Pathways to Meaning-Making Through
Leisure-Like Pursuits in Global Contexts

Yoshitaka Iwasaki, Ph.D.
Department of Therapeutic Recreation, College of Health Professions
Temple University

Abstract

This paper incorporates international and multicultural perspectives on meaning-making through leisure-like pursuits, by acknowledging voices of non-western people including Asians, Middle-Easterners, Indigenous persons, Africans, and South Americans, in addition to some dominant Euro-North American perspectives. Based on a literature review and content analysis and synthesis, major pathways linking leisure-like pursuits to meaning-making are identified, specifically, their roles in facilitating: (a) positive emotions and well-being; (b) positive identities, self-esteem, and spirituality; (c) social and cultural connections and a harmony; (d) human strengths and resilience; and (e) learning and human development across the life-span. More generally, however, in people's quest for a meaningful life, the processes of meaning-making through leisure-like engagements involve both remedying the *bad* and enhancing the *good*. Achieving a more balanced understanding of leisure-like engagements and meaning-making as a global phenomenon is implied and advocated.

KEYWORDS: *Culture, globalization, international, leisure, meaning*

Introduction

As with almost all human phenomena, western domination continues in leisure research (Iwasaki, Nishino, Onda, & Bowling, 2007). Western thinking is important and useful; however, in an international scene, the voices of non-western people should be heard, honored, and acknowledged into the global conceptualization of leisure phenomena. To this end, this paper gives explicit and careful attention to non-western cultural contexts in the conceptualization of leisure as a means of generating meanings. This paper intentionally highlights non-western perspectives, although some dominant western ideas are incorporated into understanding of meaning-making mechanisms of leisure from multicultural perspectives in international contexts. I must caution, however, that this paper intentionally uses the term *leisure-like pursuits* to acknowledge some difficulty or problem with employing the term *leisure* to describe leisure-like phenomena engaged by non-western people in non-western contexts. Because language is a culturally-based means of communication, a potential risk of imposing a western-based language (including the term leisure) is recognized throughout this paper.

Leisure can provide opportunities or spaces for meaning-making although different people under varied life circumstances may gain different meanings from leisure (Shaw & Henderson, 2005). About 10 years ago, Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997) suggested that one of the emerging challenges for leisure researchers was to understand how leisure generates or provides meanings. We have advanced such understanding to some extent; however, no systematic integration of knowledge about leisure and meaning-making has previously been published. Specifically, it appears that there is a gap in the current knowledge about meaning-making through leisure concerning, in particular, *how* leisure can help people gain valued meanings.

In this paper, meaning-making is defined broadly as the processes of gaining something important or valuable in life, while the paper focuses on the role of leisure or leisure-like pursuits in meaning-making. Intentionally, this very broad definition is used in order not to miss or eliminate possible mechanisms or processes that may be perceived as ways of meaning-making through leisure-like engagements by non-western people living in non-western contexts.

Given that people strive to find meanings in life (Frankl, 1985), understanding how people gain meanings through leisure-like involvement is an important research agenda. A sense of meaning or purpose is essential to happiness and well-being (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). In defining leisure, Kelly and Freysinger (2000) emphasized that meaning is more important than activity per se, while Shaw (1999) advocated for the importance of examining how people find meanings within social contexts. Furthermore, Juniu and Henderson (2001) suggested that meanings gained from leisure supercede or cut across each of the various dimensions of leisure such as time, activity, and space. In the context of Argentina, Mantero (2000) recognized that leisure is a symbolic and meaningful activity in community life of people. Consequently, meaning-making through leisure has important implications for understanding the contribution of leisure to the quality of life of people and communities (Kleiber, 2001; Stebbins & Graham, 2004). According to World Leisure Association's (2000a) position statement on leisure education and community development, meaningful leisure provides "opportunities for self-actualization and further contribution to the quality of community life" (p. 55).

Commenting on the role of leisure in meaning-making, Hutchinson (2004) argued that "leisure can be generative of a range of personal, familial, social, and cultural meanings," possibly facilitated by "a sense of connection, accomplishment, self/relationship/cultural affirmation, hope, control, etc." (p. 31). Caldwell (2005) identified several intertwined aspects of leisure that can generate meanings such as a context for: self-determined behavior, competence, social relationships, self-reflection and -affirmation, identity development, and transcending negative life events. In his discussion of the developmental value of leisure across the life-span, Kleiber (2001) talked about creating meanings as a key aspect of learning and development, while emphasizing leisure as an important source of meaning-making. He argued that "just keeping busy with no consideration of the meaning of activities can be disintegrative" (p. 9). Major's (2001) study on female runners suggested that valued meanings can be gained from the activity of running through experiencing a sense of accomplishment, social affiliation, and health benefits, as well as a sense of empowerment and control. King (2001) described that people (particularly, women) can find meanings from the activity

of quilting by conveying "powerful personal and social messages through fabric and design" (p. 27) and by making "rhetorical statements about life, religion, politics, and even war" (p. 28).

