AN EXPLORATION OF THE “INVITATION DAY” AS A LEISURE ACTIVITY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CONSPICUOUS LEISURE AND CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

Abstract
Leisure is gradually becoming an important element for the quality of life with a vast number of activities. A great number of leisure pursuits are known to exist but studies have indicated that women’s leisure in Turkey is predominantly home-centered. Among the most common leisure activities of women in Turkey are visits to friends, relatives and neighbors, and participation in so-called “invitation days”. The “invitation day” is a highly popular leisure activity in which women come together and spend time at their homes, mostly at the weekends. The aim of this study is to examine invitation days as a home-based leisure activity in terms of conspicuous leisure and consumption. For this aim, in-depth interviews were conducted and six themes - knowledge display, family praise, home arrangements, physical appearance, benevolent contribution, and menu and food service - emerged in the context of conspicuous leisure and consumption.

Key Words: Leisure, Conspicuous Consumption, Conspicuous Leisure, Invitation Day

GÖSTERİŞÇİ BOŞ ZAMAN VE GÖSTERİŞÇİ TÜKETİM KAPSAMINDA “GÜN” BOŞ ZAMAN AKTİVİTESİNİN ARAŞTIRILMASI

Özet
Boş zaman içerdığı birçok aktiviteyle yaşam kalitesinin önemli bir bileşeni olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Boş zaman aktivitesi çeşitliliği rağmen, yapılan araştırmalarda Türkiye’de kadınların boş zamanlarını çoğunlukla ev içi aktivitelerle

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Introduction

Leisure is becoming an increasingly important source of personal values and life satisfaction for many people (McLean and Hurd 2012). It is believed that leisure participants are absorbed in or concentrate on the ongoing experience of the activity (Lee 1999) such as involvement, fun, enjoyment, pleasure, freedom, timelessness, relaxation, among other positive moods (Lee et al 1994). On an average day, nearly everyone aged 15 and over (%95) engages in some sort of leisure activity such as watching TV, socializing or exercising during leisure time (American Time Use Survey 2009). In Turkey, the most preferred leisure time activities are watching TV and videos, socializing, reading, doing sports, engaging in hobbies and games, and volunteering (Time Use Survey 2006). Although there are a lot of leisure pursuits and leisure time habits that can be potentially taken up, most researches have shown that much of women’s leisure is fragmented, and many women do not feel they are entitled to leisure. The growing body of research on women’s leisure indicates that women’s position in society, their lack of access to valued resources and societal expectations about women’s lives and responsibilities are all factors that reduce women’s freedom and constrain their options (Baker 2009).

Gender analyses have constituted a useful means of probing new ideas concerning leisure in recent years. For example, Jackson and Henderson (1995) examined constraints to leisure according to gender differences and found that women faced more constraints in their leisure than men (Henderson 1996). In a qualitative study, Little (2002) examined the constraints to leisure by women participating in adventure recreation in Australia. Themes of constraints to leisure experienced by women were gender roles, family and other responsibilities, personal and technical constraints, each connected to sociocultural constraints. Both individual and cultural constraints of women from different sociocultural backgrounds were also explored by some researchers. For example, ArabMoghaddam et al. (2007) explored the leisure constraints of Iranian women and found that the major constraints to leisure for the Iranian women were lack of structure related to opportunities and facilities for leisure and personal home expectations, and social security constraints. ArabMoghaddam et al. (2007) found that the most common leisure activities undertaken by Iranian women were watching TV, family gatherings, reading and religious activities. This finding may show the effects of culture and religion on women’s leisure. There are also some other studies (Kay 2005 as cited in ArabMoghaddam et al. 2007; Livengood and Stodolska 2004; Martin and Mason 2003; Walseth 2006) addressed some of the issues linking religion, culture and women’s leisure. In the same vein, Koca et al. (2009) examined the cultural and social factors that influence the participation of Turkish women in leisure activities and indicated a number of different factors that can be counted as constraints to

Anahtar Kelimeler: Boş Zaman, Gösterişçi Tüketim, Gösterişçi Boş Zaman, Gün
Turkish women such as family responsibilities, ethics of care, inadequacy of facilities, marital and parental status, lack of time, social approval and economics. Many women in Turkey had to sacrifice their leisure time and freedom to defer to the needs of their children, and had feelings of guilt about their needs for leisure and freedom. Demir (2005) also found that Turkish female students were more likely to than males to be significantly influenced by responsibilities, satisfaction and expectation from life, perception of opportunities, social politics arranging leisure activities, ethnicity and status of men and women in society. These findings showed that the reality of gendered Turkish society in which women seem to be more disadvantaged than men (Demir 2005).

