

Chapter 12

Afterthoughts on Leisure and Future Research Directions

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The first main purpose of this book was to provide an overview of recent empirical and conceptual work on leisure and positive psychology. Overall, the chapters in this book provide an insightful and broad perspective of leisure across the lifespan and highlight new and emerging perspectives. At the end, our final aim is to articulate those perspectives around the importance of basic and applied research regarding positive leisure science (PLS). In this chapter, we will consider and discuss some of the conclusions that have emerged from this book. We choose those that, in particular, open new issues and directions to leisure future research.

In 2000 the *Journal of Leisure Research* published a special issue that invited numerous scholars, novice and veteran, to discuss issues related to the then past, present, and future of leisure studies. It is the hope that this volume of edited chapters continues that discussion and contributes new ideas and directions for the future that can encourage the emergence of new theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and practices about leisure.

This book was presented in three parts (besides this fourth part where this 12th chapter is included). In part one, authors discussed the central role and the impact of leisure in positive living, stressing the broad concepts of positiveness and lifespan; authors in part two considered the role and impact of leisure in positive human growth and development, and in part three, authors highlighted the role of leisure in the pursuit of well-being and quality of life across the developmental spectrum.

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Across the chapters, a diversity of perspectives and methodologies were evident, but all together they shared the conviction of the importance and usefulness of leisure as a main variable for the understanding of human development. A common thread across authors included the need to understand the best way of living through leisure, regardless (or because) of cultural features, individuality, and social structures or constraints. Each author focused on unique topics toward that common thread.

In the first part of the book, Robert Stebbins concluded that leisure is today's only "happy science." He went on to advocate for its importance both theoretically and practically in shedding light on, and offering services to facilitate, positive leisure science. Also in the first part, Douglas Kleiber discussed the process of reconstruction and how leisure is redeemed throughout life, with a focus on later life. He posited that the processes of engagement and disengagement are dialectically related to leisure, urging consideration of the possibilities afforded by societies for redeeming leisure in later life through three main processes: preretirement education, intergenerational civic engagement, and service tourism.

In the second part of the book, leisure was considered a main experience, activity, or context responsible for the emergence of a positive and worthy life. In this part, authors considered that leisure was associated with different concepts such as developmental assets and healthy life styles, identity, and cultural and individual meanings.

Focused on prevention and youth, Linda Caldwell and Monique Faulk highlighted the positive impact of leisure in preventing risk and promoting adolescents' health, well-being, and positive development. Their chapter addressed the paradox that leisure can be associated with both positive and negative outcomes for youth. They emphasized the need to analyze three related elements of leisure (experience, activity, and context) and to use these elements in leisure education interventions to reduce risky behavior and promote positive outcomes.

In a somewhat similar vein, a particular focus on leisure experience was contributed by Teresa Freire, who described how leisure subjective experience and identity developmental processes can combine to contribute to the positive and healthy development of adolescents. As for new challenges, she highlighted the use of leisure in daily life as a facilitator of adolescents' development and the need to articulate different theoretical perspectives to improve research as well as intervention aimed at promoting positive development.

From a more contextual point of view, Ramon Zabriskie and Tess Kay highlighted the impact of family context in the construction of a leisure lifestyle. Their model, which offers a framework within which the relationship between family functioning and family leisure can be scrutinized across different family types, is a challenge to developmental questions as well to intervention processes.

Finally, Marta Bassi and Antonella Delle Fave addressed context from a cultural perspective. They described the importance of exploring the developmental contexts of unstructured activities as opportunities for discovering new resources, discovering self-determining motives, and for finding new meanings in life. Bassi and Delle Fave underlined the need to design interventions to address psychological dependence on artifacts and externally structured environments, which characterize western societies.