Iwasaki, MacKay, Mactavish, Ristock, and Bartlett's (2006) study with several marginalized gropus of individuals including Aboriginal persons with diabetes in Winnipeg, Manitoba found that such activities as social gatherings and Aboriginal dancing generated social, cultural, and spiritual meanings in an Indigenous cultural context. Based on her own research and review of the literature on leisure space among disadvantaged groups of women, Wearing (1998) concluded that people from different cultural backgrounds can gain a diverse array of meanings from enriching leisure experiences, and leisure spaces can provide the context for personal, communal, and political growth. Likewise, Henderson and Frelke (2000) suggested that leisure provides a culturally or sub-culturally meaningful space for people (particularly non-dominant groups of individuals such as racial minority women).

This paper incorporates multicultural and international perspectives on meaning-making through leisure-like pursuits, by acknowledging voices of non-western people including Asians, Middle-Easterners, Indigenous persons, Africans, and South Americans, in addition to some dominant Euro-North American perspectives. Based on a literature review and content analysis and synthesis, major pathways linking leisure-like engagement to meaning-making are described to gain a more balanced (rather than heavily dominated by western thinking) understanding of leisure-like involvement and meaning-making as a global phenomenon.

Strategies for Review of Literature and Content Analysis/Synthesis

The World Leisure website was a primary source used to identify published papers and books written from global and international perspectives. World Leisure is a world-wide organization with the mandate to facilitate and advocate for research on leisure in cross-cultural contexts. *World Leisure Journal* is the official journal of this organization; thus, all papers published in this journal between 2000 and 2005 were initially included in the review. Recent books, position papers, and conference proceedings, which have been published or coordinated by the organization, were also included in the initial review. In addition, recent papers (from 2000 to 2005) published in *Journal of Leisure Research, Leisure Sciences, Leisure Studies*, and *Leisure/Loisir* were also reviewed. In general, however, *World Leisure Journal* has published significantly more papers written within non-western contexts than have the other journals.

During the initial selection process, the primary inclusion criterion was that an article or book chapter discussed some aspect of leisure-like phenomenon from a non-western perspective and/or within a non-western context. The secondary inclusion criterion was that an article or book chapter discussed meaning-making and leisure-like engagement including from a western perspective. All the tables of contents (including the titles), abstracts (for journal articles), and book descriptions (for books) were reviewed using these criteria to determine whether each article or book chapter discussed some element of meaning-making through leisure-like pursuits. If it did, the author has reviewed its contents more carefully and thoroughly.

Because this paper aims to emphasize and bring forward non-western perspec-

tives, the author has intentionally looked for ideas written within a non-western context, by considering the representation of different regions of the world. This literature review has then led to include and highlight ideas written from Asian, Middle-Eastern, Indigenous, African, and South American perspectives. Despite this paper's mission to prioritize non-western perspectives, completely eliminating western perspectives is not consistent with the global thrust of the paper. Thus, some dominant Euro-North American perspectives are included to facilitate global and international representations. Beyond the leisure research literature, the author has incorporated some key ideas about meaning-making from non-leisure literature to help better explain psychosocial and cultural aspects of meaning-making particularly within an international context.

During the process of analyzing and integrating ideas gained from the literature review, the key questions being asked included: (a) What aspects of leisure-like phenomena can lead to meaning-making? and (b) How can leisure-like engagement facilitate meaning-making? Thus, the focus has been on identifying the pathways or mechanisms by which leisure-like involvement generates meanings. Specifically, the author has conducted content analysis and synthesis across the articles/papers and book chapters reviewed in order to identify key themes that are considered essential to meaning-making processes through leisure-like pursuits. The author has then documented specific ideas and examples to support each theme in a global and international context.

Results of Content Analysis and Synthesis

Review of the literature and content analysis and synthesis led to the development of a concept map (Figure 1) to illustrate key pathways to meaning-making through leisure-like pursuits in global contexts. The first section presents and describes specific factors or mechanisms by which meaning-making through leisure-like engagements
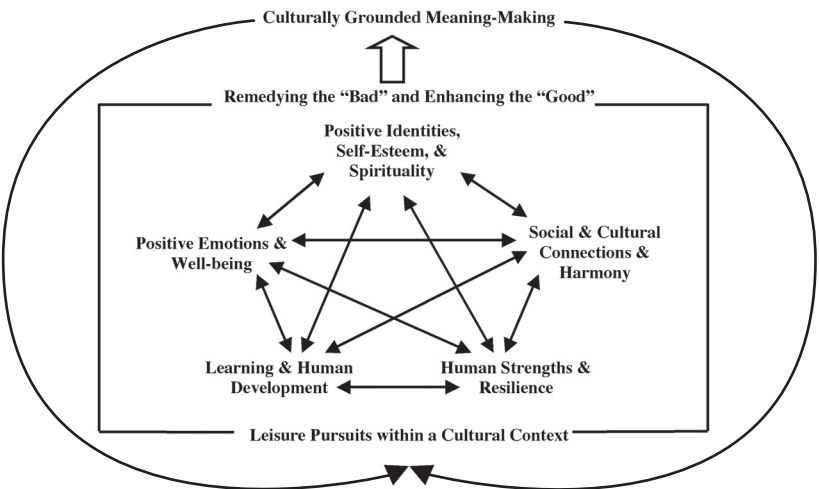

Figure 1. A concept map of pathways to meaning-making through leisure-like phenemena in global contexts

operate, whereas the second section supercedes these specific factors to explain an overarching theme of meaning-making through leisure-like phenomena at a more general level.

