

Leisure and Recreation Involvement in the Context of Healing from Trauma

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Abstract

Trauma (e.g., abuse, war trauma) has a lasting impact on individuals and exerts negative effects on thinking, feeling, and behavior. This study used *Leisure Connections*, a leisure-based psycho-educational group, as a context to examine people's perceptions of leisure and recreation involvement and how these perceptions change during the process of healing from trauma. Reported are the results of the Assessment of Leisure and Recreation Involvement (LRI; Ragheb, 2002) and qualitative findings from interviews with people who participated in *Leisure Connections* ($n = 13$; 9 women and 4 men). Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed: (a) the disconnection between the LRI and people's felt experience of leisure, (b) alterations in people's intellectual understanding of leisure, (c) affective shifts in leisure experiences, and (d) behavioral themes revealing a readiness and resistance to change. Discussion of LRI scores in relation to these themes furthers understanding of the role of leisure in the processes of coping, healing, and transcending the effects of trauma.

KEYWORDS: *abuse, healing, involvement, leisure, recovery, trauma*

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² For additional information about *Leisure Connections* please refer to Griffin, J. & Arai, S. (in press). A program logic model of Leisure Connections: Recreation therapy in the context of trauma. Forthcoming in the *Therapeutic Recreation Ontario (TRO) Annual 2008*.

Leisure and Recreation Involvement in the Context of Healing from Trauma

This article focuses on leisure and recreation involvement in the lives of people who have experienced trauma. Trauma is the result of life-threatening or emotionally overwhelming events generally beyond the scope of normal human experience (e.g., violence associated with war, a serious motor vehicle accident, or abuse-related trauma including physical, sexual and emotional forms of childhood and adult abuse) and places immense physical and psychological stress on an individual (Matsakis, 1996). Women outnumber men 9:1 in the experience of trauma (Statistics Canada, 1993). The General Social Survey (GSS) in Canada reported a prevalence of 11.6% for lifetime sexual abuse among women over 15 years of age (Cohen & McLean, 2003), although measures of childhood trauma and sexual abuse are often underreported due to the sensitive nature of disclosing traumatic events (Grella, Stein, & Greenwell, 2005; International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, 2007). While relatively equal proportions of women and men experience physical or sexual violence by a common-law or marital partner, men and women experience very different types of spousal violence and the impact of the violence is often more significant for women than men (Charman et al., 2006).

Trauma is “an event that continues to exert a negative effect on thinking (cognition), feeling (affect), and behavior long after the event is in the past” (Haskell, 2003, p. 113). Healing from trauma is a long journey an individual embarks on in search of a deeper understanding of self. Finding safety, managing affect, grieving, and emancipation are the processes many survivors experience on their journey to healing (Bills, 2003). It is a journey of anguish, courage, and strength as the individual confronts the past, seeks to grow into a new way of being, and accesses with deeper consciousness an understanding of self in relation to family, work, leisure, and community. Healing from trauma involves a process of coming to understand the many ways trauma affects one’s life, including managing the experience of traumatic re-enactment, addressing the use of isolation as a form of coping, and acknowledging issues related to control and self-harm. Without healing, the effects of trauma and the related isolation and

marginalization may be ill-health and diminished well-being. Abuse-related trauma may impact individuals’ work, career, and personal and social relationships (Centre for Addictions and Mental Health [CAMH], 2004), and is associated with higher incidences of psychological issues (Breslau, 2002; Grella et al., 2005; Herman, 1992), mental illness (International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies [ISTSS], 2007), and poverty (Alisen, 2003; MacMillan, 1999). Given the significant impacts of trauma on overall health, there is a significant role for leisure in supporting individuals who have experienced trauma to: cope with the stress associated with trauma; to heal the spiritual, social, and psychological wounds associated with trauma; and to transcend these challenges to become more present and engaged in living.

Knowledge about the impact of trauma on leisure (Griffin, 2002, 2005; Meister & Pedlar, 1992) and leisure as a resource for coping with stress (Iwasaki, MacKay, MacTavish, Ristock, & Bartlett 2006; Schneider & Wilhelm-Stanis, 2007) including stressors associated with negative life events (Hutchinson, Loy, Kleiber, & Dattilo, 2002; Kleiber, Hutchinson, & Williams, 2002), has been emerging in the last decade. Despite these research efforts, in the context of aiding the complex process of healing from trauma, there is more to be discovered about the process itself and how it can be facilitated through recreation therapy. This study examined people’s experiences and perceptions of leisure and recreation involvement in the journey of healing from trauma through their participation in *Leisure Connections*, a group within the Program for Traumatic Stress Recovery at the Homewood Health Centre in Guelph, Ontario. *Leisure Connections* is a leisure-based, psycho-educational group facilitated by a Recreation Therapist using experiential group processes with psychotherapy processing to investigate the relationship between trauma and leisure and examine ways that leisure may play a role in the healing process. The larger study, from which this article was written, involved collaboration between the Recreation Therapist, an academic researcher and two graduate student research assistants. One aspect of this larger project, which will be presented here, examined reflections on the importance, pleasure, interest, intensity, centrality and meaning of leisure using the Assessment

of Leisure and Recreation Involvement (LRI; Ragheb, 2002) and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The research questions addressed in this article are: What is the relationship between quantitative assessments of recreation and leisure involvement, as measured by the LRI, and people's perceptions of their involvement? How does this relationship change over the course of their participation in *Leisure Connections*? These research questions arose in part from the recreation therapists' previous attempts to use standardized assessment tools with people in *Leisure Connections*. Following a pilot study, the LRI was chosen as it best reflected the central concepts addressed in *Leisure Connections*.

Before we begin, it is important to clarify our perspective and the language we use in reference to the people involved in the study. People who have experienced trauma are referred to by different 'labels'; they are research participants in the research context, clients or patients in the clinical environment, and survivors in the trauma literature. In our practice of research and writing about the journey of healing from trauma, we prefer to take a "person-first" approach and therefore refer to the participants in the research as people in the *Leisure Connections* group, or simply, people in the group; or people who have experienced trauma. Where possible we strive to enable each individual's voice and unique story to emerge in the writing.

Prior to describing the study and findings, a review of literature related to the effects of trauma on individuals and their leisure is provided. From the trauma literature we review the common effects of trauma. In recreation therapy, literature concerning the impacts of trauma on leisure arises from the integration of knowledge about trauma into recreation therapy practice and the recreation therapist's experiences in facilitating *Leisure Connections*. The emerging literature available on this subject is subsequently reviewed.

Experiences and Effects of Trauma

Pain and conflict associated with trauma motivates individuals to develop psychological coping strategies and protective social strategies. Having survived the trauma, many individuals develop well honed skills in humor and possess an outward appearance that con-

tinues to hide the experience of trauma to the observer (Bass & Davis, 1994; Stout, 2001); however, for others, trauma has a significant impact on work, leisure, and personal and social relationships and is highly associated with social isolation, mental illness, and poverty. While varying among individuals, the effects of trauma include: anxiety and hyperarousal, numbing and dissociation, avoidance of triggers and social isolation, and re-enactment and re-victimization.

Chronic feelings of anxiety—worrisome thoughts or an apprehension that something unpleasant will soon occur (Schiraldi, 2000; Veterans Affairs, 2001)—associated with the experience of a trauma elicits a stress response in the body. Consequently, difficulties with sleeping, hyperarousal and the experience of panic attacks are commonly found (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; Haskell, 2003; van der Kolk, 1989).

