



EMERALD POINTS

LEISURE LIFESTYLES

Organizing Everyday Life for
Fun and Fulfillment

ROBERT A. STEBBINS



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for Fun and Fulfillment

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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PREFACE

Lifestyle is one of those commonsense ideas that have been undergoing a parallel scientific elaboration, in this case for over 90 years. In popular usage, lifestyle is a person's or a group's "way of life" or "way of living." Lifestyle is of central concern in the common exhortation of "get a life" or start living a fuller or more interesting existence. This is a very general conception, however, which squares poorly with the observation that each person's lifestyle is typically unique in its total composition. The challenge facing social science is how to inject some order into this commonsense generality and how to turn it into a useful concept for guiding research while enriching our understanding of what it means. I strive here to meet this test, though only for the domain of leisure.

Learning more about people's lifestyles is worth the effort, be it those of work or leisure, if not the two combined. By doing this, we have learned through research that a person's lifestyle may be more or less agreeable or disagreeable, something to anticipate with eagerness or dread. This evaluation seems to hold more for work lifestyles than for those anchored in leisure, in good part because it is based on different criteria. Thus, work activities may be interesting, involve people fun to be with, and pay decently as well. The same is true about many leisure activities, where there is, however, little or no remuneration. Beyond such broad-gauged criteria lie the distinctive leisure lifestyles, which spring up around particular free-time activities. Examples are legion, including the serious ones of downhill skiing, chamber music playing, amateur archeology, orienteering, tennis, and museum volunteering and the casual ones of regular kaffeeklatsches, sessions of bingo, lunches with colleagues or nonwork friends or relatives, and outings of small walking groups.

Lifestyles in which one or more serious leisure activities figure consist of interests that are regularly pursued. Here, participants must routinely train, practice, rehearse, gather information, and otherwise become steadily involved with the amateur, hobbyist, or career volunteer activity of which they are enamored. The idea of lifestyle does not logically include sporadic involvements in an activity, as happens with some collectors, hikers, tourists (cultural

and mass), hobbyist bakers and do-it-yourself enthusiasts, casual players of games and sports, and people who knit.

In addition, leisure lifestyles are structured along the dimensions of time and space and, in the serious pursuits, structured along the lines of the social world in which every lifestyle is embedded. Relationships also shape our leisure lifestyles, covered in this book under the headings of “close relationships” and “acquaintanceships.” Finally, lifestyles in general – work and leisure together – because they are not naturally constituted of harmonious elements, force those who live them to wrestle with how to balance the incompatible elements. Thus, the final pages of this book center on the nature of and quest for an optimal leisure lifestyle. Achieving such harmony in one’s working lifestyle is omitted from this discussion based on the belief that the two domains are incomparable. Most work is obligatory, leaving the worker with few opportunities for finding additional positivity there or for redressing its disagreeable aspects as they impact on work or leisure. Not so with leisure itself, however, where much greater freedom exists in which to organize free time that can lead regularly to fun and fulfillment.

All told, this book sets out 10 criteria for examining leisure lifestyles, with the hope that future research thus oriented will provide us with a deep understanding of this important aspect of the modern use of free time. The criteria are solo/collective activities, close relationships, acquaintanceships, casual leisure, serious leisure, certain demographic correlates, time, space, social world, and optimal leisure lifestyle (life balance). The theoretic underpinning of all this is positive psychology (especially the fun, satisfaction, self-fulfillment dimension) and the serious leisure perspective.

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Thanks much,
Bob

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LEISURE LIFESTYLE THEORY AND RESEARCH

As a concept, lifestyle has many applications, most notably in life in general, in work, and in leisure. In everyday usage, we tend to intermix these three, as we talk about “way of life,” “work/life balance,” “everyday routine,” and similar conceptions. It is evident, too, in the common exhortation of “get a life” or start living a fuller more interesting existence. The definition of lifestyle guiding this book fits these broad images well:

...a distinctive set of patterns of tangible behavior that is organized around a set of coherent interests or social conditions or both, that is explained and justified by a set of related values, attitudes, and orientations and that, under certain conditions, becomes the basis for a separate, common social identity for its participants.

