Chapter 4
Leisure Experience and Positive Identity Development in Adolescents

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Introduction

The search for a balance between time for compulsory tasks and time for freedom and relaxation is one of the most important issues related to the role of leisure in achieving well-being. Leisure's complexity and its relationship with so many life aspects make it an important issue in the study of optimal human functioning.

A review of the literature regarding leisure and adolescence shows a wide spectrum of conclusions about how leisure contributes to adolescent development in general (cf. Verma & Larson, 2003) and on identity development in particular (cf. Shaw, Kleiber, & Caldwell, 1995). This chapter aims to analyze these contributions and integrate them into the scope of positive adolescent development.

We recognize that leisure is a multidimensional concept that includes individual, social, and environmental aspects; this understanding underlines our perspective of leisure as subjective experience determined by the interaction between the individual and his/her environment. This interaction leads to the emergence of an experiential perception of leisure that is present in and occurs throughout daily life. The experience of leisure, then, results from a historically, culturally, and societally defined time, determined by both the opportunities available within the daily environment and by individual characteristics (Freire, 1999, 2006b). Regarding developmental research, this chapter aims to develop an understanding of leisure's contribution to positive identity development in adolescence.

To address these objectives, this chapter is structured according to different topics. First, we discuss the relevance of the relationship between leisure, adolescence, and positive development. Then, we discuss the concept of leisure, proposing a specific definition that considers leisure a subjective experience that integrates a variety of

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components, supported by a psychosocial-environmental approach to leisure and development (Freire, 1999). The specific relationship between leisure and identity is then explored by discussing different concepts of identity, such as personal, social, and place identities. After this, the concept of positive identity development in adolescents is discussed as an optimal match between leisure components and types of identity. This conceptual match forms the core of our approach. Finally, some conclusions and considerations for future research are considered, highlighting new directions for leisure studies.

Leisure, Adolescence, and Positive Development

Although leisure is not examined exclusively within the context of adolescence, its positive impact on adolescents is presented in the literature as it relates to the multiple life variables that influence developmental trajectories. Accordingly, the conceptual triangulation between *adolescence, development, and leisure* provides a basic framework for the study of identity in adolescence. *Adolescence* is viewed as a period for "resources to be developed" (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003), a period during which plasticity, adaptive developmental regulations, and thriving converge, as expressed in the concept of "positive youth development" (Lerner, von Eye, Lerner, Lewin-Bizan, & Bowers, 2010). *Development* is based on the perspective of improved person-context interactions that structure healthy life trajectories, in addition to problems, disorders, or dysfunctions that limit the course of developmental trajectories (Larson, 2000; Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2003). *Leisure* can be understood as opportunities for adolescents to be active producers of their own development (Dwokin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Freire, 1999; Silbereisen, Noack, & Eyferth, 1986), highlighting youth activities as contexts for development (King et al., 2005; Larson, 2000).

Adolescents spend significant time in leisure activities in comparison with other groups in the general population, i.e., in comparison with adults, who have to devote a significant amount of time to work and other tasks related to several social roles (Super, 1984). Previous studies of Portuguese adolescents (male and female high school students, mean age of 17.1 years), using the experience sampling method (ESM) during a week of their daily life, have shown that they spent approximately 36.9% of their week engaged in free-time/leisure activities (including 16.5% in socialization), 29.2% in productive tasks (17.9% studying at school and 10.3% studying at home), and 15.7% in maintenance activities (Freire, Fonte, & Lima, 2007). A recent ongoing study of high school students (boys and girls, mean age of 16.76 years old) using the same methodology found that, over the course of a week, they spent 31.1% of their time engaged in productive activities, 30.3% in maintenance activities, and 38.4% in leisure activities. In a different study (Freire, Lima, & Fonte, 2009), high school students (boys and girls, mean age of 16.7 years), questioned about their life interests via self-report measures, have reported that leisure (structured and active activities), social relationships with peers, and mass media

(watching TV and listening to music) were their preferred activities (respectively, 31.39, 22.28, and 19.75% of the 395 answers provided). It is interesting to note that the activities adolescents referred to are all about free-time/leisure activities, particularly if we do not differentiate between active and passive leisure. When questioned about the activities they would like to do if they were free to choose whatever they wanted, leisure activities were indicated most frequently (27.41%), followed by work (14.72%), social relationships/peers (13.71%), and personal thoughts/emotions (13.2%) in a total of 197 answers. As in other studies of adolescents from other countries and cultures, these results show that leisure activities are relevant to the daily lives of adolescents for two reasons: the considerable amount of time spent on leisure activities and the positive meanings adolescents associate with these activities. This justifies leisure's status as a highly preferred life activity among adolescents (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984).

