

LEISURE LIFESTYLES

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Organizing Everyday Life
for Fun and Fulfillment

BY

ROBERT A. STEBBINS

University of Calgary, Canada



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Malaysia – China

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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.

Robert A. Stebbins
Calgary, Canada

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