

The Moderating Role of Gender in the Relationship Between Leisure Involvement and Life Satisfaction

Serbest Zaman İlgilenimi ile Yaşam Doyumu Arasında Cinsiyetin Düzenleyici Rolü

Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi

 Gizem KARAKAŞ¹
 Ersin ESKİLER²
 Emrah SERDAR¹

¹ Department of Recreation,
Sakarya University of Applied Sciences,
Sakarya, and Türkiye

² Department of Sports Management,
Sakarya University of Applied Sciences,
Sakarya, and Türkiye

Corresponding Author / Sorumlu Yazar
Assist. Prof. Dr. Gizem Karakaş
gdogduay@subu.edu.tr

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Abstract

The study aimed to examine the relationship between the leisure involvement and life satisfaction of sports-fitness center participants and to determine the role of gender in this relationship. This study was designed in correlation survey design. A structured online survey method was used to examine leisure involvement, life satisfaction and personal information form and was delivered to potential participants. From the private sports-fitness center determined through deliberate sampling, 227 individuals answered the survey anonymously and voluntarily. Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis based on the Bootstrap method were performed for statistical evaluation. In the regression analysis, it was found that the predictor variables included in the model explained approximately 11% of the change in life satisfaction. It was determined that leisure involvement did not have a significant effect on life satisfaction, while gender had a negative significant effect. It was determined that the moderating effect of leisure involvement and gender variables on life satisfaction was also positively significant. When the details regarding the moderating effect were examined, it was found that the effect of leisure involvement on life satisfaction was statistically significant in men, while the effect of leisure involvement on life satisfaction was statistically insignificant in females. As a result, the effect of leisure involvement on life satisfaction differs significantly according to gender. It was found that participants with higher levels of leisure involvement tended to report higher levels of life satisfaction, and there was a significant difference in terms of gender. Leisure involvement has a stronger effect on the level of life satisfaction in male participants. The findings of this study provide references to relevant sector stakeholders regarding the leisure behaviors, participation and leisure experiences of sports-fitness participants.

Keywords: Leisure involvement, Life satisfaction, Gender, Sports fitness center

Öz

Çalışmada spor-fitness merkezi katılımcılarının serbest zaman ilgilenimi ile yaşam doyumu arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemek ve bu ilişkide cinsiyetin rolünü belirlemek amaçlanmıştır. Çalışma, korelasyon türü ilişkisel tarama modelinde tasarlanmıştır. Veriler, serbest zaman ilgilenimi, yaşam doyumu ve kişisel bilgi formu aracılığı ile yapılandırılmış çevrimiçi anket yöntemiyle potansiyel katılımcılara ulaştırılmıştır. Kasti örnekleme yoluyla belirlenen özel spor-fitness merkezinden, 227 birey anonim ve gönüllü olarak anketi yanıtlamıştır. Pearson korelasyon analizi ve Bootstrap yöntemini temel alan regresyon analizi gerçekleştirilerek istatistiksel değerlendirmede bulunulmuştur. Regresyon analizinde modele dahil edilen tahmin değişkenlerinin, yaşam doyumundaki değişimin yaklaşık %11'ini açıkladığı tespit edilmiştir. Yaşam doyumu üzerinde, serbest zaman ilgileniminin anlamlı bir etkisinin olmadığı, cinsiyetin ise olumsuz yönde anlamlı etkisinin olduğu belirlenmiştir. Serbest zaman ilgilenimi ve cinsiyet değişkenlerinin, yaşam doyumu üzerindeki düzenleyici etkisinin de olumlu yönde anlamlı olduğu belirlenmiştir. Düzenleyici etkiye ilişkin ayrıntılar incelendiğinde, erkeklerde serbest zaman ilgileniminin yaşam doyumu üzerinde istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir etkisinin olduğu, kadınlarda ise anlamsız olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Sonuç olarak serbest zaman ilgileniminin yaşam doyumu üzerindeki etkisi cinsiyete göre anlamlı düzeyde farklılaşmaktadır. Daha yüksek düzeyde serbest zaman ilgilenimine sahip katılımcıların daha yüksek düzeyde yaşam doyumu bildirme eğiliminde olduğu ve cinsiyetin anlamlı bir etkisinin olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Serbest zaman ilgileniminin erkek katılımcılarda yaşam doyumu düzeyi üzerinde daha güçlü bir etkisi vardır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, spor-fitness katılımcılarının serbest zaman davranışları, katılımı ve serbest zaman deneyimleri konusunda ilgili sektör paydaşlarına referanslar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Serbest zaman ilgilenimi, Yaşam doyumu, Cinsiyet, Spor-fitness merkezi

