Becoming Political: An Expanding Role for Critical Leisure Studies

By: Jeff Rose, Justin Harmon, and Rudy Dunlap

Abstract:

This article explores the intersection of politics and leisure, pointing to the fact that power has always been present in leisure activities, settings, practices, and institutions. In noting some of the past contributions of leisure scholarship, it also highlights a need for increasingly political leisure research, where knowledge production, epistemologies, and methodologies help unpack multiple critical leisures. Using engagements with Foucauldian biopolitics, political ecology, and radical political thought, this article sets the stage for the eight manuscripts that engage with critical components of political dimensions of leisure. In light of the pressing catastrophes of our time, we contend that scholars and educators can and should be engaged in building a more critically diverse and intellectually productive academy.

Article:

"That things are 'status quo' *is* the catastrophe." (Benjamin, 1940)

Leisure and the political

Leisure is not solely a theoretical construct; it exists in the real world, with real consequences, and it is contemplated, engaged, facilitated, and managed by real people. Similarly, leisure as time, activity, and/or state of mind has tangible effects on people's experiences in the world. Therefore, leisure is permeated with politics, illustrated in aspects of our lives where power is arranged, arbitrated, and withdrawn in particular ways. Politics in this sense is understood to be plays of power in the distribution of resources. This broad definition of politics enables wide incorporation of what one might determine to be a "play of power," in addition to what is constituted by the notion of "resources," which might be material, administrative, or otherwise. It is the "play of power," as manifested in leisure settings and experiences, which this special issue of *Leisure Sciences* explores: the research and scholarship in this special issue proceeds from the

assumption that a fuller accounting of the phenomenon of leisure must include an examination of, and engagement with, leisure as a venue for the active exercise of power.

Foucault, power, and biopolitics

French social theorist Michel Foucault provides relevant philosophical grounding for unpacking power and power relations. Foucault (1983) understood and problematized three generalized forms of power: institutional (rules associated with ethnic, national, and religious affiliations); economic (class-based inequities); and subjective (personal engagements with subjectivities and submission). For Foucault, power exists across multiple scales, and he focused his research on the ways in which institutions (though historically situated) instantiate and leverage power. He also focused on the historical formation of ideas and practices in terms of their effects on the present. Foucault theorized creatively on the relation among truth, power, and knowledge. In line with critical theory roots from Marx, Frankfurt School theorists, and elsewhere, he explored power that is often expressed through dominant political and economic frameworks.

Further, power is what constitutes people as social agents. Foucault endorsed an understanding of individuals as both constructed by, and vehicles for, the exercise of power, which they wield over themselves and others. In this sense, Foucault maintained space for particular kinds of agency, asserting that "power is exercised only over free beings, and only insofar as they are free" (Foucault, 1983, p. 221). Inquiry into relations of power, for which Foucault is perhaps most famous, also implicates and articulates those forces acting *against* dominant institutions, for wherever there is power, there is also resistance.

Power, and subsequently politics, has multiple and often competing valences. Power is most readily considered in its negative connotation, where some members of society have power over others. A noncontradictory positive connotation of power is one in which people and groups have the power to do things. Seeing power in only its positive or negative light, without appreciating its complexity in alternate valences, is to employ and engage with the concept of power too narrowly. Foucault (1977) explained:

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it "excludes," it "represses," it "censors," it "abstracts," it "masks," it "conceals." In fact, power produces; it produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. (p. 194)

Foucault sought to move away from a zero-sum approach to power, noting that power circulates through a metaphorical capillary system of society, moving from large, mainstream passageways to the smallest circuits of social interaction. For Foucault, power moves through all aspects of our social processes, discourses, and institutions, regardless of their externally recognized influence.

More often than discussing power itself, Foucault focused much of his writing and talks on *power relations*. Power relations explore how different groups both interact with and exert influence over other groups, and it is this dynamic interplay that influences the ways in which power flows through a social system.

…power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the "privilege," acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an affect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who "do not have it"; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. (Foucault, 1977, p. 27)

It is these power relations, more than anything else, that influence the practice of politics, which Foucault understood as being deployed nearly everywhere.

