

Relationship Between Self-esteem and Leisure Boredom Among College Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between self-esteem and leisure boredom among university students. Students ($N = 405$) at a large Midwestern university were recruited as the study sample. Participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) and the Leisure Boredom Scale (LBS). Study findings revealed that leisure boredom was negatively associated with self-esteem. Therefore, university administrators, educators, and campus recreation professionals should continue to provide positive leisure and recreation programs for college students on campus.

Key Words: Self-esteem, leisure boredom

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Introduction

Fostering self-esteem in participants is a common and important goal in recreation and other human and health services. Self-esteem refers to the regard that an individual holds toward oneself, that is, a person's overall judgment of self (Thomson & Rudolph, 1995). A high level of academic achievement was found to be an indicator of self-esteem among college students (El-Anzi, 2005; Hoge, Smith, & Hanson, 1990). In addition, McNeal (1995) reported that high school students who participated in any type of extracurricular activity tended to report higher self-esteem than those who did not participate in extracurricular activities.

Meanwhile, boredom is "a state of relatively low arousal and dissatisfaction, which is attributed to an inadequately stimulating situation" (Fiske & Maddi, 1961, p.243). Although boredom within the school system has been widely studied (Fiske & Maddi), little attention has been given to the issue of leisure boredom and its relationship with self-esteem. Among young people, leisure activities are particularly important because they provide opportunities to explore their autonomy and form identities, and to provide opportunities to socialize (Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991). However, the lack of a broad leisure repertoire or a perceived boredom during one's leisure time may lead to both behavioral and psychological problems (Iso-Ahola & Crowley). The notion of leisure boredom is a common phenomenon among young people (Caldwell, Darling, Payne, & Dowdy, 1999). Studies reveal that rather than achieving optimal leisure experiences, a significant proportion of adolescents and youth experience leisure time as unsatisfying mainly due to boredom (Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990).

Understanding the relationship between leisure boredom and self-esteem can be relevant to leisure and recreation practitioners who work with young adults. Those working with participants with low self-esteem, especially as

it relates to leisure boredom, can gain insight on how such influences can impact one's self-esteem and psychological well-being. Similarly, administrators, recreation faculty, and campus recreation personnel on campus can gain insight for planning and implementing leisure and recreation programs for university students.

Literature Review

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is defined as a global evaluation made about one's personality, and is derived from subjective evaluations people make about their behavioral traits (Pullen, 1994). Self-esteem is also regarded as the extent to which one's self-evaluations are favorable or unfavorable (Baron, 1998). Rosenberg (1979) stated that self-esteem is one dimension of a person's self-concept and a person's overall thoughts and feelings about his or herself as an object. Self-esteem is also an important index of mental health and well-being (Banas, & Gibb, 2007; Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2001). High self-esteem implies one has a positive sense of self-respect and self-worth, whereas low self-esteem indicates self-rejection, self-dissatisfaction, and self-contempt (Rosenberg, 1965) and is related to aggression, antisocial behavior, and delinquency (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005). In addition, Saracoglu, Minden, and Wilchesku (1989) reported that high academic achievement is associated with high self-esteem and high self-efficacy among university students while low academic achievement is associated with poor self-esteem and low self-efficacy.

Self-esteem is influenced by and influences one's relationships with others. Studies have found that self-esteem is enhanced by having or the perception of having the approval of others, especially of peers and parents. More specifically, Steinberg (1999) found that sound peer relationship, especially the approval of peers, was the most important contributor to

young people's self-esteem. Others have found that family satisfaction which includes parents' support and healthy relationships with other siblings was significantly associated with high self-esteem among young adults (Buri, 1987; Cashwell, 1995). Self-esteem is also associated with several demographic variables including gender (Gentile, Grabe, Dolan-Pascoe, Twenge, Wells, & Maitino, 2009; Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Bussell, 1999; Steinberg, 1999), academic achievement (Luster & McAdoo, 1995; Robinson, 1995, Wiggins, Schatz, & West, 1994), age (Twenge & Campbell, 2001), and racial status (Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007; Porter & Washington, 1993).

