



Global Leisure Debate: responses to challenges on leisure, mental health and well-being

John Dattilo

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John Dattilo 

Penn State University, University Park, PA, USA

This Global Leisure Debate occurred on 9th/10th June for approximately an hour as part of the WLO Knowledge Sharing and Networking Experience. WLO chair, Joanne Schroeder, moderated the session with participants, Simone Fullagar from Griffith University in Australia, Joe Pavelka from Mount Royal University in Canada, and me from Penn State University in the USA. In preparation for the discussion, we read transcripts from interviews with Alfonso Jimenez, Director of Research and Innovation at Ingesport-GO fit, Martyn Allison, Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association Honorary Member, and Joe Taylor, Founder of The Wave Project UK. These knowledgeable practitioners discussed challenges, inequalities, barriers and opportunities associated with mental health and well-being within the leisure context. The WLO Secretariat, Cristina Ortega Nuere and the WLO staff developed three 5-minute videos with each video featuring one of the three invited participants providing our reactions to the transcripts identified as WLO Pre-Experience Videos. Many of those attending the debate reviewed the videos prior to the discussion.

We discussed ways leisure service professionals can address mental health challenges and help people achieve well-being identifying that our mental health exists on a fluctuating continuum influenced by the intersectionality of characteristics including gender, race, ethnicity, ability and many more. We also recognized the value in distinguishing leisure from free time as well as recreation and sport activities, since leisure extends beyond utilitarian purposes of recuperating from work, diverting our attention and conspicuously consuming goods. Connections between mental health and leisure become apparent when we recognize that leisure is an intrinsically valuable subjective state of being involving meaningful virtuous actions characterized by authenticity resulting in a sense of identity and agency intertwining with happiness and, ultimately, our ability to flourish (Dattilo & Lopez Frias, 2021).

Consequently, addressing challenges to our leisure as it connects with mental health and well-being is a social justice issue requiring us to consider the implications of power dynamics (Lopez Frias & Dattilo, 2020). As the world continues to battle the COVID pandemic and associated challenges to our well-being, it is encouraging to realize that our interactions embedded within culture create power, and, therefore, we can shift power over individuals that result in oppression and marginalization to power that supports people in solidarity to achieve leisure (Lopez Frias & Dattilo, 2021). We concluded that leisure service providers can address challenges to mental

health and well-being by promoting inclusive leisure services that create a sense of belonging and welcome everyone to experience leisure (Dattilo, 2021a). We also acknowledged the value in demonstrating a willingness to make accommodations that promote equitable leisure experiences through various strategies such as leisure education (Dattilo, 2021b).

I am humbled by the invitation to participate in the debate, am thankful for having engaged in such an intellectually stimulating experience, and I look forward to future WLO Knowledge Sharing and Networking Experiences.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

John Dattilo  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9332-0932>

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