

What is Leisure? The Perceptions of Recreation Practitioners and Others

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The purposes of this research were to determine if agreement exists among leisure services practitioners regarding the meaning of leisure and to examine how they describe themselves and the body of knowledge related to leisure services. In addition, these responses were compared with a group of individuals outside the field to determine if these practitioners possess a unique understanding of leisure, leisure practitioners, and the body of knowledge. Members of the Recreation Branch of the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association (n = 108) and a purposive sample of employees of two local adoption agencies (n = 30) completed questionnaires, including a True/False section, a three-part free-list component, and demographic information. Data were analyzed according to consensus modeling theory using Anthropac™ data analysis software and SPSS™. The True/False data indicated high agreement, and thus, “culturally correct” definitions of leisure for each group that support traditional and multidimensional definitions of leisure. When analyzed along with the free-list data, the most frequently reported dimensions of leisure paralleled traditional definitions (i.e., free time, activities). The responses of both groups indicate that professionals need to know about management and activities. Implications of these findings are discussed in relation to models of service provision.

Keywords leisure, leisure and practice, professional knowledge

The word “leisure” evokes a variety of thoughts, images, and concepts. Normative denotations of the word have traditionally been expressed in terms of *free time* or *activity* and some scholars have added *state of mind* as an alternative definition of the word (see Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Other leisure scholars have critiqued this popular conception (e.g., Dustin & Goodale, 1999; Hemingway & Parr, 2000; Kelly, 1996) and have related leisure, from a critical perspective, to emancipatory action (e.g., Hemingway, 1999), participatory democracy (e.g., Stormann, 1993), and community development (e.g., Arai & Pedlar, 1997). The hermeneutics of leisure may appear, superficially, to be a purely academic exercise. However, Ellis and Witt (1990) posited that definitions of leisure arguably impact how recreation practitioners conceptualize and implement services. Furthermore,

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Whitson and Slack (1989) pointed out that “. . . the discourses of management, and indeed of leisure, need to be understood as linguistic and socio-historical constructs which reflect, at any given time, the state of play in ongoing struggles to redefine institutional ‘missions’” (p. 30). Unfortunately, what practitioners know, or at least believe, to be true about the meaning(s) of leisure have not been adequately addressed.

The relevance of leisure and leisure studies to leisure services practice has been discussed, particularly in response to Burdge’s (1985) essay and more recently in essays by Estes (2000), Hemingway and Parr (2000), and Parr (2000). Sessoms (1986) suggested that although a considerable amount of research has addressed the meaning of leisure in people’s lives, what we have not considered is the possibility that “to the masses, leisure is what the public relations and advertising executives say it is. Average citizens could not care less about the debate on whether their activities are recreational, leisure expressions, exercise, play, or a state of mind” (p. 109). He also suggested that “Rather than chastise the public for its failure to understand the significance and importance of leisure, we should be developing data about a system that the public has come to accept as important” (p. 112). The implication is that leisure services should find, as its starting point, the public’s understanding of leisure and develop products and services that capitalize on and reinforce the public’s perceptions of leisure. How does the public define leisure? If the profession uses the public’s understanding of leisure as a starting point, what then is the “unique body of knowledge” defining the profession, distinguishing a professional from a nonprofessional?

The purposes of this research were to determine if there is agreement among leisure services practitioners related to the meaning of leisure and to examine how they describe themselves and the body of knowledge related to leisure services. In addition, the practitioners’ responses were compared to a group of individuals outside the field, to determine if these practitioners possess a unique understanding of leisure, leisure practitioners, and the body of knowledge associated with the field.

Related Literature

Meanings of Leisure

Research

Mannell and Kleiber (1997) suggested that leisure has alternately been defined and operationalized as an objective or subjective phenomenon. As an objective phenomenon, leisure is understood to be an activity or set of activities, a particular setting such as a beach, or a specific time period, and is typically measured through time-budgets or activity inventories. However, time-budget studies and activity inventories have been criticized, particularly due to inconsistent results and an “external definitional vantage point.” That is, leisure is defined and operationalized by the researchers who “typically assume that specific activities have a common meaning or are defined as leisure by everyone in the study” (p. 72). One way to overcome these assumptions is to allow the research participants to label their time, activities, or settings as leisure (an internal vantage point). While this type of research addresses whether or not an individual views a specific activity or set of activities as leisure, it does not directly address whether the research participants define leisure itself as activity, setting, or time period. For example, for a given individual, the activity of softball may almost always be labeled leisure, while the reverse may not be true; softball is almost always leisure, but leisure may not almost always be softball.

