

Personal identities and leisure sociology essay



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What is identity? Our identity is what differentiates us from each other. How we look, talk; think all contribute to our various identities. It is what sets us apart from each other. Similarly leisure and recreation has its own identity that sets it apart from all other modalities. I shall speak on how leisure form and change identities.

Roots of identities

Numerous philosophers have dealt with concepts of a person's "self". But not until the late 19th century did people try to dismantle identity and see what identity really is. Researchers and theorists like Freud and Jung are the greatest influences on recent interpretations of identity. There are also developmental theorists who believe that there is a process in forming an identity.

BIRTH à INFANCY à CHILDHOOD à ADOLESCENCE à ADULTHOOD à DEATH

This has become the norm. People think that our identities are derived from social status and our roles in society. Due to this, emphasis is placed on the exterior and aesthetic gimmicks to improve our identities. This is known as a social construct. Everything is constructed by society and people. Not by pure hard facts.

Personal and social identities

These are the two parts that are brought together and eventually makes up our identity. Personal refers to how the person perceives themselves.

Whether they think they are funny, happy or confident. The social part refers

to the roles we take on. We become recognizable by these roles. E. g. daughter, student, teacher sister etc....

Identity is greatly formed during adolescence (ages 13-23). Although we keep growing, our core characteristics are created and carved into us during these years. Erikson (1968) says that the more successful kids are at resolving problems during younger ages the better psychologically equipped they will be to adjust and consequently, happier.

Developmental theorists focus on how people accept and embrace their roles. They have come up with a checklist that describes what a psychologically healthy person should be. In America, a healthy person contributes to the community by means of employment, civic involvement and general community participation.

As I said earlier, the bulk of our identity is formed in adolescence. From ages 23-60, people's identities are completed with their jobs and the work they do. However this can cause devaluation of people who are unable to work due to disability or other circumstances. Leisure can change this and these people formulate identities.

Leisure and identity formation

There are numerous factors that contribute to development such as biological, social, family, school etc. But during adolescence we experiment and we stick to what we think is best for us. In America adolescents are allowed to step out of line with regards to appearance and behaviour. This is known as social non conformity. During adolescence people can take part in numerous leisure time activities, be it structured or unstructured. People

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believe that these activities can help identity formation or conversely believe that their identity has already been formed and that is why they commit themselves to the activity. Both show that leisure has direct impact on people's lives and identities. Leisure can be instrumental or expressive.

Instrumental leisure is when a person uses a leisure activity to help in other areas of life. Art is a good example as a person may paint for their pleasure but may have high levels of talent and hope to get into an art school.

Because instrumental leisure is usually based on an outcome of leisure, it is said to be externally motivated.

Expressive leisure is done just for the pure enjoyment of the activity.

Continuing from the above example if you take graffiti art, although it is often called vandalism, those artists do it for the pure enjoyment and they also produce some amazing pieces of art.

Leisure contexts are transitional

Adolescence is the transition phase of development. Leisure and other factors contribute to this transition. The stimulus (activity) can have benefits for development. But when partnered with the participant's enthusiasm and commitment it has the power to increase benefits for development. Some skills that can be learned through leisure are communication, negotiation, flexibility and teamwork etc. All these skills develop during adolescence which as I mentioned earlier is the transition phase.

Leisure contexts provide opportunities to explore and try different leisure identities

In America, they are exposed to a whole host of recreation and leisure programs (structured and unstructured) and this contributes to their and the peoples identity. They have their summer camps, boy and girl scouts for kids, which are done in holidays and after school. Haggard and Williams (1991 & 1992) believe that there is a correlation between these activities and the person's future identity. E. g. people that play musical instruments when kids are more likely to become musicians.

But what happens to non-participation? Does it mean that if we don't participate we are identity-less? I believe that we are not identity-less but rather direction-less because recreational activities are activities that we do in our free time. We aren't going to engage in activities that don't give us pleasure. So from our recreational activities we get direction to who we are going to become.

