

SERIOUS LEISURE AND PLACE ATTACHMENT: A CASE STUDY OF AMATEUR ATHLETES IN RURAL OKLAHOMA

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to investigate serious leisure characteristics as personal traits while examining amateur athletes' leisure pursuits associated with a specific place where they enjoy their leisure time and to examine which characteristics of serious leisure enhance or reduce the person-place relationship for rural amateur athletes. Data were obtained from on-site and self-report surveys given to amateur softball players enrolled in the community-based adult programs of the City of Stillwater, Oklahoma. Canonical correlation analysis (CCA) was employed to investigate the interrelationship between six qualities of serious leisure and three dimensions of place attachment. The result showed that amateur athletes' systematic pursuit has significant correlation with the place where they enjoy their chosen leisure activity, and all the serious leisure characteristics of softball players positively enhance the person-place relationship. The strong identification and unique ethos of serious leisure are two of the strongest indicators reflecting the softball players' seriousness of their leisure pursuit, and social bonding is the most important element facilitating softball players' attachment to the field.

1.0 Introduction

Leisure has been regarded as a "placemaker" and individuals' dedication to pursuit of leisure in a specific location may develop their emotional, practical, and social attachment to the place (Henderson & Frelke, 2000). Place has been considered as an important factor that may facilitate or hinder individuals' leisure and recreation experience (McCool, Stankey, & Clark, 1985). The aspect of place is composed of meanings, activities, and physical settings (Relph, 1976). Place attachment has been used in various fields to explain the meaningful bonding between people and physical settings (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004). However, the relationship between personal leisure involvement and place attachment has been discussed but has reminded unclear (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003).

Serious leisure, a term and theory developed by Robert Stebbins (1992), is a salient form of leisure and highlights how individuals' systematically and substantially pursue their leisure. The concept of serious leisure could be used to explore amateur athletes' characteristics of pursuing their leisure systematically and acquiring benefits from the process (Stebbins, 1992). In the United States, community recreation programs provide amateur athletes a reachable and affordable opportunity for adults to pursue their leisure and enhance their recreational skills and experiences (Hastings, Kurth, Schloder, & Cyr, 1995). According to the Amateur Softball Association of America (2012), there were over 170,000 teams, 2.5 million players and 500,000 coaches annually involved in softball games, and the adult amateur is the largest group nationwide. Many softball players consistently and systematically are involved in their chosen leisure activity in their nearby neighborhood, being amateur athletes and "serious" about their leisure pursuit. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to apply serious leisure characteristics as personal traits examining how amateur athletes' leisure pursuit associated with a specific place where they enjoy their leisure time and to examine which characteristics of serious leisure enhance or reduce the person-place relationship for rural amateur athletes.

2.0 Methods

2.1 Setting and Sampling

Data were obtained from on-site and self-report surveys given to amateur softball players enrolled in the community-based adult programs of the City of Stillwater, Oklahoma. This city located in north-central Oklahoma includes the main campus of Oklahoma State University. In the City of Stillwater, the adult softball program is usually provided in fall, summer, and spring and attracts approximately 500 to 800 amateurs to play every season. The purpose of the adult softball program in the city is to provide an opportunity for adults who are interested in recreation, socialization, and physical fitness to enhance their skill level and have fun within competitive games. This program not only pulls the city residents to participate in softball games but also attracts players from other cities or towns in the nearby communities. In fall of 2011, an estimate of the people enrolled in the softball program was approximately 600. According to the season schedule, there were three leagues of the adult softball program: men, coed, and senior league. The researchers followed various leagues' schedules to conduct on-site surveys. The on-site surveys were delivered at the city softball fields which are managed by the Department of Parks and Recreation in the City of Stillwater from October 10, 2011 through October 31, 2011.

2.2 Instrument

The questionnaire included three sections. The first section investigated the participants' level of systematic leisure pursuit. Six factors (18 items) out of 18 factors (54 items) were selected from Serious Leisure Inventory and Measurement (SLIM) (Gould, Moore, McGuire, & Stebbins, 2008) for investigating the seriousness of these amateur baseball players. The rest of 12 factors (36

items) were not included in the study, because they are regarded as an inventory of outcomes but not an additive reflection of seriousness (Gould et al., 2008). The six factors of SLIM applied in this study were perseverance, significant effort, career progress, and career contingencies, strong identity, and unique ethos, all of which measures the “seriousness” of amateur athletes rather than the outcome of their leisure pursuits. The second section examined the amateur athletes’ attachment to a specific place. The Kyle, Graefe, and Manning’s place attachment instrument (2005) was employed in the study, including four statements of each of three factors: place identity, place dependent, and social bonding (12 items). The third section focused on the demographic information of these amateur athletes, such as gender, age, highest education achieved, ethnic group, whether the respondent was a city resident, and distance from home to the place of participation.

