To Philosophize or Not to Philosophize: An Issue on Leisure Programming for Baby Boomers.

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Abstract

The art of leisure programming is underscored by a variety of leisure philoso-phies, approaches, and theories. However, the practicality of the latter in actual leisure programming practices does not appear to be evident. Recreation program-mers are merely "doing what has been done" or are basing leisure programs on a checklist of items, rather than truly understanding their participants. By putting philosophical practices on the windowsill, so to speak, recreation programmers are missing the mark in the true goal of providing leisure programs that meet their participants' leisure needs. A case in point is the current issue facing recreation programmers in which baby boomers are going to redefine the way they engage in retirement and leisure. If what is said about boomers is true, the future of leisure programming lies with understanding the unique beliefs and characteris-tics of boomers, particularly by application of philosophy in leisure programming practices. This paper addresses how philosophy can improve recreation and leisure programming practice.

KEYWORDS: Leisure, recreation, programming, philosophy, values

Introduction

Philosophy is a funny sort of thing; we say we use it, but in reality, we just are not sure what to do with it. In recreation and leisure studies, we study philosophy, write personal and professional philosophical statements, and often say that philosophy drives what we do- but somewhere along the way philosophy becomes a window dressing to students in recreation and leisure studies programs and practical application in the field. Philosophy is little understood as the vibrant methodological basis it ought to be in everything we, as recreation professionals, do in the field. A case in point is leisure programming. Philosophy should drive leisure programming but in reality- little practical philosophical application occurs in the study of leisure programming or in fact, with the actual design and application of leisure programming.

For example, recreation programmers have typically focused on the content and technique of a program, often adopting past or related ideas, rather than developing a conceptual basis of leisure services driven by the values of a particular cohort. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the case that a philosophically based model, one driven by the objective and subjective values of a cohort, is the most comprehensive approach in leisure programming.: the baby boomer population. The following pages will provide a review of common programming practices, application of a philosophical approach to leisure programming, and a four-step paradigm that allows the recreation professional to put principles learned into action.

Leisure Programming Defined

At the simplest level, leisure programming is the process of providing opportunities for recreational participation including various activities such as sports, games, hobbies, fitness classes, arts and crafts, music drama and dance, or social events, as seen in most community parks and recreation program guides. It is argued that being a good leisure programmer involves the ability to systematically identify and meet the leisure needs and interests of various participant age groups and ability levels. Further, it is argued that the participant, through the use of leisure programs, forms values, develops skills, and learns processes of recreation and leisure (Edginton, Hudson, Dieser, & Edginton, 2004). As recreation professionals, we must remember that leisure programs are not an end in themselves; meeting the needs and desires of our participants is the true reason for the existence of leisure-service agencies. Therefore, we are reminded that our participants should be considered the focal point of leisure programs and services hence, the need to understand the values of a particular cohort.

Current Leisure Programming Practices

We know that no one correct way of planning or conducting leisure programming exists. Traditionally, leisure programming has been implemented by a number of different program approaches or theories:the most common being the traditional approach, current practices approach, expressed desires approach, or the benefits based approach (Cochran, 2005). Theory may be defined as a principle or collection of principles that possibly explain some behavior, a means to clarify the

relationship between a particular proposition, statements linking abstract concepts to empirical data, and premises to account for data (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Understanding leisure theory allows a recreation programmer to better understand the meaning or purpose of the participants' leisure activity choice or involvement in order to create environments for the desired experiences to occur. We teach this in our classrooms and these conceptual frameworks are what recreation professionals are supposed to use as the guiding philosophies for understanding leisure behavior and providing leisure services.

Though there may be different approaches to cultivating leisure experiences, philosophically, leisure has been taught as a means to understand the concept as a whole rather than from the participation values of an individual. Historically, Plato and Aristotle saw leisure as a product of selective disengagement, relaxation, contemplation, and private enjoyment (Kleiber, 1985). Leisure has also been described as the basis of culture where celebration and affirmation ensure its continuance and where the ritualization of playfulness offers new cultural forms (Pieper, 1965). Further, the study of leisure has primarily evolved into three basic approaches: time, activity, and state of mind (Godbey, 2003). In other research, deGrazia (1964) takes the position that relative freedom from obligation is traditionally regarded as the essence of leisure while, according to Neulinger (1981), the possibility also exists for one to be at leisure even when at work. Other leisure scholars have focused on leisure as a state of mind or attitude, either transitory or as a way of life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Iso-Ahola & Mannell, 1985).

