sustainability

MDPI

Article

Leisure Constraint Negotiation Strategies among Serious Leisure Participants in Swimming: Experiences of Facility Use Restriction Due to COVID-19

Jongsoon Kim [1], Saesook Oh [2,*] and Boonhong Yeon [3,*]

[1] Division of Sports Science, Leisure Welfare Culture Institute, Kyonggi University, Suwon-si 16227, Korea; sdivertido@hanmail.net
[2] Division of Sports Science, Sports & Leisure Industry, Kyonggi University, Suwon-si 16227, Korea
[3] Department of Sports Studies, Soongsil University, Seoul 06978, Korea
* Correspondence: penn_sso@kgu.ac.kr (S.O.); pink6066@naver.com (B.Y.)

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the leisure constraint negotiation strategies adopted by the people participating in swimming as a serious leisure activity in the context of COVID-19 by using qualitative research methods. The study was conducted over five months, from September 2020 to January 2021, via the use of snowball sampling. Six unmarried employees in their 30s living in Seoul and Incheon, Korea, were the participants of this study. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, two or three times among each participant. For data analysis, all the recorded contents stated by the participants were transcribed. The results are as follows: first, among the leisure constraint negotiation strategies, the cognitive constraint negotiation strategies were "supernatural attitude toward swimming" and "positive attitude toward the post-COVID-19 period"; and second, among the leisure constraint negotiation strategies, behavioral constraint negotiation strategies were derived as "substitution of activity and motivation" and "participating facilities and crowding management." Based on these results, it can be concluded that the special leisure experiences and leisure constraint negotiation strategies only for swimming within the framework of facility use restrictions were caused due to COVID-19 and further suggested ways to improve the practical management of leisure and sports activities based on the facilities.

Keywords: leisure constraints negotiation; serious leisure; swimming; facility use restriction; COVID-19; facility use restriction

check for updates

Citation: Kim, J.; Oh, S.; Yeon, B. Leisure Constraint Negotiation Strategies among Serious Leisure Participants in Swimming: Experiences of Facility Use Restriction Due to COVID-19. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 3583. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14063583

Academic Editor: Franklin G. Mixon

Received: 23 February 2022
Accepted: 15 March 2022
Published: 18 March 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic on 11 March 2020. This virus has come to have significant knock-on effects on every part of human life. Following other nations, the Korean government also imposed national controls, such as closing schools and universities, shortening business hours, postponing sports events, and ordering people to stay at home. The wearing of masks, vaccination, working at home, social distancing, and restriction in indoor physical activities have become a part of our daily lives. Unlike the other infectious disease issues, COVID-19 has led to a long-term battle, with there being a major social and economic crisis, not only in Korea, but all around the world [1]. The Korean government has come to implement a special quarantine system for each region by adjusting it to the level of infectious disease crisis in accordance to the daily number of confirmed cases. The Korean government is implementing the quarantine guidelines by dividing the infectious disease crisis warning stage into five sub-stages, depending on the spread of COVID-19, and there is a limit on the number of people using all the indoor and outdoor facilities depending on the stage, which can contribute to great restriction in daily life. Such changes are no exception for an individual's participation in leisure activities. Due to the restrictions on most of the

close contact activities, many people have difficulty finding leisure activities to enjoy in a less close contact environment [2]. This is because, with the step-by-step strengthening of quarantine guidelines, the use of multi-use facilities such as indoor sports facilities, spectator sports facilities, and performance halls with more close contact have come to be restricted [3].

Korea is a society that values work–life balance. In 2015, the Framework Act on the Promotion of National Leisure was enacted, which is based on the pursuit of work–life balance that reflects the perception of the importance of leisure both personally and socially. This law shows that Koreans have become more interested in leisure activities. According to a survey conducted by the Gyeonggi Research Institute [4] on the mental health of people after COVID-19, about half of the Koreans (48%) reported experiencing stress and depression due to COVID-19. In a survey conducted by the Seoul Metropolitan Government [5] on the daily lives of citizens, which has changed since COVID-19, approximately 32% of the citizens living in Seoul, the capital of Korea, stated that the most difficult thing is to be constrained from leisure activities. Leisure constraints are defined as factors that limit the range and opportunity of free will for leisure, which may inhibit or prohibit a person's decision to participate in activities [6–8]. Leisure constraints are caused by various factors that interfere with human participation in satisfactory leisure activities, causing suspension of leisure activities, or by various complex factors, influencing the decision-making process of participating in leisure activities and making choices in different forms depending on the situation [9]. In other words, this refers to the tangible and intangible obstacles that limit an individual's participation in leisure activities and the internal psychological state, attributes, characteristics, and external circumstances perceived by an individual [10]. There are a number of cases of limited access to leisure participation resulting from various types of leisure constraints, such as time, money, facility, and space [11]. In addition to the existing constraints, there are factors where the participation in leisure activities has stopped due to the social-structural constraints caused by the unexpected emergence of COVID-19.

To distinguish between the terms "leisure space" and "leisure facilities", while leisure space tends to be resource-centered, leisure facilities tend to be user-centered [12]. Additionally, leisure space refers to all the spaces where leisure activities take place and the total amount of physical resources through which one can get away from daily life and enjoy leisure [13]. Accordingly, leisure space in this study is defined as the total amount of physical space where one's leisure activities take place. Leisure facilities are artificially created spaces with a high ratio of capital investment [14]. Most of the previous studies have focused on the issues of accessibility to reduce lack of time, diversity of leisure facilities and programs, satisfaction and quality of public facilities, and commercialization of private facilities [15–18]. As we are witnessing a time of unexampled chaos, it is necessary to expand our views pertaining to leisure constraints and leisure space to prepare for the upcoming post-COVID-19 era.