As discussed above, many psychosocial and demographic variables have been reported to have relationships with self-esteem. However, little attention has been paid to leisure-related variables, including leisure boredom.

Leisure Boredom

Boredom is the result of having nothing to do that one likes rather than nothing to do per se (Shuta, 1993). That is, it is a state of low arousal and dissatisfaction (Fiske & Maddi, 1961) due to the lack of external stimulation and the prolonged exposure to the monotonous stimulation (O'Hanlon, 1981). Leisure boredom is a negative mood or state of mind that reflects a mismatch between optimal experiences and the experiences that are perceived to be available to the individual (Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990). Csikszentmihalyi (1975) stated that leisure boredom results if leisure skills are greater than the challenge of leisure opportunities.

Hickerson & Beggs (2007) found that boredom has numerous negative physical and psychological consequences among young people. For example, boredom has been associated with poor performance in work place (Game, 2007). Boredom has also been connected with a host of abusive behaviors such as drug use (Wegner, Flisher, Muller, & Lombard, 2006), eating disorders (Sommers, & Vodanovich, 2000), drunk driving (Dahlen, Martin, Ragan, & Kuhlman,

2004), and pathological gambling (Blaszczynski, & Nower, 2002). Within settings of higher education, boredom has been associated with diminished academic achievement (Fogelman, 1976; Maroldo, 1986) and school dissatisfaction (Gjesne, 1977). Moreover, boredom is one of the most frequently identified reasons for students leaving school either temporarily or permanently (Farmer & Sunberg, 1986; Larson & Richards, 1991).

While studies examining the relationship between self-esteem and leisure boredom are not found, studies about the relationship between self-esteem and leisure participation do exist. For example, McNeal (1995) found that high school students who participated in any type of extracurricular activity tended to have higher self-esteem than those who did not. Such students also showed higher academic performance in school, reduced likelihood of dropping out, and lower rates of delinquency and drug use than their counterparts.

No established theories exist regarding the relationship between self-esteem and leisure boredom. While there can be many internal and external motivations for leisure, Iso-Ahola's (1989) theory of leisure motivation addresses the notion of negative motivation for leisure, which may support the relationship between the two variables. According to this theory, it can be assumed that people may wish to engage in leisure activities to escape from their interpersonal problems (e.g., poor social skills, peer rejection) and/or personal problems (e.g., leisure boredom, low self-esteem). At the same time, they may wish to obtain some personal and/or interpersonal rewards by engaging in or seeking leisure activities. Put differently, people who seek to actively engage in leisure activities may have more rewarding experiences such as increased popularity among peers (e.g., interpersonal reward) and increased social and/or leisure skills (e.g., intrapersonal reward). Those rewarding experiences are likely to lead to increased self-esteem.

Purpose of the Study

Self-esteem has been an important construct in human and health services areas including leisure and recreation. However, few studies have examined the nature of self-esteem and its relationship with leisure boredom, which is an important leisure variable, among young adults. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine perceived leisure boredom among university students and its relationship with self-esteem.

Methodology

Sample

The sample consisted of 405 university students at a large Midwestern university. The study was conducted during a summer session. Thus, the study was delimited to students who enrolled in the summer session. Since there were few low division introductory level courses available during the summer session, only a limited number of the first and second year students were recruited for the study.

Instrument

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was utilized to measure self-esteem of the participants. While designed as a Guttman scale, the RSE is now commonly scored as a Likert scale. The 10 items are answered on a four point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. While the scale was originally designed to measure the self-esteem of high school students, it has since been used with a number of other groups including adults in a variety of occupations. One of the scale's greatest strengths is the volume of investigations that have been conducted with a wide range of groups over the years. The scale generally has high reliability: test-retest correlations are typically in the range of 0.82 to 0.88, and Cronbach's alpha for various samples are in the

range of 0.77 to 0.88.

The concurrent, predictive, and construct validity of the RSE have also been demonstrated. For instance, the RSE correlates significantly with other self-esteem measures such as the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978). Also, the RSE correlates in predicted directions with measures of depression, anxiety, and peer-group reputation (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978). Some examples of the items are "I take a positive attitude toward myself," "I wish I could have more respect for myself," and "I certainly feel useless at times."