However, Henderson et al. (2002) and Henderson and Gibson (2013) noted that the research on women’s leisure seemed to be moving away from a focus on the negative aspects of constraints to leisure toward the more positive emphasis on empowerment. In many of the studies published from 2006-2010, leisure was empowering because women were resisting traditional norms and gendered opportunities for leisure (Henderson and Gibson 2013). In addition, through changes in birth control, and the economics and technology of communications and the labour market, women now enjoy more opportunities for leisure and have gained more power and more freedom (Rojek 1991).

In this sense, although the most common leisure activities of women in Turkey are generally home-based such as visiting relatives, friends, neighbors and family gatherings, they contribute satisfying women’s needs to be social, and they also the most important occasions giving them the opportunity for a feeling of freedom, satisfaction and enjoyment (Aslan and Aslan 2012).

In Turkey, arguably one of the most important home-based leisure activities of women is participation in so called “invitation days.” The “invitation day” is an alternative leisure activity organized by women and is a specific type of opportunity for Turkish women to find leisure (Sonmez et al. 2010). It offers the widest arena for freedom, because women can express who they are without constraints or compulsion. They gossip, they sing songs, they dance, they eat, they share their problems and happiness with each other and step outside of the prescribed roles participating in the invitation days. In addition, women without their husband gather in the invitation days, so it offers them to feel having more freedom from work, family, house or other responsibilities. Particularly housewives in Turkey participate in invitation days as a social leisure activity for a number of reasons such as to avoid stress, to socialize, to save up money, or to economize. Furthermore, one of the outstanding characteristics of the invitation day is that it reflects women’s conspicuous leisure behavior because of the fact that prior to and/or during the invitation day women prefer to consume luxury products, undertake decorative modifications, and prepare some kinds of food and drinks merely for the invitation days (Sonmez et al. 2010). Hence, the present study aims to examine the invitation day as a home-based leisure activity in terms of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption.

**Literature Review**

**Women and leisure**

Research on women and leisure emerged as a body of knowledge approximately 30 years ago (Henderson and Gibson 2013). Several authors have concentrated on the constraints which limit women’s leisure, and discussed the meaning of leisure for women using broader feminist
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Feminist leisure research made women’s lives invisible, emphasized dignity and choice for women in all areas of their lives, and identified women’s lack of power (Parry and Fullagar 2013). Male power clearly repressed women’s leisure activities in a number of areas. Men were assumed to be active, energetic, independent and intellectually assured. Women, in contrast, were regarded to be weak, passive and equipped by nature to concentrate on the domestic sphere (Rojek 1991). Therefore, a prominent theme in early studies was that women were the disadvantaged sex (Roberts 2006). Feminist researchers within the field of leisure studies (Aitchison 1997; Aitchison 1999; Deem 1999; Green et al. 1990 as cited in Balckshaw 2010; Wearing 1998) suggested that “women’s leisure is constrained, not only directly to the narrow range of activity options open to them, but also because of the temporal, spatial, economic, ideological, socio-psychological factors involved, as well as the influence in this process of the categories of social class, race, ethnicity, income level, work and domestic situation, and prescribed gender roles” (Blackshaw 2010: 79). According to the researches, childcare, number of children, family responsibilities, cultural norms, money, lack of time, inadequacy of facilities, obligations, men’s power and control were identified as the key constraints on women’s leisure (Blackshaw 2010; Demir 2005; Green et al. 1990 as cited in Balckshaw 2010; Koca et al. 2009). All these constraints tend to prevent or change women’s opportunities for leisure experiences (Koca et al. 2009). For instance, in many societies, being feminine has been defined as “sticking close to home”. It is believed that the proper place for women was the home and public leisure was exclusively a male domain (Khan 2011). Therefore, women in general tend to participate in leisure activities, which are deemed appropriate and acceptable for their gender so as to balance or counteract any disapproval society (Baker 2009).

Recent leisure researches, however, seemed to be moving away from a focus on the negative aspects of constraints to leisure toward to the more positive emphasis on empowerment (Henderson and Gibson 2013).

