey was approved by the College at Brockport Institutional Review Board.

One hundred twenty-eight older adults participated in the study for a 26% response rate. The average age of the older adults in this sample was 84.4 years old ($SD = 6.36$), with the ages ranging from 55 to 97 years old. As described in Table 1, a majority were female (68.8%; $n = 88$), white/Caucasian (96.9%; $n = 124$), and held a bachelor’s degree or higher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1 Older Adult Demographic Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single (never married)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(60%; \( n = 81 \)) and widowed. Because more than half of the older adults were widowed (53.9%; \( n = 69 \)), and due to the small sample size of single, married, and divorced elders, marital status was later divided into “widowed” and “all others.”

Measures

Elements of the survey involving leisure participation values and the importance of participation in recreational activities were obtained from the Cochran Baby Boomer Quiz (Cochran, 2005; Cochran et al., 2009). In this original instrument, participants were asked to rate the importance of twenty-three reasons that they would participate in leisure and recreational activities, ranging from not important to very important on a 4-point scale. Each of the reasons belonged to one of the six categories of non-moral values. These values include competition, educational, physiological, social, relaxation, and aesthetic reasons for leisure participation (Sperazza, 2010).

For this particular study, the authors utilized an updated version of the instrument that includes two additional reasons that participants might value leisure relating to intergenerational motivations (Sperazza, 2010). To reduce the burden of survey administration on older adults, the response scale was reduced to “1 = Important,” “2 = Neutral/Indifferent,” and “3 = Not Important.” Lower scores indicated greater importance of leisure values.

The recreational and leisure participation subscale’s reliability was .85, indicating high reliability, and the six composites had an internal consistency coefficient of .74 (Sperazza, 2010). Face validity, or the belief of what is being measured that seems to coincide with a person’s opinion on what is being asked, has been determined through consultation by a panel of experts (Sperazza, 2010). Cronbach’s alpha for the current survey administration with the modified response scale was .74, consistent with previous reports.

The first part of the survey focused on leisure values; the second part of the survey included demographic information, where participants were asked to specify their gender and marital status. Marital status is defined as single, married, divorced, or widowed; while gender is comprised of male or female.

Procedures

This project utilized a cross-sectional, non-experimental research design and used a convenience sampling methodology. To recruit survey participants, information about the survey and administration times and methods were publicized in an article in two monthly newsletters at the assisted/independent living setting. The same information was shared at resident council meetings. In addition, a flyer publicizing the same information was mailed or hand delivered to residents’ apartments.
On the days of survey administration, participants were recruited in person by graduate student research assistants in the facility’s public gathering areas during lunch and dinner. Surveying took place in these public places, as well as in some older adults’ apartments. Students received training in administration of the survey, the latter of which is estimated to have taken approximately 15 minutes to finish. Research assistants were instructed to take notice of any cognitive, auditory, or visual issues experienced by older adults participating in the survey. Participants were advised via cover letter and during survey administration that participation in this research project was completely voluntary. They were invited to provide their name and other contact information to students only if they desired to receive a copy of the study results, participate in a follow up focus group, or be enrolled in a drawing to win a $25 super market gift card. Once consent was given, the research assistants administered the survey to the older adults by reading the questions and indicating the participant’s response.

### TABLE 2 T-test for Gender and Leisure Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>13.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>10.02</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>8.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.

**p < .01.

Note. M = mean. SD = Standard Deviation.

### TABLE 3 T-test for Marital Status and Leisure Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Widowed</th>
<th>All others</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>6.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>13.57</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>12.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>9.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.

**p < .01.

Note. M = mean. SD = Standard Deviation.
RESULTS

This study examined six categories of leisure values summarized in Tables 2 and 3. In the physiological category, which was comprised of two questions, the average score for men was 2.57 ($SD = 1.03$), and the average score for women was 2.44 ($SD = .817$). The scores indicate the relative importance of physiological leisure for both genders; however, the difference is not statistically significant, $t = .744; p = .458$. The average score for widowed older adults was 2.58 ($SD = .98$), and the average score for all others was 2.37 ($SD = .76$). These scores signify that all marital statuses find physiological leisure values important to them, though this difference is not statistically significant, $t = 1.38, p = .167$.

In the relaxation category, comprised of three questions, the average score for men was 6.75 ($SD = 1.27$). For women, the average score was 5.95 ($SD = 1.38$). These scores show that males and females are more neutral/indifferent toward leisure for relaxation, although women value relaxation leisure slightly more than men. This difference is statistically significant, $t = 3.07, p = .003$. The average score for widowed older adults was 6.10 ($SD = 1.37$), whereas the average score for all other adults was 6.32 ($SD = 1.43$). These scores indicate widowed elders and all other elders reported being neutral/indifferent when asked about relaxation leisure values. The difference is not statistically significant, $t = -.888, p = .376$.

