

Routine and Project-Based Leisure, Happiness, and Meaning in Life

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Abstract

The search for happiness and life meaning is an ancient quest. Positive psychology has brought this topic to the forefront of modern research. Previous research has shown that meaning and happiness can be found through one's vocation and through leisure pursuits. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of routine and project-based leisure experiences on meaning and happiness. Three-hundred and five college students participated in the study. Structural equation modeling and regression analyses revealed significant relationships between meaning, happiness, and routine leisure pursuits. Social engagement, personal reflection, and time spent outdoors were potent predictors of happiness and meaning. Implications for the leisure field are discussed in light of these findings and other relevant research.

KEYWORDS: *Happiness, meaning in life, social capital*

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Introduction

More than 60 years ago, Victor Frankl attributed a notable increase in diagnosed neuroses to a lack of meaning in life. His position was summed up in the now famous quote, "...people have enough to live by, but nothing to live for; they have the means, but no meaning" (Frankl, 2006, p. 140). This statement comes as no surprise to those who specialize in the fields of psychology and human development. Increases in wealth and intelligence, two popular indicators of progress, have done little to influence general happiness and well-being (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Flynn, 1998). Ten percent of Americans now have mood disorders, and major depressive disorder is the leading cause of disability in the US for 15- to 44-year-olds (WHO, 2004). If Frankl is correct in asserting that meaning and happiness dwell together, then life purpose is not just the culmination of a hierarchy of fulfilled needs (Maslow, 1954), but the driving force behind a life of thriving. While meaning and happiness may emerge from a variety of circumstances, leisure pursuits consistently rank high on the list of facilitators (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). The term "leisure" may apply to any number of activities undertaken during free time and/or for their own sake (Godbey, 2007). An understanding of how the type and duration of leisure activities influence happiness and meaning would allow for a more prescriptive program design, guiding leisure programmers and participants toward purposeful living.

Literature Review

The Will to Meaning

Frankl's innovative branch of therapy, Logotherapy, is based on the principle that humans are primarily motivated by a search for meaning and purpose. This theory is juxtaposed to Nietzsche's "Will to Power" and to Freud's "Will to Pleasure." While security, efficacy, and enjoyment may motivate us to act in certain situations, an underlying sense of purpose drives us to persevere through even the most difficult times. Life meaning, though defined in a variety of ways, is consistently regarded as vital to thriving. Meaning in life has been tied to greater work enjoyment, life satisfaction, and happiness (Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000; Chamberlain & Zika, 1998; Debats, van der Lubbe, & Wezeman, 1993). Individuals that report a lack of life purpose also report a greater need for therapy (Battista & Almond, 1973), higher levels of depression and anxiety (Debats et al., 1993), and suicidal ideation and substance abuse (Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986). It is reasoned that a lack of meaning leads to psychological distress, which is manifested in a variety of neuroses.

There is no abstract, universal meaning that applies to everyone's life. Meaning must be found individually within the present moment, and can be facilitated by: (a) creating a work or doing a deed, (b) experiencing someone or something powerful, or (c) the attitude we take to unavoidable suffering (Frankl, 2006). Recent research has identified similar antecedents to meaning, including the pursuit of important goals, the development of a coherent life narrative, and self-transcendence (Kenyon, 2000, Seligman, 2002). A meaningful life can help to fend off

depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies, thus paving the way for happiness and life satisfaction to emerge (Debats et al., 1993; Harlow et al., 1986). Such is the basis of the Positive Psychology movement, which endeavors to “improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5).

Happiness

The quest for happiness is universal and as old as human existence. The ancient Greeks considered happiness the only true end worth seeking (Aristotle, 1996). In the US, the pursuit of happiness is considered a fundamental human right. Bhutan has identified “Gross National Happiness” as their primary indicator for national progress (c.f. grossnationalhappiness.com). The rise of Positive Psychology has brought about a slew of research centered on positive affect. So popular is the topic that entire journals have emerged to disseminate research focused only on such themes (c.f. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, *Journal of Happiness Studies*). Though happiness is a widely accepted and highly praised construct, its elusive, ephemeral character renders it a difficult topic of study. Undaunted, researchers have identified many predictors and correlates of human happiness.

