

## CHAPTER 2

# BASIC CONCEPTS

## *Philosophical Analysis of Play, Recreation, and Leisure*



*What would life be without play? Play is fun, freedom, a way to socialize, our reward after hard work. When we play at something, we enjoy it for its own sake. It's a refuge from ordinary life where one is exempt from the usual obligations, customs, and rules. Play is our brain's favorite way of learning. . . . We evolved through play. Our culture thrives on play.<sup>1</sup>*



### INTRODUCTION

Any consideration of the broad field of recreation and leisure should include a clarification of terms and concepts. The words *play*, *leisure*, and *recreation* are frequently used interchangeably, as if they meant the same thing. However, although related, they have distinctly different meanings and it is important for both students and practitioners in this field to understand their varied implications and the differences among them.

The rationale for stressing such conceptual understanding is clear. Just as a doctor must know chemistry, anatomy, kinesiology, and other underlying sciences in order to practice medicine effectively, so too the recreation and park professional must understand the meaning of leisure and its motivations and satisfactions if he or she is to provide effective recreation programs and services. Similarly, the leisure scholar should not withdraw from the real world of leisure programming and participation by focusing only on abstract or theoretical models of free-time behavior. Instead, the scholar should become familiar with the profession of recreation service and should contribute to its effective performance. Such conceptual understandings are critical to the development of a sound philosophy of recreation service and to interpreting leisure-service goals and outcomes to the public at large.

## THE MEANING OF PLAY

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The word *play* is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *plega*, meaning a game or sport, skirmish, fight, or battle. This is related to the Latin *plaga*, meaning a blow, stroke, or thrust. It is illustrated in the idea of striking or stroking an instrument or playing a game by striking a ball. Other languages have words derived from a common root (such as the German *spielen* and the Dutch *spelen*) whose meanings include the playing of games, sports, and musical instruments. Play is traditionally considered a child's activity, in contrast to recreation, which is usually described as an adult activity. Today, however, it is recognized that people of all ages take part in play.

### Historical Perspectives

In ancient Greece, play was assigned a valuable role in the lives of children, based on the writings of Plato and Aristotle. The Athenians placed great value on developing qualities of honor, loyalty, and beauty and other elements of productive citizenship in children. For them, play was an integral element of education and was considered a means of positive character development and teaching the values of Greek society.

Later, as the Catholic Church gained dominance among the developing nations of western Europe, play came to be regarded as a social threat. The body was thought to detract from more spiritual or work-oriented values, and every effort was made to curb the pleasurable forms of play that had been popular in the Greek and Roman eras.

Gradually, however, educators and philosophers such as Froebel, Rousseau, and Schiller came to the defense of play as an important aspect of childhood education. For example, Froebel wrote of play as the highest expression of human development in childhood:

Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage. . . . A child that plays thoroughly with self-active determination, perseveringly until physical fatigue forbids, will surely be a thorough, determined man, capable of self-sacrifice for the promotion of the welfare of himself and others.<sup>2</sup>

## EARLY THEORIES OF PLAY

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In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of influential scholars evolved comprehensive theories of play that explained its development and its role in human society and personal development.

### Surplus-Energy Theory

The English philosopher Herbert Spencer, in his mid-nineteenth-century work *Principles of Psychology*, advanced the view that play was primarily motivated by the need to burn excess energy. He was influenced by the earlier writings of Friedrich von Schiller, who suggested that when animals or birds were fully fed and had no other survival needs, they vented their exuberant energy in a variety of aimless and pleasurable forms of play. Spencer saw play among children as an imitation of adult activities; the sport of boys, such as chasing, wrestling, and taking one another prisoner, involved "predatory instincts."

## Recreation Theory

An early explanation of play that was regarded as the converse of the Schiller-Spencer view was developed by Moritz Lazarus, a German philosopher, who argued that rather than serving to burn excess energy, the purpose of play was to conserve or restore it. In other words, when one is exhausted through toil, play recharges one's energy for renewed work. Lazarus distinguished between physical and mental energy, pointing out that when the brain is "tired" (provided that it is not overtired), a change of activity, particularly in the form of physical exercise, will restore one's nervous energy. To illustrate, the desk worker who plays tennis after a long day's work simultaneously discharges surplus physical energy and restores mental energy.

## Instinct-Practice Theory

A more elaborate explanation of play was put forward by Karl Groos, a professor of philosophy at Basel, who wrote two major texts: one in 1896 on the play of animals and another in 1899 on the play of humans. Groos argued that play helped animals survive by enabling them to practice and perfect the skills they would need in adult life. He concluded that the more adaptable and intelligent a species was, the more it needed a period of protected infancy and childhood for essential learning to take place. Thus, among humans, there was a lengthy early period during which children engaged in varied activities to perfect skills before they really needed them.

## Catharsis Theory

The catharsis theory is based on the view that play—particularly competitive, active play—serves as a safety valve for the expression of bottled-up emotions. Among the ancient Greeks, Aristotle saw drama as a means of purging oneself of hostile or aggressive emotions; by vicarious sharing in the staged experience, onlookers purified



Modern ethologists who have systematically studied the behavior of animals and birds in interaction with each other and with their environment have identified varied forms of play that appear to illustrate the instinct-practice theory. For example, much play among young animals, particularly primates, involves aggressive teasing and mock battles. Such play represents a ritualized form of combat, in which the combatants practice their fighting skills and learn to interact with each other in establishing a "pecking order."

Anthropologists who have observed preindustrial tribal societies point out that "playing house" is often a form of rehearsal for adult roles. In some African rural villages, it may involve both technical and social skills, as boys and girls build and thatch small houses and make various tools and utensils. Often the play forms are gender related: Boys typically make axes, spears, shields, slings, bows, and arrows or build miniature cattle kraals, whereas girls make pottery for cooking real or imaginary food or perhaps weave mats or baskets of plaited grass.

themselves of harmful feelings. A number of early twentieth-century writers expanded this theory. Harvey Carr, an American psychologist, wrote:

Catharsis . . . implies the idea of purging or draining of that energy which has antisocial possibilities. . . . The value of football, boxing, and other physical contests in relieving the pugnacious tendencies of boys is readily apparent as examples. Without the numberless well-organized set forms of play possessed by society which give a harmless outlet to the mischievous and unapplied energy of the young, the task of the teacher and parent would be appalling.<sup>3</sup>

Coupled with the surplus-energy theory, the catharsis theory suggested a vital necessity for active play to help children and youth burn excess energy and provide a socially acceptable channel for aggressive or hostile emotions and drives.