(Developed from Sobel, 1981; Veal, 1993; and Stebbins, 1997a)

Daria Miseng (2019, p. 236) summarizes these earlier conceptualizations as

...a characteristic of an individual's life activity that manifests itself in regular behavior patterns at various levels of this activity, namely: (1) an individual's general interaction with the world, (2) life strategies and tactics, and (3) cultural preferences. Describing lifestyle as a characteristic of life activity and a product of an individual's interaction with the environment, it is necessary to consider it as a manifestation of subjectivity and individuality, which can reflect personal life choices and self-actualization prospects in the form of a certain social quality in a specific context of relations with the world.

Discussion in this chapter is, however, confined to the leisure lifestyle, the way of life experienced in the domain of free time.

I start with a selective review of the theoretic literature on leisure lifestyles. Next I examine the approaches to studying those lifestyles. The concluding section of the chapter treats of lifestyle analysis as a broad explanation of participation in certain leisure activities. Throughout, I emphasize that these activities comprise the elemental foundation of the study of lifestyles experienced in free time.

TYPES OF LEISURE LIFESTYLES

Kelly (1999, pp. 144–147) observed that, since leisure easily lends itself to stereotyping, its classification according to stereotyped lifestyle has become a convenience (on common sense and leisure, see also Stebbins, 2017). Thus many lifestyle classifications are based on a single theme such as passive worker, “jock,” artist, high-risk enthusiast, outdoor person, and so on. A fundamental weakness of such typologies is their assumption that leisure is segregated and that a specialized area of free time is pursued independently for the rest of life. Apart from this approach to developing typologies, there exist a variety of types based on people’s patterns of consumption, which, as Kelly notes, have been constructed primarily to serve commercial marketing interests.

Thus theoretically based typologies in leisure are comparatively rare. Nonetheless, Gunter and Gunter (1980) developed one that merits wider citation than it has received. They considered leisure lifestyles along two dimensions: (1) time/choice/structure and type and (2) degree of psychological involvement in a particular activity. By cross-classifying these two dimensions, they generated four types. (1) First, there is *pure leisure lifestyle*, which the authors see more as an experience than as a specific type. Here there is little institutional structure constraining high involvement in the leisure activity, as in the thrill of the roller coaster ride or the flow felt in alpine skiing (assuming skier competence on the hill). (2) An *anomic leisure lifestyle* results when a highly structured institutional environment frames low involvement in leisure. This leads to disengagement, exemplified in recreational drug and alcohol use. (3) *Organized leisure lifestyle* is my term for the Gunters’ category of activities found in highly structured institutional environments that are also highly absorbing psychologically. The leisure of group-based amateurism falls here (e.g., community theater, sport teams, amateur orchestras, and dance groups). (4) An *alienated leisure lifestyle* arises from a weakly structured institutional environment, wherein leisure involvement is correspondingly low. This type is

the classificatory home of passive entertainment, as seen in the inveterate consumer of television and the regular patron of a neighborhood bar.

STUDYING LEISURE LIFESTYLES

Leisure studies specialists have done research on and theorized about lifestyle in at least four ways. One, they have shown an interest in how participants mobilize the resources needed to engage in a leisure activity (e.g., time, money, social support). Two, they have examined participants' ties to the social world and constituent organizations of a particular core leisure activity and how these sometimes facilitate and sometimes hinder involvement in that world. Such activity is defined as "the distinctive set of interrelated actions or steps that must be followed to achieve the outcome or product the participant finds attractive (e.g., enjoyable, satisfying, fulfilling)" (Stebbins, 2009a, pp. 5–7). Three, some lifestyle analyses have revolved around how the core leisure activity serves as a basis for personal and social identification with it. Four, the costs and rewards of such activity have been studied as these are experienced not only while participating in the activity itself but also while participating in the broader social milieu in which it is embedded. The last three approaches will be considered under the headings of discretionary time commitment and the three forms of leisure (serious, casual, and project-based), while the first, to which we turn next, will be examined independently.

