

Leisure and Career Development of College Students:  
Preliminary Findings of a Longitudinal Study

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationships between leisure and career maturity of college students. Data were collected from orientation classes ( $N = 239$ ) in the College of Arts and Sciences at a midwestern state university. Results indicated that students who perceive themselves as effective, competent and in control of their leisure have a clearer and more consistent picture of their occupational goals, interests and talents. Second, students who are more committed to leisure have better attitudes toward exploring the world of work and have enhanced ability to make career decisions.

## Leisure and Career Development of College Students:

### Preliminary Findings of a Longitudinal Study

Leisure <sup>fosters</sup> ~~is important to~~ development because it <sup>offers</sup> ~~serves as~~ a means to achievement ~~of~~ long-term individual and societal goals (Glancy, Willits, & Farrell, 1986; Roberts & Sutton-Smith, 1962; Sherif & Sherif, 1965). <sup>Leisure activities</sup> ~~It provides~~ important situations and <sup>activities</sup> ~~milieus~~ for social development and enables participants to acquire useful skills, <sup>construct from an</sup> ~~facilitate~~ identity, achievement, and to <sup>formulate</sup> ~~obtain valuable information about~~ future aspirations (Glancy et al., 1986; Munson & Widmer, 1995; Shaw, Kleiber, & Caldwell, 1993).

Leisure is <sup>an especially</sup> ~~salient~~ <sup>role during</sup> ~~in~~ adolescent development because it <sup>gives teenagers</sup> ~~provides~~ the freedom to explore, test and receive feedback on <sup>possible selves</sup> ~~personal identities~~ and <sup>career directions</sup> ~~role learning~~ (Haworth & Smith, 1976; Kleiber & Kelly, 1980; Munson, 1993). The skill and challenge associated with certain forms of leisure <sup>help</sup> ~~seem~~ to develop the competence needed <sup>to move</sup> ~~for passage~~ from ~~childhood and~~ adolescent play experiences to adult work roles (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Kleiber, Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1986). For example, leisure activities <sup>do not</sup> ~~are considered~~ <sup>provide</sup> valuable exploratory experiences that enable persons to investigate occupationally-related activities (McDaniels, 1984; Super, 1957, 1984). Longitudinal career development research by Hong, Milgram & Whiston (1993) demonstrated significant relationships between adolescent leisure activities and adult occupational choices and work accomplishments.

The relationship between leisure and the process and outcomes of career development is <sup>an important</sup> ~~a significant~~ yet relatively unexplored <sup>topic</sup> ~~area~~ in both leisure and career

development research. Super (1957) postulated that the opportunity to reality test occupational identifications through role playing and participation in leisure activities *provided meaningful opportunities for* represented a ~~salient aspect~~ <sup>in</sup> of the synthesizing process of vocational development. If participation in leisure helps to broaden a person's perspective by exploring new experiences, acquiring skills (e.g., decision making), and developing and strengthening attitudes (Glancy, et al., Holland & Andre, 1987), then it may have a significant impact on the career development of college students.

~~As part of a longitudinal investigation on the association between leisure and the career development of undergraduate college students,~~ <sup>OT</sup> ~~the purpose of this study was to~~ examine the relationship between leisure and career maturity. [The latter is an important aspect and indicator of career development and is defined as "readiness to cope with vocational development tasks" (Savickas, 1984, p. 222). These developmental tasks involve societal expectations characteristic of each stage of an individual's vocational or work life. For example, the tasks of adolescence are to explore, specify and implement a career choice (Super, 1963). Therefore, based on previous literature that suggests there is a connection between the experience of leisure and career development, we expected to find significant relationships between the following leisure measures: leisure efficacy, time spent in leisure activities, and leisure salience (participation and commitment), and career maturity measures: career exploratory behaviors, vocational identity, career exploratory attitudes and career decision making.



## Method

### Participants

The participants consisted of 239 freshmen students enrolled in a midwestern state university. One hundred and forty-three female and 96 male students, with an average age of 18.3 years (range = 16-31) were recruited from the orientation classes in the College of Arts and Sciences, in the fall semester, 1995. The ethnic breakdown of the participants included: 84.1% white, 10.9% African American, .8% Hispanic, .4% Asian, .4% Native American, .4% Pacific Islander, and 2.5% listed themselves as "other."

