



A Future for UK Leisure Studies: Back to Work

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Abstract

The work-leisure relationship was the pivotal issue from the 1950s–1970s when the study of leisure first became a field of collective academic endeavour in North America and the UK. Since then this relationship has declined in visibility. It is now treated as just one among several sources of social divisions alongside gender, age, ethnicity, and also sexual orientations and (dis)abilities. Currently leisure studies has problems of identity, relevance and representation. This paper argues that the only secure future for the field is to return to work.

Keywords Employment · Leisure · Occupations · Unemployment · Well-being · Work

1 Introduction

‘It seems reasonable to conclude that the work-leisure relationship as it has been understood in leisure studies is no longer fit for purpose. Established definitions of work and leisure that have served well have changed in practice and meaning’ (Snape et al. 2017, p188). Between 1963 and 1983 four books used *Work and Leisure* as their titles (Anderson 1967; Haworth and Smith 1975; Parker 1983; Smigel 1963). Since then the title has been used just once (Haworth and Veal 2004) and this most recent book does not resemble its predecessors. It has two sections. The first is devoted to changes in work since the 1970s. The second is a collection of papers on leisure and well-being, leisure studies’ new ‘central life interest’ into which Snape et al. (2017) advise the subject to collapse.

Since the 1970s the work-leisure relationship has declined in visibility in leisure studies. It is now treated as just one among several sources of social divisions alongside gender, age, ethnicity and also sexual orientations and (dis)abilities. Currently leisure

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studies has problems of identity, relevance and representation (Fletcher et al. 2017; Silk et al. 2017). The ‘L’ word has been disappearing from department and programme titles. The subject has experienced the same fate in Australia and New Zealand. *‘Since their establishment 30-35 years ago, there are no longer any specific Leisure Studies degrees... The decline in leisure studies as a distinctive field of study in Australia and New Zealand is irrefutable... Overall it appears that the current state of leisure studies is that it has become a diverse and disparate field within academia’* (Tower et al. 2018, pp. 61 and 65). This paper argues that investing in well-being will push leisure studies further into a backwater, and that the subject’s only route to a secure future is ‘back to work’.

This paper addresses leisure studies in the UK but all the arguments apply equally to the study of leisure in other first generation leisure studies countries in North America and Australasia. Elsewhere there is no past to which leisure studies might return, so the advice is to proceed by establishing a secure anchorage between the study of leisure and work.

The following sections start with the classic work-leisure issues on which leisure studies was originally built. The next section overviews trends in leisure studies since the 1980s in which the profile of the work-leisure relationship has sunk, but also identifies new issues, arising from changes in work, with which leisure studies can engage. The third and final section explains why the work-leisure relationship is the only topic around which the wider leisure studies field can cohere and regain attention throughout academia and beyond.

2 Work and Leisure: Classic Studies

When leisure studies was being established as an academic subject, some of its scholars (mainly sociologists) reworked the *social* problems of leisure that had been addressed between the world wars in the UK (see Snape 2018a; Snape and Pussard 2013). During this period leisure was the topic of a series of conferences, reports and books. Recreation movements had also been formed in America and Europe, and international collaboration had begun. Trade unions and socialist parties were part of these movements, and their principal demand was for more leisure time. They wanted reductions in hours of work. This was partly in order to reduce unemployment, but also because leisure time was seen as an intrinsic good. However, this depended on workers being able to use their free time beneficially. Vulnerable groups were believed to be young people who left school for unemployment or dead end jobs, and who were proving ‘unclubbable’, not in contact with any youth organisations, and also residents on the new sprawling owner-occupied and social housing estates that were bereft of leisure amenities. There was also concern about the malign effects of the new mass media (radio, recorded music and movies) which were believed to discourage more active and beneficial uses of free time. Another concern was the wider socio-psychological effects of assembly line factory jobs, governed by time and motion study: the jobs’ mind numbing character seemed likely to spill into ‘mechanical’ leisure. ‘The long arm of the job’ (Meissner 1971) was in fact the main issue adopted by leisure studies in the 1960s and 70s.

