In the first chapter, leisure was defined generally as activity chosen primarily for the experience. It is assumed that some satisfaction, even "fun," is anticipated. That is adequate as a beginning, but there is much more. The concept of leisure, after all, has a long history. It was important to the classic Greek philosophers and has commanded considerable attention ever since. As a consequence, there have been a variety of conceptual approaches that often appear to be in conflict.

Defining Leisure

Definitions are always partly a matter of perspective. That perspective may be based on certain philosophical presuppositions, cultural biases, or personal preferences. Some definitions are useful for particular purposes. Leisure, never a very specific concept, has been defined in a number of ways.

Leisure as Time

Leisure is approached as time beyond that required for subsistence, maintenance, rest, and other necessities of living. When international research has employed daily diaries of time use, it was assumed that labeling activities permitted them to be designated as work, maintenance, or leisure. However, walking could be for many purposes, cooking for pleasure, and reading required for work preparation. The term "discretionary" was then included in many definitions. Leisure was seen as "free time" that was more than residual or left over; it was a matter of choice. The problem with this was obvious: How do you know? Does the seemingly simple measure of time require knowing what is going on in the mind of the actor? This complication led to other approaches. The concept of free time, however, remains important because it allows for simple comparisons. Teens have more free time than do young adults, single men than married, the retired than those in mid-career, and employed single mothers least of all. The leisure as remaining time approach is limited by the fact that all obligations are seldom completed. The leisure as discretionary time model is limited by the problem of constraints that must be overcome to engage in most leisure. Nevertheless, for comparison purposes the concept remains useful.
Leisure as Activity

Leisure is commonly assumed to be defined by the form of the activity. This, too, is useful for such purposes as survey research. Checklists of activities—going to concerts, playing basketball, watching TV, etc.—are combined with some measure of frequency to obtain a profile of a person’s leisure. Like time, the results can be quantified and compared: Males engage in more team sports than do females. Women are more involved in the arts than are men. The problems are also similar. Is a pickup basketball game leisure after school but not if required by an educational class? Is swimming leisure at the beach but not when a health assignment after a heart attack? Is a cocktail party leisure on weekends but not at a sales conference? Is shopping leisure sometimes but not when filling the weekly grocery list? It is true that leisure is usually doing something that has a recognized form. Further, some forms are leisure more often than not. But there is nothing, except perhaps daydreaming, that is always leisure. The activity approach, like time, is useful, but is not an adequate definition. Meaning is more important than the form. Joffre Dumazedier proposed an activity definition based on meaning:

Leisure is activity—apart from the obligations of work, family, and society—to which the individual turns at will, for either relaxation, diversion, or broadening his (sic) knowledge and his spontaneous social participation, the free exercise of his creative capacity.

Such a definition, however, includes the social context and the meaning to the actor, a far cry from just listing the name of the activity. Such definitions have led to attention to meaning as well as form.

Leisure as a State of Mind

The most extreme response was to assert that the form of the activity is irrelevant; only the meaning counts. Leisure is defined by attitude or the state of consciousness, not form, time, or place. Leisure is defined by meaning to the actor. In the classic book Of Time, Work, and Leisure, deGrazia refers to leisure as a rare condition, a “state of being, a condition of man (sic), which few desire and fewer achieve.” This is more than feeling good. It is a condition that connotes freedom and self-fulfillment. Psychologists tend to take a more attitudinal approach. Leisure is activity in which the actor perceives freedom, intrinsic motivation, and non-instrumentality. An activity is leisure when the actor feels it has been chosen primarily for its own sake, for the experience itself. From this experiential perspective, then, leisure is located in the consciousness of the individual, not in the social context or form of the activity. It can occur at any place and at any time. Anything that produces this feeling, the use of drugs for example, may be leisure regardless of longer-term meanings or outcomes.