Before COVID-19, the leisure activities people participated in in Korea were ranked in the following order: physical, social, natural-based, cultural, and intellectual activities. However, after the outbreak of COVID-19, most of the major leisure activities changed to natural activities [19]. Basing on the restriction on the use of indoor sports facilities due to COVID-19, it can be said that nature-based leisure activities with relatively easy access to space and low risk of exposure to infection have increased [20]. For example, a study by Yeo [21] and a survey by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism [22] showed outdoor physical activities without restrictions on use to be actively recommended after COVID-19; in fact, the rate of participation in outdoor physical activities increased by about 33.9% in comparison to what it was before 2019.

Swimming is one of the top 10 club activities as per an annual survey of national leisure activities in Korea, and it has an evenly high participating population across all ages [22]. Swimming consists of various types of activities, such as survival swimming and open-water swimming for all ages [23]. Many previous studies have discussed swimming,

one of the most popular sports in Korea, by mainly focusing on the causes of leisure benefits, especially the psychological and social benefits of swimming [23–25].

The reasons for participating in swimming may vary from person to person, such as hobbies, diet, health, and skill acquisition. However, most swimming participants feel positive changes at physical and psychological levels through swimming, leading to high levels of serious leisure activities beyond simple hobbies or play [26]. "Serious leisure" refers to the leisure activities carried out to acquire specific skills and professional knowledge, and leisure has become the center of an individual's life [27,28]. In other words, serious leisure participants endure repeated training processes through systematic training methods, while making constant efforts to acquire professional skills and knowledge by using video clips and related materials [17,29]. In these circumstances, serious leisure not only relieves the stress of daily life, but also leads to leisure continuation via the obtaining of a high level of accomplishment and life satisfaction [30,31]. Additionally, serious leisure participants experience the process of increasing the level of recreation specialization by appropriately controlling their own abilities and difficulty levels in physical activities [28].

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, things are changing constantly, with there being fewer close contact activities in natural and outdoor areas, which can be said to be of relatively low risk to the spread of COVID-19 in comparison to indoor areas [4]. In addition, certain aspects of the swimming behavior have also changed. Before COVID-19, some of the swimmers enjoyed open-water swimming, swimming in the ocean or crossing the Han River as adventure sports that are distinguished from swimming in indoor swimming pools [32]. People who participate in adventure sports such as open-water swimming tend to realize their ideals or goals, because they are attracted to strong sports with new and thrilling feelings [33]. In particular, as space constraints have emerged due to COVID-19, the number of swimmers seeking to participate in open water is increasing.

This phenomenon is explained by the concept of "leisure constraint negotiation strategy." In comparison to the participants of casual leisure, those participating in serious leisure continued their participation via the leisure constraint negotiation strategy. Even though leisure constraints exist, dropout does not appear unconditionally, and leisure participation continues to appear via the controlling of various factors of leisure constraints on their own through leisure constraint negotiation strategies [34]. There are two types of leisure constraint negotiations: cognitive and behavioral [35]. First, cognitive strategies specifically evaluate priorities through self-determined importance. These are perceived values related to leisure and they precede the behavioral strategies. Second, behavioral strategies are actions that overcome constraints. Leisure constraint negotiation strategies include finding of partners, financial preparation and time management, leisure intensity control, leisure skill acquisition, and activity energy charging [36]. According to the previous studies on serious leisure and leisure constraint negotiation strategies, leisure constraints have a negative effect on serious leisure, while leisure constraint negotiation strategies have a positive effect on serious leisure participation [37–39].

Taken together, in the current COVID-19 situation, there are restrictions on the participation in facility-based leisure activities such as swimming, and leisure constraints due to such restrictions are unusual situations. It is necessary to explore how the people participating in swimming as a serious leisure consistently participate in leisure activities using leisure constraint negotiation strategies, despite the space constraints. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore what the extraordinary constraints of swimming participants caused by facility use restrictions were and what leisure constraint negotiation strategies they represented based on a qualitative analysis. Ultimately, by examining the leisure constraints and the negotiation strategies of the people participating in swimming as a serious leisure, we can provide the direction for change in leisure spaces and facilities meant for facilitating sustainable participation in swimming and ensuring the diversity of leisure spaces.

2. Methods

2.1. Selection of Interviewees

A total of six unmarried employees in their 30s living in the Seoul metropolitan government area or Incheon metropolitan city, Korea, were the participants of this study. The study subjects were limited to those who had experience in swimming masters competitions or obtained swimming-related certifications such as lifeguard certification or sports instructor certification. There are serious leisure participants who sign up for a membership in swimming pools near their residences or workplaces, and are steadily taking lessons to shorten the competition records and correct their posture. The duration of participation in swimming varies from 2 to 7 years. Their participation involves an exercise routine that makes them swim almost daily, including free swimming. In addition, participants in this study showed a high degree of leisure commitment and involvement in swimming, except for time constraints such as overtime until COVID-19 restricted the use of facilities. It was clear that they showed the characteristics of serious leisure, which can be characterized as professionalism, effort, endurance, identification, unique ethos, or personal rewards. There were ten in-depth interviewees who first participated in the study, but six interviewees finally participated because four cases of non-serious leisure participants or elimination due to personal reasons were excluded during the interview process.

The size of the sample for the qualitative research may vary depending on the research design. Based on a review of previous studies, phenomenological studies require approximately three to ten participants [40]. Six participants (A~F) were included in this study, which was adequate for a phenomenological qualitative research. As a sampling method, snowball sampling was used, which repeats the process of collecting cases using one or several participants, and then another appropriate participant is introduced. The first two participants were introduced by an acquaintance of the researchers, and the sampling was conducted by repeating the same process.

