

RETIREMENT AND FLOW:
CAN THE CASUAL LEISURE PURSUITS OF OLDER ADULTS IN RETIREMENT
CREATE THE EXPERIENCE OF FLOW?

by
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the casual leisure activities of older adults and the potential they have to create flow experiences. The research question was as individuals who may be more likely to engage in casual leisure, can older adults still achieve the state of flow and experience its associated benefits? A qualitative approach including one-on-one interviews and participant's activity journals were used. The study found that participants often choose leisure activities based on the perceived enjoyment and potential benefits; maintaining physical and mental health, altruism, or maintaining relationships with friends and family. Being purposeful in their choices and focusing their full attention on the task at hand can create flow experiences. Even if participants do not achieve flow, choosing their leisure activities for the benefits they can provide ensures that they are contributing positively to their own well-being and sometimes the larger community.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Increased leisure time is something we all seem to dream of; for most of us this dream may not become a reality until later in life. The “Golden Years” can seem ideal; do what you want, when you want, but retirement is still a major transition in life. The increased free time, compared to working years, can be challenging to deal with and the way that time is used can make the transition easier or more difficult (Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007). Maintaining a good quality of life has been shown to be beneficial for staying mentally and physically healthy as we age, and can also make the transition to retirement a more positive one (Adams, Leibbrandt, & Moon, 2011; Drentea, 2002; Heo, Lee, Pedersen, & McCormick, 2010; Nimrod, 2007). The definition of what a good quality of life is can be subjective, and mean something different for each individual; for this research a good quality of life is considered to be reached when individuals are happy and have a moderate to high level of life satisfaction. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) presents his concept of flow as an important factor to achieving and maintaining a positive quality of life. Flow is the psychological state in which people are so intensely involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Csikszentmihalyi’s research has shown that experiencing flow regularly can create better life engagement and life satisfaction, which in turn creates more positive emotions and better self-esteem (1990, 1997, 2000). While flow has most often been associated with serious leisure pursuits, Stebbins (2007) suggested that experiencing flow is not limited only to serious leisure participation, the enjoyment and immediate stress relief components of casual leisure may contribute to the experience of flow. The short lived, pleasurable experiences of casual leisure can play an important part in the well-being process by enhancing mood,

fostering a positive outlook, stimulating the senses, thus fostering resilience to stressful life circumstances (Ornstein & Sobel, 1990). While there may be ample leisure time and choices during the post-work years, declining mental and physical health can mean that older adults are no longer able to participate or interested in high skill, high challenge activities that are most often associated with serious leisure. So, as individuals who may be more likely to engage in casual leisure, can older adults still achieve the optimal state of flow to maintain a strong level of physical and mental health?

Strong Silents

Strong Silents are the generation of Americans born between 1925 and 1946. Their habits of saving and thrifty spending were shaped by the Great Depression, World War II, and the post war boom years (Jenkins, 2014). They enjoyed their working years during a time when employment was more stable than today and their willingness to conserve has made them the most affluent elderly population in U.S. history (Jenkins, 2014). Many have been able to afford a comfortable life in retirement thanks to pensions, annuities, and social security. The fixed income from previous employers, social security benefits starting at 65, and lower Medicare costs have created a confident retirement that may not be possible for upcoming generations. They have been able to afford the necessities as well as the “extras” in retirement (Timmermann, 2005). Feeling confident that they have enough money to last through their retirement years, many Strong Silent retirees have expressed joy in spending their money on themselves, kids, or grandkids, while they are here to enjoy it with them instead of saving up an inheritance to leave behind (Timmermann, 2005). Great financial security means that the Strong Silent generation has a variety of leisure opportunities available to them.

Flow

A hot, sunny day, the water is cool and calm as a canoe drifts down the river; no noise from cars, no stress from work just the peacefulness of nature and being with friends, that is my “optimal experience” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Time becomes irrelevant, I am completely immersed in my activity, I am familiar with the river so I know without thinking, when and how to paddle so I can successfully complete the trip down stream; that is how I achieve flow. The intense psychological state of flow can provide a sense of control and an escape from life’s problems, when people experience flow, nothing else seems to matter (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). When a person is able to experience flow their quality of life improves because it creates a sense of purpose, enjoyment, and a sense of control to everything we do (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Some people enjoy painting, fixing cars, crafting, or cooking; flow activities are going to vary from person to person. The requirements for achieving flow are characteristics most often associated with serious leisure; possessing skills to meet the challenge, goal-directed, rule-bound actions that provide immediate feedback as to how well one is performing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Serious leisure is often engaged in with the goal of acquiring a combination of special skills, knowledge, and experience, not just having fun. For example, a piano player is familiar with their craft and they know what notes come next and what the placement of their fingers should be, and when an error is made they can hear it. One of the more recognized conditions of flow is the balance of skill level and challenge level. When a person is utilizing a high level of skill and it is matched with a high level of challenge, or a low level of skill matched with a low level of challenge, the activity has a strong potential for creating flow.

This pattern is disrupted when looking at the daily lives and leisure activities of older adults (Heo et al., 2010). Heo, Lee, Pedersen, and McCormick (Heo, Lee, McCormick, & Pedersen, 2010; 2010) found that the balance between challenge and ability level did not play an important role in experiencing flow among the individuals, however, other factors such as a sense of control, loss of time, or intense concentration may have more influence on whether flow is achieved. Older adults have a tendency to choose less challenging, less physically demanding activities (Heo, Lee, McCormick, et al., 2010; Liechty & Genoe, 2013). Continuing to be involved in leisure activities is important and has been shown to extend the years of living independently, decrease disability, and enhance overall quality of life (Aldrich, 2004). A study that examined the everyday activities of older adults, found that older adults rated their activities as fairly easy and that they were happiest when engaging in activities with a low level of challenge (Pushkar, Arbuckle, Conway, Chaikelson, & Maag, 1997). Another study by Heo, Lee, Pedersen, and McCormick (2010) found a non-significant relationship between serious leisure and flow in older adults. Many of their participants found short-lived, pleasurable activities, or casual leisure activities, such as watching television, reading, listening to music and even housework to be relaxing and flow like.

Casual Leisure

The high investment and intense involvement of serious leisure activities are widely considered to be the most effective way of achieving flow. Notwithstanding the benefits of serious leisure, activities such as doing crossword puzzles, playing bingo, or having coffee with a friend do not require much effort, but are still enjoyable past times. Casual leisure is understood as being “immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively

short-lived pleasurable core activity, requiring little or no special training to enjoy it” (Stebbins, 1997, p. 17) In later research Stebbins (2007) further explained casual leisure as falling into eight types: play, relaxation, passive entertainment, active entertainment, sociable conversation, sensory stimulation, casual volunteering, and pleasurable aerobic activity. The Red Hat Society is a recreational group for women over 50, and its mission is to play, be silly, and build relationships with other women. Often their activities include potlucks, holding parties, scrapbooking, and other similar casual leisure activities. A survey conducted of 1,693 Red Hat Society members found, contradictory to Stebbins research, that casual leisure fostered personal rewards, and promoted strong self-identification for these women (Shen & Yarnal, 2010). As previously mentioned retirees often choose more casual leisure activities, but less challenging leisure does not necessarily mean that it is less enjoyable or less beneficial. (Heo et al., 2010; Hutchinson & Kleiber, 2005; Nimrod, 2007) If casual leisure can provide these benefits, then perhaps it is not so far-fetched to conceive that casual leisure could provide retirees with the flow experience. The sense of control, distorted sense of time, and high degree of concentration could have more influence than the level of challenge and skill for older adults achieving flow.