When all of these approaches or theories are synthesized, we come much closer to a philosophic, definitive explanation of leisure behavior which may help in designing and implementing leisure programs and services. Usually, we use these philosophic approaches very pragmatically and practically. In our experience as programmers, we have never heard other programmers say that their programs were based on a **specific programming** approach or theory. Rather, leisure programming usually begins with what is cursory knowledge about a group of leisure participants or if a specific program approach is used, it tends to collect general rather than specific, individual information. For example, consider the Benefits-Based Programming (BBP) approach. In this approach, recreation professionals engineer theory-based experiences that are directed at specific, targeted outcomes (Rossman & Schlatter, 2003). BBP uses a four step model: 1) identify desired outcomes, 2) program for those specific outcomes, 3) assess the outcomes, and 4) share findings with organizations that can benefit from results. Applying a BBP approach to leisure programming gives clear general target outcomes rather than specific outcomes to the individual. For example, a BBP nutrition program would provide adults the opportunity for better adherence to appropriate low-fat eating regimen, but the approach does not focus on the individual and specific participant valued interest- to socialize or to learn a new skill.

Another example might be our general way of gaining knowledge about children. Cursory knowledge of children tells us that children like games and therefore we provide games that **we believe** children would want or like. For adults, we might do a survey of all of the types of activities that **we can imagine** and we ask

adults to select their preferences. We then provide as many of these services as possible. On the surface, this appears to be effective in providing leisure services to our participants. Truth be told, even these methods often leave leisure programmers wondering what their participants truly want.

Additionally, much of today's professional literature on programming and the delivery of recreation services still deal with the "hows" and "whats" (i.e., content and technique) not with the "whys" or the philosophical conceptual basis of our services. More often than not, the literature is a discussion of the techniques used by a particular recreation agency in promoting and sponsoring a given program, rather than a discussion of the philosophy and rationale for the development of the provision for that service or set of activities (Cochran, 2005). Additionally, though we consider our own personal and professional philosophies regarding leisure, they are often not reflected in the development or implementation of leisure programs (Cochran, Stoll, & Kinziger, 2006).

One single theory or philosophical approach will never be able to offer a general explanation of human behavior, particularly in regards to leisure, nor will it help answer the common questions faced by the leisure programmer- "Why aren't people participating in my programs?" and "How do I get them to come back?". Moreover, research regarding programming also provides information about factors of constraints, motivations, or life satisfaction (Baack, 1985; Jackson, 1991; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997) rather than the values that come through participation in leisure, showing that a philosophical approach again is ignored. Aside from some innovations in the actual delivery of services, most park and recreation agencies and their recreation programmers, continue to do what they have done in the past and base said practices on the approaches they know and are comfortable with (Cochran, 2005). Combining this with the above approaches presents a curious condition.

Since current practice does not appear to implement philosophy into program design, but continues to follow "what we have always done", and present programming appears to work, why worry about philosophy? The answer is common practice may not be the most effective method of offering leisure programs. It may limit possibilities rather than enable better and more participant activity opportunities. Philosophy offers many important practical applications, if we know how to use it.

A Philosophical Approach to Leisure Programming

Philosophy , from the Greek language, means a love of wisdom. Philosophy asks the important, difficult questions of life from who am I, what am I, from where do I come, to what is meaning of life ? To address these questions, we must delve into the nature of reality and even the metaphysics or the origins of our being and our humanity. Philosophy does not necessary generate new knowledge but it is the nexus of our culture and our value systems which we formally study through epistemology, ethics, politics, and even aesthetics. Unlike the professional philosopher, the everyday person struggles with finding the words to practice philosophy and many people may operate at a subconscious level around these difficult issues—they may not be able to articulate what they believe but they do have feelings and values, both the objective and subjective values of life. In realitythe

everyday person has and practices philosophy. Philosophy for them is evident in the intuitive subjective feelings of who they are. Philosophy is not just for the professional philosopher but is used as practical application for all of our personal inquiry of who we are and what we believe (Kretchmar, 1994).