Introduction

Leisure is defined as the period during which individuals, free from any pressure, engage in activities for pleasure and entertainment based on their own preferences, outside of working hours that are allocated to meet biological needs and sustain their lives (Sönmez & Gürbüz, 2022; Walker, 2008). Planned and structured activities, especially those involving physical effort, carried out during this period form the basis of leisure activities. Participation in such activities is important for the development of individuals' physical, social, and mental health (Steinhardt et al., 2021; Gürkan et al., 2021). Therefore, physical activities performed during leisure play a significant role in our lives. Since individuals' leisure preferences vary according to their desires, needs, and expectations, the concept of involvement gains importance (Yetim & Argan, 2018). In this context, leisure is also defined as the freedom to choose among options with a fundamental approach that includes enjoyment, relaxation, and personal development (Leitner & Leitner, 2012; Demirel et al., 2022).

The concept of involvement, grounded in social judgment theory, was extended to marketing research by Laurent and Kapferer (1985) to better understand consumer purchasing behavior. In this context, involvement is defined as an unobservable interest, a state of arousal, a motivational element that can vary in cause, and a condition triggered by a specific stimulus (Kerstetter & Kovich, 1997; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Mitchell, 1979; Eskiler & Karakaş, 2017). In subsequent years, the concept of involvement was adapted to the context of leisure to understand people's behaviors and attitudes toward a recreational activity. Within this framework, leisure involvement is defined as an unobservable state of motivation, arousal, and/or interest directed toward a recreational activity (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Song et al., 2022). In other words, leisure involvement is also conceptualized as a motivational connection that individuals form toward a leisure activity, arising from their current leisure behaviors and exhibited attitudes (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Bal Turan & Gülşen, 2023). Although there are different conceptualization attempts among scholars, the consensus regarding leisure involvement is that it represents the degree to which individuals dedicate themselves to a leisure activity, or the strength of the cognitive link between the self and the leisure activity (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). Chien (2020) stated that leisure involvement is associated with the intensity, duration, and frequency of activity participation, while Burnkrant and Sawyer (1983) emphasized that due to the highly motivational and satisfying nature of involvement, it influences individuals' re-engagement in leisure activities and the sustainability of their behavior (Öztürk & Alpullu, 2023). Indeed, engaging in leisure activities enables individuals to strengthen their social relationships, create personal meaning (Chen et al., 2020), and enhance their life satisfaction (Hawkins et al., 2004; Masood & Khan, 2023).

Life satisfaction, considered another important factor in terms of individuals' behavior and health (Beşikçi et al., 2019), is defined as an attitude resulting from the cognitive evaluation of one's overall contentment with life (Heller et al., 2004). From a different perspective, life satisfaction is a psychological state in which individuals evaluate their lives as a whole and feel content with this evaluation (Diener et al., 1985). According to Heller and colleagues (2004), events and contextual factors play a prominent role in life satisfaction, and in this context, life satisfaction is formed by the sum of pleasant and unpleasant life experiences. On the other hand, leisure participation is considered an important source of enjoyment, and leisure satisfaction offers various social and psychological benefits such as life satisfaction, subjective well-being, and a sense of accomplishment (Liu & Chu, 2020; Stebbins, 2018). Moreover, regular participation in leisure activities is said to fulfill individuals' psychological needs such as belonging (attachment), autonomy, relaxation, meaning, and a sense of mastery, all of which can contribute to promoting life satisfaction (Sato et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2014). Research has shown that leisure shaped by individuals' involvement has a positive impact on their life satisfaction (Aydin, 2022; Aktop & Göksel, 2023; Hawkins et al., 2004).