If politics are plays of power in the distribution of resources, then they are the very articulation of Foucauldian power relations. When politics are addressed in specificity toward people, what is at stake for people is life itself — *bios*. Foucault's (1979) biopolitics, then, is simply the governance of life itself. Biopolitics considers ways in which political power (and particularly state power) can be applied toward all aspects of human life. Foucault saw that biopolitics is always and everywhere in performances of contemporary governance, where (formal) political bodies sought to regulate and control life. Broadly, a biopolitical lens helps map the flows of power (thereby describing and analyzing power relations) over life in both specific and diffuse ways.

This biopolitical control over aspects of life has specific implications for leisure, as the ways in which leisure and labor interact is increasingly complex. Leisure is always a site of emotional labor, among other forms of labor (Rojek, 2010). As those labors are captured within political economies, our leisure becomes yet another site for biopolitical engagement (Rose & Spencer, 2016). If there is a weakness to the biopolitical lens, it would be its totalizing nature: if biopolitics is the plays of power in the distribution of resources *as they control life*, then what is not biopolitics? When and where is life not controlled by power relations? Nearly every understanding and articulation of leisure imaginable has political aspects, pointing toward a critical trajectory for leisure scholars.

Political leisure

There does not exist an imaginary, *apolitical* realm free from social and economic systems that influence them, even if such a fantasy might be appealing to some. To argue the apolitical nature of leisure and leisure pursuits is to engage in a version of willful ignorance. The argument often countered, that researchers should "just stick to leisure," is in and of itself a political statement, a political stance, and a reactionary one. It is a desire to maintain the status quo, a status quo with vested interests involved. There is an assumption that something as seemingly benign, since leisure — or recreation, parks, tourism, sport, hospitality, etc. — is not already political. But every aspect about leisure, from its management to its implementation to its funding to its identities, is political. In our contemporary age, marked by varied, ongoing, persistent catastrophes of neoliberal retrenchment, global climate change, ecological instability, environmental depletion, settler colonialism, wealth inequity, identity-based violence, state and nonstate terrorism, and so on, there is an emergent need for a coming together around a common

purpose of critical political leisure engagement. In the context of the catastrophic status quo, terrains of possibility remain open through a range of variously scaled initiatives, prompting the question: In what ways can counter-hegemonic politics and thought be enacted during the current conjuncture? The articles in this special issue highlight some of the ways in which leisure is, or can be, a conduit for navigating and negotiating seemingly disparate networks, conflicts, and relationships.

The political aspects of leisure have been uneven and irregular in leisure scholarship. Issues of diversity, inclusion, and, subsequently, relevance have always remained at the fore of leisure scholarship, with particular recent attention to race and gender. While noted leisure scholars have shown intermittent interest in the politics of leisure, rarely has leisure scholarship been explicitly political, a noted absence in a time of increasingly politically divided social and governmental structures in the early 21st century. Leisure scholars' collective and individual silences on many of the most politicized issues of contemporary life, many of which directly impact leisure services provision, management, staffing, and funding, represent an uneasy complicity in accepting and perhaps even replicating systems of injustice.

There are a number of contemporary uprisings, movements, and projects that purposefully include both radical disruptions of the status quo and perhaps equally radical attempts to resurrect, defend, or repurpose the heritage of past movements. All of these phenomena are in need of critical research and engagement from leisure scholars. Examples might include (but are not limited to) Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, Nuit Debout, the Standing Rock Tribe and the Dakota Access Pipeline, the Malheur Wildlife Refuge occupation, protest assemblies or plaza occupations, and Break Free climate justice activism, as well as militant Islamist movements, resurgent white supremacist organizations, and the rise of nationalist movements throughout Europe and elsewhere. Interrogating these issues is aided by critical, politically active standpoints.

Critical leisures

Becoming political necessitates a steady focus on a variety of avenues of injustice that most potently confront leisure experiences. The roles of race, gender, class, relationship to nature, and political economic ideology are interconnected areas that political and politicized leisure scholarship must address. However, there are pitfalls associated with not adopting a political stance in leisure sciences.