2.2. Interviews

In this study, we conducted in-depth interviews of the research participants after obtaining their consent using a qualitative research method. Before in-depth interviews, researchers briefly addressed the purpose of the study and the contents of the questions in advance. The participants were allowed to record the interviews for future transcription and analysis. The interviews were conducted for approximately five months, from September 2020 to January 2021. This period included the period during which there were restrictions on the use of multi-use facilities in metropolitan areas, such as Seoul and Incheon, in accordance with the government's quarantine guidelines.

Due to the infection issue of COVID-19, in-depth interviews were conducted twice or thrice with each participant via phone calls or video chats.

For rapport formation in non-face-to-face situations, unstructured pre-phone interviews were conducted, and the participants were allowed to review the semi-structured questionnaires in advance. Each interview lasted for less than an hour, and the researchers tried to make the participants address their statements in as detailed and sincere fashion as possible in non-face-to-face interview situations.

The unstructured interviews included general questions about swimming, motivation to swim, pleasure of feeling while doing it, reason for continuing swimming, swimming routine, and so on. The semi-structured questions were pertaining to the following: (a) characteristics of serious leisure participation; (b) experiences of participation motivation, pattern, duration, etc.; and (c) COVID-19-related leisure participation, leisure constraints, leisure constraint negotiation strategy, etc. In particular, examples of the question regarding leisure constraint negotiation were: (a) Did you have any constraints when you were enjoying swimming? If so, can you explain what it was? (b) Did you ever give up anything to swim? (c) If you have to give up anything for swimming, what point should be considered? (d) How do you maintain your commitment and involvement in swimming when you feel

constrained? These questions were deliberately asked extensively to enable interviewees to share their experiences and perspectives and extract themes from the data [40].

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using inductive categorical analysis. First, all the recorded contents stated by the participants were transcribed. Based on this, encoding and categorization were conducted. Data collection and analysis were performed simultaneously [41,42], and patterns and themes were identified and described from the perspective of the participants [43]. During data analysis, the transcribed content was read several times and the meanings that stood out were conceptualized. The keywords related to leisure and leisure constraints negotiations were extracted and the sub-categories were derived using symbolic phrases; these sub-categories were integrated as superior categories.

In the research process, the consent of the study participants was taken and their inspection was conducted to increase the research ethics and trustworthiness. Specifically, the research participants were given a full explanation about the purpose of the research and the contents of the questionnaire before in-depth interviews, and they agreed to the video and audio recording and transcription conducted during in-depth interviews to be used only for research purposes. The participants and researchers communicated regarding the researchers' interpretations and meanings of the interview content. In addition, in order to prevent any misinterpretations, confirmation was received from the participants on the transcription. Each researcher underwent a process of contrast review of the classified codes [44] and shared the analysis results through periodic meetings held among the researchers. During the analysis process, the peer review was conducted by a professor majoring in leisure sports, a professor majoring in sports culture, and a Ph.D. scholar majoring in leisure and recreation to prevent errors that may occur due to excessive interpretations on the part of the researchers. The triangulation method is applied when trying to pursue at least three methods to prove or confirm the results derived from the study, and this verification process can reinforce the validity of the study [45]. This study was triangulated through the confirmation of the results of the research participants, the peer verification, and the review of previous studies.

3. Results

Constraints do not always prevent or limit participation [8,46,47]. Constraints come in many forms, such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural [10]. Leisure, however, continues through a leisure constraint negotiation strategy, even in situations where it is difficult to overcome [48]. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the leisure constraint negotiation strategy adopted by the people who participated in swimming as a serious leisure activity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The participants of this study were all unmarried employees in their 30s. All the participants extensively mentioned their motivation for starting swimming, their leisure constraints, and their leisure constraint negotiation strategies. A major constraint was the work-related time management prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Except for the work overtime or high workload, they participated in swimming while maintaining the lessons and training schedules set by themselves.

> I just focused on swimming no matter what. So far, swimming comes first. (C)

> Working overtime . . . most of swimming pools, free swimming time is set. If I cannot make it, there is no way to enjoy swimming on that day. That is the strongest constraint, I think. (E)

> While working overtime, I cannot go swimming even if I want to . . . job is the biggest constraint. I do not have any interpersonal constraints. I just say, I am going swimming and do not meet people. I only swim. I enjoy having people who swim with me. Instead, I hang out less with others. (D)

The participants in this study responded that they enjoy social interactions with relatives or friends, but only to the extent that they do not interfere with their swimming lessons and training. However, the frequency and cost of participating in swimming naturally decreased due to the closing of multi-use facilities for leisure caused by the COVID-19 situation, which reduced their passion.

> Nobody knows when the COVID-19 situation gets better or worse. I used to spend a bunch of time in swimming. I was goal-oriented person . . . Passion, time . . . everything gradually fades. (E)

> Before COVID-19, I went to another swimming pool and swam a lot following the free swimming at my registered place. But now, I do not go all the way there. I feel I am not getting enough amount of swim . . . decreased a lot. (B)

> My passion for swimming is not the same as before. I think the amount spent on swimming has also decreased by about half of what I spent usually. (A)

According to Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey [11], structural constraints (e.g., lack of time and money, availability) act as the determinants of participation if intrapersonal or interpersonal constraints do not exist. Similarly, the participants of this study rarely stated the leisure constraints on intrapersonal or interpersonal factors. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, lack of time due to jobs was the main and strongest leisure constraint. However, in the face of the pandemic, they experienced changes in attitudes toward swimming in accordance with the restrictions on facility use. Leisure constraint negotiation strategies based on the understanding of leisure constraints of serious swimming participants are discussed in the next section.

3.1. Constraint Negotiation Strategies

3.1.1. Cognitive Constraint Negotiation Strategies

In this study, the cognitive strategy adopted during leisure constraint negotiations is a way to manage constraints by justifying the situations that prioritize swimming. The results showed that the participants had a supernatural attitude toward swimming and maintained a positive attitude, thinking that the demand for swimming would increase when the COVID-19 pandemic ended.

