Healthy Aging: A More Objective Method to Explore the Link Between Leisure and Aging

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Successful aging has been criticized on its strict standards: Reduce the risk of disease and disability, maintain mental and physical function, and participate in later life actively (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Reaching the standards is difficult in older adults, and the term successful is subjective. Similarly, the term active aging may be also subjective. How should we define active or inactive? If older adults enjoy doing solitary leisure activities that can maintain their well-being, can they be defined as inactive? Dr. Amy Lorek provided a concept of healthy aging in her article entitled “Healthy Aging and Leisure: Research to Support Taiwan’s Service Provision.” This concept may be more appropriate and useful for general aging population. Lorek discussed how to research the goal of healthy aging through leisure participation.

Lorek defined healthy aging as discovering ways to adjust to age related changes by modifying one’s lifestyle (p.5). Therefore, an appropriate lifestyle may extend a number of years of healthy status, and reach the ultimate goal (healthy aging). Aging is the nature of creature. While we cannot stop the physiological aging, we can reconcile the negative impact of

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aging through healthy lifestyle. Lorek also suggested three lifestyles that could improve healthy aging: physical active, cognitive active, and social active, and indicated the important role of leisure in these lifestyles. For example, older adults might be physically active through sport leisure participation, improve cognitive function through learning leisure participation, and receive social support from social leisure participation. In addition, Lorek demonstrated the benefits of volunteering as a type of social leisure activities. She believed that older adults could improve the sense of community and social harmony and reduce the depressive symptoms through volunteering.

Hsueh and Tseng (2002) investigated the retirement plan among Taiwanese participants who were aged 45 and older. Their results indicated that 40% of the participants planned to do volunteering after retired. According to the 2013 Report of the Taiwanese senior citizen condition survey, 50.4% of older adults participated in social activities. Religious and volunteering activities were the most popular ones. Moreover, 14% of the participants who were aged 55-64 were planning to do volunteering during the retirement. Volunteering appears to be a popular leisure activity for older Taiwanese adults. The Taiwanese policy makers should provide related service to cultivate middle adults’ interests in volunteering before retirement, and build a proper matching system of volunteer groups for older population. Older adults may receive the benefits of volunteering and thus promote healthy aging.

Lorek not only recommended several leisure activities that could promote healthy aging, but she also suggested two theories as a theoretical framework of healthy aging, Selection, Optimization with Compensation
(SOC) and Self-Determination Theory. Lorek explained that leisure could be viewed as a mediator in these theories. Older adults could improve the benefits of SOC and self-determination by participating in leisure activities.
References