Therefore, the involvement and consequent engagement in leisure activities is a major aspect of promoting positive development in adolescence. One major issue centers on the impact of effective participation and engagement in leisure activities, showing how different activities can have different impacts on development and shedding light on leisure's beneficial role in development (Larson, 2000). Larson considered the component of initiative "a core quality of positive youth development" and "a core requirement for other components of positive development, such as creativity, leadership, altruism, and civic engagement" (p. 170). According to his approach, leisure can provide a set of structured activities that can improve initiative and positive development, which facilitates the movement into positive adulthood. Along the same conceptual line, Lerner's perspective has been of great importance in showing how adolescence is per se associated with positive development, using the concept of *plasticity* (Lerner et al., 2010). This concept represents a fundamental strength of the adolescent period and shows how systematic changes may result in more positive functioning. Action and involvement are some of the most important requirements for achieving this positive development, and leisure activities permit and create opportunities for this to occur (Rich, 2003), mainly if they integrate intrinsic motivation, concerted engagement in the environment, and persistence over time that directs these elements toward a goal (Larson, 2000; Watts & Caldwell, 2008).

This perspective underscores the distinction between free time and leisure, types of leisure activities, and the discussion surrounding the positivity and negativity of leisure outcomes (Bartko & Eccles, 2003; Caldwell, 2005b; Freire, 2006a; Freire & Stebbins, 2011; Vicary, Smith, Caldwell, & Swisher, 1998). While we recognize the potential disagreement about these issues, we advocate for a leisure that fosters development and allows adolescents to learn from their experiences and acquire new skills and competencies while developing a positive relationship with themselves, the others, and the environment, becoming "interested adolescents" (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). This is related to the concept of optimal leisure defined as a learned experience, being the context the main source of education by giving structured, adequate, and healthy opportunities of choice about the activities to involve in (Freire, 2007; Freire & Stebbins, 2011). Adolescents can have

different experiences during free time, but only some of them are related to leisure, and only some of these constitute optimal leisure experiences. Optimal leisure creates conditions that allow adolescents to realize their full capacities and strengths, is positive in its essence, and thus promotes positive development and well-being (Trainor, Delfabbro, Anderson, & Winefield, 2010). One main issue of leisure experience is that its positiveness is independent of external social standards. Only from an experiential or phenomenological point of view is possible to understand this apparent paradox (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). Studies on the quality of subjective experience and its fluctuation through daily life show the importance of analyzing dimensions of experience, related activities, and contexts' features separately for a deep understanding of adolescents' experiences and associated meanings (Freire et al., 2007; Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). Leisure researchers must be aware of this in order to understand why leisure (and not free time) experience is always associated to positive feelings and outcomes from the perspective of participants.

Our approach demands a complex definition of leisure that integrates its optimal impact on positive development.

Leisure Experience and Its Components

The diverse range of definitions of leisure in the literature shows that there are no clear, agreed-upon core characteristics for a unique definition that could be understood by all researchers, regardless of their research field.

Different authors have tried to define what makes leisure a different experience from other experiences of daily life. From Neulinger (1974), who highlighted perceived freedom as the most important dimension associated with leisure, to the concept of flow and optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1991) has been one of the most powerful tools for comprehending leisure experience from a psychological perspective (Mannell, Zuzanek, & Larson, 1988). Despite different approaches, definitions tend to highlight the relationship between the individual and his/her daily life contexts, making the person-environment interaction approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) relevant to the study of leisure experiences and their impact in pathways through adolescence (Crockett & Crouter, 1995). For instance, Caldwell (2005a) proposed an integrative approach, considering that leisure must be analyzed as an experience, an activity, or as a context. Although recognizing this broad arena for leisure studies, in this chapter, we will focus in leisure as experience, trying to understand its characteristics and different components.