Leisure as a Quality of Action

This approach begins by asserting that leisure is more than a state of mind; it is doing something. That something may be mental and imaginative as well as physical. It may be
solitary or socially involved. But it involves doing something in a real time and place. It may focus on the experience, but is in a context that includes the self taking action in a defined environment. It is not just feeling free; it involves real choice, even in the midst of all kinds of limits and constraints. It is the quality of the activity; its "playfulness," that makes it leisure. It may take place anywhere and at any time, but it has a quality of self-contained meaning. It is related to work, family, education, the economy, government, religion, personal development, sexuality, and almost everything else. Yet it has distinguishing dimensions of action with its primary meaning in the experience.

Leisure as a Dimension of Life

It would seem evident at this point that it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw clear and consistent boundaries around anything people do and call it leisure. It is experience, but in context. It has form, but is not defined by the form. It takes place in time, but defines the time rather than being defined by it. One possibility is that leisure is not a clearly defined domain of activity or consciousness at all. Rather, it is a dimension of life. It is an adjective more than a noun, a quality more than a thing. Some research has found just this: A dimension of being done primarily for the experience in the midst of all kinds of activity including family responsibilities and work. Leisure is the expressive dimension of life that may occur or be constructed in any context.

Themes of Leisure

It would seem evident that there may be no one "best" definition of leisure. Rather each has some values and some limitations. It is usually best, then, to refer to "leisure time," "the experience of leisure," "activity," or even "play" as a quality of action. There are, however, certain themes that are persistent. The first is as old as Aristotle who referred in Book I of the Politics to "time free from the necessities of work." Some understanding of freedom runs through most definitional approaches. This does not, however, mean freedom from all limits, regularities, and constraints. Leisure is in contexts that are integral parts of its meaning. It is freedom to act, not freedom from form and context.

The other persistent theme of defining leisure is its focus on the meaning or quality of the experience. Leisure has a "playful" quality in that its meaning is primarily in the experience. The general agreement begins to break down, however, when those qualities are to be identified. What does it mean to be "free" in a scheduled sports contest with boundaries, rules, officials, priced tickets, and performance expectations? What does "play" mean for the mother at a picnic for which she has spent hours in preparation and has to watch out for the safety of four children? What does it mean to be "intrinsically motivated" when we are practicing skills for a later event or performance? The focus may be on the experience, but leisure experiences are more complex in their meanings than any simple slogan can encompass.

What is clear is that leisure may be almost anything at any time and any place. This means that leisure is not always positive and constructive. There is a negative side to anything, including leisure. Leisure may be wasteful, destructive, and dangerous. It is gam-
bling as well as religious contemplation. It may involve the sexual use of other persons as well as a fully committed and caring communion. It may be cruel as well as compassionate. And as already proposed, it may take place at the workplace as well as the playing field, and in family time as well as vacation time. As such it may well be time, activity, experience, a quality of action, or a dimension of life. Or it may be all, and more.

Defining Play

"Play" is usually used to refer to the activity of children. Children play and adults have leisure. Of course, we know that animals play as well. Historically and philosophically, however, the term "play" is far more encompassing. Yet, we do speak of being "playful" as a quality of our activity. Play connotes spontaneity, openness, action, and intrinsic satisfaction. Play is said to be developmental for children for whom play is their central activity, the primary context of learning. But it seems to drop out adult reference.

Like leisure, play may be seen as a quality of action. Johan Huizinga developed a perspective that argues that play is a fundamental human activity. He stresses the enjoyment of play as well as its intrinsic motivation. He adds that play is "out of the ordinary," a sphere of action that creates a temporary reality. It may have order and beauty, but is not for any preset external purpose. Just because of its openness, play is fundamental for creativity. It is in play that the innovative ideas are produced that become the basis of social, cultural, and even economic development. In its own created order, play is the context for exploration of the "not yet." This is true for the person as well as for the society.