Pathways to Meaning-Making through Leisure-Like Pursuits in Global Contexts

The concept map identifies five themes or factors in describing meaning-making mechanisms of leisure-like pursuits including their roles in facilitating: (a) positive emotions and well-being; (b) positive identities, self-esteem, and spirituality; (c) social and cultural connections and a harmony; (d) human strengths and resilience; and (e) learning and human development across the life-span. The concept map presents the proposition that leisure-like engagement provides an opportunity to develop, gain, or experience each of these five factors within a particular cultural context. As depicted in the map, these factors are interconnected with each other, and all of them are concerned with remedying the "bad" and enhancing the "good" (an overarching theme to be explained later). Rather than independently, the combination and integration of many (or, possibly, all) of these factors help people gain valued meanings through leisure. This conceptualization emphasizes that recognizing the *cultural context* in which the pathways of meaning-making through leisure operate is important because culture plays a key role in facilitating meaning-making processes. These pathways are considered circular and dynamic because engagement in leisure within a particular cultural context both facilitates and is influenced by culturally grounded meaning-making, as illustrated in the concept map. The following section describes five specific factors or mechanisms by which meaning-making through leisure-like pursuits can operate.

Positive emotions and well-being experienced from leisure-like pursuits.

One pathway to meaning-making through leisure-like engagement appears to be its role in promoting positive emotions and well-being. According to Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) and Hutchinson (2004), people can find positive meanings within ordinary daily events and activities (including leisure) by discovering positive values, having positive experiences, and gaining a sense of well-being from these events and activities. This idea is consistent with a wide range of evidence documented in the literature in various cultural contexts.

For example, Yau and Packer's (2002) focus-group study with older adults in Hong Kong emphasized a meditative effect of T'ai Chi to enhance emotional and mental well-being, including greater cognitive function, and a stronger belief in the ability to take active control over life, emotions, and health. Also, Gong (1998) and Yang (1998) suggested that facilitating tranquility and peace of mind for many Chinese people is an essential element of such activities as hiking in the mountains, visiting a temple, and drinking tea or wine, which is tied to understanding the meaning of life. Many Chinese enjoy spending tranquil moments outdoors, appreciating the nature to gain true rest and relaxation, and experiencing the harmony between their inner spirit and the objective world (Wang & Stringer, 2000; Yu & Berryman, 1996). Importantly, these activities (e.g., T'ai Chi, hiking, drinking tea) take place within a unique Chinese cultural context and facilitate positive emotions and well-being in culturally relevant ways. Particularly, experiencing tranquility, peace of mind, and harmony between inner spirit and outer world has a Chinese cultural connotation, whereas taking control over life

seems to have a universal significance (Bandura, 1989) beyond Chinese culture. All of these elements generated through leisure-like engagement can lead to meaning-making. For example, spending tranquil moments in wilderness provide opportunities to gain spiritual meanings for many Chinese (Wang & Stringer).

Due to an increased interest in and a rising demand for alternative medical treatments, health tourism (i.e., travel for health and well-being) is a growing industry in the world (Stathi & Avgerinos, 2001). For instance, spa baths that have the therapeutic power of thermal waters are popular destinations for health tourism in Greece, Germany, Italy, and France. Such popularity and growth in health tourism is understandable because the natural environment affects health and well-being in a positive way (Stathi & Avgerinos). In North America, Sukenik, Flusser, and Abu-Shakra (1999) found that natural cures, including spa therapies, contribute to better health, well-being, and quality of life.

There is evidence that traditional, cultural, and spiritual practices (e.g., prayers or meditation, pow-wows, memorial feasts, and ceremonies) of urban American Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN) persons can act as a buffer against stress and help them maintain well-being (Balsam et al., 2004). These practices seem to have a leisure-like element (e.g., dance and music in pow-wows), and positive emotions and well-being experienced from these activities appear to facilitate culturally relevant meaning-making (e.g., spiritual meanings) within a Native American context.

In his analysis of national population surveys in Japan, Harada (2004) documented the shift toward a more leisure-oriented lifestyle. Specifically, many Japanese have increasingly acknowledged leisure-like pursuits as a most important aspect of their lives in order to satisfy their need for more balanced and enjoyable life, and greater well-being and life quality. Public interest in leisure and recreation-like activities has continued to grow as facilitated by government policies such as resort developments and shorter working hours.

In Israel, Ritsner et al. (2005) found that leisure-like activities were significantly and negatively associated with depression and emotional distress among Jewish or Arab Israelis with mental illness. Not only were these activities linked to positive emotions and well-being (i.e., lower depression and distress), but they also provided an opportunity to find meanings by counteracting negative states in a culturally appropriate way. Finding positive meanings can also have significant therapeutic effects, such as recovery from depressed mood and distress and improvements in health and well-being (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998; Keltner & Bonanno, 1997). Culturally relevant forms of leisure-like engagement can provide an opportunity for experiencing positive emotions and facilitating well-being in a culturally meaningful way.

