

行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫 成果報告

“休閒：一種生活策略？”臺灣中年母親休閒認知之型塑與  
跨週期演化

計畫類別：個別型計畫

計畫編號：NSC94-2413-H-028-001-

執行期間：94年08月01日至95年07月31日

執行單位：國立臺灣體育學院休閒運動學系

計畫主持人：陳渝苓

報告類型：精簡報告

報告附件：出席國際會議研究心得報告及發表論文

處理方式：本計畫可公開查詢

中 華 民 國 95 年 11 月 1 日

(Leisure as positive: series I)

“Leisure as a life strategy? ”: The evolvement process of leisure recognition among Taiwanese mothers in managing the midlife transition.

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**I. The background: An opportunity to advocate.**

We, the so-called modern civilians, currently live in a changing society that never stops evolving (Booth, Darke, and Yeandle, 1996). Stimulating by the enormous impacts produced by the change of social ideology, development of information technology, and the rising demands of life quality, our living surrounding has different facades and realities every day, even every moment. “Leisurely” speaking, if we perceive leisure as one subject of the social science context, it is necessary for us to acknowledge that the idea of leisure, including all other sub-leisure concepts, such as recreation and play, is also evolving along with the society (Chen & Chen, 2003)<sup>1</sup>. At this point, a lot of traditional issues have to be re-examined from new perspectives; a lot of neglected groups or subcultures, such as gender and age groups, are necessary to be re-discovered and re-discussed in leisure-related studies (O’Neil, 1991; Kelly and Freysinger, 2000). Mostly important, the new explanation of leisure should apply to these discussions in order to make them use to our changing society.

Gender, the most fundamental issue in leisure studies, is evolving too. Since 1980s, a few scholars who highly interested in women’s leisure started their “Journey” to discover women’s leisure benefits, participation, opportunities, constraints, and most critically, women’s own experience (Henderson et al, 1989, 1996; Hochschild, 1989; Gilligan, 1982). Responding to this wave of thought, there were many studies relating to women’s leisure and recreation in recent Taiwan. Yet, few studies really “speak for women from women’s standpoint”, when most others still adopt homogeneous perspective to generalize all women’s leisure in spite of any other factors that possibility cause diversity among women’s everyday

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<sup>1</sup>陳相榮, 陳渝苓. (2003). Please see references for details.

life (Chen, 2004). For example, the type of leisure/recreation/sport participation is a frequent-appeared research topic in leisure-related studies, as well as the category of leisure constraints. These studies have great contribution for publics to comprehend a regular social fact, but these studies also fail to disclose the very basic rationale or life logic that exists behind the social fact. On the basis of this neglect, there is an urgent call to encourage scholars to understand women's experience from women's own, as Henderson et al's belief revealed in the masterpiece "Both gains and gap." (1996).

In addition, Denzin (1997), an outstanding sociologist and methodologist, urged scholars to care for the importance of the "context," because it really matters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Women's leisure behavior and recognition toward leisure could be very diverse in different contexts, such as time, space, and most evidently, life courses. Due to the significant impacts originated by the age factor in people's lives, the issue of life course (or life span) is always the major concern in leisure-related field (Levinson et al, 1973; Iso-Ahola, 1980; Kelly, 1996). However, the characteristic of "continuity" in life courses studies does not draw much attention. For example, in 2004 Hsu and Lee conduct a study, which concerns women in empty-nested period, to successfully expose how women's utilize leisure to empower themselves. Yet, we shall understand that the life course cannot be merely divided into different spans, because the continuation and interrelation between different spans should be concerned, especially for two spans that are consecutive to each other. Similarly, leisure behavior will change across different life courses, but the change has a consequence, which means that leisure behavior won't occur for no reason.

Besides, if we like to discuss issues regarding women and life courses, motherhood is the other fundamental concept necessary to be included. Many leisure researchers recognize motherhood in a passive way (e.g., hard working, ethic of care, etc.). They also identify the appearance of children will bring a most dramatic impact in women's life and becomes the major source of mothers' leisure constraints (see Chen 2003, Ruth, Kelly, lifespan, Henderson,

Shaw, 2001; Lee, 1996). Based on this argument, motherhood carries a victim image<sup>2</sup>, and this reason justify their expectation for one day that “freedom” will come—after kids grown up. This perspective is usually emphasized by scholars in leisure discipline, however, other developmental psychology literatures indicate different opinions. According to Papalia and Olds (1992), mothers have serious anxiety and complicated coping process after the “loss” of their kids. Is this contradictory? And, does leisure relate to this contradictory?

Thus, two curious questions still stays in vagueness:

“Do mothers really perceive children as major constraints to their leisure?”

“What role do leisure play in those mothers everyday life, especially in the transition of life courses—early motherhood and later motherhood?”

## **II. The purpose of the study**

As a consequence, this is a continuing study of the author’s doctoral dissertation<sup>3</sup> regarding Taiwanese mothers’ identity construction through leisure participation (including recreation and sport). In this previous study, the author focuses on how women deal with their “inborn” constraints caused by children, how mothers adopt leisure as a way for positively constructing their limited role, and further optimistically manage their everyday life. Noticeably, the author has found two remarkable facts:

1. Motherhood is not passively constrained by family and kids as many scholars assumed.

Instead, the relationship between the mother and her kids constitutes the most basic ground for mothers’ leisure recognition and participation. For example:

“Sometimes I am pretty confused, you know, confused. I have to spend lots of time, but sometimes I will be afraid..um... of someday after my kids grow up. They are my best pals, see? One day if they are gone, I guess I will

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<sup>2</sup> Oppressed by family and ethic of cares. Please see Gilligan, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Chen, Yu-Ling. (2003). *A Choice among No Choice”: Exploring Taiwanese Mother's Agency and Identity along the Blurred Boundaries between Leisure, Work and Consumption*. Ph.D Dissertation. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Champaign, IL.

be pretty... um, I don't know..”<sup>4</sup>

(Miss Lin, talking about her kids)

People always recognize that children live upon their mothers. However, the author's previous study (Chen, 2003) reveals the symbiosis relationship (leisure-wise) between mothers and their children, and this type of relationship also exposes mothers' emotional dependency on kids (Chen, 2004 NSC). Additionally, mothers' implicit fear to their future loss (of kids) is disclosed as well in this former study. Who depends on whom? It is still unknown.

