

# **What the Ferengi Can Teach Us About Leisure: An Inter-galactic Learning Experience**

Patricia Ardovino  
University of Wisconsin at La Crosse

## **Introduction**

Peeling back the layers of ancient societies reveals rich stories of pastimes. The art styles of the Kingdom of Kush, the foot races of Ancient Greece, the bread and circuses of the Roman Empire, the theatrical presentations in Ancient China, and the poetry of the early empire of Muhammad (Russell, 1999) all give students a peak at the depth and breadth of the history of leisure. But why stay in this Galaxy to study leisure? The planets of Betazed, Ferengi, Klingon, Cardassia, and Bajor offer opportunities to explore other dimensions of leisure in diverse societies. These Star Trek societies are the offspring of Gene Roddenberry and his colleagues. While there are many societies presented in the television series and movies of Star Trek, these five societies work particularly well when studying leisure.

To begin this assignment, the class is divided into five groups: Betazoids, Ferengi, Klingons, Cardassians, and Bajorans. It is irresistible to type cast the students: therapeutic recreation students as Betazoids, student athletes as Klingons or Cardassians, artistic or musical students as Bajorans. They are told to seek as much information as possible on their assigned society. Students can choose to watch the television series or movies, read available books, or find information on the internet.

Students are asked to get an overall sense of their society such as the location of their home planet and the physical appearance of their species. They are also given these specific questions to answer: What does the family of your society look like? What is the role of males? Females? Children? What games are played? Sports? Music? Theater? Literature? What food do they eat? What are their views on play? Do they have pets? Hobbies? How do they interact with their environment? Are they spiritual? Do they express their spirituality? Do they have rituals? Celebrations? How do they view time? How do they perceive freedom?

Students reconvene in class to compile their information. A spokesperson is chosen from each group to present their findings. Betazoids present first, then Ferengi, Klingons, Cardassians, and Bajorans. After initial presentations, a discussion is conducted comparing and contrasting the societies.

To wrap up the exercise, students are asked if they wish to switch groups. Surprisingly, few move. They seem to be comfortable and somewhat loyal to their assigned

society. Follow up assignments may include deeper examinations of the cultures of the Ho Chunk tribe, a YMCA summer camp, a youth soccer league, or a nursing home.

The following gives a brief summary of each of the five chosen societies and lessons that may develop during discussion. The Star Trek resources used for this article are listed at the conclusion.

### *Betazoids*

The inhabitants of planet Betazed are humanoid in appearance. This matriarchal society believes that men are commodities. They enjoy theater and literature, exotic delicacies, and fine wines. Betazoids are peaceful people and have few weapons. They have a natural characteristic of complete honesty. During adolescence, they develop the abilities to read each other's thoughts and to communicate telepathically. They cannot, however, read the minds of Ferengi. Betazoids require therapy because of difficulty in screening out telepathic noise from other people. They do however, make wonderful counselors.

The discussion of the Betazoids can revolve around two issues in leisure. First, Betazoid society can be examined while considering perspectives on women's leisure presented by Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, and Freysinger (1996). Second, the therapeutic recreation specialist's role as therapist during functional intervention (Peterson & Stumbo, 2000) can be compared to the Betazoid's role as counselors.

### *Ferengi*

Ferengi are a hardworking, prosperous, technologically sophisticated race. They are humanoid in appearance except for their unusual four-lobed brains and large ears. The courage and masculinity of Ferengi males are rated by the size of their ears. There are no divorces or broken homes in the nuclear family of the Ferengi. Male children study economics, calculus, and business at school. They play with action figures, and enjoy darts, 3D chess, and finger puzzles.

The Ferengi are quite devoted to their families, but this devotion pales in comparison to their ruthless devotion to the Almighty Profit and the 285 sacred Rules of Acquisition. The number one Rule is "Once you have their money, never give it back." Ferengi look for profit even in death. Ferengi dead are not buried. The corpse is vacuum desiccated, packaged as relics, and sold by the family of the dead.

Although Ferengi men revere their mothers, Ferengi women remain in the kitchen, pregnant, and barefoot, or, better yet, bare. They are forbidden to talk to strangers, wear clothes, go out in public or travel.

The obvious comparison of the Betazoids and Ferengi centers on their value systems: a matriarchal society of compassion, peace, and sophistication versus a patriarchal society of greed, ruthlessness, and selfishness. Knowing that Betazoids cannot read the

minds of Ferengi makes the discussion all the more interesting. The values of the Ferengi might be judged as despicable, but they should not be dismissed easily. Ferengi devotion is real. Their culture is based on commerce and there is no distinction between business and pleasure. But their society works for them. Their culture can be studied and analyzed but it must be respected.

The discussion of the values of these Star Trek cultures can lead to comparisons between other cultures. Interesting studies and comparisons can be made with the value systems of adolescents (Hersch, 1998), and gangs (Klein, Maxon, & Miller, 1995). Other discussions may revolve around leisure in a capitalistic society (Dawson, 1988).

### *Klingons*

Klingons are humanoid with high, ridged foreheads and long hair. They appear dark and swarthy. Klingons are proud people who value honor, tradition, strength, combat, and ritual. They don't surrender and they don't bluff. Their aggressive nature has made them superior warriors and their Empire a military power to be feared and respected. The complex physiology of Klingons includes multiple organs and back up systems, which enables them to be resilient in battle. To die in battle is the ultimate honor.

For a Klingon, to have a disability is to be considered useless. Klingons would prefer suicide. Dying of old age in bed is also considered dishonorable. But the ultimate dishonor for a Klingon is to be held captive by an enemy.