Study Context

Current findings show the benefits of pursuing leisure activities as we age and the mental and physical benefits of achieving flow. A number of studies examine the relationship between serious leisure and flow (e.g., Heo et al., 2010), but few look at the relationship between casual leisure and flow. For this study I want to look at the casual leisure activities of older adults at Iris Trail continuing care retirement community. Iris

Trail is a 43-acre, gated community located in the southeastern United States. The facility offers retirees an option of carriage homes or apartments, as well as 4 levels of medical care and nursing home facilities as residents' needs change. Iris Trail currently has about 160 residents, age 62 or older. The facility provides a full schedule of events and amenities, such as a pool, library, and workout rooms, to provide residents with abundant opportunities for socializing and leisure activities. Residents at Iris Trail fit the Strong Silent characteristics; most are between the ages of 69-86, are well prepared for retirement, and take the opportunity to spend money on travel, family, and other “extras.”

I was able to recruit 12 residents to interview, and through those interviews learned about their casual leisure pursuits and gained insight into their possible flow experiences. I aim to add to the present literature of casual leisure and flow, but also to add to the literature on leisure activities and aging. As the world's population is aging and Baby Boomers are beginning to retire, it benefits those who are aging, and those that are caring for the aging population to have a strong understanding of how and why leisure activities are beneficial.

Research Purpose

Findings from existing studies show the mental and physical benefits of achieving flow for people of all ages, and have also shown the benefits of continuing leisure participation in old age. Heo, Lee, McCormick, and Pedersen's (2010) study found that there was a non-significant relationship between serious leisure and flow, and that older adults often did not participate in the high skill, high challenge activities that may be required to achieve flow. Retirees often do not choose as many serious leisure experiences as they may have prior to retirement, it warrants looking at other aspects of

older adult's leisure activities to see what other factors may influence their flow experiences. There are various reasons why older adults spend more time participating in casual leisure, such as decreased mobility, lack of transportation, fixed incomes, and declining health. Based on this knowledge it may appear that older adults are doomed to live out post-retirement lives without achieving the "optimal experience" and reaping the benefits of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 3). The purpose of this study is to find out if casual leisure pursuits of older adults can contribute to achieving flow. Building on Hutchinson and Kleiber's (2005) observations that casual leisure could be meaningful because it provides benefits such as buffering stress, buffering the impact of negative events, and sustaining coping efforts, this study will look at the possible characteristics of casual leisure that may contribute to flow.

Research Questions

As people age, maintaining a strong level of physical and mental health is important to maintaining quality of life. Achieving flow experiences through leisure pursuits has been shown to be beneficial to well-being. This research will be guided by the following questions:

1. Is it possible for older adults to experience flow during via casual leisure pursuits?
2. Related, do participants' casual leisure pursuits facilitate a sense of control, a distorted sense of time, or a high degree of concentration?
3. Finally, if casual leisure does not contribute to the achievement of flow, does it still contribute positive to participants' perceived quality of life?

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Leisure has received a great deal of attention in the literature on aging because it is widely regarded as an important part of successful aging. It provides physical benefits, helps maintain emotional and social wellbeing, and has also been touted for helping to relieve stress (Aquino & Russell, 1996; Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996; Hogan, 2005; Lim, 2004). Staying active as we age can be extremely beneficial but also harder to do; for older adults, relaxation and passive leisure take up a large portion of their time and that amount of time increases with age (Gauthier & Smeeding, 2003; Sellar & Boshoff, 2006). In fact, one reason why older adults may benefit from casual leisure more than younger generations could be that casual leisure is such a large part of older adults' daily lives. While there is more time for leisure during retirement, the limitations on the type of leisure activities for older adults may be beneficial in achieving flow as well, by forcing them to focus on the depth of activities instead of the breadth (Kleiber, McGuire, Aybar-Damali, & Norman 2008). This idea may also explain why the high skill, high challenge balance often associated with achieving flow does not seem to be true when looking at flow in older adults (Heo, Lee, McCormick, et al., 2010). Heo, Lee, Pederson, and McCormick's (2010) study on flow in the daily lives of older adults showed that flow was often achieved through activities like house work, listening to music, reading, or watching TV. To understand the relationship between older adults' casual leisure activities and their flow experiences this chapter will review some of the scholarship on those topics.

Strong Silents

Born during the depression and raised during World War II, the “strong silent” generation earned its nickname by being cautious, indifferent, and having a relative lack of adventure and imagination (Pennington-Gray & Lane, 2002). Despite their unflattering moniker, the Silents’ cautious nature and commitment to hard work have enabled them to become the most affluent population of older adults in U.S. history (Jenkins, 2014). Strong Silents tend to give freely to charity, enjoy traveling, and have a compassionate social conscience (Pennington-Gray & Lane, 2002). Some of these characteristics may play a part in not only the leisure choices of the older adults in this study, but also how they experience leisure. Improvements in health care, changes to social security, less physically demanding jobs, and a decline in employer pensions mean that younger generations, like the baby boomers, are staying in the work force longer (Johnson, Butrica, & Mommaerts, 2010). For this study, I will be working with Strong Silents so the findings may not be transferrable to other generations of retirees. Not only do generational differences affect leisure choices but the event of retirement itself can change leisure patterns (Drentea, 2002).

Retirement and Leisure

Retirement is a major life event and the transition from working life can be rocky (Heo et al., 2010; Macquarie & Krahe, 2011; Nimrod, 2007). The significant amount of free time can be a challenge and the way that the increase in free time is handled can make or break the adjustment to retirement.

According to Macquarie and Krah (2011):

Leisure has been recognized as a "shock absorber" for changes that occur over the normal life-course. For retirees, it has been identified as an important means of maintaining mental and physical health as well as contributing significantly toward well-being and life satisfaction. Satisfaction with leisure is also important for retirees as positive correlations have been identified between leisure satisfaction and life satisfaction, and retirement satisfaction. Undoubtedly, leisure affects the retirement experience. (p. 109)

It is estimated by 2050 that 22% of the world population will be 60 years or older (Macquarie & Krahe, 2011). It is becoming increasingly important for older individuals and those who care for them to be familiar with the best leisure practices. Many of the residents of Iris Trail have been retired for several years, but are new to the community. The change from complete independent living to becoming a member of a retirement community can be difficult, but their leisure activities can provide much-needed continuity.

Casual Leisure

Stebbins's (1982, 1992, 1997; 2008) work on serious leisure and casual leisure has gained wide acceptance in the field and has served as a useful framework for discussions about "optimally healthy or beneficial leisure" (Shen & Yarnal, 2010, p. 162). Serious leisure often times seems to be recognized as the "ideal" leisure. The characteristics of serious leisure, perseverance, career potential, significant personal effort, durable benefits, unique ethos, and strong identification are perceived to lead to deep, fulfilling leisure experiences (Stebbins, 2008). Serious leisure has been shown to

contribute to the subjective well-being of older adults, life satisfaction, physical health, and mental health (Heo et al., 2010; Heo, Stebbins, Kim, & Lee, 2013) Though seemingly less ideal, casual leisure came about as a tool for better understanding serious leisure (Stebbins, 2008). Casual or non-serious leisure is defined as more superficial, pleasurable activities that do not require much skill but are useful in achieving immediate, short lived rewards. Stebbins (2007) himself acknowledged that casual leisure is understudied and often portrayed as inferior to serious leisure because of its perceived limited ability to bring the lasting benefits. I am hoping to contribute to the literature on casual leisure through this study by showing the ability of casual leisure to contribute to the flow experience, at least in older adults, may be underestimated. Current research on the psychological experience of flow, indicated it can be achieved through a variety of activities, but touts serious leisure's high skill, high challenge level because "the best moments occur when a person's body or mind are stretched to its limits in voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 3).

Some researchers have suggested that the enjoyment of casual leisure can be just as important as serious leisure, and I tend to agree. Hutchinson and Kleiber (2005) found that casual leisure's ability to buffer stress and negative events, as well as aid in coping can be valuable contributions of casual leisure activities. Getting to a mature age has its perks, but it also means you see more negative life events, friends and family pass away and illnesses and ailments become more commonplace. Small events that allow for time to rest and recharge, perhaps be without pain could seem more meaningful than they do to younger populations who still feel that they have health and time on their side. This

could be a contributing factor in the short-lived hedonistic activities of casual leisure being more beneficial to older adults than they are to younger generations.