Happiness, defined also as positive affect and subjective well-being, is a product of inheritance, environment, and attitude (Seligman, 2002). Gender has a negligible effect on happiness, though a more communal disposition, often regarded as a feminine trait, is associated with greater happiness (Michalos, 1991). Despite stereotypes of the “grumpy old man,” happiness has been shown to remain constant with age (Diener & Suh, 1998). Extraverts consistently report higher levels of well-being (Fujita, 1991; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), while neuroticism is highly predictive of negative affect (Watson & Clark, 1984). Self-esteem and self-efficacy also predict subjective well-being, though this effect is much stronger in individualistic cultures (Feasel, 1995; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996).

Environmental predictors of happiness include one’s level of education and income (Diener, Sandvik, & Diener, 1993), being married (Diener, Gohm, Suh, & Oishi, 2000), physical health (Foster, Hebl, & Dawson, 2004), leisure satisfaction (Veenhoven, 1994), and consistent physical activity (Audrain, Schwartz, Herrera, Goldman, & Bush, 2001). Social interaction also has a powerful effect on one’s level of happiness. Number of friends, frequency of engagement, and frequency of formal and informal social activities (i.e. parties, clubs) are all associated with greater levels of subjective well-being (Argyle & Lu, 1990; Crede, Chernyshenko, Stark, & Dalal, 2005). Finally, time spent in the outdoors is associated with positive mood (Maas, Verheij, de Vries, Spreeuwenberg, Schellevis, & Groenewegen, 2009), and religious experiences have been tied to life satisfaction (Ellison, 1991).

While informative, much of this previous research utilized correlational analyses, leaving open the question of causality. Recent research (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005) challenges conventional assumptions, contending that happiness is not only the result, but may be the cause of positive life events. Such claims complicate any attempt to draw a clear path to happiness. Frankl embraced this ambiguity and discouraged the direct pursuit of happiness, contending that “happiness cannot be pursued, it must ensue...” (2006, p. 138). Given the inherent elusiveness of the construct, chasing happiness could be counterproductive. Fur-

thermore, if one fails to achieve happiness, one may experience further distress at one's ineptitude. This could lead to an endless cycle through which distress breeds further distress. Alternatively, Frankl proposed a process of transcendence, by which an individual "loses him/herself" through engagement with others and life events. In this way, one creates his/her own life meaning through purposeful daily activities.

The Role of Leisure

"Happiness is thought to depend on leisure; for we are busy that we may have leisure, and make war that we may live in peace."

—Aristotle

Meaning can come through a variety of mediums in life, not the least of which is one's vocation. Donovan (2000) reported a .50 correlation between job satisfaction and personal affect. However, according to a recent survey only 45% of Americans are satisfied with their jobs (a 61% decrease from 1987) and only half of workers find their jobs interesting (The Conference Board, 2010). Despite their dissatisfaction, those who plan to remain in their current job will do so because of a good friend at work, a good paycheck, or an easy commute—hardly the material of a meaningful vocation. Given the lack of interest and satisfaction in the work environment, Americans might seek happiness and meaning through other outlets.

Leisure can be a powerful medium for the discovery of life's meaning, whether it be through the experience of positive emotions, positive self-identity, the development of social connections, or lifelong learning (Iwasaki, 2007). In fact, it is often argued that the pursuit of a meaningful life is a function of leisure (Godbey, 2007). Commonly agreed upon components of leisure include: voluntary activity, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, and self-discovery (Czichsentmihalyi, 1990; Godbey, 2007; Iso Ahola, 1980). These components may be encountered through short-term, project-based leisure experiences or through long-term commitment typically associated with routine and/or serious leisure experiences (Stebbins, 2009).