Theoretically, philosophy is the deliberate and rational attempt to understand the whole and the sum of one's experience, in both its objective and subjective aspects, with a view for more effective living (Dyal, 1999). Philosophy raises questions about what we do and why we do it, and goes beyond individual cases and phenomena to treat questions of a general nature. Philosophy is a more reflective and systematic activity than common sense, and its power lies in its ability to enable recreation professionals to better understand and appreciate the activities of everyday life (Elias & Meriam, 1995). But how can we use such an abstract definition and apply it to a useful service such as leisure programming? One way is to articulate in common sense language what philosophy does for leisure programming., Tthat is, if leisure programming is for more effective living, how would we go about trying to ferret out both the objective and subject aspects? To further our philosophic questioning, we must ask if the current approaches are good and how these approaches are affecting individuals' experiences and outcomes (Kretchmar, 1994; Meier, 1995).

Presently, we view leisure programming as one distinct part of the leisure process and , something we do to better the lives of our participants. In fact, we should want our leisure programs to be "philosophically good" for our participants, going beyond the present common practices of leisure programmers and attempting to understand our participants through a philosophical framework, one that embraces both objective and subjective values.

Thus we should be asking a series of meaningful philosophical questions. Is our present approach to leisure programming capturing the true essence of individual specific information about our clients' leisure interests? Is our approach helping understand personal, objective and subjective values about leisure? We may capture the objective information through a check sheet, but could we know more about wants and needs if we could capture the subjective nature of needs and wants? The objective value might be "I swim because I want to get fit"; the subjective value might be "I swim because I enjoy my body moving through water", or "I find meaning in my life through exercise and swimming"These subjective values are not easy to capture but we argue that they can be captured and that practical philosophy might help us answer these important questions (Charles, 2002; Kretchmar, 2000). Without applying philosophical applications into leisure programming on a regular basis, recreation professionals   may not adequately meet the needs of diverse populations nor will those populations receive the quality of leisure that they desire and that they deserve.

A Case In Point

As stated earlier, recreation programming usually begins with information and knowledge about its participants from the programmer collecting objective data from the population. For example, one cannot effectively provide children's games without first understanding what children want or like. Thus if we want to serve

a population, we need to know about that population—from the population itself. However, suppose we broaden this collection of information by capturing specific culture information as well as understanding that each individual has a specific subjective and objective value structure. One cannot effectively provide leisure services resulting in participant benefits without first understanding the nature of their character and their culture. Let us apply this concept to a specific generation of leisure users- the baby boomers.

Since the emergence of the baby boomer generation in the 1960s, there has been a dramatic change in the values held by Americans. The unique set of values and characteristics held by the baby boomer cohort is vastly different from previous generations. This encompasses all aspects of life, affecting their beliefs about self, career, home, and leisure. Baby boomers are part of an individualistic, self-focused generation which is economically optimistic; they are highly educated, comfortable with technology, healthier, more affluent than any generation before them, and despite their hectic lifestyles, leisure is still a necessity (Belsie, 2001; "Boomers Regain Top Spot", 2001).

As society ages, recreation programmers will need to be more inclusive and focus on values and perspectives of a cohort when developing programs such as: culture, impact on society, their leisure and retirement perspectives, and economics. Presently , however, leisure program development has relied on various traditional approaches or theories when offering leisure programs, which may not meet the needs of the baby boomer generation.

For example, in assessing boomer leisure interests, rather than gearing survey questions toward the specific values of the population, leisure programmers have typically assessed leisure interests with survey questions more reflective of the "Greatest Generation," those that have come before the boomers (Brokaw, 1998). Recreation professionals have "assumed what has objectively worked in the past will work for this group" rather than considering the uniqueness, socio-demographics, and life experiences of each cohort as they begin a new phase in retirement (Cochran, 2005). As such, these survey questions by recreation professionals have primarily been geared toward the objective values of those who lived during the Great Depression, WWII, and the Korean War.

Consequently, leisure programmers trying to recruit boomers to their programs may be faced with a lack of interest and poor retention rates, which over the long haul may translate into leisure program cuts. To assess the objective and subjective values and then rethink leisure programming towards a boomer friendly environment will require that leisure professionals better understand the values, interests, and goals of this group.