MOBILIZING RESOURCES

Gary Fine (1989) sets out a theory of provisioning for leisure, which highlights the importance of key resources for undertaking particular free-time activities. Fine, whose theory centers on the collective side of provisioning, notes that these resources are provided by organizations of every sort. Individual interest in a given activity, he observes, depends at least as much on it being available and having a reputation of being fun as on personal need and preference. Leisure lifestyle is thus anchored in significant part in what is organizationally available to would-be participants.

Fine (1989, pp. 322–323) sets out eight assumptions on which his theory rests, each based on the broad presupposition that most leisure organizations wish to grow and, at the very least, maintain a steady existence.

- (1) Organizations with greater access to resources will be more successful than those with less access to resources.
- (2) The extent of participation in leisure organizations depends on the organization's ability to provide desired resources for members.
- (3) Those organizations that provide the most resources to individual members will be those that succeed.
- (4) Leisure organizations compete in a market, and those that are more efficient in providing resources will survive better than those that are not.
- (5) Leisure organizations must make their activities known to a general public; those that publicize themselves most effectively will be most likely to survive. Effective leisure organizations connect themselves to media outlets and forms of interpersonal recruitment.
- (6) Individuals participating in a leisure activity must have access to credible information; those organizations that are best able to provide this information will survive.
- (7) Individuals participating in a leisure activity must enjoy their relations with other participants; those organizations that are best able to facilitate this sociability will survive.
- (8) Individuals participating in a leisure activity need their own personal identity validated; those organizations that are best able to provide for identity validation will survive.

Even if not every leisure organization wants to grow or grow at the same rate, each wants to survive, notwithstanding a small number of members who might prefer its dissolution.

Fine goes on to discuss four key resources of leisure organizations. One is knowledge, information that enables competent execution of the leisure activity. The second is sociability, and many clubs offer occasional "sociable times" during a typical year, including dinners, picnics, parties, and receptions (e.g., weekly meetings of local Rotary chapters). Additionally, successful organizations allow time for informal interaction among members when attending meetings and other get-togethers. And many leisure activities have their identity symbols, something associated organizations can often provide, whether a cap, T-shirt, lapel pin, or bumper sticker. In prestigious organizations, the membership card is a primary identity symbol. Fourth, some leisure resources are copyrighted and made available only through an organization, as is true for barbershop music arrangements and guidebooks of certain hiking clubs.

This theory helps explain leisure provision in formal, legally established organizations, and informally organized leisure groups that meet regularly and have an elected executive structure, for example, president, treasurer, and secretary. Omitted from this provisioning theory are the many small formal and informal groups where members supply all of what they need to pursue the shared activity. Examples include musical duos, trios, and quartets; sports teams (e.g., bowling, basketball, ice hockey); bridge clubs; friendship groups meeting in bars and coffee houses; outdoors groups who hike, ski, fish, run, or cycle together. This set of leisure participants has its own variety of lifestyles, formed in part around the fact that the provision of necessities is an individual responsibility rather than an organizational one. The same may be said for solo leisure activities, as in golf, archery, bread making, amateur science, and the individual entertainment arts.

DISCRETIONARY TIME COMMITMENT

The organizational resources underlying leisure lifestyle serve as a complement to the resources individuals bring to the pursuit of their free-time activities. Chief among these personal resources are time, money, and social support. Much of the rest of this chapter centers on the first of these, with some attention also given to the third. Here discussion of time is organized around the criterion of *discretionary time commitment*. In leisure studies, free time has long been considered a key resource for people to manipulate to their personal ends.