The five main benefits of casual leisure are creativity, “edutainment”, regeneration, maintenance of interpersonal relationships, and well-being (Stebbins, 2007). While these are things that can benefit every generation, they may not be traits that every generation values to the same degree, particularly regeneration, maintenance of relationships, and well-being. Adults sixty-five and older tend to have established hobbies and activities they enjoy and gravitate towards leisure activities that help them maintain important relationships with friends and family (Beggs, Kleparski, Elkins, & Hurd, 2014). Improved social relationships not only provide better mental health and well-being, but also have positive ramifications for physical health; being engaged with peers and family members can be motivation to engage in more leisure activities and from more leisure comes more health benefits (Chang, Wray, & Lin, 2014). Research has shown that increased leisure activity is associated with lower risk of developing chronic diseases, greater range of motion, and better cardiovascular health (Adams et al., 2011; Ashe, Miller, Eng, & Noreau, 2009; Hogan, 2005; Lim, 2004). Older adults who engaged in activities with others reported greater social support and lower depression scores. Frequent involvement in enjoyable leisure time has been shown to lead to lower blood pressure, lower body mass index, and better perceived physical function (Pressman et al., 2009). Individual activities, also contribute to the improved well-being of older adults by restoring their social and physical resources (Pressman et al., 2009). Taking time to sit down and do some mental activities, such as reading or crosswords might allow older adults to physically recover from other activities like gardening or mall walking (Chang

et al., 2014). Being alone to listen to music or watch TV could help recuperate emotional energies that may have been spent attending to a stressful situation earlier in the day (Chang et al., 2014). Individual activities can act as “breathers” a chance to take a break from stresses creating an increase in positive emotions and reducing stress (Pressman et al., 2009).

While there is more time for leisure during retirement, limitations on the type of leisure activities older adults can participate in may force them to focus on the quality of activities instead of the quantity (Kleiber et al., 2008). Intense focus is another trait associated with achieving the state of flow so while the task itself may not be particularly challenging older adults may be putting more effort into their casual leisure activities and thus getting more out of them. The Selection, Optimization, and Compensation (SOC) model for successful aging reinforces this idea by stating that older adults, because of constraints, choose activities that are most beneficial and help them achieve their goals, rarely spending energy on “wasteful” endeavors (Freund & Baltes, 1998). The leisure activities of older adults, may often be casual, but are still goal driven and focused on achieving a person’s own optimization while engaging in these activities, once again encouraging the achievement of flow. These factors may help explain why older adults reap more benefits from casual leisure and why the high skill, high challenge balance often associated with flow falls short when indicating which activities may help older adults achieve flow. In my experience over the years at Iris trail I would say that many of the leisure activities residents engage in are casual leisure. The community events calendar always has ample leisure opportunities, the majority of which would most likely be considered casual leisure. Any given week there are coffee hours, holiday parties, Wii

game nights, shopping trips, and day trips to local attractions. Serious leisure activities seem to be more likely when residents choose activities outside of the event calendar offerings. Residents may already have an established group that shares their interests and talents, for example a quilting group that they have been a part of for years and not all members of that group live at Iris Trail or leisure activities such as woodworking that would require great skill and be better done individually.

Flow in Older Adults

Heo, Lee, Pederson, and McCormick's (2010) study of flow in the daily lives of older adults found that many of their participants achieved flow through activities like house work, listening to music, reading, or watching TV. The balance between challenge and ability level did not play an important role in experiencing flow among the individuals in their study and they concluded that perhaps other factors, such as sense of control, loss of time, or intense concentration may have had more influence on whether flow was achieved (Heo et al., 2010). The current research on flow in older adults has many common themes.

The location of leisure activities could play an important role in achieving flow. A recent study found that participants were more likely to experience flow while they were at home perhaps because a significant portion of their time is spent at home (Heo et al., 2013). Another reason for increased flow experiences at home could be the self-esteem, sense of identity, and control over the environment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Swenson, 2010). Prompting the inclusion of the question "where are you when you do this activity?" for the current study to ensure this is taken into account. The activities

performed at home and those performed out tend to be different in nature; at home activities tend to be homemaking, art/crafts, cultural, and entertainment based while away from home is more active leisure; volunteering, exercise, and shopping (Kwok & Tsang, 2012). This factor is important to keep in mind for the current study since location seems to play a role in whether older adults are choosing more active or passive leisure activities.

Social context is another recurring theme in older adult leisure and flow experiences (Hutchinson & Kleiber, 2005; Larson, Mannell, & Zuzanek, 1986; Privette, 1983). Often times individuals that still had a spouse reported doing activities together, while those who were unmarried reported spending more time with children or friends; these interactions improved well-being by creating a source of emotional security, physical assistance, and a buffer against loss (Larson et al., 1986). Hutchison and Kleiber (2005) found that when spending time with friends or family being cared for was not always the main goal, but more simply to feel a sense of companionship and belonging. Older adults who still live with a spouse reported doing the majority of their relaxing activities with their spouse (Heo, Lee, Kim, & Chun, 2012). This is important to note for the current study because many of the participants are currently married, so their casual leisure experiences may be different than those who are single. The pattern of interacting with a spouse could also be tied to location as married couples may be more likely to interact with each other at home, but interact with others when participating in activities outside of the home. The type of activities that include spousal interaction could also contribute to experiencing flow.

I hope to be able clear up some of the mystery behind older adult's flow patterns. It is already clear that they differ from younger generations, but exactly why that is has only been suggested at this point. The connection between casual leisure and flow in older adults has come up as a side note in previous studies, but not been the main focus of the research. The current study strives to understand if older adults can achieve flow through their casual leisure. I want to get a subjective view of older adults' leisure activities and flow experiences. To do this I will conduct qualitative interviews to generate a better understanding of their leisure experiences and what may help them achieve flow.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

For older adults, the benefits of achieving flow and participating in leisure are well documented (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Heo et al., 2010; Heo et al., 2010; Hutchinson & Kleiber, 2005; Nimrod, 2007). The majority of these studies have been conducted as quantitative research or mixed methods producing primarily numerical results. The quantitative data is helpful for finding relationships and trends that may be applied to larger groups, but that is not the aim of the current study. This study is to focus on the nuances of Iris Trail residents' casual leisure activities and gain insight into their possible flow experiences. The present study will take an interpretive approach to the matter, recognizing that the feelings, emotions, and physical sensations that occur during leisure are subjective experiences, as is the psychological state of flow. The experience of flow can be described generally and the components that are most often associated with achieving flow can be taught, but ultimately flow experiences are contextualized by an individual and his or her circumstance. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), "Optimal experience depends on the ability to control what happens in consciousness moment by moment, each person has to achieve it on the basis of his own individual efforts and creativity" (p. 5). Utilizing a qualitative design for this study will allow the researcher to engage in purposeful dialogue with participants about their individual leisure experiences.

Leisure activities among older adults can be limited by many factors; not only mental and physical, but also financial. The individuals I have chosen to study are a part of the most affluent generation of retirees, the Strong Silents (Pennington-Gray & Lane,

2002). Many of the Iris Trail residents spend time traveling, socializing, and actively seeking ways to make the most of their retirement years. All participants in this study live independently in their own homes and have no history of mental illness. Looking at this group will allow me to hear from older adults who have the most leisure choices available to them and be able to coherently convey their feelings and thoughts in both written journals and interviews.

Participants & Site Selection

I chose to conduct this study at Iris Trail for convenience, rapport, and the active leisure participation of residents. Iris Trail is a continuing care community that I have visited on a regular basis for the last ten years, including being a resident myself for four months while working as an intern with a local sports team in 2008. Iris Trail is a gated community with a 43-acre property located in southern United States. The community has over 160 residents that live in multi-bedroom carriage homes or apartments. The majority of residents are at least 62 years old, which is the minimum age required to move into the community. Community members pay an initial entrance fee, starting at \$139,900 and then a fixed monthly fee based on the size of the living location and the number of residents occupying it. The monthly fees allow for transition to the onsite nursing home at no additional cost if that becomes a need. The monthly fees cover utilities, taxes, all home and lawn maintenance, as well as personal services. Personal services include; one chef prepared meal per-day, all activity programs, 24-hour security and nursing care, local transportation, Wi-Fi, and weekly housekeeping.