In an effort to address potential differences in leisure values and attitudes of the boomer generation, several studies were undertaken (Cochran, 2005; Cochran, Beller, & Stoll, 2008a; Cochran, Beller, & Stoll, 2008b). After examining the literature on recreational leisure pursuits, two valid instruments using a traditional leisure interest format were identified (Rossman & Schattler, 2003; Snepenger, & Cheek, 1982). One was chosen and given to a sample of boomers. Interestingly, after reading the first two pages, these boomers revolted and refused to answer,

stating that little applied to their interests or goals (Cochran, 2005). When queried further, the boomers stated that they don't see themselves as "retirees", or "check list" sort of folks. They said that if the survey was interesting and relevant to them, they would participate. When asked what was relevant they said, "Your survey is boring, make it fun." To address these responses, an effort was made to capture what objectively and subjectively drives boomers' participation in leisure activities. The result lead to a different assessment approach, one based more on their subjective values of fun and their objective values education (Cochran, 2005).

And, because recreation professionals are typically the individuals trained to identify and implement organized leisure activities, it was also decided to pilot studies on both the boomer and non-boomer recreation professionals. If our beliefs about the subjective and objective values of this culture are unique, then it would appear relevant to understand the uniqueness of the boomer culture and their contributions to society. Thus after pilot phases, the instrument was revised to include not only 26 multiple choice and objective questions related to knowledge about boomer aging and society, culture, leisure values, retirement values, economic and discretionary income, and aesthetic values but also open-ended subjective questions about their current as well as projected leisure pursuits.

In studies at a regional (n = 243) and national level (n = 231) (Cochran, 2005; Cochran, Beller, & Stoll, 2008a) involving both boomer and non-boomer recreation professionals, we found that boomers have strong values in terms of their: culture, impact on society, unique leisure and retirement perspectives, and economics. In the preliminary study (n=234) using the Cochran Baby Boomer Quiz, we found that boomers are: active, dynamic, educated, economically sound, and live life to its fullest (Cochran, 2005). The 40 question Cochran Baby Boomer Quiz challenges participants as to their knowledge about the baby boomer generation and their values as well as the preparedness of a leisure and recreation agency for providing specific programs and services to this generation. Several examples of close-ended general questions include: "What activity is no longer considered the mainstay feature of retirement communities?", "What factors should be considered when programming for the baby boomer generation?", "Boomers will spend the vast majority of their assets on?" and, "Baby Boomers enjoy group events rather than individualized activities?" Open-ended questions include: "Has your agency considered the impact this generation will have on its programs, facilities, and services? If YES, please list 4 areas or items that your agency and staff have done, or are in process of doing, to adequately provide boomer programs, facilities, and/or your services", "Do YOU feel confident with your knowledge about this generation to provide adequate programs, services, and facilities? (1 is low, 5 is high)," and "How do you rate your AGENCY's overall preparedness for this growing aging population and leisure services? (1 is low, 5 is high). In this preliminary study, using both descriptive as well as inferential statistics we found that when recreation professionals were asked what they knew of baby boomer's values, they clearly misconceived the leisure interests of boomers. They thought that boomers had the same leisure interests as our current greatest generation senior citizens, despite knowing that boomers are a different cohort. Programmers made no indication of

relating said values to their practices of designing leisure programs.

In another preliminary study of boomer (n = 115) and non-boomer (n = 116) recreation professionals, encompassing the northwest, southwest, midwest, northeast, and southeast, we had similar findings to the original study (Cochran, Beller, & Stoll, 2008a). While twice as many non-boomers incorrectly identified who comprised the boomer generation, both groups incorrectly identified the approximate percentage of boomers over age 50 and a large number were unable to identify the approximate percentage of the population over age 65 in 2030. Approximately half of both groups were unaware that the median income of boomers is 50,000 - 60,000 dollars and over a third of both groups did not know that the vast majority of boomer assets will be spent on leisure. Thus, the professionals did not know basic objective value information about this population.

