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LEISURE SCIENCES AND LEISURE STUDIES: LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS WHEN ANSWERS WILL DO?

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Introduction

In this paper I will compare and contrast UK *Leisure Studies* and North American *Leisure Sciences*. In undertaking this task I want to explore two broad theses:

- (i) Although *Leisure Sciences* and *Leisure Studies* are distinctively different both theoretically and methodologically they suffer from a common failing - an underdeveloped understanding of the "meaning" of leisure - in socio-cultural and contextual terms.
- (ii) That they have both arrived at a similar type of "crossroads" but by different routes - Leisure Sciences via a methodological two lane black top, Leisure Studies via a theoretical freeway.

I will illustrate these issues via a brief examination of recent debates within *Leisure Studies*. In doing so I will attempt to draw some comparisons with *Leisure Sciences* (based largely on my reading of the Journal of Leisure Research and various state-of-the-art reviews which have appeared during the past 5 years (for example, Jackson and Burton, 1989).

Throughout this paper I use the term *Leisure Sciences* to refer to the work of leisure scholars in the USA and the term *Leisure Studies* to refer to work in the United Kingdom. Clearly such an exercise contains the dual dangers of false homogeneities and false dichotomies (Burton, 1996) - both Leisure Studies and Leisure Sciences contain a number of theoretical and methodological perspectives. However, what I want to present is, following Weber, a one-sided accentuation of reality to illustrate some basic issues which affect Leisure Studies and Leisure Sciences.

Such dilemmas remind me of Alexander Dumas' comment that "all generalisations are dangerous...even this one".

Leisure Studies: A dominant paradigm or contestation?

Ken Roberts (1987) has said that it is not possible to identify anything called "British leisure theory". He could have added that there is also an absence of a "dominant methodological paradigm". British Leisure Studies is much smaller, less specialised and

less methodologically coherent (or monolithic) than *Leisure Sciences* appears to be. In part this is because many so-called leisure scholars in Britain "have just one foot in the field" (Roberts, 1987). Few of the mainstream leisure studies writers confine themselves solely to the study of leisure.

Leisure as "not leisure"

Leisure Sciences seems predominantly concerned with defining leisure (largely in psychological terms), illustrating motivations, satisfactions, benefits and exploring constraints. However the *Leisure Studies'* orientation has tended to view leisure as a site where broader sociological, political and cultural relations and conflicts are visible. Much of Leisure Studies has been driven by the belief that leisure is the product of factors which are "not leisure" (Clarke and Critcher, 1988). Therefore, analysis and interpretation is likely to take place within broader areas of study and reflect their conceptual and theoretical concerns (cultural studies, sociology, theories of consumption, economics, feminist studies, policy analysis). The concern has been less with producing the definitive definition of leisure and its properties, than with the possibilities of the *concept* of leisure.

Therefore, most Leisure Studies' writing and research is less "leisure centred" than Leisure Sciences, being rooted in theoretical concerns which connect analysis to broader social contexts. The main commitment is usually to the investigation of divisions based on class, gender and race. This reflects a more general concern with the differential distribution of power and inequalities of opportunities, the changing nature of citizenship, the impact of industrialisation, the role of the state and, latterly, the postmodern condition as they are evidenced in leisure. As a result of this approach the *individual* freedoms and choices supposedly inherent in leisure are viewed in ideological and cultural, rather than psychological, terms.

Society in leisure

Critics have suggested that in Leisure Sciences we are often presented with *leisure without society*, and recent debates identify a need for broader analyses based on a conception of *leisure in society*. Although this approach is one strand of Leisure Studies, it is better to view the Leisure Studies approach as the exploration of *society in leisure*.

From this perspective leisure is not regarded in terms of individual consumption and fulfilment. Rather, it is a site for the *reproduction* (or at least reflection) of wider economic, social and cultural inequalities. Under the influence of certain forms of historiography, liberal/humanist sociology, neo-Marxist cultural studies and a range of feminisms, leisure has increasingly been analysed as a site of struggle, cultural contestation, negotiation and resistance. Instead of attempts to develop a specialist leisure sociology (or psychology), we have had a number of *sociologies of leisure*. As the issues in leisure are simply the classic questions of sociology (Coalter, 1984) there is little need for specialised "sociologies"- in fact the search for such coherence is deemed both undesirable and impossible.