Henderson and Hickerson (2007) summarized the literature about women and leisure from 20012005 and noted that deeper understanding of the meanings of the constraints would be useful. Examining constraints in the context of benefits means that resistance to the power of others, ability to overcome constraints, which lead to personal empowerment and increased leisure opportunities for women (Henderson and Hickerson 2007; Shaw 2001). Thus, the earlier women-centered research tended to focus on meanings, constraints and experience of leisure, while the more recent leisure scholarship has been more concerned with how leisure seen as a form of resistance to structured inequities and cultural gender role prescriptions (Henderson and Shaw 1995; Shaw 2001), and how the benefits of leisure mitigate some of the constraints (Henderson and Hickerson 2007). For example, in Freysinger and Flannery (1992), Thompson (1992) and Wearing’s (1992) studies, leisure as resistance was found to benefit individuals in a number of ways, including psychological and developmental benefits because it leads to personal empowerment and new identities (Henderson and Shaw 1995; Shaw 2001). There are plenty of examples in recent times of women using leisure to contest patriarchy and participating in sport to prove themselves (Roberts 2006).

Hence, in today’s world, women’s former disadvantages are disappearing, gender role attitudes have become less traditional and times are changing (Roberts 2006). Women are doing less housework than in the past, the proportions of women in the workforce have risen, women’s earnings have increased relative to men’s (Roberts 2006), women can pursue
nontraditional leisure choices (e.g., motorcycle operators) despite their gendered assumptions (Henderson 2007), barriers to male power has gradually overcome (Rojek 1991), and women were resisting traditional norms and gendered opportunities for leisure (Henderson and Gibson 2013). Leisure is empowering to women through activities such as Harley riding, triathlons, boxing, rugby, bodybuilding, and climbing (Henderson and Gibson 2013). The growth of leisure’s involvement in social welfare and recreation issues have reinforced changes in the balance of power between the sexes. In addition, through rapid social changes and better status being given to females (Khan 2011), women now enjoy more opportunities for leisure and have gained more power and more freedom (Rojek 1991).

However, the changes have been limited and critics of post-feminism argue that only a minority of females has been able to benefit from any of the new opportunities to evade former constraints in leisure (Roberts 2006). That is, poststructural feminism denies the existence of one single truth (Aitchison 2000) and the literature about women’s leisure does not “fit” all women (Henderson 1996). In other words, “the definitions or explanations developed so far, cannot be generalized to all other females and may not be inclusive of all women’s experience, but may be culturally specific” (Henderson and Shaw 1995: 137). Most societies are still patriarchal and male domination has still strong influence on women’s leisure (Khan 2011), sexist attitudes have obviously not withered away (Rojek 1995) and structured inequities are not melting away (Aitchison 2000) in some cultures. For example, in Turkish society, even in modern families, the idea of caring for the self, particularly in regard to basic human activities like leisure, recreation and relaxation, is considered “selfish”. Acting for others, whether she is a daughter or wife or mother, is a common female attitude in Turkish culture. Therefore, women are socialized into given norms and values of Turkish culture and they are more likely to establish their leisure around their family responsibilities, and cultural and social structures. The activities for leisure being mostly home-based and socially structured as visiting friends and relatives are commonly shared in this culture (Aslan and Aslan 2012). One of the most common home-based leisure activities of women in Turkey is participation in the invitation days (Sonmez et al. 2010).

**A traditional leisure activity of Turkish women: The invitation day**

The invitation day is a regular occasion when woman hosts other women in her home and come together to spend time in the company of each other, to find leisure and social support (Henderson and Gibson 2013; KhatibChahidi 1996; Sonmez et al. 2010). In Turkey, this traditional leisure activity is named as invitation day, reception day, day, gold day, currency day or money day (Sonmez et al. 2008). In this study, the term “invitation day” is used rather than the others because it is capable of including previously described connotations and Sonmez et al. (2008) was first addressed this traditional leisure activity as an invitation day in their study.

Usually, friends or relatives form a group or groups to organize this activity, determine the date of the invitation day and agree on who will organize it. Women usually gather once a month in one of the women’s house and a piece of gold or a sum of money is presented to the host by each of guests. In this way, those who attend such invitation days can economize or save some money for the future, simply by participating (Ekal 2006; Sonmez et al. 2010).

As mentioned above, the invitation day is a means of socialization for Turkish women and has also been recognized as such by institutions out of Turkey. A number of EU (European Union) Grundtvig Projects, which carry the aim of providing adults with education and
fostering lifelong learning, have focused on this traditional activity of Turkish women and have recommended this activity to women in other parts of Europe. Researchers from Europe determined that Turkish women not only learned something together and shared their experiences, but also gained relief from stress through invitation days (Sonmez et al. 2010).

