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Familia Ludens: Reinforcing the Leisure Component in Family Life

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Leisure is examined as a normal and potentially vital component in the contemporary family. Consideration is given to the interplay between work and leisure and the means by which leisure facilitates companionship and family interaction. Specific attention is given to the lack of reinforcement of family leisure in present institutions and the important role leisure can play in marital, child, parent-child, and retirement adjustment.

In his study of the march of civilizations, Johan Huizinga (1949) carefully examines the role of play in culture. He concludes that man appears to develop the presence of the play element as an integrating force for his institutions and society as a whole. The playing man, "homo ludens," is recognized by Huizinga as a viable and natural condition of mankind with myriad permutations. An offshoot of this concept led a number of recreation groups to adopt the slogan: "the family that plays together, stays together." The family from this point of view, is perceived of as utilizing play to facilitate its integration or solidarity. In other words, familia ludens becomes a measure of the health and vitality of a family. At a higher level, the reinforcement of companionship as a means of integrating the modern family as an institution presupposes the element of togetherness and sharing found in the playing family.

Play, however, is but an active form of leisure and it is important to understand leisure before we can adequately test the above family related assumptions. There is little question that today the family is being influenced by a change in perspectives of and opportunities for leisure. New conceptions of work, job, career, leisure, play, and recreation are challenging the structure of the family. Leisure has been hailed the harbinger of ill as well as the source of new life for the family (Hobart, 1963). Somewhat surprisingly, little attention has been given the leisure factor by family life professionals. As an indication of this lack of awareness, an examination of marriage and family texts reveals that very little, if any, mention is given the role of play, recreation, or leisure in the modern family.[1] Lack of research in the area can partially explain this but the dearth of speculation beyond the "do things together" cliche is difficult to understand. Perhaps it is time to consider familia ludens and explore several questions: Is leisure really an important consideration for the family and why; should leisure reinforcement be a function of family life specialists; and if so, what should the principle concerns be in this area?

It is important first of all to examine what is happening in the worlds of work and leisure. Work, for many in the post-industrial society, is increasingly losing much of its earlier meaning (cf. Reisman, 1958; Goodale and Aagaard, 1974). This is especially true in the case of the job or

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[1] A notable exception to the above is the text by Robert O. Blood, *Marriage* (Free Press, 1969) which devotes a chapter to "Companionship in Leisure."

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occupation.[2] Kaplan states that "the familiar ticket to life—work—seems in danger of having outlived its acceptability" (1971,26). The definition of who we are is usually answered by an occupational reference-lawyer, professor, plumber, and so forth. But what if you find little meaning in your job, your required hours of "work" are being reduced, and the economy cannot support your continuing to "moonlight?" The idea that any occupation can provide a sense of accomplishment if only the proper job enrichment techniques are employed or if children are reared with the proper orientation toward work is highly questionable. What Jacques Ellul calls the "autonomous monolithic technological society with its scientistic values" (1968,38) strains to reduce each task to its simplist component and man becomes the servant, not the master.

Families are encouraged, nevertheless, to reinforce the work ethic. "Parents, regardless of social class, do a great deal to determine whether a child will be work-oriented or a sluggard, whether he will seek or avoid responsibility" (Lipsett, 1962,46). The implication is made in this statement that the option to a work orientation is a lothesome state and that persons selecting another life orientation are somehow avoiding responsibility. While the case for vocational education on the part of parents is not denied (Shoffner and Klemer, 1973), it is questionable whether the work ethic, as it has been reinforced, is truly functional any longer.

As discretionary time becomes more available, the work ethic fails to allow genuine freedom. Working at play becomes the norm. Vacations are preplanned to the most minute detail. Weekends are an endless string of "things to do." Even sex is defined in terms of schedules and techniques (Lewis and Brisset, 1967). According to Alexander Reid Martin (1961):

> The complete inability to relax even for a moment is a common complaint and evidence of neurotic disturbance. The widespread and characteristic symptoms of our so-called age of anxiety stem from a fear of relaxation and leisure. This reaches its most intense expression in many individuals who are unable to take vacations, in those who are beset by severe after-work irritability, and in those who suffer from what is called the Sunday neurosis.

If support for the work ethic as *the* dominant life force in man is increasingly dysfunctional or inappropriate as it appears to be, perhaps even worse would be the lack of support for an adequate replacement. There is particular danger in supplanting the work ethic with no ethic. Not surprisingly, this is already occurring and having a negative effect on the family.