As a subjective phenomenon, leisure is understood to be a “. . . mental experience [of an individual] while engaged in leisure activities and the satisfaction or meanings derived from these involvements” (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997, p. 55). As a subjective phenomenon, leisure also has been operationalized both externally (from the researcher’s perspective)

and internally (from the research participant's perspective.) For example, a researcher may measure a participant's level of perceived freedom, positive affect, and intrinsic motivation while engaged in, or immediately following, an activity. An episode with high levels of those qualities would be labeled "leisure" by the researcher. From an internal vantage point, researchers have used the definitional approach to elicit the criteria people use to define their experiences as leisure. In a study by Shaw (1985), research participants were asked to classify their activities as leisure, work, a mix of leisure and work, or neither leisure nor work (an internal, objective perspective). Interviewers then asked the participants about "perceptual factors" which led the individual to classify an activity in a particular way. These perceptual factors supported the notion of leisure as a subjective experience (an internal, subjective perspective.) Shaw found that freedom of choice, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, and relaxation were the perceptual factors most associated with the experience of leisure.

Howe and Rancourt (1990) reviewed the challenges of accepting definitions of leisure as free time or activity and proposed that while leisure certainly takes place in time and space, a state of mind definition allows researchers to focus on the relationship between leisure experience and the concept of self. They further qualified leisure experience as "the personal, subjective experiencing of leisure" (p. 400). Defining leisure as a state of mind or experience facilitated what Mannell and Kleiber (1997) termed the "psychologization of leisure studies;" specifically, the application of social psychological theories, concepts, and methods to understanding leisure behavior. According to Hemingway and Parr (2000) the social psychological approach legitimated and contributed to the body of leisure research in three ways:

First, it offered a more satisfactory explanatory framework in traditional social scientific terms than existing descriptive efforts. Second, it provided arguments for leisure's centrality to individual well-being. Third, it gave practitioners an apparent means to validate program advocacy and design using research findings (p. 145).

However, they also cautioned that an over reliance on social psychology and traditional social science has neglected the underlying social and cultural contexts of individual's lives that give rise to individual characteristics and give them meaning.

The focus of much research into leisure's meaning has been from an empirical, social-psychological perspective, i.e., a focus upon the individual's perception of leisure as personal experience (Hemingway, 1990). Critical perspectives have sought to broaden this conceptualization. In the critical tradition, leisure does not occur independent of historically conditioned social, economic, and political contexts. Rather, on a macro-level, leisure practices reproduce or resist dominant modes of cultural production. As such, leisure is a phenomenon that is continually negotiated by people within constraints imposed by historical forces (e.g., capitalism), cultural ideology, and politics, and is embedded in social contexts (e.g., race, class, age, gender, ability/disability). Negotiation of roles and "appropriate" choices may occur within social structures and status hierarchies from both the "top-down" (hegemony) and "bottom-up" (resistance). In this dialectical condition, the brute force of history is not given, social structures are not fixed and forever, and people are viewed as active creators of the everyday world. Leisure becomes an aspect of life through which people may be repressed or liberated, controlled or empowered. Critical perspectives reveal how leisure is connected to broad processes of development and change in society.

Notable examples of scholarship in the critical tradition include investigations of leisure as participatory democracy (e.g., Stormann, 1993; Hemingway, 1996) and civility (e.g., Sylvester, 1995); critical approaches to leisure research (e.g., Kelly, 1996; Hemingway,

1990, 1999; Samdahl, 1999; see also Parr & Hemingway, 2000 for a discussion); leisure and community development (e.g., Reid & van Druenen, 1996; Arai & Pedlar, 1997, 2001); and leisure's relation to class, commodification, and consumption (e.g., Mullet, 1988; Featherstone, 1991; Kelly, 1996). Sylvester (1995) argued for modes of inquiry along lines of empirical, interpretive, *and* critical investigation that would include the valuation of *moral* relevance, a civility. Along similar lines, Stormann (1993) noted that "a leisure professional is a citizen first and a professional second" (p. 65). Arai and Pedlar (2001) stated that a focus on choice and autonomy in leisure serves not only to reinforce an emphasis on individual benefits, but actually constrains efforts to understand leisure's relation to community benefits and "the achievement of the common good" (p. 44). In most cases, philosophical arguments for a critical investigation of leisure have sought to unmask the historical, political and economic conditions that have prevented full and meaningful participation of *all* citizens in society.

In another contrast to social psychological approaches, Mobily (1989) conducted a study "to ascertain the validity of popular definitions of recreation and leisure" among a group of high school students. Two free-list techniques were used to compare responses to the key words leisure and recreation with previous studies. He found little support for definitions uncovered in previous research using more psychometric approaches. Specifically, words associated with freedom, intrinsic motivation, and "final orientation" were rarely mentioned in response to the key words. However, fun/enjoyment/pleasure was the most frequently mentioned response category. Mobily concluded that for these high school subjects, "Leisure was best defined by pleasure (and related terms) and specific passive activities (e.g., sleep, television, relaxation, reading). Leisure seemed to mean leisurely" (p. 19). Clearly, different methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation reveal different, but related, pieces of the overall picture that represents "leisure."