In traumatic situations dissociation is highly adaptive and may be necessary for survival as it enables an individual to, "disconnect emotional content—the feeling part of our 'selves'—from our conscious awareness" (Stout, 2001, p. 8); however, in the aftermath, problems arise when the individual remains disconnected. With dissociation there may be memory gaps, including a lack of recollection of the actual traumatic event, no recollection of the emotional responses (e.g., fear, terror or pain) that accompanied the event, memory gaps of entire periods of time, or a general numbness of feelings (Bass & Davis, 1994; Herman, 1992; Schiraldi, 2000; Veterans Affairs, 2001). When numbing painful memories, it is inevitable that joyful memories will also be numbed (Schiraldi, 2000).

By denying the occurrence of a stressful event or traumatic situation, and attempting to postpone dealing with the feelings, associated feelings may actually impede daily life functioning by initiating the stress response via intrusive thoughts, which stem from the appearance of an unsuspecting trigger (Herman, 1992). Such triggers, including persons, places, sounds or smells, then elicit memories of the traumatic event (Schiraldi, 2000). Stress reactions, a fight or flight response, may act to disconnect the individual from the present as if enduring the trauma again (Matsakis, 1996). Avoidance is achieved by attempting to escape

from the things that trigger an emotional response. Related to avoidance are feelings of shame, self-hate, low self-esteem, and social isolation resulting from the fearing of people and relationships (Herman, 1992; Matsakis, 1996; Schiraldi, 2000).

Traumatic re-enactment is an unconscious process including the compulsive repetition of trauma, which “ultimately perpetuates chronic feelings of helplessness and a subjective sense of being bad and out of control” (van der Kolk, 1989, p. 402). Associated here are addictive or compulsive behaviors (van der Kolk, 1989) and engagement in a multitude of activities to occupy time (Griffin, 2005); self-harm, including alcohol or substance abuse, binge-eating, purging food or starving (Haskell, 2003); and re-victimization or increased vulnerability to further sexual violence (CAMH, 2004; van der Kolk, 1989). If re-enactment continues over a long period of time, overall health may be impacted negatively (van der Kolk, 1989).

Impact of Trauma on Leisure

A leisure lifestyle encompasses the activities people choose to do and the extent to which activities provide opportunities for true self expression, or conversely, to continue the cycle of abuse and trauma. As Griffin (2005) noted, issues arising in the leisure context also surface in other areas of a person’s life including, “[i]ssues of trust, intimacy, boundaries, shame/guilt, barriers, spirituality, self-nurturing, safety, insecurities and fears” (p. 225). The effects of trauma outlined in the previous section impact the individuals’ awareness and consciousness about their experience in leisure. Trauma may also lead to the experience of avoidance or re-enactments in leisure (e.g., patterns of solitary leisure, which reenact a tendency to isolate and fear emotional and physical intimacy with others) and hinder the capacity of leisure to play a positive role in the individual’s life. These effects on leisure functioning (beliefs and behaviors) are described in more detail below.

Trauma is associated with deficits in awareness of self and one’s feelings, needs and interests, and emotional disconnection, which make it difficult for people to: (a) identify what leisure is to them; (b) to identify what they find enjoyable about an experience; or (c) to identify activities that provide them with a sense of

relaxation, fun or satisfaction (Griffin, 2005). When understandings of leisure are constructed in a context of trauma, painful feelings are often associated with these memories. Experiences of fun may be coupled with intense feelings of anxiety and fear, resulting in a difficulty feeling safe in leisure and cycles of negative association with leisure (Griffin, 2005). Consequently, people who have experienced trauma are often other-focused and do not perceive leisure as a positive aspect of their everyday lives (Griffin, 2005; Meister & Pedlar, 1992).

As Griffin (2005) noted, people who have experienced trauma often unconsciously reenact aspects of their trauma, such as maladaptive coping strategies and deeply rooted shame beliefs, through their leisure experiences. Without awareness of traumatic re-enactments, seemingly healthy leisure choices can validate beliefs of worthlessness and self destructive behaviors. Consequently, leisure experiences may be influenced by conscious or unconscious strategies to avoid reminders of traumatic experiences. Avoidance behaviors may happen in conjunction with intense and often debilitating feelings of shame and guilt and deficits in self-awareness. According to Griffin (2005), four types of avoidance behaviors have been observed: *isolation in leisure*, *avoidance of leisure*, *busy leisure lifestyles*, and *self harm in leisure*. *Isolation in leisure* results from severe impairments of trust in self and others, and leads to a felt lack of interpersonal safety. Isolation involves reenacting patterns of being alone and feeling abandoned and rejected, and is associated with strong feelings of being unworthy or undeserving of friends.

Avoidance of leisure may involve caretaking and people-pleasing behavior to receive approval or recognition from others or to avoid conflicts. Complete avoidance of all leisure involvement may reflect deep rooted fears around play and leisure (i.e., it was not safe to play as a child) or deeply rooted shame and guilt-based beliefs about not being worthy of leisure; and/or perfectionist or productivity-focused behavior based in a fear of failure, punishment, rejection, abandonment, and feeling worthless as a person (Griffin, 2005). Meister and Pedlar (1992) found that the women in their study tended to compensate for feelings of low self-worth, anger, guilt, and depression by striving for perfection (overcompensation) and excep-

tional levels of performance in everything they did, including recreation.

Busy leisure lifestyles incorporate excessive activity motivated by emotional numbing or complete emotional avoidance. Staying busy leaves little time to attend to personal thoughts or feelings and sabotages a sense of balance as, "living with equanimity creates intense feelings of fear and hyper-vigilance. . .intense expectation that something will go wrong, described as 'waiting for the other shoe to drop'" (Griffin, 2005, p. 221). This approach to leisure has an escapist or diversionary focus (Meister & Pedlar, 1992).

Self harm in leisure, another type of avoidance, may be apparent in drug and alcohol abuse, engaging in unprotected sex, or more subtle manifestations including activities that begin to take on punitive qualities or push beyond healthy limits (e.g., distance running, thrill seeking) (Griffin, 2005). Where leisure is often used to "challenge the spirit," Meister and Pedlar (1992) found that in some instances the reward associated with challenge activities (climbing, kayaking, mountain biking, running) was the element of danger to self that went with the activity.

Methods

Study Context

*Leisure Connections (LC)*² is a closed, leisure-based psycho-educational group developed and implemented in the Program for Traumatic Stress Recovery (PTSR) at the Homewood Health Centre in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. The PTSR provides services to adult survivors of trauma ranging in age from 18 to 70 years, with over half of the population being female (Wright & Woo, 2000). In addition to trauma, many clients have additional diagnoses of major depression and histories of addictions. The multidisciplinary team of practitioners in the PTSR (including medicine, psychology, nursing, occupational therapy, recreation therapy) provides access to a continuum of therapeutic interventions, with the majority of treatment being group oriented. While individual sessions occur for some more specialized services (e.g., Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), the therapeutic community (comprised of approximately 33 people in the PTSR and the multidisciplinary team) is an integral part of

the healing process. The therapeutic community provides a social context, in which people may find support, rehearse healthy behaviors, and experience the development and respect of personal boundaries and social safety. Creating an environment of safety, community, and healing is the central focus of the PTSR program (Griffin, 2005; Wright & Woo, 2000).