There is overwhelming evidence that participation in sports and exercise is associated with both physical and mental health benefits (Paluska & Schwenk, 2000; Heckel et al., 2023). However, due to the social construction of gender roles (Moen, 2001), a significant gender disparity in participation in physical activities is frequently reported (Eime et al., 2022). Studies also indicate consistent gender differences in leisure activities (Chang, 2016; Mao et al., 2023). Although research on leisure and gender dates to the 1970s, studies on leisure activities have primarily focused on the impact of social roles on leisure. (Karaküçük et al., 2017). On the other hand, the concept of gender is a phenomenon that can positively or negatively influence leisure preferences in society. At this point, the Hierarchical Leisure Constraints Theory (Crawford et al., 1991), which addresses gender-based constraints, is an important theoretical approach to consider when understanding social differences in access to leisure opportunities. The theory, by specifically explaining barriers arising from gender differences, allows for a more comprehensive analysis of factors that limit participation in leisure activities. In this context, the perspective offered by the Hierarchical Leisure Constraints Theory provides a meaningful framework for gender-focused leisure research and forms the theoretical foundation of this study.

According to the theory, factors such as age, gender, health problems, shyness, lack of skills, disinterest in activities, responsibilities and duties, and facility conditions can affect leisure use and preferences (Karaküçük et al., 2017; Son et al., 2008). The Hierarchical Leisure Constraints Model argues that individuals must overcome individual constraints, interpersonal

constraints, and structural constraints (social and environmental factors) to participate in leisure activities (Godbey et al., 2010; Kim & Trail, 2010). According to this theory, women experience individual constraints due to stereotypical and sexist attitudes (Karaküçük et al., 2017). It is also known that women face more interpersonal constraints regarding leisure compared to men (Godbey et al., 2010). The likelihood and frequency of women participating in organized and informal sports activities are reported to be lower than those of men (Chang, 2016). The social gender role of women can be considered a recreational constraint (Orhun et al., 2024). The roles and perceptions of differences attributed by society to female and male identities even segregate the leisure spaces utilized by individuals (Karaçan, 2016). One of the spaces frequently used for leisure activities is sports and fitness centers. It is believed that the leisure spent in these settings should be examined from a gender perspective.

In this context, the present study aims to examine the relationship between leisure involvement and life satisfaction among participants of sports and fitness centers, and to determine the role of gender in this relationship. It is anticipated that the research findings will help us better understand the effects of leisure involvement on life satisfaction and enable practitioners to develop more effective interventions by considering gender differences. In line with the purpose of the study, the following hypotheses have been proposed:

H₁: Leisure involvement is positively correlated with life satisfaction.

H₂: Gender moderates the relationship between leisure involvement and life satisfaction

Method

Research Design

This study, conducted to examine the relationship between leisure involvement and life satisfaction and to determine the role of gender in this relationship, was designed using a correlational relational screening model, which is one of the quantitative research approaches.

Research Group

The research group consists of participants from a private sports-fitness center located in Istanbul, in a region favorable for access to sports activities. Data was collected from 227 participants between April and June 2024 through convenience sampling, using both face-to-face interviews and Google Forms. In this context, the selected sample provides an appropriate representation to understand gender participation among individuals who have access to leisure activities. Of the participants, 63% (n=143) are male and 37% (n=84) are female; 74.9% (n=170) reported being single, and 25.1% (n=57) reported being married. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 52 years ($\bar{X}=26.01 \pm 6.56$).