Being able to enjoy retirement at Iris Trail is the culmination of many years of hard work. The population at Iris Trail is affluent and well educated, many residents have

at least a bachelor's degree, and the majority of participants in the research group have received a master's degree or higher. The community boasts many former military leaders, university faculty, scientists, medical professionals, and NASA employees. There is a lack of ethnic diversity at Iris Trail; residents are primarily white, non-Hispanic with very few minorities. The Iris Trail residents participating in this study are all white non-Hispanic, the convenience sampling method and the makeup of the population made it difficult to get an ethnically varied research group. The active lifestyles and resources available to this group of older adults gives them more leisure choices than other groups of similar age might have.

The main clubhouse offers several of the community's activity areas; a soda shop, computer lab, library, and pool room. It also houses the apartments, both dining facilities, assisted living, nurses' offices, and physical therapy areas. There is also a large conference room that is used for church services and special events. An on-site activities coordinator ensures a full calendar of events to participate in, such as holiday activities, day trips, birthday parties, movie nights, and hobby groups like knitting and crosswords. Two workout rooms, indoor and outdoor pools, and tennis courts allow members convenient ways to maintain their physical health.

Residents have access to two different dining areas; the Soda Shoppe or the main dining room. The Soda Shoppe is the more casual option with no dress code requirements. Food can be picked up for take-out or residents can eat from the buffet. The main dining room offers a five course meal; appetizer, soup, salad, entrée, and dessert. Full sit down dinners are served Monday through Thursday and Saturday nights with seating between 4:30pm and 6:30pm. Proper attire is required for the dining room,

no jeans, shorts, or flip flops. Sunday brunch is the most formal meal and men are asked to wear a coat. Residents can eat at either place using their monthly meal plans.

Building Rapport

I have been a visitor to this community since 2004, when my grandparents moved here. Many residents have come and gone over the years, but there is a core group that I have known from the beginning. From 2004 to 2007 my visits were infrequent due to school obligations in Tennessee and living so far away, but the summer of 2008 I lived in the community. My grandparents were gracious enough to let me stay with them during my five-month internship with a local minor league baseball team. My schedule was hectic with normal 8-5 office hours in addition to game responsibilities, but being the youngest resident by far meant I was a familiar face to almost all of the community. After college I took a job with a university in town and lived in the area for several years. I made it a point to have dinners in the main dining room at least once a week with my grandparents. Diners are seated in order of arrival in the main dining room, allowing residents to get to know more of their peers; it also allowed me to get to know many of the community members. Residents, for the most part, are highly educated former faculty, doctors, or high-ranking military members. A few still travel and conduct presentations and consultations in their respective fields across the country. It has been inspiring to hear about their lives over the years and there is no shortage of stories to be told when you sit down with them. Their interest in seeing young people grow and learn is always encouraging and they enjoy hearing about how my school and work projects are progressing. Many of these people have seen me grow from a high school graduate to now pursuing my master's degree. After deciding my research would be working with

older adults and this group in particular, I have made sure to increase my visits to Iris Trail, for dinners, holiday events, and helping out with their community garage sale each month. My presence and hopes of conducting research with them has been well received. Many of the residents are eager to help a member of a younger generation and expand their knowledge as well.

Data Generation

For this research, I am interviewing members of the Iris Trail community regarding their leisure activities. Participants must be a resident of the Iris Trail community, a member of the strong silent generation aged 69-90 years, and in good mental health. A recruitment event was held to inform residents what would be asked of them if they chose to participate and inform them of the study's primary goals. Prospective participants were given an initial demographic questionnaire to ensure they meet the inclusion criteria. I have created an activities journal (Appendix A) for them to record at least five days of activities. Residents were asked to complete the journals towards the end of each day recording the activities that stuck out the most to them from a given day. This serves two purposes, it does not take an exorbitant amount of time to participate, and it ensures that I will have written data of the activities that meant the most to them. I do not need a full detailed account of every activity. Included with the journals are definitions of casual leisure, serious leisure, and flow, as well as a list of the eight characteristics of flow so that participants can review those ideas and start associating them with their leisure time.

Those that meet the inclusion criteria and wish to participate are turning in their journals to me via mail, so I can review them prior to the interviews. While my primary

source of data will come from interviews, these journals will also be used in part for data analysis. A minimum of 12 participants will complete the activities journal and be interviewed. One 45-minute interview session was scheduled with each participant and a few were sent additional questions via email to clarify some points. Interview questions for this study were compiled with the goal of being able to connect casual leisure activities and flow experiences. Questions have also been added to help address findings of previous studies. Heo, Lee, McCormick, and Pederson (2010) study of older adults' serious leisure revealed that the balance between challenge and ability level did not play an important role in achieving flow. This prompted me to look more closely at other factors that may contribute to flow, such as high degree of concentration, time passing quickly, clarity of goals, or paradox of control. In order to do this, I have included questions such as "Does this activity help distract you from stresses you might have, do you find yourself easily wrapped up in the activity, unaware of time passing, when you do this activity is it to reach a goal you might have or purely for entertainment?" While the concept of flow has defined characteristics, it is still a subjective experience. By using an interpretive approach and conducting semi-structured interviews I hope to hear their sincere thoughts and feelings about their casual leisure, possible flow experiences, and what factors they believe contribute to that experience. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes, in order to ensure ease of participation and provide the most comforting environment to speak with them. All interviews were recorded on an Olympus Digital Voice Audio Recorder VN-721PC, transferred to my password-protected laptop and transcribed as soon as possible.

Data Analysis

Once interviews were conducted and transcribed, transcriptions were distributed to participants for member checks. This ensured that participants' thoughts and opinions were being correctly relayed in the study. Any necessary changes were made to the data entries based on member feedback before coding began. I also kept a research journal to document initial observations and pre-analysis thoughts. The initial open coding of data worked to break down the vast amounts of information. The coding process then started to reveal the "essence-capturing and essential elements of the research story," leading to the development of categories and consequently their connections (Saldana, 2009, p. 8). Initial codes were reviewed and consolidated into focused codes that captured the meaning of related pieces of data. Focused codes and the data they represented served as the basis of analytic categories that structured the study's findings. Once a strong set of categories was established those were reviewed in order to create coherent themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The themes were then put into more abstract groupings to provide a deeper understanding of how they relate to the research questions, and were then compared back to the data for fidelity (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). In doing so the current study seeks to better explain flow in older adults and expand current understandings of casual leisure.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study several steps will be taken. IRB approval was received to proceed with this study and I completed all necessary ethical certifications. Member checks were conducted after all journals and interview data had been received, to ensure accuracy of all transcriptions and edits. Close consultation with

thesis advisors also ensured that the study was carried out properly and ethically.

Working with more experienced researchers helped ensure that all efforts were made to truthfully represent participants' responses and data analysis was done properly. A debriefing presentation will be scheduled to provide participants with beneficial information regarding their leisure choices and achieving flow in the future.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

Previous research has shown that retirement can significantly reduce individuals' experience of flow (Heo, Lee, Pedersen, & McCormick, 2010) and Csikszentmihalyi's work (1990, 1997, 2000). Flow puts a strong emphasis on the parity of high skill and high challenge and often takes place in the context of serious leisure activities. Changes in mental and physical abilities that occur as we age, limit older adults' opportunities to engage in serious leisure activities (Liechty & Genoe, 2013). The concern is that older adults might not be achieving flow and therefore not reaping the health benefits of reaching the "optimal experience" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 3).

