

A study on
importance of leisure
sociology essay



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Societies consist of men, woman, and children and of various age groups. If these components are not present there can be no society. They make up society collectively. Our society responds differently to recreation and leisure and in turn so do the individuals. The individuals play an important part of how they function in society and how they react to recreation and leisure. The way in which we perceive our roles in society impacts on our recreational and leisure activities. We must consider the way in which we as individuals and our society come together in terms of recreation and leisure. As individuals we need to ensure that our roles in society impact positively. Society in general does not consider the impact of their roles and how it affects leisure. They both are two different entities but function together. I will consider the factors that affect us as individuals in society and how it relates to our leisure in the following discussion.

Leisure as a Social Phenomenon

Leisure is considered to be a complex social phenomenon that affects many social institutions and should not be considered as just past time activities.

Recreation and leisure significantly affects several social institutions.

However if utilised incorrectly they can have negative effects on many aspects. Within our societies leisure can be practised in different ways. It can be undertaken alone or in solitude, or it can be occur in a social environment that can be private or community based.

We can all participate in leisure in its different forms and this does not necessarily mean that it is not influenced or affected by other people. Our leisure is in fact more often than not affected by other people.

Our surroundings and environment can affect our privacy in terms of leisure in three ways: namely by supporting it, by infringing on it and by forcing us into it. Parents can support the leisure activities of their children by purchasing toys for them, which can inspire them to pursue a specific career or cause in life.

Our leisure can also be infringed upon by others, for instance competing over the television with an older brother or sister when your favourite show is on.

Circumstances can also force us into solitary leisure, for example writing. A famous example is J. R. R. Tolkien, the author of the, The Lord of The Rings novels. In the trenches of World War I, he began recording the episodes of war that brought horror to him. He used this as escapism from the harsh reality he was facing. These recordings of the harshness he experienced were later transferred into the books, The Lord of The Rings. The writing of his books not only provided a sense of recreation and leisure to him. It has also provided these benefits for millions around the world. This demonstrates how one person's leisure can directly and indirectly affect people around them. His books have been developed into multi - million dollar earning movies. The movies have lead to memorabilia and figurines being collected by children and adults as hobbies. People have flocked to the premieres of these movies. This indicates the domino effect of his recreation and passion on the rest of the world. This has also positively affected numerous people and economies.

In contrast to this an individual's solitary recreation can also have negative consequences. In February 2004, Warren le Blanc murdered his 14 year old

friend by savagely beating him with a claw hammer and stabbed him after luring him to a park in Liverpool, England. Warren re-enacted violence from a popular video game that he used to play called Manhunt. Warren played this game as a recreational past-time but there was a negative transfer from his experience. The game gained interest for all the wrong reasons. It was played on the personal computer and Sony play-station platforms. These are both popular past-times for all age groups. This demonstrates how a video game, a popular past-time, became a societal hazard which stemmed from a person's solitary recreation. This emphasises the need for control of technology in our societies in order to alleviate negative consequences. However it must also be remembered that the positives of solitary recreational experiences outweigh the negatives.

Leisure does not only occur in solitary settings. It can also directly involve other people. They can take the form of bystanders and participants. Both bystanders and participants collectively contribute to the activity.

People can further be divided into primary and secondary groups. Primary groups are small groups in which there are face to face relations which are fairly intimate and personal in nature. These primary groups consist of two types namely: family and cliques. Secondary groups are defined as a larger relatively temporary, more anonymous; formal and impersonal group based on some interest or activity and whose members interact on the basis of specific roles (Henslin, 1993). Secondary groups can be a cooking class, book club or Sunday golf league.

Primary groups have several factors such as social custom, family beliefs and kinship which influence leisure activities. Secondary groups on the other hand are not only influenced by the group but the individuals in - turn can affect the group.

The type of groups that we as individuals form part of will have an influence on our leisure activities. It will also affect the people in that group. Our role in these groups will affect our societies in which we exist. It will have individual implications as well as group implications.