Positive identities, self-esteem, and spirituality gained from leisure-like pursuits.

Another pathway to meaning-making through leisure-like involvement appears to be its role in facilitating positive identities, self-esteem, and spirituality. Generally, self-esteem is a construct related to how an individual values oneself (Porter & Washington, 1993). According to Hewitt (2002), self-esteem is an element of a culture, and "the language of self-esteem translates deeply rooted cultural issues into personal terms" (p. 139).

The review of literature shows that leisure-like pursuits can provide a context for people with different cultural backgrounds to enhance self and social identities,

which are tightly linked to self-esteem and spirituality. Salzman and Halloran (2004) suggested how engagements in Indigenous activities (e.g., music, arts, crafts, literature, and traditional ceremonies and festivals) by Native Hawaiians, Alaskan Natives, and Aboriginal Australians facilitate identity and spirituality, inspire stronger pride and self-esteem, and help to gain cultural meanings. Culturally appropriate forms of leisure-like activities (e.g., music, arts) can promote positive identities, spirituality, and self-esteem, which are essential to gaining meanings in a Native cultural context.

Based on reviews of the literature and available statistics on leisure-like behavior in Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, Martin and Mason (2003) highlighted the growing importance placed on leisure-like activities by Muslims. The authors emphasized that religious festivals and activities are a means of promoting cultural identity, spirituality, and self-esteem and that "a uniquely Muslim state of mind and its potential influence on leisure behaviour" (p. 45) is important. Spiritual forms of leisure among Muslims appear essential to gaining positive identities and self-esteem, which have connection to meaning-making (e.g., cultural and spiritual meanings) in an Islamic context.

Sheykhi (2004) also observed that a growing number of Muslim tourists from the Middle East, south, central, and even east Asian countries visit Islamic monuments in Iran. Sheykhi suggested that this form of religious and cultural tourism can provide an opportunity to enhance cultural identity, spirituality, self-esteem, and life quality of many different population groups beyond Muslim tourists. Gaining cultural and spiritual meanings seems to be a critically important outcome of this form of tourism.

In Boca-Barracas, Argentina, Moore and Cosco (2000) examined the role of women in supporting "rich lives in poor neighbourhood," by focusing on culture and children's play. The study highlighted the critical aspect of immediate and extended families and supportive institutions in providing spaces for play and cultural activities that enrich cultural and spiritual identities of children from low income families. The findings of the study demonstrated that culturally relevant forms of play and leisure are important to promote positive identities and self-esteem of these Argentinean children.

Amusa et al.'s (2001) study on young Batswanans (aged 15 to 30 years old) showed that leisure-like engagement is an essential part of life. The authors suggested that participation in indigenous games, pastimes, and sports is important to restore and maintain cultural and spiritual values and identities and self-esteem among its youth to counter social problems such as poverty, and to improve the quality of their lives. Finding meanings and values of life is a critical outcome from this process in a unique cultural context of Batswana. Clearly, leisure-like activities can provide an opportunity to facilitate positive identities, spirituality, and self-esteem in a culturally meaningful way.

Social and cultural connections and a harmony generated from leisure-like engagement.

Another pathway to meaning-making through leisure-like pursuits involves social and cultural connections and a harmony in interpersonal and community contexts. A number of culturally grounded examples identified from my review of literature show how these connections are developed through leisure-like activities and how they contribute to meaning-making. For example, the central role of family ties has been documented in many Asian regions such as in China (Yau & Packer, 2002), India (Nagla, 2005), Singapore (Yuen, 1996), and Taiwan (Leung et al., 2004), as well as in

the Middle East (Kousha & Mohseni, 1997; Martin & Mason, 2003) and Indigenous (Thompson & Gifford, 2000).

Speaking of the importance of tea for Chinese people, Jennings (2001) described that "every Chinese city has teahouses and plazas. Here sitting around is a sacred subculture. This scene provides a release from the humdrum. Tea rules the leisure scene, and locals believe it nurtures health" (p. 76). Having tea for Chinese is sacred and highly valued, conveys culturally relevant meanings, and constitutes a way of life as an important leisurely routine (Jennings). In India, Nagla (2005) described the role of dining among extended families as a "leisurely collective ritual" (p. 25). Similar to tea for Chinese, dining in Indian villages has cultural and spiritual significance and provides an opportunity for meaning-making in a family, community, and cultural setting. Sivan, Robertson, and Walker's (2004) large-scale survey in Hong Kong reported that social activities of eating out and going to tea houses are among the top leisure activities. This popularity in modern Hong Kong society cannot be explained without recognizing the importance of culturally bounded ties among family and friends. In an urban community setting, Yuen's (1996) study in Singapore reported that urban parks provide shared leisure-like opportunities to build social and cultural connections.