Assuming a psychosocial-environmental perspective about development (Freire, 1999), we consider leisure as subjective experience. In the last decades, and since the emergence of the social cognition paradigm, increased attention has been paid to the study of subjective experience, aimed to analyze internal phenomenological states (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) and their consequences for social thinking and

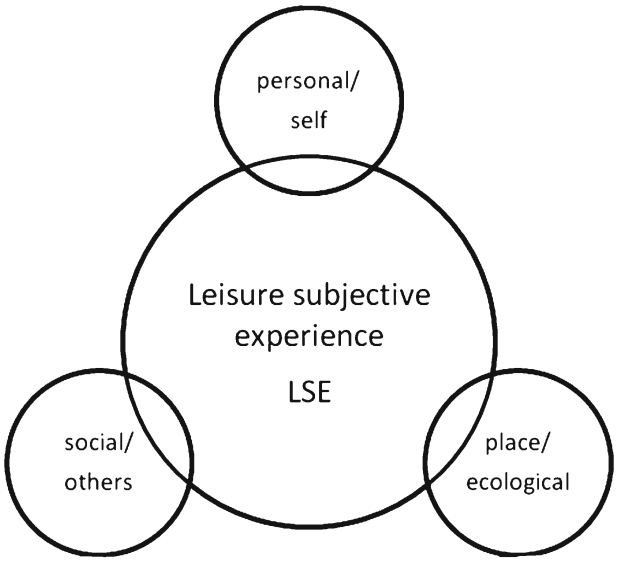


Fig. 4.1 Leisure subjective experience (*LSE*) and its components: personal leisure (personal/self), social leisure (social/others), and place or ecological leisure (place/ecological)

behavior (Bless & Forgas, 2000). Accordingly, our concept of leisure subjective experience (LSE) integrates three different but interrelated components that comprise different levels of analysis about leisure experience: the personal leisure (intrapersonal level), the social leisure (interpersonal and intergroup levels), and the place or ecological leisure (environmental level). Altogether, these different levels create a psychosocial-ecological definition of leisure experience, as expressed in Fig. 4.1. These different levels tend to be discussed separately in leisure literature, but our objective is to bring them together for a complete definition of leisure, to better understand its impact on adolescents' development.

Particularly in adolescence, the LSE emerges from action in context, as stated by Silbereisen, Eyferth, and Rudinger (1986), when subjects are involved in and performing leisure activities. This experience is then interiorized and represented in their sociocognitive map (Freire, 2011). In this process, leisure activities are important opportunities for adolescents to be engaged and learn about themselves, others, and contexts.

Several studies have shown how certain types of activities have different impacts on adolescents' experiences or development (Dwokin et al., 2003; Shernoff & Vandell, 2007), depending on whether the activities are structured or nonstructured (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Larson, 2000) and social or more solitary (Trainor et al., 2010), and also on their breadth or intensity of youth activity involvement (Rose-Krasnor, Busseri, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2006). For some leisure researchers, leisure refers to specific kinds of activities (with the definition of leisure based on characteristics that differentiate it from other activities); however, we are interested in the experience that emerges from involvement and engagement in certain kind of activities. Therefore, activity is an important intermediate between the individual and the lived external context and can provide further opportunities to act (Freire & Stebbins, 2011; Stebbins, 2009). The causes or consequences of acting on leisure subjective experience (LSE) can be personal, social, or related to places,

and together they shape and represent the lived experience of leisure (from a socio-cognitive point of view).

Personal Leisure

Personal leisure refers to the intrapersonal level of LSE and comprises the individual or the self, with his/her subjective and idiosyncratic experiences, integrating personal skills, aptitudes, likes, and dislikes about leisure time or activities. It is strictly related to personal or individual characteristics and internal resources from a psychological point of view.

As shown in empirical literature, several leisure studies emphasize the impact of leisure activities and/or contexts on the improvement of internal resources that might affect positive development of adolescents. Different outcomes have been highlighted, showing how leisure participation can be associated with the improvement of different competencies, such as academic and cognitive performance, psychological well-being, the development of autonomy and decision-making skills, initiative development, emotional competency, or the emergence of optimal experiences while leisuring (Bartko & Eccles, 2003; Ben-Zur, 2003; Delle Fave & Bassi, 2000, 2003; Dwokin et al., 2003), among others.