Textbooks

It is important to examine definitions of leisure as portrayed in introductory recreation/leisure studies textbooks, because these texts represent one of the primary ways new practitioners are inculcated into the professional body of knowledge of the field. (Having said that, it must also be noted that a significant number of leisure services practitioners may not, in fact, hold academic degrees in recreation/leisure studies. For the moment, this will be treated as a separate, but related issue.) Central to these textbook definitions, are the elements of time and activity, with freedom as a descriptor of such time and space. Kelly (1996) emphasized, "What makes an activity leisure is the definition of the action by the participant. It is something more than just a state of mind, however. . . . Leisure is directed action in the sense that there is real decision" (p. 22). Kraus (2001) allowed that, in addition to free time and activity, leisure may also be considered as a state of mind or attitude, either transitory or as a way of life.

Rossmann and Schlatter (2000) defined leisure in their program planning text as ". . . an experience that is most likely to occur during an engagement that is freely chosen for the intrinsic satisfaction inherent in participating in it" (p. 7). From this perspective, the role of a leisure services programmer becomes an "experience facilitator" rather than simply an "activity provider." Edginton, Jordan, De Graaf, and Edginton (1995) discussed leisure as a means of seeking balance in our hectic lives.

In many societies, people use leisure as a way of counter-balancing stresses that result from living and working in technologically-oriented, competitive, rapidly changing society that requires attention to a high degree of stimulation in the form of information, media communications and human interaction (p. 33).

Leisure, whether it is viewed as activity, free time, or state of mind, provides opportunities not only for “. . . relaxation, self-improvement, cultural and family stability and interaction, but also for escape, novelty, complexity, excitement, and fantasy” (p. 33).

While textbook definitions are usually based on current research and academic thought, Mobily (1989) pointed out that these meanings “may be the furthest thing from what the public has in mind when it comes to the services they expect from recreation departments” (p. 11). In addition to differences in academic definitions of leisure and definitions used by the public, it is likely that practitioners and academicians have different perceptions as well. Parr (1992/1993) found that practitioners and academicians understood “leisure theory and philosophy,” its meaning, value, and relation to the core body of knowledge of the field in different ways.

Cultural Consensus

According to Roberts (1964, cited in Romney, Weller, & Batchelder, 1986, p. 314),

It is possible to regard all culture as information and to view any single culture as an ‘information economy’ in which information is received or created, stored, retrieved, transmitted, utilized, and even lost. . . . In any culture information is stored in the minds of its members and, to a greater or lesser extent, in artifacts.

In psychological terms, individuals manage the infinite bits of information they are exposed to by categorizing like bits of information and storing the categories in memory. Murphy and Medin (1985) posited that a person’s background knowledge or “naïve theories” about the world give concepts and categories their meaning. In other words, how a person decides which bits of information are salient enough to be retained and how each bit is stored in memory (which category of knowledge it belongs to) is a function of personal experience. For example, when asked to list attributes of a particular concept, subjects list features that seem relevant to the situation and are salient in accordance with their background knowledge, rather than everything they know about a concept.

In anthropological terms, this background knowledge or “naïve theories” about the world is a function of cultural membership. Individual category systems do not exist solely in the minds of individuals, nor are they a function of individuals’ experiences in a vacuum. Members of a culture possess shared knowledge of a given content domain (category of knowledge) due to their common experiences with relevant concepts. An “information economy” of a single culture implies that of all the infinite bits of information available, members of a culture attend to selected, relevant bits, creating subsystems of knowledge. Kroeber (1948) described what he termed “systemic culture patterns” as “a system or complex of cultural material that has proved its utility as a system that tends to cohere and persist as a unit . . .” In addition, “Any one such systemic pattern is limited primarily to one aspect of culture, such as subsistence, religion, or economics . . .” (p. 312). A systemic pattern consists of bits of cultural material that are interconnected in specific ways. Therefore, the bits of information *and* their connections as a “category” system are shared within the culture, and may also be passed, as a unit, from one culture to another.

Cultural consensus theory and consensus analysis build on the notion of systemic culture patterns and on the phenomenon of “high concordance codes” defined by Roberts, Strand, and Burmeister (1971) as “those patterns known by the vast majority of adults in a culture [for which] the linguistic codes . . . are well designed for general communication” (p. 245). According to Romney, Weller, and Batchelder (1986), each culture pattern is associated with a semantic domain, or organized set of words or concepts that, when taken together,

constitute a single conceptual domain. For example, Roberts, Chick, Stephenson, and Hyde (1981) examined the internal structure of relevant behavior events (e.g., ace serve, foot fault, passing shot crosscourt) associated with the game of tennis. Participants were asked to sort 60 cards representing the behavioral events according to their similarity. The piles represent the category system used by each participant to understand behaviors relevant to the game of tennis. The individual data were then aggregated and analyzed using hierarchical clustering and multidimensional scaling techniques.