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY CONCEPTS OF PLAY

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During the first three decades of the twentieth century, a number of psychologists and educators examined play, particularly as a developmental and learning experience for children.

### Self-Expression Theory

Two leading physical educators, Elmer Mitchell and Bernard Mason, saw play primarily as a result of the need for self-expression. Humans were regarded as active, dynamic beings with the need to find outlets for their energies, use their abilities, and express their personalities. The specific types of activity that an individual engaged in were, according to Mitchell and Mason, influenced by such factors as physiological and anatomical structure, physical fitness level, environment, and family and social background.<sup>4</sup>

### Play as a Social Necessity

During the late nineteenth century, leaders of the public recreation movement called for the provision of organized recreation for all children. Joseph Lee, who is widely regarded as the father of the play movement in America and who promoted the establishment of numerous playgrounds and recreation centers, was instrumental in the public acceptance of play as an important force in child development and community life. Jane Addams, founder of the Hull House Settlement in Chicago and a Nobel Peace Prize winner, advocated the need for organized play opportunities that served as an alternative to the difficult life children living in poverty faced on the streets. These values continue to be embraced by contemporary communities, as is evidenced by public and private support of parks and recreation departments, community recreation programs, after-school programs, and other play-based activities.

### Typologies of Play Activity

In the twentieth century, more and more social and behavioral scientists began to examine play empirically. One such investigator, the French sociologist Roger Caillois, examined the play experience itself by classifying the games and play activities that



Joseph Lee believed that play contributed to the wholesome development of personal character because it involved lessons of discipline, sacrifice, and morality. He saw it as more than a mere pleasurable pastime, but rather as a serious element in the lives of children and—along with his contemporary pioneer, Luther Halsey Gulick—as a vital element in community life. This view extended itself to a literal application of play as a means of preparing children for the adult work world. Wayne Stormann points out that play was considered a useful form of manual training because it coordinated bodily functions, promoted health, and prepared children for the “indoor confinement,” first of schools and then of factory life.<sup>5</sup>

were characteristic of various cultures and identifying their apparent functions and values. Caillois established four major types of play and game activity: agon, alea, mimicry, and ilinx.

Agon refers to activities that are competitive and in which the equality of the participants' chances of winning is artificially created. Winners are determined through such qualities as speed, endurance, strength, memory, skills, and ingenuity. Agonistic games may be played by individuals or teams; they presuppose sustained attention, training and discipline, perseverance, limits, and rules. Clearly, most modern games and sports, including many card and table games involving skill, are examples of agon.

Alea includes games of chance—those games or contests over whose outcome the contestant has no control; winning is the result of fate rather than the skill of the player. Games of dice, roulette, and baccarat, as well as lotteries, are examples of alea.

Mimicry is based on the acceptance of illusions or imaginary universes. Children engage in mimicry through pretend play. This category includes games in which players make believe, or make others believe, that they are other than themselves. For children, Caillois writes:

The aim is to imitate adults. . . . This explains the success of the toy weapons and miniatures which copy the tools, engines, arms and machines used by adults. The little girl plays her mother's role as cook, laundress and ironer. The boy makes believe he is a soldier, musketeer, policeman, pirate, cowboy, Martian, etc.<sup>6</sup>

Ilinx consists of play activities based on the pursuit of vertigo or dizziness. Historically, ilinx was found in primitive religious dances or other rituals that induced the trancelike state necessary for worship. Today it may be seen in children's games that lead to dizziness by whirling rapidly, and in the use of swings and seesaws. Among adults, ilinx may be achieved through certain dances involving rapid turns, such amusement park rides as roller coasters, and a variety of adventure activities, including skydiving and bungee jumping.

## Contrasting Styles of Play

Caillois also suggested two extremes of play behavior. The first of these, *paidia*, involves exuberance, freedom, and uncontrolled and spontaneous gaiety. The second, *ludus*, is characterized by rules and conventions and represents calculated and contrived

activity. Each of the four forms of play may be conducted at either extreme of *paidia* or *ludus* or at some point on a continuum between the two.

## The Play Element in Culture

Probably the most far-reaching and influential theory of play as a cultural phenomenon was advanced by the Dutch social historian Johan Huizinga in his provocative work *Homo Ludens* (*Man the Player*). Huizinga presented the thesis that play pervades all of life. He saw it as having certain characteristics: It is a voluntary activity, marked by freedom and never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty. It stands outside the realm of satisfying physiological needs and appetites. It is separate from ordinary life both in its location and its duration, being “played out” within special time periods and in such special places as the arena, the card table, the stage, and the tennis court. Play is controlled, said Huizinga, by special sets of rules, and it demands absolute order. It is also marked by uncertainty and tension. Finally, it is not concerned with good or evil, although it has its own ethical value in that its rules must be obeyed.

In Huizinga’s view, play reveals itself chiefly in two kinds of activity: contests for something and representations of something. He regarded it as an important civilizing influence in human society and cited as an example the society of ancient Greece, which was permeated with play forms. He traced historically the origins of many social institutions as ritualized forms of play activity. For example, the element of play was initially dominant in the evolution of judicial processes. Law consisted of a pure contest between competing individuals or groups. It was not a matter of being right or wrong; instead, trials were conducted through the use of oracles, contests of chance that determined one’s fate, trials of strength or resistance to torture, and verbal contests. Huizinga suggested that the same principle applied to many other cultural institutions:

In myth and ritual the great instinctive forces of civilized life have their origin: law and order, commerce and profit, craft and art, poetry, wisdom, and science. All are rooted in the primeval soil of play.<sup>7</sup>

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PLAY

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Over the past several decades, numerous authorities in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis have examined play and its role in personality development, learning theory, mental health, and related areas.