Supernatural Attitude toward Swimming

The participants maintained a supernatural attitude that considered swimming as a safe activity that could be sustained even during a pandemic. They thought that the coronavirus might not transmit in sanitized pool water, although they should be careful of the transmission in locker rooms and shower rooms. This attitude served as a negotiation strategy to continue swimming even during COVID-19, a rather extreme constraint situation. The supernatural attitude toward the fact that cannot or has not been scientifically explained about swimming and the infectious diseases in participants who enjoy serious leisure is a remarkable finding.

> There were fewer people infected in the pool than I thought. And compared to the other exercises, it was much less. Other exercises have a high risk of infection owing to them being practiced in confined spaces. The swimming pool itself is well ventilated. I heard that I have less chance of getting infected underwater. (A)

> As a swimmer, I wonder if the swimming pool is really safe or dangerous from infection. So, I googled to find anything helpful and I got some. But I am not sure if the swimming pool center gave any information to the members. For example, whether the coronavirus can survive in the pool water or no. It would be nice to let me know about such information. (B)

According to Means [49], the author of "10,000 Years of Swimming," ancient Greeks regarded swimming as a citizen's virtue and valued the ability to move gracefully underwater. According to Chaline [50], swimming reflects the characteristics of modern sports,

including leisure, physical fitness, competition, and amateurism. In addition, swimming is related to a traditional medical treatment, which is considered to have an indirect effect on diseases by helping the body restore its balance.

For the participants of this study, swimming may be a special therapy or a mysterious experience beyond leisure sports. This is because the flexible movement in water as well as the technical aspects of swimming style and records are attractive. When we fully enter inside water, our bodies float in a way that we cannot experience when we feel gravity on the ground. In addition, we may have a mysterious experience of focusing on swimming while our sensory organs, which usually react sensitively (e.g., sight, hearing, sense of touch, smell, etc.), are dull [51]. In this context, the participants may have had an attitude that they believed swimming to be safer than the other leisure activities in multi-use facilities. These cultural and behavioral characteristics of swimming were the background for understanding the supernatural attitudes of swimming participants and the leisure constraint negotiation strategies that can sustain their activities even in the context of COVID-19.

Positive Attitude toward the Post-COVID-19 Period

The participants in this study expected the demand for and popularity of swimming to increase after the end of COVID-19. The main content of the participants' expectations was that even those who do not like swimming will be interested in swimming and there will be an increase in the swimming population. These expectations served as a leisure constraint negotiation strategy that allowed them to constantly participate in swimming by maintaining a positive attitude. The participants of this study were serious leisure participants who were devoted to swimming and passionate enough to predict the trends in swimming demand and swimming participation skills.

> I need to increase the amount of swimming. Even the people around me who do not swim are looking forward to swimming. Everyone's desire for leisure is increasing now. I think the number of swimmers will increase a lot. People's desire to spend more on the swimming industry will grow. People will spend more. (D)

> There are many people around me who stopped swimming or wanted to learn how to swim, so I think the number of people who swim again will increase after COVID-19. I guess there will be more people in the swimming pools if people who were not able to swim start swimming. (E)

Maintaining a positive attitude is a well-known strategy in cognitive leisure constraint negotiations. In their study of female surfers, Fendt and Wilson [50] reported the possession of positive behavior and mindset as the determination to not lose a rich experience. The female surfers with this positive attitude felt individual growth and development while continuing their training and tours, and through this, they negotiated leisure constraints. In addition, regarding the constraint negotiation strategies for travelling, Karl, Sie, and Ritchie [52] suggested a change in aspiration through positive reappraisal as a cognitive constraint negotiation strategy. Meanwhile, a recent research study discussed self-efficacy as a leading variable for influencing the leisure participants to maintain a positive attitude as a leisure constraint-negotiation strategy [53]. Self-efficacy in leisure is the confidence in the ability to procure leisure resources and start planning, and it affects the behavior of promoting participation in leisure activities regardless of the leisure constraints [48]. The participants continued to participate in leisure activities by maintaining a positive attitude based on their confidence in their ability to procure swimming resources or start planning. In other words, participants continued their leisure participation by maintaining a positive attitude toward swimming via self-efficacy as a leisure constraint negotiation strategy. According to a study by Covelli [54] on female hunters, hunters with higher levels of self-efficacy were more motivated and confident in using negotiation strategies to overcome the constraints.

3.1.2. Behavioral Constraint Negotiation Strategies

In this study, the behavioral strategies adopted during leisure constraint negotiations were defined as the behaviors meant for overcoming constraints. The participants of this study continued to participate in swimming by replacing their behavior and motivation for swimming. In addition, the participants moved to find the available facility to swim or manage the level of crowding, and find out what level of crowding is safe for maintaining social distance.

Substitution of Activity and Motivation

The participants maintained their swimming participation to improve their records of the competition. However, as direct participation in swimming was inevitably reduced due to the leisure constraints caused by COVID-19, participation in swimming was maintained through the negotiation strategies that replaced swimming-related activities such as aerobic exercise and basic training to improve swimming skills or view training videos on media. In addition, they lost the goal of the competitions or records, since almost all the competitions were cancelled in the backdrop of the pandemic. It was found that the participants who felt a sense of accomplishment through daily hard but professional swimming training maintained swimming participation by replacing them with a relatively general leisure motivation for maintaining health.