2.3 Analysis Approach

The major analysis approach of the study is canonical correlation analysis (CCA) which is commonly considered as an extension of multiple regression analysis. Canonical correlation analysis, a multivariate statistic approach, is used to predict multiple dependent variables from multiple independent variables simultaneously, while multiple regression analysis only could be used to predict a single dependent variable from a set of independent variables. In other words, CCA is usually used to explore the relationship between two set of multiple variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In this study, the canonical correlation analysis is employed to facilitate the interrelationship between six qualities of serious leisure (perseverance, significant effort, career progress, and career contingencies, strong identity, and unique ethos) and three dimensions of place attachment (place identity, place dependence, and social bonding).

3.0 Results

3.1 Socio-demographics

The total of 191 pen-and-paper based surveys was collected on the city managed softball fields, but 184 surveys were considered as complete cases which were included in the following analysis approach. In this data set, the players’ age ranged from 18 to 83 years old and the average age was 33 years old. The majority of softball players were male, Caucasian, having college degree, resident of Stillwater, and living within 10 miles distance to the field. Table 1 reports the demographic information of the study participants.

Table 1. Socio-demographics of Amateur Athletes

Demographic Information		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	136	74%
	Female	48	26%
League	Men	95	52%
	Coed	70	38%
	Senior	19	10%
Ethnic Group	Caucasian	148	80%
	Native-American	11	6%
	Hispanic	9	5%
	Asian	3	2%
	African-American	2	1%
	Mixed/Other	11	6%
Education	High school or less	34	18%
	College or above	150	82%
Resident	Yes	134	73%
	No	50	27%
Distance	< 3 miles	54	29%
	3-10 miles	85	46%
	10-20 miles	18	10%
	>20 miles	27	15%

3.2 Instruments Testing and Descriptive Analysis

The amateur athletes’ serious leisure and place attachment characteristics were examined by having softball players rate the agreement of each statement of five possible agreements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 indicating “strongly disagree” to 5 indicating “strongly agree”). The perseverance and career progress of serious leisure had mean score of 4.00 or higher, and there characteristics of place attachment had mean score ranged from 3.17 to 3.81. All the Cronbach’s α of serious leisure and place attachment factors were 0.80 or higher which indicated that the statements within each factor were having dependable internal reliability. Table 2 lists the mean scores, standard deviation (SD), and Cronbach’s α of the two instruments employed in the study.

Table 2. Mean, SD, and Cronbach's α of Serious Leisure and Place Attachment Instruments

	Variables	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Serious Leisure	Perseverance	4.68	0.80	0.89
	Efforts	3.81	0.94	0.82
	Career Progress	4.26	0.92	0.93
	Career contingencies	3.64	1.01	0.88
	Identity	3.55	1.02	0.83
	Unique ethos	3.64	0.97	0.88
Place Attachment	Place identity	3.79	0.78	0.81
	Place dependence	3.17	0.87	0.87
	Social bonding	3.81	0.80	0.80

3.3 Canonical Correlation Analysis

Table 3 indicates the summary of canonical correlation analysis. The multivariate tests of significance (Hotelling's T-test=0.30, $p<0.05$; Wilk's test=0.67, $p<0.05$) indicated a significant relationship between the linear combination of the serious leisure traits of softball players and their attachment to the specific physical location. In the study, although three canonical functions were extracted, only the first function was statistically significant at the 0.05 probability level, and other functions would not be interpreted because of the non-significant contribution. Within the first function, the correlation coefficient between serious leisure and place attachment was 0.44 which refers to the strength of the relationship between two set of multiple variables. The squared canonical correlation was 0.19 which indicates the shared variance between the pair of canonical variants (serious leisure and place attachment).