Rather than a concern with individuals, individual psychologies, benefits and satisfactions

the orientation is towards broader social aggregates and issues of inequality of power, hegemonic processes, collective identities, access and provision of opportunities and citizenship. With a *society in leisure* approach analysis and interpretation tends to draw on structural forms of explanation. Categories of class, gender, race and state are predominant in the literature and linked to "reproductionist" meta-theories relating to capitalism, hegemony, patriarchy and so on.

In parallel with these "sociologies of leisure" the predominant theme in leisure policy analysis is the changing nature of citizenship, the relationship between public leisure provision and rights of citizenship and the role of the state as guarantor of such rights. The predominant concern is not with analysing and celebrating individual or group *difference*, but with addressing issues of *inequality*, not within liberal individualism but within a collectivist welfare perspective.

As an aside, one of the main differences between the approach of the Journal of Leisure Research and Leisure Studies lies in the relationship between methodological and policy implications. The predominant concern in the former seems to be with increasing methodological sophistication, with the conclusion to a high proportion of articles being reflections on methodological shortcomings - the validity of the method seems to be given a higher priority than the policy relevance of the conclusion. Conversely the concern of those working in Leisure Studies is usually the strategic policy implications of the work, often with little regard for statistically significant evidence.

It could be argued that, whereas Leisure Sciences is characterised by *cognitive theory* - an attempt to establish knowledge about certain aspects of the world - Leisure Studies is dominated by *normative theorising* - arguments about the way the world *ought* to be (Craib, 1984).

Ideologies, benefits and meanings

Reproductionist approaches (Neo-Marxism, cultural studies and various forms of feminism) lead to a scepticism about subjectivities and the "benefits" and "satisfactions" supposedly associated with leisure. Underlying most analyses is an unresolved dilemma about the "ideology of leisure" and the extent to which "perceived freedom" and notions of "choice" are much more socially circumscribed than is recognised, or are mere ideological constructs through which hegemonic processes are at work.

The extent to which some of this type of analysis is taken is illustrated by one recent critic who commented that,

"..any activity which looks as if it reveals choice, or autonomy....is liable to be reinterpreted ...to show that its very autonomy is a source of usefulness in hegemonic unity" (Harris, 1992).

However a more mainstream sociological concern is that an over-emphasis on psychological constructs, such as "leisure as a state of mind" (Neulinger, 1981), "perceived freedom", maximum arousal (Iso Ahola, 1980) or "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1982), are in danger of confusing the *sociological* concept of leisure with the

psychological experience of *pleasure*. They point to a risk of reducing the socially and culturally-specific "constitutive rules" (Hemingway, 1995) underlying activities and their meaning to logical/ psychological categories.

Postmodernism

The predominance of structural, collectivist forms of analysis (informed by a welfarist/citizenship ideology) has meant that the postmodernist challenge to "meta theories" has had a greater impact in Leisure Studies than Leisure Sciences. According to one British theorist (Rojek, 1993) postmodernism has produced a crisis in Leisure Studies' "collectivist theorising". It has also supposedly undermined the ability of most Leisure Studies scholars to sustain their commitment to emancipatory politics.

The issues raised by postmodernism have become a regular theme in the journal Leisure Studies and it was the predominant theme in the 1993 LSA International Conference (much to the consternation of some delegates). However, little has appeared in the pages of the Journal of Leisure Research. Despite this absence a brief examination of some aspects of the postmodernist debate within Leisure Studies may help to illuminate the current debate (if not crisis) in *Leisure Sciences* about theory and methodology.

For example, recent volumes of the Journal of Leisure Research and state-of-the-art reviews (Jackson and Burton, 1989) have contained expressions of concern about the limitations of the dominant positivistic methodological tradition within *Leisure Sciences*. Jackson and Burton (1989) support calls for a greater recognition of the relationship between leisure/consumption and social and economic change and the need to place and interpret research results in a broad societal context. Further, Jackson (1989) argues that we have insufficient understanding of *why* people choose particular forms of leisure and the nature of the *meanings* attributed to activity. These issues of meaning and the relationship between leisure and society, increasingly recognised as an absence in both Leisure Studies and Leisure Science, are central to postmodernist arguments.