The participants of invitation days are typically housewives of the middleclass, though women from more affluent circumstances are also known to participate. By housewives are meant the female heads of household, that is, the wife or some person in the family who has general charge of the domestic affairs (Folbre 1991). Furthermore, it is known that women from the upper class and/or women with higher educational backgrounds also tend to participate in or organize invitation days with their friends as the “invitation day” provides an opportunity for displaying one’s house, furniture and housework abilities. In this sense, invitation days have a different atmosphere in which women wear their best outfits, welcome their guests in the guest room, which is considered as the best part of the house, serve special food and drinks and generally abstain from bringing their children along (Sonmez et al. 2008).

Hence, to some extent, invitation days can be conceptualized as a conspicuous leisure activity as women have not only free time to participate in invitation days, but they also reflect their desire to display who they are through their purchases, appearance, knowledge, and their serving methods to enhance their social prestige and status.

In this regard, to be able to understand women’s leisure in Turkey, it is necessary to examine the context of women’s lives in the Turkish society in which invitation days loom large. Therefore, women’s conspicuous behaviors during invitation days as a leisure activity need to be examined.

**Conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure**

The meaning of the word “conspicuous” is eye-catching and prominent, but the word requires a more emphasizing description in the context of consumption than its original definition, which was formulated as “wasteful and lavish consumption expenses to enhance social status” (Chadhuri and Majumdar 2006: 2).

Based entirely on observation, more than a hundred years ago Thorstein Veblen (1899) proposed that the American rich were spending a significant portion of their time and money on unnecessary and unproductive leisure expenditures and coined the term “conspicuous consumption” to describe such behavior (Chadhuri and Majumdar 2006). Veblen recognized that status did not automatically accrue to individuals who had wealth. Rather, status was obtained by putting wealth on display. One way of doing this is by engaging in conspicuous leisure and a second way to advertise wealth is through conspicuous consumption (Scott 2010).

The term conspicuous leisure is the time spent on certain pursuits in return for higher status. As examples, Veblen noted that to be a gentleman, a man must advertise his wealth through immaterial activities such as games and sports, and various forms of domestic music and household arts, which have little economic value in themselves. Manners, breeding, polite usage, decorum, and formal and ceremonial observances are also required social facts of reputable degree of leisure. These physical habits and dexterity are other unproductive uses of time (Veblen 1953).

Conspicuous consumption, is the second way to display wealth, is the behavior of “spending a significant portion of one’s time and money on unnecessary and unproductive
leisure expenditures” (Chadhuri and Majumdar 2006: 2). Veblen observed that status in the community was demonstrated not by the skills obtained in leisure time but by appearances; women’s clothing, for example, is a kind of conspicuous good and provides an example of conspicuous consumption (Scott 2010). Conspicuous goods are different from many frequently purchased goods as they satisfy not just material needs but also social needs such as prestige (Shukla 2008). Trigg (2001) indicated that conspicuous consumption is the act of displaying wealth through realizing extensive leisure activities and luxury expenditures which are not actually necessary. Wastefulness was at the root of conspicuous consumption, because to be able to spend large sums of money on useless futile products clearly denounces the conspicuous consumer as a member of the leisure class (Guimarães et al. 2010).

In earlier periods, conspicuous consumption was defined as extravagant expenditures on expensive and luxury items to display wealth or status consciously or unconsciously and purchasing behavior meant display and demonstration. On the other hand, in the modern and postmodern periods, consumption has become a means of self-realization and identification as consumers no longer merely consume products; they also consume the symbolic meaning of those products. Therefore, people can communicate with others and display their status through less expensive but “tasteful” expenditures. An important implication of these discoveries is that “individuals could choose to buy any product merely for the sake of being different from others, rather than to display their wealth or status” (Chadhuri and Majumdar 2006: 7).

Drawing upon these periods and the existing literature, it can be inferred that there exists a clear gap in explaining conspicuous consumption with regard to materialistic goods as well as experiences, knowledge, praises and services, as the latter also create conspicuousness. In addition, participants of the invitation day are thought to constitute a potent market for conspicuous leisure; however, this particular segment the participants of this kind of leisure activity has not been studied yet from the perspective of conspicuous consumption. Thus, the aim of the present study was to describe the dimensions of conspicuous leisure and consumption by examining the habits and behavior of women who participate in a special leisure activity – the invitation day.