While number-based questions may be more difficult to answer correctly compared to many of the other instrument questions, knowledge about the changing demographics of the US population during the next 25 years and how assets will be applied to leisure activities has important implications for recreation professionals and program planning. Interestingly though, non-boomers knowledge about the boomer generation diverged in a couple of areas. The first area involved knowledge about boomer leisure values. All boomers knew that the boomer generation believes they work hard, play hard, and spend hard, while many non-boomers did not attribute these values to the boomer generation. Additionally, boomers believe that leisure is a necessity; while again, non-boomers had limited knowledge about leisure's importance to boomers. And, while boomers prefer individual activities, the non-boomers at a very high percentage believed boomers preferred group activities. In all but one question, non-boomers were unable to correctly identify how boomers view retirement. For instance, boomers view retirement as the next phase in their lives while non-boomers thought it was a transition from society and work, more of how the greatest generation views retirement. And, while golf has been a popular mainstay for the greatest generation retirees, it has much less appeal to boomers. The final area of difference concerned some of the values behind leisure. For instance, to boomers, leisure is about continued growth, and in many cases about further education, rather than just as relaxation or play. Non-boomers were twice as likely to believe that boomers sought leisure for relaxation and play.

Given that these studies were conducted across the United States in each of the major geographic regions with similar findings, it is important for recreation professionals to rethink their approach to identifying, developing, implementing, and recruiting the boomer generation to their leisure programming as well as how we instruct our future recreation professionals in the classroom. While boomers plan to carry their willingness to learn new things, their desire for challenge, as well as their passion for education and culture with them into retirement, these studies lend credence to the need for recreation professionals to examine different avenues for programming more specific to the values of boomers and beyond today's traditional seniors.

By developing leisure programs based on assessments which are not focused on a particular cohort, recreation professionals are doing an injustice to their participants. The result neglects the very objective and subjective values of the

cohorts they aim to serve. Therefore, programmers will be missing the mark on providing key leisure opportunities that their participants desire and deserve. By examining the boomer generation values and beliefs relative to leisure pursuits, the recreation professional will have a more reflective and philosophical stance in which to develop appropriate and meaningful leisure programming for a particular cohort such as boomers. Thus it is prudent for the recreation professional to adopt a philosophical lens when designing and implementing leisure programs as well as teach our students on the front lines this importance.

Cochran Leisure Program Paradigm

Considering that understanding both the subjective and objective values of the cohort can give direction and focus for every leisure programmer and considering that delving into these values may help understand programming needs, we developed a basic philosophical model. This model, the Cochran Leisure Program Paradigm (CLPP), is designed to apply said principle into practice- to help in giving us direction and focus in understanding a cohort in order to produce leisure programs that are specific and unique to a population and the individual. The Cochran Leisure Program Paradigm (CLPP) is a four-step paradigm that offers a step by step philosophical approach with intermediate descriptions for examining values of a cohort:

Step One: Review the information on and about the population.

Step Two: Examine the objective and subjective values of the literature and of the cohort.

Step Three: Determine objective and subjective leisure participation values of a cohort.

Step Four: Develop a philosophical lens premise.

Between each step is an intermediate description box that describes how the step is carried out.

For example,

Intermediate Box One: Understand the purpose of philosophy and its application to leisure programming.

Intermediate Box Two: Description of how values can be found in the literature.

Intermediate Box Three: Assess the population to further discover values of leisure participation.

Intermediate Box Four: Put learned concepts into action.