Project-based leisure and volunteer tourism. Stebbins (2009, p. 82) defined project-based leisure as "short-term, reasonably complicated, one-shot or occasional, though infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time, or time free of disagreeable obligation." Volunteer tourism was specifically identified by Stebbins as a new type of leisure activity which combines travel and service to benefit a target group. These experiences may include travel and service within one's home country or abroad. Interest in volunteer vacations is increasing across all age groups, with participants and host communities often reporting powerful outcomes (Travel Industry Association, 2006). Participant outcomes include: self-discovery (Lyons & Wearing, 2008), pro-social values, cognitive, affective and reflective assets (Bailey & Russell, 2010), and increased social consciousness and interest in activism (McGehee, 2002).

Skeptics may scoff at the idea of finding life meaning over the course of a brief vacation. Frankl was fond of responding to such skepticism with the following quote from Emil A. Gutheil: "One of the more common illusions of Freudian orthodoxy is that the durability of results corresponds to the length of therapy" (Frankl, 2006, p. 127). Kurt Hahn, a German-born educator and pioneer of adventure education, would concur. In his defense, Hahn often referred to the evil transformation of Macbeth, an incident requiring all of 35 minutes. If such negative outcomes can occur in a short span of time, surely one might gain a new perspective on life in more than a week. Such was the basis of the Outward-Bound model (Walsh & Golins, 1976), which endeavored to "reorganize the meaning and direction of the learner's experience" (p. 21). Empirical research supports this model (Sibthorp, 2006) and a host of studies have attributed similar results to a variety of experiential programs (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Neill, 2003). Volunteer tourism is also conceptually and empirically associated with meaning-making, despite limited program duration (Lepp, 2008; Wearing, Deville, & Lyons, 2008). Indeed, participants of all ages profess an interest in volunteer vacations precisely because it enables them to "travel with a purpose" (Castro, 2010).

Routine leisure. Though not as novel a form of leisure, one's usage of daily free time may also provide happiness and a sense of purpose. It is not uncommon for individuals to contribute more time, effort, and financial investment to their chosen leisure pursuits than their paid vocations (Stebbins, 1996). Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) reported a moderate correlation ($r = .51$) between satisfaction with recreation and subjective well-being. Many studies have also reported a strong connection between quantity & quality of social activities and subjective well-being (Burger & Caldwell, 2000; Kahana, Redmond, Kahana, Johnson, & Young, 1995; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). The importance of social relationships has been touted by researchers and practitioners alike. Many such relationships, of course, are formed through leisure activities.

Social engagement. One positive outcome of social engagement is the building of social capital. This system of networks and relational ties has been shown to influence almost every aspect of one's life, from physical health, to academic and work success, as well as happiness and life meaning (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Putnam, 2001). These benefits can be realized through informal activities (i.e., eating out with friends) or through formal engagement (i.e., team sports, community service). Prosocial leisure pursuits, such as volunteering, may enhance one's social network, garnering support for individuals in an often-isolating modern culture (Henderson & Presley, 2003). Furthermore, those pursuits which encourage network ties across social boundaries (i.e., race, gender, etc.) may benefit both the individual and society through increased dialogue and understanding (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). Conceivably, those who engage in leisure activities which enhance opportunities for social engagement, particularly boundary-spanning activities, could gain benefits from these experiences in the form of life purpose.

A person's social capital is not only limited to their direct experience. Those who are better connected may also benefit those around them, through an over-

flow of social support and general positive affect (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Positive attitudes and behaviors may also be encouraged or discouraged by norms within a specific social network. Christakis & Fowler (2009) reported that a person is more likely to be physically fit (or vice versa) if their close friends and family are fit. This influence even went beyond immediate relationships to include friends of friends. However, Centola (2010) found that thicker network ties (i.e. close friends and family) have a more immediate and lasting effect on behavior than other random associations. Other researchers contend that more important than any single influence is the confluence of all factors on the immediate social environment (Wilson, O'Brien, & Sesma, 2009). The constant reinforcement from this social milieu, direct and indirect, is thought to strongly encourage individual attitudes and behaviors. Given the potential influence of one's immediate social environment, our study included social engagement items for the participant, their family, and their close friends.