Methodology

As the purpose of this research was to discover and understand the conspicuous leisure and consumption dimensions of women participating in and organizing the invitation day as a leisure activity, a theory building, qualitative research design was adopted. The grounded theory approach uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a certain phenomenon and the purpose of this theory is to build a theory that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Therefore, the grounded theory method was chosen for this study to address the need for a coherent theoretical framework in the field as it enables the researcher to develop a substantive theory.

A purposive sampling approach was adopted in the present study. The sample was composed of women participating in and organizing invitation days that were thought to be representative for this study. These were mainly women who participated in invitation days at least once a month. The sample frame provided homogeneity in terms of the women’s lifestyles and leisure pursuits, and at the same time the sample embraced diversity in terms of age, income, education level and frequency of the participation in invitation days. It was believed that the informants’ different educational attainment levels and participation frequencies would
allow the researchers to determine the leisure consumption patterns of the group under investigation from different perspectives.

The data collection process involved listening to, observing and recording invitation days. In keeping with the theory building objectives of the study, semi-structured interviews were employed to reveal the conspicuous consumption dimensions of women’s leisure. Thus, discovery-oriented in-depth interviews were conducted with 35 women participating in and organizing invitation days in the Eskisehir province in Turkey. In order to maintain a holistic perspective, all interviews and analyses were conducted by the researchers. Interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was reached that is, “when the concepts were exhausted and no new information was revealed from the interviews” (Cheung et al. 2007: 239).

The interviews included open-ended questions about the women’s conspicuous leisure and consumption behavior on the invitation day. Consistent with previous research into conspicuous leisure and consumption (Carr 2005; Chaudhuri and Majumdar 2006; Foley, Holzman and Wearing 2007; Shukla 2008), a set of broad questions was developed for the interviews. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the informants and the length of each interview ranged between 45 and 75 minutes. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

In addition to transcripts, the researchers noted comments relating to each participant’s behavior, verbal expressions and other nonverbal circumstances and further observed the participants’ physical appearance, clothing, personal grooming, the arrangement of the house and other details particular to the invitation day.

The participant observation process included attending invitation days, observing women’s preparations for the invitation day, looking through the home design and serving, observing the physical appearance and personal grooming of the women, involved, asking questions about the menu and taking some photos.

The data analysis process involved listening to each audiotaped interview three times and the independent coding of the recording to minimize researchers’ bias and ensure data quality and reliability.

Furthermore, the transcripts were examined closely line by line and reread carefully three more times to verify the coding and the researchers then came together and reconciled the coding. Discrepancies were resolved by consensus.

Results and Discussion

A total of 35 interviews were conducted. The sample profile indicates that the predominant occupation of the respondents, all of whom were women, was housewife (80%) while the other occupations reported were secretary (5.7%), retired (2.8%), laborer (2.8%), public official (2.8%), teacher (2.8%) and representative (2.8%). The participants were divided into four segments according to their age profiles: 26-35 (14.2%), 36-45 (31.4%), 46-55 (48.5%) and 56-61 (5.7%) (Table 1).
Table 1. Summary of the participants’ demographic backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emel</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Public Official</td>
<td>Esra</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aysen</td>
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<td>Representative</td>
<td>Ilkime</td>
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<td>Housewife</td>
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<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Nurcan</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Ummiye</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Retired</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Fatma</td>
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<td>Housewife</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sevil</td>
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<tr>
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In addition to demographic questions, in-depth interviews were held with the survey sample. A constant comparative analysis of the authors’ accounts uncovered six themes related to conspicuous leisure and consumption aspects of the leisure activity under examination – the invitation day. These themes were examined in the light of the context in which they were collected during the interviews. The results are reported through the interpretations and behaviors of the women participating in the invitation day. Six preliminary themes emerged from this study: knowledge display, family praise, home arrangements, physical appearance, benevolent contribution, and menu and food service.

Knowledge display

During the in-depth interviews, participants were asked about their conversations on invitation days and a knowledge-based conspicuousness theme emerged from the analysis, suggesting that women were able to keep conversations flowing by talking about education, cooking, politics, family issues, fashion and current news. Being knowledgeable and demonstrating knowledge cannot be directly related to conspicuousness; however, the participants indicated that they were extremely happy to trot out their knowledge as they used
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this to impress others. Thus, there is evidence of knowledge demonstration, which is not a tangible or expensive product, but it is tangible proof to display educational or social status. The women indicated that they attached great importance to knowledge as a surrogate indicator of power or status because their primary objective was to impress others. They also pointed out that they provided each other with recommendations concerning music, books, and TV programs. Therefore, recommendations also constituted a symbol of knowledge and were employed to suggest “I know a lot of things so I can give you recommendations on…” Thus, during invitation days, women demonstrate their knowledge as a conspicuousness as is evidenced in the following quotes from the interviews:

“... Invitation days seem like a waste of time. For instance, some women on public transport gossip saying “look at them, we are coming from work, while they are coming from invitation days” and they contempt invitation days. But to me this is not the case; days are agoras for women where they can broaden their minds. We suggest the latest books to each other and exchange opinions. These are my answers to those who think invitation days are just a waste of time” (Nevin, 49).

