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AN INTERVIEW WITH BONNIE PARKHOUSE

BY

DAVID L. GROVES

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the societal manifestation of change in the sport industry. Bonnie Parkhouse, an Associate Professor at California State University-Fullerton and president of SMARTS is among the most innovative educators in the field.

SOCIETAL CHANGES/LIFESTYLE IMPROVEMENTS

Question 1: What are the differences between sport and leisure?

Answer: Each plays an important part in today's society. The titles Sport and Leisure are an interrelated concept. Leisure is more of a casual approach to activities and sport is more competitive. Even though this is a simplistic definition, it will work for this interview because my primary focus and interest is fitness, which is a synthesis of these approaches. It is a concept that is based upon a striving for a quality life and it is this attitude to improve one's self and environment that is the important concept in today's society.

Question 2: What are the current trends in society in relation to sport, leisure, and fitness?

Answer: The move is primarily away from spectator activities toward participation. Many argue whether this is the era of leisure or sport. It is the era of the fitness entrepreneur. The business world is coming to recognize the importance of fitness and the development of a new lifestyle. Much investment is being made in apparel, equipment, facilities, etc. It is becoming one of the major industries and the very basis of this is the public's dedication to a new lifestyle. This lifestyle is not based upon the Puritan ethic but upon the concept of dedication to quality of life.

Question 3: What has been the impact of this dedication to fitness upon the individual?

Answer: Other than the obvious health benefits, the primary element has been an improvement of self-image/self-concept. This has given the individual more confidence and has helped him/her to become more socially acceptable. The result has been that he/she is more outgoing.

Question 4: What has been the importance of the women's movement in today's society?

Answer: Women have entered into the market and have been a primary factor in the stimulation of change in sport, leisure, and fitness. They have been the primary element that has brought the change. Historically, Title IX has brought much change but even more important, has been the women's concern for fitness/health. Women have increased their interest in all activities, like swimming and jogging. Over half of the women exercise on a regular basis. In 1964, 24 percent of the population exercised. Today, in a recent Harris poll, over 50 percent exercise and of those that exercise, 33 percent are women. This increased participation has opened new markets to manufacturers of apparel, sporting equipment, etc.

Question 5: What has been the trend toward equalization with men's activities?

Answer: An example of equality is in the past U.S. Open where the women's and the men's singles champions received equal paydays for their winning efforts. There has been a greater recognition in women's abilities to compete with men in most events. This has opened new vistas and markets because it is no longer segregated into the concept of men's and women's activities.

Question 6: What has been the impact upon industry of this increase in participatory types of activities, especially among women?

Answer: One of the biggest impacts has been the generic look. Much apparel and equipment is developed for both men and women and little distinction is being made in fashion or equipment. The result of this increased awareness of fitness attitude has been additional revenue for the sports industry and represented a deviation from traditional emphases. There are new opportunities for enterprising individuals to create new markets. It is a time of change and transition in our society and the entrepreneurial innovators are those who are expanding the market and utilizing this time to create successful operations. These entrepreneurial efforts extend from design of sporting equipment to fashion and apparel. The trend is not only limited to the participation but actually extends into the social setting. Because of the mixed activities, new social opportunities are created. The result has been better adjustment and equality. Also, most fashion and apparel for non-participating activities are making an emphasis and impact upon the fashion world because many of the fashions have a sports design. In the area of food, the health considerations and the fitness aspect are causing a greater demand for the type of food that not only looks good but is nutritional and healthy. The emphasis on the impact upon business and industry is one of change and understanding these changes in a wider market and the extending of this market to the public.

Question 7: What is the basic nature of the changes that have occurred?

Answer: The change that has occurred is that it is no longer a luxury but a necessity and therefore, is a high-priority in most individual's budgets. The concern for quality of life has replaced the protestant work ethic and there is now a basic attitude toward health and wellness. It is a primary staple in attitude and is receiving greater priority, especially among women. Women have helped bring this attitude more to the forefront in society because they are more conscious of their physical appearance. Sport, leisure, and fitness are best epitomized in a new lifestyle and concern for oneself and a quality life. This concern for the healthier lifestyle is the backbone of today's society and will continue to be an important social process that will carry us into the 21st century. It is an attitude that must exist with us if our nation is to survive because most other societies historically have not dealt with the increased leisure time. Sport, leisure and fitness have and will help bring us to a position in our society that is not as pleasure oriented but helps deny self which is an element that controls, and is indeed based upon a stoic discipline, which is an essential ingredient to keep the society productive. During the Puritan work ethic, it was a denial of self based upon dedication to the goal of "work" as the important element in life. In today's society, it is quality of life that is the pursuit and the basic concept that integrates the sport and leisure movement. Fitness is a concern for health and wellness and an individual's effort to become more productive.