A current study of Portuguese high school students aimed to evaluate and compare different types of activities of daily life (productive, leisure, and maintenance activities) in terms of the quality of subjective experience showed strong differences between the three types of activities when considering participants' affective dimension (negative and positive affect variables). Data were based on the analysis of 4,631 moments of 165 adolescents' daily life, collected with ESM procedures and using standardized Z scores. In terms of negative affect, the results showed that leisure activities had a negative mean versus a positive mean for productive and maintenance activities (F (2, 4,630) = 16,150, $p < .001$). In contrast, results showed an opposite pattern for positive affect, with leisure activities showing the highest mean (positive) against negative means for the other two types of activities (F (2, 4,633) = 16,030, $p < .001$). These results illustrate the association between leisure and high positive affects and low negative affects, particularly when compared with other activities of their daily life.

Recently, some studies have examined the relationship between leisure and physiological functioning as an important aspect of individual experience. For instance, it is possible that leisure promotes physiological recovery and optimal functioning by increasing positive affect and decreasing negative affect. In fact, engaging in a wide variety of leisure activities is linked to increases in positive affect, life satisfaction, and life engagement levels, as well as decreases in negative affect and depression (Pressman et al., 2009). Both positive and negative affects are linked to cardiovascular, neuroendocrine, and immune functioning outcomes (Bunting, Tolson, Kuhn, Suarez, & Williams, 2000; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Iso-Ahola, 1997). These results suggest that leisure activities have both psychological and physiological benefits.

Thus, a set of results and conclusions highlight the positive impact of leisure in this personal dimension of adolescents' subjective experience. The main outcome is the enhancement of internal resources to help adolescents develop into stronger people whose lives follow more positive and healthy trajectories.

Social Leisure

Social leisure is specifically related to social interaction, that is, interpersonal or intergroup relationships during leisure, showing another component of LSE. Several leisure activities are undertaken in the company of others, for others, or because of others to achieve social objectives. Some studies show how leisure activities offer opportunities to experience new social interactions with new or familiar persons, putting in practice a wide variety of social competences: developing a sense of community, being part of a social group that is acknowledged and esteemed, having friends and adults who constitute supportive social networks, gaining a sense of belonging, and providing opportunities for social relationships and new identities in adolescence (Dwokin et al., 2003; Eccles et al., 2003; Kleiber, 1999). Despite the development of social skills, it is the acquisition of a social capital through leisure that is underlined in this social leisure component.

Such questions demand an understanding of people and the contexts within which social leisure relationships take place. In the same study reported above of Portuguese adolescents (high school students), the relationship between social interactions, in terms of the people the adolescents were with while doing an activity (five categories were considered: family, friends, classmates and teachers, others, and alone) and the type of activities (productive, leisure, or maintenance activities), was analyzed. Results showed a strong association between the type of activities and the companions (χ^2 (8, N = 411) = 1,137, $p < 0.000$), showing that the type of activity they engage in is not independent of the type of company they have.

This is a relevant aspect of subjective leisure experience (SLE): it highlights that some leisure activities (or contexts) create different opportunities for specific social connections and related personal experiences, making the two components of leisure experience (personal and social) conceptually related. The relationship between activities, social relations, and individual experience, through leisure, also demands an analysis of where this integration takes place, which is analyzed next.

Place or Ecological Leisure

Leisure subjective experience (LSE) also encompasses the places where leisure activities and related experiences occur, highlighting the concept of environment and specifically that of place or location. Most of the research outcomes focus on the consequences of participating in activities, but few look beyond what the activity offers in terms of its characteristics and the connection between them and personal

features or social interactions. As Jack (2010) states, it seems that social relationships are believed to develop in a vacuum, rather than in specific places capable of influencing a person's identity. Activities take place within specific surroundings, and they are strictly shaped by external scenarios. This means that places are often a criterion for choosing an activity, for achieving personal goals, or for embracing certain opportunities and experiences associated with specific places (Abbot-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Hay, 1998; Korpela, 1992).

Regarding the relationship between leisure activities and places where they took place, in the same study of Portuguese adolescents, the relationship between the location where adolescents conducted an activity (four categories were considered: school, home, others' houses, public places) and the type of activities (productive, leisure, and maintenance activities) was analyzed. The results showed a strong association between the type of activities and associated places (χ^2 (6, N = 313) = 1,257, $p < 0.001$), showing that the type of activity was not independent of the type of place where the activity took place. Leisure places are associated with specific activities, and different activities require different surroundings and resources. Places can thus create different opportunities for specific experiences in adolescents' lives.

