

CHAPTER

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Recreation and Leisure

An Introduction

A phone call is how the excitement all started. We made the decision to attend the NASCAR race in Las Vegas for the sixth year in a row. What is it that keeps drawing us back to this fun-packed weekend? Maybe it is the thrill of being involved in such an awesome event that truly puts the pedal to the metal. Preparing to get to a NASCAR race is just as exciting as being at the race. We go to dinner with the friends who are going with us at least once a month prior to the weekend of the race. The discussions we have about what we are going to do and how we are going to get there keep the excitement alive. As the weekend gets closer and closer, our anticipation grows. The weekend before the race, we go to dinner one more time and finalize all of the weekend's plans. When we get to the race weekend, our anticipation is overwhelming. The behind-the-scenes action at the race is incredible. There is a carnival atmosphere behind the scenes that fans get to experience only when attending a race. You walk through the souvenir area and see all sorts of crazy items. In addition, there are more than 20 NASCAR sponsors promoting their products—from oil, to power tools, to home improvement stores. You walk through this carnival-like atmosphere and get caught up in the excitement because there are so many promotions and free goodies to take home. If you are lucky enough to get into the pits, this brings a whole different level of understanding and emotions. Going through the pits gets you close to the action of the race. It's amazing to see these pit crews make a simple adjustment on the race car simply to get it to go one-tenth of a second faster. You get caught up in their excitement and determination to win the race. In this sport, the drivers are incredible people; they truly believe that the fans are important to their success. When you walk through the pits and see your favorite driver, your emotions race and you are on a natural high.

When you attend a NASCAR race and you have never been to one before, you get the real sense of the camaraderie among the fans. People from all walks of life are there and have come together to watch this great sport. Your driver may not win the race, but the competition among the fans during the race keeps your level of adrenaline high. (One year we sat by a Jeff Gordon fan at a race. This fan was hilarious to watch as he showed so much emotion in his body language as Gordon was doing well—and then crashed.) It's fun to watch people interact as they talk about their favorite drivers. A local race track does not have the level of excitement as a NASCAR race does. It's exciting to meet people from all over the world. We are all there for one reason: to see a great race and experience the fun.

INTRODUCTION

Recreation and leisure have multiple meanings based on individual experiences and perceptions. Recreation is defined from an individual perspective. It could include watching television, attending an opera, base jumping, mowing the lawn, taking your children to the zoo, playing checkers, downloading

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music, writing a book, an evening on the town, or whatever one chooses to make it. Leisure theorists struggle to agree on what to call these types of experiences. Is it recreation, leisure, free time, available time, creativity, selfishness, or hedonism? One's own perceptions are so important in the defining of leisure and recreation that researchers continue to debate their meaning to society, individuals, and culture. However, as this text will show, recreation, parks, and leisure services have become an important part of government operations and a vital program element of nonprofit, commercial, private-membership, therapeutic, and other types of agencies. Today, recreation and leisure constitute major forces in our national and local economies and are responsible for millions of jobs in such varied fields as government, travel and tourism, popular entertainment and the arts, health and fitness programs, hobbies, participatory and spectator sports, and travel and tourism. Beyond its value as a form of sociability, recreation also provides major personal benefits in terms of meeting physical, emotional, philosophical, and other important health-related needs of participants. In a broad sense, the leisure life of a nation reflects its fundamental values and character. The very games and sports, entertainment media, and group affiliations that people enjoy in their leisure help to shape the character and well-being of families, communities, and society at large.

For these reasons, it is the purpose of this text to present a comprehensive picture of the role of recreation and leisure in modern society, including (1) the field's conceptual base, (2) the varied leisure pursuits people engage in, (3) their social and psychological implications, (4) both positive and negative outcomes of play, (5) the network of community organizations that provide recreational programs and related social services, and (6) the development of recreation as a rich, diversified field of professional practice.

VARIED VIEWS OF RECREATION AND LEISURE

For some, recreation means the network of public agencies that provide facilities such as parks, playgrounds, aquatic centers, sports fields, and community centers in thousands of cities, towns, counties, and park districts today. They may view these facilities as an outlet for the young or a means of achieving family togetherness; pursuing interesting hobbies, sports, or social activities; or as a place for growth and development for all ages.

