Classical Theories of Play & Recreation

RRT 287

Classical Theories of Play

Why do people play?



- ◆ Scholars have riddled for years, "Why do people play?" (Why is something so frivolous a cultural universal?)
- What useful function does it perform?
- ◆ Is it a societal function that should be supported?

Classical Theories of Play

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- ◆ 1. Surplus Energy Theory
- ◆ 2. Relaxation Theory
- ◆ 3. Preparation (instinct/practice)
- ◆ 4. Recapitulation Theory
- ♦ 5. Cathartic Theory
- ♦ 6. Compensation Theory
- ◆ 7. Competence/Effectance Theory

Classical Theories of Play

Surplus Energy Theory

- Play is motivated by a need to release surplus energy.
- ♦ Observe children just before recess...
- ♦ It does **not** explain why people with little energy still play.



"Our team will murder yours tonight!"

Classical Theories of Play

Relaxation Theory



- ♦ We play because we need to relax from the stresses of our daily
- But some people don't lead stressed lives...
- Recreation can often be competitive & stressful...

Classical Theories of Play

Preparation Theory (Instinct/Practice)

- Play prepares us for adult life by teaching:
 - team work
 - role playing
 - following the rules.
- ◆ But did Pilgrim children have a need to play computer games?



Classical Theories of Play

Recapitulation Theory

- Activities that re-enact events from our history as a race are intrinsically more rewarding.
- Hunting, shooting, hide-&-seek, chasing, & throwing games are seen world-wide.



But many don't reflect history!

(Bungee jumping, hackysack, hang gliding, GameBoy...)

Classical Theories of Play

Cathartic Theory

- We play because we need to express disorganized or painful emotions in a harmless way.
- Greek "catharsis" theater purged people of hostile emotions.
- Children re-enact their punishments (scolding a doll...)
- "Taking it out on the other team..."

Classical Theories of Play

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Cathartic Theory

(continued)

- We play because we need to express disorganized or painful emotions in a harmless way.
- ◆ Greek "catharsis" plays purged people of hostile emotions.
- ♦ Children re-enact their punishments (scolding a doll...)
- ◆ Doesn't explain most recreation. (hiking, baseball, stamp collecting...)

Classical Theories of Play

Compensation Theory

- We play to satisfy psychic needs not satisfied through our work (boring, repetitive jobs...).
- Boredom may motivate some play behavior, but boredom is not necessarily work related.
- Librarians may play chess and ditch diggers may play rugby!
- Doesn't fully account for motivation to play.

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Competence/Effectance Theory

- Humans seek to optimize their level of arousal.
 - (We turn loud music down, but, if it is too quiet & we turn it up!)
- We all have a need to generate interactions with our environment (from child to adult).

Classical Theories of Play

Competence/Effectance

Theory (continued)

- Optimization of arousal & the need for interaction with our environment leads to the following scenario:
- When we have an <u>effect</u> and cause a reaction from our environment we get a sense of <u>control</u> & power. This gives us a feeling of <u>competence</u>.
- ◆ May account for general motivation but it can't separate play from work!

Classical Theories of Play



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Classical Theories of Play--What good are they?



- ◆ No <u>single</u> theory can explain all recreation behavior.
- ◆ As managers we will understand people (& their conflicts) better if we understand their motivations.
- Play can be the greatest motivator!
 It defines lifestyles, industries, & major resource allocations.

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