Leisure, Recreation and Gender

In our post - modern era the categories of gender are gradually being broken down and multiple categories of gender are arising. With post - modernism people are able to express their gender and sexuality with fewer boundaries and constraints.

As history suggests men have been the superior sex in most western cultures. In past centuries recreational activities were reserved for men only. There was also a general segregation of genders.

Males were the bread winners and woman in were in charge of the household. Due to this most of the woman undertook their recreational activities at home. In recent times the expectations of woman and men have changed. Men and woman tend to change and share roles within our post - modern society.

Men have a desire for leisure as it is motivated by their hard work. They consider it as a reward for the work they endure. Women generally have a

weaker motivation for it as they have to deal with the constraints of the household first. Women tend to combine their leisure with household chores, such as decorating or supervising activities for the children.

I certainly feel that leisure opportunities do exist for women outside of the household but other duties and concerns take precedence. There may be cases where equal opportunity exists for men and women but women still tend to perform the feminine tasks. They will naturally be concerned with meals and care of children at various activities.

Another problem facing women's participation in these activities is that they find it difficult to participate in them. Other woman may be too busy with family, lack physical ability or merely not knowing where to learn the activity. It is important that women empower themselves in aspects of leisure and recreation. This will ensure that they will also reap the benefits of recreation and leisure. Men need to accept them into programmes and provide equal opportunities in our communities.

In recent times there has been an increase in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. People now feel free to disclose their alternative sexual identity. In the past however leisure did not deal with issues of sexuality. These individuals are now being openly accepted into communities; however few opportunities exist for them in terms of recreation and leisure. They are increasingly becoming parents, which indicate that they also have families. All families need to enjoy the benefits of recreation and leisure including the gay and lesbian families. There are few programmes that are designed for them, which re-enforces that they

need to be accepted into all programmes without discrimination. There have been programmes such as the gay games and Olivia cruises but this creates segregation. We should design programmes that accommodate everyone irrespective of their sexual orientation. In this way we eliminate any misconceptions and preconceptions that people may have within our societies.

Leisure, Recreation, Race and Ethnicity

Involvement in recreational and leisure activities is influenced by ones race or ethnicity. These factors also contribute to how programmes are provided for communities' people. Race and ethnicity both influence recreation and leisure but have different meanings.

Race refers to the genetic make up of a person. This includes characteristics such as eye colour, skin colour and hair. Ethnicity refers to our social and cultural heritage. Ethnic groups can be identified by language, customs and religion; this is what distinguishes them from other groups.

There continues to be racial and ethnic stereo types in our society despite the ongoing struggle against discrimination. This impacts significantly on recreation and leisure due to the fact that most programmes do not cater for all races and ethnicities. It also creates segregation amongst groups in programmes. This is one of the reasons that the department of Sport and Recreation of South Africa has created the indigenous games project. The project is trying to trace and bring in indigenous heritage to life amongst people of South Africa. Western cultures predominantly oversee these programmes. Leisure services should aim to merge the different groups in

order to give people the opportunity to learn about the different races, cultures and ethnicities collectively. This would create an understanding between the differences that people may experience. This would also prevent under representation in the diverse races and ethnicities. We need to ensure that all groups feel comfortable and feel a sense of belonging when participating in these programmes. Everyone should be invited, included and involved. By having programmes that include these factors we can create understanding and positive relationships between groups. This will enable us to overcome the prejudice and racial discord that may be still present in our communities.

I feel that one way in which we can alleviate the problem of under representation is for the so called minorities to give themselves another identity. They must no longer consider themselves as a minority. By constructing an alternative identity they can give themselves a new representation. This would lessen the perception of them being minorities by others. This in turn would make them more open to participation in programmes. This may develop an attitude in them in which they believe that they are part of the group. We must strive to provide programmes that alleviate inter-group misunderstandings and promote favourable relations.

Socio – economic Status and its Influence on Leisure and recreation

Socio – economic status is a means of classifying people into categories based on their income, education, occupation and wealth.

People within a specific class have similar attitudes, values and interests. These things can impact on recreation and leisure choices. Socio - economic status can affect leisure in a number of ways.