The *Leisure Connections* group is facilitated by a Recreation Therapist and occurs in four 70 minute sessions (one block) on Mondays and Wednesdays during a 2-week period. *Leisure Connections* involves up to eight people who self-select or are referred by the therapeutic team. The group uses experiential learning activities to process stress and trauma issues associated with leisure and healing from trauma; this includes leisure education components focused on definitions of leisure and the benefits of leisure, and experiential activities (e.g., tug of war, group bean bag toss, dyad hand mirroring game) that enable people to process non-verbally as well as verbally. Through experiential activities people in *Leisure Connections* have an opportunity to increase self awareness and recognize patterns associated with traumatic re-enactment and avoidance in leisure, while gaining a deeper understanding of the role of leisure in the healing process. A variety of topics have been developed for the group. The specific topic and experiential activity chosen is based on the therapist's assessment of themes identified in earlier group process and the physical and cognitive abilities of the participants. This approach to group delivery creates a sense of fluidity, and it is client-centered, honoring the needs of the group and allowing individuals to work 'in-the-moment' with their thoughts and feelings.

Study Participants

The people in this study included males and females enrolled in three blocks of *Leisure Connections* between December 2006 and April 2007. In each block of *Leisure Connections*, participants all had prior experiences of trauma but differed in age, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, cultural background, and type of trauma experienced (e.g., childhood abuse, adult experiences of violence or rape, workplace trauma, motor vehicle accidents, combat related stress). The people in *Leisure Connections* were also at different points

in their individual healing journeys and in their treatment phase in the PTSR. Consequently, some individuals entered the group in week 2 of the PTSR, other individuals were in week 4, and others in week 5. Some had previously participated in a different program at Homewood, and others were admitted to the PTSR program for the second or third time. For this study a consecutive sampling technique was employed; consequently, all of the people enrolled in three blocks of *Leisure Connections* were invited to participate in the research. Individuals who chose not to participate in the research were able to continue their involvement in *Leisure Connections*. The Recreation Therapist was blind to the recruitment process to increase confidentiality within the research and to decrease potential impacts of the research on the therapeutic process. From the 24 people enrolled in these three blocks of *Leisure Connections*, 20 decided to participate in the study.

Data Collection

To examine people's understandings and perceptions of leisure and recreation involvement, two different methods of data collection were employed. Prior to and immediately following *Leisure Connections*, all of the people in the study completed the Assessment of Leisure and Recreation Involvement (LRI; Ragheb, 2002). The LRI consists of six subscales including the pleasure, meaning, centrality, interest, importance, and intensity of leisure and recreation involvement. Samples of the statements included in each are as follows:

- Importance: I reserve sufficient time to engage in my favorite leisure activities. I continue to do the leisure activities of my choice, even when I am busy.
- Pleasure: My favorite leisure activities give me pleasure. After completing my leisure activities, I usually feel satisfied and full.
- Interest: I usually want to know more details about the leisure activities that interest me. Engaging in my favorite leisure activities expresses my wishes.
- Intensity: The leisure activities I do occupy my feelings. My favorite leisure activities help me to discover many things

about myself.

- Centrality: I feel that I am responsible about choices made to participate in leisure activities. I am willing to devote mental and/or physical effort to master my preferred leisure activities.
- Meaning: Without engaging in my favorite leisure activities, life has no flavor. I express myself best when I am doing my favorite leisure activities.

For each subscale, people responded to four questions, rating their response on a scale from 1 to 5. Responses to the four questions were then totaled to a score out of 20. In addition, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted, following *Leisure Connections*, and probing questions enabled the researchers to explore ideas that emerged during the interview. In total, 17 people (12 females, 5 males) completed the LRI before and after *Leisure Connections* and 13 (9 females, 4 males) participated in individual interviews immediately following the completion of the group. The interviews were conducted at the Homewood Health Centre by the academic researcher and two graduate students using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide focused on five main areas of exploration: (a) *Leisure Connections* influence on the person's understanding of leisure in her life, (b) the person's responses on the Leisure and Recreation Involvement subscales, (c) changes in understanding of self as a result of *Leisure Connections*, (d) *Leisure Connections* influence on the person's healing journey, and (e) recommendations for improving *Leisure Connections*. Sample questions from the interview guide included: As a result of your experiences in *Leisure Connections*, how has your understanding of leisure changed? How did *Leisure Connections* help you to understand the choices you make during your free time? Looking at your LRI score for interest, your score at the beginning was ___ and at the end of *Leisure Connections* it was ___. How has your interest in leisure and recreation activities changed for you?

The interviews ranged in time between 30 and 90 minutes and were digital audio recorded to capture the words of the people in the

study. Interviews were then transcribed by the researcher who conducted the interview into electronic text files for import into QSR NVivo 7, which was used to assist with data management and analysis. To maintain confidentiality, all interview transcripts and LRI results were labeled using pseudonyms, which are used in place of people's real names in reporting the results of this study.

Data Analysis

For each person who participated in the study, LRI responses were tabulated for each of the six subscales, and the results of the LRI implemented prior to and immediately following *Leisure Connections* were compared ($n = 17$). For this process an EXCEL spreadsheet was used with separate worksheets created for: the two sets of raw scores, calculation of subscale scores, and then comparison of subscale scores across the two implementations of the LRI.

For the 13 completed interview transcripts, the first step in the data analysis process was the formation of open codes from transcripts. Open coding involves unrestricted formation of categories based on manifest content found in the data (Strauss, 1987). In-vivo codes were used whenever possible and the data were analyzed minutely—line by line and phrase by phrase—to develop many codes that may be used for comparison (Strauss, 1987). This resulted in eight broad themes: disconnect between the LRI and person's experience of the process; no conceptual connection to leisure; re-defining leisure; reclaiming past leisure; reclaim and reconnect to current leisure; staying open to affective connection; readiness for change; and no change in leisure behavior—changes in intellectual awareness and attitude. The next step in the analysis process was the formation of axial codes. This involved a critical comparison of the codes formulated in the open coding phase and generation of additional themes (Strauss, 1987). The original 8 themes were broken down to further elucidate the properties of each theme, and 16 themes resulted. The relationships that became apparent were clustered into themes and subthemes (Strauss, 1987). For example, the original theme "disconnect between the LRI and person's experience of the process" was broken down into:

(a) feeling a disconnection between LRI scores and felt experience, (b) differences in response perspectives, (c) perceived time constraints, (d) difficulty with wording and phrases of LRI, and (e) no experiential or conceptual connection to leisure and/or self in leisure. In the selective coding phase, the patterns and relationships between the themes were further explored (Strauss, 1987), resulting in the merging of some themes so that 4 main themes and 10 sub-themes remained. These themes and subthemes are presented in the Findings section. These analyses were conducted simultaneously by the Principal Investigator and Recreation Therapist. Differences in coding were discussed and consensus reached on required changes resulting in investigator triangulation (Patton, 2002) to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

Findings

Leisure Connections created a context for individuals to explore their understanding of leisure and practice new ways of experiencing themselves in leisure outside of the context trauma. Table 1 indicates a broad range of scores on the LRI subscales; generally scores ranged from 4 to 20 for all subscales on both LRI1 and LRI2. The rows in Table 1 have been organized from highest to lowest on the Sum of Individual Change scores. As indicated, there was significant variation among the people in the study in their subscale scores and in the change from LRI1 (completed before *Leisure Connections*) to LRI2 (completed after *Leisure Connections*). For example, Karen showed a significant amount of change from LRI1 to LRI2, increasing on the Importance subscale and decreasing on all other subscales. For Jean, LRI1 scores were high except for the Importance subscale and on LRI2 most scores increased (especially, Importance), while Centrality decreased slightly. In comparison, Nancy's scores on LRI1 were consistently low across all subscales and there was little change between LRI1 and LRI2. The columns in Table 1 have been arranged from highest to lowest (left to right) in the Sum of Subscale Change. Overall, the largest changes were found for the Importance and Meaning subscales (Sum of Subscale Change equal to 44 and 35 respectively), and

the smallest amount of change for the pleasure and centrality subscales (sum of change equal to 18 for both subscales).