> Traditional leisure literature says little about challenging social standards and practices that are oppressive, working creatively and meaningfully with trauma and violence, negotiating a world riddled with racism and oppression, or creating meaningful solitary leisures. It lacks a voice grounded in critical theory and cognizant of the diversity of leisures. (Fox, 2011, p. 185)

Fox expands leisure to its plural formulation, inspiring us to think critically about the ways in which leisure is contested and deployed differently across social, cultural, and geographic contexts. Similarly, Mair (2002) encourages a formulation of leisure that "is constructed within and celebrates multiple voices, varying opinions, and diversity" (p. 232). These critical theory-

informed approaches, where power and power relations are prominent, support a foregrounding of politics in our understandings of leisure.

So-called "critical leisures" have a rich, if perhaps undersized, tradition in leisure studies journals and scholarship. Several critical constructs, for instance, life politics (Rojek, 2001), civil leisure (Mair, 2002), pleasure politics (Sharpe, 2008), the pleasure citizen (Riley, Morey, & Griffin, 2010), position leisure as explicitly political, elucidating the political agencies that participants enact through their leisures, both in concept and in practice. These critical perspectives on the politics of leisure and leisure as politics note that for a variety of reasons, including globalization, neoliberalism, cultural change, shifting identities, and others, conceptual boundaries are blurring among leisure, labor, and citizenship (Erickson, 2011; Gilchrist & Ravenscroft, 2013; Mair, 2002; Rojek, 2010; Rose & Spencer, 2016). Our literature has featured leisure-as-resistance themes (Wilson, 1988), though they have hardly been dominant, as leisure spaces are where individuals and communities can struggle against prevailing (and often oppressive) institutionalized social relations and conditions, particularly as they relate to spaces for the performance of marginalized identities (e.g., Johnson & Samdahl, 2005; Kivel & Kleiber, 2000; Scraton & Watson, 1998; Visser, 2003). There remains an emancipatory potential in the public sphere (Hemingway, 1996), illustrating necessary interconnections between leisure and the political instantiation of democracy. Seen in this light, there are unequivocal connections among leisure as a concept, leisure as a set of practices, and critical engagement in the sociopolitical world (e.g., Mair, 2002; Ravenscroft, 1993; Rojek, 2001).

A number of empirical studies in leisure have adopted politicized, critical orientations toward methods, data, analysis, and engagement with populations of concern (e.g., Lashua, 2005; McDonald, 2008; Parker, 2007; Wheaton, 2007). For instance, Gilchrist and Ravenscroft (2013) illustrated the ways that fun, nonconformist articulations of leisure in public spaces have the effect of promoting a politics of anarchism, vital for both political resistance movements and struggles to enact sociopolitical change (Springer, 2016). Such scholarship points scholars increasingly toward a "critical theory of leisure" (Fox, 2011; Hemingway, 1999), one that requires a politically active stance and diverse paradigmatic frameworks.

Becoming political

It is clear that leisure scholarship has had sporadic political engagement, but to date it lacks a sustained commitment toward explicitly political scholarship and engagement. More directly, we are not a particularly political discipline, as of yet. If a more explicitly political "critical theory of leisure" is sought, what tangible steps might scholars, educators, and practitioners enact to move us in such a direction? What epistemologies and paradigmatic assumptions must we incorporate to support this move intellectually? While leisure studies will have to forge its own way, we can learn from best practices from within and from other allied disciplines that have already branched out into more political directions.

Political ecology's example

Scholars interested in moving toward more political work could follow, in part, the directions of political ecology, an entire field of practice and understanding that positions complex nature-

society relations through politicized lenses, particularly (though not exclusively) through a lens of critical political economy. Though it has philosophical roots that extend back centuries, political ecology arose as a more coherent discipline in the 1980s, pulling from traditions in geography, anthropology, and environmental sociology, as a response to empiricist and positivist renderings of nature-society relations that were unable to address some of the most pressing concerns of the time. As a variety of disciplines were struggling to address questions of concern through traditional empiricist and positivist paradigms, political ecology was developed as a more cogent and engaged form of intellectual thought to fill a void, and political ecologies of leisure have developed as well (Rose & Carr, 2018). Leisure studies might recognize a similar void in our scholarship, and they might steadily and systematically develop a political leisure scholarship that better addresses the most pressing questions of our time. A brief exploration of political ecology points a way forward for critical researchers in leisure studies and associated fields.

