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Essay Choice 1B – Constraints and Barriers to Leisure Experience

There are many different types of constraints to leisure. Goodale and Godbey reference three types of barriers to leisure: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Intrapersonal constraints refer to “psychological and spiritual attributes which influence activity preferences rather than intervening between preferences and participation” (Goodale/Godbey, 1988). These are internal constraints, sometimes based on emotion, and tend to change over time. Because of their emotional nature, these types of constraints are perhaps hardest to overcome. It is difficult to convince a person to go to a square dance when they believe dancing is a sin and the fiddle is the Devil’s instrument. Often the barrier is not the result of a belief, but is psychological in nature. An example of this is when a person experiences an undue amount of stress while engaging in an activity that focuses the (perceived) attention of onlookers on the “stress-laden” participant. For the leisure professional, it is especially difficult to deal with barriers that reside in the realm of the trained psychologist.

Interpersonal constraints are “...the result of relationships with other people” (Goodale/Godbey, 1988). If a person likes to play football, or any pastime that requires the participation of others, that person will likely seek out relationships with others who enjoy football as well. However, if one’s reference group changes (example- changing jobs or moving to another geographic area) to a group who would rather play baseball, the individual is likely to prefer baseball over football. One way in which the leisure professional can combat this type of constraint is by advertising offered programs. If the person (who moved) knew

that there was an amateur adult football enthusiast club in his new hometown, he has the potential to meet a new reference group that enjoys the activity that he enjoys.

Structural constraints “...represent blocks or obstacles to participation ...which intervene between personal preference and participation” (Goodale/Godbey, 1988). An example of this constraint is the bicycle enthusiast who lives on the upper level of an apartment building with no elevator. The hard labor required to take the bicycle down the many flights of stairs to the street level (and carry it up again after an exhausting ride) outweighs the enjoyment of bicycling.

As a leisure professional, it will be my job to decide whether to overcome these barriers in a program setting or, since the barriers are individual in nature, decide that they should be dealt with by the individual, in his or her own way. Yiannakis looks at this question from a sociological perspective rather than a psychological one. “...by studying the aggregate views of the group we are able to identify patterns and trends of constraints that are so perceived by the vast majority as being so” (Yiannakis, 1999). By studying patterns and trends we are able to understand constraints on group and community levels (i.e. to see the larger picture that is painted by constraints common to a majority of participants). This understanding will help the leisure professional to predict trends and proactively combat constraints.

Economically, it is far more logical for the leisure professional to combat group constraints (sociologically) before attempting to fight individual constraints (psychologically). If money, time, and professionals were limitless,

perhaps an individual approach would make sense. By focusing on the sociological aspects of leisure constraints, the leisure professional will have the opportunity to make fundamental programming policy alterations which will limit global constraints and allow more individual participation. In addition to economics, the leisure professional is not (generally) trained in the psychological aspects of individual emotional problems that are associated with constraints.

Consider the basketball coach who spends 80% of her time with a reluctant player. The coach might eventually “break through” whatever emotional constraints are involved in the attitude of the participant, but at what cost to all other players on the basketball team? While the constrained player’s leisure experience might (*after* dealing with the constraints) be phenomenal, the levels of participation and enjoyment for the rest of the team have declined because the coach spent all of her time trying to “fix” the constrained player. This assumes that the untrained “psychologist/coach” was successful at all. If the coach had taken a sociological approach, she would have seen the necessity in having the cracked basketball court re-surfaced and the times of practice re-organized to coincide with bus schedules. The implication being that it is better for 99% of participants to have a better leisure experience than 1%.

I do not believe the leisure professional should forget about the 1%. I do believe that in a programming situation, the needs of the many should outweigh the needs of the one. If one caters only to individuals, participant numbers will dwindle until there aren’t enough individuals to cater to. Perhaps the next step for recreation programming will be to organize classes focused on constraints. One example being a class on “couples dancing for shy people”. This would use

the sociological approach to affect the changes necessary to deal with the (now) “global” constraint of shyness instead of having the shyness remain an individual constraint in a class on “couples dancing for all people”.

References:

Goodale, Thomas and Godbey, Geoffrey. 1988. The Evolution of Leisure: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives. State College, PA. Venture Publishing

Yiannakis, Andrew. 1999. *Defining Leisure: A Sociological Perspective* from the webpage: <http://playlab.uconn.edu/leisdef.htm>