2. In addition to the doubtful symbiosis relationship, the other major suggestion in author's previous research is the possible existence of “Anticipatory Leisure”, which proclaims that mothers reveal a tendency to adopt a type of strategic leisure/recreation participation for their “future”—their next life stage. In other words, for those who current have kids at side might actively use certain types of leisure/recreation for the purpose of preparing their life in next stage (empty-nested period). But this proposition needs the further examination.

On the basis of these two unsolved problems remained from the author's previous research, for the purpose of responding Henderson and Denzin's call and corresponding to governments current “six major education concerns<sup>5</sup>”, this study intends to focus on four major issues: mothers, family, the “continuation” of life course, and leisure development, in order to built a integrated study to understand mothers' special life strategy in confronting their “midlife transition” (Levinson, 1978).

More specifically, this study attempts to answer the following four consequential questions:

1. How does the symbiosis relationship between mothers and children affect women's

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<sup>4</sup> The interview texts from author's previous study, see no.3.

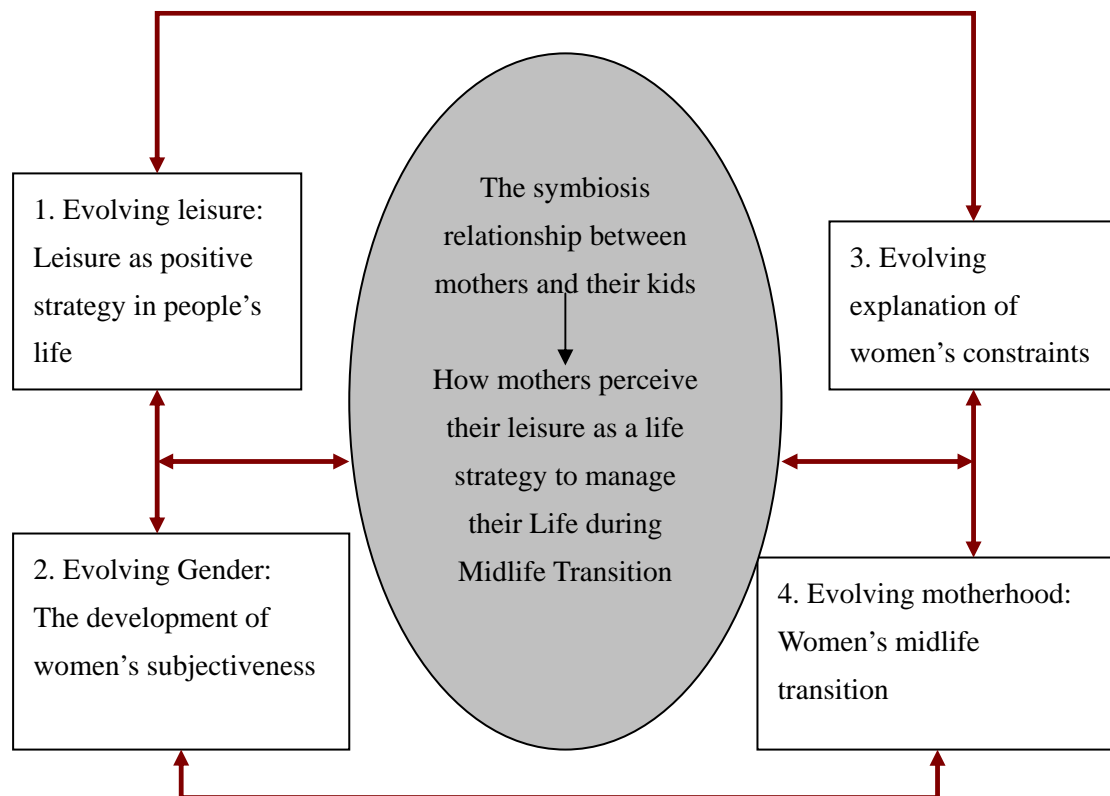
<sup>5</sup> 6 major education concerns: gender, family, environment, human rights, career, and Information Technology. Please see [http://hersearch.yam.com/edu9/edu9\\_issue/](http://hersearch.yam.com/edu9/edu9_issue/) for more details.

midlife transition from the perspective of leisure?

2. How do mothers sense and recognize their leisure during midlife transition (across different life courses)? How can leisure (including recreation, exercise, and other sub-leisure concepts) become a strategic solution that helps mothers to manage their everyday life?
3. What type of leisure strategy that mothers adopt to manage their everyday life?
4. What's the difference between mothers who adopt leisure as life strategy and those who do not?

In order to answering these questions, four major perspectives will be employed as the theoretical foundation of this study: leisure as positive strategy for people's life, the development of the concept of gender, new explanations of leisure constraints, and women's midlife transition. Hopefully this four-dimension literatures review that centers on the idea of "evolving" can provide more theoretical support for justifying the legitimacy of this study.

**Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework**



### **III. Review of the Literature:**

#### **1. “Not Only...But Also”: Leisure as Positive**

Leisure is an evolving process (Kelly, 1983) rather than a fixed norm or phenomenon. The concept of leisure historically has not enjoyed much currency as either an analytic construct or as a category of human action. In previous decades, scholars tended to define leisure in more inactive ways—e.g., as left-over/residue time, as non-work activities, or as non-obligated experience (Kelly, 1996, 2000), and the function of leisure is usually treated as a way of compensation of labor. What these definitions have in common is their opposition to ideas of “work”, “active” production, and “energetic” living experience. In both the US and Taiwan, a dominant ideology which privileges work as active and denominates leisure as passive continues to inform our ideas of the concept. In this condition, leisure that contains the ideas of recreation and play is often associated with hedonism, laziness, or extravagance. Moreover, leisure has been categorized as a “feminine” characteristic (especially in its association of being “non-productive”) by androcentric ideology (see Firat 1994; McDowell, 1999). Similar to women’s marginalization in our society, leisure is a concept that has been excluded from the social process.

However, there has been a dramatic change in defining the meanings of leisure in the past two decades (Chen, 2003; Chen & Chen, 2003). Researchers interested in exploring leisure-related issues have adopted a whole new approach to defining and examining the meanings of leisure, rather than merely assuming leisure as a passive status or a manipulated instrument by the macro structural power. More and more scholars attempt to put emphasis on leisure itself, including the denotation it enclosed—such as “freedom”, “freewill”, and “self-determination” (Kelly and Kelly, 1994), and the possibilities that leisure can potentially provide to people’s ordinary lives (Kelly, 1983). Different from previous definitions, the concept of leisure becomes more associating with individual’s agency, which contains the

idea of self-determination and autonomy at the core (Chen, 2004). Additionally, the purpose of leisure has shifted from previous relaxation-oriented aim to current wellness-achieving intention (Ton, 2001; Chen, 2003<sup>6</sup>). Based on this argument, leisure is positive and useable, which means that leisure for people's everyday life not only provides the function of "escape from the routine" and "relaxation" from the work, but at some levels offers a more positive, constructive, and encouraging meanings in people's everyday life (Austin and Crawford, 2001). Through leisure, a lot of things can be achieved, as some scholars claimed (Shaw, 1994, 2001). Especially when many scholars adopt social interactionist approach and agree with George H. Mead's "self" theory (Mead, 1934; Blummer, 1969), they believe that Mead's determination about the "self" theory opens a gate that allows leisure to become a place for actively involving individual's interpretation toward the concept of leisure, recreation, and play (Kelly, 1983, Wearing, 1991; 1992). Simply put, leisure serves positive purpose and meanings in our lives.

## **2. "Leisure on women's own": The rise of the women subject**

Different from the women movement's in 1960s that focuses on women's equality issues, such as emphasis of women's equality and similarities to men (Gross, 1986), the recent feminists gradually shift their attention from passive/oppressive points of view to women's subjectivity, autonomy, and empowerment ( Deem, 1986; Wearing 1998; Wearing 1991; Henderson et al 1996, Scanlon 2000, Hsu and Lee, 2004)—"that is, to women's right to political, social, economic and intellectual self-determination" (Gross 1986, p. 193).

In the past two decades, scholars interested in women-related issues not only attempted to deconstruct traditional assumptions of womanhood, but also fought against universalizing women's experience in certain themes. Instead, they emphasize the diversity among women who has different cultural backgrounds and recognize women's subjectivity in the context of

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<sup>6</sup> 陳相榮 (2003). Please see references for details.

their daily practices (Tucker, 1998; Wearing 1998). This new version not merely provides women chances to redefine and re-conceptualize their traditional identities (Wearing 1988, 1991); it grants researchers a new approach to re-examine women's daily experience simultaneously.

Although there are many different feminist theories, their cores are the same—addressing the issues of equal rights and opportunities for women, and making women's daily experience visible in our society (Henderson, 1996; Henderson et al, 1996). A few researchers in the field of leisure studies claim the importance of gender issues and commit themselves in exploring the meanings of women's leisure, despite three decades of feminist scholarship in general (Allesi, 1986; Henderson 19994a, b;; Henderson et al. 1989, 1996; Shaw,1988, 1992, 1994, 2001; Freysinger & Flannery 1992; Wearing 1988, 1991, 1998; Green, 1999; Henderson and Bialeschki 1991, Lee, 1996). Additionally, many scholars advocate re-examining traditional leisure theories and constructing new understandings, especially by using feminism as an approach to discover women's own interpretation toward leisure (Henderson 1994b, 1996; Wearing 1997, Henderson et al, 1996; Aitchison 2000). Researchers who sense this urgency (e.g. Henderson 1994a, b, 1996; Freysinger and Flannery 1992; Shaw 1994, 2001; Green 1998, O'Neill, 1991) advocate that women's leisure cannot be determined from traditional point of view, such as “male scholarship” (Henderson 1994a, Tetreault, 1985), because these views failed to acknowledge the complexity, diversity, and uniqueness of women's leisure (Wimbush & Talbot, 1988; Henderson 1991; 1994a; Wearing 1998). O'Neill (unknown) points out those traditional definitions of leisure are problematic for women because “[they] fail to acknowledge the wider cultural context” (p. 197). Henderson (1994a) also suggests researchers to put more thoughts on gendered meanings in order to understand how gender construction affects women's interpretation of leisure. Here is the formula she provided for analytic purpose:

Gender meanings of Leisure=Values/Entitlement + Benefits/Outcomes +

Containers/Opportunities + Negotiated constraints + Life situation

(Henderson, 1994a, p. 3)

Based on this formula, if we want to understand the meaning of women leisure, it is a requirement for us to admit that there are many factors able to affect how women perceive leisure,<sup>7</sup> especially for those who engage in the family context. Leisure, for women, cannot be determined by a singular dimension. Instead, it is a complicated complex which involves in every facet of mothers daily life, and it is unfair to use dichotomy to separate women's experience into two singular definitions: either leisure or work. What is more important for them is the process of how women achieve their own determination toward this concept.