> Just having small talk with other swimmers . . . Well, buying some more swimming equipment like swimsuits or watching YouTube for vicarious satisfaction . . . The channel of Team USA . . . from there I watch swimming competitions . . . And, I think yoga or pilates are helpful for swimming. I became so interested in other ground sports as a supportive training for swimming. (D)

> Because of my job . . . an office worker . . . I have been sitting for a long time. I felt the losing of muscle mass, so my back hurts sometimes. Rather than participating in competitions or improving records, I am continuing to swim to maintain my health. (E)

Reducing or replacing of leisure participation is an important constraint-negotiation strategy. Long-term participation can be maintained by minimizing intrapersonal constraints such as anxiety and depression [55]. In this study, participation in swimming was reduced due to structural constraints, but was still maintained by replacing it with related activities or changing the motivation. Overcoming leisure constraints can be explained via substitutability, along with the negotiation strategy. The concept of the substitutability theory focuses on alternatives that might provide psychological experiences, satisfaction, and benefits similar to the original activities [56,57]. Recreation substitutability is described as the interchangeability of recreational experiences and to seek an alternative or substitute one or more of the time, activities, and resources of the experience to achieve acceptable equivalent results [58,59]. Generally, alternative forms include temporal, resource, and strategy [60]. The participants of this study continued swimming through alternative activities and motivations in the context of COVID-19, which made their participation almost impossible.

Participating Facilities and Crowding Management

The COVID-19 quarantine stage was applied differently depending on the number of confirmed cases in each local area. The metropolitan areas, including Seoul and Incheon, where the number of confirmed cases was high, were relatively higher than that of other regions, and the use of facilities such as swimming pools was strongly restricted. All the participants were restricted from participating in a high level of quarantine because their residences and workplaces were located in metropolitan areas. As a negotiation strategy for these leisure constraints, the management of facilities in other areas or consideration of facility crowding played a very important role in them continuing to participate in swimming.

> I did it until the swimming center closed. Public pools were all closed, but private ones weren't, right? So, I was looking for places like those. It was not just me . . . swimmers around me were also looking for such places, and I joined with . . . I also went to other places located countryside . . . tried to find out if it is available somewhere. (F)

> If Seoul was in the 2.5th stage of quarantine, Gyeonggi-do was in the 2nd stage. Then some pools were available there. I have been looking for places like that. I went there for about 3 days a week. (C)

> I was unable to find indoor pools that are available. I end up turning to open water swimming. (B)

> I feel safe because there are not that many people around . . . not many people . . . 2 or 3 people per lane . . . I am relaxed. Not many people during the time of free swimming, the average number of swimmers is around 2 or 3 people per lane . . . not that many. (C)

> I went for swimming once, but there were fewer people than I thought. I do not know if it is because of safety concerns. About three, including me, were in the swimming pool every time I went... few in the pool . . . I think it would be okay because I am the only one in the shower room. So, I just go. (E)

In general, management in a leisure constraint negotiation strategy involves adjusting and/or managing plans and time. By analyzing the leisure constraint negotiations for triathlon participants, Kennelly, Moyle and Lamon [61] found planning and time management to be very important for constant participation. In particular, these negotiation strategies contributed toward the minimization of the negative impact of participation in the triathlon on other aspects of life. In addition, the time management strategy may be presented as a strategy that can replace the desired activity with a more convenient one [33]. However, as a noticeable result of the study, the facilities and the crowding management capable of participating in swimming were drawn. When participating in leisure, the perceived risk of facility crowding negatively effects participation satisfaction [62]. The facilities available in the context of COVID-19 are very limited, and facility crowding means that there is a very high level of safety risk. Accordingly, the active management of participants was derived as a major negotiation strategy. When it comes to leisure and recreation, the management of facilities and crowding are important factors for improving the quality of participation experience and the utilization of appropriate resources [63]. Therefore, it is necessary to research the constraints related to the safety management of facilities, the quality of participation experience, and the post-COVID-19 era.

Leisure is achieved through an active attempt to find a compromise between individual priorities and situational constraints [64]. This is called the leisure negotiation strategy. The results of this study also showed that leisure constraint negotiation strategies can be divided into behavioral and cognitive strategies. In addition, the cognitive negotiation strategy, "supernatural attitude toward swimming" and "positive attitude toward post-COVID-19", precede the behavioral negotiation strategy of "substitution of motivation and activities" and "participating facilities and crowding management".

4. Discussions and Implications

The following sections summarize and discuss the results of this study. First, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the participation of unmarried employees in their 30s in serious leisure was a major constraint on work-related time management. Time management is the most representative behavioral negotiation strategy. As shown in the time management of the participants of this study, when they feel constraints due to lack of time, they act very carefully on priorities to succeed in negotiating the constraints. For example, people participate in leisure activities while overcoming temptations such as personal or social relationships [65]. However, the leisure constraints experienced in the unusual situation of COVID-19 were a problem of place management, called constraints on the

use of facilities. It can be seen that this has changed from time constraints before COVID-19 to facility constraints after COVID-19. Therefore, in addition to time management in leisure constraint negotiations, an in-depth research on the leisure constraints in the post-COVID-19 era should be conducted for the management of place constraints and behavioral negotiation strategies. Especially, the aspect of "facilities and crowding management" is a meaningful topic related to the pandemic and leisure. The characteristics of swimming participants selected in this study are participants in high-level serious leisure activities who feel positive changes in physical and psychological aspects through swimming beyond simple hobbies or play and strive to gain expertise in specific skills and knowledge through swimming. In terms of leisure constraint negotiations in the COVID-19 situation, it was judged that different types of leisure constraint negotiation strategies would be derived from participants who enjoy swimming only as a hobby.