For others, recreation may be found in a senior center or golden age club, a sheltered workshop for people with cognitive disabilities, or a treatment center for physical rehabilitation. For some, traveling, whether it be by trailer, motorcoach, airplane, train, or cruise ship, is the preferred mode of recreation. The expansion of the travel and tourism industry has been staggering. Travel clubs have become increasingly popular, with several airlines built around short trips through extended travel. Disney has initiated a line of cruise ships that focuses on family and has extended the idea of travel and tourism yet again. Resort destinations from Vail, Colorado, to Orlando, Florida, to Las Vegas, Nevada have developed travel and tourism with new levels of services and lodging, including a dramatic growth in timeshares.

For a growing generation of young people, recreation and leisure have taken on new meanings of adventure, risk, excitement, and fulfillment as they seek to meld technology and recreation. The idea of recreation participation may not include any physical activity but focus instead on Internet-based games, social networking, sharing music, instant messaging, and new ventures yet to emerge. The activity may

be as dissimilar as sitting in front of a computer to being involved in extreme activities such as skateboarding on a Bob Burnquist–designed and built 360-foot skateboard ramp with a 70-foot gap that must be negotiated to safely complete the experience. It may involve participation in ESPN's X-Games as a participant, spectator, or video game player. ESPN has defined extreme sports through sponsorship and promotion sponsorship. The X-Games include activities such as inline skating, BMX racing, snow sports including snowboards and free-style skiing, surfing, streetball, and motorcycles.

Environmentalists may be chiefly concerned about the impact of outdoor forms of traditional and emerging play on our natural surroundings—the forests, mountains, rivers, and lakes that are the national heritage of all Americans. More frequently, the environmental movement includes a growing awareness and global perspective.

Without question, recreation and leisure are all of these things. They represent a potentially rewarding and important form of human experience and constitute a major aspect of economic development and government responsibility



Recreation occurs in many forms with group involvement highly desirable for some individuals.

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today. It is important to recognize that this is not a new development. Recreation and leisure are concepts that have fascinated humankind since before the golden age of ancient Athens. Varied forms of play have been condemned and suppressed in some societies and highly valued and encouraged in others.

Today, for the first time, there is almost universal acceptance of the value of play, recreation, and leisure. As a consequence, government at every level in the United States has accepted responsibility for providing or assisting leisure opportunities through extensive recreation and park systems, tourism support systems, and sport facilities and complexes.

Diversity in Participation

Often we tend to think of recreation primarily as participation in sports and games or in social activities and ignore other forms of play. However, recreation includes an extremely broad range of leisure pursuits, including travel and tourism, cultural entertainment or participation in the arts, hobbies, membership in social clubs or interest groups, nature-related activities such as camping or hunting and fishing, attendance at parties or other special events, and fitness activities.

Recreation may be enjoyed along with thousands of other participants or spectators or may be an intensely solitary experience. It may be highly strenuous and physically demanding or may be primarily a cerebral activity. It may represent a lifetime of interest and involvement or may consist of a single, isolated experience.

As discussed elsewhere in this text, the diversity and depth of participation are similar to looking inside a three-dimensional box (Figure 1.1) and seeing on the vertical plane the diversity represented by the different kinds of activities and experiences one might engage in as part of recreation and along the horizontal plane the depth or intensity of participation. On the third plane, which gives the box dimension, the aspect becomes more complex because one has to take into account why people participate (psychological aspects) as well as with whom they participate (social aspects), the time (free