Consensus analysis is based on the premise that agreement among individuals, regarding some conceptual domain, indicates knowledge of that domain and is built on several assumptions (Borgatti, 1996b). First, each participant is responding from the same cultural reality. That is, any variability in response is due to variations in amount of knowledge of the conceptual domain. Second, responses of each individual are given independently and “[t]he only force drawing people to a given answer is the culturally correct answer” (Borgatti, p. 45). Finally, all of the questions come from the same conceptual domain.

These assumptions lead to the following conclusions: First, the amount of sharing (correlation) of knowledge between any two individuals is a function of the degree to which each has knowledge of the objective set of facts or reality. The correlation between any two individuals is a function of their individual correlation with “reality” or “the truth.” Second, individual competence is a function of the degree of agreement among individuals and can be estimated by the correlation of the responses of an individual and those of all other members of the group. Finally, the correlations among more competent individuals will be higher than those among less competent individuals. These assumptions are the same as those used in the calculation of item reliability in test construction theory. The difference with consensus analysis is that reliability theory is applied to informants rather than to test items. Individuals inform about a content domain just as items do on a test or questionnaire.

When inquiring about cultural knowledge, it is frequently the case that the “correct” answers to the questions are unknown. The point of consensus analysis is to attempt to estimate both the competencies of the individuals and to estimate the “culturally correct” answers to the questions. Romney, Weller, and Batchelder (1986) demonstrated that individuals who are more competent (i.e., knowledgeable) will agree among themselves more than those who are less competent. For this reason, the answers of the more competent should be weighted more heavily than those of the less competent when reconstructing the “culturally correct” answers.

Cultural “Data”

We did not use a random sample in this study. However, Handwerker and Wozniak (1997) demonstrated the validity of using a convenience sample when collecting cultural data. They distinguished between two types of data collected by social and behavioral scientists. “Life-experience” data are labels “that reflect elements of the unique life history that makes each of us an independent being . . .” (p. 870). For example, asking a person to report their age or marital status results in an answer that is independent from any other person’s response to the question. The assumption in classical statistical theory that data observations occur independently allows for estimations of reliability, validity, and generalizability. “Cultural” data reflect a social construction of meaning based on interactions with and knowledge of others. For example, asking informants “How do you know you are a mother?” necessitates examining the cultural context of what it means to be a mother and thus, “. . . appear[s] to invalidate the usual statistical techniques and make the classical sampling criterion of case independence impossible to attain” (p. 870). To address this problem, Handwerker and Wozniak compared the responses of an unbiased (random) sample with the responses of a convenience sample on both types of data. They found that, in response

to questions related to cultural data, the samples yielded identical findings and concluded that these findings “validate the practice of selecting informants because they are available for cultural domains” (p. 873).

The present study used the theoretical approach of cultural consensus analysis to determine: (a) if a group of leisure services practitioners agreed on specific meanings associated with leisure, (b) if a group of individuals who do not work in the field agreed on specific meanings associated with leisure, and (c) the “culturally correct” meanings associated with the concept of leisure for both groups. Parr (1996) argued that methods used by previous researchers assessing the importance and relevance of leisure to the body of knowledge associated with the leisure services field may have missed important connections between the two. Specifically, differences in rankings of importance and relevance of leisure among different groups of practitioners and academicians may in fact reflect differences in meaning. Differences in meaning can be identified by determining if a systemic culture pattern exists. That is, members of a culture will structure their knowledge or hold certain beliefs similar to other members of the culture, based on their experience as a member of the culture, and differently than nonmembers of the culture.

The specific research questions addressed in this study were:

1. Does a systemic culture pattern related to leisure meanings exist for public recreation practitioners and others outside the field?
2. How do public recreation practitioners and others outside the field characterize “leisure” and are there differences between the two groups in these characterizations?
3. How do public recreation practitioners and others outside the field characterize “leisure professionals” and are there differences between the two groups in these characterizations?
4. How do public recreation practitioners and others outside the field characterize the body of knowledge associated with leisure services and are there differences between the two groups in these characterizations?

Method

Participants

Questionnaires were mailed to all members of the Recreation Branch of the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association (response rate = 39.6%, $n = 108$). All were employed in public recreation with averages of 16 years of employment in the field and 7 years in their current jobs. The majority of the respondents indicated multiple areas of primary responsibility including programming, administration, and operations/facilities. The mean age of the respondents was 41.3 years, half were male, 90.4% were Caucasian, and 93.5% had a college degree. Forty seven percent of those with a college degree reported their college major as Leisure Studies/Recreation. Questionnaires were also mailed to a convenience sample of respondents outside the field of leisure services from two local adoption agencies (response rate = 60%, $n = 30$). The mean age of the non-recreation professionals was 39.7 years. They were predominantly female (93.3%), Caucasian (89.7%), and had completed a college degree (86.7%). None of the respondents outside the field had any significant work/volunteer experience or education in leisure services.