Second, alternatives to activity and motivation were derived as a behavioral negotiation strategy. The study participants replaced the activities or changed their motivation to continue swimming during the COVID-19 pandemic. Motivation factors are considered important in the process of leisure constraint negotiation. Hubbard and Mannell [33] have argued that negotiations partially mediate the relationship between motivation and participation in the constraint-negotiation process model. Son, Mowen and Kerstetter [48] suggested that the motivation for participation is an important factor that has a direct and positive effect on successful negotiations. They also mentioned that it is necessary for future research to identify the additional factors that may affect negotiation efforts and efficiency. Although constraints have lowered the level of participation, they were found to reduce the negative effect by inducing more use of negotiating resources. In this regard, in the study of Oh [8], the "leisure constraint-reduction" model was proposed as a successful aging model through leisure. This model stated that the factors of "selective optimization and compensation (SOC)" and "social support (SS)" influenced by intrinsic motivation mitigate the negative relationship between leisure constraints and leisure participation. These results are representative examples showing that the roles of negotiation resources, strategies, and intrinsic motivation are important factors in the process of leisure constraint negotiation. The processes of leisure constraints and constraint negotiations differ depending on the level of leisure constraints. For example, if participants perceived a high level of leisure constraints, leisure constraints can have a positive effect on the process of constraint negotiation [66]. In their study, Lee and Hwang [39] reported that the serious leisure participants put in a high level of negotiation effort to overcome leisure constraints. In other words, the constrained experiences of serious leisure participants have a positive effect on participation directly and indirectly via the creation or activation of negotiation efforts [67]. In addition, Han and Sa [68] analyzed the experiences and processes of leisure activities in the COVID-19 situation using qualitative research methods, and confirmed that changes in leisure space and access to leisure information were important. In other words, leisure participants change in leisure space and access to leisure information as new alternatives because of their existing leisure participation experience and anxiety about leisure participation. Thus, this study indicates that the high level of leisure constraints felt by the serious swimming participants in the context of COVID-19 seems to have played a positive role in finding negotiation strategies.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the leisure constraint negotiation strategies adopted by people who participate in swimming as a serious leisure in the context of COVID-19 through the use of qualitative research methods. Facilities that use a restricted environment due to COVID-19 have come as a special leisure constraint for people participating in swimming as a serious leisure, and leisure constraint negotiations can be concluded by dividing them into cognitive and behavioral strategies. The cognitive negotiation strategies were found to replace the swimming-related activities and motivations and help continue their activities by presenting actions to manage the available facilities

and crowding. In particular, the "supernatural attitude towards swimming", derived as a cognitive strategy for leisure constraint negotiations, is considered as a special attitude of only serious leisure participants who have experienced the value and meaning of swimming. In addition, "participating facilities and crowding management", derived as a behavioral strategy for leisure constraint negotiations, is considered as a special behavioral strategy in the context of COVID-19, in that the crowding of swimming facilities is actively expressed. Many studies have been conducted on facilities, technologies, competition, and the positive effects of sports types. In comparison, what are the reasons for having and values of fundamentally active activities? How does crowding of facilities affect leisure behavior? There is a lack of interest and research regarding these questions. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth research to derive characteristics such as "supernatural attitude" of specific sports, which is one of the results of this study. An empirical study should be conducted on how the crowding factor that increases perceived crowding in almost all sports after COVID-19 will affect leisure behavior. Ultimately, these studies are expected to help improve the practical management of leisure and sports activities based on the facilities. Restrictions on the use of facilities in the context of COVID-19 are a special situation, but it can serve as a generalized restriction that can be faced again at any time in the future. It is necessary to prepare additional countermeasures at the facility level so that leisure activities can be continuously encouraged along with safety quarantine campaigns to overcome the anxiety and limitations in using leisure facilities due to COVID-19. Additionally, leisure spaces and facilities need to be changed that can secure individual space due to their larger and wider size or lower crowding than now. Therefore, it is judged that the leisure constraint negotiation strategy that reflects the characteristics of the people participating in swimming as a serious leisure derived in this study and the specificity of the COVID-19 situation is a very meaningful analysis.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, J.K., S.O. and B.Y.; methodology, J.K.; formal analysis, J.K.; writing—original draft preparation J.K., S.O. and B.Y.; writing—review and editing, S.O. and B.Y. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2020S1A5B5A16082842).

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Go, D.U. What makes people overcome COVID-19 pandemic? Vulnerable or tolerable characteristics. *Korean J. Consum. Advert. Psychol.* **2020**, *21*, 399–424.
2. Choi, J.S. An alternative review of family leisure in the post-corona era: Focusing on online video contents of national museum of Korea. *Soc. Leis. Cult. Stud.* **2021**, *19*, 1–21.
3. Kharshiing, K.D.; Kashyap, D.; Gupta, K.; Khursheed, M.; Shahnawaz, M.G.; Khan, N.H.; Uniyal, R.; Rehman, U. Quality of life in the COVID-19 pandemic in India: Exploring the role of individual and group variables. *Community Ment. Health J.* **2021**, *57*, 70–78. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
4. Gyeonggi Research Institute. COVID-19 generation, How's your mental health? *J. Behav. Cogn. Ther.* **2020**, *414*, 1–25.
5. The Seoul Metropolitan Government. Analysis of Socioeconomic Changes in Seoul due to the Spread of COVID-19. Available online: https://data.si.re.kr/data-insight-report/55582 (accessed on 11 November 2021).
6. Jackson, E.L. Leisure constraints: A survey of past research. *Leis. Sci.* **1988**, *10*, 203–215. [CrossRef]
7. Jackson, E.L. Special issue introduction: Leisure constraints/constrained leisure. *Leis. Sci.* **1991**, *13*, 273–278. [CrossRef]
8. Oh, S.S. Successful Aging through Leisure Gardening: A Study on Constraints Negotiation. Ph.D. Dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, USA, 2005.
9. Henderson, K.A.; Stalnaker, D.; Taylor, G. The relationship between barriers to recreation and gender-role personality traits for women. *J. Leis. Res.* **1988**, *20*, 69–80. [CrossRef]