### Play in Personality Development

A respected child psychologist, Lawrence K. Frank, points out that play is important to the psychological and emotional development of children:

Play, as we are beginning to understand, is the way the child learns what no one can teach him. It is the way he explores and orients himself to the actual world of space and time, of things, animals, structures, and people. Through play he learns to live in our symbolic world of meaning and values, of progressive striving for deferred goals, at



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*Play can be viewed from developmental, psychological, anthropological, creative, and cultural perspectives.*

the same time exploring and experimenting and learning in his own individual way. Through play the child practices and rehearses endlessly the complicated and subtle patterns of human living and communication which he must master if he is to become a participating adult in our social life.<sup>8</sup>

### **Psychoanalytical Perspectives on Play**

Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychoanalysis, had a number of distinctive views regarding the meaning and purpose of play. Freud saw play as a medium through which children are able to gain control and competence and to resolve conflicts that occur in their lives. He felt that children are frequently overwhelmed by their life circumstances, which may be confusing, complex, and unpleasant. Through play, they are able to reexperience threatening events and thus to control and master them. In this sense, play and dreams serve a therapeutic function for children. In general, Freud felt that play represented the child's way of dealing with reality—in effect, by playing with it, making it more acceptable, and exerting mastery over it.

Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, rearranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him? It would be wrong to think he does not take his play seriously; on the contrary he takes his play very seriously and he expends large amounts of emotion on it. The opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real.<sup>9</sup>

A number of Freud's other theories, such as the “pleasure principle” and the “death wish,” have also been seen as having strong implications for the analysis of play. The Freudian view of play influenced many psychotherapists and educators in their approach to childhood education and treatment programs. Bruno Bettelheim, Erik

Erikson, and Anna Freud, Freud's daughter, all experimented with the use of play in treating disturbed children.

## Play as Creative Exploration

Other contemporary theories of play emphasize its role in creative exploration and problem solving. Studies of arousal, excitement, and curiosity led to two related theories of play: the stimulus-arousal and competence-effectance theories.

**Stimulus-Arousal Theory** This approach is based on the observation that both humans and animals constantly seek stimuli of various kinds, both to gain knowledge and to satisfy a need for excitement, risk, surprise, and pleasure. Often this is connected with the idea of fun, expressed as light amusement, joking, and laughter.

However, the expectation that play is always light, enjoyable, pleasant, or humorous can be misleading. Often, play activities can be frustrating, boring, unpleasant, or even physically painful—particularly when they lead to addiction (as in the case of drug, alcohol, or gambling abuse) and subsequent ill health or economic losses.

**Competence-Effectance Theory** A closely related theory holds that much play is motivated by the need of the player to test the environment, solve problems, and gain a sense of mastery and accomplishment. Typically, it involves experimentation or information-seeking behavior, in which the player—whether human or animal—observes the environment, tests or manipulates it, and observes the outcome. Beyond this, the player seeks to develop competence, defined as the ability to interact effectively with the environment. Often this is achieved through repetition of the same action even when it has been mastered. The term *effectance* refers to the player's need to be able to master the environment and, even when uncertainty about it has been resolved, to produce desired effects in it.

**Cziksentmihalyi's "Flow" Principle** Related to the competence-effectance theory is Mihaly Cziksentmihalyi's view of play as a process in which ideally the player's skills are pitched at the challenge level of the tasks. If the task is too simple, it may become boring and lacking in appeal. If it is too difficult, it may produce anxiety and frustration, and the player may discontinue the activity or change the approach to it so it becomes more satisfying. Beyond this idea, Cziksentmihalyi suggests that there is a unique element in true play, which he identifies as a sense of flow. This is the sensation players feel when they are totally involved with the activity. It involves a feeling of harmony and full immersion in play; at a peak level, players might tend to lose their sense of time and their surroundings and experience an altered state of being. Such flow, he argues, could be found in some work situations, but it is much more commonly experienced in play such as games or sport.<sup>10</sup>

## Play Defined

It is difficult to arrive at a single definition of play because it takes so many forms and appears in so many contexts. However, a general definition would describe it as a form of human or animal activity or behavioral style that is self-motivated and carried on for



■ *If the slopes match the skiers ability, downhill skiing is an optimal activity in which an individual might experience flow.*

intrinsic, rather than external, purposes. It is generally pleasurable and is often marked by elements of competition, humor, creative exploration and problem solving, and mimicry or role playing. It appears most frequently in leisure activities, but may be part of work. It is typically marked by freedom and lack of structure, but may involve rules and prescribed actions, as in sport and games.

## THE MEANING OF LEISURE: SIX VIEWS

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What exactly is leisure? The concept of leisure as a unique, desirable component of the human experience was first articulated by ancient Greeks. In more recent centuries, scholars attempted to define leisure in terms of both its role in society and impact on the individual. For the Athenians particularly, leisure was the highest value of life, and work the lowest. Since the upper classes were not required to work, they were free to engage in intellectual, cultural, and artistic activity. Leisure represented an ideal state of freedom and the opportunity for spiritual and intellectual enlightenment. Within modern philosophies of leisure that have descended from this classical Athenian view, leisure is still seen as occurring mostly in time that is not devoted to work. However, it is considered far more than just a temporary release from work used to restore one for more work. Etymologically, the English word *leisure* seems to be derived from the Latin *licere*, meaning “to be permitted” or “to be free.” From *licere* came the French *loisir*, meaning “free time,” and such English words as *license* (originally meaning immunity from public obligation) and *liberty*. These words are all related; they suggest free choice and the absence of compulsion.