A number of specific perspectives and techniques illuminate paths from political ecology that political leisure might emulate. First, political ecologists are encouraged to look for "landscapes of irony and paradox" (Robbins, 2012, p. 3) for those contradictions that contribute both rich texture and painful injustices in our sociopolitical worlds. How do social programs actually run counter to their intended goals? In what ways are particular movements embedded in particular ideological discourses? What practices actually (perhaps unintentionally) subvert their own stated aims? These types of contradictions are at the heart of critical engagement and research. In leisure studies, where are the ironies and paradoxes that cannot be, or have not been, explained by research to date? Second, by noting the politicized nature of leisure experiences as opposed to understanding them as *apolitical* phenomenon, this disjuncture amounts to the "difference between identifying broader systems rather than blaming proximate and local forces; between viewing systems as power-laden rather than politically inert; and between taking an explicitly normative approach rather than one that claims the objectivity of disinterest" (Robbins, 2012, p. 13).

Many of the manuscripts in this special issue make explicit connections to the politicized notions that are required of such normative approaches. How can scholarship operate at multiple scales to incorporate the empirical realities of the localized, ideographic conditions while also operating at a sufficiently broad scale to identify the larger sociopolitical practices, discourses, and ideologies at work? Can we, as scholars and generators of knowledge, acknowledge our own vested interests that color our scholarship, teaching, and outreach? Finally, as a field of radical praxis, political ecology aims to expose relations of power and seeks possibilities for social and environmental justice. Political ecologists often experiment with the representational limits of the field and research methods to make visible counter-hegemonic (environmental) knowledges and to support subaltern narratives of (environmental) certainties. Where is the space for leisure to engage in a radical praxis of possibility, where the potential for addressing inequity, injustice, and marginalization is addressed in spaces of leisure? How can we more fully incorporate novel and more inclusive methodological treatments and rigorous analyses in ways that makes our scholarship more accessible to communities of concern?

The contemporary political moment

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin (1940) famously claimed "that things are 'status quo' *is* the catastrophe" (N9a, 1). Benjamin's unfinished work provides a cultural (and Marxist) critique on consumption, city living, and the life of the street, using the lived, experienced, and felt. Benjamin developed the role of the flaneur, the nominal stroller, idler, or walker, who is supposedly at one's leisure to peruse the shops and the people and the urban landscape. But Benjamin saw this "leisure pursuit" as a much more critically engaging role. It was a multimethodological prescription for engaging with the surrounding world, one in which, informed appropriately by critical theory, enabled insights that would otherwise be undetectable (Buck-Morse, 1986). For Benjamin, this flaneur role enabled a diagnosis of modernist/capitalist cultural practices that seemed sufficiently benign at any superficial inspection, but were in fact problematically catastrophic when placed into appropriate critical context.

Radicalism

How, then, might leisure scholars engage in our own forms of Benjamin's flaneury, moving from benign, removed engagement with sociopolitical phenomena to a politically relevant form of scholarly engagement able to critically name, complicate, explain, and predict? Paulo Freire (1970) advocated for a radical stance on these issues, noting that small, incremental assessments and advocacies have rarely been successful:

> The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side. (p. 39)

Freire was hardly alone in his calls for radicalism. Again, pulling from intellectual contributors to political ecology provides insight in a field's openness and acceptance of radical ideas, practices, and scholarship. Historical figures, such as Pyotr Kropotkin (1842–1921) and Elisée Reclus (1830–1905), made substantial contributions toward anarchist and antiauthoritarian ideas and practices. Kropotkin (1990) espoused a revolutionary but socially cooperative anarchism, resisting and working to dismantle hierarchical social conditions. Kropotkin sought to undermine many of the taken-for-granted assumptions of contemporary social science knowledge and methods while simultaneously creating an empirically grounded rationale for more just principles for organizing society, providing normative visions of alternative futures (Springer, 2016). Kropotkin (1888) showed that in the animal kingdom, cooperation, rather than competition, is central to both survival and selection; bringing these insights into the organization of society was (and remains) a radical proposition, imagining a world without domination, violence, and hierarchy. Similarly, Reclus (1890) noted that revolution, as both a concept and a practice, is part of evolutionary change in both social and environmental systems. Injustices are not a part of an inevitable evolutionary selection but of authoritarian, agency-filled choices toward dominance and subjugation of others. Marxism generally focuses on revolutionary potential of producing an idealized end state (egalitarian communism); anarchism appreciates the dynamism and the continual production and reproduction of our social and

political worlds. Anarchism is more of a process than a product, with the product regularly associated with violence and naïve utopianism (Springer, 2014).