In recent years, the few researchers contribute themselves to develop and re-define women's issues for the purpose of enriching the deficiency of traditional leisure theory, such as Green's study of women's friendship (1998); Jackson and Samdahl's study of lesbians' leisure (1998); Parry and Shaw's study about women in menopause (1999); James' study about the space using (2001); and Henderson's study in women of color (2001), etc. In author's previous study (Chen, 2003), the meaning of "leisure as positive" is apparent too, especially when mothers come out an new life strategy—"Anticipatory Leisure"—for preparing their future life after the separation with their grown-up kids. All of those confirm that the meanings of leisure have very different meanings to the past.

### **3. "Alternative leisure"<sup>8</sup>: Deconstructing mother's constraints**

Freedom and constraints, similar to the co-existence of brightness and darkness, are two most fundamental ideas within the concept of leisure. The issue of women's leisure in particular cannot be separated from the discussion of constraints they encountered because of women's disadvantaged situation in society. Women have been targeted as the major subjects

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<sup>7</sup> Actually, Henderson points out that this formula is useful for men's leisure analysis as well, since it relates to the idea of gender.

<sup>8</sup> The concept of "alternative leisure" was presented in 2004 PreOlympic Congress held in Thessaloniki , Greece, from Aug 6 to Aug 11<sup>th</sup>.

in studies regarding constraints. In early studies (1980s), most researchers paid visible amount of attention to define different types of constraints, such as economic constraints, lack of opportunities, lack of time, and lack of facilities (Jackson 1988, Searle and Jackson, 1985). Along with the rising importance of leisure-related issues that have been enriched by feminism (Henderson, 1991), the discussion of women's constraints has tended to be varied and more related to women's daily practices. Meanwhile, the definition of constraints has been extended to "any factors that affect leisure participating negatively" in every perspective (Henderson et al, 1996, p. 195), rather than "preventing women from their leisure participation" (Goodale and Witt, 1989).

Since the 1980s, leisure constraints research has had a prosperous development in both conceptual and empirical studies (Henderson et al. 1996, p. 195). There are many models that have been formulated in order to theorize and conceptualize the idea of constraints. Primarily, according to Crawford, Jackson and Godbey's (1991) classic model, leisure constraints can be divided into three different categories: intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints.

First of all, Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, and Freysinger (1996) define intrapersonal constraints as those "factors that affect preferences or lead to a lack of interest in particular types of leisure activities" (p. 196).. The occurrence of intrapersonal constraints is due to an individual's inclinations, attitudes, situations (such as age and time), and values that possibly affect his/her leisure participation. In addition, this level of constraints also includes other social members' influence on the formation of individual's preference, which indirectly causes individual's lack of interest in certain types of leisure activities (Jackson & Scott, 1999).

Crawford et al. (1991) indicate that intrapersonal constraints result in interpersonal constraints "if they affect the nature of relationships and interactions" (Samdahl & Jekubovich 1997, p. 432). On the basis of the intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal

constraints “involve the interaction and relationship between individuals” (Samdahl and Jekuborich 1997, p. 432). For example, parents tend to prohibit girls from engaging in some leisure practices or going to some places during the night because of the consideration of safety; lack of company or lack of leisure partners are also good examples to explain this type of constraints. Different from intrapersonal constraints, this type of constraint represents external restrictions involving others.

Actually, these two levels of constraints cannot be separated; instead, they are intertwined because an individual’s preferences and leisure interests are intertwined with his/her interaction with other social members, internally and externally. I argue that there is no clear boundary between these two levels of constraints. For example, lack of leisure partners will result in the loss of interest in certain types of activities.

Lastly, the structural constraints can be recognized as “factors which intervene between leisure preference or choices and actual participation” (Samdahl and Jekuborich 1997, p. 431). Unlike the previous two constraints, the structural constraints are not directly related to interpersonal relationships (Henderson et al. 1996). For example, lack of money, lack of time, lack of facilities and space will result in this kind of constraint on leisure because personal needs cannot be coordinated with some external factors.

However, a question emerges: Does the existence of leisure constraints actually results the failure of participating leisure? In author’s previous study (Chen, 2003), it is found that the occurrence of leisure constraints and participation are not necessary relates to each other in mothers’ everyday life. This means, mothers reveal outstanding tendency to negotiate their constraints and simultaneously, endow their leisure new meanings, such as the appearance of “alternative leisure” which is second-choice type of leisure they can practiced under many constraints. For example:

“ Well, it is impossible for me to go to gym after work, I have to take care of kids, no choice. But do I keep exercising? of course, but I will go

someplace safe that my kids can come with me, such as the ice arena in nearby playground. I can jog,, and kids can rollerblade in that arena.”

(Mrs. Wang, talking about her exercise habit)<sup>9</sup>

As Chen (2004) suggested, scholars cannot merely discuss the types or categories of constraints that stop people’s leisure participation. Rather, research should considerate the insufficiency of constraints theory and pay more attention in exploring how people negotiate leisure and make participation possible (Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993).