10. Crawford, D.W.; Godbey, G. Reconceptualizing barriers to family leisure. *Leis. Sci.* **1987**, *9*, 119–127. [CrossRef]
11. Crawford, D.W.; Jackson, E.L.; Godbey, G. A hierarchical model of leisure constraints. *Leis. Sci.* **1991**, *13*, 309–320. [CrossRef]
12. Kim, H.J. *Policy Types of Leisure Space*; Korea Culture & Tourism Institute: Seoul, Korea, 2007.
13. Moon, K.I. Use Characteristics and the Valuation of Palaces as Urban Leisure Space: A Case Study of 4 Palaces in Seoul. Ph.D. Dissertation, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea, 2002.
14. Kim, H.S. Influence of Participation in Sports Program at Leisure Welfare Center for Elderly on Psychological Well-being. Ph.D. Dissertation, Konkuk University, Seoul, Korea, 6 March 2006.
15. Han, J.O.; Jung, D.; Lee, J.S. An Empirical study on satisfaction of public leisure facilities and leisure life: Mediating effect of leisure policy satisfaction. *J. Leis. Stud.* **2019**, *17*, 61–85.
16. Hong, J.E.; Lee, C.H.; Kim, M.I. Investigating the relationship between public leisure service satisfaction and community attachment-Focus on community center in Seoul. *J. Leis. Recreat. Stud.* **2011**, *35*, 161–172.
17. Hwang, Y.P. Safety work of leisure and leisure infrastructure-Focusing on leisure and sports facilities. *Korean Soc. Leis. Recreat.* **2018**, *11*, 19–29.
18. Lee, S.M. A study on the demand of domestic youths for leisure facilities. *Korea Inst. Youth Facil. Environ.* **2016**, *14*, 83–92.
19. Sa, H.J.; Han, J.H. COVID-19 and Leisure constraints: Testing hierarchical leisure constraints model. *Korean J. Phys. Educ.* **2021**, *60*, 387–400. [CrossRef]
20. Kim, E.J.; Kang, H.U. A Meta-analysis on the relationship between leisure constraint and leisure constraint negotiation: Focused on leisure sport participants. *J. Leis. Recreat. Stud.* **2020**, *44*, 41–50.
21. Yeo, K.A. Guidelines for safe outdoor sports activities in the era of COVID-19. *Sport Sci.* **2021**, *155*, 58–65.
22. Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. 2020 Physical Activity Participation Survey. Available online: https://www.mcst.go.kr/kor/s_policy/dept/deptView.jsp?pSeq=1442&pDataCD=0417000000&pType=2020 (accessed on 3 August 2021).
23. Park, J.H.; Baek, J.H. The mediation effect of exercise adherence on the relationship between serious leisure and exercise commitment by swimming participants. *Korean J. Sport* **2017**, *15*, 287–296.
24. Koo, D.W.; Lee, K.M.; Kim, J. The effect of swimming participant's passion and emotion on self-management and exercise adherence. *Korean J. Phys. Educ.* **2013**, *52*, 87–100.
25. Park, G.B.; Lee, K.M.; Kim, J. The effect of swimming participant's leisure constraints negotiation on leisure flow and social happiness. *J. Sport Leis. Stud.* **2014**, *57*, 525–536. [CrossRef]
26. Lee, Y.J. Effects of serious leisure on quality of life under corona pandemic: An analysis of the mediated effect of positive leisure psychological capital as an integrated concept. *Asia-Pac. J. Multimed. Serv. Converg. Art Humanit. Sociol.* **2020**, *10*, 17–28.
27. Lee, Y.J. Korean football supporters culture as serious leisure. *Korean J. Phys. Educ.* **2004**, *44*, 553–563.
28. Stebbins, R.A. *New Directions in the Theory and Research of Serious Leisure*; Edwin Mellen Press: Lewiston, NY, USA, 2001.
29. Jeon, H.J. The Relationship between Serious Leisure and Recreation Specialization for Tennis Club Participants. Ph.D. Dissertation, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea, 2011.
30. Kim, B.; Lee, Y.J.; Joo, H.C. Relationship among achievement goal orientation, passion and intention of participation for rally sports masters swimming competition participants. *J. Sport Leis. Stud.* **2016**, *64*, 553–563. [CrossRef]
31. Lee, C.W.; Kim, C.H.; Song, W.I. Lived experience of Taekwondo training as serious leisure for female college student. *J. Leis. Recreat. Stud.* **2005**, *29*, 261–270.
32. Choi, Y.J.; An, S.H.; Kim, H.B. An examination of relation model among self-efficacy, self-achievement and serious leisure of a participant in Han river cross swimming challenge. *Korean J. Sport* **2016**, *14*, 437–448.
33. Hubbard, J.; Mannell, R.C. Testing competing models of the leisure constraint negotiation process in a corporate employee recreation setting. *Leis. Sci.* **2001**, *23*, 145–163. [CrossRef]
34. Shin, K.L.; Oh, S.S. Categorization of leisure constraints of participants in leisure sports in accordance with the characteristics of sociology of population. *Korean J. Leis. Recreat. Park* **2009**, *33*, 157–169.
35. Jackson, E.L.; Crawford, D.W.; Godbey, G. Negotiation of leisure constraints. *Leis. Sci.* **1993**, *15*, 1–11. [CrossRef]
36. Lyu, S.O.; Oh, C.O. Recreationists' constraints negotiation process for continual leisure engagement. *Leis. Sci.* **2014**, *36*, 479–497. [CrossRef]
37. Hwang, S.H.; Seo, H.J. Relationships among leisure constraints, leisure constraints negotiation, and serious leisure. *Korean J. Sport Sci.* **2009**, *20*, 298–307. [CrossRef]
38. Kwon, K.S.; Oh, T.Y.; Seo, W.J. The role of society activity as leisure constraint negotiation strategy for leisure constraint of sport participant. *Korean J. Leis. Recreat. Park* **2015**, *39*, 22–32.
39. Lee, M.J.; Hwang, S.H. Leisure constraints and leisure constraints negotiation strategy according to the leisure pattern (serious leisure vs casual leisure). *J. Leis. Stud.* **2012**, *10*, 1–21.
40. Cresswell, J.W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods*; SAGE Publications: New York, NY, USA, 2014.
41. Marshall, C.; Rossman, G.B. *Designing Qualitative Research*; SAGE Publications: New York, NY, USA, 1989.
42. Merriam, S.B. *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*; Jossey-Bass: Hoboken, NJ, USA, 1991.
43. Agar, M. Getting better quality stuff: Methodological competition in an interdisciplinary niche. *Urban. Life* **1980**, *9*, 34–50. [CrossRef]
44. Gibbs, G.R. Thematic coding and categorizing. *Anal. Qual. Data* **2007**, *703*, 38–56.
45. Robert, K.Y. *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*; Guilford Publications, Inc.: New York, NY, USA, 2011.