In part three of the book, leisure was discussed as a source of well-being and quality of life across the developmental spectrum. In this part, authors touched upon

different domains of leisure such as therapeutic recreation, flow and quality of life, physical activity, children and fatherhood, and finally the broad concept of happiness. As in part two, a diversity of perspectives and methodologies was present, but all together these chapters identified the importance and usefulness of leisure as a main variable for the understanding of well-being.

The issue of recreation is considered in depth through the contribution of Colleen Hood and Cynthia Carruthers. These authors concluded that leisure is an important avenue to develop well-being. Their focus on practitioners included the use of the Leisure and Well-being Model (LWM), a model theoretically and empirically based, to provide direction to support individuals' engagement in leisure for facilitating well-being. Their interest in people with disabilities opened a diverse range of new challenges, both for research as well as for practice.

Kim Perkins and Jeanne Nakamura showed how flow experiences greatly enhance one's quality of life. Flow experiences in leisure develop skills and strengths differently from other experiences, contributing to enjoyment of life. These authors underscored how the particular characteristics of flow experiences need to be considered and how further research is needed to clarify how experiences or emotions shift within flow. Perkins and Nakamura suggested that the challenge for research is to study how leisure provides an excellent context for developing new findings regarding the dynamics of positive and negative factors in producing flow, in particular, and enriching experiences, in general.

A specific focus on health and physical exercise is provided in the chapter by Jorge Mota et al. They underlined the need for participation in regular physical activity during adolescence in order to prevent chronic diseases in adulthood. Their contributions provide new suggestions and challenges for the effective creation of recreational opportunities for active participation both for boys and girls. The role of social and environmental opportunities is highlighted in terms of future research.

John Jenkins focused on a specific population and relationship, analyzing children and fatherhood, and the role of leisure in the positive parenthood process of nonresident fathers. He described how leisure is an important area of research not only for a broad understanding of the relation between nonresident father-child contact but also a very rich area of study for leisure studies grounded in the analysis of social relationships.

Finally, Jeroen Nawijn and Ruut Veenhoven highlighted the relation between the two main broad concepts of happiness and leisure, showing how leisure is potentially very important to individuals' sense of well-being and how it can positively affect happiness. They suggested more research on project-based leisure and serious leisure would be important future directions. Furthermore, they suggested that research be conducted in different cultures and within countries' structures, in order to avoid standardized conclusions based on developed countries. They also highlighted leisure as a main context for testing the study of happiness and advocated for the usefulness of longitudinal methodologies to better disentangle the relation between leisure and happiness.

Having considered all authors' contributions and their commonalities with regard to a positive leisure science, we now would like to consider issues that in particular piqued our interest and motivated additional research questions beyond those explicitly addressed by chapter authors. These issues and ideas are at the margins of empirical

evidence and are, at this point, thought experiments to contribute to future research directions, defining the main issues for the positive leisure science perspective. We discuss these next.

The Relevance Question Again: Is Anybody Listening?

A decade ago, Shaw (2000) challenged leisure researchers to reflect on whether “we” only are talking to ourselves, and if so, why was no one else listening? We (Freire and Caldwell) give a cautious nod to some good movement in the right direction in terms of leisure researchers being “listened to” by non-leisure researchers. In increasing numbers, leisure scholars are publishing in non-leisure journals, and leisure scholars are being cited in other fields as well as being brought to the interdisciplinary table. The state of the art of leisure science as it exists today, however, still falls short of its potential contribution to the study of human-environment interaction. Henderson (2010) highlighted some approaches to move forward and prevent the decline of leisure studies in the twenty-first century. These approaches included embracing changes, articulating a collective identity, recognizing positive contributions of leisure, and identifying collaborations between researchers and practitioners across disciplines and professions. Acting on these approaches, in addition to others that we discuss, may entice others to listen.