The increase in middle-class youthful deviancy can partially be explained as an inability to creatively utilize discretionary time. This should not be taken as an attack on the alternative life styles of youth who are attempting to develop a different ethical foundation for their lives. Many of these latter persons are opting out of the so-called "work-trap" in favor of a preferred orientation toward creative leisure. But what of the "T.V. generation" that has been fed only the pablum of vicarious participation and entertainment, controlled activities with defined leadership, and a notable lack of clear-cut work goals? Many of them get into trouble simply out of boredom. Without proper leisure socialization, this probably will increase.

Another problem resulting from a lack of leisure reinforcement is that free time increasingly becomes less "free." As an example, Walker (1969) reports that labor-saving devices have not had as much effect on relieving the homemaker from household tasks as many believe. What usually happens is that standards shift, filling the potentially released time. For example, when clothes were washed by hand, they were usually worn longer and washed less frequently. Today, we expect a change of clothes daily and a clean wardrobe from which to select our garb for the day. Without education for leisure, increases in non-work time will probably continue to lead to a disconcerting rise in

[2] For an excellent discussion of the difference between job and work, see Thomas F. Green, *Work, Leisure, and the American Schools* (N.Y.: Random House, 1968.)

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standards and a loss of freedom for all family members.

Why is Leisure Important?

Leisure offers a new source of family integration suited to the age toward which we are moving. John Neulinger (1974, 120) recently stated:

> It is not necessary that we downgrade work in order to raise the value of leisure. Leisure is not non-work; leisure is not time left over from work. Leisure is a state of mind; it is a way of being, of being at peace with oneself and what one is doing.

Free time, therefore, is not leisure; it only releases the possibility of leisure. As the potential for this freedom is increasing, it would be appropriate to discuss what leisure can do for the family.

First, leisure fulfills needs for personal relaxation. It cleanses the mind and frees one to consider alternatives. In effect, leisure should help release persons from the conventionality which tends to restrict individuals in their decision-making and their opportunities for alternative modes of interaction. There is a tendency for roles to become increasingly defined over time, especially in the family. It is only during leisure that persons become free to consider other means of handling tasks.

This spontaneity and reduction in inhibition is very important in developing interpersonal understanding. If persons interact primarily in defined roles, then the feedback they receive limits both the realization of their self as well as that of the other. The result is the "role-playing" so common in many families with the necessary reduction in communication to reduce the threat of structural instability. Interpersonal communication is enhanced by leisure. The realization of the other beyond the constraints of a particular role improves the level of understanding and offers further possibilities for exchange. In addition, leisure allows the release of normal pressures and tension, the opportunity to share frustrations, and the ability to compensate for inadequacies in other areas.

The cohesiveness of the family can be improved through the sharing of leisure. By enjoying a common experience, the participants develop a sense of exclusiveness and come to know one another better. Stone and Taves (1956) report that a "combat metaphor" is common among family campers who come to view their experience as a means of improving their social solidarity. The wilderness trip, for example, is perceived of as a struggle only able to be won if each person understands one another. This strengthening of family ties among campers has also been reported in studies by West and Merriam (1970) and Lay and Devall (1974).

The sense of solidarity, however, is increased by more than just the experience of the shared activity itself. In many cases, a great deal of planning and preparation is done before the activity is even engaged in. The family that plants a garden together may spend weeks deciding what will be grown, where it should be located, what procedures need to be followed, and so on. After the activity, the process of recollection often reinforces the cohesiveness of the family and opens the communication of the members revealing new opportunities for interaction.

But not all leisure activities function in the same way for families (Orthner, 1974). Individual activities may provide relaxation for the persons involved but they also develop their own set of commitments that reduce possibilities for communication and sharing. A high proportion of time spent in individual activities has been found to be negatively related to marital satisfaction (Orthner, 1975). On the other hand, "joint" activities, those which require interaction, are most likely to be associated with family solidarity. Games, camping, and most forms of play allow persons to explore their environment with greater freedom and to test themselves in new situations. Family roles are less clearly defined in such activity and role exchange becomes possible: the husband might cook, the wife pitch the ball, or the children control the rules.

"Parallel" leisure activities, a third possibility, offer the promise of sharing but produce an actual reduction in participant interaction. The spectator oriented activ-

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ities dominate this pattern of leisure with television viewing their forte. As a recreational resource, the television provides an opportunity for the family to be together, to vicariously experience something in common, but with few necessary requirements for sharing. Planning is provided by the networks and the "T.V. Guide" and recollection is handled through re-runs and magazines. Parallel activities, therefore, may give the family a feeling that they are "doing things together" and yet hide the underlying tension and needs for interpersonal reinforcement that are handled in joint activities.