Firstly, the amount of education and/or the amount of money that a person has influences the amount of free time and income available for recreational purposes. In general the lower classes have been minorities when it comes to participation in recreational activities. They also seldom participate in health and fitness programmes. Those in higher classes who have more education and disposable income look for more refined and prestigious leisure. For example, in the United States it has been discovered that the poor working class and middle class have been the predominant users of public and non - profit services. The agencies that function in the various sectors provide programmes for all income levels but target the lower and middle class particularly. This is a rational approach as it provides opportunities for those who cannot afford the more expensive recreational options. However the upper - class may have access to these programmes but often choose to go the commercial route. They may utilize these services as most consider it as providing a higher quality of service. The upper class may also choose the option of commercial services due to the issue of status. Status may be assigned to things such as exclusive club memberships or exotic travel destinations.

There are also activities that may appeal to all social classes such as reading or socializing but there are others that can be placed in each social class exclusively. For example, attending the opera or yachting may most likely be assigned to the upper class, where as a camping trip would more likely be an

activity of the middle class. Sometimes there are activities that are popular to all classes but may be enjoyed in different ways.

Socio - economic status has a significant effect on recreation and leisure activity choices. If we are to be justified providers of recreation and leisure we need to understand these impacts and supply services that meet the needs of everyone. It may not always be possible to provide these services to all people but we need to understand the variations in needs and leisure patterns for those that we target. In this way we can ensure that no one is denied and unrepresented of recreation and leisure opportunities.

An important factor that has restricted many people lately is the global recession. The ability to fund recreational or leisure services is an issue that all socio - economic classes have faced. With the current state of the economy all service providers have to generate income to stay alive, even the non - profit and public organisations. The concept of pay to play is becoming more prominent and this eliminates the poor and working class almost entirely. Many programmes are being kept alive by sponsorships and in - turn keep our much needed recreational programmes alive and accessible to all.

Is leisure good or bad?

Most if not all leisure activities we can do have positive outcomes. There are really good leisure activities, however, only if they are carefully moderated. Some of the activities that people participate in during their free time include sports, cultural activities, technology as well as socialising with friends.

Sporting activities e. g. swimming or playing soccer provide great positives in the sense that we exercise, we relax, forget about our problems for a while and meet people. I feel that leisure activities which involve sport should keep the element of competition as low as possible. The emphasis should be on having fun and taking in the experience. When it develops into a serious competition it could deter others who are simply there for the fun aspect. Everyone should be included at all times with the intention of providing some sort of satisfaction to all involved.

Cultural activities like learning to play a musical instrument, reading or writing can provide a host of positives. Many people use music as a mode of personal expression of their thoughts and emotions. This can help provide an outlet for the individual. There are many traditional instruments that people can learn to play despite being of different ethnic or racial backgrounds. The instructional classes educate people on the culture behind the music as well as provide them with the skill of learning how to play these instruments. This also allows us to overcome barriers of race and ethnicity in the sense that people spend more time with other races.

Technology provides us with alternatives to traditional leisure and recreation. It sometimes eliminates the physical component but can stimulate the mind. Playing video games, web browsing and watching television can be very interesting as well as educational. There are video games which can give us an idea of what it takes to pilot a plane or be a front line soldier during the Second World War. It creates experiences similar to the actual thing and provides escapism from the reality of life. We should however be very careful with these activities; they can make people socially

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incapable, by making them shy or quite and restrict face to face encounters. It can also make people spend too much time indoors. We must draw a firm balance when participating in these activities in order to extract the positives. Television has numerous good or bad programmes which can educate, provide relaxation and relieve stress in an individual. It also has negative influences, which means we must select what we watch carefully.

Most individuals enjoy spending time with friends, such as going to the movie theatre, going out for dinner or going out at night. These activities provide a lot of benefits to us but there are problems associated with it as well. A major problem is the abuse of alcohol and drugs at night time meeting spots. People tend to over drink on nights out with friends and engage in substance abuse. Substance abuse can have serious emotional and physical implications. Self - control will lead to happy and enjoyable experiences in these situations.