Dislocation and fragmentation

The argument is that rapid economic and social change - the emergence of post-Fordist forms of organisation, the growth of the service sector and service class, the fracturing of old collectivist cultures and the domination of much of life by electronic media - have produced fundamental social, cultural, economic and political dislocation. Old collective identities and common interests (class, gender, race, community and even nation) have become fragmented and diffuse. Status depends not on place in productive/ reproductive systems, but on one's status accomplishments in the sphere of consumption, one's access to, and manipulation of, cultural codes and signs. Consumption has become central to the construction of a wide variety of personal and social identities, indicated and fuelled by the decline of "mass consumption" and the proliferation of niche markets.

Such analyses raise particularly important questions for Leisure Studies, with its emphasis on collectivities and shared identities (usually founded in shared material and/or ideological circumstances).

Changes in meaning

However postmodern arguments are not simply about the empirical fact of diversity and fragmentation. The fundamental challenge relates to the *meaning* of these activities, and it is here where both Leisure Studies and Leisure Sciences seem not to have met the challenge.

Writers on the postmodern condition suggest that the nature and meaning of the leisure/consumption experience has changed. In addition to the individualising impact of social and cultural fragmentation, arguments about "hyperreality" and "authenticity" suggest that everyday life has been "emptied" of meaning, with "spectacle" replacing meaning and sensation overpowering value (Rojek, 1993). In the "decentred" conditions of postmodernity the relationship between the form of leisure/consumption and material (and collective) realities has been broken - reality resides in the signs, codes and representation (advertising, fashion, media) - which we consume and use in the individual search for a sense of self.

In such conditions, the evolutionary liberal-humanist ideology, which views leisure as a site of self-improvement and self-development, is seen as illusory.

"The role of freedom, choice, flexibility and self-determination which Modernity presents as the birthright of the common man is a realm of fantasy" (Rojek, 1993).

There are no longer any reliable signposts to point to the direction of self-improvement and self-actualization (Rojek, 1993).

Such theoretical propositions appear to have moral and epistemological implications. Critics (Henry, 1994; Murdock, 1994; Scraton; 1994), have suggested that the postmodernist desire to describe and celebrate *difference* has led to the ignoring of *inequality* and *disadvantage*. The effect of this is to question the basis for a moral dimension to social theory and policy analysis (Henry, 1994). Even more radical is the proposition that the fragmentation and diversity of the modern world is also accompanied by the end of meta narratives - communism, liberalism, Marxism, rationalism and feminism are no longer viable "projects".

Such arguments represent a direct assault on both the neo-Marxist cultural studies tradition and the evolutionary liberal humanist approaches within both Leisure Studies and Leisure Sciences.

The Leisure Studies response

Life styles versus life chances

Within Leisure Studies one type of response has been to prefer to talk of *life chances* to *life styles* (Murdock, 1994; Scraton, 1994). In this regard most Leisure Studies scholars would agree with Crook's (1991) contention that,

"..the view has gained currency that the really big problems are not social but involve the interpenetration of natural, technical, signifying and psychic process...[so]..'the social' risks being left out in the cold"

Similarly Murdock (1994) has suggested that

"In an effort to give culture its due, theorists of sign value and the struggles over the meanings of goods too often go overboard, erasing the relations between culture and specific economic and political realities"

Murdock (1994) recasts the assertions of fragmentation and diversity as "*separation and exclusion*". In a striking metaphor from Tester (1994) he illustrates the limitation of the postmodernist concentration on consumption and signs - "what is interesting about shops today is not what is in them, but who sleeps in their doorways".

He suggests that discussions of the postmodern condition are over-dependent on the "service classes" (and the intellectual class?). Although accurately describing certain socio-cultural changes, there is a failure to give a full account of the *uneven nature* of the presumed changes and their socio-political consequences. He points to dramatically increased income polarisation and the emergence of an expanding underclass. One example will suffice - in the United Kingdom between 1979 and 1991 those with less than half the national average wage increased from 5 million to 13.5 million.