Table 1. Participants' leisure participation information

		<i>n</i>	%
Daily Time Spent	1-2 hours	148	65.2
	3-4 hours	48	21.1
	≥ 5 hours	31	13.7
Days Attended per Week	1-2 days	117	51.5
	3-4 days	66	29.1
	≥ 5 days	44	19.4
Weekly Time Spent	1-5 hours	50	22.0
	6-10 hours	56	24.7
	11-15 hours	49	21.6
	≥ 16 hours	72	31.7

As seen in Table 1, the participants, 51.5% (n=117) reported visiting the sports-fitness centers at least 1–2 days per week, 29.1% (n=66) visited 3–4 days per week, and 19.4% (n=44) visited 5 days or more per week. During each visit, 65.2% (n=148) spent 1–2 hours, 21.1% (n=48) spent 3–4 hours, and 13.7% (n=31) spent 5 hours or more at the center. Finally, participants stated that the average weekly time they dedicated to leisure activities was distributed as follows: 16 hours and above (31.7%, n=72), 6–10 hours (24.7%, n=56), 1–5 hours (22%, n=50), and 11–15 hours (21.6%, n=49).

Data Collection Tools

Based on previous research, a questionnaire structured in three sections was developed to examine leisure involvement, life satisfaction, and socio-economic information. The socio-economic section included items such as gender, age, and education level. Participants were also asked about their experiences at the sports-fitness center, the frequency of their activity participation, and the average time they spent on leisure activities per week.

To determine participants' levels of leisure involvement, the Leisure Involvement Scale developed by Kyle et al. (2007) and adapted into Turkish by Gürbüz et al. (2018) was used. This scale consists of 15 items and 5 sub-dimensions. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha values for the sub-dimensions ranged between .820 and .882, while the overall scale Cronbach's alpha was found to be .958.

For life satisfaction, the Life Satisfaction Scale developed by Diener et al. (1985) was employed. This scale has been adapted to the Turkish culture with different samples (Köker, 1991; Durak et al., 2010). The scale consists of five statements used to assess participants' overall life satisfaction. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater life satisfaction. The Cronbach's alpha value for this scale is .889.

Data Collection and Analysis

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Sakarya University of Applied Sciences (Approval No: E.167838), and permission to conduct the research was granted by the relevant sports-fitness center. Before administering the data collection instruments, participants were provided with a brief explanation about the purpose and significance of the study. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS and AMOS software. In the initial stage, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis) were calculated using SPSS. Normality was tested based on the criterion that skewness and kurtosis values fall within the ± 2 range (George & Mallery, 2016), and multivariate kurtosis was assessed using Mardia's coefficient (Mardia, 1985) (see Table 2).

In the second stage, the measurement model's validity and reliability were evaluated using AMOS. Cronbach's alpha

($\alpha > .70$) and Composite Reliability (CR $> .70$) values were used to assess construct reliability. Factor loadings, CR, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE $> .50$ and CR $> \text{AVE}$) values were used to evaluate convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2009). Model fit was assessed using indices such as Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), alongside Chi-square (χ^2/df) test results (Kline, 2005; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). Finally, to test the hypothesized relationships between variables, regression analysis based on the Bootstrap method (Process v4.2, Model 1) was conducted. A bootstrap resampling option of 5000 samples was used. To accurately detect the effect of the interaction term on the outcome variable, continuous variables were mean-centered (Gürbüz, 2019; Hayes, 2013). Cohen's f^2 was calculated to evaluate the effect size of the model (Kenny, 2020).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the variables

	<i>r</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>Sd</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>	α
Attractiveness (LIS)	.308**	3.46	1.060	-.343	-.539	.882
Centrality (LIS)	.256**	3.60	1.012	-.498	-.320	.845
Social Bonding (LIS)	.241**	3.74	.983	-.722	.089	.863
Identity Affirmation (LIS)	.259**	3.74	.963	-.710	.286	.831
Identity Expression (LIS)	.219**	3.60	.982	-.558	-.109	.820
LIS	.285**	3.64	.904	-.681	.330	.948
Life Satisfaction	1	4.56	1.483	-.550	-.778	.889