Being responsive to and preventative of the "status quo catastrophes" of the moment, from climate change to neoliberalization to racial profiling to war profiteering to retrenchment in government services for those most in need, requires an active, political academia. But it requires an active, political academia that is self-aware, reflexive, rigorous, grounded, and theoretically and practically informed. In this (global) political moment, in light of the election of Donald Trump, the Brexit vote, and Modi's demonetization initiatives, the future is increasingly difficult to predict, but it is clear that Benjamin's analysis of the catastrophic status quo is not solely historical, but also contemporary and dynamic.

Moves for leisure

Just as other social science disciplines have steadily incorporated a stream of more politically oriented scholarship, leisure should continue apace. In addition to following trajectories in other disciplines (e.g., political ecology), looking to the traditions already established in the critical leisures scholarship is an additionally helpful starting point. In Fox's (2011) call for critical theories of leisure, she suggests leisure scholars have four basic obligations: we must keep our links with our (broadly defined) intellectual pasts; we must acknowledge and explore leisures different from our own; we must engage directly with social and environmental injustices that plague peoples around the globe; and we have "the duty to wonder and play" (p. 191). These obligations point toward critical engagement, an area that unites research, teaching, and scholarship in a wide variety of academic disciplines, and is a way to be more politically attune and politically active.

Critical engagement from leisure scholars requires attention from five intersecting domains of inquiry and engagement: theory, methodology, pedagogy, products, and actors (Figure 1). Theory refers not only to the theoretical robustness of the research but also to the ability to challenge existing theories and to position theory as generative rather than static. Theory also connects issues of ontology and epistemology, which cannot be decoupled (Berbary, 2015; Berbary & Boles, 2014). Over the past half-century, leisure studies have shifted across paradigms, epistemologies, and methodologies, providing a wide diversity of topics of interest and ways to better understand them. Politically engaged research should challenge and clarify the assumptions and perspectives that researchers and scholars have undertaken in the pursuit of understanding leisure. Methodology includes both the rationale for methods chosen, and those tools used to gather and analyze data, specifically tailored to the questions of concern (Johnson & Parry, 2015). In political research and scholarship, elements of methodology should be both rigorous and inventive. Third, pedagogy – teaching and learning processes – should carefully integrate with knowledge production processes. Fourth, what products emerge from critical engagement? What are the moments of change, the differences in material circumstances, and/or the increased opportunities that result from political engagement (i.e., McIntyre, 2008)? Pedagogy could be a product, as could academic papers and technical reports. These products should be sustained over time, so that the knowledge production processes and felt sociopolitical changes sustainably continue. Finally, who are the actors involved in the engagement? How do the various engagement endeavors conduct decision-making processes? How are communities

empowered, and how are nontraditional contributors incorporated? Together, these five domains can engage the possibilities and tensions that arise through the intersection of scholarship and other forms of political action. Questions of practice, praxis, epistemology, positionality, and others arise from these interconnected domains.
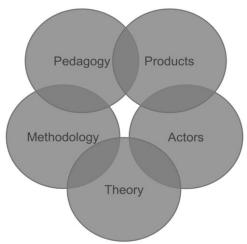

Figure 1. Overlapping elements of critical engagement.

Potential steps for engaging critically and politically with leisure research and scholarship include:

- Be historical. Via Marx, sociopolitical conditions do not materialize independently, but arise from specific social, economic, and geographical conditions.
- Recognize leisure inequities as products of broader sociohistorical processes rather than particular discrete events.
- Read power in the landscape, and know that politics is therefore nearby. Search for those spaces of irony and paradox and ask how those conditions came to be.
- Consider the appropriate scale of resistances. There is a need to balance the fight against small injustices with the fight against those injustices that immiserate working class and poor lives.
- Recognize local, ideographic struggles as connected to structural dimensions of inequality, including the unequal distribution of power and resources.
- Avoid exclusive focus on "perpetrator-victim" models (Pellow, 2000, p. 592), which might be overly simplistic and fail to uncover various complexities involved. Most discrepancies involve a broader array of critical stakeholders with often contradictory, dynamic loyalties and sympathies.
- Similarly, avoid participating in the "oppression Olympics" (Johnson, 2014, p. 389), where competitions for the most oppressive status impede movements for justice. Embrace similarities and differences of movements that seek to support justice causes.