### Measures

Leisure Efficacy. A modified version of Gecas' (1971) Self-Efficacy Scale was used to measure leisure efficacy. Self-efficacy generally "refers to people's assessments of their effectiveness, competence, and causal agency" (Gecas, 1989, p. 292). In this case leisure efficacy measured persons' beliefs about their effectiveness, competence and causal attributions in leisure. The scale used twelve bipolar pairs of adjectives based on Osgood's semantic differential (1962, 1964). Each was set on a five-point Likert-type scale. Participants are asked to rate themselves, "as you ordinarily think of yourself," on a stimulus term (e.g., in general, in work, etc.) for each of the twelve adjective pairs. We used the stimulus term "in leisure" to assess persons' self-evaluation of themselves in leisure. The sum of the 12 adjective pairs equals one's overall self-efficacy. Factor analysis of the 12 adjective pairs yielded three self-evaluation scales: General SE, SE-Power, and SE-Worth. Item loadings on the principal factor ranged from .51 to .76.

Factor loadings for the second factor, SE-Power, ranged from .54 to .72. SE-Worth loadings ranged from .56 to .72 (Gecas, 1971).

Leisure Activities. Leisure activities in this study were defined as intrinsically motivated out-of-class activities (including informal as well as more formally organized extracurricular activities) that college students do for their own enjoyment and by their own choice, and not to fulfill class requirements or earn grades and credits (Hong, et al., 1993). In a procedure similar to that used by Munson and Widmer (1995), participants recorded hours per week spent in various categories of leisure activities by circling none, less than 5, 5 to 10 and more than 10. The leisure activity categories developed by Ellis and Rademacher (1987), included expressive activities (sports and games, arts and hobbies, and listening to music), relaxed activities (socializing, reading, and watching television), and learning activities (thinking and contemplating).

Leisure Salience. Two leisure scales, leisure participation and leisure commitment, were used to measure the importance of leisure in participants' lives. They are subscales of The Salience Inventory (SI) (Super & Nevill, 1986) which measures the relative importance of five primary life roles: student, worker, citizen, homemaker, and leisurite. Leisure activities in The Salience Inventory are defined as "taking part in sports; watching television; pursuing hobbies; going to movies, theater, or concerts; reading; relaxing or loafing; being with your family and friends."

The SI measures the importance of each of the roles on three dimensions: Participation, Commitment, and Values Expectations. The participation scale is the

behavioral dimension and assesses "what you do or have done recently" in each of the five roles. The commitment scale measures the degree of affect or commitment an individual has toward the roles. It asks "how do you feel about" the five roles. The third dimension, values expectations, also affective in nature (and not used in this study), assesses "which values you seek" in each of the five life roles. The range of scores for the leisure participation and leisure commitment scales are 10-40. Internal consistency for samples of high school, college, and adults were .80 for all three. Additionally, the SI has been judged to have appropriate content, construct and concurrent validity (Nevill & Super, 1986).

Career Exploratory Behavior. Sixteen items from the Career Exploration Survey (CES) (Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983) were used to assess career exploratory behavior. The instrument has 62 items which measure 16 dimensions of career exploration. The items cluster into three groups. The first group has seven scales which measure career search behaviors including environmental exploration and self-exploration. Three scales comprise the second group which are concerned with reactions to exploration (e.g., exploration stress and satisfaction with information). The third group of six scales deals with beliefs about future exploration such as certainty of exploration outcomes. Dimensionality, reliability and validity were established in four studies comprising 680 observations across 601 persons. Coefficient alphas for the exploratory process scales ranged from .74 to .88 yielding acceptable internal consistency. Construct validity was established by using a behavioral validation approach measuring

known exploration behavior changes over time for two groups of persons (Freedman, Stumpf, & Platten, 1980; Freedman, Stumpf, Weitz, & Platten, 1981).