Note: ** $p < .01$, $\bar{X}$: Mean, *Sd*; Standard deviation, α : Cronbach's alpha, LIS: Leisure Involvement Scale

When examining the descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables, all constructs are moderately to weakly correlated with each other and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Among the variables, Attractiveness ($\bar{X} = 3.91 \pm 0.93$) has the lowest mean, while Life Satisfaction ($\bar{X} = 6.17 \pm 1.05$) has the highest mean. The skewness and kurtosis values for all variables fall within the ± 2 range. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were found to be above .70, ranging between .820 and .948.

Table 3. Factor loading, validity, and reliability

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Items</i>	λ^*	R^2	CR ($> .70$)	AVE ($> .50$)
Attractiveness (LIS)	LIS3	.860	.740	.896	.742
	LIS2	.904	.817		
	LIS1	.780	.608		
Centrality (LIS)	LIS6	.821	.674	.849	.653
	LIS5	.826	.682		
	LIS4	.776	.602		
Social Bonding (LIS)	LIS9	.856	.733	.868	.688
	LIS8	.881	.776		
	LIS7	.745	.555		
Identity Affirmation (LIS)	LIS12	.846	.716	.841	.640
	LIS11	.708	.501		
	LIS10	.831	.691		
Identity Expression (LIS)	LIS15	.742	.551	.811	.590
	LIS14	.713	.508		
	LIS13	.857	.734		
Life Satisfaction	LSS5	.735	.540	.889	.617
	LSS4	.840	.706		
	LSS3	.812	.659		
	LSS2	.866	.750		
	LSS1	.649	.421		

* $p < .001$, Standardized factor loading, AVE: Average variance extracted, CR: Composite reliability, LIS: Leisure Involvement Scale, LSS: Life Satisfaction Scale

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The CFA results indicated that the model provided a satisfactory fit to the observed data ($\chi^2/df=1.761$, SRMR=.041, RMSEA=.058 [90% CI: .046–.069], GFI=.90, NFI=.93, TLI=.96, CFI=.97). RMSEA values between .05 and .08, and GFI and NFI indices ranging from .90 to .95 indicate an acceptable model fit (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). Accordingly, the RMSEA, GFI, and NFI values fall within acceptable limits. Furthermore, the SRMR value below .05 and TLI and CFI indices above .95 suggest a good model fit (Hair et al., 2009; Kline, 2005). The χ^2 statistic was significant ($p < .01$), and the ratio of χ^2 to degrees of freedom was below the recommended threshold of 3.0 (Kline, 2005).

Table 3 presents the standardized regression coefficients (λ), indicating the relationship of each item to its respective

factor and the squared values of these coefficients. All standardized factor loadings ranged from .649 to .904 ($\lambda > .60$) and were significant, demonstrating that each item meaningfully represents its construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2009).

Reliability and validity assessments of the model are summarized in Tables 2 and 3. Cronbach's alpha values (.820–.948) and Composite Reliability (CR) values (.811–.896) exceeded the acceptable threshold of .70 (Hair et al., 2009). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from .590 to .742, exceeding the .50 cutoff, with CR values higher than AVE, supporting convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2009). These findings confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement model.

Findings

Table 4. The moderating effect of gender on the relationship between leisure involvement and life satisfaction