“There are some friends who turn the days into a show; they are smart alecks, they know everything and they talk too much” (Emine, 51).

“We talk about where to buy a dress, which hair dresser we go, where to shop during sales, which brands are on sale, and of course fashion... some prefer only one brand and stick to it, some are knowledgeable but they usually show off” (Elif, 27).

**Family praise**

The participants in our sample were generally middle aged (40-60) and thus nearly everyone was married with children. This could be the reason why the participants were generally talking about family issues during the invitation day as it was reported by the researchers following their observation. It was noted that the women were very much interested in every aspect of their children’s education and consistently mentioned their children and praised their success at school. Therefore, it can be suggested that the women unintentionally used family members’ success as a way of impressing others. Besides, it was also observed that the women liked to talk about their husbands, who were reported to love their wives, to dedicate themselves to their families and to cave in to all demands of their spouses. Furthermore, expensive and luxury wedding anniversary gifts or birthday presents such as jewelry, diamond earrings and watches, which are items that any wife would love to possess, were found to be used by women to signal their love but in a conspicuous way. These were reflected by the women in the interview as follows:

“Women like show off; they always talk about their kids’ success at school, not to mention their husbands’ promotions” (Nazlı, 40).

“...She gave the good family impression from outside, always talked about her husband; then we figured out that they were divorced...We liked her clothes and she used to say “my husband bought them for me”, too bad” (Hilmiye, 49).

**Home arrangements**

During the in–depth interviews, the respondents were further asked about the kinds of arrangements they would make for their guests prior to the invitation day. The women reported
to give particular importance to visual presentation and aesthetics; thus, the visual quality at home emerged as one of the most prominent issues for women on the invitation day. It was pointed out that in order to enjoy the invitation day, all rooms, including the bathroom and the kitchen, should be well-organized and well-presented in such a way that all women feel welcome and valued. When the participants were asked how to be appreciated by their guests, they responded that this might depend on how well the home is arranged and cleaned up. It was further indicated that the furniture, carpets, curtains, and seats were the most important household items to display wealth. Women suggested that they sometimes changed the locations of these household items for the invitation day and made some decorative modifications, and even bought new seats and furniture for the sake of displaying wealth and impressing others. This kind of behavior gives signs of home-based conspicuousness and therefore the home arrangements theme emerged. In this regard, cleaning the house and designing it carefully, putting some silverware on the table, changing the place of the furniture or sofa sets, creating a new atmosphere with already existing household items, changing the casual table cloth with a jazzed up one and similar arrangements are demonstrations of wealth and also of the value given to their guests. This was clearly reflected in the data provided by participants of the invitation day:

“I purchase different home perfumes for the guests to kill the house odors. I buy different kinds of toiletries and I change the colors at home, too. For instance, once I did everything yellow; yellow dishes and yellow glasses...This attracted attention. I never use casual plates and also I always use stylish napkins, and of course I serve tea with my leather tray” (Yasemin, 30).

“Some of my friends have painted their walls, changed their chairs and sofas, used their silvers and lacework...to me it’s all ego satisfaction because they are pretty much prone to show off and like their backs padded” (Canan, 44).

“I don’t care about brands but I see people flip over the carpet and look at its brand by using some excuse. They drop a thing on it and flip the carpet” (Nevin, 49).

“My sister bought a 12 square meter carpet for twelve thousand Liras. She has got the money and bought it straight away. I would do the same if I had money” (İklime, 61).

Physical appearance

Physical appearance, which included the clothing, personal grooming and personal care of women, represented a strong association with conspicuous consumption products according to the in-depth interviews because the women indicated that they usually wore different dresses to be unique, went to the hairdresser or a beauty salon for a haircut and hair dye or even for pedicure, manicure, makeup and blow-drying, and bought some clothes, high-heeled shoes and accessories just for the invitation day. When the women were asked how they prepared for an invitation day, they reported that they either went to a hairdresser or a beauty saloon in order to adorn themselves in charming apparel. In addition, they reportedly primped themselves up for the invitation day by overdressing, dressing up their outfits with accessories and a handbag, high-heeled shoes, shining makeup, applying nail polish and getting hair care for the sake of looking good.