Also, Kousha and Mohseni's (1997) study revealed that life satisfaction among Iranian women in urban areas is directly linked to their satisfaction with leisure-like experiences. It was also found that gaining social meanings from spending quality time with family and friends is an important outcome of leisure-like activities for those Iranian women. Kloeze (2001) explored the nature and role of leisure-like engagement in the lives of Turkish families in Dutch cities. She found that even after several generations, these Turkish families were still strongly oriented toward their original cultural traditions, values, and ways of life. Their free time was spent frequently with family members within the neighborhood or city (e.g., meadows and parks), or even visiting family in the original homeland, Turkey. These culturally-oriented leisure-like activities were valued and meaningful for Turkish families although gender-based power imbalance was evident in their lives including a leisure-like domain. For example, mosque and café were a popular place for leisure, but only for Turkish men, not for women (Kloeze).

As an example of meaning making in Indigenous culture, Lopez et al. (2002) suggested that "Native American spirituality involves the belief that all things are connected and are worthy of respect" (p. 705). Often, the lives of indigenous peoples are guided by seeking harmony and balance among interrelated thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and the nature (Lopez et al.). Also, in an indigenous cultural context, Thompson and Gifford (2000) highlighted the importance of both family social system (active role in family; e.g., preparing or sharing of family food) and community social system (active role in community; e.g., active maintenance of links with extended family and the environment). They discussed that these systems can "protect the individual through real and symbolic connection to family, community, land, and past, and therefore decrease an individual's vulnerability" (p. 1464). Thus, for indigenous persons, the interdependence and connectedness among family, community, and the environment are essential to survival in life and help to gain meanings of life.

From a philosophical perspective, it is important to acknowledge that the dominant value in each culture affects leisure-like phenomena and people's quest for mean-

ing. Taoism, for example, strongly influences the lives of many Chinese and their lei-sure-like engagements, as it values connections to nature, holistic wellness, traditional and martial arts, literature, painting and poetry, and festivals (Wang & Stringer, 2000). Hinduism underscores the harmony among the body (action), mind (thought), and spirit (awareness), as reflected in yoga as "a discipline for the quietening of mental modifications" to experience "true self" (Sharma, 2002, p. 19). A positive association between participation in yoga and life quality was found in Damodaran et al.'s (2002) study in Bombay. These dominant values (e.g., Taoism, Hinduism) in various cultural contexts have a strong impact on people's lives including the process of meaning-mak-ing through leisure-like pursuits. Highlighting the importance of interdependence and harmony in meaning-making processes, Baumeister and Vohs (2002) argued that "the essence of meaning is connection" (p. 608), and Lopez et al. (2002) suggested that seeing "the possible connections among things, events, and relationships" (p. 705) is important to achieve life meanings. Ryff and Singer (2000) emphasized that having quality ties with others is "a core feature of quality living across cultures and across time" (p. 30).

Human strengths and resilience shown through leisure.

Another key pathway of meaning-making through leisure-like engagement is that it reveals, utilizes, or promotes personal, collective, and cultural strengths of people to deal with life challenges. For instance, Salzman and Halloran (2004) and Wearing (1998) emphasized that despite the oppressive colonial systems historically affecting Indigenous peoples throughout the world, these individuals gain cultural and spiritual meanings by involving in Indigenous music and dance, arts and crafts, storytelling and literature, traditional rituals, and the use of humor and laughter. Such involvement is instrumental to reassure the strengths and resilience of these individuals and their communities, and becomes a basis for finding the meanings of life. Lopez et al. (2002) argued that identifying the diverse strengths of individuals and cultural groups and valuing diverse meanings of the good life can facilitate optimal functioning of indi-viduals and communities. Clearly, there is the need to acknowledge human diversity including racial, ethnic, and cultural issues, which strongly influence the meanings of life and the clues to the good life (Lopez et al.).

The central role of human strengths and resilience in meaning-making is consis-tent with Ryff and Singer's (2003) argument that deep and rich meanings of life can be found when individuals face and overcome substantial challenges or difficulties in life. In line with this argument, Kousha and Mohseni's (1997) study on Iranian women suggested that leisure-like opportunities are important for these women to experience a sense of satisfaction with and enjoyment in life and to deal with or overcome social and cultural barriers in a male-dominated society. Those Iranian women described the act of shopping, which not only involved spending time with family and friends, but it also showed women's economic independence and power. Participants in Yau and Packer's (2002) study indicated that T'ai Chi as a form of Chinese martial art provided an opportunity for deep meditation to develop an inner calmness and strength, which helped them deal with challenges in life.

In his participatory action research that used documentary photography and sto-rytelling, Graziano (2004) found that gay men and lesbians in South Africa showed

signs of strength, hope, and optimism despite the prevalence of oppression and adversity in their lives. Particularly, he reported that interactions with significant others in such places as Black churches played a key role in challenging discrimination, fighting social injustice, honoring life, and maintaining hope. One participant in his study mentioned, "I am satisfied with the happiness I have. I will remain strong" (p. 311) showing her/his strength and resilience. Also, Bowleg et al.'s (2003) study revealed resilience among racial minority lesbian women. For example, several participants emphasized the uniqueness and privilege of being a Black lesbian, while others valued the freedom or liberation that they experienced (e.g., through social leisure activities) rather than following socially prescribed stigma. As shown above, regardless of the types of activities including shopping for Iranian women, T'ai Chi for Chinese, Black churches for South African gay men, and social leisure for Black lesbians, a key factor for meaning-making through leisure appears to be reassuring the strengths of individuals and their groups/communities.