Recreation can occur any place and includes a variety of activities.
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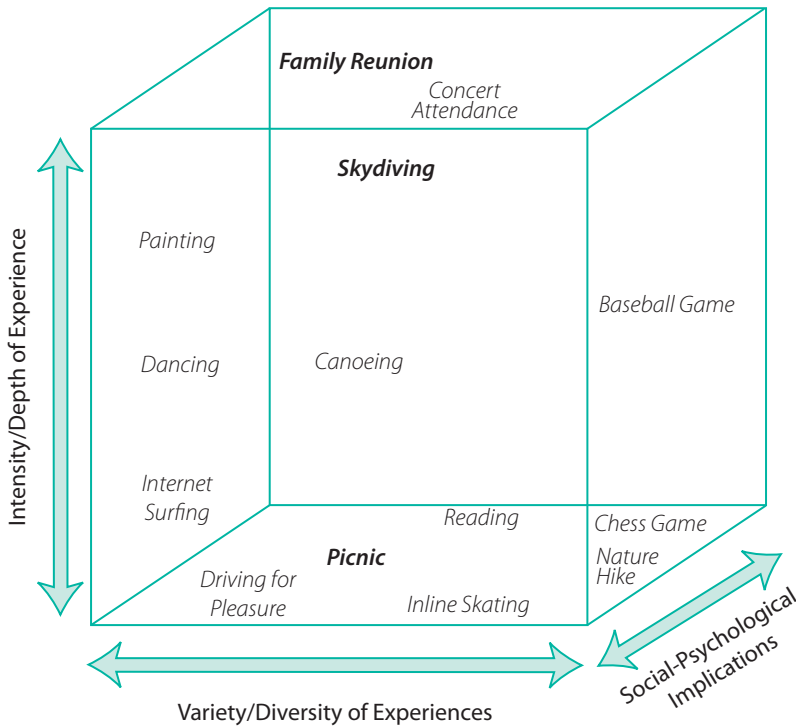


FIGURE 1.1 Simplistic Representation of the Complexity of Recreation and Leisure Experiences



AN ANALYSIS OF THE NASCAR WEEKEND

The introduction to this chapter provides an excellent opportunity to analyze a leisure experience.

- ◆ Attendance at the NASCAR event did not begin with the decision to go to the event but rather with the anticipation, based on previous experiences. Note how the author describes the introduction to the opportunity: "A phone call is how the excitement all started." From that phone call the decision was initiated, but what aided in the final decision, among many competing factors, was the previous six experiences in Las Vegas.
- ◆ The author asks, "What is it that keeps drawing us back to this fun-packed weekend?" and then goes on to explain that part of it is anticipation, part is preparation and the recognition that the preparation is part of the experience, and part is all of the on-site experiences surrounding this event.
- ◆ One might ask, Is it leisure or recreation if you are just a spectator? But in this case, being a spectator is only part of the event. Engaging in the related activities, such as eating with friends, shopping, visiting the pits and garages, being in the crowd, and finalizing all of the details, are all part of being at the race.
- ◆ In regard to Figure 1.1, there is an intensity related to this experience. It may primarily be emotional, but feelings resulting from the experience are real and sometimes intense. These feelings and experiences contribute to the social-psychological aspects of leisure and affect the intensity and diversity of the experience.
- ◆ Upon arrival, the intensity of the engagement becomes even more pronounced as "our anticipation is overwhelming. The behind-the-scenes action at the race is incredible. There is a carnival atmosphere behind the scenes that fans get to experience only when attending a race."



Watching a pit crew is part of the experience for NASCAR fans.
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Looking at an experience through the eyes of a participant enhances one's understanding of the leisure experience. It helps the leisure researcher and practitioner to understand why people participate in activities, what they want to gain from involvement, and the potential outcomes and benefits. As valuable as studying and experience are, for the novice, involvement and reflection may provide the best way to describe the experience.

time versus obligated time) spent in the activity, and the costs associated with involvement or away from other activities (economic). Figure 1.1 shows in a very simple way the challenges faced when exploring a leisure activity. Researchers have invested years and written thousands of articles attempting to explain the leisure experience. Figure 1.1 depicts that challenge but fails to take into account individual perceptions of the experience, which are all important. This text explores each of these aspects in detail. By the conclusion, readers will have gained an understanding of the diversity and complexity of the leisure environment, services, involvement, and participation.

Motivations for Recreational Participation

In addition to the varied forms that recreation may take, it also meets a wide range of individual needs and interests. Although other chapters in this text describe play motivations and outcomes in fuller detail, they can be summarized as follows. Many participants take part in recreation as a form of relaxation and release from work pressures or other tensions. They may be passive spectators of entertainment provided by television, movies, or other forms of electronic amusement. Other significant leisure motivations are based on the need to express creativity, develop hidden talents, enhance physical skills, or pursue excellence in varied forms of personal expression.

For some participants, active, competitive recreation may offer a channel for releasing frustration and aggression or for struggling against others or the environment in adventurous, high-risk pursuits. Others enjoy recreation that is highly social and provides opportunities for making new friends or cooperating with others in group settings.