#### **4 “Gains or loss?” The crisis mothers confronted in midlife transition.**

Midlife is the most contradictory period in life spans (Levinson,1978; Kelly and Freysinger, 2000; Rapport and Rapport, 1975; Iso-Ahola, 1980). Some people recognize this period of time as the “prime of life” or so-called “golden era” (Kelly and Freysinger, 1999), due to the success people achieved and the stability people maintained, in terms of money, family, wisdom, and generativity (Mannell and Kleiber, 1997). Yet, some scholars acknowledge this life span develop along with many different “crisis” (Bammel and Burrrns-Bammel, 1992), especially in the perspective of “loss”: loss of youngness, loss of energy, and loss of future expectation since the life road will be downhill afterwards.

For women, the most significant factor in charge of women’s adulthood is the appearance of the first kid (Olds and Papalia, 1992; Russell, 2002; Kelly, 1983, 1987; Huang, 2003<sup>10</sup>). Based on the nature bond between kids and mothers, plus the social enforcement that encourages mothers to ethically take good care with their kids, motherhood is an everlasting role (Chen ,2003). Midlife, at this sense, is hard for a mother, since a woman have to experience a few dramatic changes in this period of time: have children, raise them, educate them, let go of them, and the menopause. Many researches who emphasize on the early stage of family life span notice how much a mother have to change, such as drop out

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<sup>9</sup> Interview transcripts in the previous study . See footnote 3 for details.

<sup>10</sup> 黃千慈 (2003). Please see references for details

from labor market and make schedule adjustment (till children grow up), in order to appropriately execute the maternity role. However, these studies ignore the in-depth feelings and adjustment of mothers after their “loss” of children in empty nest period (Tai, 2002<sup>11</sup>). The transition between “gains and loss”—gain kids, lose freedom vs. gain freedom, lose kids in later— constitute the fundamental ground for mother’s contradictory life situation and everyday experience, and for a lot of times, this transition causes coping/adaptation problems on women (Levinson, 1978).

Indeed, the mid-life period lays a series ambush of challenges for women in their everyday life. According to related studies regarding women in midlife transition, interestingly, women reveal amazing capability in dealing with the life change (Olds and Papalia, 1992). Chen (2003) points out the possibility of anticipatory leisure, which discloses women’s agency in positively use leisure as a strategy to manage their future for preventing negative living status in future life span; Huang (2003) indicates that women has “better” coping ability than men in midlife; Hsu and Lee (2004)<sup>12</sup> claims that women in empty nest period demonstrate a process of entitlement and empowerment toward their life situation; Olds and Papalia (1992) also recognize that women in midlife span might perceive the transition passively, yet, more and more women reveal an optimistic development, psychological-wise and attitude-wise, in confronting their future (including the forthcoming later adulthood). Yet, except Chen’s study (2003), few studies concerns about the type of coping strategies that are able to help women to manage their life, not only for now, but for future as well. Thus, this becomes the most important question that is attempted to answer in this study.

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<sup>11</sup> 臺美光 (2003). Please see references for details.

<sup>12</sup> 許義忠, 李幸蓉 (2004). Please see references for details.

#### **IV: Methodology: Qualitative Thinking**

By adapting the theoretical reviews I laid out in the previous chapter as a basis, again, we understand that the core of the research is seeking for an understand toward women's subject daily experience, and how leisure involves in their lives. This is a standpoint research within feminism, which "focuses on women's standpoint and conceptualizes the everyday world as a problematic, that is continually created, shaped, and known by women who within it and its organization, which is shaped by external material factors or textually mediated relations" (Olesen, 2000, p. 222). This study not only recognizes women's "everyday everynight activities" (p.222) as the most fundamental thing to understand, but also acknowledges women's own subjectivity as a site to produce knowledge, as many scholars claim in their women-centered studies (Green, 1998; Henderson, 1991, Smith, 1987, Harding, 1987).

In recent leisure-related studies, the need of re-exploration and re-definition toward the purpose of enriching the deficiencies of traditional theoretical framework is not the only challenge that has been discussed widely. The increasing attentions are urged to focus on the search for alternative methodology that allows new opportunities and instruments for researchers to examine leisure issues differently, instead of using traditional quantitative-centered approach which is derived from positivistic origin (Henderson, 1991; Dupuis, 1999). Dupuis (1999) indicates that in recent years there are more scholars in our discipline, who dissatisfied with Positivism tradition, turn to conduct "qualitative-exploratory research" (p.43) in order to seek for an understanding toward some certain cases or issues. Especially for those who are interested in women's studies, this becomes the primary group that take qualitative approach and data collection to fulfill the desire of understanding women's experience and situation, which cannot be easily exposed by using traditional methods (eg. Green, 1998; Parry and Shaw, 1999). Similarly, this study does not plan to search for a universal generalization or rules as other quantitative studies did; rather,

discovering women's daily experience and how they construct their reality are the basic intention here. Due to this reason, the qualitative, interpretivist approach will be utilized in order to "understand" rather than "explain" the meanings of married women's world.

## **1. Qualitative data-collection: Instruments**

### **a. Focus groups**

Focus groups, or focused interviews, has been identified as the most widely used and originative method for data collection in social science, especially for qualitative research design (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). In fact, focus groups belongs to the category of interviews method, yet, with numerous conversational partners who active involve in a discussion process toward a subject (Schwadt, 1997). According to Goldman (1962), focus groups method has three major elements:

Group—a group of interactive people that have common interests.

Depth— a search for an in-depth understanding and disclosure.

Interview—a meoderator use this group as a way to acquire knowledge. (p.16)

The reason to deploy this method as the primary one for data collection is based on author's previous study regarding mothers. In that study, conversational partners revealed an amazing tendency of "sharing". Each interviewee was willing to share their stories with others, and hope she can share others' stories as well. In addition, author recognize motherhood as a complicated concept, and utilizing focus groups can further help conversational partners to depict and disclose themselves when they have "allies"—other mothers—at sight.