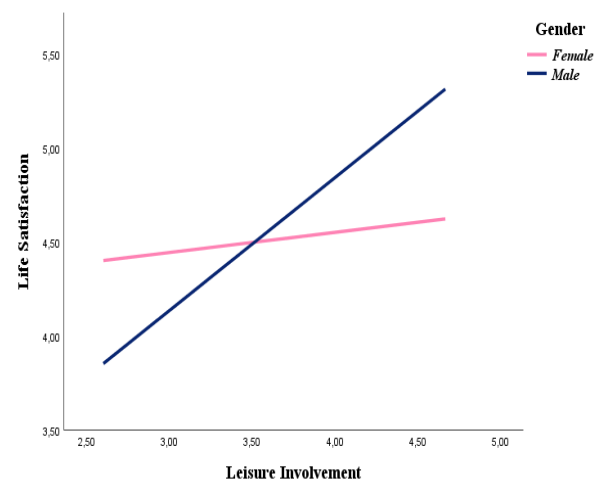
Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients	SH	t	p	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
LIS	.107	.164	.655	.513	-.215	.430
Gender	-2.106	.793	-2.659	.008	-3.669	-.546
Interaction	.599	.211	2.840	.005	.184	1.016
Constant	4.124	.616	6.598	.000	2.910	5.337

Model: $R^2=.114$, $F_{(3, 223)}=9.535$, $p<.001$

A regression analysis based on the bootstrap method with 5000 resamples was conducted to determine the moderating role of gender in the effect of leisure involvement on life satisfaction. It was found that the predictor variables included in the regression model explained approximately 11% of the variance in life satisfaction ($R^2=.114$). Leisure involvement was found to have no significant effect on life satisfaction ($b=.107$, $p > .05$), whereas gender had a significant negative effect ($b = -2.107$, $p < .01$). The interaction effect between leisure involvement and gender on life satisfaction (moderating effect) was also found to be positively significant ($b=.599$, $p < .01$). The inclusion of the interaction term increased the explained variance by 3.2% ($\Delta R^2=.032$). Additionally, Cohen's f^2 value for the interaction term was calculated as .046, indicating a small effect size (Kenny, 2020). This suggests that although the interaction effect is statistically significant, its contribution to the overall explanatory power of the model is limited.

Table 5. The moderating effect of gender on the relationship between leisure involvement and life satisfaction

Gender	Effect	SE	t	p	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
Female	.107	.164	.655	.513	-.215	.430
Male	.707	.134	5.296	.000	.443	.964



Graph 1. The moderating effect of gender on the relationship between leisure involvement and life satisfaction

When examining the details related to the moderating effect (Graph 1 and Table 5), it was found that leisure involvement had a statistically significant impact on life satisfaction in males ($b=.707$, 95% CI [.443, .964], $t=5.296$, $p < .001$). In females, however, the effect of leisure involvement on life satisfaction was determined to be statistically non-significant ($b=.107$, 95% CI [-.215, .430], $t=.513$, $p > .05$). As a result, the impact of leisure involvement on life satisfaction differs significantly by gender.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between leisure involvement and life satisfaction among fitness center participants and to determine the role of gender in this relationship. The gender-based aspects of social life can have an impact on individuals' leisure participation and outcomes. The meaning/satisfaction of life inherent in leisure can be achieved by individuals through different types and levels of involvement. Fitness centers, which are one of the ways to stay fit and engage in physical activity, are leisure spaces that maintain a fresh place in popular sports culture. Given their widespread use, fitness centers are leisure activity venues where the effects of gender differences should not be overlooked. In this regard, the present study was conducted specifically in fitness centers, which are relatively more accessible and have a broader audience.

The results indicate a positive and significant relationship between leisure involvement and life satisfaction ($r=.285$, $p<.01$). This suggests that participants with higher levels of leisure involvement tend to have higher levels of life satisfaction. It is well-known that participation in physical activities at fitness centers extends beyond just physical benefits (Heckel et al., 2023). Studies in the literature also mention the positive effect of individuals' leisure involvement on life satisfaction (Aydın, 2022; Aktop & Göksel, 2023; Çevik et al., 2021; Öztürk & Alpulu, 2023). These findings provide empirical evidence supporting previous research results. On the other hand, it was found that leisure involvement has a stronger effect on life satisfaction among male participants. Considering that fitness centers are leisure spaces with relatively intensive use by men, it can be stated that the obtained results are acceptable for the specific sample in this study. However, the Cohen's f^2 value calculated for the interaction term indicates a small effect size. Indeed, previous large-scale international studies have found that, despite using different samples, life satisfaction measures, and statistical methods, the contribution of gender to life satisfaction is significant but small (Fortin et al., 2015; Graham & Chatopadhyay, 2013; Joshanloo & Jovanović, 2020). These findings align with Hyde's (2005) gender similarity hypothesis, which suggests that males and females are fundamentally similar in many psychological variables. Inglehart (2002) explains the small gender difference in life satisfaction by stating that "a person's gender is a permanent characteristic, meaning that by the time most people take the survey, they have already adapted to the advantages and disadvantages of being male or female."