Science and technology has provided our societies with the highest levels of comfort. Technology has also made much more time available to us.

Holidays and vacations have also increased and the duration is much longer.

If we do not control our leisure and recreation it may become the core of our existence. Our free time must be spent constructively rather than being detrimental to us. It is the responsibility of our societies to make recreation and leisure an asset rather than a liability.

How is leisure beneficial to the individual in Society?

Leisure has many implications to the individuals in our society and it does not discriminate against race, class or gender when providing people in our

society with positives. Society needs to be educated on how recreation and leisure programmes can be beneficial to them. This will promote participation and emphasise the importance of it in our societies. Leisure is a major force in our lives, to the extent that it has become a major concern for governments, parents and leaders.

People are now spending more money each year on activities such as sport, tourism, outdoor recreation and many other past – times. There has also been a drift towards organised leisure with changes in basic living and competition between our interests. However leisure can still be spontaneous, solitary and surprising.

Apart from physiological needs such as sleeping, leisure is what we engage in mainly. According to Leitner and Leitner (2004) if you are 18 now, of the probable 60 years that you will live for, you will spend 18 years in full time leisure. This might be an alarming statistic but it is quite precise. Recreation and leisure has the ability to educate and provide us with vital components for our health and growth from our birth to our death. It is in this sense that leisure provides us with a sense of wellness, satisfaction and improved quality of life. Recreation and leisure can provide the potential to significantly contribute to our physical, social and emotional well being.

Having considered the importance recreation and leisure I will now discuss the benefits that it can provide us with.

Emotional well- being is an important component for a good life. If we are mentally healthy we are filled with positive emotions. Recreation and leisure can provide us with positive emotions.

Recreation and leisure provides a channel for us to improve self - definition, self actualization and a sense of empowerment. It provides us with opportunities for self - exploration of our talents, capacities and our potential. Recreation and leisure do not possess any constraints and can be used to reinforce our identities. Being actively involved in Recreation and leisure relates to our mental health in way that leads to our intrinsic motivation being enhanced in daily life. Iwasaki and Mannell (2000) found that by simply believing in it, it can contribute to our emotional well - being and is enough to reduce mental illness symptoms. This may be quite precise in the sense that in what ever we do we have to think positively in order to achieve our goals. On the other hand, active leisure and recreation may be more stimulating than passive recreation and more beneficial to our psychological health. If the both are linked the outcomes may be even more positive.

Stress is a major issue for everybody. Numerous studies have pointed out leisure's ability to help people cope with stress. Stress can often make us very sick and can lead to complications such as heart disease, hypertension and body pains. The effects of these complications can be reduced by recreation and leisure.

The research in the field of recreation and leisure has confirmed that enjoying life's pleasures, having satisfying social relationships and pursuing self - expressive behaviour can help to lower stress and have positive effects on our immune system. This suggests that we should support our recreation and leisure in order to avoid these complications. Psychological well - being

can be promoted by activities that are meaningful, fulfilling and active. It provides a balance for the demands of life even during times of crisis.

Our physical health is strongly related to emotional health. Our physical health can benefit greatly from leisure and recreation. By staying active in recreational and leisurely activities we can gain numerous physiological benefits. The cardio - vascular, respiratory, musculo - skeletal and metabolic systems benefit greatly. Recreation and leisure can help the body respond favourably by reducing the risks that of coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer and diabetes.

An active lifestyle also helps decrease fatigue, provides us with protection against obesity, maintains bone density and joint mobility and may even protect us from urinary tract infections. Constant physical activity promotes enjoyment, encourages support from others and enhances our confidence in our ability to regularly participate. It also helps to reduce any negative perceptions of being physically active.

Technology and peoples life styles have made life in general more sedentary. This emphasises the importance of activity during recreational and leisure activities much greater. It does not matter on the type of activity that has been chosen. It can be a game of Frisbee, surfing, group exercises or even tai chi. They will all provide some sort of physical benefit. Numerous studies have also confirmed that regular participation in these recreational activities provide the necessary aerobic benefits.