### **b. Field Notes**

Before, during, and after each focus groups session, the interviewer will require taking notes in order to record some data or events based on informal conversations with interviewees and observations. The purpose of taking filed notes is to supplement some deficiencies of focus groups, especially for those which cannot be verbally expressed, such

like interviewees' facial expressions, their body language, or other incidents happened while focus group session is on progress. The use of this technique will not only help the researcher to have more information about conversational partners, but also add up some interesting insights which are noteworthy in this study. Especially when the researcher tries to transcribe the conversation, field notes can assist the researcher to recall some details which are omitted in recorded tapes or help them to decide the possibilities of follow ups. In addition, field notes can make the interviewer to recode her thought and perception during the interview, and this will be useful for the researcher when she write up reflexive texts in the future analysis.

### **c. Participant-Observations**

“Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak”

(Berger, 1972, p.7)

Berger (1972) recognizes the importance of “seeing”. Although the way we see is seriously affected by our subjective values and attitudes, the seeing still plays a very crucial role especially when we try to interpret our world verbally. “It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world” (Berger, 1972). On the basis of this argument, the participant observation cannot be omitted in qualitative data-collection since it is the most basic way to encounter the behavior performed by an individual. In this study the participant-observation will be used during the process of focus group session in order to supplement the deficiency of focus groups.

## **2. Qualitative data-collection: Sampling**

### **a. conversational partners:**

Due to the purpose of this research, women who have children and currently situate in midlife transition will be the ideal conversational partners (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) for this study. However, we should notice that the midlife is a continuing process that has no special start or certain end since the core of this study is to find out women's experience “during” this

process. In order to achieve this purpose, the following criteria have been deployed in order to obtain appropriate conversational partners:

1. Women who are married with children.
2. Women who are aged from 35 to 55.
3. Both housewives and professional women will be included in sampling (for the purpose of comparison in data analysis).

Totally, this study has recruit 14 mothers to attend 3 different focus groups, 5 for two, and 4 for the other, and the conversation data were collected separately.

#### **b. Sampling:**

Utilizing a useful sampling technique that enables the researcher to recruit appropriate interviewees can benefit the efficiency of Focus groups. However, the “quality” of interviewees should be more emphasized since the purpose of this study is not to induct a generalization. Thus, the conversational partners are those who are willing to provide rich data with abundant description (Charmaz, 2000). To achieve this goal, I deployed snowball sampling technique that grants me more chance to find more suitable interviewees by people’s referral and recommendation.

#### **c. The starting point:**

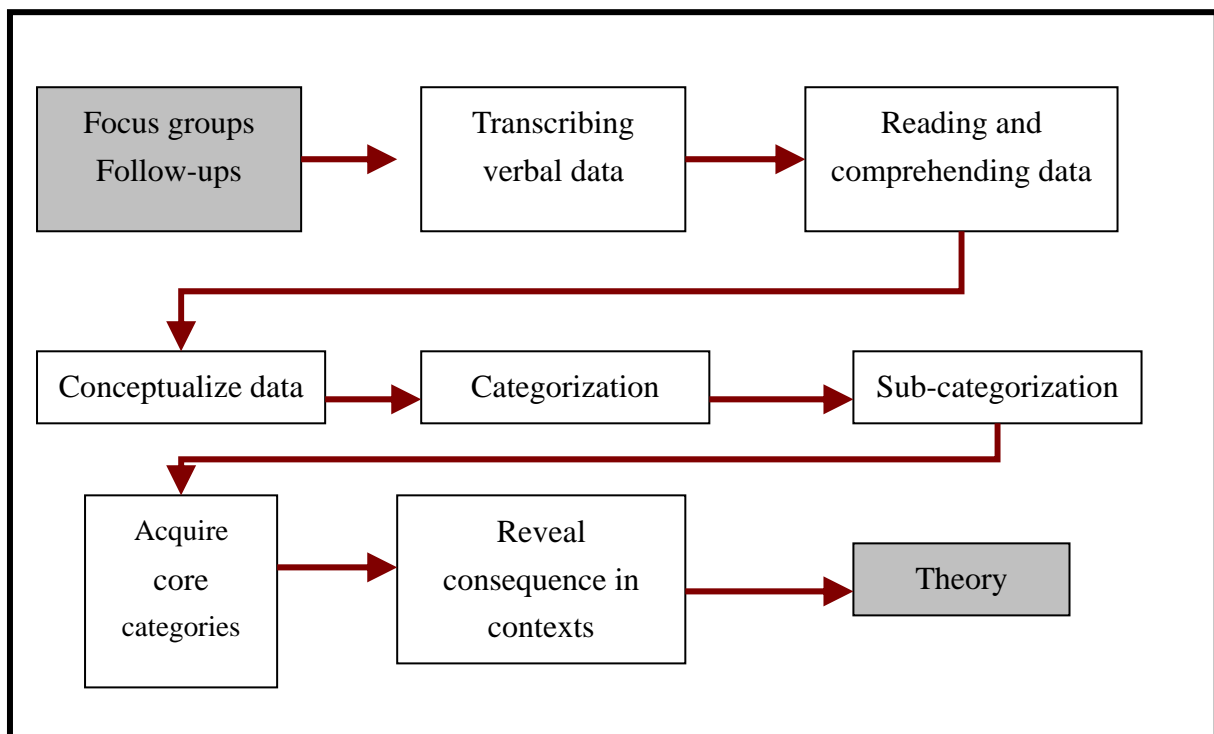
In previous study, the author has gained acquainted with an unofficial mothers’ association established by a group of mothers who are willing to share their insights and tactics. Basically, this study will follow this social network and use this group as the starting point to form the initial focus group.