Flow producing activities contribute to intrinsic motivation

If a person pursues an activity and they achieve some form of enjoyment from it, more often than not, they will continue to pursue it. And do avoid stagnation they will keep on challenging themselves in that activity. When we take it to a high level, we have to take charge of our behaviours and we can feel responsible and confident about our lives.

Leisure activities across the life span assist with continuity

Leisure can give a person stability if practiced over long periods of time i. e. childhood to adulthood. People can learn how to react and cope in different

situations. For example a person that initially takes up running to lose weight soon finds themselves enjoying the running. Their primary aim which was weight loss now shifts to enjoyment and the weight loss is a positive by product of the running. Other positive outcomes of the running are more active lifestyle, stress reduction etc. The running has been infused into the person's identity.

Conclusion

Whether we believe it or not, our leisure and recreational activities contribute largely to our identities and who we are. It has been highlighted that leisure gives us direction and more often than not leads us to our destination of discovering ourselves. Best part is that we have fun on the way there.... it is recreation after all.

Social values of recreation and leisure

What is important to you?

Everyone is different and have different ideas and opinions as to what the perfect or good life is. What we perceive are the products of values instilled into us, as well as past experiences. An individual's recreation behaviour is controlled by personal, social and cultural beliefs e. g. drinking.

Social values

These are important in shaping behaviours associated with leisure and subsequently delivering the right programs. Social values relate to action, vitality, individualism, materialism and group identity. Western society lean towards goal orientated action. They value time and keeping busy. Their values are demonstrated in their work i. e. the job they do and how they do

it. And this is further reflected in their activities. In America, the more active you are the more of an asset you are because it implies that you can produce and consume more goods and services. This is known as vitality. It is, however, important to keep intact the principle of individualism.

Recreation shouldn't force people to suppress their individualism but rather allow them to explore and express it fully.

Materialism is being judged on your possessions. What you have, where you got it from and how much you paid for it is all that matters. People ring up the credit cards in order to attain immediate pleasures as they simply have to have that item at that exact time. There has been a huge boom in the equipment and apparel market due to materialism and people's extra large consumptive behaviour.

Group identity is very important. Nobody wants to be left out and therefore everybody wants to fit in. People then create these groups, private clubs and associations so that people with similar thoughts and interests can join these groups and have their own identities. There are very many groups and because of this there are many service providers in leisure program delivery i. e. public, non-profit and private sectors.

There has been a huge shift of recent and values that were important before have lost their importance and other patterns have now emerged. There has and always will be different values and thoughts between urban and rural people. This is so because their priorities are very often different. Social and moral values are an eternal concept. How they are expressed is a different issue.

Values or recreation and leisure experiences

Some theorists analyze the value of recreation in terms of its meanings and motives. Why a person did a specific activity and what they would have got out from that activity. Other theorists aren't so intense and believe it to be a pleasurable activity. Leisure and recreational activities can be either planned or spur of the moment. It can be done in groups, alone physical or non physical in nature. Because recreation is so diverse, everybody can extract individual meanings from their recreational activities.

Clawson and Knetsch's (1966) explanations fit outdoor recreation almost perfectly. They proposed that there are five steps involved in recreational activity. These five are planning, travelling, doing, returning and reminiscing. All of these stages add to the enjoyment of the activity as a whole and add to the excitement of the activity.

Another concept is serious leisure which is the pursuit of a role, hobby, or activity that the participants find so fulfilling that they centre their lives on that activity e. g. musicians who use their talents for charity or causes only. Angelina Jolie and Madonna charity work in Africa.

The opposite also applies and it's aptly called casual leisure. This is when people do stuff just for the fun of it like relaxing, watching television etc. Both types have value for the individual. Kleiber (2000) said that people don't appreciate the simple things like casual leisure.

Benefits and motivations for recreation and leisure

People do leisure because of the benefits that accompany it. People take part to achieve benefits and these benefits are closely linked to the

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motivation that initially encourages the participation. Some benefits affect the individual, the community, the environment and the economy.