Reflecting on their LRI scores, participants described their experiences in more detail. Interview themes revealed the underlying

process of individual change that influenced their scores. In the following sections, four main themes are presented (see Table 2). Each theme is comprised of subthemes that capture the core properties of the theme.

TABLE 1: OVERALL SCORES FOR LRI COMPLETED BEFORE AND AFTER LEISURE CONNECTIONS

		Importance ^d	Meaning	Intensity	Interest	Pleasure	Centrality	Sum of Indiv. Change ^e
Karen ^b	LRI 1	4	13	18	16	16	17	34
	LRI 2	13	5	10	13	13	14	
	Change	9	-8	-8	-3	-3	-3	
Teresa ^a	LRI 1	12	12	12	13	16	13	26
	LRI 2	8	15	17	18	20	18	
	Change	-4	3	5	5	4	5	
Anita ^a	LRI 1	5	19	13	14	12	19	15
	LRI 2	8	14	17	16	16	20	
	Change	3	-5	4	2	4	1	
Jean ^a	LRI 1	9	17	20	16	19	19	15
	LRI 2	20	20	20	16	20	18	
	Change	11	3	0	0	1	-1	
Brenda ^b	LRI 1	9	17	12	9	15	15	14
	LRI 2	6	14	15	12	15	17	
	Change	-3	-3	3	3	0	2	
Marion ^a	LRI 1	10	11	10	12	14	13	12
	LRI 2	13	12	14	14	14	15	
	Change	3	1	4	2	0	2	
Michael ^b	LRI 1	8	8	12	11	16	14	12
	LRI 2	9	13	12	16	16	15	
	Change	1	5	0	5	0	1	
Derek ^c	LRI 1	5	12	12	12	12	13	9
	LRI 2	9	11	10	12	12	11	
	Change	4	-1	-2	0	0	-2	
Sara ^c	LRI 1	14	13	16	15	14	16	8
	LRI 2	16	15	16	16	16	17	
	Change	2	2	0	1	2	1	
Wade ^c	LRI 1	18	15	15	16	16	16	8
	LRI 2	17	17	17	15	18	16	
	Change	-1	2	2	-1	2	0	
Helen ^a	LRI 1	15	14	16	12	16	16	6
	LRI 2	15	16	16	16	16	16	
	Change	0	2	0	4	0	0	
Jordan ^b	LRI 1	12	16	16	16	16	16	3
	LRI 2	9	16	16	16	16	16	
	Change	-3	0	0	0	0	0	
Nancy ^c	LRI 1	4	4	4	4	6	4	2
	LRI 2	4	4	4	4	4	4	
	Change	0	0	0	0	-2	0	
Sum of Subscale Change ^f		44	35	28	26	18	18	

Note. ^a People in Block 1. ^b People in Block 2. ^c People in Block 3. ^d The total possible score on each subscale is 20 with a high score considered to be a score of 16 or above and a low score considered to be 12 or below. ^e Sum calculated by adding the absolute change across the six subscales. ^f Sum calculated by adding the absolute change on subscale for all individuals.

TABLE 2: THEMES ARISING FROM DISCUSSIONS OF THE LRI

Theme 1-Disconnect Between the LRI and People's Experience of Leisure	Theme 2- Cognitive Shifts in Leisure Perceptions	Theme 3- Affective shifts in leisure experiences	Theme 4: Shifts in Leisure Behavior
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1a- A lack of experiential framework for leisure leads to different response perspectives • 1b- Difficulty with wording and phrases of the LRI • 1c- Perceived Time Constraints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2a- Intellectual understanding of leisure • 2b- Understanding traumatic reenactment in leisure pursuits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3a- Reclaiming past leisure interests that had been discontinued • 3b- Reclaiming current leisure for self • 3c- New experiences of leisure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4a- Readiness for change • 4b- No change in leisure behavior

Theme 1-Disconnect Between the LRI and People's Experience of Leisure

Across all three blocks of *Leisure Connections* all 13 people who participated in the interview indicated an incongruence between their LRI scores and perceptions and affective experiences of leisure. All subscales reflected this incongruence. For example, Nancy's low score on the Meaning subscale (scores of 4 out of a possible 20 for both LRI1 and LRI2) was inconsistent with her statement that her meaning of leisure had "changed immensely." Derek disagreed with his low LRI score for the Pleasure subscale and explained, "I think it is different from what it appears. I am doing things now that I thoroughly enjoy, stuff I haven't done in a long time." Likewise, Marion disagreed with her lack of change on the Pleasure subscale (scoring 14 both times), commenting that, "it [leisure] was deeper than I thought it was."

Further analysis of the interview transcripts revealed three subthemes that may explain the disconnection between people's felt experience and their LRI scores. These subthemes are described in the following sections.

Theme 1a- A lack of experiential framework for leisure leads to different response perspectives. Sometimes in the *Leisure Connections* group, people who have survived trauma have no experiential framework to reference

concepts of safety, self-nurturing or leisure as it applies to them. Consequently, three people indicated they struggled with how to respond to questions on all subscales of the LRI. Marion, like many of the other people in the study, described not having leisure at all:

I didn't have time for me and anything leisure. . . So, I've never connected to leisure at all because it's always been go, go go, working and school, working and school and because we weren't allowed to have any fun as children. What's leisure?

Despite consistent reminders to respond to the LRI from a present perspective some people, such as Anita and Jordan, responded to the LRI questions from a past, future or ideal-hypothetical perspective. This influenced their scores across all LRI subscales. Although slight increases in Anita's LRI scores were found following *Leisure Connections*, the overall scores remained low and Anita commented on this by saying, "You can't comprehend it (leisure) if you don't, if I don't know what it is at the beginning."

This lack of an experiential understanding of leisure as a concept for the self creates discrepancies in the LRI scores. When the term "leisure" appeared on the LRI and people lacked an experiential understanding, they

struggled to answer or responded from a past, future, or ideal-hypothetical perspective.

Theme 1b- Difficulty with wording and phrases of the LRI. Several people struggled with interpreting words and/or phrases used on the LRI, particularly on the Meaning, Intensity and Importance subscales. For example, both Michael and Brenda commented on feeling confused by the phrase “occupy feelings” used in question 13 of the Intensity subscale (e.g., “The leisure activities I do occupy my feelings”). Specifically, Michael struggled with whether “occupy” meant using leisure to distract one from feelings (i.e., numbing) or to assist a shift in feelings (i.e., from stressed to relaxed). He commented during the interview, “if it said change, I would have answered it differently. It said occupy and I understand that to be, is it occupying a particular feeling? I just didn’t read into that question right.”