This study took a qualitative approach in trying to answer the question, is it possible for older adults to experience flow during their casual leisure? By reviewing the characteristics of flow, such as sense of control, distorted sense of time, and a high degree of concentration, it was hoped that participants would be able to identify their flow experiences and the specific characteristics that had an influence on creating it. When conducting the analysis for this study participants' activity journals were taken into account but the primary source of data was from interview transcriptions. The majority of activities discussed were casual leisure, and many participants cited physical ailments that prevent them from being able to do as many serious leisure activities as they did earlier in life. Additionally, this study took into account the effect of casual leisure on quality of life. While all activities might not have been flow inducing it is possible that casual leisure could contribute positively to participants' quality of life. Qualitative

interviews were used to better understand older adults' casual leisure habits and highlight any factors that could contribute to their flow experiences.

The older adults in this study had a wide variety of activities that they were involved in. Many discussed social events held on the property, such as social hours, brunches, and parties, as enjoyable ways to spend leisure time. Individual leisure choices were varied, aside from travel almost all participants enjoyed different past times; leading scientific lectures, learning a unique instrument, baking, quilting, and everything in between. While the activity choices differed, there were common themes that emerged. In general, all of their leisure choices were based on socializing, helping contribute to a cause, or to maintain or improve their own health and well-being. Most participants said they did not go into a leisure activity with specific goals, but after speaking with them staying active and maintaining a sense of purpose were highly valued. Participants had mixed responses to flow. Some felt strongly that they were achieving flow through leisure experiences while others were more uncertain. Participants may not always have been able to recognize a state of flow, but often times their strong commitment to the tasks at hand and focus on reaping the benefits of their activity choices makes the potential for achieving flow strong.

The 12 participants for this study were all members of the Iris Trail community, the length of residency varied from just under a year to 13 years in residence. Having the financial security to retire at Iris Trail allows residents to choose from many leisure activities that may not be available to other retirees. Bill and his wife have lived at Iris Trail for 13 years, they travel often and enjoy being able to spend money on their kids and grandkids. Bill, 83-year-old participant, captured participants' general lifestyle

saying, “In this stage of life most everything we do is in the leisure category...which is what we’re supposed to be living in full retirement, so we do pretty much what we want aside from the basics, like paying bills.”

Participants’ Leisure Activities

While the primary focus of this research is casual leisure, participants’ activity journals and interviews addressed a wide variety of leisure activities. Most participants described at least half of their leisure time being spent in casual leisure pursuits versus serious or non-leisure activities. The freedom of full retirement allows them the opportunity to participate in many activities. Choosing leisure activities seemed to come down to two main questions; is this something I would like and does it benefit myself or someone else? A thorough knowledge of their own likes and dislikes also helps them efficiently choose what activities are worth spending energy on and which they can pass on. John and Rose, a husband and wife that were newer members of the community, both knew from a young age what they enjoyed doing for leisure, while other participants leisure activities were new since retirement. John enjoyed doing electrical engineering work and Rose’s grandmother taught her how to sew and they both still enjoy those activities regularly.

John: [smiles] Yes, I feel very, very I guess fortunate is the right word? That uh, I knew what I wanted to do when I was back about tenth grade. I don’t participate in something now, in this stage of life, unless it’s something that I anticipate I will enjoy.

Rose: You know, lots of people have a talent and they don't really discover what it is until, but, that's my talent. I love to sew, I love the fabrics and now-a-days we have so many different color choices and patterns compared to 25 years ago.

Other participants' leisure activities started after their working years had ended. The freedom to not engage in something they were not proficient at or uninterested in seemed to be highly valued. They all had similar thought processes behind choosing what leisure activities to be a part of.

Lucy, 77, and her husband often participated in leisure activities together:

If it's difficult we don't do it. If we don't want to, we don't have to now. We look for things we enjoy or think we might enjoy, maybe something new to learn, something we haven't seen, someplace we haven't been.

Ashley, was the director of a counseling center prior to her retirement and enjoys the ample leisure time retirement provides her:

A combination of two things: One, is would I enjoy it and is there any benefit to me? Because I do exercise in my leisure time, not because it's my favorite thing to do but it's a benefit and I need to do that. That's kind of how I pick.

John, was a newer resident having lived there for just under 2 years, he spent much of his leisure time as a volunteer at a local state park:

I don't participate in something now, in this stage of life, unless it's something that I anticipate I will enjoy. There are things going on here [the community] that uh...the lawn and garden people they go out and they grow flowers. That's not my thing so I don't do that.

While participants had more time for leisure in retirement, as older adults there may be less physical energy to put forth for activities making it vital for them to be efficient in choosing how they use that energy. Three prevalent themes emerged among all participants' leisure; being social, contributing or helping, and self-improvement. These were the main motivations for participants when considering leisure activity choices.

Social Leisure

The community events, like the Saturday breakfast, stretch classes, and social hour were popular activities among the participants. The social interaction and a chance to improve physical health make these attractive activity choices. Phillip, 83, enjoyed sitting on several planning committees at Iris Trail:

The activities here are so structured that you don't have much time, particularly extended days like a whole day vacant. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday we always got exercise in the mornings, stretch classes, and then social hour...in the evening. I find the stretch classes are very accommodating for that [stress relief] and it gives us an avenue to exercise and do enough of it that we feel that we haven't cheated on not trying to stay fit. It's not enough to really achieve much, but it keeps us up and I really appreciate having that available.

Belle, a former nurse, who has lived in the community for 12 years enjoyed socializing. She often attended the community events as well as having friends to her apartment for coffee or bible study. Belle: "Sunrise Saturday, we have a potluck breakfast on Saturday mornings it is just wonderful fun. All the time. It's social and I enjoy the conversation, that's just flow every time." Similarly, Irene grew up with her mother and sisters always

entertaining and she herself continues to entertain. She also sits on the activities committee for the community.

[Explaining social hour] It's from 5 til 6 and there are a lot of people that drink coke or whatever and you can drink wine. Most people do, and there's 2 or 3 that usually bring in an hors d'oeuvres. It's a social hour, meet newcomers, it's just a nice time.

Social activities were the most casual of the participants' leisure. These activities were done primarily for the enjoyment of being with others and to nurturing relationships with friends.

Altruistic Leisure

Many residents did volunteer work or sat on committees. Volunteering was a way for them to contribute and help those outside of the Iris Trail community. Being on a committee helped them gain insider knowledge and sometimes influence decisions regarding activities and future plans at Iris Trail. Phillip, 83, found committees beneficial to gaining knowledge and taking part in the Iris Trail community:

I enjoy it [being on committees]. You're on the forefront of the community when you're on a committee working [on] something. So you, develop an interest and a knowledge that's maybe a little bit beyond what everybody else is aware of. Maybe you have some controlling influence on things that happen because of it and that's attractive too.

Sitting on a committee did not have the same appeal for all the participants. Many chose to volunteer or put their skills to use helping those who may be bed-ridden or unable to

get out often. Carrie, 81 years old and a 13-year resident, volunteers with meals on wheels and serving meals at Salvation Army:

Yes, we go out on the van go to three different places and... help serve the food that the Salvation Army has had either donated or that they have prepared. The homeless, or the ones that need meals know where the bus stops. And they're always lined up there waiting ...

John, has been a docent at Kennedy Space Center and currently serves as a tour guide at a local national park. He likes being able to teach others as well as learn from them:

I do it [volunteering at Little River Canyon] because I find it so interesting to talk with people who come as visitors. The very fact that it's a national park means people see it on their maps and think "let's go see the park" so there's a lot of people that come from all over the country and even the world. So having the opportunity to just talk with them, not only about the park but about where they're from. It's just very, very interesting to me.

Rose has always enjoyed sewing and liked being able to put that to use helping those who cannot get out and about as well:

Now we can help somebody else but there are ladies here that are wheelchair bound or have these electric chairs, you know and stuff like that and they can't really get around to do a lot of things but they know how to crochet or knit. So, they're making 8 inch squares, it's a small project they can hold in their hands then we'll sew them together and we'll give them out as lap robes for wheelchairs to different charities. It's wonderful because they're people who never leave their apartments or they do to

go get a meal and come back so this gives them something to look forward to and you should hear the chatter when they all get together!

Finding a way to continue contributing to the greater good seemed important to many participants. They have the free time and abilities to help out in ways that they were not able to during their working years and enjoy giving back.