There are 6 benefits associated with leisure. They are:

Physiological- benefits that affect health and fitness of the individual

Psycho-physiological- benefits that span physiological and psychological health (stress management)

Psychological- benefits that can lead to enhanced self competence and self worth.

Economic- tourism is in face leisure and it spurs on the economy.

Environmental- protection of the environment has been an avenue ventured to save and promote outdoor recreation.

Socio-cultural- benefits that arise when you feel proud of you community

A new program has emerged- the benefits based movement. This movement can be split down into three components namely benefits based awareness, programming and management. The programs main aim is to increase awareness of leisure and recreation through effective programming and campaigning to create a large support base for parks and recreation.

Constraints to recreation and leisure

There are many benefits to be gained from leisure and recreation, but we must also look at the limiting and inhibiting factors. Leisure constraints include things that affect participation, frequency, intensity, duration and

quality of the experience. Constraints affect the person and how they feel. Various models were made to try to conceptualize and understand leisure. A successful model categorized it in four categories.

Intrapersonal constraints- this deals with the person and may lead to lack of interest.

Interpersonal constraints- associated with relationships and how people work togetherà cooperation.

Intervening structural constraints- outside elements that affect participation. Lack of money, transport or facilities.

Antecedent structural constraints- external factors that stop a person from participating or enjoying the activity to the fullest. These constraints need to be overcome by the community. E. g. people want to walk, but there are no sidewalks.

Economic values of recreation and leisure

Basic economics say that the success of a product is measured by its demand and subsequently its supply. With recreation the demand is always there as people want to have fun and want to have safe places to do it in. The three sectors have reacted to this demand and have supplied the facilities and programs. Citizens can benefit hugely as jobs, personal growth and revenues increase.

Usually we look at the income statement of companies and sectors to ascertain its success. But with leisure and recreation it is better to look at the expenditure statement rather than income. Over the years recreation

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expenses have increased from 2% of a family's expenses to 10%. This is a positive sign and step in the right direction as people are starting to recreate more. Recreation is also described as inflation and recession resistant. Recreation is big money but expenditures aren't only what the public spends on recreation, but also what government spends on recreation. So with government have three levels, there should be large amounts of money being spent on recreation. But that is not the trend.

Participation rates

By checking and keeping proper records of how many people engage in leisure and recreation we can also measure the effect leisure and recreation has on the economy. If more people participate, then more money needs to be allocated for facility upgrading, or new facilities and new programs.

Intangible benefits

Leisure and recreation also include economic benefits such as increase in area and property values.

Location and property values

Most places in America are dependent on tourism to sustain the community e. g. Orlando Florida Disneyland or the Atlantic Coast. Majority of the community would be without jobs and the hospitality and tourism industry would be without clients. If this had to happen property values would decrease and employment issues would crop up. When recreation facilities are correctly constructed and maintained they appreciate the land that they are on. Lake properties generally have higher values.

Economic impact

All communities have common places for recreation e. g. Bowling alleys, gaming arcades, pool halls, restaurants etc. These places generate money from tourists and the community. But more often citizens recreate at home and tourists use these tourist attractions where they spend foreign money and boost the economy.

Goods and services

People want to work in a happy environment and a place where they are comfortable. They want family time and satisfaction. Recreation can give this. Recreation keeps people happy which makes them more productive and therefore increases the economic value of that area.

Employment

Job opportunities are numerous in recreation such as managers, supervisors, programmers, admin clerks etc. These are positions often seen in the public sector. The non profit sector is just as huge. If you take a camp for example, these are the possible jobs that are available: camp counsellors, admin staff, coaches, instructors etc.

Conclusion

Leisure has a clear cut place in the economy. A lot of people earn their keep by producing items of recreation. All these leisure programs and parks would not be needed if there was no interest in leisure. As time goes by leisure is getting bigger and bigger and these are great steps in the right direction.