Further, both he and Scraton (1994) suggest that postmodernist analyses are not only class biased, they are largely gender blind. They both point to the changing, and often deteriorating, condition of women in the labour force. In Europe in the past 25 years although the number of males in employment has fallen by 1 million, the number of women has risen by 13 million. However much of this work is part-time and low paid and can only be viewed within the context of the restructuring of patriarchal relations and changing connections between domestic life and public life, which require to be analysed rather than simply described or celebrated. (Scraton, 1994)

Scraton (1994) suggests that the issue of diversity has long been recognised and a subject of debate within feminism - clearly women are differentiated by class, race and age. However she asserts that there remains a "shared condition" which must be taken as the starting point of analysis. She concludes that there is little evidence that the world is changing to such an extent that we no longer need to centre the social debate around inequalities and systems of exploitation and oppression.

Critics have suggested that postmodernism, by concentrating on forms of conspicuous consumption within a particular class (the new service class), largely ignores the ordinary - the situated and negotiated nature of everyday life. The "tourist gaze" lasts for two to three weeks per year, but what about the other 49? Crouch and Tomlinson (1994) suggest that leisure is lived in, often tightly bounded, social networks and communities and is often self-generated/organised and not dependent on commodities and forms of electronic media.

The extent of "change"

Related to this is the contention that analysis of the postmodern condition is based on a rather simplified and over-homogenised view of the "modern". Any analysis of supposedly epochal changes inevitably creates false dichotomies and overly homogenises both past and present. An English historian, Richard Johnson (1979), writing 16 years ago about an earlier version of this theory - the so-called "embourgeoisement" of the working class in "post industrial" societies - suggested that,

"if we start from the premise of complexity and division and not simplification and unity, then the "changes" which are perceived might not appear as radical or as permanent as is supposed".

The challenge of meaning

Therefore, the contentions about the postmodern condition - dislocation, fragmentation, "spectacle" and "hyper-reality", the fracturing of the relationship between the real and the sign, the "decentredness" of everyday life, consumption as the major site for self-actualisation - raise propositions about a subject which, paradoxically, neither Leisure Studies or Leisure Sciences have dealt with successfully - the *meaning* of leisure diversity and activity.

The challenge therefore is to investigate the extent to which everyday life has been "emptied" of meaning; the extent to which "spectacle" has replaced meaning and sensation has overpowered value (Rojek, 1993). Does reality reside in the signs, codes and representation (advertising, fashion, media) and has the relationship between the form of leisure and consumption and material (and collective) reality been broken?

The failure of Leisure Studies and Leisure Sciences to address these issues is surprising. Some versions of the "postmodern condition" read like a re-statement of the various forms of theories of post-industrialism, the "end of ideology" (Bell, 19) and the "embourgeoisement" of the working class - issues long recognised, and celebrated, by Leisure Studies.

For example, 22 years ago the introduction to one of the first British Leisure Studies textbooks (Smith, Parker and Smith, 1973) acknowledged the "pluralisation" of social life and stated that;

"..the growth of individualised self-awareness underpins the movement towards ego-conscious symbolism ...status symbols and life-styles are becoming expressions of individual taste rather than reflections of economic position or social class ...there are some things that only money can buy but they are becoming fewer and more people are able to buy them".

In France Dumazadier (1974) was referring to " a new social need for the individual to be his (sic) own master" and asserting that the subjectivity of the individual had become "a value in itself". In 1983 Kelly was proposing an existentialist-oriented form of symbolic interactionism in which the concept of "role identity" displaced the simply

intrinsic/extrinsic approach to motivation, with analysis concentrating on the "enactment potential of the [leisure] opportunity". In 1974 Burns was suggesting that we need to examine individuals' psycho-social commitment to a range of available statuses in seeking to give expression to positive aspects of their self-image (Burns, 1974).

However, such assertions and theoretical propositions have not formed a systematic research agenda for Leisure Studies or Leisure Sciences. Within Leisure Studies the individualising assumptions of these analyses were rejected and those influenced by the cultural studies tradition were content to embrace various forms of semiotics and "read" the (usually collective) meanings of activities.