The 16 items of the survey used to measure career exploratory behavior asked participants to "indicate how much you have behaved in the following ways over the last 3-4 months with respect to your career" on a five-point Likert scale (little, somewhat, a moderate amount, a substantial amount, and a great deal). Examples of items included: "Systematically searched for an outlet for my abilities," "Experimented with different career activities," and "Sought opportunities to demonstrate skills."

Vocational Identity. The VI, a subscale of a larger instrument, My Vocational Situation (MVS) (Holland, Daiger, & Power, 1980), was used to measure the extent to which participants possessed "a clear and stable picture of one's goals, interests, personality, and talents" (Holland, Daiger & Power, 1980, p. 1). The VI includes 18 items in true-false format such as "I need reassurance that I have made the right choice of an occupation," "I don't know what my major strengths and weaknesses are," and "I need to find out what kind of career I should follow." A total score for the VI is obtained by summing the total number of responses marked false. The greater the number of false responses, the higher the vocational identity, or the clearer the individual is on his/her occupational goals. Internal consistency was reported as .86 for high school students, .88 for college students and .89 for adult workers (Holland, Gottfredson, & Power, 1980). Construct validity by the same authors indicated that high scorers tend to be rated as organized, confident and competent to deal with life

situations. Other researchers found the VI correlated well with vocational development, career maturity and ego identity achievement (Healy & Mourtou, 1985; Graef, Wells, Hyland, & Muchinsky, 1985; Savickas, 1985).

Career Exploration Attitudes and Career Decision Making. Two sections from the Career Development Inventory (CDI) (Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan & Myers, 1981) were used to measure career exploration attitudes and career decision making. Career exploration is a 20-item scale and asks individuals to rate the use of various sources of career information and their usefulness. It measures one's inclination to use exploration opportunities and resources. Low scores suggest that individuals are not concerned about using good sources of occupational information.

The decision making scale includes 20 brief sketches of persons making career decisions and asks the student to select which alternative they believe is best. The scale score indicates knowledge of decision-making skills and applications. Low scores suggest that persons do not know how to make effective choices and are not ready to use occupational information acquired in their career planning. High scores suggest that with adequate occupational information and skills in decision making, persons are ready to make tentative career choices. Internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha for the exploration and decision-making scales were .80 and .62 respectively. Construct validity for the whole instrument was demonstrated by the factor structure of the measure and by expected year, sex and major field differences (Thompson & Lindeman, 1984).



### Procedures

Questionnaires were administered by freshman orientation instructors in the College of Arts and Sciences. Participants were informed that the study examined the relationship between the activities of college students and their career development. They also were informed that the results of the study would be available to those who requested it, that participation was voluntary, and that there would be no penalty for not participating. Those who agreed to participate were asked to read and sign a human subjects consent form that had been approved by the university. The battery of instruments took approximately 30-40 minutes to complete.

### Results

Data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially. Means, standard deviations and zero order correlations are presented in Table 1. To more closely examine the relationships between the two sets of four leisure and career variables, canonical correlations were calculated. These values, along with the standardized canonical weights, are presented in Table 2.

Two significant canons emerged ( $p < .01$ ). The magnitudes of the  $R_c$  values indicated that the first pair of canonical variates were moderately correlated ( $R_c = .37$ ); the second set of variates also were correlated ( $R_c = .26$ ). Inspection of the magnitude of the standardized weights indicated that the first canonical factor was best represented by leisure efficacy in the leisure space and vocational identity in the career space. Therefore, high leisure efficacy is associated with high vocational identity scores. The

weights that best represent the second variate space are commitment to leisure and career exploration attitudes and career decision making.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between leisure and career maturity of college students. Results from the two sets of significant canonical correlations support the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between leisure and career maturity. First, college students who score high on leisure efficacy also score high on vocational identity. In other words, those who see themselves as effective, competent and in control of their leisure, have a clearer and more consistent picture of their occupational goals, interests, personality and talents. Second, college students for whom leisure is important, as evidenced by their commitment to leisure, have more developed career choice skills. They tend to have better attitudes toward exploring the world of work and have enhanced ability to make career decisions. However, this also suggests that these students are not using career process skills (i.e., not applying them to world of work behaviors such as exploring occupations and making career choices). Thus, well-rounded "leisurite" college students appear well-prepared to make career choices by having good career process skills, but are reluctant to act out those behaviors.