Scholars have engaged critically in political topics and moments throughout the history of leisure research, and scholarship in this special issue of *Leisure Sciences* on the connections of leisure and politics extend this tradition in meaningful ways. The issue begins with a trio of articles that address the enduring presence of race as a tool of oppression in American society. As opposed to being glibly characterized by freedom and enjoyment, Mowatt develops the notion that leisure

should also be understood as a tool of racecraft, the articulation of power to support a racialized social order. Exploring the history of public and private swimming spaces in the United States, Mowatt makes the cases that unjust racial relations in leisure settings are not particularly new but instead are countenanced in deep historical structures that developed in particular sociopolitical contexts. In a similar vein, Pinckney, Outley, and Brown unpack what it means to "play while black." Contrasting with dominant discourses on the benefits of play for youth, the authors document the unequal access and unjust engagements of black youth with recreation and leisure experiences, leading to both symbolic and material violence. Finally, Brown, Outley, and Pinckney explore leisure as a crucial domain for the socio-political development of black youth. In contrast to conventional portrayals of black youth as "at risk," Brown, Outley, and Pinckney draw our attention to the use of culture-specific out-of-school programming that endeavors to develop critical political consciousness among its participants.

Lashua and Baker explore the relationship among architecture, space, and leisure, considering how space is reinvented to create meaningful leisure opportunities. What happens when a space "outlives its original purpose?" Lashua and Baker illustrate how creative attempts at "architecture by subtraction" lend to expressing agency in leisure. In a decidedly different exploration of space and power, Sturm and Rinehart explore the development of New Zealand's premier indoor cycling facility, the Avantidrome, as a prototypical incarnation of neoliberal discourse. Despite being developed under a rhetorical banner of "sport for all," the Avantidrome functions predominantly as a preserve of white, male elite cycling.

Moving away from macro considerations of power and space, Glover's scholarship situates politics in the everyday conversations that unfold in our leisure. He notes our shared politics, as problematic as it often seems, must be developed and encouraged through "cross-talk" in the rapidly diminishing public sphere. Reclaiming our public sphere requires leisure processes and leisure spaces to critically engage with our political discourses.

Mueller, Mowen, and Graefe bring attention back to conventional electoral politics in an examination of political affiliation as a decisive factor in voters' support for leisure initiatives in Pennsylvania. In contrast to dominant narratives of partisan polarization, the authors' found that voters are generally support ballot initiatives benefitting the state park system, irrespective of party affiliation.

In the issue's final article, Kivel's essay vividly brings the politics of leisure into our current neoliberal political moment, with all of its contradictions, pressures, and confusions. While noting the successes of leisure research, she also contends that an ongoing process remains, and that our scholarship can contribute substantially to this critical process. Her meditative practice both grounds us in the current moment while simultaneously remaining aware of the bigger picture; the realities of the moment require action from all of us.

Taken as a whole, the special issue's articles remind us that politics' "plays of power" are not limited to spectacles of national and international governance but are ever-present in our daily lives. As such, many of these articles viscerally illustrate the ways in which dominant existing sociopolitical relations are (re)creating problematic systems of dominance. They point leisure

scholars toward a need for more radical thought (and scholarship) to address and counteract such systems.

Moving forward: research, health, and politics

There always has been, and likely will always be, a need for social scientists from leisure's varied traditions to provide thorough, data-driven, empirically grounded, descriptive, and analytical research and scholarship. Traditionally active leisure stakeholder groups, ranging from park and recreation agencies to nonprofit community groups to community developers to various private interests, are in need of data and analyses to inform planning, management, and other strategic decisions. However, in support of both descriptive and analytical research, there must also be a critical stream of scholarship and research, research that is overtly political and active. Following Benjamin, maintaining a status quo in what leisure sciences does would represent a form of catastrophe for our field. Calling for increased and increasingly sophisticated critical research is not necessarily contradictory to traditional research approaches, designs, analyses, and representations but can augment and solidify these already well-established perspectives. Further, some of the best scholarship is both empirical (data driven and descriptive, analytical, or both) *and* critical. Without excluding the contributions of other types of scholarship, studies that provide both aspects are strongest for moving these discourses forward.