Materials

The survey instrument consisted of a three-section questionnaire: a thirty-item true/false section, a three-part free-list section, and a demographic section. The true/false statements

were developed from content found in a range of introductory leisure studies textbooks. Leisure was presented from a variety of perspectives including free time, activity, setting, and state of mind or attitude; leisure as an opportunity for community development; accessibility to leisure; leisure as consumption; leisure as a means to an end and an end in itself; leisure and choice/freedom; and the job of leisure service practitioners. The free-list component of the survey instrument asked the respondents to list as many words, concepts, or phrases which came to mind for *Leisure*, *Leisure Professional*, and pertaining to the *Body of Knowledge of the parks, recreation and leisure services field*. The instrument was pilot-tested with a group of graduate students to assess clarity, readability, and the possibility of multiple interpretations of the true/false statements. After group discussion and feedback, minor changes were made to the instrument.

Analysis

The true/false data were analyzed according to consensus modeling theory using Anthropac™ data analysis software (Borgatti, 1996a). In this study, the conceptual domain pertained to meanings associated with leisure. Each informant's responses were correlated with the responses of every other informant and the resulting matrix was then factor analyzed. If the bulk of the variability in responses can be explained in one factor, then the existence of a systemic culture pattern is concluded. According to Borgatti (1996b), a ratio of at least three to one of the first eigen value to the second is needed to conclude that cultural consensus exists. Anthropac™ also generates a "culturally correct" answer key by weighting the responses of the more reliable informants more heavily than less reliable informants. Informant reliability is calculated by correlating each informant's responses with every other informant's responses. Informants who are in high agreement are said to know more about the cultural domain and thus are more reliable (Romney, Weller, & Batchelder, 1986).

The free-list data were transcribed verbatim and then cleaned by standardizing forms of words, e.g., choices was changed to choice, enjoyable was changed to enjoyment, etc., creating a list of terms for each group. The recreation practitioners (RPs) generated approximately 91, 189, and 291 different words or phrases, respectively, in response to each of the keywords in the free-list task (leisure, leisure professional, and concepts related to the body of knowledge of the field). The nonrecreation professionals (NRPs) generated approximately 50, 73, and 128 different responses. The researchers combined the lists for each group and produced master lists for each keyword. The items in the master lists were reduced to categories containing similar terms and the data were recoded to reflect the categories. SPSS™ data analysis software was used to tabulate the frequencies for each category, for each group.

Results

Existence of Systemic Culture Patterns

To determine the existence of systemic culture patterns the true/false data were analyzed separately for each group. The responses of each individual were correlated with every other individual's responses and the resulting matrix was factor analyzed. Within each group, the respondents overwhelmingly agreed on the culturally correct answers, and both the recreation practitioners (RPs) and the non-recreation professionals (NRPs) generated the same culturally correct answers. (RPs' mean agreement = .78, ratio of the first eigenvalue to the second = 12.97; NRPs' mean agreement = .74, ratio of the first eigenvalue to the second = 9.48).

Characterizations of “Leisure” and the Existence of Differences

As noted above, both groups generated the same “culturally correct” answers in response to the true/false data (see Table 1). In addition, both groups generated similar lists in response to the keyword “leisure” (see Table 2). In terms of the true/false data, both groups supported the “multidimensionality” of leisure as evidenced by their agreement with such statements as “what is leisure for one person may not be leisure for someone else,” “leisure may have different meanings and value, dependent upon one’s cultural background,” and “leisure is an attitude that may be experienced in a variety of life domains such as work, education, family, religion, etc.” Furthermore, respondents indicated agreement with a range of interpretations of leisure. For example, both groups had a high level of agreement with the statements “Leisure is a state of mind,” and “Leisure is doing a favorite activity.”

Both groups indicated they did not believe that “leisure is the freedom to do whatever you want, whenever you want, with whomever you want.” However, their agreement that this statement was false was moderate at best (weighted frequencies for RPs and NRPs were 61.6% and 56.7%, respectively). Both groups believed that ethical choices and right conduct are important aspects of leisure (86.4% and 88.8%, respectively). The respondents’ beliefs regarding leisure as developmental action, particularly related to access, were mixed and somewhat contradictory. Both groups agreed that: (a) leisure is an important context for individuals to develop their full human potential (both groups >95%), (b) women (particularly working mothers) have less free time and thus less leisure (NRPs = 93.9%, RPs = 78%), and (c) some individuals and groups do not have equal access to leisure (NRPs = 93.6%, RPs = 83.3%). However, both groups agreed that leisure *is* available to all those who desire it, regardless of race, economic class, gender, or ability (NRPs = 88%, RPs = 73.9%). In comparing the levels of agreement between the two groups, differences of 15 percentage points or more were found for three items: (a) the item related to women’s leisure mentioned previously; (b) “work is productive and thus a high priority, while leisure is unproductive and thus a lower priority” (RPs = 93.5%, NRPs = 77.8% believe this to be false); and (c) “television viewing, as a leisure activity, is a factor in the decline of American culture in recent years” (RPs = 69.7%, NRPs = 86.8% believe this to be true).