Other individuals take part in leisure activities that involve community service or that permit them to provide leadership in fraternal or religious organizations. Still others take part in activities that promote health and physical fitness as a primary goal. A steadily growing number of participants enjoy participation in the expanding world of computer-based entertainment and communication, including CD-ROMs, Internet games, video games, smart phones with applications, iPods, the Internet, and much more. Others are deeply involved in forms of culture such as music, drama, dance, literature, and other forms of fine arts. Exploring new environments through travel and tourism or seeking self-discovery or personality enrichment through continuing education or various educational activities represents other important leisure drives.

Case Study

Quilting as Leisure: Why I Quilt

The following is a first-person account of a recreation/leisure activity. As you read the account, think about your recreation activities. Ask yourself how you see this as leisure and how you don't see it as leisure. Compare it to what you do for recreation. One of the discoveries you will make in this text is that leisure is varied and its value or worth is frequently determined by the individual participant.

I have been sewing for over 50 years. I've always enjoyed sewing. There is a great satisfaction from creating something from a flat piece of fabric. I like how I feel when I take different pieces, colors, and patterns of fabric and organize them into something beautiful—and sometimes useful.

My first attempts at quilting were pretty basic, consisting of two pieces of material and sandwiched between them a piece of batting (cotton wadding for use in quilts) and all of it tied together by yarn at 5- to 6-inch intervals across the fabric. I didn't just jump into quilting and spend all of my time doing it. I had seven children to raise so oftentimes quilting was put aside for days and weeks at a time or done after everyone else had gone to bed. As my children got older and were less demanding, I found more time to quilt.

All the children have their own families now and I'm able to devote more time to my quilting. I make quilts for children and grandchildren graduating, new grandchildren, other special occasions, for friends, and sometimes for me! When my oldest grandson died in an accident I made a quilt for his two brothers and when a granddaughter broke her arm, she too needed a quilt to help her feel better. Quilting is a way for me to share my self and my love with others. It also makes me feel good when I visit and see my quilts in my children's homes.

Why do I quilt? When I quilt I feel happy. Quilting makes me feel good about myself. It's like a release from other things going on in my life. It allows me to bring order by organizing groups of fabrics to a structured and planned piece. A big part of quilting is finding fabric. I enjoy finding fabrics that speak to me through colors, patterns, and prints. I can envision how they will blend together in a quilt. I feel like an artist using fabric and colors, creating designs and patterns. I usually only work on one project at a time, but I have several other projects I'm thinking about and conceptually planning. Some of these I draw to get a feel for how they will look. You may find different quilt drawings scattered in various rooms of my home. So, not only am I working with my hands, but I'm keeping my mind agile with the planning and anticipation.

I want my quilts to bring joy to others, to celebrate events, to comfort, and to give beauty. In doing this I feel a sense of accomplishment, of helping others, and joy!

Questions to Consider

1. When you participate in recreation how are your feelings and motivations similar or different to those described in this case study? Why do you think they might be different?
2. Select a recreation activity you enjoy and write about it. Answer the following questions:
 - a. When did you begin to participate in your recreation activity?
 - b. How do you feel when you participate in the activity?
 - c. Why do you participate in the activity?
 - d. How do you feel when you are done with the activity? Is there any carryover of feelings to a later time?

6 **CHAPTER 1** Recreation and Leisure**Summary**

This chapter provides an introduction to the study of recreation, park, and leisure services, seen as vital ingredients in the lives of Americans and as growing areas of career opportunity and professional responsibility. It outlines several of the unique characteristics of leisure involvement, such as the diverse forms of recreational involvement and motivations shared by persons of all ages and backgrounds.

The chapter includes a brief description of the recreation, park, and leisure-service profession and emphasizes the need for specialized educational preparation for those holding responsible positions in this field. It suggests reasons for studying recreation and leisure.

Questions for Class Discussion or Essay Examination

- 1.** Read the case study, and then explain what leisure means to you.

- 2.** If motivations are important in the study of leisure, explore some of the reasons you participate in recreation activities and be prepared to discuss why and how you are motivated.

- 3.** Review Figure 1.1 and explain the variables that influence decisions about participation in recreation activities.