The early Greek word *scole* or *skole* meant “leisure.” It led to the Latin *scola* and the English *school* or *scholar*—thus implying a close connection between leisure and education. The word *scole* also referred to places where scholarly discussions were held. One such place was a grove next to the temple of Apollo Lykos, which became known as the *lyceum*. From this came the French *lycée*, meaning “school”—again implying a bond between leisure and education.

## The Classical View of Leisure

Aristotle regarded leisure as “a state of being in which activity is performed for its own sake.” It was sharply contrasted with work or purposeful action, involving instead such pursuits as art, political debate, philosophical discussion, and learning in general. The Athenians saw work as ignoble; to them it was boring and monotonous. A common Greek word for work is *ascholia*, meaning the absence of leisure—whereas we do the opposite, defining leisure as the absence of work.

How meaningful is this classical view of leisure today? Although the Greek view of leisure as a necessary and integral piece of a holistic life has merit, this view has two flaws. First, it is linked to the idea of an aristocratic class structure based on the availability of a substantial underclass and slave labor. When Aristotle wrote in his *Treatise on Politics* that “it is of course generally understood that in a well-ordered state, the citizens should have leisure and not have to provide for their daily needs,” he meant that leisure was given to a comparatively few patricians and made possible through the strenuous labor of the many.

In modern society, leisure cannot be a privilege reserved for the few; instead, it must be widely available to all. It must exist side by side with work that is respected in our society, and it should have a meaningful relationship to work. The implication is that leisure should be calm, quiet, contemplative, and unhurried, as implied by the word *leisurely*. Obviously, this concept would not apply to those uses of leisure today that are dynamic, active, and demanding or that may have a degree of extrinsic purpose about them.

## Leisure as a Symbol of Social Class

The view of leisure as closely related to social class stemmed from the work of Thorstein Veblen, a leading American sociologist of the late nineteenth century. Veblen showed how, throughout history, ruling classes emerged that identified themselves sharply through the possession and use of leisure. In his major work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, he pointed out that in Europe during the feudal and Renaissance periods and finally during the industrial age, the possession and visible use of leisure became the hallmark of the upper class. Veblen attacked the “idle rich”; he saw leisure as a complete way of life for the privileged class, regarding them as exploiters who lived on the toil of others. He coined the phrase “conspicuous consumption” to describe their way of life throughout history. This theory is dated because of the rise of greater working class leisure, and because many members of extremely wealthy families work actively in business, politics, or other demanding professions.

To some degree, however, Veblen's analysis is still relevant. The wealthy or privileged class in modern society continues to engage in a wide variety of expensive, prestigious, and sometimes decadent leisure activities even though its members may not have an immense amount of free time. They tend to travel widely, entertain, patronize the arts, and engage in exclusive and high-status pastimes. Recent scholars have characterized contemporary leisure in Western cultures as consumerist and motivated by the pursuit of diversionary experiences that can be purchased. Ramsey expressed the following critique of consumerist leisure:

So the nasty face of consumerist leisure expresses acquisitiveness, possessiveness, what the ancient Greeks called *plenoxia*: the desire for more than one's appropriate share. . . . The paradox around obligation-free leisure time is the drive quality, the compulsions and obsessions around purchase and use, to which many people are vulnerable due to the sheer vastness and ease of consumerism.<sup>11</sup>

## Leisure as Unobligated Time

The most common approach to leisure is to regard it as unobligated or discretionary time. In a number of sociological references, this concept of leisure is clearly stated. The *Dictionary of Sociology* offers the following definition:

Leisure is the free time after the practical necessities of life have been attended to. . . . Conceptions of leisure vary from the arithmetic one of time devoted to work, sleep, and other necessities, subtracted from 24 hours—which gives the surplus time—to the general notion of leisure as the time which one uses as he pleases.<sup>12</sup>

This view of leisure sees it essentially as time that is free from work or from such work-related responsibilities as travel, study, or social involvements based on work. It also



### Time-Strapped Americans?

In 1992, Juliet Schor published her seminal text, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*. Her primary thesis was that during the latter part of the twentieth century the American workweek started to increase after almost 100 years of decline; this due to the work and spend lifestyles of most Americans and increasing pressure from employers to work longer hours.<sup>13</sup>

In response to Dr. Schor's research, many other scholars utilized time-diary studies to better understand the nature and pace of American life. Some of the most notable research in this area by Geoffrey Godbey and John Robinson contradicted the findings of Schor. They found that paid work and housework hours actually declined from the 1960s to the 1990s. During this time period, they found a slight increase in free time and television viewing time. Godbey and Robinson concurred with other scholars that a growing number of Americans felt time pressure. This sense could be driven by a number of factors, including the increase of two-income households and growing materialism.

excludes time devoted to essential life-maintenance activities, such as sleep, eating, or personal care. Its most important characteristic is that it lacks a sense of obligation or compulsion. This approach to defining leisure is most popular among economists or sociologists who are particularly concerned with trends in the economic and industrial life of the nation. Other scholars, including feminists, have found this definition useful in the study of time constraints faced by working adults in contemporary society.

Although this definition appears to be convenient and largely a matter of arithmetic (subtracting work and other obligated tasks from the 24 hours that are available each day and coming out with a block of time that can be called leisure), it has some built-in complexities. For example, is it possible to say that any time is totally free of obligation or compulsion or that any form of leisure activity is totally without some extrinsic purpose? Is it also possible to say that all unobligated time is intrinsically rewarding and possesses the positive qualities typically associated with leisure? For example, some uses of free time that are not clearly work or paid for as work may contribute to success at work. A person may read books or articles related to work, attend evening classes that contribute to work competence, invite guests to a party because of work associations, or join a country club because of its value in establishing business contacts or promoting sales. Within community life, those nonwork occupations that have a degree of obligation about them—such as serving on a school board or as an unpaid member of a town council—may also be viewed as part of a person's civic responsibility.