Current perspectives on science and methodological advances challenge leisure scholars even further. Scientists from all disciplines work in an era where scientific fields and related boundaries are at the same time strictly defined and strongly interdependent. Being a multidisciplinary field by nature, leisure researchers have come to study leisure from various disciplinary perspectives, but it is rare that a true interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach is taken. This latter approach would undoubtedly contribute to leisure’s relevance by unraveling how leisure is one of a complex set of variables and causal pathways to conditions of human existence. In her 2000 article, Shaw observed that perhaps the reason no one was listening was due to the lack of relevance of our work and implicated the “leisure as the dependent variable” problem.

Reflected in this series of chapters, leisure scientists are beginning to study leisure as the independent variable and more importantly, an interdependent variable. As an independent variable, leisure can be viewed as a potential predictor of a series of life outcomes, including both physical and emotional health, for example. As an interdependent variable, other questions such as how work/leisure balance affects different groups of people across the lifespan can be considered. We do not advocate an abduction of research on leisure as a dependent variable, but we do strongly encourage studies that are based on a broader interdisciplinary perspective.

Social ecological theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) is a grand theory that provides a conceptual framework for placing pieces of the human experience puzzle in an attempt to better understand correlational or causal mechanisms for human-environment interaction. Although it is extremely difficult to test the entire

framework due to its complexity, as methods and analytic tools become increasingly sophisticated, this theory takes on new importance for leisure scientists. Social ecological theory (SET) provides a framework to understand or model how leisure is woven in the fabric of daily existence by considering how individual characteristics (e.g., motives, values, attitudes, and neurological functioning) influence and are influenced by social relationships (e.g., parents, siblings, peers, and teachers), which influence and are influenced by environmental, social, political, and religious structures and norms (e.g., school, church, and cultural opportunities), which influence and are influenced by the broader culture and socioeconomic context. SET (and other similar grand theories) provides a platform for diverse research perspectives ranging from ethnographic research or developing grounded theories through qualitative methods to quantitative approaches. Moreover, this type of theory forces one to think about important interactions such as gene X environment or gender X culture or to study how one set of variables may mediate a relation of interest.

Leisure researchers cannot escape the lack of relevance issue unless we *engage fully* in interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research where scientists from different disciplinary backgrounds, including leisure, work together to solve broader societal problems. Leisure researchers need to provide theoretical and empirical evidence that all facets of leisure (e.g., structural opportunities as well as leisure experiences) matter to human existence. The evidence must be compelling, be based on strong scientific principles and methods, locate how leisure is interwoven among and across all elements of daily life, and demonstrate how leisure is connected to broader individual or social issues. Focusing on things like poverty, social marginalization, addictions, or immigration rather than leisure itself provides a starting point for how positive leisure science can contribute to larger human-environment issues. In many countries, leisure service provision came into existence based on the need to solve social problems. Over time the field has become so theoretically and methodologically insular that leisure's relevance is at risk. Reconnecting with the pragmatic potential of leisure to improve social and individual conditions removes this risk.

The genesis of this book grew out of the desire to make leisure research relevant. Freire's desire to define the field as "positive leisure science" is in response to the need to recognize the enormous contributions already made as well as to encourage future contributions to enhance advances in psychology and other fields that focus on the positive rather than the negative.

The Concept of Leisure as Positive

Although it is easy to understand what leisure is from a common sense perspective, several difficulties emerge when trying to define it from a theoretical or scientific perspective. How to define leisure and in what extent it differs from other similar concepts is a crucial question. Although this is an ancient question, a clear answer does not exist yet. Across the chapters, the authors consensually lamented that,

historically, this is one of the weaknesses underlying leisure studies. Thus, the complexity of the concept is appreciated along with the incapacity for its clear operationalization.

One aspect related to the definition of the concept is the word used to name it. In particular the expression of “free time” has a historical weight that cannot be underestimated. As stated by Godbey (2000), in contemporary industrial societies, leisure was considered a social problem because of the increase of unobligated time in societies due to the decrease in hours worked. This time-filled, zero-sum perspective, however, begs the question of the qualitative aspect of time use. As we have seen in this book, free time can be filled in positive, healthy ways or in negative and unhealthy ways (individually as well as societally). Moreover, leisure as time to be filled seems to be incompatible with leisure as relaxation or contemplation. This makes the distinction between leisure and free time a must in conceptual leisure discussions because time is needed to have leisure but having time, *per se*, does not guarantee the perception of having or being in leisure.