Latterly some interest has been expressed in the concept of lifestyle (Veal, 1989) in response to the supposed failures of class-based analytical approaches. However critics of this approach (Scruton and Talbot, 1989; Critcher, 1989) suggest that the use of essentially market research oriented statistical aggregates tell us little about "antecedent" causes. The question as to "why" such choices are made and their situated meaning still remains the central question for Leisure Studies.

A crisis of Leisure Sciences?

With regard to *Leisure Sciences* it is interesting to speculate why the more sociological agenda did not take off and why postmodernism has not provoked a "crisis". From the outside this seems to be explained by a number of factors:

- ◆ The low priority accorded to theorising and issues relating to the *leisure in society* or *society in leisure*.
- ◆ The emphasis on individuals and individual psychology means that the postmodernist contention about "fragmentation" and "diversity" seems self-evident.
- ◆ The apparent lack of utility of traditional socio-demographic variables in "explaining" (ie predicting) leisure behaviour (Jackson and Burton, 1989).
- ◆ The largely benign postmodernist emphasis on difference and diversity fits well with the socio-political ideologies in the USA.
- ◆ An underlying ideology of leisure which had as its essence individual freedom and choice - what Kelly (1994) has referred to as "the ideology of freedom and openness". This articulated much more strongly with certain aspects of the broader socio-political culture - liberal individualism, optimism, achievement orientation and self-improvement - than in welfarist Britain with much more collectivist views of citizenship and social hierarchies.

◆ **Insularity**

Apart from the differing theoretical and methodological concerns of the Journal of Leisure Research and Leisure Studies the most noticeable feature is the nationalities of the authors. For example, in Vols 12-14 of Leisure Studies 47% of authors were non-UK. In Vols 25/26 of Leisure Sciences all authors were from the USA (with 3 Canadian co-writers) and one Australian.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that the social, theoretical and methodological assumptions of this paradigm are being called into question. For example, Burton (1989) argues that the reification of methodology within the dominant "scientific rationalist" epistemology (with its concentration on surveys, correlational methods and model building) produces "a confusion between method and substance" and mitigates against the generation of new ideas.

The limitations of this paradigm seem precisely those which postmodernism has raised - the meaning of leisure/consumption. For example, Kelly (1994) argues that the way forward for Leisure Sciences is to suspend "the ideologies of freedom and openness ... in favour of research that is truly situated in the actual contexts of leisure interaction". He continues, "leisure is ethnic" in that it is *in* and *of* particular cultures and, significantly in the light of the postmodernist contentions about dislocation and fragmentation, that it "may be the context for expressing and creating community". Hemingway (1995) suggested in a recent Leisure Studies article that we need to pay much more attention to the "constitutive rules" which construct particular leisure experiences and provide the basis for intersubjectivity

The feminist challenge

However, it is significant that the main challenge to this positivistic/individualistic paradigm is from feminist researchers, with their assertion of the need to understand situated meaning and the role played by structure and ideology in creating contexts and meaning.

For example, Henderson (1991) suggests that

"Part of the inability to understand constraints on women's leisure may be due to an inadequate and narrow definition of constraints that has focused primarily on intervening and structural aspects of constraints.....to understand individual constraints on women it is necessary to examine the *a priori* social context on manifested constraints on leisure. Thus it is the *context* that becomes particularly evident in an analysis of leisure and its concomitant constraints".

From a Leisure Studies perspective it is interesting to note that feminist writers appear to be the most *international* in orientation of those working in Leisure Sciences. It would seem that they had to go outside the theoretically limited positivist tradition of Leisure Sciences for *theoretical* perspectives to analyse the condition of women.

However, from a broader methodological and theoretical perspective, the contribution of feminist researchers has not simply been to "put women on the agenda". Ignoring for the moment the major theoretical and political divisions within "feminism" and the contentious assertions about "feminist methodologies", it is clear that they have illustrated the need to move beyond an individualising psychological analysis of intervening and structural constraints. They have emphasised the need for a more thoroughly *sociological* analysis of *antecedent* conditions.

As Karla Henderson (1991) has argued,

"the leftist feminist position seeks to address issues about the values, structures and the interaction of content and process...it begins to address how constraints research can be applied not only to individuals but also to social institutions"

Mutual understanding, tolerance and communication ?