During the interview, Teresa and Brenda questioned their interpretation of the importance of leisure in relation to other aspects of their lives. Teresa understood “importance” as meaning something that had to be added to her life rather than identifying her current leisure experience as meaningful. Reflecting on her lower Importance score (12 on LRI1, 8 on LRI2), Teresa explained this decrease stating, “I wonder if I was thinking . . . it’s [leisure] something that I have to add. . . in order for leisure to be important.” She now understands leisure to be, “. . . not any less important than anything else. . .” Consequently, her lack of clarity influenced her LRI response.

For the Meaning subscale, Karen spoke about challenges with interpretation of the word “meaning” and its distinction from importance. Karen’s original interpretation of “meaning” was connected to goal-directed activity which reenacted her deeply rooted shame-based beliefs, as she stated, “I had to have a reason to do it or it wasn’t meaningful.” Consequently, in her shift away from goal-directed leisure toward fun in leisure, experiences were perceived as less meaningful but not less important to her.

Differences in interpretation of words and phrases on the LRI led to discrepancies in scores. In part, interpretations of meaning, importance, and intensity were influenced by beliefs, cognitions, and emotions associated with trauma experiences. Variations in inter-

pretations are also related to changes in people’s understanding of leisure as described in Theme 2.

Theme 1c- Perceived Time Constraints. Some people in the study reflected on feeling rushed during the administration of the LRI. As a result, people noted that the LRI scores did not accurately reflect their perception of their leisure experiences. For example, Marion commented:

. . . when we were filling it [the LRI] out the period of time was limited and it was more of a rushed thing. . . So I think that I probably would have maybe answered a lot of those questions differently.

Similarly, Anita described the decrease in her Meaning subscale score from 19 to 14 as, “I think when I did the first questionnaire, I think I even said to you that I don’t know, not that I answered them right or not, but it was kind of rushed.”

For some of the people their struggle to respond to the LRI was equated with a feeling of time pressure. This was used to explain the disconnection between their LRI scores and their perception of leisure.

Theme 2- Cognitive Shifts in Leisure Perceptions

People often spoke about leisure in general terms, at times disconnected from how leisure applies to meeting personal needs; however, two main themes emerged from discussions of the the LRI related to the development of an intellectual understanding of leisure. An intellectual perception of leisure shifted as general knowledge of leisure changed (as in theme 2a), or understanding increased regarding how traumatic re-enactment is surfacing in leisure pursuits (theme 2b).

Theme 2a- Intellectual understanding of leisure. People in the study reflected on developing an intellectual awareness of the importance of leisure and self-nurturing, whereas prior to *Leisure Connections* group there may have been no understanding of leisure at all. This intellectual understanding of leisure impacted responses on all six subscales of the LRI. On the Pleasure subscale specifically, three people (Anita, Jean, and Teresa) identified developing an intellectual connection to leisure and self-nurturing. For example, Anita described self-

nurturing as, “. . . another big one for me. . .” Initially describing that she did not have time for herself and/or leisure and self-nurturing, Anita found it helpful to learn that “. . . they [leisure and self-nurturing] are both kind of connected.” Likewise, Jean commented, “That it [self-nurturing] is really a word that I never understood. Like I just kinda, yeah – yeah, self-nurture, blah-blah. But there’s lots of ways that you can do it. . .” Knowing that leisure should ideally be a part of daily routine, Teresa noted, “I don’t find it a chore, whereas when someone would say to me before, ‘you really need balance, you can’t work 18 or 20 hours a day.’ Now I know that it just needs to be part of my everyday life.”

For some people, shifts in understanding led to new intellectual associations between leisure, health, and well-being. Specifically, Teresa and Derek described this theme. Derek described, “I realized that leisure is very important in order to have a healthy life. Now I’m going to focus on more pleasure than business.” Teresa also spoke about a new intellectual understanding of leisure:

...I guess at the beginning I thought well, gosh what does this [leisure] really have to do with my healing and my being here [Homewood]. My being here is about getting well and I never thought that [leisure] was part of being well, being healthy and being balanced....and so I looked at it after those very few classes – I really came to realize that yeah, it’s a very important part and it’s necessary.

As people began to make these intellectual connections they also began to re-define what leisure is for them. For many people in *Leisure Connections*, previous leisure definitions were restricted to sports and physical activity, to activities that cost money or required a large time commitment. For Jean, re-defining leisure was about associating leisure with life balance. Jean explained, “Balance and recognizing, you know, that everybody kinda needs time to do things that they want. And that it doesn’t have to be big or cost money or whatever, it can be simple.” Jean’s new definition broadened her choices to include small everyday types of activities (e.g., walking). This new definition shifted the importance of leisure for her dra-

matically as reflected on the LRI (Importance subscale scores increased from 9 on LRI1 to 20 on LRI2).

At times, leisure resonates as an unfamiliar concept that is disconnected in meaning. Through *Leisure Connections*, people began to develop an intellectual understanding of leisure. Expanding the concept of leisure in their understanding of activities included making the connection to self-nurturing, health, and healing from trauma. This change in definition also led to a shift in perceptions about the role of leisure participation in everyday life and influenced a change in responses on LRI2 on all six subscales, particularly the Pleasure and Importance subscales.

Theme 2b- Understanding traumatic reenactments in leisure pursuits. Many people described shifts in their awareness of how leisure engagements are often a reenactment of thoughts, feelings, or beliefs related to the trauma. For Brenda, traumatic reenactment in leisure presented as consistently engaging in solitary leisure, and reenacting patterns of isolation and feelings of fear, which resonated from the time of the trauma. As she stated, “I really gained a large amount of insight as to why I don’t have leisure activities and why it is difficult for me to find that association with people, that connection with people. I think the things that you sometimes bury just seem to pop right out.” Brenda described her awareness that she continues to avoid leisure involving social interaction as a reason for an increase in her LRI scores for the Intensity of leisure (shift from 12 on LRI1 to 15 on LRI2) and the decrease in the Meaning of leisure for her (17 on LRI1 to 14 on LRI2).

For others such as Michael and Karen, constant busyness in both activity participation and work enabled emotional avoidance and reinforced productivity-focused behavior and reenacted beliefs that play is not permissible or safe. Karen previously identified reading text books as a leisure interest. Through *Leisure Connections* she realized that her need to read text books, specifically, was linked to a childhood belief that her free time needed to feel productive, not a waste of time. Karen, described, “. . . I think I was still thinking that leisure was reading text books. So I thought it was really important. And now, I realize that leisure is something different.” Karen described that

reading textbooks was actually a reenactment of a trauma belief and not leisure at all. For Karen, this change in awareness impacted on her LRI scores. Scores on LRI1 for the Meaning, Pleasure, Centrality, Intensity, and Interest subscales were all rated as “high” and on LRI2, Karen’s scores on all subscales decreased with the exception of the Importance subscale. Although, the relationship between Karen’s Meaning and Importance subscale scores were noted earlier, the overall decrease in scores was connected to understanding traumatic reenactment in her leisure experience.