Although leisure as monochromatic or sequential is the predominate view of time across many societies and cultures, particularly industrialized societies, it is also important to consider time as polychromic or synchronic, where life is experienced as in flux and fluid, and allows for a more organic person-time interactional perspective. This lack of rigidity allows for a more nuanced examination of doing more than one thing at a time or responding to the moment in a way that deepens or compresses time, for example. Although there is quite an active research group that focuses on time use, it appears that most research from this perspective has to do with monochromatic, sequential leisure. Positive leisure science may benefit as well as contribute to “time use” studies by more fully considering leisure as time. For example, the role of relaxation and contemplation may be better viewed from a more complete view of leisure as time.

As evidenced in the treatment of the concept leisure by authors in this book, the term leisure is philosophically and morally laden with meaning. In addition, leisure “time” or “experience” is something that ebbs and flows over the lifespan, and as such leisure may hold different meanings for people as they age from birth to death. Leisure is thus a cumulative dialectic from which a paradox and a conceptual challenge emerge. The clear conceptual dichotomy that exists in the literature might be described as two camps. One is that leisure is always positive, and if it is not, then that phenomenon being experienced is not leisure, but another kind of experience (e.g., someone who is in a golf foursome out of obligation but does not consider the experience at all enjoyable). In this camp, researchers consider that the subjective experiences associated with leisure are entirely positive. Indeed, the leisure literature generally twins leisure with goodness (e.g., Drozda, 2006; Rojek, 1999; Williams & Walker, 2006) or positiveness (Stebbins, 2009) or even with fulfillment and gratification.

Researchers from the other camp suggest that “in leisure” or “through leisure,” individuals may engage in actions or have subjective experiences that may have detrimental consequences for them (i.e., acts of vandalism by youth who are motivated by boredom may be fun for them, but not considered as leisure by society).

Some scholars have termed these forms of “leisure” to be “purple recreation” (Curtis, 1979, 1988) or sub-zero on the Nash pyramid (Gunn & Caissie, 2006). There is clearly an interest among leisure scholars to wrestle more deeply with these two perspectives. Interested readers can also consult the special issue on “Deviant Leisure” in the journal *Leisure/Loisir* (Vol. 30, 2006).

Authors in this book provided some ground for a deeper and more nuanced exploration of the positive yet negative potential of leisure. Freire and Stebbins (2010) stated that the assumption that leisure experience is always positive is based in the evidence that while experiencing it, individuals perceive the action as positive even if it goes against social standards. A parallel idea is offered by Perkins and Nakamura in their chapter of this book, who suggested that a flow experience/activity can be simultaneously positive and amoral. To fit or match individual and social parameters in leisure is then a matter of education and of construction of shared cultural meanings, which is the aim of intervention and prevention strategies.

From a historical perspective, there have been a number of times that social leaders have suggested that some type of leisure education is needed to help the masses or to help specific groups (e.g., youth) deal with leisure. This historically implicated need for leisure education may suggest that leisure in of itself is not inherently positive. Else, why would leisure education be necessary? Leisure education, itself a challenge to define, is fundamentally about change. That is, leisure education attempts to change the individual’s leisure-related attitudes, behaviors, values, or skills from one less positive state to one more positive state. From this perspective, leisure education has also been considered to be a possible intervention to help reduce risk behaviors in leisure and promote positive and healthy experiences and behaviors. Perhaps this debate is merely a historical artifact as a result of initially poorly chosen words. Perhaps the correct term should have been called “time use education,” which would then allow for the purity of the “leisure as inherently positive” perspective to live unchallenged. We wonder whether this is an unresolved debate or whether future research and philosophical inquiry can reconcile these two seemingly opposite perspectives.