In regard to the aesthetic category of leisure values, which consisted of two questions, the average score for males was 2.62 ($SD = 1.00$) while the average score for females was 2.45 ($SD = .741$). These scores indicate that both older men and women value aesthetic leisure, with women placing a slightly higher importance on aesthetic leisure values. However, the difference between genders is not statistically significant, $t = .961, p = .341$. The average score for widowed older adults was 2.63 ($SD = .95$) while the average score for all other marital statuses was 2.35 ($SD = .63$). These scores indicate older adults of all marital statuses find importance in aesthetic leisure, with those who are widowed placing slightly less value on aesthetic leisure than all other marital statuses. There is statistical significance in this difference, $t = 1.98, p = .049$.

In relation to the education category of leisure values, consisting of four questions, the average score for males was 4.22 ($SD = 1.47$) while the average score for females was 4.23 ($SD = 1.41$). The scores indicate that education is an important leisure value for both males and females; however, this difference is not statistically significant, $t = -.050, p = .960$. The average score for widowed adults was 4.40 ($SD = 1.53$) whereas the average score for all other marital statuses was 4.03 ($SD = 1.27$). These scores indicate that widowed along with all other marital statuses identify recreation activities with educational values as important. This difference is not statistically significant, $t = 1.47, p = .143$. 
Regarding the competitive category of leisure values, which was made up of seven questions, the average score for males was 12.82 (SD = 3.26). The average score for females was 13.52 (SD = 2.91). These scores show that while males value competitive leisure more than females, both genders reported feeling neutral/indifferent toward competition as a reason to value leisure. This difference was not statistically significant, \( t = -1.20, p = .229 \). The average score for widowed older adults was 13.57 (SD = 2.88), indicating competition to be more of a neutral/indifferent value of leisure. All others scored 12.98 (SD = 3.18), and while this score also represents a neutral/indifferent value, it does show that non-widowed older adults value competition slightly more than widowed elders. This test was not statistically significant, \( t = 1.11, p = .269 \).

Concerning the social category of leisure values, there were seven questions, and the average score for males was 10.02 (SD = 2.95). The average score for females was 8.83 (SD = 1.61). These scores signify that females find social leisure to be of greater importance than males. This difference was statistically significant, \( t = 2.38, p = .021 \). The average score for widowed older adults was 8.98 (SD = 2.04), indicating that most widowed elders find importance in social leisure. The average score for all others was 9.47 (SD = 2.34). These findings suggest that social leisure is of more importance to widowed older adults than it is to all other marital statuses. This difference was not statistically significant, \( t = -1.25, p = .213 \).

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to identify the leisure values of older adults who reside in a senior living environment. Specifically, marital status and gender were analyzed. Although older adults may be sharing leisure services due to the nature of their residential living environment, it is important to understand what drives them to participate deeper than their mere interest in the type of activity offering.

This discussion focuses on each area value category that was examined and synthesis the findings with recommendations and implications.

**Competitive Values**

Findings in this study suggest that males place higher importance on competition when participating in leisure activities than do females. The literature reports that women participate in leisure activities because they enjoy it and not because they want to prove that they are able to (Counihan, 2008). In this current study, women reported being more indifferent/neutral regarding competition in leisure activities, which supports previous research stating that women participate in leisure more for enjoyment, rather than for competition.
with others. This study further indicates that older adults of all marital statuses view competition as neutral/indifferent in terms of a leisure value. There was no statistical significance in this result.

Educational Values
Older men and women of all marital statuses identified education as an important leisure value; there were no statistically significant differences between these groups in any of the findings. While these findings resulted in minimal variation between males and females, previous research indicated that females are likely to place a higher value on educational leisure than males (Sperazza, 2010).

Physiological Values
Leisure values relating to health, exercise, and relaxation were important to both older adult men and women. There was no statistical significance in the difference. Wang et al. (2011) suggested that changes in marital status for older adults can promote higher values placed on health and exercise. However, this study found that older adults of all marital statuses placed high importance on physiological leisure values. The difference was not statistically significant.

Social Values
Existing literature poses contradicting results regarding social values placed on men, with some research reporting that older adult men value leisure to increase time with their families (Steinkamp & Kelly, 1985), and some research stated that men prefer spending their leisure time independently and away from others (Moore et al., 2012). Results indicated that older adult women place higher importance on social leisure values than do men, thus supporting literature on this value.

Another element to social leisure values is thought to be reflective of one’s marital status. The level of importance for an older adult can depend on social supports that may or may not already be in place. Older adults who have been single for some time may prefer to stay more independent and participate in leisure of choice; newly single older adults (i.e., recently widowed) and married older adults may participate in leisure activities to increase socialization and to spend more time with family (Pinquart & Schindler, 2009; Wang et al., 2011; Yeh & Sing, 2004). The results in this study were not statistically significant. However, similar to some of the literature, this study found that widowed older adults place a higher value on social leisure than all other marital statuses.
Relaxation Values

Findings in this study express that while both older men and women reported more neutral/indifferent values of relaxation, women reported slightly more importance than men. These findings were statistically significant. While literature does not delineate information regarding older women’s leisure values of relaxation, studies did note that men often value independent and passive leisure activities (McKenna et al., 2007).