Discretionary time commitment is an, essentially, non-coerced, allocation of a certain number of minutes, hours, days, or other measure of time that a person devotes, or would like to devote, to carrying out an activity (Stebbins, 2020, pp. 78–82). Such commitment is both process and product. That is people either set (process) their own time commitments (products) or willingly accept such commitments (i.e., agreeable obligations) set for them by others. It follows that disagreeable obligations, which are invariably forced on people by others or by circumstances, fail to constitute discretionary time commitments, since the latter, as process, rest on personal agency. In short, this conception of time commitment finds expression in leisure and the agreeable sides of work (which, in effect, are experienced as leisure; see Stebbins, 2004c).

Note, however, that we can, and sometimes do, make time commitments to carry out disagreeable activities, whether at work or outside it. Such commitments – call them *coerced time commitments* – are, obviously, not discretionary.

Hence, they fall beyond the scope of this discussion and, with some interesting exceptions, beyond the scope of leisure (but see later passage on leisure costs).

More generally, we commonly speak of past, present, and future time commitments (discretionary and coerced) at work, leisure, and in the realm of nonwork obligations. The kinds of time commitments people make help shape their work and leisure lifestyles and constitute part of the patterning of those lifestyles. In the realm of leisure, the nature of such commitments varies substantially across its three forms: serious, casual, and project-based leisure.

SERIOUS LEISURE PERSPECTIVE

Only those elements of the serious leisure perspective (SLP) are presented here that are needed to understand the place of leisure in the leisure lifestyle. In its most general sense, the Perspective is the conceptual framework that synthesizes three main forms of leisure showing, at once, their distinctive features, similarities, and interrelationships (the SLP is discussed in detail in Stebbins, 2007, 2012, 2015a, 2020). The Perspective also explains how the three forms – serious pursuits (serious leisure/devotee work), casual leisure, and project-based leisure – are shaped by various psychological, social, cultural, and historical conditions. Each form serves as a conceptual umbrella for a range of types of related activities (see Fig. 1.1). For a brief account of the SLP, see the history page at www.seriousleisure.net or, for a longer version, see Stebbins (2020).

Serious leisure is systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge, and experience (Stebbins, 1992, 2001c). The term was coined by the author (Stebbins, 1982) to express the way the people he interviewed and observed viewed the importance of these three kinds of activity in their everyday lives. The adjective “serious” (a word the respondents often used) embodies such qualities as earnestness, sincerity, importance, and carefulness, rather than gravity, solemnity, joylessness, distress, and anxiety. Although the second set of terms occasionally describes serious leisure events, they are uncharacteristic of them and fail to nullify, or, in many cases, even dilute, the overall fulfillment gained by the participants. The idea of “career” in this definition follows sociological tradition, where careers are seen as available in all substantial, complex roles,