Wearing's (1998) notion of *leisure space* is also relevant to explaining the strengths and resilience of people in various cultural contexts world-wide. She introduced personal narratives about the lived experiences of Aboriginal women in Australia including such activities as sewing, craft circle, storytelling, poetry, and painting. She showed that these activities provided a personal or collective space for affirming self-worth, autonomy, pride, and strength; for releasing stress and tension; and for gaining community spirit.

Wearing (1998) also described that Bosnian women refugees created a space for themselves to engage in voluntary activities, knitting, and sewing, which provided a context to gain meanings for survival, self-respect, and communal support. One Bosnian woman refugee commented, "I discovered so much about myself. I am a strong woman. When I look at other refugees, I see many strong women" (p. 172). Wearing suggested that leisure has potential for empowerment both individually and collectively and, ultimately, for social change, and through this empowerment and transformation process people can gain important meanings of life.

Learning and human development through leisure-like engagement across the life-span.

The contribution of leisure-like activities to learning and development across the life-span is another pathway to meaning-making. Kleiber (2001) suggested that leisure offers an important context for learning and human growth to deal with a series of developmental challenges. In this developmental process, leisure enables people to gain meanings by providing an opportunity for feeling capable, defining self in relation to others, connecting with others, and contributing to others or society. Lloyd and Little's (2005) study on Australian women who participated in an outdoor adventure recreation program provided evidence about the role of leisure in learning and development, as illustrated by one person's comment: "You understand yourself better, and you then understand other people better" (p. 170). Self-discovery and understanding others seemed to be important factors to make one's life more meaningful (Lloyd & Little).

Spector and Cohen-Gewerc (2001) argued that in Israeli culture people pursue a journey of discovering their uniqueness through leisure-like pursuits to facilitate human development in a meaningful way. Amusa et al. (2001) emphasized the im-

portance of leisure education for young Batswanans including the use of Indigenous games and sports as a developmental tool, and their contribution to strengthening cultural identity and life quality. Also, Sheykhi (2004) discussed the role of leisure-like activities among Iranian adolescents in facilitating creativity, exploration, and education. Speaking of leisure-like engagement as a symbolic activity for people in Argentina, Mantero (2000) noted that such engagement provides a cultural space that is essential to promote personal and social growth and development. For people such as Israelis, Batswanans, Iranians, and Argentineans (as shown above), culturally grounded forms of leisure-like activities appear critical to learning and development throughout one's life through gaining some valued meanings.

These ideas about the linkage of leisure-like activities to meaning-making and human development are highlighted in position statements by the World Leisure Association (2000ab)—i.e., meaningful leisure opportunities are important for learning, self-determination, self-identity, and self-actualization; building community; and enhancing the quality of personal and community life. Thus, leisure-like engagement can provide an opportunity for learning and human development, which are a basis for meaning-making and life-quality-enhancement.

Quest for Meaningful Life: Remedying the "Bad" and Enhancing the "Good"

The previous section has described specific mechanisms by which meaning-making through leisure operates—these are key factors or elements of leisure-like pursuits that facilitate meaning-making processes. This next section transcends these specific elements to explain an overarching theme of meaning-making through leisure-like phenomena at a more general level.

Baumeister and Vohs (2002) contended that "meaning is powerful both for remedying the bad and for enhancing the good" (p. 616) because meaning-making is integral to happiness, fulfillment, and other forms of positive well-being (e.g., identity, self-worth), as well as reducing suffering or coping with adversity. They emphasized, "A consistent theme throughout meaning-making research is that the people who achieve the greatest benefits are those who transform their perceptions of circumstances from being unfortunate to fortunate" (p. 614). The ideas of remedying the bad and enhancing the good, and of transformation from adversity to prosperity, seem particularly relevant to leisure-like phenomena as a means of dealing with and transforming life difficulties cross-culturally, beyond simply producing positive outcomes. Although these processes are evident in many of the literature reviewed above, additional literature is provided below to further support this contention.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2003) gave voices to Palestinian mothers who had lost a child to suicide bombing. These women participated in an empowerment group (termed a "voice therapy") that provided a safe context for them to express their feelings. Shalhoub-Kevorkian found that building connections among Palestinian women who have suffered in a similar way was an essential part of healing and recovery. This group provided these women with a family context to cope with their losses as illustrated by the following quote, "when I see the family content, it eases my pain." In this family-like context, songs, gatherings, food, talks, praying, poetry, and writings took place. Shalhoub-Kevorkian described that "despite the enormous trauma inflicted upon these

mothers, and the continued incapacitation by political and social institutions, they did not break down" (p. 404). This empowerment group then created a safe space, filled with care, love, support, protection, and hope (Shalhoub-Kevorkian). Importantly, the key process experienced by these Palestinian women was to transform life adversity through empowerment-oriented leisurely activities in a culturally relevant family-like context. This transformation process involved both healing from and remedying the trauma (e.g., easing pain) and producing positive outcomes (e.g., hope, support, love).