### **3. Qualitative data analysis**

According to Psatha (1995), the purpose of qualitative interview (includes focus groups) is to discover the “order” of interviewees’ life (Order and orderliness, p.2). In this study, the data is derived from a constructing process by the interaction among members in the focus group. Through this interaction, the “knowledge” is produced (Chen, 2003). In order to fulfill this

purpose, the interpretivism (Denzin, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000)) and ground theory (Glaser, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) will be utilized as two major guidelines for data analysis. The logic of the data analysis for this study is as following (Huberman and Miles, 1994; Lin, 2004<sup>13</sup>):

Figure 2: Data Analysis



<sup>13</sup> 林本炫 (2004). Please see references for details.

## V. Results

Understandably, a mother's daily life cannot be separated from her care giving obligations. In particular through the discussion of family leisure and "me time", one issue is revealed: mothers tend to change the way of perceiving a role-determined situation as a more enjoyable experience by actively altering their attitude. When they have any other alternative to change their current living condition, this self-compromise or negotiation is apparent. Due to this climate, there is one more kind of experience that traps women into the debate between the dichotomy of leisure and work, and this debate directly affects their way to define their leisure.

One reason for the complexity of how mothers recognize their leisure lacks of the clear separation between the concepts of work and leisure. For mothers, the traditional dichotomy between these two ideas is not applicable in their daily life because their everyday experience is more mixed, perplexed, and disarrayed (Davidson, 1996). The discussion above illustrated that most of the time mothers cannot distinguish whether their obligation brings pleasure to them, or if their pleasure is partially derived from their obligated responsibilities. For mothers, leisure is rather a process of self-debating, and its definition is not only affected by their personal preferences, but also determined by their mood and remaining energy. Namely, a professional women's fatigue will make her weary while performing her domestic chores after work; or, a mother's special interest or inclination will make her achieve a sense of happiness and satisfaction even from polishing and waxing floor:

[Can you describe your feeling when you perform those domestic tasks?]

"you mean, housework? Um.. it depends. Something I like and something I dislike. Like cooking, I love cooking. I love to create something that is delicious, both for my family and myself." (Ms. Wang, M.)

However, this feeling keeps altering in different situations mothers encounter. It is not uncommon to find in my interviews that interviewees' conversation contradicts their previous

statements. For example, sometimes they might claim an experience like cooking to be enjoyable, yet next minute, they would describe it is troublesome as well. For example, although Ms. Wang expressed her enjoyment with cooking, some of her accounts also reveal her struggle, particularly when she mentioned her weariness in simultaneously taking care of her outside (professional job) and inside (domestic jobs) work:

“Tired, I am so tired. Sometime after my work I think about how many things I need to do in the evening, only think, I feel so tired, especially cooking, preparing and cutting, and the dish cleaning, oh, I feel so tired.” (Ms. Wang M.)

For those tasks, such as cooking, childcare, and shopping, which wear the form of obligation but meanwhile have the potential to produce leisure experience confuse mother’s recognition and interpretation of work and leisure, in addition to the fact that individual experience is always subjective and diverse. It seems that mothers are in an endless process of struggle and negotiation between passive acceptance of their duties and active gratification of the pleasure brought by those duties. Here is another example provided by Mrs. Lee:

“ I love mopping. I like to see my floor and staircase shinning and clean...(laughing), is that silly? I hope to maintain the order of my house. When I see everything is in its’ place, I will feel happy.” (Mrs. Lee)

But, this experience is different when her children keep making trouble:

“...when they (kids) eat, they don’t want to sit, they run away and spill their food everywhere. I will get angry, because I need to clean the house again.”  
(Mrs. Lee)

Hence, it seems that asking interviewees to provide definitions of their leisure experience is a doubtful strategy. Several conversational partners express their moods, temper, and frame of mind play a crucial part in affecting their daily experience:

[Generally, when will you deal with some domestic jobs?]

“ Anytime. I don’t have a certain period of time for these tasks, but I will use some available time, like, when kids are watching their cartoon, I will pick up some stuff to do, like folding clothes or cleaning my kitchen..”

[Since you are a professional woman, do you feel tired when you perform those responsibilities?]

“Well.. um... it is okay... not too suffering. If I am too tired, I won’t do many domestic jobs since I don’t have any energy left. So, if kids misbehave at this moment, I will....sometimes... yell at them, because they cause me a lot of trouble in cleaning the disaster they made, you know, when you are exhausted, you lose your patience in everything.”

[So, why do you mean “not too suffering”?]

“I mean, if I feel good, invigorated, or in a relaxed situation, like weekends, I will enjoy doing those duties...(laughing).. *Poor women*, I think it’s our *destiny* to keep everything clean and neat. ...(laughing).. It’s weird to know that you are not doing those stuff for your families, sometimes, you just do those stuff for yourself, you know? Like, last weekend I washed all comforters and sheets, and when I smell the cleanness while I sleep, I feel so good...haha, am I an *idiot*?” (Ms. Huang)

Evidently, Ms. Chou’s question about her stupidity was rethoric (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). This type of self-debating recurs in interviewees’ narratives. On the one hand, the enjoyment accompanied by performing those mini tasks reaffirms their acceptance of being primary care-givers with a positive attitude (after her negotiation). Yet at the same time, they question themselves about this acceptance and use the term, like “poor woman”, “idiot”, or “predestination” (according to Ms. Liu) to joke about themselves. Actually it is not a joke, but a doubt toward her situation and the roles that it requires her to perform.