Play may be spontaneous or structured. It may incorporate both freedom and order. In fact, it is in a context of order that we are most likely to experience what Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow." Flow is a heightened state of consciousness in which there is total involvement and immersion in the current activity. When skill and the challenge meet, externals disappear in the highly satisfying experience. Flow may take place anywhere and is the quality that draws us back to challenging and creative activity. Other thinkers have identified play as the context of all sorts of deeply satisfying, personally developmental, and socially significant action.

One approach would be that play is the quality of action in creative, fulfilling leisure. Another would be that any activity, creative or destructive, that is open in its outcomes and focused on the immediate experience would be called "play." In any case, play is not confined to childhood. Rather, play is activity with a childlike "lightness" of style, is expressive primarily for its own sake, and creates its own world of meaning. We may be playful at work, with others, in rule-bound games or projects, and for brief moments as well as longer events. Play, then, becomes a quality of action or even a dimension of life. It is fundamental to our species' nature.

Defining Recreation

Recreation may be defined in much the same way as leisure, inclusive and multifaceted. Its Latin root, *recreatio*, refers to restoration. Re-creation connotes a preparation for something
else, usually work, family tasks, or civic responsibilities. Recreation, then, becomes a social issue. It is organized for social purposes, a means to the economic end of productivity, the personal goal of health, the social aim of building relationships, or some kind of growth or learning. As such, recreation may be required activity in a school program or sponsored by a corporation concerned about the physical and mental health of its employees.

Recreation, then, is organized activity with the purposes of the restoration of the wholeness of mind, body, and spirit. It presupposes some other activity that tires, depletes, or deteriorates that wholeness. Leisure has the language roots signifying freedom and recreation connotes restoration. As such, recreation becomes a social institution. It is intended to benefit the society through the health/wholeness of its citizens. It may be rest from demanding work or preparation for those demands. It may be mental, physical, or spiritual. It may be routinized or unique. It may be highly organized, even a drill, or relaxed and unstructured. But it has external purpose, measurable or immeasurable benefits. Recreation is defined as “voluntary non-work activity that is organized for the attainment of personal and social benefits including restoration and social cohesion.”

**Mini-Debate: Leisure Is a Human Universal**

Is there any society and culture without leisure? It may depend on how leisure is defined. If leisure is clearly set-apart and demarcated time, then there have been relatively simple societies without such organization and social boundaries. In some societies, leisure is woven throughout the day in ways that do not draw clear lines between work and leisure. If leisure is defined as a quality of action or even a dimension of life, then it seems unlikely that it would be absent from any human life or culture.

**Yes**

- Leisure is really another way of referring to a fundamental quality of human, and even animal, existence. To be human is to play. Leisure is inclusively viewed as this quality of action or life. As such, it is impossible to conceive of life without it.

- Leisure and play are such basic dimensions of life that they are found throughout the life course. Infants play simple response games before they speak or walk. Children play in more complex ways and learn how to be social actors in the process. There is no age that abandons leisure as irrelevant or unimportant. From an individual perspective, play/leisure are deeply expressive of our natures.

- From a social perspective, leisure is universal in its bonding function. It is in leisure that we develop, strengthen, and extend many of our most important relationships. What is a friendship or a family without leisure/play as the context of exploring new facets of relationships and expressing enduring ones?

- We are not automatons or robots. Rather, it is human to be expressive and free. We concentrate on the experience of an action so that we may be truly ourselves. We cannot go through life always taking orders, obeying rules, and conforming to every little social expectation. We need to be able to be novel, different, ourselves. We need to immerse ourselves in what we do, even experience flow, to be more than totally scripted beings.
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- Any culture has to be open to what is new, creative, and different. In work, there are predetermined outcomes. In leisure, we can attempt the different and see what results. We may play anywhere designing at the computer and in the wilderness. In any case, we are trying out, testing, and realizing possibilities that we cannot attempt in the routinized and prescribed world. In leisure, we create the culture, play with ideas, and test seemingly inconsistencies in ways that recreate the future.