Other leisure activities. Social engagement is only one of many sources of positive influence through leisure. Regular physical activity can improve objective and subjective well-being (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005) and cognitive brain function (Voss, Prakash, Erickson, Basak, Chaddock, Kim, & Alves, 2010) whether it is done individually or with others. Time spent outdoors can improve mood, decrease symptoms of ADHD, and improve physical health (Maas et al., 2005; Primack, Swanier, Georgiopoulos, Land, & Fine, 2009; Scopelliti & Giuliani, 2004). Artistic pursuits (i.e., art, music) have been shown to influence awareness, perception, persistence, and judgment (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, Sheridan, & Perkins, 2007). Finally, reflective activities such as journaling and meditation may influence wisdom, openness, compassion, and physical and mental health (Bailey & Russell, 2010; Nidich et al., 2009).

Given the lack of work satisfaction, the ubiquitous nature of leisure, and the recent surge of attention to the field of positive psychology, a better understanding of the impact of specific leisure pursuits on meaning and happiness is in order. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a short-term volunteer travel experience, routine social engagement and participation in various leisure activities on one's happiness and meaning in life.

Method

Surveys were distributed to 305 students at a university in the Midwest, ages 16 to 22 ($M = 20.6$), two-thirds (65%) of whom were female. Two hundred and four of these students participated in an alternative spring break trip that included cross-country travel and community service. A total of 184 surveys were completed, resulting in a response rate of 90%. An additional 101 students who were not participating in the trip also completed the surveys (94% response rate). This purposive sampling method was utilized in order to achieve a substantial amount of variance in regular civic engagement. Participants completed the surveys one week before spring break. Those attending the volunteer travel experience completed an additional survey electronically (via email) during the week after spring break. This final assessment achieved a response rate of 71%.

The experience utilized in this study was the Pay It Forward Tour (PIFT), a 10-day cross-country service-trip. Participants elected to be a part of this tour during their academic spring break. There were no incentives for participation. Past participants identified skill enhancement and a desire to help others as their key motivators for attending this tour (Bailey & Russell, 2009). Daily activities included travel by coach bus, community service (i.e., tutoring, homeless shelters), and reflective group discussions. This experience was deemed appropriate to test Frankl's (2006) theory of meaning-making, as it could potentially address all three methods of finding purpose in life. Participants on the PIFT would have the opportunity to perform a good deed, experience someone/something powerful, and respond to the unavoidable suffering of others (i.e. poverty, inequality).

Measures

Meaning in life. Meaning and purpose in life was measured by the Meaning in Life questionnaire (MLQ), a 10-item questionnaire with two subscales assessing one's search for, and discovery of meaning in life (e.g., "I am searching for meaning in life," "My life has no clear purpose"). This instrument was chosen due to its reported noncollinearity with similar positive constructs such as happiness (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). Reliability for the MLQ and the two subscales was robust ($\alpha = .77, .87, .89$).

Social engagement. Regular social engagement and community involvement of the participant, their parents, and their closest friends was assessed with 22 items adapted from the "Social Capital Short Form" (The Saguaro Seminar, 2002). These items assess one's routine involvement with informal and formal social activities over the past 12 months and their trust of others. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted on the social capital items indicated that one's own social capital, and that of their parents and friends could be combined into one, unobserved social capital construct (TLI = 1.0, CFI = 1.0, RMSEA = .00 - .095).

Happiness. There is understandably much debate over the measurement of happiness. Many studies utilize a single-item indicator (i.e., "I am happy"), which has proven defensible in many contexts (Abdel-Khalek, 2006; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). However, given controversy over the subjectivity and lack of reliability for single-item, quality of life indicators (Bernhard, Sullivan, Hurny, Coates, & Rudenstam, 2001), the current study utilized a four-item happiness construct. This construct incorporated several relevant aspects of happiness, including possessions and status ("I am content with what I have in life"), perspective-taking ("My friends would describe me as a happy person"), comparison with others ("Compared with those I know, I'd consider myself a happy person") and mood stability ("It doesn't take much to make me upset or angry"). This construct incorporates popular dimensions of happiness supported by previous research (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005) while remaining concise and relevant to the study at hand. Reliability for the happiness construct was acceptable ($\alpha = .70$).