During leisure time, and while participating in leisure activities, people act and react within different places, realizing that specific places contribute to specific leisure experiences (individual or social). In our perspective, the physical or place level integrates with these intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup levels, contributing to a sense of fulfillment and engagement with the social world. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) highlight the importance of identifying with a place, and according to Jack (2010), the places that are part of an individual's life (the places where they grew up, their house, schools, places where they played with friends, and many others) are crucial to individuals' identity development because they are places that elicit feelings of security and a sense of belonging.

It is the integration of these three different levels (personal, social, and ecological) that produces the subjective experience of leisure as one of the most relevant and positive experiences in adolescents' daily life. When leisure experience allows interaction of these three components, adolescents become more involved and engaged in leisure activities and consequently learn more about the social world and about themselves as active and interactive persons, which foster self-esteem and self-expression that contribute to identity construction and a positive sense of self.

Because leisure integrates personal, social, and place dimensions, it is important now to understand how leisure is related to identity formation processes.

Leisure and Identity Formation

Several studies have emphasized how participation in leisure activities specifically contributes to identity formation (Haggard & Williams, 1992; Kivel, 2000; Shaw et al., 1995).

In fact, development in adolescence is strictly associated with identity building, which is considered the most complex and challenging task that individuals face during this life period (Havighurst, 1972). Identifying leisure experience's contributions to this developmental process is both relevant and complex, particularly if the aim is to understand the interrelation between the adolescent and his/her social world to create opportunities for positive development. It is within the dialectic of individual self-expression and social accommodation that the role and significance of leisure in adolescent development is considered (Kleiber & Richards, 1985). As Kivel and Kleiber (2000) indicate, within the field of leisure studies, leisure is generally assumed to be a positive context for adolescent development because of the benefits that arise from engagement in and commitment to activities and because the selection of leisure activities may be an expression of the congruence between one's personality and leisure choices, which in turn has developmental benefits. Therefore, identity has been recognized as a main outcome of involvement in leisure activities.

The majority of the literature on this topic highlights the growing interest in the effects of leisure activities on identity formation and consequently on positive youth development, although few studies empirically support these relationships. Despite this, authors suggest that more knowledge about the role of leisure in adolescence can contribute to advances in the theoretical understanding of identity formation (Shaw et al., 1995). Existing studies tend to analyze identity as a unique and holistic concept; however, a deep analysis of identity shows more than a single, simple concept. If we cross different domains within psychology, the concept of identity becomes complex and relevant when examined parallel with developmental assets during adolescence.

According to Shaw et al. (1995), in the process of identity formation, adolescents separate themselves from others, particularly their family of origin, and develop a sense of agency and autonomy (individualization process). At the same time, they need to develop relationships with other people and identify with a particular group (social relatedness process). Consequently, both personal and social identities are strongly referenced in research that analyzes identity formation (Kivel & Kleiber, 2000). However, few studies and little empirical evidence exist about the role of physical structures, specifically in terms of locations for leisure opportunities, and their role in sociocognitive processes. Sociocognitive processes are of great relevance in adolescence because the acquisition of hypothetico-deductive or formal-operational reasoning facilitates the growth of metacognitive strategies for self-regulating psychological states and actions over time (Brandtstadter, 1998; Larson, 2000) and where locations or places have a main role.

A review of the literature related to the concept of identity shows three types of identity concepts: personal identity, social identity, and place identity. Within different psychological fields, these different identity domains are analyzed separately, but in this chapter, we tried to integrate them into a new approach to identify and show that once they are articulated, they can offer new insights into the study of positive adolescent development and identity formation through leisure.

Personal Identity and Leisure

Developmental psychology approaches have highlighted the concept of identity as a matter of personal definition and self-construction. Identity was thought to focus mainly on personality traits or structural aspects of the self and their continuity or stability across the life span.

Early studies of identity formation are associated with academics, such as Erikson (1950, 1968), Marcia (1980), and Waterman (1984). Although they emphasized different aspects, their perspectives shared an emphasis on the individual as a source of idiosyncratic characteristics, or a sense of self, organized through normative developmental patterns that were consistent throughout the life span and integrated different behaviors across multiple domains of life. However, these theories considered development from an individualistic perspective, focusing on the individual dynamic of self-construction and devoting less attention to surrounding contexts and how they shape those processes, even if on a personal level.