No

- A society must have an economic surplus to have leisure. If both children and adults are at a level of economic scarcity so severe that time is completely devoted to survival, then there is no time or energy for leisure. Pacific island cultures may have leisure woven throughout the day in their relative abundance and simplicity. But the Sahel desert in Africa is quite another matter. Even families may compete for scarce food in a famine. In extreme privation, there is no time or place for leisure.

- Leisure as we know it is a product of the industrial revolution. Factories, the efficient division of labor, and economic surpluses produced the designated times that made leisure possible. Productivity growth has now led to a society that devotes more and more time to the consumption of leisure goods and services. Leisure as the legitimate reward for productivity is part of an economic/social system that separates work and leisure. Further, postindustrial economic expansion identifies leisure as an economic sector in which consumption must be expanded. Leisure, then, is very much a product of a particular set of organizations and even ideologies.

- No matter how widespread play/leisure is, it is not basic. Most fundamental to human life are primary commitments such as work and primary relationships such as family. Businesses run efficiently with nothing arranged for leisure. Social bonding can take place as families perform their necessary tasks of maintenance and nurturing. Leisure is secondary to what is necessary and, therefore, not a human universal.

- As suggested by the multiplicity of definitions of leisure in this chapter, there is no consensus as to what leisure is anyway. Anything that vague and uncertain can hardly be a human universal. Play may be a human dimension, but leisure requires time and place. It takes particular forms in any culture. It is, thus, a construction of a particular time rather than a basic dimension of life. Further, the forms of leisure differ so widely among different cultures that finding the common elements that would make it a universal would seem an impossible task. As will be demonstrated in the next debate, even "freedom" is problematic. Leisure is a social construction of its specific culture rather than a human universal.

This debate illustrates how important definitions are for an exchange of ideas. Just how leisure is defined sets the terms of argument. Opponents who agree on terms may no longer be in opposition.

Debate: Leisure Is Free Choice

The common definitions of leisure all make some reference to freedom, free choice, or at least discretionary time. How realistic is this assumption of freedom?
Yes

- The classic definitions of leisure from Aristotle on refer to freedom. To be realistic, this does not mean a total freedom from all constraints or limitations. Rather, it means that there is a real element of choice. It is freedom to engage in the activity or not. Leisure is distinct from necessity. That is its distinguishing characteristic. Leisure is chosen because of anticipated satisfaction in the experience, not because of social or economic requirement.

- Leisure is personal. It may involve other people, the culture, and forms of activity. It is, however, primarily personal. Its meanings are for the person. As such, there is a fundamental freedom. Over time, individuals develop leisure styles and commitments that fit them. Even longer-term meanings are developmental. We engage in activities because we are becoming something more in the process. If the activity is a social requirement, it is not leisure.

- Leisure is separate from our work, family, and community roles. It is never required by those roles. Dumazedier’s definition is a standard for such separation. Leisure is “apart from” the necessities of our social roles.

- Leisure is a special world. As in Huizinga’s approach to play, leisure creates its own separate world of activity. The playing field, the stage, and other leisure venues are special for that activity. They have their own boundaries that make free and creative activity possible.

- From one perspective, leisure is a state of mind. It is a special consciousness that includes a sense of freedom. Without that sense, there is no leisure, only an extension of all the obligations of life. For example, a picnic is just another chore for the mother/caregiver/manager unless she feels that it is an experience of freedom. That’s what makes it leisure.

- When we define leisure as time, it is the “free” element that makes it leisure. It is “discretionary” time in that we have multiple options for its use. When there is only one possibility, that is not leisure. Leisure is “freedom to” do it or not.

- Further, leisure is experience for its own sake. It is what goes on in the process that is defining. For example, we may experience leisure with almost anyone. There is “family leisure,” but it is not all nonwork activity when other family members are present. When caregiving and nurturing expectations allow for no choice, then even beach volleyball may not be leisure at all.

- It is, then, a matter of definition. Leisure from this perspective is defined by freedom. The term “existential” refers to selfhood that is created by decision and action. It is the existential element in human activity that creates leisure. And it is that element that makes it profoundly human.