Routine leisure. Routine leisure participation was assessed with six items describing how often one participates in the following leisure activities on a monthly basis: team sports, journaling, art, music performance, watching television for 3 hours or more, spending more than 20 minutes outdoors, and prayer or meditation. Age, gender, and GPA were the only demographic measures addressed.

Analyses

Paired t-tests were conducted to measure differences in pre and post-test scores for volunteer travel participants. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized to assess the relationships between social engagement items, meaning in life, and happiness using pre-test scores. The model was first explored using half ($n = 140$) of the participant data (randomly selected), then a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using the other half of the data. To elucidate the most salient predictors of meaning and happiness, a three-stage regression analysis was conducted on each of the MIL subscales, and on the happiness construct with the following progression: 1) Demographics, 2) Social Capital items, 3) Leisure activity items.

Results

Findings indicate that routine leisure more strongly predicted happiness and meaning than did the project-based experience. There was no difference in pre and post test scores for volunteer travel participants on the MLQ ($t = -.403$; $p = .687$) nor on overall happiness ($t = .529$; $p = .93$). SEM analyses provided support for the proposed structural model (TLI = .911, CFI = .929, RMSEA = .071). As shown in Figure 1, one's direct and indirect social relationships (i.e., social capital) were directly related to both meaning ($r = .282$) and happiness ($r = .289$). The *discovery* of meaning in life, however, demonstrated a much stronger direct relationship to happiness ($r = .644$). One's *search* for meaning was not significantly related to happiness. Social capital and the discovery of meaning together account for over 60% of the happiness construct.

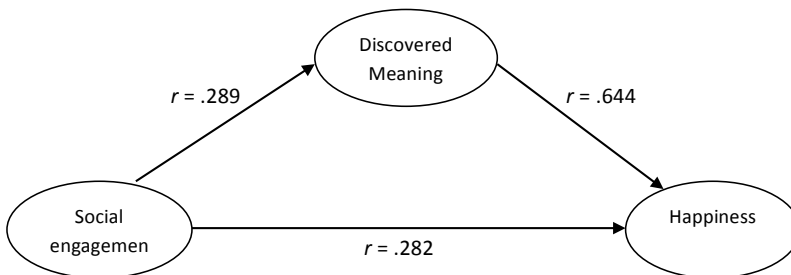


Figure 1. Illustration of the Latent SEM for Social Engagement, Discovery of Meaning, and Happiness

A three-stage regression analysis helped to elucidate those social capital items and leisure activities which were most influential for meaning and happiness. Neither demographics, nor social capital, nor leisure activities were significant predictors of one's *search* for meaning. The only individual item to significantly predict one's search for meaning was level of attendance at religious ceremonies. The *search* for meaning was unrelated to *discovery* of meaning or happiness. One's level of social capital did account for 17% of the variance in the discovery of meaning. The most salient items for the discovery of meaning, with all other items in the model, included: Age, having friends who participate in activities for personal development, level of friends' club attendance, and amount of personal time spent in prayer or meditation.

Finally, demographics ($p = .029$), social capital ($p = .002$), and leisure activities ($p = .008$) all accounted for a significant amount of unique variance in the happiness construct. The items which accounted for the most unique variance in the happiness construct were the amount of time spent outdoors, and amount of time spent in prayer and meditation. Trust also factored into one's level of happiness. Those who felt that people were generally trustworthy and who disagreed with the statement, "I can only trust my core group of friends" reported higher levels of happiness.