The period between 15 and 25 is one of exploration, a time for seeking information about occupations, selecting career alternatives, deciding on a particular occupation, and starting to work (Sharf, 1992, Super 1957). The later years of this stage, particularly years 18-22, and sometimes referred to as "youth" (Kleiber & Kelly, 1980),

are recognized as the transition years from childhood to adulthood. Self-definition continues to be a major issue during this period and includes a great deal of experimentation with lifestyles and vocational directions (Kleiber & Kelly, 1980). College students in this study (a majority of whom were entering this period called youth) who perceived themselves as competent in their leisure activities also demonstrated a more clearly defined vocational identity. This was a salient finding because it was not the amount of time, nor the importance (participation and commitment) assigned to leisure that was significant, but the perceived competence associated with those activities. Implications for this finding suggest that if leisure is to make a significant contribution to career development or in this case, career maturity of college students, it is not enough for counselors or student personnel workers to simply help students fill "free time" with activities. The challenge is to help them find meaningful, or "transitional" activities (Kleiber, et al., 1986) in which to develop effectiveness, competence and control.

On the other hand, college students who are highly committed to leisure and who demonstrate good career process skills (i.e., positive exploratory attitudes and decision making), but who also remain uncommitted to an occupational choice may be using leisure counterproductively or as a means of delaying the process of growing up. In situations like this, Kleiber and Kelly (1980) indicated "the experience of leisure as freedom from constraint and a desire for immediate pleasurable experience may have a countersocializing effect in delaying entry into the work force and traditional life systems"

(p. 112). These students may need to balance leisure and other life career roles in order to be able to develop and function more effectively during their college experience and beyond.

Additional research needs to be conducted on the relationship between leisure and career development. In general, longitudinal research is needed on college students to determine the long-term outcomes of leisure participation on educational achievement, adult success, happiness, and occupational mastery and adaptation. More specifically, and as a spin-off of this study, two possible avenues should be considered. First, research should examine the career outcomes (listed above) of those who perceive themselves as efficacious in leisure pursuits and who concurrently demonstrate high levels of career maturity, versus those who do not. Second, those committed to leisure and who exhibit good career process skills, yet who delay making career choices, should be studied to determine if they become as achieved, successful and happy as individuals who identify with an occupational choice earlier.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations for Leisure and Career Variables

Variables	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	LE	LA	PL	CL	CB	VI	CA	CD
Leisure Efficacy	47.2	6.2	-							
Leisure Activities	27.1	4.1	.13*	-						
Participation in Leis	28.0	6.3	.22**	.10	-					
Commit to Leisure	30.9	6.9	.23**	.09	.72**	-				
Career Behavior	40.7	11.9	.21**	.15*	.07	.06	-			
Vocational Identity	10.7	4.8	.36**	.05	.01	-.00	.16	-		
Career Attitudes	49.3	8.1	.11	.03	.17	.15*	.28**	.05	-	
Career Decisions	11.5	3.2	.06	-.01	.11	.16	-.01	.05	-.07	-

\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .01$



Table 2

Standardized Canonical Weights and Canonical Correlations for Leisure and Career Variables

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Standardized Weights</u>	
	<u>Variate 1</u>	<u>Variate 2</u>
<u>Leisure</u>		
Leisure Efficacy	0.9603	-0.0673
Leisure Activities	0.2803	-0.2799
Participation in Leisure	-0.2384	0.3015
Commitment to Leisure	-0.0376	0.7308
<u>Career</u>		
Career Exploration	0.4226	-0.0746
Vocational Identity	0.8449	0.0695
Career Exploration	-0.0780	0.7243
Career Decision Making	-0.1524	0.7523
<u>Canonical Correlation Results</u>		
<i>R<sub>c</sub></i>	.37	.26
Alpha level	.01	.01