Leisure, Human Strengths, Potentialities, and Lived Contexts

A topic with a rich history of research interest is leisure in daily life (e.g., Shaw’s contributions in 1985, 1991, and 1992). Despite that history and interest, another common theme in this book is the need for scientific inquiry regarding leisure’s contribution to daily positive well-being and development. Authors address the need for more research that focuses on relations between social contexts and the emergence and building of personal strengths, potentialities, and optimal functioning. Research is also needed to better understand how individual characteristics and motives interact with proximal and distal social relationships, structures, cultural values, and norms. Human experience integrates different dimensions, such as cognitive, affective, motivational, and physiological. From this perspective, opportunities,

meanings, and constraints for leisure in daily life are continually negotiated, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Furthermore, we do not well understand how and what kinds of values are transmitted about leisure and its role in people's lives. Nor do we understand how societal structures contribute to opportunities for and experiences of leisure, neither – and in an opposite side – do we know enough about how physiological states can be causes or consequences of leisure behaviors. Finally, numerous leisure activities done in free time in daily life, such as forms of “electronic” leisure, have escaped leisure researchers' focused attention.

Several authors in this book have implicitly or explicitly identified that leisure as a life event (the integration of experience, activity, and context) can be a real-time laboratory to study human experience and behavior to enhance internal processes and/or external conditions of worthy living. In such way, positive leisure science should focus on leisure as an intertwined series of life events (from physiological, psychological, to environmental and societal). Only in that way it is possible to consider the complex range of related variables, not as a simple collection of discrete causes and consequences or relations, but as networked variables. That is, although discrete leisure activities and experiences may be important, it is the cumulative experiences and pattern of leisure that may be most interesting to study with respect to both related health and development outcomes as well as contributions to society over time.

Within this perspective, daily life becomes a true laboratory for gathering knowledge about human experience and leisure from a research or intervention perspective. Researchers have tended to ignore this important but more “mundane” aspect of leisure context, behavior, and experience. Daily leisure (or the pattern of leisure in one's life), however, is the main underpinning of human experience as people grow and develop within their daily events. As stated by John Kelly, “...the context of any research (in leisure field) should be ‘*ordinary life*’” (2000, p. 77). In accordance with his perspective, every simple or complex leisure life event is part of the ongoing construction of day-to-day life, and this is also true for the study of human optimal living.

Methods, Measurement, and Analytic Strategies in Leisure Studies

Throughout this book, a range of methods, measurement, and analytic strategies have illustrated empirical findings or underlying conceptual frameworks. In making suggestions for the future, authors questioned methods of gathering information about leisure variables and associated causes or outcomes. Their suggestions reflect a growing recognition on the use of multiple methods of data collection and analysis that must be available in the twenty-first century where complexity of phenomena is the core of leisure science.

In many scientific areas of inquiry, as stated previously in this chapter, the focus on daily life has become an important context for gaining knowledge about human life. Contemporary methodologies aimed to better understand daily life

have included a range of online and/or real-time data collection methods, such as the experience sampling method (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987), the ecological momentary assessment (Stone & Shiffman, 2002), or the day reconstruction method (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004). These methods are complementary to traditional retrospective, self-report data and improve researchers' abilities to measure the quality of people's lives and their subjective experiences, including psychosocial and physiological variables. Besides their particular strengths and pitfalls, these kinds of methodologies open the possibility of understanding how people experience the settings and activities of their lives or how they use their time, in terms of lived experience in real time, blending qualitative and quantitative forms of data. These methodologies highlight the ecological validity and supply the memory biases associated to the recall process applied in self-report measurements. Positive leisure science should include new methodologies to have the possibility to look to new and different data about leisure and related variables.