Using the CLPP

In the first step, one must understand how both objective and subjective values, as defined by philosophic recreation professionals, are the leaders in leisure programming and should have a philosophical framework which consists of values and goals that work in harmony with their program delivery system (DeGraaf, Jordan, & DeGraff, 1999). In this case, the baby boomers are educated, determined,
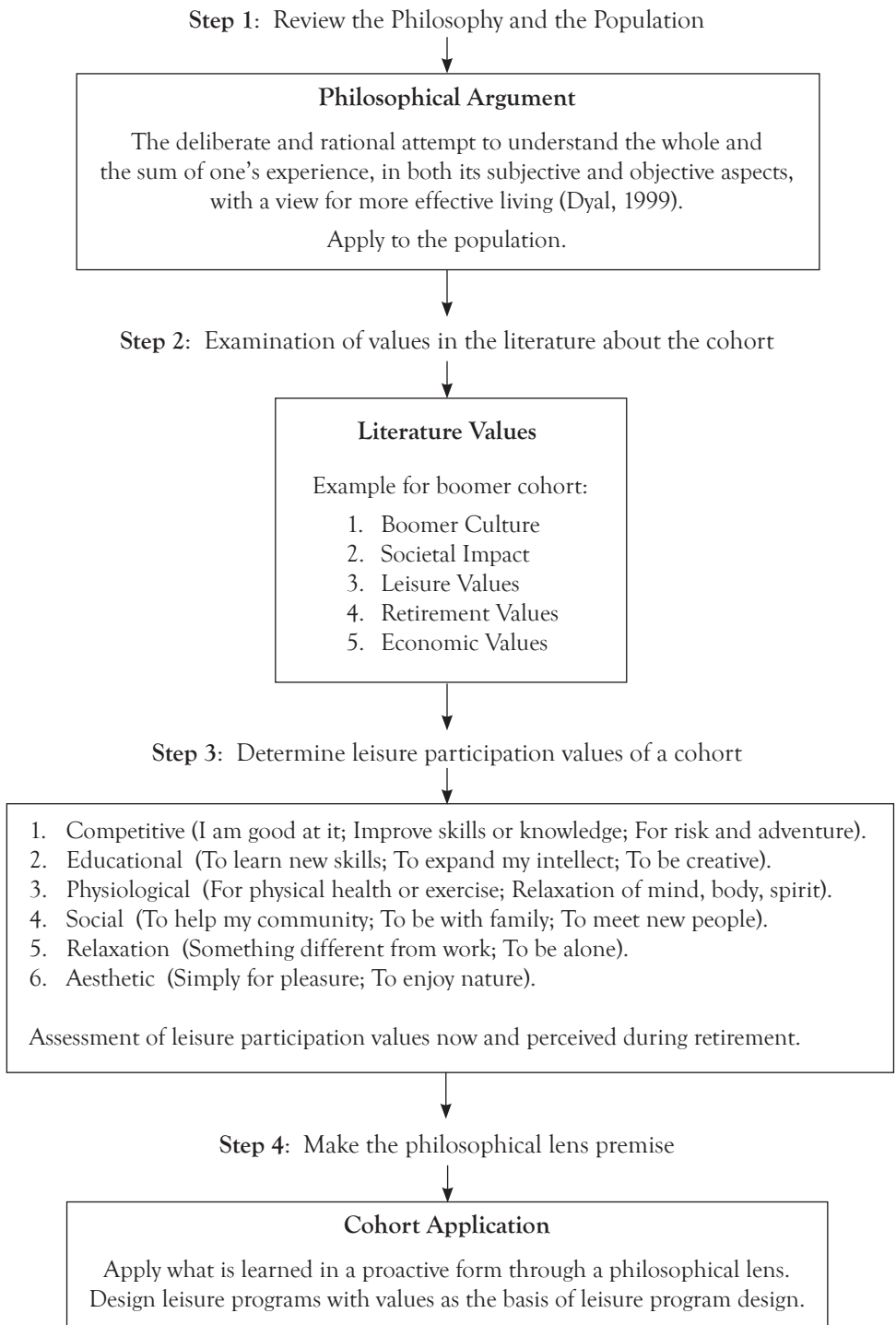
Step 1: Review the Philosophy and the Population

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Philosophical Argument

The deliberate and rational attempt to understand the whole and
the sum of one's experience, in both its subjective and objective aspects,
with a view for more effective living (Dyal, 1999).

Apply to the population.

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Step 2: Examination of values in the literature about the cohort

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Literature Values

Example for boomer cohort:

1. Boomer Culture
2. Societal Impact
3. Leisure Values
4. Retirement Values
5. Economic Values

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Step 3: Determine leisure participation values of a cohort

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1. Competitive (I am good at it; Improve skills or knowledge; For risk and adventure).
2. Educational (To learn new skills; To expand my intellect; To be creative).
3. Physiological (For physical health or exercise; Relaxation of mind, body, spirit).
4. Social (To help my community; To be with family; To meet new people).
5. Relaxation (Something different from work; To be alone).
6. Aesthetic (Simply for pleasure; To enjoy nature).