As people in the study explored their relationship with leisure they began to understand how aspects of their trauma were reenacted in their leisure experience. This awareness often changed how participants understood and experienced their leisure as they moved from reenactments in leisure to using leisure as a healthy coping resource. LRI scores on all subscales were impacted by these shifts in the person’s understanding of traumatic reenactment and leisure.

Theme 3- Affective Shifts in Leisure Experiences

For the people in the study, leisure experiences in the past were often associated with negative feelings and thoughts, such as fear, shame, isolation and, exhaustion, due to a consistent cycle of traumatic reenactment in leisure. However, people described experiencing an affective shift—including a renewed sense of playfulness and enjoyment—in relation to their personal experiences in leisure. Often, this was described in tandem with changes in their intellectual awareness of leisure (themes 2a and 2b).

Theme 3a- Reclaiming past leisure interests that had been discontinued. In this theme, reclaiming refers to current attempts to participate in leisure activities that had been enjoyed in the past but had been discontinued due to depression, and/or the negative impact of trauma on the individual’s lifestyle and beliefs. Reclaiming past leisure interests was described in relation to the Pleasure, Interest, and Intensity subscales.

Several of the people in the study (e.g., Derek, Sara, Teresa, Anita) described wanting to reconnect to what they used to enjoy. When asked about how a sense of fun or enjoyment

changed, Sara described a reconnection with playfulness, “I’ve found again some of the playfulness that I had lost.” For some of the people in the study, play was not permitted during childhood. This was described by Anita:

[I]t’s just changed in looking at life in general, the enjoyment part, even for the big picture of enjoying life. So my whole thought process and my feelings changed toward leisure as far as just this whole enjoyment, doing things that I enjoy and doing things for the right reasons and really being aware of myself and my feelings as far as enjoyment.

Reflecting on her surprise in response to an increased score on the Pleasure subscale (16 on LRI1, and 20 on LRI2), Teresa stated, “Yeah, I really surprised myself because I guess you don’t really realize what you are missing until you see it or are exposed to it again and enjoy it.” For Teresa, this increased enjoyment led to an increase in her interest in leisure (13 on LRI1, 18 on LRI2 on the Interest subscale). As she stated, “...I think I’d really like to have that [leisure] as part of my life again.”

As people reclaimed leisure interests that had been discontinued in the past, or even for the first time enabled themselves to play, they described experiencing a return of a sense of pleasure, fun, or enjoyment. This was reflected in changes in scores on the Pleasure, Interest, and Intensity subscales completed on LRI2.

Theme 3b- Reclaiming current leisure for self. People in the study described working through a process of affectively reclaiming current leisure interests – meaning they learned to be more present or receptive to their felt emotional experience during their leisure. Here, reclaiming is referenced as a process of shifting away from habitual engagement in leisure activity to more conscious choices based on intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, leisure motivations to engage in a leisure activity. In relation to this change, affective shifts in reclaiming current leisure interests were captured in all subscales, with the greatest representations in the Meaning, Interest, Intensity, and Pleasure subscales. For some of the people (Marion, Michael, Anita) the meaning of leisure changed in relation to the way they connect with leisure. Marion describes being more present during

her leisure experiences, resulting in an increase in the meaning of leisure as she began to connect with the world differently, “. . . like I said connecting with the world, with what’s around me whether it be you know, a conversation, a walk in the park. Everything has a meaning.” Similarly for Michael, the experiential activities during *Leisure Connections* (e.g., tug of war) provided a safe and playful context to learn more about leisure for himself, which he described as contributing to a large increase in his Interest score (from 11 on LRI1 to 16 on LRI2).

Overall, whether their scores went up or down, people in the study described changes in affective intensity as a result of conscious changes in habitual leisure engagement. Anita attributed the increase in her Intensity score on the LRI (13 on LRI1 to 17 on LRI2) to being more mindful about why she engages in certain activities, “now every little thing that I do, not that I sit there and question it but I do it because I enjoy it. . . being able to sit with it and enjoy it.”

Teresa’s ability to stay more present and focused during her leisure activities seemed to have positively heightened the intensity of her leisure experience. Teresa’s LRI scores for the Intensity subscale shifted from 12 on LRI1 to 17 on LRI2. Teresa described it this way, “you feel like you are participating and you feel like you are involved and it’s like a sense of letting go and um, just inhibitions, and just sort of having fun and not being so wound up.” Similarly, the intensity of Karen’s leisure changed as a result of her affective connection to leisure. Unlike Teresa, Karen had a different perception of intensity. Karen’s intensity scores on the LRI decreased from a high score of 18 prior to *Leisure Connections* to 10 after the group; this change was viewed by her as a positive shift. She explained that her affective connection to her leisure experiences has shifted to feeling more relaxed, which is in direct contrast to the heightened emotional state (hyper-vigilance) she experienced in other parts of her life. This may suggest that Karen’s new felt emotional response to her leisure has also created a shift in her LRI scores.

For some people, affective shifts in leisure engagement came about as a result of learning to challenge perfectionist and workaholic behavior patterns in leisure. Wade, Helen,

Jean, Marion, and Sara all described a need to set boundaries around their current experience of leisure to create and maintain an intrinsic connection to their leisure activities. For some, boundaries needed to be set with themselves and how they engaged in a particular activity. Wade, for example, was learning to challenge perfectionist behavior by setting boundaries around how he connected to enjoying golf:

I’m not as obsessed with it. Like to me I had to play 100 rounds of golf a year. Alright, now I play 60, right? So I don’t go there and just play for the sake of numbers or frequency. It is more like, well I feel like playing I think I’ll play today.

In response, Wade’s scores on the Pleasure subscale increased (16 on LRI1 to 18 on LRI2).

For others in the study, boundaries needed to be set with other people, such as family, to ensure some personal time. For Helen, setting boundaries with family influenced an increase in her interest in leisure (shifting from a low score of 12 on LRI1 to a high score of 16 on LRI2).

As people described reclaiming their current leisure interests they described a shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivations and associated this with being more present focused. For some, this included a feeling of being more awake and letting go of the trauma, or shifting from a feeling of rigidity and hyper-vigilance to being more relaxed while engaged in leisure. As people challenged workaholic and perfectionist tendencies that had driven their leisure experiences, they began to set boundaries in themselves and in relationships with others. These affective shifts influenced scores on all subscales, particularly Meaning, Interest, Intensity, and Pleasure.

Theme 3c- New experiences of leisure. Some people in the study experienced affective connections to new activities in their leisure experiences. During their time in *Leisure Connections* people described trying out new activities such as board games, crafts, and going for a coffee or shopping with friends. For some people who coped with their trauma through isolation, self-harm, or emotional avoidance; social, self-nurturing, and playful leisure activities were brand new experiences. During the interviews, four people (Anita, Jean, Nancy,

and Teresa) described new affective shifts with a focus on self-nurturing in leisure. In Nancy's case, although her LRI scores remained the same from LRI1 to LRI2 (with the exception of the Pleasure subscale), she noted a shift from not engaging in leisure to discovering that she can engage in leisure and that it is also fun. Nancy described how fear kept her from engaging in leisure in the past and how she is learning to incorporate skills such as body scanning into her present leisure:

I think it [leisure] will be a lot different because before if I didn't do it, or if I did it and I didn't enjoy it, I didn't understand why I didn't enjoy it. Now if I'm a little bit nervous or something I'll realize, I'll body scan and realize that it's just minor fear and it's trying something new and once I get over that I'll be fine.