The strict view of leisure as time that lacks any obligation or compulsion is suspect. If one chooses to raise dogs as a hobby or to play an instrument in an orchestra, one begins to assume a system of routines, schedules, and commitments to others. Stebbins discusses the concept of obligation as an aspect of leisure experience, pointing out that so-called "semi-leisure" may degenerate into "anti-leisure," defined by Godbey as

activity which is undertaken compulsively, as a means to an end, for a perception of necessity, with a high degree of externally imposed constraints, with considerable anxiety, and with a minimum of personal autonomy.<sup>14</sup>

## Leisure as Activity

A fourth common understanding of leisure is that it is activity in which people engage during their free time. For example, the International Study Group on Leisure and Social Science defines it thus:

Leisure consists of a number of occupations in which the individual may indulge of his own free will—either to rest, to amuse himself, to add to his knowledge and improve his skills disinterestedly and to increase his voluntary participation in the life of the community after discharging his professional, family, and social duties.<sup>15</sup>

American sociologist Bennett Berger echoes this concept by pointing out that the sociology of leisure during the 1950s and 1960s consisted of "little more than a reporting of survey data on what selected samples of individuals do with the time in which they are not working, and the correlation of these data with conventional demographic variables." Obviously, this concept of leisure is closely linked to the idea of recreation, because it involves the way in which free time is used. Early writers on recreation stressed the importance of activity; for example, Jay B. Nash urged that the

procreative act be thought of as an active, “doing” experience. Recuperation through play, he wrote, isn’t wholly relegated to inertia—doing nothing—but is gained through action.

For many individuals, Nash’s view of leisure would be too confining. They would view relatively passive activities, such as reading a book, going to a museum, watching a film, or even dozing in a hammock or daydreaming, to be appropriate leisure pursuits, along with forms of active play.

Feminist scholars have criticized conceptualizations of leisure as activity as irrelevant for many women whose everyday life experiences cannot be easily categorized into a work/leisure dichotomy. Furthermore, definitions of leisure as activity do not accommodate individual perceptions about particular activities. Some individuals may view preparing a meal as a pleasurable activity of self-expression, whereas others view the activity as a monotonous, domestic obligation. In response to this criticism, contemporary scholars who study leisure as activity are primarily concerned with the outcomes of a particular activity rather than the activity itself. Therapeutic recreation scholar David Austin offers this definition of leisure:<sup>16</sup>

Intrinsic motivation is also a central defining property of leisure. It is the intrinsically motivated, self-determined nature of participation, coupled with the match between abilities and challenges, which defines leisure and makes it so involving. Leisure allows people self-determined opportunities to stretch themselves by successfully applying their abilities in order to meet challenges. Such experiences are growth producing, leaving participants with feelings of accomplishment, confidence, and pleasure (Austin & Crawford, 1996).

## Leisure as a State of Being Marked by Freedom

The fifth concept of leisure places the emphasis on the perceived freedom of the activity and on the role of leisure involvement in helping the individual achieve personal fulfillment and self-enrichment. Neulinger writes:

To leisure means to be engaged in an activity performed for its own sake, to do something which gives one pleasure and satisfaction, which involves one to the very core of one’s being. To leisure means to be oneself, to express one’s talents, one’s capacities, one’s potentials.<sup>17</sup>

This concept of leisure implies a lifestyle that is holistic, in the sense that one’s view of life is not sharply fragmented into a number of spheres such as family activities, religion, work, and free time. Instead, all such involvements are seen as part of a whole in which the individual explores his or her capabilities, develops enriching experiences with others, and seeks “self-actualization” in the sense of being creative, involved, expressive, and fully alive. The idea of leisure as a state of being places great emphasis on the need for perceived freedom. Recognizing the fact that some constraints always exist, Godbey defines leisure in the following way:

Leisure is living in relative freedom from the external compulsive forces of one’s culture and physical environment so as to be able to act from internal compulsion in ways which are personally pleasing and intuitively worthwhile.<sup>18</sup>

Such contemporary leisure theorists stress the need for the true leisure experience to yield a sense of total freedom and absence from compulsion of any kind. Realistically, however, there are many situations in which individuals are pressured to participate or in which the activity's structure diminishes his or her sense of freedom and intrinsic motivation.

## Leisure as Spiritual Expression

A sixth way of conceptualizing leisure today sees it in terms of its contribution to spiritual expression or religious values. Newly founded faith-based social welfare organizations in the late nineteenth century were a driving force behind the growth of public and philanthropic leisure services during that time. During the early decades of the twentieth century, play and recreation were often referred to as uplifting or holy kinds of human experiences. In a systematic study of the professional literature of this period, Charles Sylvester found numerous references to God, Christ, divine ends, or other terms that suggested a clear linkage between leisure and religion.<sup>19</sup>

Philosopher and scholar Hayden Ramsay suggested that contemporary leisure often is self-indulgent and egotistic, rather than reflective. As a result, life is more stressful and happiness is less likely. Ramsay writes of his ideal leisure:

. . . why should physical exercise, games, reading, dancing, and butterfly-spotting not assist reflection on life, ourselves, our relationships, God, truth, justice, meaning, and so on? Leisure activities involve removing ourselves from the pursuit of external purposes and simply enjoying locating ourselves within freely chosen activities. The freedom of mind this brings is playful, and the relaxation of spirit it offers suitable for the deeper thinking we find it difficult to engage in at other, busier times—difficult today even in study and religion.<sup>20</sup>



*Volunteering is an excellent leisure activity that promotes the public good and builds social capital.*

## Leisure and Social Capital

Social capital is a concept related to the success people experience in various settings due to their connections with other people. As early as the nineteenth century, authors described the individual and communal benefits of the propensity of Americans to associate with one another.