The Leisure Boredom Scale (LBS) (Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990) was used to examine leisure boredom of the participants. LBS is a 16-item scale designed to measure respondents' subjective perceptions of leisure. The LBS is scored on a 1-5 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with higher numbers indicating higher leisure boredom. Scores are summed to obtain a total score between 16 (minimum) and 80 (maximum). Examples of the items are "leisure time is boring," "I waste too much of my leisure time sleeping," and "For me, leisure time just drags on and on." Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1990) used the LBS to investigate leisure boredom among college students in three studies. They reported acceptable levels of Chronbach's alpha coefficients of the LBS ($\alpha = 0.85, 0.88, 0.86$) for the three studies respectively, indicating high internal consistency.

Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1990) also determined the construct validity for the LBS. The LBS correlated in the hypothesized manner with measures of theoretically meaningful constructs such as social competence (negative), self-as-self-entertainment (negative), intrinsic leisure motivation (negative), self-esteem (negative), and leisure satisfaction (negative).

Data Collection Procedures

The researchers received human subject approval from the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at the Midwestern university.

Researchers also obtained class schedules (i.e., class list, scheduled hours, room numbers, etc.) and contact information of summer session instructors (i.e., names of instructors, email addresses, phone numbers) from the Office of the Registrar. Researchers then contacted each instructor either through the use of electronic mail or phone and asked permission to give the questionnaire to students enrolled in each class. Of 55 course instructors who were initially contacted, 20 provided permission for the researchers to conduct the study. Once permission was obtained, times were arranged to administer the survey. The researchers visited each class during the scheduled time (either at the beginning or end of the class). Potential participants were verbally given information on the nature and purpose of the study and were invited to participate. Participants were solicited to fill out the questionnaires and were assured that their answers would be anonymous. The time required for the subjects to complete the questionnaire ranged from 15 to 25 minutes. Finally, completed surveys were collected by the researchers in the classes.

Data Analysis

The statistical program SPSS was used to analyze the data. Data were first reviewed for missing data and examined for outliers. Descriptive statistics (e.g., means, percentiles, SD) were used to examine the demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, class standing, racial status) of the sample, along with the research variables (e.g., self-esteem and leisure boredom). Then, a Pearson product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between self-esteem and leisure boredom. The level of statistical significance was set at .05.

Results

Sample Characteristics

A total of 405 university students participated in the study. Regarding gender, respondents were almost evenly distributed with 53.5% ($n =$

216) being female and 46.7% being male ($n = 189$). The mean age of the respondents was 23.35 ($SD = 5.43$). Of the 405 participants, the majority (80.0%) were ages between 17 and 25, who were more likely traditional students.

The mean GPA for the respondents was 3.12 out of 4.00. Among the participants, 65.7% ($n = 266$) reported that their GPAs ranged between 3.0 and 4.0 and 33.8% ($n = 137$) were in 2.0 and 2.99 range. In terms of race, participants were predominantly Caucasian (77.8%, $n = 316$) followed by Asian and Pacific Islanders (8.9%, $n = 36$), Black (8.1%, $n = 32$), and Hispanic (1.2%, $n = 5$). Fifteen respondents did not identify their race (3.7%, $n = 15$).

Although the researchers attempted to obtain a stratified sample across the campus, most were from the School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (HPER) ($n = 148$, 36.5%) and the College of Arts and Sciences ($n = 126$, 31.1%). A possible explanation for this is that the two units offered more summer courses and the instructors may have been more willing to provide permission because of the relative similarity with recreation field.

Since the study was conducted during a summer session, there were few low division introductory level courses that were designed particularly for Freshmen ($n = 7$) and Sophomore students ($n = 45$). Thus, the majority of the participants consisted of either seniors ($n = 175$) or juniors ($n = 109$). Please refer to Table 1 for more detail.