In response to the keyword “leisure,” the top three responses for both groups were (a) passive/relaxation, (b) enjoyment/fun, and (c) activities. Items related to the categories of choice/freedom, state of mind/experience, and community, were each less than 3.5% of the total responses for each group (see Table 2).

Characterizations of “Leisure Professional” and the Existence of Differences

In response to the keyword “leisure professional,” the RPs replied most frequently in terms of roles, e.g., camp counselor, manager, or instructor (33.9%) and personal characteristics, e.g., athletic, creative, happy, friendly (28.6%). They responded least often in terms of skills or competencies, e.g., technical skills, educated, certified (12.5%). The NRPs responded with equal frequency in terms of roles, personal characteristics, and actions related to the job, e.g., facilitates play, budgets, links people to resources (27.6% for each category). The NRPs also responded least frequently in terms of skills or competencies (13.8%) (see Table 3).

The Knowledge Base of the Field and the Existence of Differences

The RPs responded most frequently to the “knowledge base of the field” in terms of management tasks, e.g., finance, human resource management, administration, legal issues, strategic planning (41.7%), and programs and programming, e.g., activities, programming, teach

TABLE 1 True/False Questions, “Culturally Correct” Responses, and Weighted Frequencies

Item	Culturally correct answer	NRPs weighted % n = 30	RPs weighted % n = 108
Leisure represents an important context for individuals to develop their full potential as human beings.	T	96.5	97.8
Leisure is available to all those who desire it, regardless of race, economic class, gender, or ability.	T	88.0	73.9
One of the most important things about leisure is the positive outcomes it produces for individuals and communities.	T	100.0	97.5
Women, particularly mothers who work outside the home, have limited free time and thus limited leisure.	T	93.9	78.0
Shopping is considered a leisure activity for most Americans.	T	65.4	69.0
Work is productive and thus a high priority, while leisure is unproductive and thus a lower priority.	F	77.8	93.5
Leisure is the “frosting on the cake;” a nice but nonessential component in the lives of humans.	F	84.0	95.3
Leisure is not important for its own sake, but for the positive outcomes it produces.	F	65.7	74.1
Leisure consists primarily of physical activities related to sports and/or exercise.	F	97.4	97.0
The job of a leisure services practitioner is to provide opportunities for citizens to come together in ways that will benefit the community.	T	61.9	60.6
A primary responsibility of publicly sponsored (i.e., tax supported) leisure services is to provide goods and services to customers who can afford to pay for them.	F	87.8	94.0
What is leisure for one person may not be leisure for someone else.	T	100.0	100.0
Leisure is an activity, place, or time period in which one can forget about stressful life situations.	T	93.9	96.0
Leisure is a state of mind or an experience.	T	93.9	95.2
Leisure may have different meanings and value, dependent on one’s cultural background.	T	100.0	98.4
Leisure is less important than work.	F	87.1	95.0
Leisure is a privilege for those who have earned it; reward for hard work.	F	82.5	92.4
Publicly sponsored (i.e., tax supported) leisure services are the only agencies that provide services on an equal basis to the entire population.	F	86.3	81.8

(Continued on next page)

TABLE 1 True/False Questions, “Culturally Correct” Responses, and Weighted Frequencies (*Continued*)

Item	Culturally correct answer	NRPs weighted % n = 30	RPs weighted % n = 108
Television viewing, as a leisure activity, is a factor in the decline of American culture in recent years.	T	86.8	69.7
Leisure usually requires spending money.	F	82.0	90.3
Leisure and quality of life are related concepts.	T	100.0	97.1
Leisure is an attitude that may be experienced in a variety of life domains such as work, education, family, religion, etc.	T	97.5	100.0
Leisure is the freedom to do whatever you want, whenever you want, with whomever you want.	F	56.7	61.6
The job of a leisure services practitioner is to satisfy the leisure needs of customers; i.e., provide the activities, goods, and services they desire.	T	87.6	97.1
Leisure is universal, existing across cultures and throughout history.	T	85.7	97.3
Intrinsic motivation means the reason for doing something in leisure is the satisfaction gained from doing it.	T	97.5	96.3
Leisure is free time.	T	70.9	66.5
Leisure is doing a favorite activity.	T	87.3	91.8
Ethical choices and right conduct are important aspects of leisure.	T	88.8	86.4
Some individuals and groups do not have equal access to leisure.	T	93.6	83.3

sports (16.9%). The NRPs responded most frequently in terms of management (19.7%), programs and programming (16.9%), and knowledge of people, e.g., human development, demographics, cultural diversity, and needs (15.2%). Only 6.4% of the RPs' responses were related to knowledge of people (see Table 4).

