

## Reaction Paper 2: Work or Play?

As college students, we all strive to live our lives with purpose: to have a good job after graduation, to serve those less fortunate and to maintain and nurture meaningful lifelong friendships. All these things take “work” – real, tangible *work* – yet we complain on a regular basis that we’d much rather be at “play”: out to eat with friends, at a baseball game, on the couch watching television or in the outdoors. But, as we know, the work that we do outweighs the play that we participate in. Why is this? And can we conclude that one is better than the other?

The simple answer is that work – completing certain tasks by a certain time for a certain award, a paycheck – makes play possible. Without some form of a monetary award, “play” as we know it would be nearly impossible. It is for this reason that people express their displeasure with “work” – because it typically precedes the preferable “play.” Simply put, when we are working, we’d rather be playing.

However, this discussion assumes that “work” and “play” are isolated and mutually exclusive entities. When we pursue careers, we do so based on our own personal preferences. We do so because we enjoy some facet of a career. Taken one step further, we may even say that we find leisure in some part of a chosen field. This fact consequently suggests that work and play can be interrelated. Investment bankers most likely read the Business section of the newspaper on a Sunday morning, while a park ranger might choose to spend an afternoon at a state park. Both of these activities are not “work” in the sense that these individuals are *required* to read the newspaper or visit the park, yet both activities might *accompany* the “work” and considered “play,” given that both individuals participate leisurely. We can conclude that it is best when work *is* play.

Human beings have an innate disposition to be exposed to wants of human nature. In other words, we have certain desires, defined by our personal experiences. Work, then, is a process that involves satisfying those wants, aiming to change the world in some way. Does play allow us to change the world? Probably not, at least not in the sense that “work” suggests that we do. While work is a collective activity,

perhaps beneficial for an entire community, play is individualistic by nature (Oakeshott).

By definition, we as individuals are constantly looking for opportunities to play, thus the necessity of work. However, if this was entirely the case, we wouldn't have multi-million dollar CEOs continuing to work, given that their salaries could feed a Third World nation. These select individuals could in essence sign for an early retirement and go from there. But in reality, they continue to work, some well into their 60s. In a May 2006 issue of Forbes Magazine, an article asks this question: How does a company (in this case Google) keep employees coming to work when their paychecks are so large? For one, the online giant assumes that smart people enjoy the company of other smart people, feeding on the assumption that people enjoy ("play") learning from each other. Secondly, this select company of prominent individuals in the technology industry has been successful for a reason: They have all produced some sort of tangible evidence for achievement and advancement in the industry, something that sets them apart from other similar engineers. That's another reason why work is valued in our society. This tangible evidence – perhaps that report compiled over the course of three years, or novel written over the course of 10 – is enjoyable. While it may be difficult to assert that this evidence is in itself play, this type of work is not complained about, and is closer to play than we might realize. Instead, this is what keeps people motivated. This is what keeps people working. Many wish for more vacation time at work, while many wish to not work at all, forgetting the rewarding (playful?) times at work.

As we pursue happiness as individuals, we connect with those individuals in our working and playful lives. In Marge Piercy's poem "To Be of Use," she explores why work is not a private thing.

I want to be with people who submerge / in the task, who go into the fields to harvest  
/ and work in a row and pass the bags along.

Work is a culmination of our values shaped by our family and community. If work is done right, we play. If we play, we create we create memories best suited to illustrate what matters to us. What matters to us provokes the creation of our memories, our stories of these interactions. These interactions set us on our way to our pursuit of happiness.

**Works Cited**

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