In essence, mothers’ daily reality is a combined mixture of their baffling and uncertain daily experience. The transformation of oppressive experience explains why mothers easily perceive family leisure as their leisure as well. In interviews I asked about this mixed feeling.

Amazingly, they understand this point very well and explain this fact in a very organized, prepared manner when they talk about their adjustment:

“Those stuff (domestic duties) won’t change, and nobody will do that for you. All you can do is accept this fact, and try to gain some positive feeling from doing it.”

“. . .what can you expect from being a mother? The meaning of adjustment does not mean that you only can find it in your free time, like, after children go to sleep or sometime else. You need to create something and arrange a good atmosphere for yourself, and in this way your family members benefit too. Believe or not, this is the most important thing in your marriage. (Ms. Wang G)

And, when they compare their current life with pervious single life or life before children, they all stress the importance of self-negotiation:

“The major difference is, um.. how to say this..um..you cannot do what you like whenever you like, or upon your preferences, because you are in a family now and your family members are your priority. So, you need to change your old patterns, habits, or give up something, and try to discover some fun from your routine. Otherwise, it is impossible for me to stand this type of life. Some people call it sacrifice, but in my opinion, you loss something and meanwhile, you gain something. It depends on your attitude and the way you look at it.”  
(Ms. Liu)

Ms. Wu used an appropriate term to describe those mixed experience: “Ku-zhung-zhu-lo”<sup>14</sup> - gaining happiness from bitterness, meaning that a mother needs to be capable of gaining some fun from doing some harsh or weary stuff, because:

“This is a *choice among no-choice*, rather than continuously complaining about your situation.” (Ms. Wang, G)

This attitude, “a choice among no-choices,” is a guideline for how a mother deals with her daily life. When a woman’s situation does not offer her too many opportunities, her agency allows her an ability to negotiate or adjust the passive restrictions. From the

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<sup>14</sup> A Chinese old idiom.

perspective of family leisure (or affiliated leisure), mothers have a strongest weapon—love/devotion—to sustain them from achieving a compromise before their family. From the perspective of “me-time”, the entitlement of personal freedom justifies mothers’ resistance to their restricted role and living condition. Yet, in my opinion, those two forms of typical leisure mothers recognized in their everyday life cannot represent their agency and autonomy as well as their strategies to positively enjoy what they are obligated to do. In other words, they make use of a self-determined attitude while they confront the role-determined situation. Instead of viewing this transformation with passive acceptance of socially assigned roles, I would rather approach this kind of conciliation as autonomic self-adjustment. Those women are not resisting being a ‘mother’; rather, they attempt to enrich and extend the possibilities of this identity and potentially bring variety into their daily experiences which can help them to have some fun, enjoy the feeling of freedom in a must-experience life span.

Principally, the occurrence of this reconciliation is everywhere in mothers’ daily life, regardless of if it is weekdays or weekends. It is highly inappropriate to ask them to answer “what is leisure” or “can you define your leisure” because their answer cannot reflect their real thoughts. Mothers’ leisure is not a term or fixed concept easily explained. It is changing, flowing, and only mothers themselves can know when their leisure experience will occur.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Leisure is an important dimension of mothers’ daily routine. It carries complicated meanings and its occurrence and contribution should be recognized in the context of women’s daily situation I laid out in the previous chapter. Following the themes stemming from my interviewees’ conversations, the traditional definitions of leisure assumed by previous studies are abstract for them as they are derived from a dichotomy: leisure and work. The concept of work is ambiguous for both professional mothers and full-time moms since the second shift or domestic tasks do not have official determination in Taiwanese society. Thus, their

recognition of leisure, supposedly a concept opposite to work, becomes blurred because their daily life is encompassed by family, children and endless related tasks.

However, mothers demonstrate a capability of self-adjustment in front of their no-alternative situation if they identify motherhood as a must-have period. As the interviewees' say, motherhood is not an object to resist since the reward it provides is both precious and priceless, a fact which cannot be easily understood by those who have never been a mother. Therefore, instead of passively mourning after their 'predestined' femininity (of being a woman), mothers show their courage in challenging their constraints and discovering every possibility in both private and public spheres in order to strive for a positive living experience if they have chances. This is why mothers involve in many types of self-debating and self-negotiation in their daily life.

As Shaw (1994) states, leisure could be constraining itself reinforcing "femininity" that was produced from the role of a mother. Family-oriented or affiliated leisure is the typical example of it. However, this explanation ignores mothers' autonomy regarding their willingness to devote themselves to their families. Their playing the role of mom is not for the social expectation, but for her own willingness.

Meanwhile, leisure could be an outcome derived from women's entitlement to 'take a break' or 'being selfish', which symbolizes liberation from their daily restriction. Me-time is a good example. From my interviews, mothers show that they understand their limitations well, and they clearly know when they need a retreat from their hard work and when they should grasp opportunities for enriching themselves since 'mother' is not the only explanation in their life.

Time is a significant factor for determining mothers' experience. This factor brought up an endless competition in mothers' daily life because they are required to compete with their own time. The more time they can save, the more time they can claim for themselves. This condition sets up a stage of mothers' continuous self-debating between their obligation and

freedom, or limitation and emancipation because mothers confront their duties with whole new viewpoints: a possible place for leisure to occur, the leisure containers. Thus, in mothers' everyday practice, leisure could be viewed as a strategy for passing this difficult life span, a strategy for bringing enjoyment and creating possibilities.

So, what is leisure for mothers?

“ I don't know your (interviewer) academic definitions. What is leisure? I never give it a good thought. An activity, or weekends? I cannot give you any good answer since I don't know it, but something for sure; I know when I feel happy...” (Ms. Chieh)

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