The literature also suggests that marital status can have an impact on relaxation leisure values. Shiovitz-Ezra and Leitsch (2010) state that some married older adults may value spending time away from spouses and family and being alone if their marriage is strained. However, Wang et al. (2011) explained that newly singled or widowed older adults value leisure more to meet new people and increase socialization. Results indicated that widowed and all other older adults scored similarly as neutral/indifferent when asked about relaxation leisure values, with no statistical significance in the scores. This could imply that marital status has little impact on relaxation leisure values in older adults.

Aesthetic Values

The results of this study support the hypothesis that older men and women, as well as all levels of marital status, value leisure for overall health, well-being, and for the sake of pleasure. Further support surrounding the hypothesis that older women place a higher value on social leisure than older men was present. In addition, older adults with varying marital statuses all ranked this value category as being important. Individuals who were widowed rated aesthetic values higher than all other marital statuses and this difference was statistically significant. The literature on aesthetic leisure values is sparse. Further research in this category of leisure would be beneficial as the number of older adults residing in senior living facilities continues to increase. Our study found that older men and women scored closely in ranking aesthetic leisure values as being important. There was no statistical significance in the difference. These results appear to be a true representation of how boomer and seniors view leisure activities for relaxation, play, and continued growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

When developing leisure programs for older adults residing in senior living facilities, it is important to consider two elements: (1) the age breakdown of residents (i.e., boomers vs. seniors), and (2) the understanding of their leisure values in relation to age breakdown. While some of the leisure value results did not show statistical significance, it is evident that the number of
older adults in senior living facilities will continue to grow as life expectancy increases. Adults, whether boomers or seniors by age, face successful aging with many of the same experiences. In addition, senior living facilities need to understand how variables such as marital status and gender can result in changes among leisure values with their residents. Based on the results of this study, providers should consider the following:

Recognize the Importance of Social Interactions

Older adult women and widowed elders are more likely to value leisure for social reasons. In this study, the social value category includes the desire to be with family. This could be done by inviting family members to events or providing a balance of programs during the week and weekend to accommodate the different schedules of older adults and their families.

Given the trend of spousal loss in later life, recreation planners should bear in mind the special needs of those who are recently widowed, making sure that they do not fall through the cracks as they navigate through this significant transition and assume a vastly different role in life. A support group for the recently widowed, with a dual emphasis on social interaction and events, would perhaps be helpful in this regard.

Continued Engagement with the Nature and Surrounding Environment

Valuing the nature and pleasure for its own sake in recreational pursuits, rather than for the purpose of competition, is equally appreciated by older men and women, and, most notably, by those who are widowed. Leisure activities should include outings to places such as museums, theatrical performances, restaurants, and other local/regional destinations and attractions. If transportation is a problem, bringing the elements of nature or a guest speaker with video or hands-on artifacts could recreate a room in a facility and still provide the participant with an aesthetic experience.

Opportunities for Lifelong Education

Given the importance of educational leisure values and the high level of education attained by the participants, providing ongoing educational opportunities for elders is critical. While education can take many forms, recreation planners should consider partnering with institutions of higher education. Studies on multigenerational learning between college students and older adults are becoming more commonplace (Dauenhauer, Steitz, Aponte, & Fromm Faria, 2010; Krout et al., 2010). Planners should also consider tapping into the expertise of their own elders, many of whom have knowledge they would be willing to share with others.
Recreation and Leisure to Improve Health and Well-Being

Actively moving our bodies and engaging our brains is necessary at all ages of life. In this study, both genders and all marital statuses valued the physiological benefits of recreation equally, underscoring the fact that physical activities should be a major component of the recreational program. However, given that the health and mobility of older adults range across the spectrum, programing should reflect and respond to the varying needs and abilities of the population. Some program ideas to consider are adaptations of yoga and bowling done sitting instead of standing, using technology (e.g., Nintendo Wii Sports or Dance Revolution), and combining social interaction groups with stimulation through book clubs, Sudoku, or word puzzles.

LIMITATIONS

This study has notable limitations. Due to the sampling methodology and a 26% response rate, these results cannot be generalized to similar residential communities. As a cross-sectional design, this study only focused on the leisure values of married and single older adults as their current marital status exists. In other words, this study was unable to examine how a current married older adult values leisure later when he or she is widowed, and if this affects men and women differently or the same. Because participants were selected through convenience sampling, there was an uneven representation of married, single, divorced, and widowed older adults as well as males and females. A random sampling method could have prevented some issues with the representation of this sample. Mailing surveys to all residents and asking them to complete them on their own may have provided elders who were unable to meet during designated times to be able to participate in taking the surveys. However, it is important to consider that cognitive and physical challenges may also have prevented some residents from participating in this study. Furthermore, a lack of racial/ethnic diversity within this senior living environment. Many residents are single/widowed, Caucasian females. Therefore, it is unlikely that the results of this study can be applied to other senior living environments with more ethnic and racial diversity.

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REFERENCES