Discussion

The primary aims of this study were to determine if cultural consensus exists among leisure practitioners in regard to the meanings of leisure and if the meanings of leisure were somehow different from a group of people who did not work in the field. Do leisure practitioners have some unique understanding of the concept of leisure? Parr (1997) argued that by its very definition, a profession could be considered to have specific “cultural” knowledge of a conceptual domain that nonmembers of the culture would not share. As pointed out earlier, it has been argued that “our knowledge of leisure” is what separates professionals in the field from laypersons. In the terms of “systemic culture patterns,” leisure services professionals would attend to different bits of information, these bits of information would have shared meaning among members of the culture, and these bits of information may be organized in ways different from laypersons. This is not to say that laypersons know

TABLE 2 Partial List of Frequently Reported Responses to “Leisure”

Category	RP	NRP	Partial list of exemplars
	frequency % N = 461*	frequency % N = 133**	
Passive/Relax	21.1	19.1	Relaxation, no stress, not rushing, rest, unwind
Fun/Enjoyment	17.3	16.3	Fun, enjoyment, feeling good, pleasure, happiness
Activities	14.1	23.3	Interests, vacation, sports, watching TV, entertainment
Time	6.7	5.3	Free time, time free from obligation, personal time, time away from work, spend time
Development/ Outcomes	6.7	5.3	Rewarding, self-improvement, education, personal growth, enrichment
Active	6.1	3.8	Physical, healthy, exercise, adventure, exert energy
Social	5.6	6.0	Social, togetherness, meet people, fellowship, friends
Re-creation	5.6	8.3	Recharges, energize, rejuvenating, refresh, revitalization
Lifestyle	5.0	0.0	Lifestyle, life enhancing, needed for quality of life
Free choice	3.5	1.5	Voluntarily engaged in, freedom, free choice, locus of control, self-determination
Experience	3.0	1.5	State of mind, creative, mental, contented state of mind, intellectual

*101 participants responded to this keyword, generating 461 responses.

**29 participants responded to this keyword, generating 133 responses.

nothing about leisure, but that leisure practitioners know something more and/or something different about leisure. While the results of this study support a cultural consensus among these leisure professionals and among the nonprofessionals, the results do not support the notion that these leisure service professionals have a unique understanding of leisure.

The results of this study suggest that both groups support traditional views of leisure (free time, activity, and to a lesser extent, state of mind). The true/false data further suggest that both groups support a complex notion of the concept by agreeing with the different perspectives on leisure represented in the questions. However, at least a portion of the high levels of agreement in the true/false data may be explained due to the forced choice response set (true or false). In addition, the true/false questions represent a respondent’s agreement or disagreement with a statement presented by the researcher (akin to the external, definitional vantage point described by Kleiber and Mannell.) The free-list data represent whatever comes to mind in response to the keywords (an internal, definitional vantage point), and the more traditional view of leisure is evident in these data, i.e., leisure is associated with enjoyable, relaxing activities.

These practitioners see themselves in terms of the roles they play, more specifically, programmatic roles such as activity director, park planner, facilitator, or creator of recreational settings (33.9% of the responses). These roles are compatible with the development,

TABLE 3 Partial List of Frequently Reported Responses to “Leisure Professional”

Category	RP frequency % N = 448*	NRP frequency % N = 87**	Partial list of exemplars
Personal characteristics	28.6	27.6	Active, creative, fun, hard worker, idealist, efficient
Programmatic roles	20.5	23.0	Activity director, coach, jack of all trades, park planner, facilitator of service
Skills, competencies, job characteristics	12.5	13.8	Certified, educated, knowledge of standards, great job, understands the value of recreation, resource, misunderstood, strange schedule
Management roles	7.4	2.3	Accountant, administrator, planner, professional director, community leader
Educational roles	6.0	2.3	Advocate, educator, role model
Tasks-activities	9.2	23.0	Baseball, entertainment, facilitates play, sports, tourism, provide programs
Tasks-community	5.8	1.1	Brings folks together, community development, provides benefits to the community, public service
Other	4.9	3.4	All ages, CNN news, peer groups
Tasks-experiential	2.2	0.0	Broaden horizons, creates memories, provide enjoyment
Finances	1.6	0.0	Budgets, finances
Tasks-administrative	1.3	3.4	Evaluates, meetings, public relations, management, research

*105 participants responded to this keyword, generating 448 responses.