Increasingly, in academic literature and on university campuses in North America, there has been a recent demand for empirically connecting leisure activities, practices, and perspectives with various health outcomes for individuals, groups, and communities. There is obvious promise in better understanding how leisure contributes to human health (physical, social, mental, and spiritual) and environmental health (e.g., ecological integrity, environmental justice, conservation stewardship), and leisure literature has made substantial progress in these domains. However, it cannot be dismissed that explicitly associating leisure and health also shows promise for increased research and clinical funding through national bodies, yet another way in which neoliberal ideology and discourse permeate leisure and its scholarly consideration (Rose & Dustin, 2009). This process of the "healthification" of leisure scholarship has fundamental implications for the ways in which academics engage in teaching, research, and outreach, influencing the topics and manners in which we teach, the direction and dissemination of our investigations, and the ways in which we engage with communities. Our field is in need of continued conversation concerning the ways in which leisure research can contribute to a healthier world, reasonably supported by funding mechanisms, while maintaining streams of critical engagement and insight. Some of the finest critical leisure scholarship does not address "health" and does not attract external funding. Having space for both in our journals, our discourse, and our curriculum is imperative.

Leisure scholars, among others in the increasingly neoliberal academy, are well positioned to address the competing and often contradictory sociopolitical trends the world faces. Leisure scholars must also become increasingly self-reflective about various axes of power. As the academy is facing increasing but diversified pressures from across the social, political, and economic spectrum, we must consistently and reflexively question our own roles in the production of particular knowledges, and particular practices of the continuation of domination and subordination of individuals and groups. Knowledge production, a key purpose of leisure

scholarship, is an inherently political process, and the more readily scholars acknowledge this position, as well as how critically we engage with those most in need of political voice, will determine our field's academic relevance in the decades to come. Keeping this awareness at the fore of leisure scholarship and democratic engagement enables scholars to more cogently address issues that characterize our lived, political experiences in the world. Simply maintaining an existing status quo would further catastrophize a leisure studies that does not sufficiently engage with the political realms of our discipline and our engagements with the world.

As Foucault developed across his works, the proliferation of particular discourses is one of the dominant functions of power. By embracing particular research endeavors, certain sociopolitical questions are addressed and problematized, and perhaps advanced. Other questions, therefore, are avoided, dismissed, and perhaps entrenched or reinscribed. It would be disconcerting for leisure sciences to be unnecessarily passive in the field's response to sociopolitical issues of our time. Perhaps worse is to be constantly reactive to external pressures without bringing forward major themes that have helped define and position leisure sciences for decades. Instead, we should be aware of those pressures that color our experiences in the world, but also active in shaping the directions of our scholarship, teaching, and outreach. Maintaining a rigorous scholarly agenda, while engaging critically with the politics of our time, is central in this process.

References

Benjamin, W. ([1940] 2006). The arcades project (B. Hanssen, Ed.). London, England: Continuum.

Berbary, L. A. (2015). Creative analytic practices: Onto-episto-theoretical attachments, uses, and constructions within humanist qualitative leisure research. International Leisure Review, *2*(4), 27–55.

Berbary, L. A., & Boles, J. C. (2014). Eight reflection points: Revisiting scaffolding for improvisational humanist qualitative inquiry. Leisure Sciences, *36*(5), 401–419.

Buck-Morss, S. (1986). The flaneur, the sandwichman and the whore: The politics of loitering. New German Critique, *39*, 99–140.

Erickson, B. (2011). Recreational activism: Politics, nature, and the rise of neoliberalism. Leisure Studies, *30*(4), 477–494.

Foucault, M. (1977). Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison. New York, NY: Vintage.

Foucault, M. ([1979] 2008). The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979 (M. Senellart, Ed.). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Foucault, M. (1983). The subject and power. In H. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics (pp. 208–226). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Fox, K. (2011). Can you hear the music? Toward a polyphonic leisure scholarship. In K. Paisley & D. Dustin (Eds.), Speaking up and speaking out: Working for social and environmental justice through parks, recreation, and leisure (pp. 181–192). Champaign, IL: Sagamore.

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York, NY: Seabury Press.