However, feminist (and other non-positivist) researchers may have a major epistemological and ideological struggle on their hands. It is worth looking at two of the issues as they serve to illustrate some differences between Leisure Sciences and Leisure Studies.

Firstly, is the required embracing of qualitative and ethnographic work simply a matter of illustrating the value of methodological pluralism? Is it simply a matter of "mutual understanding, tolerance and communication" (Burton and Jackson, 1989)? Or is it about the political, academic and professional power of the dominant paradigm? It is possible that the continuing commitment of the professionals and public agencies to the "scientific rationalism", and their scepticism about ethnographic data, imply that the historically close links between Leisure Sciences (and Leisure Studies) may increasingly be an obstacle to theoretical and academic development.

Secondly, does the emphasis on quantification and correlation - on "scientificity" - reflect the status anxiety of Leisure Sciences and the desire for academic legitimacy and professional relevance? Or, are there more general cultural differences? I ask this because Gans' (1988) description of middle American values seems remarkably close to a description of positivism - "obtaining personal control over the general environment so as to minimise threat and unwanted surprise".

In the UK, although feminist writers challenged what they saw as a "dominant positivist paradigm", it was never as dominant as asserted (often restricted to government sponsored planning-oriented survey work undertaken by the first generation Leisure Studies) and certainly was not closely associated with *academic* legitimacy and promotion. As a consequence the acknowledgement of the value of ethnographic work and its adoption was much easier. This is not to say that the radical feminist critique of "gendered methodology" was accepted (see Hargreaves (1992) for a comment within Leisure Studies and Hammersley (1995) for a more general comment on feminist methodology.

Thirdly, Leisure Studies largely worked within a collectivist "welfare/citizenship" paradigm which was centrally concerned with inequalities of power and opportunities. Consequently it was relatively simple for some versions of the feminist discourse to articulate with this.

The interesting thing will not be if feminism influences Leisure Sciences - many of the its basic methodological and theoretical issues seem unavoidable. Rather, the future direction of Leisure Sciences may depend on the resolution to the debate about the relationship between epistemology and methodology - how we know things - and theory - how we explain or change things. Although there is no simple distinction between epistemology, theory and methodology, it is obvious that interpretative and ethnographic approaches can co-exist with a number of theoretical positions - without theory facts have no voice.

This seems to be implied, but not fully articulated, in Karla Henderson's (1991) comment that;

"the feminist analysis, with a focus on critique, correction and transformation starts to lay the groundwork for the *transformation* of social science and *society*"

Whatever the outcome it would seem that the long held tenets of positivism that scientific knowledge consists of universal laws and that research must be neutral and value free are being challenged within Leisure Sciences.

Conclusion

Finally, it would seem sensible to follow Giddens' (1990) argument that although we need to acknowledge the arguments about a *postmodern condition*, this does not necessary imply that we need to develop *postmodern theory*, or, more radically, concede that theorising is no longer possible.

In this regard I would argue against essentialism. Because of the empirical heterogeneity and complexity of the phenomena referred to as "leisure" there is a tendency to search for a unitary essence. Invariably this essence is presented in terms of a psychological reductionism in which the psychological dimension is allowed to stand for the social phenomenon of leisure (Coalter, 1984). The calls for a *leisure in society* approach and for a much greater emphasis on "contextualised meanings" may carry the threat of the weakening of the boundaries of Leisure Sciences (the boundaries of Leisure Studies are already rather fluid).

I say this because I would agree with Bella's (1989) contention that,

"The significant questions, then, have to do with relationships served through an activity, not whether that activity can be described as "leisure".....The meaning of the activity is in the relationships served through that activity, not in the activity itself"

In response to the challenges of postmodernism, and the failures of Leisure Sciences and Leisure Studies, what is required is qualitative, ethnographic studies of what might be term "the ordinary" - the "lived, everyday lives of people" (Crouch and Tomlinson, 1994) and the "constitutive rules" underlying activities and giving them meaning. How are people building and/or sustaining a common culture in an age of fragmentation, dispersal and exclusion? Although these appear to be "big" questions I can only agree with Kelly's (1989) call for methodological modesty and an analysis of the *situated meanings of leisure*.

To repeat, "the problem is that we are looking for solutions where answers would do"!

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