Recreation and leisure also provide benefits such as social well - being and social development. They both contribute to our friendships and the ability to

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get along with others. Recreation and leisure promotes social interaction for both children and adults.

Participation in activities that are highly sociable promotes social support. Our social well – being requires social support. This can help test connections or relationships amongst individuals and can also strengthen and test the relationships during recreational experiences. When people feel that they are being cared for and supported they tend to feel better about themselves and their lives. This can help people to develop and maintain their family lives.

With the developments in technology activities that emphasize sociability are not as common as they used to be in our societies. People are moving further away from the concept of socializing. Some prefer to watch a movie alone at home on the DVD player rather than at the movie theatre with others. People invest in home gym equipment instead of attending a gym at a recreational centre or a health club. It is important to preserve the older methods in order to promote social benefits to the individuals in our societies.

The many benefits of recreation and leisure converge to create a sense of well -being in people. It is important as it emphasizes the vitality in our surroundings and the world. It helps us develop vigorous and caring communities and has the power to create harmony among the diversity in which in exist.

Life satisfaction is what we strive for everyday. It is difficult to define but we can recognize it when we have it. It is an emotional and internal experience. Recreation and leisure helps us achieve this satisfaction. When we are

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satisfied with our lives we focus less on our selves, become less hostile and abusive and generally less vulnerable to disease. These are qualities that need to be eliminated from our societies. We need to be more loving, forgiving, trusting, creative and sociable. Recreation and leisure can help provide these qualities for us. This will in turn provide a snow ball effect as happy people tend to be more positive about their leisure activities. They feel positive and accept the belief that these activities are in fact helping them and the people around them.

In order for the importance and benefits of leisure and recreation to be experienced by people in society, we need to have leisure professionals who possess the necessary skills to ensure it is executed effectively. Whether you are employed at a hospital, camp, theme park, national organisations or a resort, you must be able to deliver positive experiences for people. You must be able to personify qualities that reflect professionalism. He should also possess qualities that enable him to deliver the programme or activity successfully.

The leisure professional must base his efforts on the needs and interests of the focus group. He should try to develop programmes based on their needs rather than his own. Even if he is employed in a profit making organisation he must focus on the desires and needs of the consumer or else he will fail in his attempts. He should possess the willingness to listen and learn to people in order to provide the correct aspects of the programme. He should embrace the diversities of race, culture, gender etc. Respect should be given to himself and the participants.

Recreational experiences require precise organisation and planning. He must be able to provide a sustained effort in the provision of activities. A willingness to put in long hours and hard work is imperative. A lot of recreational activities occur on weekends, after hours or public holidays. This means that he must be willing to work during other people's free hours. This is a major sacrifice that most people are not willing to make so it is important to consider.

The leisure professional should possess a high degree of integrity. Our world is constantly faced with acts of misconduct and improper behaviour. When delivering a service you must maintain a high level of ethical responsibility. This is important especially when dealing with the diversities amongst people. Participants should be treated with dignity and fairness by the leisure professional. This will transfer between participants; they will learn to treat each other graciously and with respect.

The leisure professional must possess the ability to project the direction of the programme or activity. He must be able to visualise the positive outcome of the service. The plan will only come together if he can first see it happening. This provides direction and intention. The participants will generally expect an excellent service but he must try to exceed those expectations.

CONCLUSION

The importance of recreation and leisure to the individuals in our society has a number of implications. As discussed earlier it relates to race, gender, socio - economic status etc., it affects a wide array of people and

institutions. We must try to educate people on the importance of these types of activities in order to overcome the various barriers that our societies face. It is one of the best developments in the last century to help overcome barriers such as diversity and health related problems. The reality is that recreation and leisure programmes do work. This is correct to the point where specific projections of what recreation and leisure can achieve have been put forth. There are national departments that have multi -million dollar budgets around the world in order to make it a part of everyone's lives. It has been making a difference to millions of lives around the world.

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