A central issue is whether families know how to develop their capacities for leisure and how to select those activities that contribute to their solidarity. Somewhat optimistically, Dumazedier feels that "family cohesion is not threatened with the new society, but renewed—thanks to leisure and semi-leisure relationships and activities" (1971, 197). But he is assuming acceptance of the "new society" with a leisure ethic, while for many persons this is not going to be an easy adjustment. The anxiety that exists with free time and the inability to select those activities that integrate the family are going to become critical issues in the immediate future. Guidance will be necessary for many families to find fulfillment in leisure.

Toward Leisure Reinforcements

The responsibility for a reorientation toward leisure should be shared by each of the institutions of society. But family-shared leisure, as a special case, certainly is not receiving the reinforcement it needs. As an example, socialization in leisure is usually associated with schooling and, specifically, with physical education. These programs, however, tend to have several strikes against them in facilitating gratifying family leisure: activities tend to be sport oriented, skills are rewarded more than pleasure, and sex-division is usually practiced. This results in competition being encouraged instead of cooperation, the continuation of the "work at play ethic," and the separation of men and women in leisure when they need to learn to relax and enjoy these periods together.

Other recreation groups have done little better. Most recreation programs are geared to a separation of family members. Men do these things, women do those things; boys do this, girls do that. Women have been barred from various recreational establishments of men, including golf courses. With few exceptions, girls are presently not allowed to participate in Little League baseball with boys. It may be expected that if a man wished to join the garden club, he would cause considerable consternation. Given this separation, it is little wonder that recreation leaders report that "the tremendous forces, positive and negative, shaping modern family life are in some ways seemingly beyond the influence of recreational forces in our society" (Miller and Robinson, 1963,257).

Neither economic nor religious institutions have been particularly noteworthy in their reinforcement of family recreation. The non-family orientation of American business has been aptly criticized (Koprowski, 1973) and there are few indications of a major change. Forced overtime, extensive business travel, relocation, the "company-first" attitude, and other factors reduce leisure possibilities. Churches, likewise, seem to develop programs that separate family members. While we rarely find a church today that forces men to sit on one side and women the other or deplores mixed swimming, total family activities are often hard to find. As an example, a local church held a family week culminating in a picnic at which the men played baseball and the boys and girls played other separate games, while the women cooked, cheered, and talked with one another. Only rarely did family members see, play, or even eat with one another after they had arrived.

This brings us to the central problem: Many families, if not most, do not know how to develop an reinforce in themselves the creative use of leisure. They become dependent on outside sources of interest to relieve them of the boredom, tension, and insecurity they often feel with one another.

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Certainly, summer camps become this for many children when their parents no longer find them comfortable to have around. It is interesting to watch the current flak over Little League and the revolt of parents who see their children being dehumanized in this "sport." A boy must work very hard, risk ridicule as well as other punishment, and conform to strict adult control over other areas of his life to "play" ball. What ever happened to sandlot ball and other spontaneous forms of play? It appears that parents have felt more comfortable in sending their children into organized activities where "responsible" adults are in control. One wonders, however, if this is not simply another means of shifting their responsibility and especially, an indication of their own insecurity with play and leisure.

This inability to creatively develop free time resources is probably best seen in the growth of television. The fact that the average family views its television set over six hours per day (Rue, 1974) is only an indication of its influence. Most important, families have become dependent on this recreational source as the mainstay of their perception of family-oriented leisure.

The above suggests that families do need guidance in effectively developing their leisure resources and that this guidance is presently not available to any significant extent. This is not to say that the family is losing its recreational function, but rather that many families are not prepared for the possibilities of leisure. Family life professionals should be concerned over the divesting of responsibility for family leisure that appears to be occurring, especially since free time without a positive leisure ethic may be a factor in familial disorganization.

It is not being advocated that a new subject be added to all the programs that are now being offered. However, it is important that this dimension be appropriately integrated into those subject areas that are relevant to leisure education. This is not a new idea. Buckland (1972) has hailed the productive use of leisure as an important element in parent education. Davy and Rowe have said that families need to be aware of their role in providing "an atmosphere conducive to the cultivation of creative interests" (1964,80). Koprowski (1973) and Rue (1974) have emphasized the need for more knowledgeable control over television viewing. In addition, Kraus (1964) has proposed that courses in home and family living explore the function of leisure and recreation in terms of their effect on building desirable family relationships.

Some Specific Areas of Concern

Marital Adjustment

In sympathy with the Mace view that good family strategy must first concentrate on the marital dyad (1974), husbands and wives need reinforcement for sharing their discretionary time together. There is a tendency for roles to be increasingly divided over the marital career and separate interests to develop. Orthner (1975) found in his study a rather steady decline in jointly shared leisure activities over the marital career. Because shared leisure is a major determinent of companionship, this decline may be a primary reason for the marital disenchantment reported in most research (cf. Rollins and Feldman, 1970).