The contribution of leisure activities to identity formation depends on different factors, including the activity's type, nature, and gendered nature (Fredericks & Eccles, 2005; Morrissey & Werner-Wilson, 2005; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). Nevertheless, recent studies emphasize the importance of leisure activities and active participation in providing a unique context for adolescents to explore their interests, talents, and skills and for allowing identity work to occur by providing opportunities to explore different identities (Sharp, Coatsworth, Darling, Cumsille, & Ranieri, 2007; Zarrett & Lerner, 2008).

Shaw et al. (1995) emphasize that, independently of any particular conceptualization about identity development theory, adolescents in this formation process initially experience confusion and low identity development. Only after experiencing individuation and social relatedness or exploring alternatives and commitment they can achieve a final and successful stage of identity formation characterized by psychosocial maturity and a coherent sense of the self as an independent person. In contrast to early approaches to identity, we emphasize the importance of viewing development as a context-specific process that is affected by the environment, with leisure providing one context that can facilitate these identity formation processes.

Social Identity and Leisure

The concept of social identity, as discussed in social psychology, is conceptualized as the part of the self-concept that relates to belonging to groups, in addition to the emotions and value the person associates with this belonging (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Because leisure includes both interpersonal and intergroup interactions, it contributes to the definition of a social identity in adolescence (Doise, 1996). Leisure groups are an important source of social identity and one of the

main contexts in which belonging to a group has a positive motivational basis (Argyle, 1996). For Argyle, the majority of leisure activities serve to enhance intergroup cooperation and promote a higher level of acceptance of other groups.

Social interaction integrates both interpersonal and intergroup relationships (Doise, 1988), and as highlighted by Abrams (1989), the study of adolescence needs to integrate these sociopsychological processes. Researchers interested in a psychosocial study of leisure and identity should continue to identify the circumstances under which leisure contexts facilitate the successful integration of personal and social identity and the developmental benefits that may accrue from using leisure to integrate these two components of identity (Kivel & Kleiber, 2000).

One of the key developmental characteristics of adolescence is the change in socially defined group belonging or group category. Adolescents move from being children to being adolescents, and this is a major social transformation in all societies (Durkin, 1998). Leisure, as a social context in which social comparison is strongly present, integrates all these behaviors and relationships (personal as well as social), making this an important issue in the understanding of adolescent development. The categorization process is of great relevance in adolescence, considering the associated development of sociocognitive structures and social identity theory emphasizes the role of the categorization process in comprehending the external world. The adolescent acquires new cognitive skills that give him/her a new framework with which to analyze the external world. This process makes these aspects of social identity extremely relevant to development (Doise, 1996). In fact, social identity integrates two dimensions: the cognitive and motivational. The first relates to the categorization and evaluation of in- and out-groups relations. The second is associated with the search for positive self-esteem, which makes intergroup differentiation relevant (Deschamps & Devos, 1998). Leisure is a major context for social identity formation, because most leisure situations are mediated by group belonging or inclusion in a particular group.

Place Identity and Leisure

The concept of place identity was developed by Proshansky (1978) and brought a different perspective to the study of identity. According to this approach inside environmental psychology, the subjective self is defined and expressed not only through social relationships with others, but also through relationships with the physical contexts that structure daily life (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983; Proshansky, Nelson-Schulman, & Kaminoff, 1979). Place identity is part of the identity process, leading to the emergence of cognitions related to the physical environments of the past, present, or future that define a person's daily existence through a sense of belonging. Although place identity focuses on the physical environment, authors who take this perspective do not exclude the social dimensions of places: there are no places without social associations or social relationships that occur outside a physical environment.

The processes underlying one's self-definition within society are not restricted to the distinctions between oneself and significant others but also embrace objects, things, spaces, and places. Once a place has a relevant role in the personal satisfaction of an individual's biological, psychological, social, and cultural needs, it assumes an important function in the identity process. Psychological bonds between the self and the sociophysical environment emerge from the relationship between an individual, others, and that places that help to develop group and individual identity (Brown, Perkins, & Brown, 2002; Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004). Place identity can thus be considered as a substructure of personal identity and consists of general thoughts and feelings about the physical world in which the individual interacts (Bonnes & Secchiarolli, 1995). This component of the self is defined as the "ecological self" (Neisser, 1988).

Another component of place identity is place attachment, which occurs when we develop positive and negative feelings about our surroundings or specific places (Jack, 2010). It is not only the physical characteristics of a place that lead to positive place attachment but the happy social interactions or life events that occur there. The emotional meaning of a place emerges from what the place symbolizes for the person (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). As stated by Kyle, Graefe, Manning, and Bacon (2003, p. 251), "a place may be viewed as an essential part of one's self, resulting in strong emotional attachment to places." These authors suggest that engaging in leisure activities is frequently an antecedent to place attachment.