Wellbeing Leisure

Exercise, taking classes, and being involved in mentally stimulating tasks were popular self-maintenance or self-improvement options. Travel was a common choice; taking advantage of time and money that was not available during working years. Travel also provided them with a way to continue learning and stay mentally sharp. Phillip and his wife, have visited 122 countries, and have many trips planned for the upcoming year.

Phillip:

We enjoy all the aspects. I like to study the geography and a little bit about the history and the culture. The foods and uh, the customs and so forth. We've got a broad brush interest in every place we go to. We never really have concentrated on any particular type [of] culture. In China things were totally different from what they are in Russia, and in Russia they are different from the other places we'd been.

While learning was a great way to challenge themselves mentally a handful of participants enjoyed teaching as a way to stretch their thinking skills. Bill, is passionate about getting kids involved in science he and have a fund to give scholarships to college students interested in pursuing science degrees. He travels and does presentation on the electromagnetic spectrum for middle school and high schoolers.

Bill:

When I'm doing my presentation on the electromagnetic spectrum, especially interplay with the audience, the questions they ask; if somebody asks a strange question and I have to think it through and come up with a new answer, that keeps the mind active.

John and his wife often did activities together, but the Learning Quest meeting each week was something he enjoyed on his own.

It's an activity [Learning Quest] that is structured to adults and in large part I guess senior adults where they hold many, I'll say 30 plus different topic classes every semester. I took a short class on Alexander Hamilton and a not so short class on forestry. It's the kind of thing that I would have liked to have done many years in the past but, when you're working on a schedule you don't really have the opportunity to do that.

Most of the participants' leisure choices were casual leisure; short lived, pleasurable activities that don't require a special skill or training. Many participant's well-being activities were more serious in nature. Participant's generally chose exercise classes for the challenge, presenting science lectures requires advanced knowledge of the topic, taking course at the local university takes concentration and commitment to succeed. Outside of exercise, most of the more serious leisure activities were chosen for their aid in keeping their mind sharp. As mentioned previously, physical ailments may deter them from choosing more difficult physical activities.

Bill, age 83, lamented hazards that come with advanced age:

In this stage of life most everything we do is in the leisure category except for uh, with all my physical ailments there are some constraints and frustrating facts about disabilities and I spend too much time looking after myself. That's frustrating.

Casual Leisure

Participants' social and altruistic leisure activities took were more casual.

Activities like the social hours, brunch, and wine tasting were enjoyed for the chance to catch up on community happenings, meet newcomers, and catch up with friends. Belle, the former nursing professor, stays active in many of the community events:

A lot of them [leisure activities] are casual... um, in fact probably as I get older more fall into the casual leisure than serious leisure. I really enjoy being with people, I enjoy a certain amount of spontaneity that comes out of uh unstructured groups.

Irene's husband is a member of the activities committee and when they are not traveling, seem to constantly be either hosting or attending social gatherings:

I came from a big family, my mother entertained a lot, my sisters entertained, I'm used to that and I enjoy that. You know at this point in life, I just love life and enjoy it. I enjoy my friends.

Nicole, is recently widowed and found that staying busy helping others and being faithful in her bible study helped her stay focused on the positives in life. "[My neighbor] and I will get together for a glass of wine every couple weeks or so. That's a leisure activity for me and just chat and see what's going on in our lives that sort of thing." Reading and working crossword puzzles were other popular casual leisure activities.

Lucy enjoyed playing solitaire and movie nights with her husband:

We sit down with Sunday night movies if it's one that's really, you know not a chick flick more of a shoot-em-up one I take my iPad and play with it so I don't get too tense. I think that's really my go to and course prayer comes in there too. If it's difficult we don't do it [laughs]. If we don't want to, we don't have too.

Rose, recently has foot surgery so her physical activities were more limited than usual but she had other leisure activities she enjoyed: "I love to work crossword puzzles and that's mental stimulation, and jigsaw puzzles. I'm not a big thinker, I use my hands more than I do my brain." While the majority of this group's leisure was casual it was still done with a purpose in mind; socializing, helping others, or improving their own well-being. I think their strong commitment to these activities, whether casual or serious help them reap the full benefits of their leisure.

Flow

Participants were provided with a detailed definition of flow at the recruitment presentation and again with their activity journals, in order to best familiarize them with the concept. None of the participants were familiar with Csikszentmihalyi's psychological state of flow prior to this study. There were mixed responses about achieving flow; some felt they never achieve flow for various reasons (e.g. never wanting to be unaware of surroundings, not wanting to lose track of time) and others knew exactly what activities could trigger flow. A closer examination found that, based on recurring themes, the focused concentration and self-rewarding experiences were the most important components of flow. Participants may not always have been able to recognize a state of flow, but based on their descriptions, their strong commitment to the tasks at

hand and focus on reaping the benefits of their activity choices makes them strong candidates for achieving flow. Ashley, was one of the few participants who described seeking challenge in her leisure time, it may also be why she was one of only a couple who fully grasped the idea of flow and knew when they achieved it. She started playing the hammered dulcimer as a way to challenge herself in retirement and has played for six years now:

I don't do much that I don't consider worth my time. So the flow I'm pretty much into what I do, now I know I am with my music. That's probably one reason I've stuck with this instrument for so long, because it is so difficult to play. You don't just go in and play it. It increases your frustration level but it also makes you think, forces you to think, it scrambles your brain because it's backwards from the piano it's crazy. So that, you know I think, I like an activity to be challenging.

Bill, was another resident who knew exactly what activities could help him achieve flow. Bill, the former air force colonel enjoys getting the chance to get younger generations excited about science:

Where I would be achieving flow would be when I'm doing my presentation, on the electromagnetic spectrum. Especially interplay with the audience, the questions they ask and the common question when I go through the bit of peak emission of the sun's green. They say "well, does that have much to do with the green flash over the ocean?" And then I set up a whole new display, usually if they have a chalkboard ... so anyway, that kind of challenge. If somebody asks a strange question and I have to think it through and come up with a new answer, that keeps the mind active. That is absolute focus and other things have trouble distracting me from that. So I would

describe that as, as flow and things that are puzzling and they also keep my mind active quite a bit too.

Carrie's entertaining was a more casual leisure experience she thought helped her achieve flow:

I could put entertaining in that line, having people in, serving dinner or not so likely dinner anymore since we have the dining room here. Being an air force wife we always had functions and invited newcomers to the base over, it's something I'm experienced at, and enjoy doing.

Belle was one of the most social participants, she has been a resident for over 12 years so she knows many of the other residents very well. Her lengthy description of the anticipation and planning each week made it easy to see why it was such a wonderful experience for her:

Sunrise Saturday, we have a potluck breakfast on Saturday mornings it is just wonderful fun. All the time. It's social and I enjoy the conversation, that's just flow every time. The planning and anticipation...when shopping for the ingredients which are needed to make the item for Saturday Morning's Pot-Luck breakfast. Friday afternoon or evening, the organization, creativity if a new recipe is tried, and time management...especially if it requires a 60-minute baking time in the morning. I feel relaxed and worry free, with time for morning meditation and prayers. Enthusiastic greetings and appreciative comments on the wonderful breakfast offerings abound. This is for most of us the only big breakfast of the week and the only one we are not eating alone. We settle in to chat, eat, and catch up with one another and the community at large, enhancing connectedness and enjoyment. It is fun to provide

good nutritious foods for friends and neighbors who always appreciate this wonderful brunch type breakfast. Before we have even been able to visit with everyone, it is time to clean up and vacate the meeting room with happy anticipation for the weekend, the week ahead with simple, utilitarian breakfasts, and looking forward to the next wonderful Saturday breakfast!

