

**“Netflix and Cope”: Down Time as a Potential Form of Coping and Self-Regulation**

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**Abstract**

Leisure and social activities have been positively correlated with subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Newman, Tay, & Dienzer, 2013; Kelly, Steinkamp, & Kelly, 1987). Although leisure has also been recognized as an important coping strategy, less is known about the specific forms of leisure that youth use to cope with adversity and especially how less structured "unwinding" activities contribute to coping. Through qualitative analysis of focus group and cognitive interview transcripts, this poster addresses the potential of unstructured leisure, or unwinding, for promoting resilience and self-regulation. Participants frequently reported using leisure activities as a coping strategy in their day-to-day lives. Leisure was described as both an active coping strategy for acute adversities and a maintenance behavior for daily hassles. Examples of types of leisure and the potential for avoidance is explored, as are implications for future research.

**Introduction**

• Leisure can be defined as time not occupied by obligations or work. The current literature frequently focuses only on overall amount of time spent in leisure (Newman, Tay, & Dienzer, 2013), with little consideration of preferences for different activities or other specifics.

• Leisure activities are often associated with higher levels of autonomy, mastery, meaning-making, or social affiliation (Newman, Tay, & Dienzer, 2013).

• Previous research has conceptualized leisure as a coping strategy, particularly as unwinding (Kleiber, Hutchinson, & Williams, 2002) or a “palliative care strategy” (Iwasaki, Mactavish, & MacKay, 2005), yet research often fails to identify concrete activities or leisure strategies that youth actually use today. Furthermore, current research often neglects more passive forms of leisure, such as listening to music or watching TV or Netflix, despite their popularity with youth.

• This study focuses on the self-care or unwinding components of many leisure activities, with a goal of investigating how youth use leisure to cope, as well as the desired outcome of their self-care strategies. Gender patterns in leisure and the potential for avoidance in the use of leisure to cope are also explored.

**Method**

Participants: 18 youth participated in 4 focus groups and 52 caregivers participated in 4 focus groups from rural Tennessee. Participants were 65.7% female. The majority of the sample identified as White/European American (non-Latino) (81.4%), followed by African American/Black (non-Latino) (14.3%), Latino/a (1.4%), Asian American (non-Latino) (1.4%), and reports of being more than one race (1.4%).

Cognitive interviews included 24 participants from Tennessee and Georgia, including adolescents aged 12-17 (54.2%) and parents (45.8%). Most (79.2%) were female. A majority of our interview sample identified as Black or African American (non-Hispanic) (62.5%), followed by White/European American (non-Hispanic) (33.3%), and Hispanic or Latino (4.2%).

Procedure: Participants were recruited through community organizations serving children and families. In semi-structured focus groups and interviews, participants discussed how they or their children cope, and their regulatory, interpersonal, and meaning-making strengths. Organizations received a stipend for their time and use of their facilities. Focus groups and interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and were audiotaped and then transcribed. All procedures had IRB approval.

**Analysis:** Transcripts were analyzed using grounded theory analysis.

**Results**

Active Leisure

“Workout. Run for a long time. Put the ear buds in and go.” – Adult Male

“What I like to do is play basketball. [My son] does basketball. He fishes.” – Adult Female

“I do like working out a lot and so, I like taking baths. I like hanging out with my friends, that’s usually what I do to relax, not what I do to fill up my time.” – Female Adolescent

“I do a crafts project or something. Or when I have my friends, we will go ice-skating or bowling.” – Adolescent Female

“She likes to ride her bike, and she likes to play basketball. She has things that she does to kind of just relax and unwind.” – Adult Female

“He fishes and he works out with his brother and their friends. They do stuff together. They’ll go out riding.” – Adult Male

Restorative Leisure

“I like to be still, and just go in my own place.” – Adult Female

“Drive. That’s something that relieves stress in me and gives me time to think.” – Adolescent Male

“My little girl, when she gets mad or she gets in trouble, she goes and sits in the bedroom by herself and reads a book...” – Adult Male

“If I really want to clear my head, I sit down and open a book, and whatever pops up in my head, draw it, write it.” – Adolescent Male

“If I’m like upset or I go out there and just like sit down on the pasture... You’re out there alone and you just let everything go...” – Adolescent Female

“If she’s had a bad day, she’ll rant for a moment, and then she’ll be okay, but then she’ll start listening to music and then be dancing, and it’s all over.” – Adult Female

Avoidant Leisure

“I shut myself out and just have to go away.” – Adolescent Female

“I’d get on my couch and I’d start playing my games. And that’s what my family hates, that I would tune them out and get on and game.” – Adult Female

“I just got in my room and I shut my door and I watch Netflix on my phone and just block the world out.” – Adolescent Female

“When I listen to music, I turn it up all the way, so I don’t have to hear nothing else.” – Adolescent Female

**Discussion**

• Participants described using three types of leisure as forms of coping: (1) active leisure, often including physical activity, (2) restorative leisure, usually a passive activity used to intentionally reset or recharge, (3) avoidant strategies, often passive activities, but with the purpose of shutting everything else out.

• In some cases, avoidant leisure could be adaptive, particularly for youth. For example, an attempt to “just block the world out” may be the best and most adaptive way to cope with a difficult or turbulent home environment. Further research should be conducted to determine the differences between avoidant and adaptive coping mechanisms through leisure.

• In concordance with Iwasaki et al.’s (2005) findings, gender stereotypes and expectations seemed to shape some of the specific activities mentioned: with males often describing active leisure (e.g. sports and physical activity), and females often describing relaxing, restorative leisure (e.g. taking a bath or enjoying nature). However, there were counterexamples to each, potentially due to less rigid gender norms or the wide variety of activities in which youth participate during and after school.

• Future research should investigate how different activities and types of leisure are related to certain outcomes, such as coping, self-regulation, levels of avoidance, and capacity for resilience. We are developing a scale to measure this form of self-care and are particularly interested in whether using multiple forms of leisure is more advantageous.

• Additionally, the value of these types of leisure as both an active coping strategy and as preventative, self-care should be explored, particularly for applications in clinical settings.

**References**


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Analysis:

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This project was supported by Award No. 2015-R2-CX-0004, awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this exhibition are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.