46. Kay, T.; Jackson, E.L. Leisure despite constraint: The impact of leisure constraints on leisure participation. *J. Leis. Res.* **1991**, *23*, 301–313. [CrossRef]
47. Shaw, S.M.; Bonen, A.; McCabe, J.F. Do more constraints mean less leisure?: Examining the relationship between constraints and participation. *J. Leis. Res.* **1991**, *23*, 286–300. [CrossRef]
48. Son, J.S.; Mowen, A.J.; Kerstetter, D.L. Testing alternative leisure constraint negotiation models: An extension of Hubbard and Mannell's study. *Leis. Sci.* **2008**, *30*, 198–216. [CrossRef]
49. Means, H. *Splash!: 10,000 Years of Swimming*; Hachette Books: Paris, France, 2020.
50. Chaline, E. *Strokes of Genius: A History of Swimming*; Reaktion Books: London, UK, 2017.
51. Fendt, L.S.; Wilson, E. 'I just push through the barriers because I live for surfing': How women negotiate their constraints to surf tourism. *Ann. Leis. Res.* **2012**, *15*, 4–18. [CrossRef]
52. Karl, M.; Sie, L.; Ritchie, B.W. Expanding travel constraint negotiation theory: An exploration of cognitive and behavioral constraint negotiation relationships. *J. Travel Res.* **2021**, *61*, 00472875211011547. [CrossRef]
53. Loucks-Atkinson, A.; Mannell, R.C. Role of self-efficacy in the constraints negotiation process: The case of individuals with fibromyalgia syndrome. *Leis. Sci.* **2007**, *29*, 19–36. [CrossRef]
54. Covelli, E.A. The Constraint Negotiation Process among Female Hunters: The Role of Self-efficacy, Motivations, and Social Support. Ph.D. Dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, USA, 2011.
55. MacCosham, B. Negotiating leisure constraints: The case of an amateur musician with epilepsy. *Leis. Stud.* **2017**, *36*, 825–837. [CrossRef]
56. Iso-Ahola, S.E. A theory of substitutability of leisure behavior. *Leis. Sci.* **1986**, *8*, 367–389. [CrossRef]
57. Jenkins, J.; Pigram, J. *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation*; Routledge: London, UK, 2003.
58. Brunson, M.W.; Shelby, B. Recreation substitutability: A research agenda. *Leis. Sci.* **1993**, *15*, 67–74. [CrossRef]
59. Hendee, J.C.; Burdge, R.J. The substitutability concept: Implications for recreation research and management. *J. Leis. Res.* **1974**, *6*, 157–162. [CrossRef]
60. Shelby, B.; Vaske, J.J. Resource and activity substitutes for recreational salmon fishing in New Zealand. *Leis. Sci.* **1991**, *13*, 21–32. [CrossRef]
61. Kennelly, M.; Moyle, B.; Lamont, M. Constraint negotiation in serious leisure: A study of amateur triathletes. *J. Leis. Res.* **2013**, *45*, 466–484. [CrossRef]
62. Yoon, S.M.; Lee, C.K.; Kang, H. Examining the relationships among the crowing, perceived risk, satisfaction, trust, and support in a festival site: The case of the Seoul lantern festival. *J. Hosp. Tour. Stud.* **2014**, *16*, 337–357.
63. Jenkins, J.M.; Pigram, J.J. Outdoor Recreation. In *A Handbook of Leisure Studies*; Palgrave Macmillan: London, UK, 2006; pp. 363–385.
64. Skinner, E.A.; Edge, K.; Altman, J.; Sherwood, H. Searching for the structure of coping: A review and critique of category systems for classifying ways of coping. *Psychol. Bull.* **2003**, *129*, 216. [CrossRef]
65. Mannell, R.C.; Kleiber, D.A. *A Social Psychology of Leisure*; Sagamore-Venture: Champaign, IL, USA, 1997.
66. Oh, S.S.; Shin, K.L.; Yeon, B.H. A study on causality among leisure identity salience, negotiation efficacy, leisure constraints negotiation, and intentions for participating leisure activity: An empirical investigation of male and female Korean college students. *Korean J. Leis. Recreat. Park* **2012**, *36*, 14–26.
67. White, D.D. A structural model of leisure constraints negotiation in outdoor recreation. *Leis. Sci.* **2008**, *30*, 342–359. [CrossRef]
68. Han, J.H.; Sa, H.J. COVID-19 and the Tasks of leisure. *Korean J. Leis. Recreat. Park* **2021**, *45*, 141–152. [CrossRef]