Leisure activity participation preferences not only provide spaces for the experience of gender relations but also contribute to the production of new gender codes in these spaces (Bozok et al., 2019). Studies have shown that men and women prefer sports-fitness centers with different goals and expectations (Güdül, 2008; Afthinos et al., 2005). This is because gender plays an active role in influencing consumer behavior, interest, and motivation (Peterson, 2005; Tekvar, 2016; Yerlisu Lapa et al., 2012). Research suggests that men show more interest in sports

than women and report higher levels of both psychological and physiological satisfaction (Aydın, 2022; Ağyar et al., 2012; Kalfa, 2017). Men place more importance on physical details such as health, competition, body and appearance, self-esteem, social interaction, fun, skill development, as well as sports equipment, apparatus, equipment quality, and environmental conditions in their motivation for exercise compared to women (Cengiz & Yaşartürk, 2020; Güzel et al., 2020; Tekvar, 2016). Similarly, men's involvement in sports-fitness centers is higher than women's in the subdimensions of importance (Serdar, 2021) and attractiveness (Kara & Sarol, 2021). Male participants perceive their activities as more exciting, engaging, and fun (Kara & Sarol, 2021). Therefore, in an area where men place such high importance on details, it becomes increasingly important for businesses to cater specifically to men, while women's level of involvement remains relatively lower. This is because marketing efforts in this field are often more strongly associated with the male body, which is linked to strength, health, and fitness (Özer & Yazar, 2023). Particularly, various advertisements shown during sports programs are typically targeted towards men. Such advertisements, which often portray a macho male image, emphasize male dominance in the service (Tekvar, 2016). In ads featuring women, they are usually depicted as weak, thin, and delicate, while men are shown as much stronger and more muscular compared to women. Women are not depicted as muscular in these advertisements because muscular women could be perceived as challenging the strength and superiority of men (Özer & Yazar, 2023). The gender regime that associates muscularity with male biological traits and avoids associating muscular bodies with femininity reinforces this perception. In this regard, sports can be considered a form of resistance, as it allows women to break out of the narrow boundaries of being thin, delicate, and fragile qualities traditionally ascribed to them (Kavasoglu & Macit, 2018). However, such discriminatory practices and unfair competitive attitudes not only lead to gender inequalities but can also harm consumers and ultimately societies (Tekvar, 2016).

It is known that women have relatively less access to leisure compared to men (Eckermann, 2012). Women often feel that the time they dedicate to physical activity is "stolen" from other pursuits that are more socially acceptable in their circles. As a result, they may not be able to devote enough attention to their sports activities, which negatively impacts their satisfaction, pleasure, and overall wellbeing (Karaküçük et al., 2017:247). Since gender roles are socially constructed, there are different roles and persistent inequality issues in society (Moen, 2001). However, women and men also follow different biographical paths and paces. These differences can provide valuable insights for the development and implementation of physical activity programs and services based on leisure (Son et al., 2008).

Some physical activities, due to their associations with masculinity and societal attitudes toward gender, are more frequently preferred by men (Kara & Sarol, 2021). In various studies, sports requiring power usage (e.g., football, bodybuilding, wrestling, boxing) are considered masculine (Adams, 2011; Alsamih, 2024; Bulgu, 2012; Gillett & White, 1992; Hacisoftaoğlu & Safter, 2015), while sports like dance, gymnastics, and pilates are labeled as feminine (Bozok et al., 2019; Koca & Demirhan, 2005). Due to gender differences, it can be said that women's participation and preference rates for such activities are lower compared to men, and this could negatively affect the level of satisfaction they derive from the activity and their overall life satisfaction (Aydın, 2022).