Couples should be encouraged to order their priorities so that joint participation in leisure activities is possible. All too often marriages get boring, even in the early years when emphasis is placed on individual pursuits or parallel activities such as television. When children arrive, expenses increase and parental role demands may make it difficult for husbands and wives to have time together alone. This may mean allocating scarce financial resources for baby sitting services but parents need to be aware of the relational costs of not having this time to share.

In addition to parenthood, other areas of marital stress can be resolved easier if some leisure is shared. Conflict is inevitable and a genuine understanding of the other is necessary for any issues to be effectively dealt with. Shared leisure facilitates this process because persons are

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more likely to communicate with and understand someone with whom they have had a common experience. The camaraderie that develops also aids conflict resolution by providing a perception of common goals rather than the separation of interests and outlooks common to many marriages.

Husbands and wives also should be encouraged to view sexual relations from the point of view of play and leisure. Miller and Robinson emphasize that "making love is the greatest, most beautiful form of play we know. In its purest, most wholesome form it is the uninhibited and enthusiastic sharing by husband and wife in the entrancing, fascinating, aesthetic games of sexual relations" (1963,264). The popularity of Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex* certainly lends credance to this perspective. Yet, many couples are held back from this experience by outmoded concepts and lack of knowledge. Other persons are so concerned with technique that a sexual experience takes on work-like overtones. Certainly, sex educators need to stress the importance of a leisure setting with free time, reduction in anxiety, and the freedom to enjoy one another as vital to sexual satisfaction.

Child Adjustment

In a recent television commercial, a mother is pictured calling out to her son: "Johnny I hope you are not *doing* anything!" This seems to speak to the anxiety of parents over the free time of children. There is a sincere lack of recognition of the value of play as a means of learning in the young. Children practice alternate roles, they create, they become more physically adept, they learn; in general, children use their leisure as a valuable tool in becoming more aware of themselves, others, and the world around them.

The 1960 White House Conference on Children reported that adult values of leisure had an overriding influence on the free time perspectives of children (Sorenson, 1961). The 1970 Conference contained a plea by the children themselves: "We want the opportunity to learn to make decisions during our free time" (Chandler, 1971,204). As an antidote for the "uselessness and worthlessness" felt by many children, it was recommended that children should have a voice in shaping their own leisure, especially in the planning of activities and programs that influence them. Furthermore, it was encouraged that "in the family, child-parent discussions about the use of leisure time should be commonplace" (Chandler, 1971,204).

But are most parents realistically prepared to handle the responsibility of this guidance? Probably not, if the data on how parents use television as a baby-sitting service are even close to being correct (Looney, 1971; Rue, 1974). It is especially important for young children to learn to use leisure creatively and constructively because if severe constraints are placed on their perceptions of leisure as youth, it is doubtful that they can free themselves from these constraints as adults. Education for leisure assumes that people are "exposed early and long to experiences that will help them develop appreciations and skills that will help the flowering of their personalities as leisure becomes increasingly available to them" (Brightbill, 1960, 94).

Parents are going to need aid in examining alternate activities, developing insights into the role of play for children and adults, and establishing guidelines on how to develop in their children the means of selecting pursuits that relieve their frustration and tensions while developing themselves personally.

Parent-Child Adjustment

The relationship between parents and children can also be helped by the creative use of leisure. Just as husbands and wives can increase their understanding of one another through sharing some of their leisure together, parent-child communication can likewise be enhanced. Parents need to be encouraged to do things with their children. When a child's free time is only spent with peers, coaches, recreation leaders, or teachers, he becomes more

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dependent on them for his self-concept development and personal satisfactions than his parents. He is likely to shift his authority to persons other than the parents because he perceives that they are more concerned and care for him. If the trend toward children spending less time with their parents continues, it may be expected that they will be increasingly less influenced by them as well. As child nurturance is a primary function of the contemporary family, this appears to be an abdication of parental responsibility. In support of this line of thinking, Nye (1958) found that juvenile delinquents were more likely to have negative concepts of family recreation, probably because they had not experienced it.