Her experience is so dedicated and involved. While it is hard for me to imagine having this kind of time to commit to, what I perceive as a minor event, while also juggling work and school demands. This does a good job of illustrating the difference between what a weekly social gathering can be for this group of retirees versus what it would mean to someone not in full retirement. Being able to have complete focus and putting full effort into whatever task that they have committed too seemed important to participants for all of their activities. Some even said they felt rude if they were not able to commit their full attention to their activities and if they do not have the energy and time to do that will not participate in an activity. Nicole was extremely purposeful in all of her activity choices. Everything she was involved in was for a reason; “serving the Lord”, helping at church, visiting with sick friends. She felt strongly that she did not have much leisure time because she was always doing something that served a purpose:

I think, well I’m bad about wanting to be in control but I do things when I’m not, so that would not be a deciding factor. Loss of self-control, I try really hard to immerse myself in anything I’m doing. For one I think it’s rude to be talking to someone and reading a paper I feel like if you’re going to do something then you need to give it your full attention.

Her perceived lack of leisure activities made it hard for her to see where flow may fit into her life, but I believe that many activities for her could very well have been flow inducing. She used her former management skills and strong compassion for others to effectively run committee meetings, organize church activities, and be there for those in need in any way she can. As she mentioned, she fully dedicated herself in any pursuit she undertakes. When I was interviewing her it was also very apparent that she is very deliberate in choosing activities with a goal in mind, no time was to be wasted; getting decisions made, helping a friend, providing a meal at church, teaching others through bible study, improving her own walk with the lord. Emil discussed several activities he enjoyed; luncheons with co-workers, traveling with his wife, and bike riding, but did not believe he achieved flow:

We don't normally feel time passing at Socrates, um but I don't know of anything that I do where I totally block out everything else. I try to always be aware of what's going on around me and that's where I was looking at this thing about flow. I never do that [achieve flow] because I never want to lose track of what else is happening. I can walk in the den when [wife] is doing something on the computer and she doesn't know I'm there; she can't walk in and I don't know she's there.

He seemed to view losing track of time or not paying attention to other things that might be happening as negative.

His descriptions of the Socrates discussion group and his later description of bike riding, I believe it is possible that those could be flow inducing activities:

Get on the bicycle and going [the goal] is to get exercise, and of course that happens.

I don't watch the clock I have a prescribed route that I ride. I don't try to beat time or anything because I don't want to fall and get broken up.

The mixed responses to flow illustrate perhaps a need to better inform participants about the state of flow instead of a lack of flow. Almost all participants had activities listed in their journals that had a potential to be flow inducing for them; activities that were self-rewarding, had a clear end goal, allowed them to lose track of time, and have a sense of control.

Conclusion

Since participants were unfamiliar with the psychological state of flow, I tried to provide a detailed but easily understood definition during the recruitment event, with their activity journals, and again at their interviews. Several participants thought of leisure time as something that you do when you have nothing else to do, making initial dialogue about leisure activities difficult sometimes. One participant informed me that in the future, perhaps I should choose something more realistic to be studying; older adults do not just sit around all day like younger folks think they do. I do not think the misconception about leisure as activities as a way to waste time is an uncommon issue. As a leisure researcher, my own view of leisure is more complex than to those outside of the leisure sciences. This group of older adults was extremely active and had copious amounts of leisure activities to discuss. The study of leisure in the lives of older adults is certainly not a new undertaking, but through the interview process I hoped to dig deeper

into the nuances of their casual leisure that may be missed in quantitative studies. Since older adults do participate in less serious leisure activities, the hope is that their casual leisure activities are creating a way for them to still experience flow and improve their well-being.

While the participants' feelings about achieving flow were mixed, possibly because of a lack of understanding, I think that many of them were experiencing flow, and that there is a strong potential for flow from their casual leisure activities.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) says that "the best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (p.3). Older adults' physical and mental limits may not be what they used to so casual tasks can seem more difficult than they once did. Some participants welcomed challenge in their leisure time, enjoying the mental or physical stimulation it provided and those participants seemed better able to pinpoint when they may be achieving flow. Enjoying the activity, being fully immersed and committed, as well as seeing a benefit either to themselves or for others seemed to take center stage for the majority of participants. They enjoyed the freedom in retirement to not do things they did not enjoy or did not feel like they were good at. While the high skill, high challenge balance, or difficult tasks, may not necessarily be vital for these older adults achieving something worthwhile was important to them. Choosing volunteer opportunities or community positions where they could be helpful were based on what knowledge or skills they already possessed. The amount of challenge desired during leisure, seemed to vary from person to person. Characteristics of flow like immediate feedback, loss of self-consciousness, and time distortion did not, in their perception, weigh as heavily. Their

perceptions may be quite limited, but many activities seemed to be flow inducing.

Participants expressed motivations behind their leisure choices but felt less strongly about achieving a goal with their leisure, aside from just completing the task they set out to do e.g. socialize, exercise, volunteer. Participant's described lack of stress in their life may make the loss of self-consciousness and time distortion less appealing. As retirees it may not be using leisure as an escape from work or school that creates the optimal experience, but instead ensuring that what little energies you have are spent wisely. Being extremely purposeful in leisure choices ensures that, in their eyes, leisure time is not wasted. By only participating in activities they value and can be fully committed to I would argue that these older adults are achieving flow. They choose tasks they can accomplish, they concentrate fully on the activity, they become deeply involved, and their sense of self is stronger after the activity they have chosen. Without the stress of work, the contrast of being in flow or not being in flow may not be as great. When you are experiencing what you consider to be the optimal lifestyle, doing what you want when you want, it may not be that flow is not occurring but that the experience itself is diminished.

When I am at work I am performing tasks that I am skilled at, I am serving a purpose for myself, earning money, and to students and staff who rely on my work to be done right. I am contributing to a larger purpose of keeping a university department running smoothly. I have a purpose and a source of connection with society, so I use my leisure time for enjoyment and a distraction from the less enjoyable things. I want time to become distorted, I want the sense of control, I want the immediate feedback, being allowed the chance to lose track of time; those are the things that help me escape to an ideal place. For these older adults, without the larger purpose of going to work, their

leisure is a way to stay connected and find meaning. Using their leisure time to volunteer, contribute to their community, and improve their own health and well-being becomes the large scale importance in their life. Having a chance to lose track of time, to have a sense of control become less important because they have that opportunity every day. Perhaps when examining older adults' leisure, which differs from younger generations and those still in the workforce, it is necessary consider a different definition of flow. One that entails the mindful and thoughtfulness that seems to be associated with older adult's leisure choices.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Reviewing the results of this thesis, it does appear that older adults can experience flow from their casual leisure activities. Participants who enjoyed more serious leisure activities seemed more clearly be aware of their flow experiences, but those who often engaged in casual leisure reported many characteristics of flow; focused concentration, merging of action and awareness, sense of control, and loss of self-conscious. Findings also supported the idea that even if these older adults are not achieving flow, their leisure activities are still viewed as a way to improve their well-being.

There is already a sizeable amount of research on older adults' leisure time and to a lesser extent their flow experiences. This study contributed to the current research by more specifically addressing the relationship between older adults casual leisure and flow; the subject has been discussed briefly as a side note of many previous studies (Heo, Lee, McCormick, & Pedersen, 2010; Heo, Lee, Pedersen, & McCormick, 2010; Kleiber, McGuire, Aybar-Damali, & Norman, 2008; Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007). The current study was able to confirm the findings of several previous studies. Kleiber, McGuire, Aybar-Damali, and Norman (2008) found in their study of leisure constraints later in life that while there is more time for leisure during retirement, the limitations on the type of leisure may be beneficial for achieving flow by forcing the focus on the quality of activities instead of the quantity. Focusing on leisure activities that have a higher chance of positive outcomes is probably better for one's sense of well-being and positive emotions, thus creating a better quality of life (Freund & Baltes, 1998). While too many activities that are not being done well could lead to more negative outcomes (e.g. fatigue, frustration, anger). The propensity of participants in this study to be intensely involved in

their leisure activities seemed to ensure that they were getting the most out of their leisure time could increase their possibility of achieving flow. Freund and Baltes (1998) discussed the Selection, Optimization, and Compensation (SOC) model for successful aging. The SOC points out that the leisure activities of older adults, may often be casual, but are still goal driven and focused on achieving a person's own optimization while engaging in these activities. The SOC model suggests that because of limitations older adults may have, the selection of activities that are most beneficial and help them achieve their goals is vital to ensure that energy is not spent on "wasteful" endeavors. Many participants voiced that they were in a time of life where they just want to enjoy it, and do not take part in events that they do not have to or do not want to. This could explain why participants in the current study reported flow experiences during some of their casual leisure, like reading, playing solitaire, entertaining, and attending social events. Being selective is not enough to ensure a flow experience, but when selection is paired with a focus on the positive outcomes associated with the activity it could be flow inducing.