Descriptive Statistics for Self-esteem and Leisure Boredom

Based on the descriptive statistics in Table 2, a number of observations can be made. First, the majority of respondents in this study appeared to have high levels of self-esteem. Specifically, the subjects showed a mean of 31.76 out of potential maximum score of 40 ($SD = 4.73$), indicating that they had positive perceptions about themselves. Second, respondents also reported that they did not usually feel

Table 1: Sample Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	n	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	189	46.7
Female	216	53.5
<i>Age Range (Mean = 23.35, Standard Deviation = 5.43)</i>		
17 – 20	115	28.4
21 - 25	213	52.6
26 - 30	38	9.5
31 - 35	19	4.7
36+	20	3.8
<i>GPA Range (Mean=3.12, Standard Deviation = .53)</i>		
1.30 – 1.99	2	.5
2.00 – 2.99	137	33.8
3.00 – 4.00	266	65.7
<i>Major Areas</i>		
HPER	148	36.5
Arts & Science	126	31.1
Business	55	13.6
Education	42	10.4
Fine Arts	10	2.5
Music	15	3.7
Exploratory	9	2.2
<i>Class Standing</i>		
Freshman	7	1.7
Sophomore	45	11.1
Junior	109	26.9
Senior	175	43.2
Graduate	69	17.0
<i>Racial Status</i>		
Caucasian	316	77.8
Non-Caucasian		
Black	33	8.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	36	8.9
Hispanic	5	1.2
Non-Caucasians (but not specified)	15	3.7

bored during their leisure time. The mean score of Leisure Boredom Scale (LBS) rated by the respondents was 32.80 ($SD = 8.12$) out of the potential maximum score of 80. This finding indicates that respondents were neither bored nor satisfied.

Zero-Order Correlation between Self-Esteem and Other Research Variables

Table 3 presents a zero-order correlation between self-esteem and leisure boredom. Leisure boredom showed a significant negative association with self-esteem ($r = -.37, p < .01$) indicating that respondents who experience boredom in their leisure time were more likely to have low self-esteem.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the

relationship between self-esteem and leisure boredom. This study found that this group of university students had positive self-esteem and they were, in general, not bored in their leisure time. In zero-order correlations, leisure boredom was found to be significantly and negatively associated with self-esteem.

In the present study, respondents did not perceive their leisure time as boring. According to a Weiner & Hunt (1983), university students possess stronger leisure orientation than work orientation. They further stated that university life represents an artificial environment characterized by high leisure involvement and low work involvement, and current university students value leisure more than work. While it warrants more investigation about the attitude toward leisure and work among the population, the finding in their study may confirm the result of this study. That is, the contemporary univer-

Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Self-esteem and Leisure Boredom

Variables (Range)	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Alpha	n
Self-Esteem (10 -40)	13.0	40.0	31.76	4.73	.87	405
Leisure Boredom (16-80)	16.0	62.0	32.80	8.12	.86	405

Table 3: Zero-Order Correlation between Self-Esteem and Leisure Boredom

	Self-Esteem	P
Leisure Boredom	-.37**	.000

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed).

sity students value leisure and actively get involved in leisure. Therefore, university students, in general, do not feel bored in their leisure time.

However, boredom has been reported to be significantly related to depression, anxiety, hopelessness, loneliness, hostility, alienation, and even borderline personality disorder (Banas, & Gibb, 2007; Donnellan et al, 2005). Significant negative correlations have been reported between boredom and purpose in life (Weinstein, Xie, & Cleanthous, 1995) and life satisfaction (Tiggemann, 2001; Watt & Ewing, 1996). That is, bored people are less likely to have clear purpose in their lives and less satisfied with their lives. Further, Bargdill (2000) found that feelings of emptiness were also part of boredom and the bored participants also tend to have a negative view of the future. Based on this research evidence, the experience of boredom can be more than an issue of self-esteem. It can be potential problems in other psychological domains that need future research attention.

