

# Leisure in Later Life: More than Activity



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# Leisure has been and continues to be defined as:

- **Time:** Residual from obligations or discretionary
- **Activity:** Type of activity or meaning of the activity
- **Experience:** Attitude or state of being



# Leisure as Activity in Gerontology

- We argue leisure is more than activity
- Gerontologists study relationship between activity and later-life wellbeing
- Find that meaningful activity is beneficial in later life
- Confirm tenets of activity theory
  - Example: themes of social engagement and meaningful activity are consistent predictors of life satisfaction as people age (Glass, de Leon, Marottoli, & Berkman, 1999).



# Taking the view that leisure is both:

- **Existential** as action that produces meaning
  - i.e. it is meaningful for the participant
  
- **Social** in both its contexts and orientations
  - i.e. leisure often takes place in a social setting with other people
  - leisure often facilitates social interaction
  - leisure is influenced by societal values
    - Kelly, (1987)
    - Leisure as a dimension of life (Kelly, 1999)



# In search of the meaning in leisure

- Importance of the social group: Consistent theme through our literature (Bruch, 1969; Field & O'Leary, 1973; Buchanan, 1985)
- Reinforced in recent studies (Kyle & Chick, 2002; 2004) - social context may be more important than the activity.
- Shamir's (1992) assertion that some membership to a social world is an important part of their identity.
- Kelly, Steinkamp and Kelly (1987) found that life satisfaction was associated with involvement in activities characterized by high personal investment and with opportunities for social interaction.
- Langley and Knight (1999) who found that if people built social networks and identify with their activity, people are more likely to continue participating in sport through life.
- In a society where interconnectedness appears to be breaking down, a sense of community can develop in leisure social worlds (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; Poole, 2001))



# Retirement-aged women and leisure

- To investigate the place and meaning of leisure in the lives of retirement-aged women living in Florida
  - How do retirement-aged women define leisure?
  - What meaning(s) does leisure have for retirement-aged women?
  - What factors influence the leisure of retirement-aged women

Gibson, H., Ashton-Shaeffer, C., Green, J., & Autry, C., (2003/2004). Leisure in the lives of retirement-aged women: Conversations about leisure and life. *Leisure/Loisir*. 28 (3-4), 203-230.