These aspects lead us to consider leisure as an opportunity to construct categories of places with strong emotional and positive interactions. According to Mowl and Towner (1995), each place, with its physical structure and social environment, can offer an important set of opportunities that facilitate involvement in leisure activities and a set of constraints that can limit it. Therefore, the authors argue, place is a very important factor that promotes quality in leisure activities. "We choose leisure activities not merely because they are useful for leisure, but to convey the very sense of who we are" (Williams, 2002, p. 353). The greater diversity of leisure places an individual experiences, the more opportunities the individual has to create cognitive categories that include the characteristics of the places and the individual-environment interactions that leisure places promote.

According to this perspective, adolescent identity can also be promoted through leisure places.

Positive Identity Development and Optimal Leisure

From a conceptual point of view, it is our objective to identify the relationship between leisure experience components and identity development processes. In fact, both concepts (leisure and identity) can be structured according to the same three levels of analysis and complexity: the personal, the social, and the ecological, making leisure a facilitator of positive adolescent development throughout daily life (Freire & Soares, 2000). This conceptual relationship is presented in Fig. 4.2.

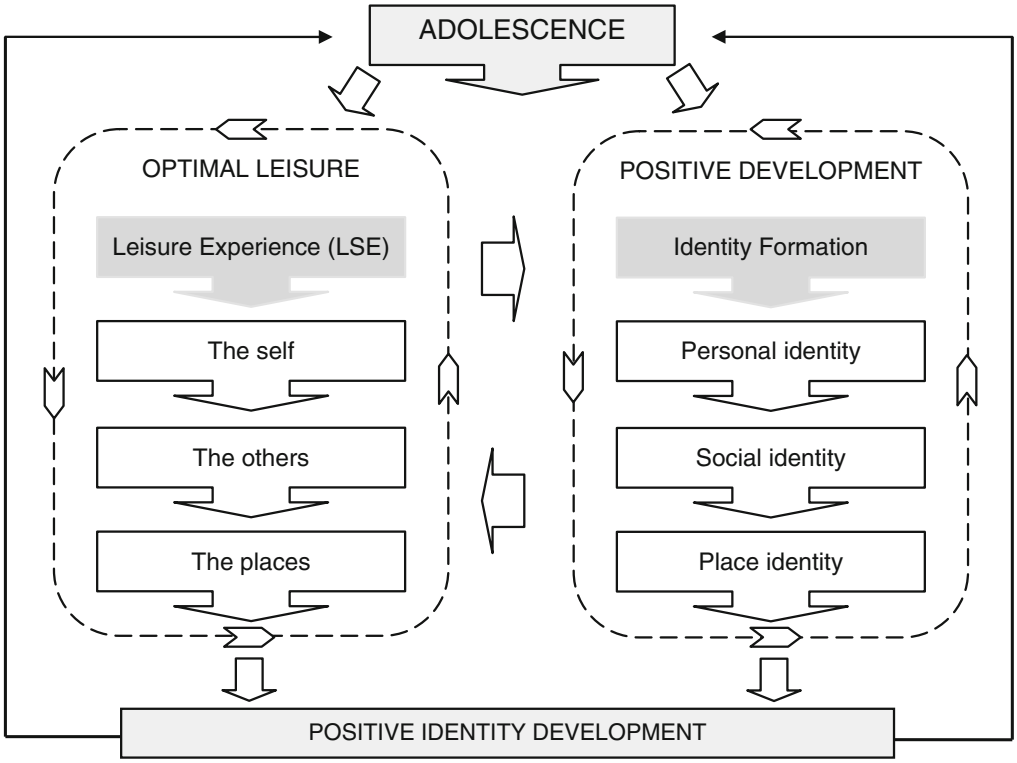


Fig. 4.2 The process of positive identity development in adolescence: the conceptual relation between optimal leisure and positive development

As the figure shows, this relationship expresses the psychosocial-ecological approach that underlines our view of leisure as subjective experience (integrating personal, social, and place features) that promotes adolescent identity in a positive way. When leisure experience occurs throughout the three levels or components (optimal leisure), adolescents are more involved and engaged in leisure activities, and as a consequence, they can learn more about the self and the external world. This involvement fosters self-knowledge and self-construction, which contributes to positive identity building (Freire, 2006b). Life contexts and associated experiences become a main source for identity formation, defining a dialectic process between the person and the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993). It is within this process that personal growth occurs with increasing strengths and capabilities.