After a severe explosion on a moon of the Klingon Homeworld, which caused serious damage to the environment, economic problems ensued. The Klingon High Council decided that they could not sustain the financial support needed by its vast military operations and peace initiatives with other planets followed.

Klingon women are gentle and are mates, partners. Klingons write love poetry and listen to Klingon operas. Their keen sense of smell enables them to be wonderful hunters. Relaxation is not encouraged. Klingons do not have tear ducts.

The very distinctive values of the societies of the Klingons, Betazoids, and Ferengi are discussion topics that are easily introduced. More vigorous debate may develop when discussing the Klingon's attitude toward disabilities. For Klingons, disability is a fate worse than death. Articles from Disability Rag, which illuminates the viewpoints of people with disabilities, can fuel this discussion. The leisure style of the Klingons may be examined. Is it an example of the Stereotype Model, the Balance Model, or the Core Model (Kelly, 1996)?

### *Cardassians*

Despite the plunder through the ages, the Cardassian ruins and archeological treasures are among the most remarkable in the galaxy. Cardassians are humanoids with

ridges that attach their necks to their shoulders. They have a stronger physiology and constitution than most humanoid races.

Cardassians understand that the major source of power is education, and their education system is unparalleled. They are known for taking care of their children and their parents. Households may have as many as four generations living together. Older people are respected since advanced age is a sign of power and dignity. Orphans, however, are outcast and illegitimate children are disposed. Military service is compulsory. Females are allowed to command a space ship. Cardassians celebrate birthdays and marriage but believe that "joy is vulnerability."

On the surface, the culture of the Cardassians closely resembles the culture of the Klingons. They both pride themselves on being fierce warriors. They both resist any semblance of being soft: no relaxation for the Klingons, no joy for the Cardassians. Yet there are differences. Cardassians wage war for survival. Klingons wage war for honor. The leisure of conquerors, oppressor, or enslavers may initiate discussion. The best examples of this, perhaps, are the Ancient Greeks and Romans (Welton, & Coe, 1998).

### *Bajorans*

Bajoran civilization is thousands of years old. Their history is filled with great philosophers, architects, and artists. The planet is rich in scenic wonders. Bajorans are humanoid with ridges on the bridge of their noses.

Bajorans are very spiritual. They believe in the existence of the Devil and the Prophets. The Prophets provide wisdom and guidance, and have no concept of linear time. They see past, present, and future as the same; they don't believe that the past is gone forever. The Prophets replenish the life force or the "pagh" of the Bajorans. Bajoran Proverbs include: "The Truth Never Dies.... and Greed is at the Root of all Deception." The Bajoran church teaches patience. No distinction is made between male and female clerics. Women are free to preach and all clergy can marry.

Bajor was a self-sustaining, independent planet before the Cardassians invaded. Cardassians brutally exploited the planet and impoverished the people. Most Bajorans were driven off the planet to live in terrible refugee camps. Other Bajorans were forced to work for the Cardassians in labor camps. The religious faith of the Bajorans gave them the strength to survive the brutal Cardassian regime.

Bajorans offer an opportunity to discuss the spirituality and leisure of people living in oppressed societies. Connections can be made to the studies of the play of children in the Holocaust (Eisen, 1988), the leisure of Sudanese refugee women (Russell, 1996), and the leisure experience of incarcerated men with mental retardation (Ardovino, 1999). The writings of Pieper (1952) can be related to leisure and spirituality.

## Outcomes

This assignment may help prepare students for the diverse people they will meet as professionals providing leisure services. It is to be hoped that students will begin to understand how culture influences leisure, and how leisure influences culture. It gives an opportunity for students to compare and contrast cultures and their leisure. Finally, this assignment gives students a chance to connect these fictitious cultures with important writings in our field.

**Authors Note.** The author would like to thank Lt. Commander Deanna Troi, Quark, Lt. Worf, Aamin Marritza, and Major Kira Nerys for their assistance in preparing this manuscript

## Resources

Okuda, M., Okuda, D, & Mirek, D. (1994). The Star Trek encyclopedia: A reference guide to the future. New York: Pocket Books.

Schuster, H., & Rathbone, W. (1994). Unofficial and uncensored Trek: The encyclopedia. Las Vegas, NV: Pioneer Books.

Van Hise, J. (1994). Unofficial and uncensored Trek in the 24th century. Las Vegas, NV: Pioneer Books.

<http://www.startrek.com>

## References

Ardovino, P. S. (1999). The meaning of leisure experience in the lives of adult male offenders and former offenders with mental retardation. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

Dare, B., Welton, G., & Coe, W. (1998). Concepts of leisure in Western thought. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Dawson, D. (1988). Social class in leisure: Reproduction and resistance. Leisure Sciences, 10, 193-202.

Eisen, G. (1988). Children and play in the Holocaust: Games among the shadows. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

Henderson, K. A., Bialeschki, M. D., Shaw, S. M., & Freysinger, V. J. (1996). Both gains and gaps: Feminist perspectives on women's leisure. State College, PA: Venture Publishing.

- Hersch, P. (1998). A tribe apart: A journey into the heart of American adolescence. New York, NY: Ballantine Publishing.
- Kelly, J. R. (1996). Leisure (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Klein, M. W., Maxon, C. L., & Miller, J. (1995) Eds. The modern gang reader. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing.
- Peterson, C. A., & Stumbo, N. J. (2000). Therapeutic recreation program design: Principles and procedures (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Pieper, J. (1952). Leisure: The basis of culture. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.
- Russell, R. V. (1999). Pastimes: The context of contemporary leisure. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Russell, R. V., and Sage, F. K. (1996). Leisure as burden: Sudanese refugee women. Journal of Leisure Research, 28(2), 108-121.
- The fate worse than death. (1990, Winter). Disability Rag, 16-17.