Gilchrist, P., & Ravenscroft, N. (2013). Space hijacking and the anarcho-politics of leisure. Leisure Studies, *32*(1), 49–68.

Hemingway, J. L. (1996). Emancipating leisure: The recovery of freedom in leisure. Journal of Leisure Research, *28*(1), 27–43.

Hemingway, J. L. (1999). Critique and emancipation: Toward a critical theory of leisure. In E. L. Jackson & T. L. Burton (Eds.), Leisure studies: Prospects for the twenty-first century (pp. 487–506). State College, PA: Venture.

Johnson, C. W. (2014). "All you need is love": Considerations for a social justice inquiry in leisure studies. Leisure Sciences, *36*(4), 388–399.

Johnson, C. W., & Parry, D. (Eds.). (2015). Fostering social justice through qualitative inquiry: A methodological guide. San Francisco, CA: Left Coast Press.

Johnson, C. W., & Samdahl, D. (2005). "The night they took over": Misogyny in a country-western gay bar. Leisure Sciences, *27*(4), 331–348.

Kivel, B. D., & Kleiber, D. (2000). Leisure in the identity formation of lesbian/gay youth: Personal, but not social. Leisure Sciences, *22*(4), 215–232.

Kropotkin, P. (1888). Mutual aid: A factor in evolution. Boston, MA: Porter Sargent.

Kropotkin, P. (1990). The conquest of bread. Montreal, CA: Black Rose Press.

Lashua, B. (2005). Leisure, civil disobedience, and the history of low power FM (LPFM) radio. Leisure/Loisir, *29*(1), 27–48.

Mair, H. (2002). Civil leisure? Exploring the relationship between leisure, activism and social change. Leisure/Loisir, *27*(3–4), 213–237.

McDonald, M. G. (2008). Rethinking resistance: The queer play of the women's national basketball association, visibility politics and late capitalism. Leisure Studies, *27*(1), 77–93.

McIntyre, A. (2008). Participatory action research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Parker, G. (2007). The negotiation of leisure citizenship: Leisure constraints: Moral regulation and the mediation of rural place. Leisure Studies, *26*(1), 1–22.

Pellow, D. (2000). Environmental inequality formation: Toward a theory of environmental injustice. American Behavioral Scientist, *43*(4), 581–601.

Ravenscroft, N. (1993). Public leisure provision and the good citizen. Leisure Studies, *12*, 33–44.

Reclus, E. (1890). Evolution and revolution. London, England: W. Reeves.

Riley, S., Morey, Y., & Griffin, C. (2010). The "pleasure citizen": Analyzing partying as a form of social and political participation. Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research, *18*(1), 33–54.

Robbins, P. (2012). Political ecology: A critical introduction. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell

Rojek, C. (2001). Leisure and life politics. Leisure Sciences, *23*, 115–125.

Rojek, C. (2010). The labour of leisure. London, England: Sage.

Rose, J., & Carr, A. (2018). Political ecologies of leisure: A critical approach to nature-society relations in leisure studies. Annals of Leisure Research, *21*(3), 265–283.

Rose, J., & Dustin, D. (2009). The neoliberal assault on the public university: The case of recreation, park, and leisure research. Leisure Sciences, *31*(4), 397–402.

Rose, J., & Spencer, C. (2016). Immaterial labour in spaces of leisure: Producing biopolitical subjectivities through Facebook. Leisure Studies, *35*(6), 809–826.

Scraton, S., & Watson, B. (1998). Gendered cities: Women and public leisure space in the "postmodern city." Leisure Studies, *17*(2), 123–137.

Sharpe, E. K. (2008). Festivals and social change: Intersections of pleasure and politics at a community music festival. Leisure Sciences, *30*(3), 217–234.

Springer, S. (2014). Why a radical geography must be anarchist. Dialogues in Human Geography, *4*(3), 249–270.

Springer, S. (2016). The anarchist roots of geography: Toward spatial emancipation. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Visser, G. (2003). Gay men, tourism and urban space: Reflections on Africa's "gay capital." Tourism Geographies, *5*(2), 168–189.

Wheaton, B. (2007). Identity, politics, and the beach: Environmental activism in surfers against sewage. Leisure Studies, *26*(3), 279–302.

Wilson, J. (1988). Politics and leisure. London, England: Allen & Unwin.