Therefore, it becomes apparent that women give great importance to clothing, sometimes shop for the invitation day, and buy some special and eye-catching clothes to appear particularly appealing and attractive. As Veblen suggested, women’s clothing presents an example of
An Exploration of The “Invitation Day” As A Leisure Activity Within The Context of Conspicuous Leisure And Conspicuous Consumption

conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1953). During Veblen’s lifetime, elite women wore clothing that was often impractical and adorned with the high-heel, the skirt, the impracticable bonnet, the corset and reflected the general disregard of comfort. In the same vein, today women prefer clothes which are expensive and uncomfortable, and display their subservient position. “For many women, clothing functions primarily as adornment and secondarily as affording comfort” (Scott 2010: 289). Similarly, the women in our study explained that they wore casual and comfortable clothes such as jeans, flat-heeled shoes or sportswear in their daily lives and they did not even apply makeup or any special care. For example, when asked if there was any difference between apparels on the invitation day and their daily lives, they stated:

“I never wear the same outfit twice in a row. I change my hair style, I wear jewelry and I even pay attention to my hair pins, just to give an appropriate image” (Mukaddes, 35).

“I have two different perfumes. I use the expensive one for invitation days and I use the cheaper one daily. I always bring my throws and inside wearing shoes with me. Though the host has shoes for guests, I still bring my own because they may not suit my outfit” (Dilek, 41).

“If I go to the invitation days without any special preparation, people will talk about me a lot. They are all elites. That’s why I do the preparation seamlessly, from tip to toe. I go to the hairdresser, get manicure and pedicure. I dress up just to get people’s attention and admiration” (Ezel, 48).

**Benevolent contribution**

As part of the survey, the participants were asked to comment on their use of home earning opportunities on the invitation day. The women stated that they were involved in some kinds of home-based earning opportunities entailing the retail of products from brands such as Avon, Oriflame and Tupperware and that they sold cosmetics, home products, kitchen utensils, underwear, accessories and trousseau to make money. Through the in-depth interviews, it was found out that nearly all women who were involved in similar opportunities were housewives and that some of them needed an extra income, some had reduced circumstances or suffered from pecuniary embarrassments and some were widowed. Furthermore, it was found that women in employment earned additional money this way without disturbing their work life and they stated that they were able to earn some pocket money.

However, it needs to be pointed out that women selling products at home to earn money do not constitute an essential part of the focus of the present study; on the contrary, women who purchase such kinds of products, thereby providing aid to those in need, are the main subjects of the present research. In this context, it can be suggested that the women provided benefit to each other with such benevolent contributions was somehow related to emulation, conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption. In addition, women indicated that although spending money on such items was not actually necessary, they nevertheless purchased items to help their friends. In other words, they wanted to be seen as helpful or kind. Additionally, it was interesting to note that even comparatively poorer women could provide such kinds of support by purchasing unnecessary products. This behavior may be explained by conspicuous display of generosity and openhandedness that signals wealth and sacrificing money for the sake of helping. This tendency to spend money on unnecessary products can also be viewed as a positive outlook on the state of the women’s finance. Therefore, it could be maintained that these findings imply that women display more benevolence by purchasing unnecessary items.
other words, women use benevolence to display wealth. For instance, the following comments from participants clearly make the point:

“One of my friends lost her husband and she sells underwear, jewelries or wallets for instance. Though I don’t like big wallets, I bought one. One of my friends was making jewelries, and I bought a piece from her, too. Then I gave it to somebody on the street. We are buying those things just to support them” (Nevin, 49).

“People sell cosmetic products on invitation days. We buy them even if we don’t need them. Sometimes just because of emulation, that’s all. Then we give them to those who need them” (Nilay, 47).

“One of my friends sells imported glass cleaning cloths; she is in need of money and I bought them just to help her. In fact, I don’t need them anyway” (Necla, 47).