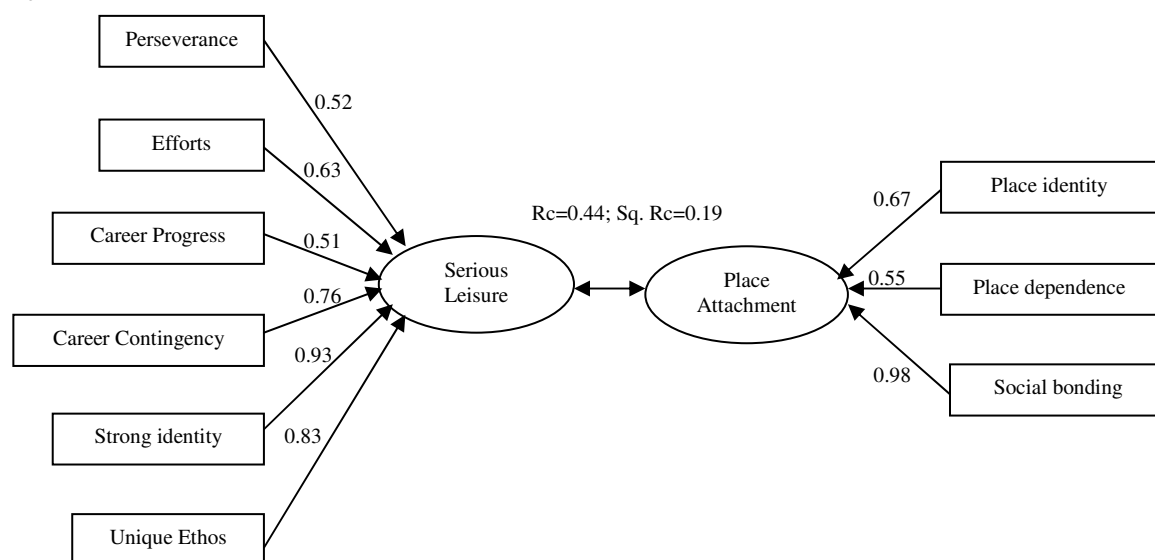
Table 3. Summary of Canonical Correlation Analysis

Multivariate Tests of Significance: Hotelling's T-test=0.30 , $p<0.05$; Wilk's test=0.67, $p<0.05$				
Function No.	Eigenvalue	Pct.	Canon Cor. (Rc)	Sq. Co (Sq. Rc)
1*	0.246	81.2%	0.44	0.19
2	0.042	13.9%	0.20	0.04
3	0.015	4.9%	0.12	0.01

Note: * statistically significant at the 0.05 present probability level

Figure 1 demonstrates the detailed correlation between amateur athletes' serious leisure and attachment to the place within the first canonical function. The arrows represent canonical factor loadings which refer to the sample linear correlation between variables and their canonical variants. Generally speaking, canonical loadings greater than 0.30 are eligible for interpretation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). All canonical factor loadings of six serious leisure characteristics and three dimensions of place attachment were larger than 0.30 which means that all the variables were important to explain the correlation between amateur softball players' traits of serious leisure and their attachment to the place. The result showed that the characteristics of amateur athletes' seriousness about their leisure pursuit are related to their emotional, practical, and social connection with the place. The amateur softball players who have higher serious leisure characteristics tended to have positive attachment to the place. Moreover, within the serious leisure concept, the most important characteristics of amateur softball players' seriousness of their leisure pursuit was strong identity (0.93), followed by unique ethos (0.83) and career contingencies (0.76) of serious leisure qualities. Other three characteristic of serious leisure: perseverance (0.52), efforts (0.63), and career progress (0.51) were relatively less representative as amateur athletes' serious leisure characteristics. In addition, in terms of place attachment, amateur athletes' social bonding (0.98) had the most substantial correlation with their attachment to a specific physical setting, while place identity (0.67) and place dependence (0.58) were relatively less contribute to softball players' attachment to the place.

Figure 1. Canonical Correlation Function between Serious Leisure and Place Attachment



4.0 Conclusion and Discussion

Using canonical correlation analysis, this study found that the rural amateur athletes' systematic pursuit has moderate correlation with the place where they enjoy their chosen leisure activity, and all the serious leisure characteristics of softball players are positively enhance the person-place relationship. The strong identification and unique ethos of serious leisure are two of the strongest indicators reflecting the softball players' seriousness of their leisure pursuit. Similarly, Green and Jones (2005) noted that social identity and unique ethos are key elements for both active and passive sport tourism participants who travel for participating or spectating sport events. Additionally, the nature of team oriented sports, such as softball, are more likely to provide opportunities for amateur athletes to have social interaction with other people, developing sense of belongingness within their team, gaining support systems to overcome difficulties (Pedersen & Seidman, 2004). Social interaction with family and friends is the most important element to facilitate softball players' attachment to the field. The socialization aspect also forms amateurs to connect with and attach to the place (Green & Chalip, 1997). In terms of community recreation programs in rural Oklahoma, if recreation providers could offer special projects/events at the fields or courts, besides regular play, amateur athletes would have more opportunities to interact with teammates, friends, family, or other people in the community which might create personal memories and enhance their attachment to the place even more.

5.0 Citations

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