Discussion

Limitations

This study revealed a number of notable findings, which must be interpreted with the awareness of a few limitations. While the sample size was appropriate for the analyses used, the purposive sampling technique complicates claims of external validity. There is also currently no standard measure of happiness. While measures were taken to account for multidimensionality, the subjectivity of the term should be acknowledged. Given that the SEM is based on cross-sectional data, it is impossible to determine the true nature of cause and effect. Finally, no follow-up measure was included to determine the long-term impacts of the volunteer travel experience.

Project-Based Leisure

The volunteer travel experience did not significantly influence meaning in life or happiness. This may be due to the short-term nature of the experience, or to a lack of time for the experience to be digested. While powerful project-based leisure experiences can be life altering, it may take time for such changes to manifest themselves (Daniel, 2003; Wearing, 2001). Other studies have reported a host of positive outcomes from short-term, service-oriented experiences including wisdom, life purpose, academic achievement, and empathy (Bailey & Russell, 2010; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006). Perhaps ephemeral concepts such as meaning and happiness would be better assessed longitudinally and/or qualitatively. Given Frankl's (2006) assertion that there is no universal meaning that applies to everyone, the rich, contextual evidence provided by qualitative research may be more illustrative of changes in life meaning. For example, a participant might not be aware that "their

life has more purpose" after serving those in need. However, they may have found a mission worth striving for; that of alleviating the suffering of others. Such changes may not be adequately assessed through global research instruments, but case studies can point toward these effects (Lyons & Wearing, 2008).

Given that short-term service projects can positively impact long-term civic engagement (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999), it may be more constructive to focus on measurable program outputs of project-based experiences which may lead to long-term meaning and happiness. Frankl's (2006) preferred method of therapy was to avoid hyper-reflection and to encourage the client to transcend their own inadequacies by engaging in meaningful tasks (i.e., volunteering). In this way, individuals are not paralyzed and isolated by meaninglessness, but are energized through purposeful encounters.

Social Engagement, Meaning, and Happiness

The SEM supports Frankl's (2006) claim that happiness comes as a byproduct of a meaningful life, though cross-sectional data complicate assertions of causality. Higher levels of regular social engagement can have a direct impact on one's overall happiness as well as an indirect impact by contributing to one's sense of meaning in life. It is noteworthy that, while the *discovery* of meaning was positively associated with happiness, one's *search* for meaning was unrelated to happiness. It is not difficult to imagine that a fruitless search for meaning could leave someone unfulfilled. Of course, not everyone in search of meaning will find it. The crux of Frankl's argument is that meaning must emerge from active engagement with the world, not through mental abstraction alone. This may indicate that, as with happiness, meaning must ensue from engagement in positive activities and relationships. The active search for elusive, abstract terms such as happiness and meaning may be exponentially discouraging, but their qualities may be found in purposeful living.

This poses a dilemma for educators and practitioners; that of encouraging the discovery of meaning without invoking the distress of meaninglessness. As daunting as this may seem, it has been the domain of experiential educators from the beginning (Dewey, 1916). The simple act of debriefing an activity can encourage the participant to reflect on the experience and make the connections necessary for meaning to emerge. The focus of such reflection would be on the activity (i.e., community service) and its purpose for those serving and those served, not necessarily on its contribution to life meaning. Through these experiences the realization of life's purpose could slowly emerge, being facilitated through meaningful action and reflection. Many methods of reflection have been utilized, ranging from highly directive to entirely open-ended (Luckner & Nadler, 1997). The method, though, may not be as critical as the opportunity.

It is notable that three of the four strongest predictors of discovered meaning did not involve one's own social engagement, but that of one's parents and friends. Parents who intentionally interact with diverse groups, and friends who seek out opportunities for personal development and participate in various clubs may benefit kith and kin as well as themselves. Parents and peers are, of course, potent socializing agents during late adolescence (Eder & Nenga, 2006). Much existent research touts the importance of various supportive relationships for positive

development (c.f., The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets). However, our findings indicate that the quality of these relationships may be as important as the quantity. "Network science" researchers (Christakis & Fowler, 2009) contend that a person's social network can influence them in positive (i.e., improved health & happiness) or negative ways (i.e. physical illness, bias, addictive behaviors). Thus, a large network of friends and family may be an asset or a detriment to development.