This approach shows the circularity of these processes in and between SLE and identity. The process of participating in leisure activities that promotes the three components influence adolescents' self-complexity, thereby making them more aware of their own responsibility in leisure choices. They become more conscious in defining what is best for them as healthy and responsible adolescents. Positive identity development is thus facilitated by involvement in activities that provide personal, social, and place opportunities to shape subjective experiences in everyday life. An important aspect is the bidirectional influence between leisure experience and identity development, which must to be considered

particularly when investigating the causality of the relationship between leisure participation and positive outcomes, such as psychological well-being associated to positive development (Trainor et al., 2010).

This conceptual approach about the process of positive identity development in adolescence is the basic framework of a group intervention program titled "Growing-up with leisure …" (Freire, 1999, 2000, 2006b), aimed at helping adolescents become active agents of their own development and the contexts in which they live. Through aspects directly related to leisure experience, the entire development process is made intentional, taking into account personal dimensions, social interactions, and interaction with life places, as discussed earlier in this chapter. We claim that adolescents can learn this and, in so doing, become more self-oriented and proactive, which in turn benefits their life-span developmental patterns. They become producers of their lives, using leisure as a means of building their biography or identity. In this intervention program, adolescents work on leisure as a daily experience that promotes the development of their own identity. Using a pre- and posttest design with a control group, results clearly showed that the participation in the program promoted participants' leisure experience and self-concept and that these positive effects were related to the program itself (Freire, 2006b).

Our perspective about positive identity development through leisure experience is an important conceptual tool for studying general developmental processes in adolescence and the developmental impact of being involved in certain types of activities on a regular and daily basis. More importantly, it is the possibility of discovering processes that highlight new directions in the study of leisure experience and positive development, shedding light on leisure-supported intervention processes and strategies that promote positive adolescent development.

Conclusion and Future Perspectives

Currently, leisure is a major context in peoples' lives. This is especially true in adolescence, which is characterized by the search for an identity that permits the individual to be connected with the social and physical world. Undoubtedly, leisure can provide a real-life laboratory for research about behavior and sociocognitive dimensions of subjective experience. This conclusion underlines relevance of studying leisure in positive psychology, making relevant the emergence of a *positive leisure science* perspective as a specific scientific domain.

The way we propose and define the leisure concept highlights the need to cross disciplinary boundaries. Our psychosocial-environmental approach encompasses contributions from different domains in psychology, such as developmental psychology, social psychology, and environmental psychology. This contribution can go further and bring together other scientific fields outside psychology. This shows that the future direction of leisure studies should be one of positive leisure science. We propose a holistic knowledge about adolescent development that allows a more complete understanding of how they can act and interact in a healthy way with

themselves and their social and physical worlds. To put leisure experience at the heart of multiple systems of knowledge is one new and challenging line of research that must be applied to a positive leisure science perspective. Again, the challenge is multidisciplinary, integrating multiple levels of analysis that create new variables to be studied: from problems and pathology (deficit), through normative, to potentiality (enhancement). Leisure as a complex and multidimensional concept can also be a central issue connecting several perspectives and approaches about adolescence aimed at improving the positive development of adolescents. Associated with this conceptual framework, it is important to highlight the role of innovative methods and methodologies in collecting data about adolescents' daily lives. We have been using on-line or real-time measures with Portuguese adolescents, such as the experience sampling method (ESM), as firstly developed by Csikszentmihalyi, Larson, and Prescott (1977), as well as traditional self-report measures in order to increase knowledge about several variables that simultaneously shape the quality of leisure subjective experience (LSE). More empirical studies are being conducted with Portuguese adolescents to validate our conceptual framework about an integrative approach on positive identity development through leisure experience. This is a new challenge for future leisure studies, mainly if different scientific fields/domains are being articulated.

Despite conceptual and methodological issues, all of the aspects highlighted in this chapter also have notable impact in intervention processes in adolescence aimed at promoting positive development. Future interventions must simultaneously integrate these different components and levels of analysis: the personal, the social, and the ecological. These variables are equally important, and by simply articulating them, it is possible to effectively intervene and lead adolescents along the most valuable path for growth and development.

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