Furthermore, leisure, today has become an area surrounded by body ideals, discourses, practices, and relationships where men can establish their identities (Bozok et al., 2019). In this sense, it can be said that women's leisure preferences and usage spaces are constrained by gender perspectives. This is because women's bodies and their use of leisure spaces are often controlled by men (Demirbaş, 2020). Given societal attributions, women are more likely to prefer activities that are considered relatively more "feminine," such as dance, pilates, or zumba. This could have resulted in lower levels of interest in sports-fitness centers, diminishing the significance of leisure involvement and its impact on life satisfaction. According to Nuqoba et al. (2023), life satisfaction is a multi-dimensional and complex structure influenced by various factors, such as economic status, health conditions, social environment, individual expectations, and the meaning one attributes to life. In this context, it is possible to talk about the existence of external and/or uncontrollable variables that could have both positive and negative effects on life satisfaction. In other words, since the leisure involvement and gender variables tested in this study only represent certain aspects of life satisfaction, it can be said that the overall explanatory power of the model remains somewhat limited.

The results obtained in this study indicate that individuals' leisure involvement has a direct impact on life satisfaction, and this effect differs based on gender. It was found that high leisure involvement is strongly related to high life satisfaction among male participants. This research clearly demonstrates that leisure involvement is a significant determinant of life satisfaction among fitness center clients, and that gender plays a distinct moderating role in this relationship. These findings reinforce the idea that leisure activities are not just hobbies, but critical factors that enhance individuals' life satisfaction.

Limitations and Recommendations

The study data were collected from a cross-sectional sample of sports-fitness participants at a single private fitness center. The high number of male participants may be attributed to the fact that the study was conducted in one specific fitness center. Similar studies focused on fitness centers have also observed male-

dominated participant groups (Arslanboğa, 2024; Çiftçi & Çakmak, 2018). Larger or smaller gender differences might emerge in studies focused on groups or nations. Global trends are not always applicable to one single nation or group. Therefore, a useful avenue for future research would be to examine gender differences in various contexts. To ensure greater data diversity, it is suggested that future studies include fitness centers that offer a broader range of services and have larger and more diverse membership bases. A limitation of this study is its exclusive focus on the moderating role of gender. Conducting similar studies across different demographic groups, cultures, and larger chain businesses could make the findings more generalizable.

The findings of this study provide valuable references for industry stakeholders related to sports and fitness participants' leisure behaviors, involvement, and experiences. Fitness centers and other leisure activity providers should develop programs and events that encourage increased leisure involvement. Given the high popularity and accessibility of sports-fitness centers, it is expected that they provide gender-neutral approaches. Advertisements targeting potential customers should focus on promoting healthy lifestyles rather than adopting a gendered approach to body image. The messaging should emphasize mental and emotional well-being rather than just physical appearance. Gender-specific leisure programs and marketing strategies should be developed to encourage participation in activities that increase life satisfaction for individuals of both genders.

Future studies could assess sports-fitness centers alongside other industry sectors from a gender perspective for a broader comparison. Future research could also examine the underlying mechanisms of gender's moderating role in this relationship. For example, psychological, social, or cultural factors that differentiate the impact of leisure activities on life satisfaction for men and women could be explored through qualitative methods. Additionally, the impact of different types of leisure activities (e.g., creative, social, physical) on life satisfaction, and how these effects vary by gender, can be investigated. Longitudinal studies provide valuable insights into the dynamics of the relationship between leisure involvement and life satisfaction over time.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest among the authors related to publication of this article.

Author Contributions

Research Idea: ES and GK; **Research Design:** GK and EE; **Data Collection:** ES; **Data Analysis:** EE; **Writing:** GK, EE and ES; **Critical Review:** GK, EE.

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