No

- It may be a matter of definition. Modern definitions are of two types. One argues that leisure is the product of modern society with its surpluses and division of labor. As such, leisure is not free but has to be earned. It is a reward of the system, not a human quality.
The second type of definition argues that leisure is a product of a particular culture. (See the previous mini-debate.) It is a social construction that incorporates the elements of that culture. Greek leisure was based on a slave system. Contemporary leisure takes place in a market economic system. Even the language we use to think about it is from a particular history of a particular culture. "Freedom" is what we call it; not a condition of life.

- Leisure is learned. We not only develop interests and learn skills in our particular communities, families, environments, and schools, but we learn from our friends and companions. We are not free in the sense of being independent and autonomous. We are products of our histories with all their limitations. Especially if we have been subject to some deprivation due to discrimination, we carry that lack of freedom with us all our lives. We learn in directed and limited ways.

- Leisure is contextual. How can we really be free when gender, race, economic class, culture, and everything else have shaped what we are able to learn and do? We do not magically become separate from the rest of our lives in our leisure. Rather, we are products of social conditions that impact everything we are and do. The separate world of leisure and play is an illusion, not a reality of life. Certainly not life in the real, crowded, segregated, and separated city.

- Leisure is role-related. We do most of our leisure with those who are related to us in other roles. We are still family members, workers, and community figures in our leisure. There are all kinds of expectations that limit and direct what we do in leisure, how we do it, and whom we do it with. Studies of the "leisure" of employed mothers demonstrates what a struggle it is to secure a little time separate from those work and family roles. Often we can gain separation from such roles only in some act of dramatic abandonment. Certainly, with most leisure activity taking place in the residence, we are not free of our roles among those whose expectations for us never go away.

- Considerable leisure is highly structured. Sports and games have rules, admission controls, spatial lines, and position expectations. How we play is anything but free. We either do it consistent with the rules or we are out of the game. To a lesser degree, almost all activity has structures. We cannot act freely, any way we please. Perhaps only the imagination is really free, and even that is subject to all the "rights and wrongs" that we have learned throughout life.

- What is "free time" when our obligations are never entirely completed? We always have some maintenance undone—the laundry or the dishes. We always have some things that others would like us to do. The obligations of life are endless. We may be able to manufacture some time for play, but it is never free. There is always a price to pay in what we leave undone. If free time were really what is left over after all else is completed, we would surely have no leisure at all.

- Even leisure as escape presupposes that there are obligations and expectations that remain in our consciousness. There has to be something to escape from, something that is still there. Leisure is mixed into life, into the realities of life that make demands on us. Further, in our leisure there are all the timetables, clothing requirements, and elements of
acceptability that we must meet in order to participate. We are never free in the sense of separation from everyone and everything else.

- Leisure has commitments. Some commitments are to ourselves. We promise ourselves to practice the piano an hour a day, exercise three times a week, or spend more time with our children. Some commitments are to others. We make dates, join teams, and accept responsibilities. Once we make those commitments, we are not free to do whatever we like unless we are willing to pay some price. We break commitments at a cost to ourselves and often to others. Insofar as leisure is social, it is hardly free.

Is it all a matter of definition? Or are there realities of life today that place so many limitations on our actions that the very idea of "freedom" is a deception? If so, then what do we mean by leisure? We will explore various aspects of that question in other chapters.

C U S S I O N  Q U E S T I O N S

1. Which definition of leisure seems best for you personally? Why?
2. Which is best for research purposes? Why?
3. What are the most important limits to freedom in leisure?
4. How do we develop our ideas of leisure and play?
5. Can leisure ever take priority over life’s obligations? How?
6. Do we have to “get away” to have leisure?
7. How much of our leisure is recreation?
8. Are play and leisure essentially the same?
9. Is there “good leisure” and “bad leisure”?

S O U R C E S

NOTES