Teresa described a shift from experiencing activities as a chore to experiencing activities as enjoyable self-nurturing leisure, "I never realized how much I enjoyed [leisure] until I realized I wasn't doing it. And how I missed it and how I think I'd really like to have that as part of my life again." Teresa's new affective connection to her leisure was largely reflected in the increased scores in the Centrality, Intensity, and Interest subscales (from 13, 12, 13 in LRI1 to 18, 17, 18 in LRI2, respectively).

As people experimented with new leisure activities, they searched for activities that were self-nurturing and provided them with a sense of enjoyment. As they engaged in this pursuit, they challenged themselves to find activities that had personal meaning or were of interest. While affective shifts were experienced for new leisure experiences, this was reflected in changes in subscale scores for some (e.g., Nancy, Teresa), and for others, no changes in subscale scores appeared.

Theme 4 - Shifts in Leisure Behavior

While people in the study revealed changes in their intellectual understanding of leisure, and some experienced a shift in their affective connections to leisure, there were differences in the extent to which behavioral shifts occurred for people. Some described experiencing a readiness for change (theme 4a) and others no change in leisure behavior (theme 4b).

Theme 4a- Readiness for change. In

Leisure Connections, insights and awareness gained from involvement in discussions and experiential exercises created opportunities for people to also create changes in leisure behavior. However, changes in actual behavior were connected to the person's readiness for change, which was influenced by factors such as: level of emotional safety, capacity to tolerate feedback, amount of experience within therapeutic groups, and perceived support. Readiness and the capacity to integrate information and experiences from *Leisure Connections* was also influenced by the larger PTSR program – specifically, the constant reinforcement of safety and grounding skills and affective processing opportunities in other groups. Helen commented in the interview:

I think it really changed for me because like with my post trauma I had time to work on it through process (Process Group) and feel better about letting it out and now that I feel that I have less trauma in there because I kind of, how do you say, let out some garbage and then that empty spot is now filled with things that I could do with my leisure and have pleasure in it.

Although four out of six subscale scores did not change for Helen, the biggest shift was noted in her interest in leisure. Her LRI1 score of 12 shifted to 16 on LRI2 for the Interest subscale.

For Nancy, all LRI subscale scores remained low and did not increase from LRI1 to LRI2 and this is not surprising given her dialogue in the interview. Nancy shared that her resistance to change was connected to her awareness that her initial avoidance of leisure was fear based. Although Nancy was learning to soothe her fear and engage in some leisure activities, she recognized that her process was slow as she still carried a fear response into her leisure experiences. This was a big insight for Nancy and she commented that the meaning of leisure has "changed immensely." As a result of her fear response to leisure activities, her readiness to change her leisure behavior was slowed due to a need to first create a sense of safety in the leisure context.

Readiness to change was also influenced to some extent by the specific leisure activity or

context that they had in mind at the time they answered the LRI questions. For some participants there may be a readiness to initiate a small safe change in leisure behavior, such as a solitary leisure activity. For example, Brenda, who rated the importance of leisure as low on both LRI assessments, described that her answer to the questions about importance depended on what kind of leisure activity was involved; specifically, whether she was attempting to engage in a leisure context she found challenging (e.g., social context) versus a solitary leisure activity (e.g., knitting).

The readiness to pursue leisure opportunities beyond the group was highly connected to people's ability to manage the affective responses that occurred (e.g., fear, shame, guilt) including an awareness of their bodies and identification of feelings that arose in relation to leisure. The process of change was described as being a slow process taken in small steps, with a distinction made in the readiness to engage in specific leisure activities such as individual pursuits versus leisure in larger social contexts. This theme was described in conjunction with either no change in subscale scores, or consistently low scores among some participants.

Theme 4b- No change in leisure behavior.

The strongest theme present in the behavioral domain was the intention of *future* changes in leisure behavior post discharge from hospital, rather than a *present* change in leisure engagement as described in theme 4a. Four participants (Derek, Anita, Helen, and Nancy) described the value of leisure as being most recognizable post discharge from hospital. Although Nancy was aware that she was thinking about leisure differently since being in *Leisure Connections*, behaviorally she noted, "well it hasn't changed. I haven't really done it yet." Nancy's low scores on all LRI subscales are indicative of her lack of *experiential* awareness of leisure engagement. Similarly, when Anita was asked about her high scores on the Centrality subscale (19 on LRI1 and 20 on LRI2) and low scores on the Importance subscales (5 on LRI1 and 8 on LRI2) she described taking a "collect the tools" approach to healing and hoped that her leisure would be different once she returned home.

For Derek, all scores in all subscales, with the exception of the Importance subscale, decreased or stayed the same. While Derek

gained an intellectual understanding of the connection between leisure and a healthy life, he noted that his LRI scores will not change until he is able to practice and engage in leisure in his life after Homewood. Similarly, while Helen's interest in leisure and the meaning of leisure has changed since being involved in the *Leisure Connections* group (increase of 4 and 2 points on the Interest and Meaning subscales of the LRI respectively), she anticipated that the other scores would increase with her ability to create a sense of safety in her leisure at home and once she actually experienced leisure. Helen noted:

. . . once I get out of Homewood and use it [leisure] and practice it at home . . . because here I'm safe to do it and I know that it's safe to do it here. Now I have to use what I learned here out in the ordinary, and that's when it's going to go up or down. I'm pretty sure it's going to go up though.

Some of the people in the study seem resistant or invested in not changing their current leisure engagement. Fears of being hurt, rejected, or abandoned by others often enable reenactment patterns in leisure, such as avoidance of leisure engagement. Brenda commented that she gained some intellectual awareness of the role social leisure can play in supporting her healing work and that she has developed some sense of safety in the context of social leisure; however, she held onto the difficulty she had in creating safety in leisure at home. In her interview Brenda spoke about being aware of the negative impact of isolation on her life, yet she described her pattern of declining social invitations, "when I take that risk, and I get smacked, then I'm not really interested in doing it again. You know what I mean?" Since she perceives a lack of safety in leisure, Brenda explained that participation in leisure is not central in her life, "I don't have the mental effort I can donate to it (leisure) right now."

Tolerating and modulating affect related to healing can feel intense for people. Experiential exercises in the *Leisure Connections* group, in addition to the intense emotional work done in other areas of the program (e.g., process group), are often triggering and can impact readiness, willingness, and openness for

more insights within the *Leisure Connections* group. Helen spoke about how her involvement in some of the experiential exercises triggered past memories of physical violence and feelings of being rejected. Helen noted that she missed one group and felt triggered by a feeling of being left out in the second group, "because of the positions I was in on the rope [during the tug of war], and the third [session] was when I had a flashback of being slapped really hard. . . it wasn't very long for me to digest it all together." When past memories are triggered it is essential to focus on safety and grounding before any further work can be done. As noted earlier, emotional safety influenced readiness for change and the assimilation of new information. For other people, the intensity of their affective experience in other areas of the PTSR program negatively influenced their readiness to be open to potential insights in the *Leisure Connections* group. Brenda explained: "So if I had for instance, a bad experience in process group and then I came to *Leisure Connections* that may still be on my mind and kind of flavoring what [the Recreation Therapist] is trying to tell us." Brenda related to her own experience of feeling "disconnected" entering *Leisure Connections* group having left over feelings from the morning groups, "...just sitting there going (shrugs her shoulders and gesture with her hands), you know, because I couldn't connect. I just couldn't connect it."