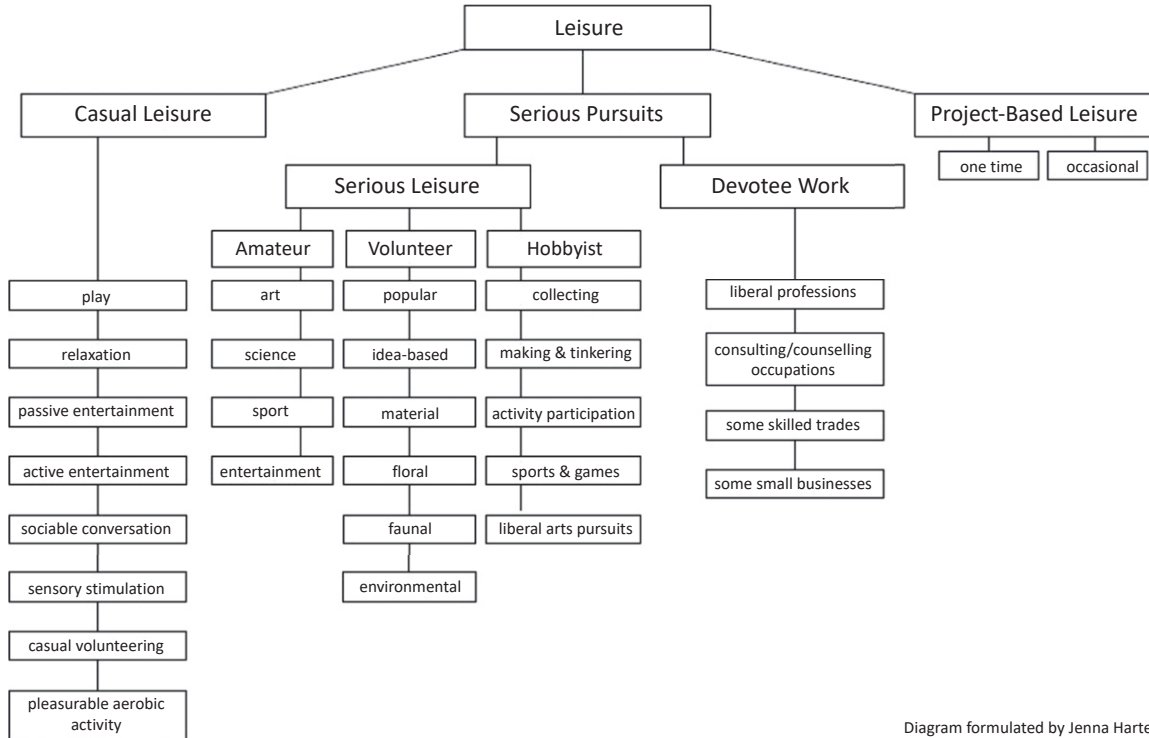


Diagram formulated by Jenna Hartel

Fig. 1.1. The Serious Leisure Perspective.

including those in leisure. Finally, as we shall see shortly, serious leisure is distinct from casual leisure and project-based leisure.

Amateurs are found in art, science, sport, and entertainment, where they are invariably linked in a variety of ways with professional counterparts. The two can be distinguished descriptively in that the activity in question constitutes a livelihood for professionals but not for amateurs. Furthermore, most professionals work full-time at the activity, whereas most amateurs pursue it part-time. The part-time professionals in art and entertainment complicate this picture; although they work part-time, their work is judged by other professionals and by the amateurs as of professional quality. Amateurs and professionals are linked in and therefore defined by a system of relations linking them and their publics – “the P-A-P system” (discussed in more detail in Stebbins, 1979, 1992, Chapter 3; Stebbins, 2020, pp. 22–23). Hobbyists lack this professional alter ego, suggesting that, historically, all amateurs were hobbyists before their fields professionalized (see the five types in Fig. 1.1). Both types are drawn to their leisure pursuits significantly more by self-interest than by altruism, whereas volunteers engage in activities requiring a more or less equal blend of these two motives.

Volunteering is uncoerced help offered either formally or informally with no or, at most, token pay and done for the benefit of both other people (beyond the volunteer’s family) and the volunteer (Stebbins, 2015a). This conception of volunteering revolves, in significant part, around a central subjective motivational question: it must be determined whether volunteers feel they are engaging in an enjoyable (casual leisure), fulfilling (serious leisure), or enjoyable or fulfilling (project-based leisure) core activity that they have had the option to accept or reject on their own terms. A key element in the leisure conception of volunteering is the felt absence of moral coercion to do the volunteer activity, an element that, in “marginal volunteering” (Stebbins, 2001a), may be experienced in degrees as more or less coercive. The reigning conception of volunteering in nonprofit sector research is not that of volunteering as leisure, but rather volunteering as unpaid work. The first – an *economic* conception – defines volunteering as the absence of payment as livelihood, whether in money or in kind. This definition, for the most part, leaves unanswered the messy question of motivation so crucial to the second definition, which is a *volitional* conception.

Serious leisure is further defined by six distinctive qualities, qualities uniformly found among its amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers. One is the occasional need to *persevere*. Participants who want to continue experiencing the same level of fulfillment in the activity have to meet certain challenges from time to time. Thus, musicians must practice assiduously to master difficult