Americans of all ages, all conditions, all minds constantly unite. Not only do they have commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but they also have a thousand other kinds: religious, moral, grave, futile, very general and very particular, immense and small; Americans use associations to give fetes, to found seminaries, to build inns, to raise churches, to distribute books, to send missionaries to the antipodes in this manner they create hospitals, prisons, schools. Finally if it is a question of bringing to light a truth or developing a sentiment with the support of a great example, the associate. Everywhere that, at the head of a new undertaking, you see the government of France and a great lord in England, count on it that you will perceive an association in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

In 2000, Harvard University Professor, Robert Putnam, brought the concept of social capital to the attention of the private and public sectors through his book, *Bowling Alone*. According to Putnam, people in the United States have become less connected to each other. Over the past 30 years, Americans' participation in clubs and associations has decreased, neighbors have become less likely to know each other, and time spent socializing with friends and families has declined. We are even less likely to participate in bowling leagues—even through more of us bowl than ever before. The impact of this decline in social capital includes increased distrust in government, decreased participation in voting, decreased public safety, and a decline in child welfare.<sup>22</sup>

In the twenty-first century, civic leaders have expressed the need for communities to increase social capital. One of the primary means of achieving this increase is through communitarian leisure that reinforces social connectedness and promotes collective endeavor. This view of leisure requires a philosophical shift away from viewing leisure as an exercise of personal freedom with principle outcomes related to individual interests.

## Leisure Defined

Recognizing that each of the six concepts of leisure just presented stems from a different perspective, a general definition that embraces several of the key points follows.

Leisure is that portion of an individual's time that is not directly devoted to work or work-connected responsibilities or to other obligated forms of maintenance or self-care. Leisure implies freedom and choice and is customarily used in a variety of ways, including to meet one's personal needs for reflection, self-enrichment, relaxation, pleasure, and affiliation. Although it usually involves some form of participation in a voluntarily chosen activity, it may also be regarded as a holistic state of being or even a spiritual experience.

## THE MEANING OF RECREATION

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In a sense, recreation represents a fusion between play and leisure and is therefore presented as the third of the important concepts that provide the framework for this overall field of study. The term itself stems from the Latin word *recreatio*, meaning that which refreshes or restores. Historically, recreation was often regarded as a period of light and restful activity, voluntarily chosen, that permits one to regain energy after heavy work and to return to work renewed.

This point of view lacks acceptability today for two reasons. First, as most work in modern society becomes less physically demanding, many people are becoming more fully engaged, both physically and mentally, in their recreation than in their work. Thus, the notion that recreation should be light and relaxing is far too limiting. Second, the definition of recreation as primarily intended to restore one for work does not cover the case of persons who have no work including the growing retiree population, but who certainly need recreation to make their lives meaningful.

In contrast to work, which is often thought of as tedious, unpleasant, and obligatory, recreation has traditionally been thought of as light, pleasant, and revitalizing. However, this contrast too should be reconsidered. A modern, holistic view of work and recreation would be that both have the potential for being pleasant, rewarding, and creative and that both may represent serious forms of personal involvement and deep commitment.

## CONTEMPORARY DEFINITIONS OF RECREATION

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Most modern definitions of recreation fit into one of three categories: (1) Recreation has been seen as an activity carried on under certain conditions or with certain motivations; (2) recreation has been viewed as a process or state of being—something that happens within the person while engaging in certain kinds of activity, with a given set of expectations; and (3) recreation has been perceived as a social institution, a body of knowledge, or a professional field.

Typically, definitions of recreation found in the professional literature have included the following elements:

1. Recreation is widely regarded as activity (including physical, mental, social, or emotional involvement), as contrasted with sheer idleness or complete rest.
2. Recreation may include an extremely wide range of activities, such as sport, games, crafts, performing arts, fine arts, music, dramatics, travel, hobbies, and social activities. These activities may be engaged in by individuals or by groups and may involve single or episodic participation or sustained and frequent involvement throughout one's lifetime.
3. The choice of activity or involvement is voluntary, free of compulsion or obligation.
4. Recreation is prompted by internal motivation and the desire to achieve personal satisfaction, rather than by extrinsic goals or rewards.
5. Recreation is dependent on a state of mind or attitude; it is not so much what one does as the reason for doing it, and the way the individual feels about the activity, that makes it recreation.

6. Although the primary motivation for taking part in recreation is usually pleasure seeking, it may also be meeting intellectual, physical, or social needs. In some cases, rather than providing “fun” of a light or trivial nature, recreation may involve a serious degree of commitment and self-discipline and may yield frustration or even pain.

Within this framework, many kinds of leisure experiences may be viewed as recreation. They may range from the most physically challenging pursuits to those with much milder demands. Watching television, listening to a symphony orchestra, reading a book, or playing chess are all forms of recreation.

## Voluntary Participation

Although it is generally accepted that recreation participation should be voluntary and carried out without any degree of pressure or compulsion, often this is not the case. We tend to be influenced by others, as in the case of the child whose parents urge him to join a Little League team, or the gymnast or figure skater who is encouraged in the thought that he or she might become a professional performer. Although ideally recreation is thought of as being free of compulsion or obligation, once one has entered into an activity—such as joining a company bowling league or playing with a chamber music group—one accepts a set of obligations to the other members of the team or group. Thus, recreation cannot be entirely free and spontaneous and, in fact, assumes some of the characteristics of work in the sense of having schedules, commitments, and responsibilities.

## Motives for Participation

Definitions of recreation generally have stressed that it should be conducted for personal enjoyment or pleasure—ideally of an immediate nature. However, many worthwhile activities take time to master before they yield the fullest degree of satisfaction. Some complex activities may cause frustration and even mental anguish—as in the case of the golf addict who is desperately unhappy because of poor putting or driving. In such cases it is not so much that the participant receives immediate pleasure as that he or she is absorbed and challenged by the activity; pleasure will probably grow as the individual's skill improves.

What of the view that recreation must be carried on for its own sake and without extrinsic goals or purposes? It is essential to recognize that human beings are usually goal-oriented, purposeful creatures. James Murphy and his coauthors have identified different recreational behaviors that suggest the kinds of motives people may have when they engage in activity:

- *Socializing behaviors:* Activities such as dancing, dating, going to parties, or visiting friends, in which people relate to one another in informal and unstereotyped ways.
- *Associative behaviors:* Activities in which people group together because of common interests, such as car clubs; stamp-, coin-, or gem-collecting groups; or similar hobbies.