All of their activity choices, whether serious or casual, fell into one of the three motivational themes; socially, altruistic, or well-being motivated. This illustrates the participants' purposefulness in choosing their leisure activities. While most participants stated that they did not have defined end goals for their leisure activities, outside of simply accomplishing the task, further discussion revealed that they chose tasks that helped them stay mentally and physically healthy, stay connected with friends, and/or contribute to a greater good. Another factor in participants' leisure choices may be, as Pennington-Gray and Lane (2002) suggested, that the strong silent generation enjoy

traveling, often give to charity, and have a compassionate social conscience. The motivational themes that came out of this study would strongly suggest the generational propensity for other-directed behavior.

There were dissimilarities between the current study and previous work. Hutchinson and Kleiber (2005) found that casual leisure's ability to buffer stress and negative events could be helpful benefits of casual leisure, while that may hold true for other groups it cannot be said of these participants. Primarily, because of their reported lack of stress and negativity at this point of their life. The maintenance free lifestyle associated with living at Iris Trail could provide these participants with less stress than other adults their age might have.

Location has also been attributed with helping achieve flow for older adults. Heo, Stebbins, Kim and Lee's (2013) examination of serious leisure and life satisfaction in older adults found that a significant amount of time spent in the home and the greater feeling of self-esteem while there could make older adults more likely to experience flow. Although location was not specifically considered for this research location was not described as a contributing factor for flow experiences. It may be possible that living in a continuing care retirement community, that the community becomes an extension of their home space and flow may occur more often within the community.

Hutchinson and Kleiber (2005) talk about the ability to buffer negative events to be a valuable contribution of casual leisure. Less strenuous activities have also been discussed as a way for individuals to reduce stress creating an increase in positive emotions (Pressman et al., 2009). Individuals in this study voiced, several times their lack

of stress at this point in their lives. Casual leisure may very well be a good way to relieve stress but it was not a particular benefit for this group of older adults, again perhaps because of their residence in a community which provides them with ample healthcare options and maintenance that may eliminate many stresses that older adults in a different retirement scenario may experience.

Implications

During this study many participants were unclear about the flow experience. This should not however, negate from the study. An understanding of the definition isn't necessary to achieve flow. Participants' detailed descriptions of the feelings and emotions associated with their leisure experiences and my own knowledge of flow, allowed me to analyze their experiences and determine when a state of flow was being achieved.

There are several recommendations for future research regarding the casual leisure and flow experiences in older adults. First, this study should be replicated with a larger sample size to provide stronger evidence of flow experiences occurring from casual leisure activities. Another suggestion would be to replicate the study with a group of older adults who live in different retirement circumstances. The socio-economic status, comfortable lifestyle, and access to a full calendar of planned activities may make the leisure trends of these participants different from those who live outside of a retirement community. Older adults who may be unable to afford to retire in a community like Iris Trail, may have different leisure experiences. A lack of financial freedom, retirement without a large peer group, and different housing arrangements may all have effects on leisure choices and experiences. Finally, the same study could be conducted at a different

continuing care community with a similar population size and income status, in order to see if results are comparable to the current study.

Study Limitations

This study was not without limitations. First, the smaller sample size of 12 participants provides only a small snapshot of older adults' casual leisure and flow experiences in a community of 160 residents. In addition to the smaller sample, the income and education levels of this particular group means that the findings from this study cannot be generalized to other populations of older adults. It is also possible that residents who were willing to participate in a research study may tend to be more outgoing and active than those who did not.

Conclusion

By only choosing activities that they anticipate they will benefit from and can focus their full attention on ensures that their leisure time is not wasted, and creates a strong potential for flow or at least flow-like experiences. Choosing their leisure activities for the opportunities that they provide to improve their own relationships with friends and family, maintain physical and mental acuity, or help others ensures that they are contributing positively to their own well-being and sometimes the larger community. If a strict definition of flow, requiring that all 8 components be met, then these participants would not be considered to have achieved the mental state of flow. However, a sense of participation in determining the content of life, and the ability to control what happens in consciousness moment by moment, each person has to achieve flow on the

basis of their own individual efforts and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Using their leisure time to achieve realistic goals, use their skills, focus intensely on the task at hand, and anticipate positive outcomes I believe help these older adults are achieving a flow-like state. Older adult leisure is so vastly different from that of other generations, I believe a different take on the flow experience is warranted. Not to say that all of their leisure is flow inducing, but to say that these older adults are not living their retirement years devoid of flow.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LEISURE ACTIVITIES JOURNAL

Daily Activities Journal

This is your journal, fill it with your descriptions of the activities you enjoy and describe how and why you enjoy those activities. Below I have given you a few suggestions of things to think about for your journal. Your journal will be collected by the researcher after your interview; it will also serve as a reference point during the interview to help jog your memory about your activities and how they made you feel. In this packet there are enough journal pages for 7 days, for this research you are being asked to record a minimum of 5 days between now and your interview; they do not have to be consecutive days.

Things to think about:

- What leisure activities are you participating in?
- How do you feel while doing these activities?
Relaxed, energized, happy, focused, etc.
- Does time seem to go by quickly while you're engaged in these activities?
- Do you view these activities as challenging or more routine?
- Are you concentrating fully on the task?
- Does this activity help you forget about the other things that are weighing on your mind?
- Where are you doing this activity?
- Is this an activity you participate in often or something new?

Leisure Activities Journal

	DATE
TIME	

Notes:

Helpful Definitions

Flow: Flow is the psychological state in which people are so intensely involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Csikszentmihalyi's research has shown that experiencing flow regularly can create better life engagement and life satisfaction, which in turn creates more positive emotions and better self-esteem (1990, 1997, 2000).

Pronunciation- Csikszentmihalyi (chicks-ma-high-ee)

Casual Leisure: immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable core activity, requiring little or no special training to enjoy it" (Stebbins, 1997, p.17)

For example, doing crossword puzzles, playing bingo, or having coffee with a friend do not require much effort but are still enjoyable past times.

Serious Leisure: possessing skills to meet the challenge, goal-directed, rule-bound actions that provide immediate feedback as to how well one is performing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Serious leisure is often engaged in with the goal of acquiring a combination of special skills, knowledge, and experience; not just having fun.

For example, a piano player is familiar with their craft and they know what notes come next and what the placement of their fingers should be, when an error is made they can hear.

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL

IRB

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

IRBN005 Version 1.0 Revision Date 06.03.2015

EXEMPT APPROVAL NOTICE

9/8/2015

Investigator(s): Sarah Standridge
Department: Health and Human Performance
Investigator(s) Email: sarah.standridge@mtsu.edu
Protocol Title: "Retirement and Flow: Can the Casual Leisure Pursuits Of Older Adults In Retirement Create The Experience Of Flow?"
Protocol ID: 16-1032

Dear Investigator(s),
The MTSU Institutional Review Board, or a representative of the IRB, has reviewed the research proposal identified above and this study has been designated to be EXEMPT. The exemption is pursuant to 45 CFR 46.101(b) **(2) Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, or Observations**

The following changes to this protocol must be reported prior to implementation:

- Addition of new subject population or exclusion of currently approved demographics
- Addition/removal of investigators
- Addition of new procedures
- Other changes that may make this study to be no longer be considered exempt

The following changes do not have to be reported:

- Editorial/administrative revisions to the consent of other study documents
- Changes to the number of subjects from the original proposal

All research materials must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,
Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

NOTE: All necessary forms can be obtained from www.mtsu.edu/irb.

Institutional Review Board Office of Compliance Middle Tennessee State University
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