According to Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1990), lack of leisure awareness contributes to leisure boredom. Also, lack of leisure skills and leisure resources may lead to leisure boredom. Therefore, leisure education focused on the development of these leisure-related attitudes, knowledge, and skills about a variety of activities, developing leisure repertoire, and utilizing various leisure resources may be essential component of promoting young adults' self-esteem. According to Stumbo and Peterson (2004), a cognitive understanding of leisure, a positive attitude toward leisure, leisure skills, and the ability to utilize resources are significant aspects of satisfying leisure involvement. That is, a purposeful leisure education program can play a role of promoting one's satisfying leisure life that possibly leads to one's positive self-esteem.

Passmore (2001) reported that positive leisure experiences provide opportunities which support and promote young people's mental

health such as competence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Particularly, achievement-oriented leisure and social leisure significantly influence mental health while solitary activities demonstrate a significant, but negative association with mental health. Her findings support the importance of provision of constructive leisure time activities that enhance positive peer and/or family relationships. Therefore, in order to enhance self-esteem of young adult clients, leisure and recreation practitioners should carefully design and facilitate leisure time activities that promote social interactions with their friends and family members. However, for study participants (i.e., university students), focus should be on leisure and recreation programs that promote social interaction among the participants.

Weiner and Hunt's (1983) stated that college and university counseling centers are not engaged in any formal type of leisure counseling or planning services. They further proclaimed that university counseling center need information pertaining to the role of leisure and should provide leisure counseling for their students that assist students in developing the leisure aspects of their lifestyle. The current study results may also provide educators and staff who are involved in campus recreation in higher education. In particular, campus recreation personnel need to understand the impact of campus recreation and programs on college students' psychological wellbeing including self-esteem. Educators in recreation field may collaborate with campus recreation staff and conduct more research on the relationship between leisure-related variables such as leisure participation and satisfaction and other constructs associated with psychological wellbeing of the students.

In this study, none of the demographic variables were found to be significantly associated with self-esteem. This appears contradictory to the traditional view that non-Caucasians, especially African American people, have lower self-

esteem (Bauumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000; Wegner, Flisher, Muller, & Lombard, 2006). This belief regarding racial difference may need to be re-examined with caution in future studies. One possible interpretation might be that minority students (e.g., African American students) in university settings may regard themselves as a privileged group compared to other groups of minority people who did not get the opportunity for higher education. Therefore, minority students in universities may have relatively higher self-esteem than other minority populations outside university campuses.

Some researchers argue that gender is associated with self-esteem. Specifically, some studies reported that males seem to have higher self-esteem than females (Kling, et al., 1999; Lent & Figuera-McDonough, 2002). This gender difference in self-esteem usually emerges during the period of puberty (Marcotte, Fortin, Potvin, & Papillon, 2002). Puberty may be a particularly stressful event for girls, and during this period, many girls report negative body image and other depressive symptoms that lead to low self-esteem (Marcotte, Fortin, Potvin, & Papillon, 2002).

The finding that there is no relationship between GPA scores and self-esteem is also somewhat contradictory with other previous studies. For instance, a study conducted by Michie, Glachan, & Bray (2001) revealed that college students who reported positive academic self-concept felt more confident in their own evaluation of their ability and also expressed greater self-esteem and satisfaction with college life. Therefore, relationship between these two variables needs to be further examined in future studies and some possible mediator variables that might enhance the respondents' self-esteem who reported low GPA scores need to be examined.

Some methodological issues must be considered when interpreting the results. First, the study design does not allow for discussion of

any cause-and-effect relationships. Second, the study results are limited to university students. Therefore, it is recommended that, for further research, randomized participants or more clinically-oriented participants need to be chosen. Also, for future research, other variables that related to self-esteem may be considered to be studied at the same time such as self-efficacy and self-effectiveness. Since self-esteem is related to many other constructs, including peer relationships, family satisfaction, life satisfaction, quality of life, leisure participation, and leisure satisfaction. It will be an interesting research agenda for health and human service professions including leisure and recreation field to provide valuable insights in practices.

Conclusion

This study revealed that leisure boredom was negatively associated with self-esteem. Future research should further examine the relationship between self-esteem and GPA to determine possible mediator variables that might enhance the respondents' self-esteem who reported low GPA scores. Finally, university administrators, educators, and campus recreation professionals should continue to focus on positive leisure and recreation programs for college students on campus.

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