- **Competitive behaviors:** Activities including all of the popular sport and games, but also competition in the performing arts or in outdoor activities in which individuals compete against the environment or even against their own limitations.
- **Risk-taking behaviors:** An increasingly popular form of participation in which the stakes are often physical injury or possible death.
- **Exploratory behaviors:** In a sense, all recreation involves some degree of exploration; in this context, it refers to such activities as travel and sightseeing, hiking, scuba diving, spelunking, and other pursuits that open up new environments to the participant.<sup>23</sup>



Visitors get an up-close look at the animals at Kuranda Koala Gardens in Cairns, Australia.

To these may be added the following motives: *vicarious experience*, such as watching movies or sports events; *sensory stimulation*, which might include drug use, sexual involvement, or listening to rock music; and *physical involvement for its own sake*, as opposed to competitive games. Creative arts, intellectual pursuits, or community volunteerism might also be considered important categories of recreational experience.

### Recreation as an Outcome

Recognizing that different people may have many different motives for taking part in recreation, Gray and Greben suggest that it should not be considered simply as a form of activity. Instead, they argue that recreation should be perceived as the outcome of participation—a “peak experience in self-satisfaction” that comes from successful participation in any sort of enterprise.

Recreation is an emotional condition within an individual human being that flows from a feeling of well-being and self-satisfaction. It is characterized by feelings of mastery, achievement, exhilaration, acceptance, success, personal worth, and pleasure. It reinforces a positive self-image. Recreation is a response to aesthetic experience, achievement of personal goals, or positive feedback from others. It is independent of activity, leisure, or social acceptance.<sup>24</sup>

Historically, leisure researchers have focused on the social-psychological outcomes of recreation. More recently, significant attention has been given to physical outcomes. Researchers and practitioners are particularly interested in the relationship between recreation participation and physical health outcomes, including reduction of obesity and other chronic health conditions.



The degree to which many individuals become deeply committed emotionally to their recreational interests may be illustrated within the realms of sports and popular entertainment. So fervently do many Americans root for popular sports teams and stars that sport has increasingly been referred to as a form of religion. The glorification of leading athletes as folk idols and the national preoccupation with such major events as the Stanley Cup, the World Series, or the Super Bowl demonstrate the degree to which sports—as a popular form of recreation—capture the emotional commitment of millions of Americans today.

## Social Acceptability

Another question arises with respect to defining recreation. Should activity that is often widely disapproved, such as drug use or vandalism, be regarded as a form of recreation? One school of thought maintains that *any* form of voluntarily chosen, pleasurable, leisure-time activity should be regarded as recreation. This view is expressed in the commonly used terms, “recreational sex” or “recreational drug use.”

Other writers take the opposite view—that recreation must be wholesome for the individual and for society and must serve to recreate the participant physically, psychologically, spiritually, or mentally. Some even argue that recreation should be clearly distinguished from mere amusement, time-filling, or negative forms of play. Rojek characterizes this approach to defining recreation and leisure as an element in “moral regulation” theory, in which different noneconomic societal institutions are used to control and “civilize” the behavior of the working classes.<sup>25</sup> Whether one accepts this position, it is important to recognize that all publicly and philanthropically financed programs must have significant goals and objectives in order to deserve and obtain support. It therefore becomes necessary to make an important distinction. Recreation, as such, may not imply social acceptability or a set of socially oriented goals or values. When, however, it is provided as a form of community-based service, supported by taxes or voluntary contributions, it must be attuned to prevailing social values and must be aimed at achieving desirable and constructive results.

The task of determining exactly what is socially acceptable or morally desirable is complex, particularly in a heterogeneous society with many different cultures and with laws that may vary greatly from state to state or even county to county. Society’s attitudes toward varied leisure pursuits have been ambiguous from a moral perspective. Certain forms of gambling have traditionally been morally or legally disapproved. Compulsive gambling is seen as an illness, and the law prohibits private gambling games, the “numbers” game, and similar pastimes, yet gambling is legal in the majority of states, and many states depend heavily for income on licensed casinos or state lotteries. Similarly, many churches sponsor bingo games, a form of gambling. Is one form of gambling recreation because it is countenanced, and another not? Apart from the obvious point that it is difficult to make such distinctions, it should be stressed that recreation is carried on within a social context. It must respond to social needs and expectations, and it is influenced by prevailing social attitudes and values. Indeed,

although we tend to think of recreation as a form of personal involvement or experience, it must also be defined as a social institution.

## Recreation as a Social Institution

Recreation is identified as a significant institution in the modern community, involving a form of collective behavior carried on within specific social structures. It has numerous traditions, values, channels of communication, formal relationships, and other institutional aspects.

Once chiefly the responsibility of the family, the church, or other local social bodies, recreation in contemporary society is the responsibility of a number of major agencies in today's society. These may include public, voluntary, or commercial organizations that operate parks, beaches, zoos, aquariums, stadiums, or sports facilities. Recreational activities may also be provided by organizations such as hospitals, schools, correctional institutions, and branches of the armed forces. Clearly, recreation emerged in the twentieth century as a significant social institution, complete with its own

national and international organizations and an extensive network of programs of professional preparation in colleges and universities.