Marafa and Yung's (2004) study in Hong Kong showed that outdoor recreation helped people deal with the SARS epidemic. This study showed that people attempted to withstand any direct or indirect effects of the SARS epidemic, which led to a growing awareness of health and environmental issues. Many individuals maintained a healthy lifestyle, a large part of which involved outdoor recreation activities. Both dealing with adversity and promoting positive outcomes (e.g., healthy lifestyle) through outdoor recreation were evident from this research. In another study with Chinese elderly in Taiwan, Leung et al. (2004) found that leisurely activity is a key contributor to life quality. As a way of dealing with aging processes, Chinese elderly expressed their vitality (as a positive outcome) by engaging in dancing, Karaoke, Tai-Chi, and drawing. Stebbins and Graham's (2004) edited book highlighting the international volunteer scene from Britain, Brazil, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, and USA, lent extensive support to the idea of volunteering as leisure in the forms of serious, casual, or project-based. They showed that volunteering can provide a variety of benefits including the promotion of individual and community life quality, as well as a means of coping with life adversity or challenge.

Mantero's (2000) study in Argentina suggested that as a symbolic activity, leisure-like engagement generates and integrates meanings of community life. He emphasized that a culturally contextualized space is an essential context for people to enjoy leisure-like activities. He also argued that in these cultural spaces that are meaningful to Argentineans, leisure-like engagement can provide an opportunity to rest, regain balance, and facilitate growth and development at both personal and social levels, as a means of dealing with life challenges. Also, the literature review by Bramante (2004) indicated that people in Brazil value meaningful leisure-like experiences as a "significant human life dimension" (p. 225) to both manage adversity and promote well-being. In a longitudinal study of 324 older Swedes, surveyed in 1981 and 1992, Silverstein and Parker (2002) found that leisure activities helped them adapt to their transition to old age and enhance life quality. Again, leisure involved both dealing with life difficulties/challenges and gaining positive outcomes (i.e., quality of life).

The role of spirituality in Indigenous peoples' lives is also relevant to the idea of leisure-like phenomena as a contributor to remedying the bad and enhancing the good. For example, McAvoy, McDoland, and Carlson (2003) found that First Nations people in British Columbia, Canada hold "deep emotional, symbolic and spiritual meanings of places that … influence their lifestyles, environment, and perceived quality of life" (p. 100). Specifically, the spiritual nature of life and the land, as well as the collective orientation of Aboriginal peoples were highlighted as essential and pervasive to all aspects of life including leisure-like activities. Spiritually meaningful leisurely activities helped them deal with adversity and promote positive outcomes (e.g., identity, gaining purpose and value in life). Previously, Fox and colleagues (1998) noted that "leisure

is integral to Aboriginal culture and cannot be separated from the spiritual, cultural, social, and physical connections" (p. 152) essential to Aboriginal peoples. The holistic nature of Indigenous peoples' lives, including its spiritual and collective orientations, seems essential to survival (e.g., via coping with adversity) and thriving (e.g., via gaining positive outcomes) within an Indigenous cultural context. As highlighted by McAvoy et al. (2003) and Fox et al. (1998), leisure-like engagement represents one part of the holistic and interconnected system of the lives among Indigenous peoples.

In summary, remedying the bad and enhancing the good are conceptualized as an overarching theme of meaning-making through leisure-like pursuits at a general level cross-culturally. This overarching theme transcends the specific themes of pathways to meaning-making through leisure-like engagement described earlier.

Concluding Remarks

To facilitate a better understanding of how leisure-like activities can help people gain meanings, this paper explicitly incorporates international and multicultural perspectives, by acknowledging the insights of non-western people including Asians, Middle-Easterners, Indigenous persons, Africans, and South Americans, in addition to some dominant Euro-North American perspectives. A number of specific examples and illustrations to support each pathway described in this paper have intentionally been drawn from many non-western contexts to achieve a more balanced understanding of leisure-like phenomena and meaning-making.

The review of literature provided therein from international and cross-cultural perspectives, along with its content analysis and synthesis, show that leisure-like activities can help people gain valued meanings in various ways. Meaning-making through leisure-like engagement can then lead to the promotion of life quality in various cultural contexts (Juniu & Henderson, 2001; Stebbins & Graham, 2004). As depicted in the concept map (Figure 1), these five pathways of meaning-making through leisure-like pursuits can function in interconnected ways, rather than in an independent way. Many, if not all, appear to be combined and linked together as interrelated pathways or mechanisms to facilitate the role of leisurely engagement in generating valued meanings. For example, culturally appropriate forms of enjoyable leisure-like activities can provide an opportunity to experience positive emotions and well-being; positive identities, self-esteem, and spirituality; and social and cultural connections and a harmony; as well as to find and utilize human strengths and facilitate human development. It is, however, important to stress that in people's quest for a meaningful life, these pathways simultaneously involve both "remedying the bad" (e.g., dealing with stressful or traumatic experiences, reducing suffering) and "enhancing the good" (e.g., promoting life satisfaction and the quality of life). As shown in the last section above (i.e., *Quest for Meaningful Life*), culturally grounded forms of leisure-like engagement can play an important role in facilitating these *dual* processes to transform adversity in life in order to promote hope, identity, spirituality, pride, harmony, well-being, and human strength and development. It is also important to acknowledge the circular and dynamic processes involving the pathways of meaning-making through leisure-like pursuits because these pursuits within a cultural context appear to both generate and be facilitated by culturally oriented meaning-making.