# Definitions and Meanings of Leisure:

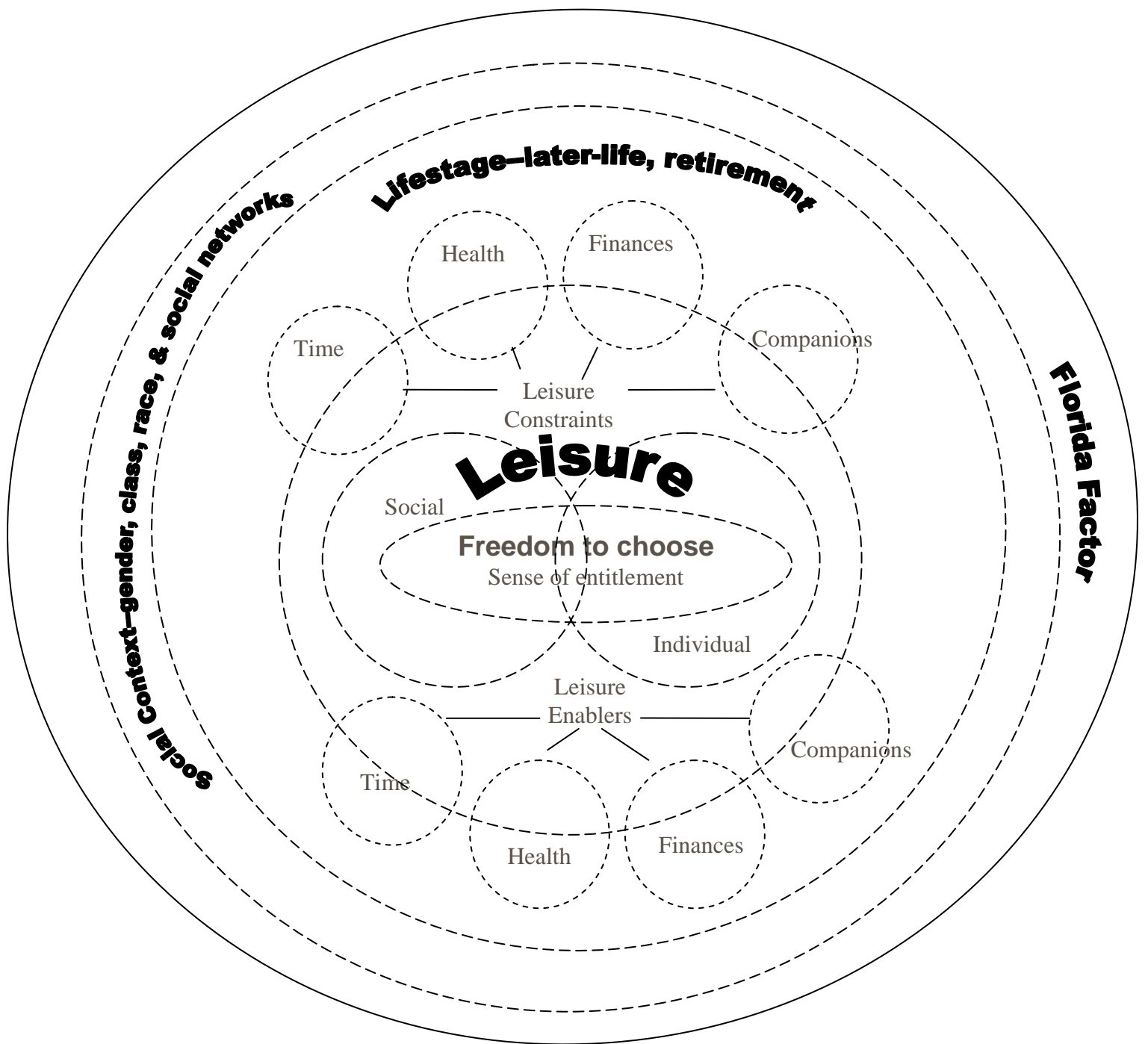
## Social context

- **Vicki**, a 71-year-old retired tax receiver stated, “*FUN! Doing things together. [My husband and I] love to dance; we do ball room dancing. We do it for enjoyment.*”
- **Hannah**, a 63 year old retiree described the meaning of her leisure: “*For us a big part is... Well we both like nature a lot and we like to go camping. We like to go in the national parks were there is no electricity.... We walk a lot and we do everything outdoors...*”
- **Grace**, 57 year old full-time caregiver of four grandchildren – **leisure is centered in religion** and “*fellowship with others*”



# Definitions and Meanings of Leisure: Individualized

- **Mary**, a 56 year old retiree who is married, explained *“Leisure- I consider that my time to do whatever it is I want to do.”*
- **Carol**, a 75 year old retiree and caregiver of her husband, defined leisure as *“doing as I please, absolutely doing as I please.”*
- **Janice**, a 77 year old recent widow described leisure as *“the things I wanted to do all my life that I wasn’t able to do- I’m doing as much as I can for as long as I can.... I am fulfilling the things that I wanted to do.”*



# **Leisure**

**Freedom to choose**

Sense of entitlement

Leisure  
Constraints

Leisure  
Enablers

Health

Finances

Time

Companions

Social

Individual

Time

Health

Finances

Companions

**social context—gender, class, race, & social networks**

**Lifestage—later-life, retirement**

**Florida Factor**

# Leisure meanings in relation to retirement

Investigate the meanings of retirement and leisure for older women living in FL

- How do older women define and construct retirement?
- Do older women consider themselves retired?
- How do older women define and construct leisure?
- Are definitions and meanings of retirement linked with conceptions of leisure for older women?

Gibson, H., Ashton-Shaeffer, C., Green, J., & Corbin, J. (2002). Leisure and Retirement: Women's stories. *Loisir et Societe/Society and Leisure*, 25, 257-284.



## **Meanings of leisure for these women were related to their meanings of retirement**

1. Freedom
2. End of paid employment
3. Husband's retirement
4. Resistance
5. To be useful

## High Leisure Ethic

*Strong sense of entitlement to leisure*

*Shared & individual leisure activities*

*Ethic of self-care*

## Resistance

*Getting old*

*Lose of independence*

*Unproductive*

*Still expected to care for family*

**Service-Centered**

**RETIREMENT**

**End of Paid Employment**

*Leisure as freedom*  
*Reward for hard work*  
*Time for self*

**Leisure-Centered**

## Need to be Useful

*Need to work*

*Volunteering is a way of giving back*

*“Retired, but not to do nothing”*

## Low Leisure Ethic

*Leisure not a priority in life*

*Leisure is boring*

*Realizes that now they have more time & freedom for leisure —but don't know if they want it*

*Need to be active & useful in their leisure*

*No strong sense of entitlement to leisure*

*Strong ethic of care*

## Husband's Retirement

*Relaxation*

*Lack of Pressure*

*Full of activity*



## Specific leisure activities defined in terms of friends

“Every week all of our friends gather at **church**, you always see them there and we go and do something special with them”. (Joyce, 65)

“We go **shopping** and **have lunch** while we are out”. (Harriett, 55)

“I go to **bingo** and I go to the **hobby club** where a lot of my friends are”. (Sue, 68)

Green, H., Ashton-Shaeffer, C., & Gibson, H. *“I would be mighty lonesome if I didn’t have them:” Friendships and leisure among older women.* Paper presented at the 8th World Leisure Congress, Brisbane, Australia, September, 12-17, 2004.

# Leisure as a Space for Maintaining Friendships

Leisure was mentioned as a context for staying in touch with friends both those living locally and those far away

- **Face to face contact** - Spending time with friends and not doing anything in particular was just as enjoyable as doing something
  - “We just sit around the table and talk” (Michelle)
  - “Sometimes we play games, Bingo, Michigan Rummy, to pass the time or we sit and have coffee or ice tea and just chat like a normal visit” (Sue)
- **Out of town friends:**
  - “At Christmas time I send out almost 200 cards and I usually write a letter....I just love getting letters and cards from my friends (Ann 81)



# Leisure is more than Activity

- Not just the activity that is important (i.e., Activity Theory) but the meanings associated with the activity
  - Kelly (1999) Leisure is both existential and social
  
- My Current work with a focus on middle and later life:
  - Physically active leisure has the physical health benefits, but a consistent theme through these studies and historically through our literature (Burch, 1969; Field & O'Leary, 1973; Buchanan, 1985) and reinforced in recent studies (Kyle & Chick, 2002; 2004) the social context may be more important than the activity.
  
  - In a society where interconnectedness appears to be breaking down, a sense of community can develop in leisure social worlds (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007)