Finally, the people in the study described their lack of leisure behavior change as a result of not having enough time to engage in leisure while in hospital. Helen, Anita, and Nancy had small changes or no changes in their Centrality scores on the LRI and attributed this to being too busy during their hospital stay to find time for leisure. Similarly, Helen and Nancy anticipated that in the future their centrality scores would increase further with more time to engage in leisure when at home.

Participants indicated an intention to change leisure behavior in the future, sometimes indicating that they just had not had enough time while in hospital; however, several aspects were identified that indicated a resistance to change. The lack of leisure behavior was, at times, influenced by a continued holding on to deeply rooted fears, or working through deep emotional processes and needing to focus on pacing and creating a sense of emotional or

physical safety while experiencing the intensity of the program as a whole. Consequently, scores on the LRI varied depending on individual circumstance and participants indicated that scores will likely increase after discharge.

Discussion

Three main findings emerge from this study examining the use of the LRI with people exploring leisure in the context of healing from trauma. These findings are discussed in the following paragraphs, and for each, the implications of the findings for TR practice and research are discussed.

First, the findings from this study reveal great variation in LRI scores among the people in this study (See Table 1). Understanding this variation in scores required an understanding of how leisure was affected by trauma in the context of the individual's life. For some there was a tendency toward isolation (e.g., Nancy), for some an absence of leisure (e.g., Anita) in their lives, for others a busy leisure lifestyle (e.g., Wade), or a tendency toward perfectionism and translation of workaholic behaviors in leisure (e.g., Karen). The findings from this study reveal these patterns were affected by a variety of factors such as: coping styles, personality, level of emotional safety, traumatic reenactment patterns, and the nature of the traumatic experience. The implication of this finding is that there is a need to consider the purpose for which the leisure assessment tool is being used. On its own, the LRI did not seem to provide information that accurately reflected the specific needs of this population and would not be useful in the creation of a treatment plan.

Second, the results of the study provide insight into how people interpret and respond to the questions on the LRI. The findings indicated that there was often a significant difference between the standard interpretation of people's scores on the LRI as described by Ragheb (2002) and people's own perceptions of their involvement in recreation and leisure. The LRI was developed using students and employees from a southeastern university in the United States (Ragheb, 2002). This may bring into question whether individuals who have experienced trauma differ significantly from the general population. Beliefs, cognitions and emotions associated with trauma influenced the challenges participants had in interpreting the

words and phrases on the LRI (e.g., occupy feelings; theme 1b), the lack of connection to leisure itself (theme 1a), and the perception of time constraints (theme 1c); which, in turn, influenced the individuals' perceptions and understanding of self in relation to leisure. It may be misleading to assume that a person, particularly one who has suffered extensive childhood abuse, would have an experiential framework to understand leisure from a safe and healthy perspective, or that leisure would be experienced as inherently positive instead of harmful. Likewise, it would be erroneous to implement a general leisure assessment assuming it would capture an accurate reflection of the leisure experiences of people who interpreted the world and themselves through trauma. As illustrated in the case of Karen, most of her scores on the LRI2 decreased at the end of her involvement in the *Leisure Connections* group. Taken at face value, it may have been interpreted that Karen's experience of leisure had changed for the negative; however, Karen noted that the decrease in her meaning subscale score was a positive shift in that she realized she had reenacted trauma-related feelings of shame (e.g., beliefs of not deserving fun or enjoyment) through consistent engagement in productivity-oriented leisure. Busy, non-fun, goal-directed activity was now associated with meaning. Since the word "meaningful" had a negative reenactment aspect to it, Karen's new experience of leisure was positively described as less meaningful but not less important. Illustrated by this difference in interpretation, which was influenced by a reenactment of trauma-related beliefs, Recreation Therapists may find it most helpful to enable patients to talk about their *personal* understanding of leisure and how it has been impacted by their experience of trauma. Working with this information in leisure counseling and activity participation sessions enables the opportunity for people who have experienced trauma to re-write their personal leisure narrative to include safe and healthy leisure experiences. Consequently, people have the opportunity to be the agent of change and to create for themselves a healthy personal history. The value of the LRI may be best represented when used in conjunction with other approaches, such as a one-to-one interview. This enables the results of the LRI to be used as a tool for self reflection

Third, the use of the LRI in conjunction with the interview data has enriched understanding of the process of change that emerges as people deepen their understanding and consciousness about their involvement in recreation and leisure and the role of these pursuits in their lives. While leisure has been identified as an important coping resource to deal with stress and the stressors associated with negative life events (Hutchinson, et al., 2002; Iwasaki et al., 2006; Kleiber et al., 2002; Schneider & Wilhelm-Stanis, 2007), the results of this study reveal the complex processes that go beyond the use of leisure as a coping resource among people who have experienced trauma. The themes presented describe the process of change that may be facilitated by the Recreation Therapist to enable leisure to regain a positive role in the life of the person healing from trauma. Part of the process that happens in the *Leisure Connections* group is to assimilate the newly acquired intellectual insights (cognitive) and corresponding emotional (affective) responses into an experiential (behavioral) understanding of self in relation to leisure. This happens at different levels of consciousness awareness (and offers a possible explanation of the discrepancy between LRI scores and people's subjective reality). This acts to begin to heal the negative effects of trauma on cognition, affect, and behavior identified by Haskell (2003). These insights are important as they may improve our ability as researchers and practitioners to identify and respond to the needs of people who have experienced trauma. When using the assessment tool to consider the change process, the findings also revealed that it is important to consider how the results are affected by a variety of other factors such as: an ability to tolerate affect, previous group therapy experience, traumatic reenactment patterns, experiences in *Leisure Connections* or in the broader PTSR, and comfort within the group influence.

In general, the limitation of the LRI for use with this population may stem from (a) the separation of leisure from other domains of experience (i.e., trauma), and (b) the mechanistic focus of assessment tools in general, breaking down the individual's experience into subunits of Importance, Meaning, etceteras. The process in the *Leisure Connections* group is about developing a personal and conscious relationship

with the whole self and learning to connect the relationship with self to leisure. Self in relation to leisure is about being mindful of feelings and personal needs or wants and consciously responding to that self-awareness with nurturing leisure choices. The cognitive, affective, and behavioral themes presented in the findings illustrate the process in which self in relation to leisure starts or continues to develop. As the findings of this study indicate, there are a variety of relationships and inter-connections among a multitude of trauma-related factors (e.g. type of trauma, coping strategies), each of the subscales of the LRI, and how participants describe the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of their personal leisure experiences.

Suggestions for future research would include a comparative study of responses of people who have experienced trauma and people who have not, to see if the same variation in scores exists for both groups, and whether the same difficulties exist for both groups in interpreting and responding to the questions on the LRI. In addition, since authors have identified a difference among men and women in both the experience of trauma (Statistics Canada, 1993) and in the impacts of trauma (Charman et al., 2006; Haskell, 2003), it is suggested that future research explore gender differences associated with trauma and leisure in more depth.

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