Beyond this development, over the past century, there has been general acceptance of the view that community recreation, in which citizens take responsibility for planning and supporting organized leisure services to meet social needs, contributes significantly to democratic citizenship. Hemingway, for example, contrasts two opposing patterns—"participatory" and "representative" democracy—and discusses the role of leisure in contributing to "social capital."<sup>26</sup>

Stormann carries the point further by examining the role of recreation in contributing to community development. He describes the work of neighborhood groups in developing vest-pocket parks and community gardens in Loisaida, a primarily Puerto Rican section of New York City's Lower East Side. Men and women involved in transforming littered vacant lots into productive and pleasant environments gained a larger vision of what their community might become and



Gardening for some is an example of a recreation activity that is freely chosen and has an element of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

learned to work with other social activists on health care, education, housing, and job development. Stormann writes:

Leisure is invested with communalism and divested of privatism. The empty and dangerous, garbage-infested, unused space became the impetus for an overpowering leisure time. Unused space became meaningful “urban space” [and led to positive] democratic human relations.<sup>27</sup>

**Leisure Opportunity and “Social Justice”** From a broader perspective, Allison makes the case that organized recreation—seen as a social institution intended to provide the “good life” for all citizens—often fails to meet the need of historically disenfranchised or marginalized groups, such as “women, people of color, individuals with disabilities, gays and lesbians, the poor, and the elderly.” For example, she writes:

Individuals with disabilities and the elderly suffer a host of injustices around issues of organizational exclusion, discrimination, and stigmatization [with] structural and institutional barriers that continue to diminish the rights and opportunities of these individuals in . . . recreation/travel environments (e.g., employment opportunities, program accessibility).<sup>28</sup>

## Recreation Defined

Acknowledging these contrasting views of the meaning of recreation, the following definition of the term is offered. Recreation consists of human activities or experiences that occur in leisure time. Usually, they are voluntarily chosen for intrinsic purposes and are pleasurable, although they may involve a degree of compulsion, extrinsic purpose, and discomfort, or even pain or danger. Recreation may also be regarded as the emotional state resulting from participation or as a social institution, a professional career field, or a business. When provided as part of organized community or voluntary-agency programs, recreation should be socially constructive and morally acceptable in terms of prevailing community standards and values.

## RELATIONSHIPS AMONG PLAY, LEISURE, AND RECREATION

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Obviously, the three terms discussed in this chapter are closely interrelated. Leisure, for example, provides an opportunity to carry on both play and recreation. Much of our free time in modern society is taken up by recreation, although leisure may also include such activities as continuing education, religious practice, or community service, which are not usually thought of as forms of recreation. In turn, it should be understood that although play and recreation tend to overlap, they are not identical. Play is not so much an activity as a form of behavior, marked stylistically by teasing, competition, exploration, or make-believe. Play can occur during work or leisure, whereas recreation takes place only during leisure.

Recreation obviously includes many forms of play, but it also may involve distinctly nonplaylike activities such as traveling, reading, going to museums, and pursuing other cultural or intellectual activities. As a social institution, recreation has broader applications than play or leisure in two ways: Recreation is often provided by institutions that do not have leisure as a primary concern, such as the armed forces or business concerns; and recreation agencies often provide other social or environmental

services and may in fact become an important linkage between municipal governments and the people they serve.

Leisure is a subject of scholarly study for many economists and sociologists; it also has come increasingly under the scrutiny of psychologists and social psychologists. However, to the public at large, leisure tends to be a somewhat abstract or remote concept. Although many academic departments and some community agencies use the term *leisure* in their titles, it lacks a sense of urgency or strong appeal as a public issue or focus of government action.

Of the three terms, *recreation* is at once the most understandable and significant for most persons. It is easily recognizable as an area of personal activity and social responsibility, and its values are readily apparent for all age groups and special populations as well. For these reasons, it will be given primary emphasis in the chapters that follow, particularly in terms of program sponsorship and professional identity.

## Role of Recreation and Leisure in Professional Education Curricula

Both recreation and leisure are the focus of higher education curricula for individuals planning to enter the overall leisure-service field. Mannell and Kleiber point out that they demand different teaching emphases. Leisure studies scholars, they write, draw on the knowledge and approaches of both the social and management sciences, with their findings reported in varied national and international journals and conferences dealing with leisure studies. They continue:

Most college and university recreation and leisure studies programs encourage their students to integrate and understand the interplay between "people," "resource" and "policy" issues.

In other words, leisure studies curricula require students to study individual and group leisure behavior as a function of social and cultural factors, the planning and management of natural and built resources for free time use, and policy/management issues associated with the provision of public and private leisure services.<sup>29</sup>

The themes that have just been introduced will be explored more fully throughout this text, as the historical development of recreation and play and the evolution of the present-day leisure-service system are described. Throughout, issues related to the social implications of recreation and leisure and to the role of recreation and park professionals will be fully discussed, along with the challenges that face practitioners in this field in the twenty-first century.

## SUMMARY

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Play, recreation, and leisure represent important basic concepts that are essential aspects of the overall field of organized leisure services. They have been explored by philosophers, psychologists, historians, educators, and sociologists from ancient Greek civilizations to the present.

Play may best be understood as a form of activity or behavior that is generally nonpurposeful in terms of having serious intended outcomes, but that is an important

element in the healthy growth of children and in other societal functions. The chapter presents various theories of play, ranging from the classical views of Herbert Spencer and Karl Groos to more contemporary concepts that link play to Freudian theory or to exploratory drives of human personality.

Six concepts of leisure are presented that depict it as the possession of the upper classes or aristocrats throughout history, as free time or activity, as a state of being, and as a form of spiritual expression. Recreation is also explored from different perspectives, with a key issue being whether it must be morally constructive or socially approved to be considered recreation. The role of recreation as an important contemporary social institution and force in economic life is also discussed.

## QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION OR ESSAY EXAMINATION

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1. This chapter presents several perspectives on play, including a review of traditional definitions of play, its role as a social ritual in community life, and its contribution to personality development. Which of these do you find most interesting and useful? Why?
2. Recreation has been simply defined as socially desirable activity carried on voluntarily in free time for purposes of fun or pleasure. Critically analyze this definition. For example, must activity always be considered socially desirable in order to be regarded as recreation? Is recreation always pleasurable? Is it always carried on voluntarily? What elements would you add to this definition to make it more meaningful?
3. The chapter presents two contrasting views of leisure—one as the slow-paced, relaxed, or contemplative use of free time and the other as active participation in a wide range of often challenging or demanding activities. Which of these do you believe is the more accurate picture of leisure today?
4. Discuss the contrasting meanings of *play*, *leisure*, and *recreation*, and show how they overlap and differ from each other in their separate meanings. Which of the three do you feel is the more useful term as far as public understanding of this field is concerned?

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