In essence, this is a rediscovery of the old adage that "you are who you hang out with," but the practical implications may be more profound. The discovery of meaning may come not only through direct social interaction with friends and family (i.e., personal social capital), but also through friends of friends. New technologies (i.e., Facebook) might enable programmers to assess social networks and/or facilitate increased interactions with positive socializing agents. This may be especially important for project-based leisure experiences, given their limited duration of influence. In this way, relationships developed during such activities, which may be very deep despite the brevity of direct contact, can be utilized as social reinforcements for continued development. Alternatively, programmers may exploit the influence of parents and peers by implementing activities for all contacts in a target clientele's immediate social network. Family programs, for example, would reinforce existing network ties and potentially elevate the entire relational framework (Palmer, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2007) This approach could transform the client's social milieu, thereby indirectly contributing to their personal development and creating a system of social reinforcements through "dense network ties" (Centola, 2010).

In addition, the three salient indirect social capital factors in this study involve boundary spanning or "bridging" experiences (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). "Involvement in a variety of clubs," "seeking opportunities for personal development," and "intentionally encountering diverse groups" would require a sense of openness and value-negotiation. Bridging activities, those which require one to go outside their normal sphere of influence, have been associated with increased empathy, perspective-taking, and reflectivity (Putnam & Feldstein; Bailey & Russell, 2010). Such assets are certainly conducive to Frankl's vision of a meaningful life. This indicates that leisure programmers should take a broader view of program design. By factoring in one's full sphere of daily influence (quality and quantity), leisure programmers could magnify positive outcomes.

Other Leisure Predictors

The six leisure activities accounted for an additional 3% of variance in the discovery of meaning and 5% in happiness. Weekly time spent in prayer or meditation influenced one's discovery of meaning and their happiness. It is curious that the search for meaning was not associated with prayer given its relationship to religious participation. Previous research highlighted the importance of personal reflection for personal growth and for retaining programmatic outcomes (Bailey & Russell, 2010). Journaling did not have an influence on meaning or happiness in this study. It is entirely possible that prayer and journaling overlap substantially, but it is noteworthy that prayer and meditation appear to be the most salient of the reflective activities in this study.

Finally, time spent outdoors emerged as the strongest direct predictor of happiness. This outdoor time was not associated with a particular activity, but did require a minimum exposure of 20 minutes. Even a short span of time spent outdoors may improve subjective well-being if enjoyed on a regular basis. This has serious implications for an American population that spends 95% of their time indoors (Mayer & Frantz, 2004). The recent surge of energy incited by the "Leave no Child Inside Movement" is encouraging in this regard. Programmers and policy-makers need to consider methods of encouraging outdoor exposure and enabling access to natural environments on a daily basis.

Conclusions

This study has relevant implications for leisure practitioners and researchers in positive psychology. Life meaning is a salient predictor of happiness, but the direct pursuit of either asset may prove to be an unfruitful strategy. Failure to achieve happiness may result in an added burden, making one feel "sad about being sad" (Frankl, 2006, p. 144). Instead, it may be more productive to encourage involvement in specific activities that may facilitate meaning and well-being. In this study, higher levels of social engagement (i.e., club attendance, public outings with friends, community service) were associated with higher levels of meaning and happiness. In addition, prayer/meditation and time spent outdoors emerged as the most salient individual activities for happiness. Natural environments have been shown to improve mood and relieve mental stress (Maas et al., 2009), and the benefits of a reflective life have been touted for millennia (Assman, 1994). Daily exposure to these factors would appear to have more impact than short-term, intensive programs. Leisure advocates should take seriously their opportunity to facilitate meaningful activities for their clientele and to reinforce positive outcomes through social networks. This may require the discretion to look beyond activities which seem immediately pleasurable, to provide activities that have been shown to influence meaning and happiness. Such intentional program design would demonstrate that "the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system" (Frankl, 2006, p. 110).

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