Despite the contribution of leisure-like activities to meaning-making world-wide, we should not ignore the inequalities in our power-based society (Sasidharan, 2002). Speaking of "the socio-cultural construction of gender as a 'hidden constraint' that shapes women's everyday life and leisure," Juniu and Henderson (2001) indicated that "an understanding of the meanings, value, and deviance of leisure within the social context in which it emerges may be far more useful than definitional consistency" (p. 8). Gender issues are further intersected with the other power-laden socially and culturally constructed concepts including race/ethnicity, class, disability/ability, age, and sexual orientation (Garnets, 2002). Thus, the reality of power imbalance and inequalities should be acknowledged and appropriately addressed politically and practically. Particularly, providing culturally relevant and meaningful leisure-like opportunities for less privileged population groups world-wide is clearly a top priority. To achieve this important goal, however, it is necessary and crucial to understand the complex and power-based nature of people's lives including the role of leisure-like pursuits.

To support this contention, Kousha and Mohseni's (1997) study on leisure-like experiences and their link to life satisfaction among Iranian women suggested that "elements that affect Iranian women's satisfaction are complex; they are the byproduct of the interaction of complex personal, traditional, and societal forces that shape women's role in the society" (p. 345). Also, speaking of Native Hawaiians, Alaska Natives, and Aboriginal Australians, Salzman and Halloran (2004) emphasized pervasive effects of colonization on the lives of these Indigenous peoples, whereas culturally relevant forms of leisure-like phenomena did play an important role in dealing with these traumatic experiences. Likewise, Palestinian women in Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2003) study experienced "the continued incapacitation by political and social institutions" although "they did not break down" in a passive and helpless way—rather, they proactively became "creators of safety nets" (p. 404) and demonstrated their strengths in the company of other women through engaging in such collective activities as songs, gatherings, praying, poetry, and writings.

Although this paper has aimed to highlight perspectives of leisure-like engagement and meaning-making in non-dominant cultural contexts beyond Euro-North American perspectives, there is clearly imbalance with respect to our understanding of leisure-like activities and related phenomena in a global, international context. Thus, a more systematic and intensive effort is needed to address the realities of lives among non-dominant groups of people world-wide. One such effort involves a culturally grounded examination of the role of leisure-like phenomena in meaning-making, which has implications for the enhancement of life quality among people in various cultural contexts. The voices of these people around the world should be respectfully acknowledged and brought forward to facilitate empowerment and positive social change in culturally meaningful ways. As emphasized by Shin and Rutkowski (2003), "quality, like beauty, lies in the eyes of the beholder" (p. 511).

More specifically, commenting on the importance of gaining insights into local people's life stories and folk knowledge, Hutchinson (2004) suggested:

Understanding the context and meaning of leisure requires attention to the particular life story that is evolving for an affected individual and how disruption in that personal narrative is resolved. Thus, the meanings that people create from their experiences in leisure, even in the face of illness or injury, may be best understood in relation to their life stories. (p. 29)

Particularly, researchers should give more explicit and careful attention to the central role of culture in meaning-making through leisure-like pursuits. We, as leisure researchers, have the responsibility to sincerely and respectfully listen to and incorporate the life stories and folk knowledge of non-dominant groups of people world-wide into the conceptualizations of leisure-like phenomena in a global context.

Of various approaches to leisure research, the usefulness of the Benefits Approach to Leisure (BAL) (Driver & Bruns, 1999) has been demonstrated across many aspects of leisure studies and services. The reader may argue that the concepts and ideas presented in this paper are within the framework of the BAL. As the author, I would like to respond by emphasizing that meaning-making through leisure-like engagement appears to be a broader and more integrative concept than benefits of leisure. Meaning-making seems to be an overarching framework or orientation in life and to supercede the notion of benefits, which tends to be an academic and technical terminology (e.g., cost-benefit analysis). Consequently, more research on meaning-making and leisure-like phenomena for a variety of population groups world-wide is warranted.

Another key rationale for the use of a meaning-focused approach to leisure research is that the term *meaning-making* appears to fit more adequately to global and international contexts across cultural boundaries than do the term *benefits* (which are a predominantly western construct). More specifically, the idea of benefits seems to have a closer reference to an individualistic western orientation, whereas the notion of meaning-making appears to have greater cross-cultural relevance because finding meanings of life seems to a valued aim/purpose of life for various cultural groups globally (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Frankl, 1985). Therefore, the concept of meaning-making through leisure-like pursuits may potentially evolve more from international and global perspectives than from western (or, more specifically, American) ideas, which have historically dominated in leisure research. This paper then advocates the need to examine meaning-making processes through culturally grounded leisure-like pursuits as a key global research agenda.

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