**Menu and food service**

On invitation days, women give great importance to preparing special and delicious food. It was indicated that the food prepared for invitation days was different from many frequently cooked types of food. The women suggested that the presentation and serving of food should be different and the food should be savory so that their guests would be satisfied with the menu and the service provided. The menu generally included kinds of pastries, pasta or “simit” (savory roll covered with sesame seeds), served with salad and dessert. The menu was either determined by the hosts or by all the participants at the beginning of the invitation day. Generally, women opted for two kinds of pastries and one kind of dessert but it was indicated that the women prepared a wide range of food and salads. They desired to display their talent with distinctive sauces and ingredients that are not normally used in their kitchens. In addition, the women strove to provide commendable service to their guests and to prepare that is not only special and unique but also matches their taste. Furthermore, the women made it clear that they did not limit their purchase of food and beverages as they desired to achieve the highest food quality possible. They indicated that they went shopping from expensive food stores and bought the most expensive ingredients. It was pointed out that the best food brands were chosen, which are necessarily expensive, and it was further indicated that different ingredients and recipes were used for the invitation day. For example, the respondents reported to serve salads with pomegranate molasses, soy sauces and kinds of spices and set the table ostentatiously with pickles, kinds of garnitures and appetizers, which are food items that are not typically used on a regular basis.

Moreover, it was indicated that the women used different tableware including plates, napkins, glasses, forks, knives and spoons, which are only used for the quests. Furthermore, they reported to change their casual carafes, saltcellars, and teapots and to use more stylish equipment such as vitreous sauceboats, silver napkin holders, and leather trays and they reportedly even mantled showy tablecloth and lace covers to display wealth. It was also added by the women that some of their friends even hired a maid to serve food and drinks and to clean the kitchen in order to be able to allocate sufficient time to chat with the quests. This may reflect the fact that women spend time and money acquiring things that they never use. This may also be indicative of the fact that women have a tendency to purchase and display luxury items as it was explicitly highlighted by the interviewees:
“Despite the fact that I don’t smoke, I buy many different brands of cigarettes and I put them on the table just to show how good my service is. I use plates for occasional use, not the daily ones. I buy special serviettes; for instance, if I am to serve fish, I buy serviettes with fish pictures I like show off. I don’t think about the cost. After all, these people come to me only once in a while” (Emel 51).

“When I plan my invitation day, I try to cater pastries that are not ordinary, rather unusual food such as side orders. They come to me once in a while. If they like and enjoy it, I never think about the cost for dessert for instance. If I am going to be happy, I never think about the price” (Nevin, 49).

“Some of my friends hire a servant for the day, just to have a chat with us during the invitation day” (Emine, 51).

Conclusion

Overall, this study makes two major contributions to the literature related to conspicuous leisure and consumption. Firstly, this particular kind of leisure activity the invitation day in the context of conspicuous leisure and consumption has not been studied before. Therefore, the information reported in the present study, though rather preliminary, can be considered as a first attempt to shed light on this type of leisure activity in the framework of the conspicuous leisure literature. Secondly, the above results lend some support to the literature concerning conspicuous consumption. In addition, women in Turkey spend their time mostly at home, thus it would be important for marketers to reveal the consumption behavior of women participating in and hosting invitation days.

As Nazik et al. (1999) revealed in their study, Turkish women spend most of their time an average of seven hours and six minutes per day at home. They spend their time mostly doing different types of housework such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for their children and family.

Therefore, Turkish women benefit from leisure activities such as invitation days, which represent the focus of this study as a context of conspicuous leisure and consumption. In-depth interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of how Turkish women consume or behave conspicuously during invitation days as a leisure activity at the weekends. Our findings, though not conclusive, are suggestive in that they provide a glimpse of conspicuous leisure and consumption experienced by Turkish women.

A total of six themes knowledge display, family praise, home arrangements, physical appearance, benevolent contribution, and menu and food service emerged in the present study. Their emergence on the one hand suggests that women give value to their guests and, on the other hand, that they spend time and money on unnecessary items which are not normally used in their daily lives. Therefore, the discovery of the six themes carries the potential to aid researchers in construct development in future conspicuous leisure and consumption studies. In addition, our findings afford important insights and help to enhance the understanding of conspicuous leisure and consumption dimensions in a leisure activity. The results of the current study are also of interest to marketers and practitioners. The study further provides some useful insights for managerial applications. First, marketers can apply their marketing mix decisions according to these findings. Second, recreationists can create a leisure atmosphere using conspicuous consumption dimensions.
However, as with all research, this study is not free of some limitations, and it suggests avenues for future research consideration. The present study focused specifically on a limited number of people. Future research efforts could be directed towards increasing the sample size in order to strengthen the generalizability of the results obtained. Furthermore, quantitative research also needs to be undertaken to test the frameworks that emerged in this research. A final limitation of the present study is that the respondents, who live in a single Turkish city – Eskisehir, may not adequately represent the total population in Turkey; therefore it should be replicated in different locations in Turkey.

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