Leisure and Public Health: Part of the Problem/
Part of the Solution

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Introduction

- Leisure as sloth (1 of the 7 deadly sins) and, as such, often a main contributor to poor public health
- But this is a simplified view of the nature of leisure.
  - Sometimes sloth (i.e., relaxation, Kleiber, 2000; recreation [regeneration]) is beneficial to health (to reduce stress, brighten outlook on life/work, etc.)
    - Problem: too much relaxation, recreation
  - In other words, by no means all leisure is slothful.
  - In short, leisure has been inaccurately stereotyped as wasteful and harmful to life and limb.

Some types of leisure

- Slothful or Unhealthy leisure is often “casual leisure.” (slide on definition and 8 types)
  - Unhealthy because most of it is sedentary and fails to challenge the mind.
  - But pleasurable aerobic activity is healthy though not mentally challenging
- Nonslothful or healthy leisure comes in two other types:
  - “Serious leisure”: (slide on definition and its 3 types)
  - “Project-based leisure”: (slide on definition)

Healthy leisure and physical fitness

- This leisure pathway to health through sport and physical fitness is recognized and widely studied, though the leisure component (i.e., meaning, motivation) has often been ignored.
- Anyway, healthy leisure is much more than sport and fitness, neither of which is everyone’s cup of tea.
- Two points: healthy leisure may be active or passive, and active leisure is not always sport.

Healthy leisure and personal well-being

- Personal well-being has been defined as “absence of negative conditions and feelings, the result of adjustment and adaptation to a hazardous world” (Keyes, 1998, p. 121). (slide on well-being) In one sense this is a private, personal state.
• Consistent with this: serious leisure generates well-being through self-fulfillment (slide) (Stebbins, 2004).
• (slide) In a second sense, well-being also has many social dimensions (social well-being): social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization (about the potential and direction of society), and social coherence (understanding of how the world around us works) (pp. 122-123). Haworth (2003, p. 317) calls all this “subjective well-being” (with all its social trimmings).
• Serious leisure is a vehicle for realizing the first three and may contribute to the fourth.
  o Generates the perception that social support is available. It appears that people find companionship in many healthy leisure activities
  o Generates perception 1) of freedom to choose, 2) of control of the activity, 3) of competence in executing it, and 4) of intrinsic motivation to pursue it. This generates stable beliefs in self-determination. [2 & 3 are serious leisure]

Some roles for public health (slide)

• Argue at all levels of government and industry for the importance of healthy leisure.
• Support leisure education programs (often disguised as lifestyle counseling).
• Support community leisure-service delivery in general and for critical groups (e.g., adolescents, handicapped, elderly, 3rd-World immigrants).

Slides

Casual leisure defined:
Casual leisure is immediately intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it. It is fundamentally hedonic, pursued for its significant level of pure enjoyment, or pleasure.

TYPES OF CASUAL LEISURE

• Play
• Relaxation
• Passive entertainment
• Active entertainment
• Sociable conversation
• Sensory stimulation
• Casual volunteering
• Pleasurable aerobic activity

Serious leisure defined:
Serious leisure is systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge, and experience.

Types of serious leisure:
AMATEUR: one of three types of participant in serious leisure distinguished 1) by a special relationship with the professionals in the same activity and with the public interested in that activity and 2) by a distinctive set of attitudes, notably, confidence, perseverance, commitment, preparedness, and self-conception. In general, professionals hold these attitudes more strongly than amateurs, while the latter hold them more strongly than dabblers or dilettantes, who only play disinterestedly at the activity.

HOBBY: a systematic, enduring pursuit of a reasonably evolved and specialized free-time activity having no professional counterpart. Such leisure leads to acquisition of substantial skill, knowledge, or experience, or a combination of these. Although hobbyists differ from amateurs in that they lack a professional reference point, they sometimes have commercial equivalents and
often have small publics who take an interest in what they do.

**VOLUNTEERING:** uncoerced help offered either formally or informally with no or, at most, token pay done for the benefit of both other people and the volunteer.
- **CAREER VOLUNTEERING:** serious leisure
- **CASUAL VOLUNTEERING:** casual leisure

**Project-based leisure defined:**
a short-term, moderately complicated, either one-shot or occasional though infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time. It requires considerable planning, effort, and sometimes skill or knowledge, but for all that is neither serious leisure nor intended to develop into such (Stebbins, 2005).

**Personal/Subjective/Social Well-Being:**

Definition: “absence of negative conditions and feelings, the result of adjustment and adaptation to a hazardous world” (Keyes, 1998, p. 121).

**Self-fulfillment defined:**
developing to the fullest a person’s gifts and character, developing that person’s full potential.

**Social well-being:**
Well-being is a private, personal state, but one with several social dimensions:

- social integration (in the community)
- social acceptance (by the community)
- social contribution (to the community)
• social actualization (feelings about the potential and direction of society)
• social coherence (understanding of how the world around us works)

Serious leisure generates well-being through self-fulfillment (Stebbins, 2004)

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Stebbins selected publication list