**28 participants responded to this keyword, generating 87 responses.

implementation, and management of enjoyable, relaxing activities, and further, these roles may, in varying degrees, be unique to someone working in the field. These practitioners also see themselves in terms of personal characteristics such as happy, flexible, confident, and conscientious (28.6%); characteristics that may apply to many leisure practitioners, but certainly would not be unique to employees in this field. Leisure is rarely mentioned in response to the keyword “leisure professional” or pertaining to the body of knowledge, and even then, only in the context of leisure activities or leisure time.

A limitation of the study is that both samples were predominantly Caucasian and that women were over represented in the sample of nonrecreation professionals. There is evidence that ethnic identity and gender play a role in the meaning and value of leisure (see Gramann & Allison, 1999; Shaw, 1999). But there is also anecdotal evidence to suggest that the view of leisure as free time activities is widely held (see e.g., Estes, 2000). Clearly, future research such as this should examine differences based on race/ethnicity and gender.

Implications

The significance of these findings lies in their ability to serve as a backdrop for the examination of potential implications for the delivery of leisure services. Our contention is that a

TABLE 4 Partial List of Frequently Reported Responses to the “Body of Knowledge”

Category	RP		NRP		Partial list of exemplars
	frequency	%	frequency	%	
	N = 848*		N = 178**		
Administration/ Management	41.7		18.0		Administration, management, budgeting, supervising, maintenance
Activities/ Programs	16.7		20.2		Activities, sports, athletics, programs, equipment
People	6.4		20.8		People, human nature, life span, personalities, socio-economic conditions
Personal characteristics	5.9		3.9		Accurate, caring, flexible, fun, innovative, task driven
Skills	4.6		1.1		Ability to work with others, fiscal skills, experience, writing skills, sports skills
Resource management	3.3		7.9		Environment, ecology, geography, green space, maintenance, natural resources, parks
Facilities & areas	2.9		5.6		Construction process, facilities, fitness center, recreation centers, swimming pools

*96 participants responded to this keyword, generating 848 responses.

**23 participants responded to this keyword, generating 178 responses.

definition of leisure as enjoyable, relaxing, free-time activities, may in fact reinforce a consumer model of service delivery. A move toward a consumer or marketing model of service delivery in the public sector has been documented (see, e.g., Slack, 1999 for a review). In this context, the job of a leisure services practitioner is to provide an array of products and services (activities, spaces, etc.), from which consumers choose those that best meet their needs. In turn, “. . . the consumer role reinforces the recipient’s reliance on professionals to program services and meet their leisure needs” (Glover, 2001, p. 3). However, this approach may serve to disconnect leisure from its potential to mean much more in the lives of humans and the societies in which they live. It does this, in part, by limiting discourse about leisure and its relation to leisure services to discussions of effective and efficient management of activities and spaces.

As Havitz (2000) pointed out, a marketing model does take into account diverse interests and that “marketers respect diversity as the basis upon which sound management strategies are constructed” (p. 45). This perspective is entirely consistent with leisure defined as enjoyable, free-time activities and leads to such questions as what kinds of products and services do working mothers want?, what kinds of products and services do middle-class suburbanites want?, and so on. This is summarized by Crompton and Lamb (1986): “. . . a marketing-oriented agency aims at ‘specific somebodies,’ that is targeted groups of people. . . . A marketing-oriented agency recognizes that different client groups have different wants which may justify the development of different services” (p. 14).

However, Scott (2000) identified four categories of practices and beliefs that he proposed keep leisure services agencies from serving disenfranchised groups, including a belief “that people are able to act freely on the basis of their leisure preferences. This belief narrows practitioners’ conception of recreation need . . .” (p. 136). An agency’s desire to develop and maintain customer loyalty further reduces recreation needs to those expressed by loyal

customers. As a matter of economic survival, responding to the needs of loyal customers makes sense, but further allows the array of services to be dictated by small numbers of “individuals and groups who have historically used an agency’s facilities and services” (p. 134). According to Samdahl (2000), “viewing leisure as something that is managed within the framework of a corporate economy, a business orientation obscures the most intriguing and powerful aspects of leisure and hides its hegemonic functions” (p. 128).

The aim of this study is not to demonstrate the value of one definition of leisure over another or the value of one model of service delivery over another, but to identify how the term leisure is construed and thus the meaning of “leisure” service provider. Having done so, channels for debate, as called for by Godbey (2000) may be opened; characterized by an openness to, and interaction with, multiple perspectives (Fox, 2000). How do conventional notions empower people in their leisure and/or limit people in their leisure expressions? Do these conventional notions reinforce stereotypes of what is deemed appropriate based on age, gender, mental or physical condition, race, etc. (Hemingway & Parr, 2000)? Expanding the discourse of leisure’s meaning and its relation to leisure services practice will connect it to larger and more significant concepts and issues than simply managing the “free-time activity business.”

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