Children, themselves, seem to want family recreational activities. Some of the most fondly remembered experiences of youth are times spent with parents but interestingly, away-from-home activities yield the most positive memories (cf. Conner, Johannis, and Walters, 1955; Stone, 1960). This may be because the sharing of new experiences is more likely to open communication between parents and children, especially when children are allowed more exclusive parental attention. In a study of high-school students, Stone (1960) found that 54 percent desired to do more with the family while only six percent desired less family recreation. It would appear then that parents are a major factor in not providing the opportunity for these experiences, even among adolescents. Guidance needs to be given to parents so that they can learn to utilize these needs of their children to better the overall family relationship. As an indication of one common misunderstanding, a young father recently told the author that he was working very hard and long hours now so that when his children get older, he will have more time to give them. Not only was he unaware of the non-family commitments he was establishing for himself, but also he did not realize that when he finally is ready for his children, and his wife for that matter, they will probably be unable to establish the kind of relationship for which he is hoping. He may simply be too late.

Adjustment to Retirement

Another area that should be of critical concern to family professionals is retirement adjustment. Despite differences in life expectancy between men and women, most persons reach retirement age married. Suddenly, they are faced with the prospect of having to deal with more potential leisure than they could have dreamed of. It has been estimated that a retired person will have more available discretionary time than the amount of time spent at work over the previous 20 years (Kaplan, 1960). Reduced incomes usually require husbands and wives to spend much of this time together in a smaller residence. If the work orientation that dominated much of their life is not properly channeled, frustrations and anxieties are likely to create marital problems. It is little wonder that many wives dread the prospect of their husband's retirement.

Conclusion

We return now to the basic issue: Is familia ludens a viable concept and is there utility in reinforcing this leisure component in family life? First, it is apparent that some qualifications need to be placed on the concept of family play. It is not being recommended that families do everything in concert so that familia ludens becomes an all encompassing life style. Individuals often need time to be alone, to reflect and relax in the presence of no one. At other times, interests may develop with non-family members that are satisfying and meet needs that cannot be enjoyed or shared with the family. In addition, it is recognized that for many families, stability is dependent upon defined roles and reduced communication, variables that might be altered in shared play.

An additional problem that must be reckoned with is the overall anxiety regarding leisure on the part of many. For some persons, this manifests itself in a fear of personal and interpersonal freedom, an

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inability to relax. The old adage that "idle hands are the devil's workshop" seems to characterize this type of person. Work becomes the driving force in life and leisure the enemy of productivity. For other persons, leisure anxiety manifests itself in a somewhat neurotic search for pleasure and fulfillment, the unusual and different experience. These latter persons measure a good vacation by the number of miles travelled, the number of kodachromes taken, and the number of waterfalls visited. The fact that every movie nominated for an award has been personally viewed becomes a status symbol. Experiences are evaluated in terms of quantity, not quality. This type of leisure is competitive and difficult to share despite the presence of others.

On the one hand, it should be emphasized that each family has to learn to find its own satisfactions, those things that allow personal fulfillment and interpersonal nurturance. On the other hand, it is evident that the family depending upon companionship as a means of integrating itself cannot establish the rapport necessary for this without the sharing of experiences together. This is not to say that "togetherness" and leisure are the same but rather that family integration based on intimacy, open communication, and interpersonal support requires a component of interaction during moments relatively free from the constraints of everyday responsibilities, i.e., during leisure. Failure to realize and experience this, for whatever reason, is likely to result in separation of interests, closure of communication channels, and stress during those times when shared leisure does occur (See Rosenblatt and Russell in this issue). This is why there seems to be considerable value in encouraging the active mode of leisure implied in familia ludens. Again, it must be recognized that not all families require this and all persons need support for independence in leisure as well as sharing, but reinforcement of sharing has not received proportionately the attention it deserves, that is the point of this paper. This is also why training people in skills such as tennis, photography, gardening, or whatever, as good as they may be for each of us, is not the entire answer. There is a deeper need, if you will, for socialization toward leisure in the broadest sense. Recreation for both the individual and the family should be the re-creation that the term implies.

The author has an old watering can with the words on it: "Don't hurry; don't worry; and don't forget to stop and smell the flowers." In a world rushing by us so fast, it can be hard to develop this kind of leisure perspective. The eminent sociologist Robert M. Caslver recognized this plight in the following:

> Back in the days when unremitting toil was the lot of all but the very few and leisure still a hopeless yearning, hard and painful as life was, it still felt real. People were in rapport with the small bit of reality allotted to them, the sense of the earth, the tang of the changing seasons, the consciousness of the eternal on-going of birth and death. Now when so many have leisure, they become detached from themselves, not merely from the earth. From all the widened horizons of our greater world a thousand voices call us to come near, to understand, and to enjoy, but our ears are not trained to hear them. The leisure is ours but not the skill to use it. So leisure becomes a void, and from the ensuing restlessness men take refuge in delusive excitations or fictitious visions, returning to their earth no more (1955, 54-55).

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