The advancement of new methods to analyze longitudinal data (e.g., latent transition analysis) or to better model nested data (e.g., hierarchical linear modeling) is also beginning to be used by leisure researchers. Still, more rigorous randomized controlled designs, or other designs such as factorial designs, are needed to answer questions about how and why leisure matters. Leisure researchers rarely describe how missing data have been handled, which is of great concern in longitudinal studies. Moreover, the rapid advances in technology have opened and will continue to open many avenues for alternative forms of data collection. Smart phones, social networking sites, netbooks, video and photo elicitation devices, and so on (this list may well be outdated by the time of the printing of this book) offer many possibilities for more sophisticated quantitative and qualitative leisure research.

New technologies used for scientific purposes call to question the form of research dissemination to scholars and practitioners. What forms of scholarship and science will be acceptable in the future? How will audio/visual/video forms of data collection be accepted and reported in order to verify quality of method and data analysis and interpretation? This question appears at the same time many social science journals are sharply limiting page lengths. With most scientific journal reviews now being completed online, the possibilities for other forms of data such as video or audio clips of photographs, for example, expand possibilities beyond numbers and words. These possibilities also apply to electronic versions of journals.

Positive Leisure Science (PLS): The New Challenge

Finally, a consideration on the proposed concept of PLS is relevant as both a conclusion and a new window for the future of leisure science. At the beginning of this book, yet as an idea, Freire suggested inserting positive leisure science (PLS) in the movement of the emergent positive psychology in psychological field. To date, the recent "positive paradigm" popular in psychology has not included leisure sciences

or if so, only sparingly. Nor have leisure researchers “jumped on the bandwagon.” At the conclusion of this book, it appears that there is conceptual and empirical evidence to consider leisure research from this new positive perspective paradigm, although it is imperative not to neglect that many free time activities done in the name of leisure are not positive and may be in fact harmful to self and society. Theoretically, there cannot be a positive without a negative; thus, both sides come into play under the “positive” framework. This calls the question of, and highlights the challenge of knowing, what is PLS and what is it not.

Taking an interdisciplinary perspective, PLS may be spread across different sciences and approaches although its pillars are based in the study of people and worthy lives in or through leisure. Although this is not exclusive or new perspective in science, or even in psychology, it is new as a lens for leisure studies. This new perspective may require a reconceptualization about the core of leisure variables to be studied with the intentional aim of making new connections with other scientific fields and researchers from other perspectives inside and outside psychology.

As previously noted, it is important to state that the emergence of a positive paradigm does not deny the existence of the negative. The literature about the negative sides of leisure is more relevant than ever from a prevention and leisure education perspective. Prevention and leisure education, for example, can contribute to a more interdisciplinary approach to solving larger social issues such as substance abuse, mental health issues, obesity, or unhealthy aging. Thus, the logic is turning the negative into positive, not as a denial but in the spirit of improvement; strengthening the resources; or redeeming as stated in this book by Kleiber. The end objective is promoting the optimal functioning of individuals and societies, thus contributing to an ultimate objective of *thriving*, as reflected by Lerner, von Eye, Lerner, Lewin-Bizan, & Bowers (2010) conceptualization of positive development.

Considering leisure from a quotidian perspective will contribute to a deeper understanding of human well-being based on how individuals and groups interact with, and act upon, daily contexts and throughout day-by-day events. It will help understand patterns of behavior and interactions across all spheres of a person’s life (e.g., personal, social, contextual, and/or physiological) that contribute to not only individual but societal health and well-being. Taking an approach such as a positive leisure science perspective that reflects a desire to promote optimal health and well-being may be an avenue for leisure science to be relevant to other disciplines and fields.

In the end, upon reflection of the authors’ contribution to this book, we (Freire and Caldwell) are optimistic about the future of leisure research and its past, current, and future contributions to promoting health and well-being of individuals, families, communities, and societies. Approaching leisure research from a positive leisure science perspective offers both challenges and rewards from scientific, policy, and practical perspectives. The authors in this book have provided a solid foundation for future thought, debate, and research on leisure.

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