Assessment of leisure participation values now and perceived during retirement.

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Step 4: Make the philosophical lens premise

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Cohort Application

Apply what is learned in a proactive form through a philosophical lens.
Design leisure programs with values as the basis of leisure program design.

Figure 1: Cochran Leisure Program Paradigm (CLPP

and believe they have no limits as to what they can do in the future (Freedman, 1999; Gillon 2004). This emphasizes the need for the leisure programmer to use philosophical principles as inspiration for leisure programming practices.

Second, examine the values of the literature and of the cohort. Five values appear again and again to describe this population: culture (their interests), impact on society (culturally, philosophically, and politically), their leisure and retirement perspectives (what they want to do and how they will do it), and economics (the power of their pocketbook in buying and selling). They are supported by current literature and give us some direction in understanding the baby boomer generation (Dychtwald, 1999; Freedman, 1999; Gillon, 2004; Morgan & Levy, 2002). Thus, understanding the values of baby boomers would appear to be an essential element to successful leisure programming.

Third, in terms of leisure participation, boomers continue to have strong values therefore creating the need to further discover specific values in relation to their psychological, educational, physiological, social, and demographic leisure interests. By examining these result , leisure programmers will be able to specifically target programs to meet the benefits desired of the participant now and during retirement. This may be done through a series of statements corresponding to each of these value areas and responses are then indicated on a likert scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

Finally, in the fourth step, application of learned principles to practice is seen through a "boomer lens", one which encompasses understanding the values of the population. The future of leisure program planning will challenge recreation professionals to rethink how programs are delivered to an aging, dynamic, and active population. Adopting a different lens will allow recreation professionals to adequately meet the needs of this diverse generation. Further, without this lens, the boomer cohort will not receive the quality of leisure that they desire and deserve.

Through practical application in the field, Recreation Director for the City of San Carlos, CA, Barry Wiess, states "Your program paradigm framework is a useful tool...assisting in the process and strategies to effectively engage staff to develop effective programming guidelines."

Boomers and A New Lens

As baby boomers march toward retirement, they are not going to be satisfied with a "regularly scheduled program" as is often found in today's senior centers. If what we know about boomers is true, the traditional approach to leisure programming and use of leisure facilities will have to break from its norm to meet the demands of the baby boomer generation. In result, recreation professionals will be obligated to develop a large range and scope of adult-focused recreational activities targeted at a program philosophy undertaking the five value areas discussed and entailing the psychological, educational, physiological, social, and demographic leisure values of this new cohort. Further, the future of leisure programming presents unique opportunities that the recreation professional must not only know but must also proactively plan for and act upon.

A clearer philosophical lens will allow recreation professionals to see boomers in a more focused picture. This lens will allow recreation professionals to fully (a) understand and begin to create programs and services that are responsive to an unusual aging society, (b) have an awareness of external opportunities and challenges which will foster innovation and positive response to serving a new cohort of participants, and (c) consider specific value structures of a new cohort. One must consider a value based programming philosophy which produces identifiable outcomes. In response to this approach, Christine Page a recreation programmer in Ames, IAtates "I agree with you wholeheartedly that good programming reflects the values of the people we are serving."

Conclusion

The recreation profession exists to provide a service so that people have more meaningful leisure experiences and that in turn positively impacts their quality of life. To measure against this objective, recreation professionals must recognize the diversity of interests, lifestyles, and age groups they serve and program accordingly. Thus, knowing that philosophy and values should give us direction and focus to understand our participants and to produce true, real, and good leisure programs, it appears that without applying philosophy into leisure programming on a regular basis, recreation professionals will not be able to adequately meet the needs of its diverse populations. When considering the interrelationship of philosophy and leisure programming, it is clear that philosophy should inspire programming practices. Relying on past approaches will not sustain the demands of this new cohort or the success of recreation professionals.

Therefore, as recreation professionals it is our responsibility to educate ourselves, our staff, and our agencies for a cohort based on values. Data supports the argument that the Cochran Leisure Program Paradigm offers insight for current professionals and academicians in recreation and leisure services settings and programs. The message for both professionals in the field and those teaching in college programs should be one which steers the design of leisure programs toward the values of a cohort.

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