2.1 The Leisure Society

In the 1960s and 70s the founders of leisure studies could celebrate victory in the campaign for shorter working time. Daily hours of work had been reduced, the weekend had been extended and holiday entitlements lengthened. Real incomes had risen, and more money could be spent on non-essentials in increasingly affluent societies. These trends were expected to continue leading to some kind of leisure society. As leisure time exceeded working time, leisure was expected to become the source of values that infiltrated work rather than vice versa. A leisure ethic was to supersede the work ethic of industrialism. Family homes were to become primarily sites for leisure rather than places to recuperate and re-create labour power (Dumazedier 1967). Citizens would take control of ‘the time of their lives’ (Best 1973, 1978). A four day work week was forecast even if people continued to work 40 h a week. Work time was to be rescheduled to accommodate leisure preferences in which a whole day was considered more valuable than an extra hour free from work each evening (Poor 1972).

Veal (2011) has noted that academic sceptics always outnumbered those who subscribed to a leisure society vision of the future. Wilenski (1963) cautioned that reductions in working time had been uneven between occupations. Bienefeld (1972) observed that the trend towards reduced working time in Britain had been in short bursts, which would not necessarily be repeated, rather than a smooth ongoing slide. Linder (1970) argued that spending power was growing more rapidly than the time available in which to spend and consume, and that the outcome was more likely to be a ‘harried leisure class’ than more leisurely lives. Glasser warned that further reductions in working time could leave people stranded in a wilderness of boredom. Anderson (1967) described leisure as an unintended by-product of industrialism for which beneficial uses had still to be identified. However, the ‘society of leisure’ served as a reference point for the entire leisure studies community in the 1960s and 70s, and it earned the field wider relevance and attention.

2.2 Shift Work

This was a second work-related issue that leisure studies adopted in the 1960s and 70s. Employment at ‘unsocial hours’ (the term that began to replace shifts) had become more common as manufacturers introduced shift systems in order to keep output abreast of rising consumer demand. The spread of employment at unsocial hours was also due to the growth of consumer services where staff had to be at work when consumers were at leisure.

Research findings were unambiguous. There were some advantages in working shifts. Workers had free time to themselves during daytime hours when children were at school, and shift workers could use leisure facilities at less crowded, off-peak, low cost times. However, the disadvantages were experienced as so overwhelming as to make any unsocial shifts unacceptable as permanent. In so far as was possible, shift workers tried to maintain normal family and leisure schedules. The outcomes were fewer hours of sound sleep, diet and health problems. Shift workers complained that they were unable to synchronise with family schedules, and to attend meetings of sports clubs and cultural societies regularly on weekday evenings and at weekends (see Brown 1959; Carter and Corlett 1982; Mott 1965; Roberts and Chambers 1985).

2.3 Spillover and Compensation

These alternative work-leisure relationships were probably *the* leading issue in leisure studies in the 1960s and 70s. The ‘long arm of the job’ was seen as creating alternatives to the mind-numbing effects allegedly associated with repetitive, assembly line work. A series of studies identified uses of leisure that were characteristic among specific occupational groups, and these cases could be divided into ‘spillover’ and ‘compensation’. There were studies of architects, railway workers, coal miners, deep sea trawlermen, weavers, managers, bank clerks and social workers (Friedmann 1961; Gertsl 1963; Lansbury, 1974; Mott 1973; Salaman 1974). Parker (1971, 1983) famously added a midway ‘neutrality’ option and relabelled the other work-leisure relationships as extension or fusion, and opposition. He also offered an explanation of the work-leisure relationship that would prevail in a particular occupation. This was said to depend on whether employees were interested in and identified with work tasks and colleagues.

This entire exciting genre of research fizzled to an end in the 1980s by when investigators had found it impossible to identify the expected work-leisure relationships in large data sets (Champoux 1978; Herbert and Aubrey 1982). Clear work-leisure relationships had been identified in earlier occupational case studies of employees who often worked among hundreds who spent their entire working lives in the same workplaces, and lived close to where they worked so that work and neighbourhood relationships overlapped. Also, most of the workers were men, doing men’s work. By the 1980s these older social formations were dissolving. Mechanisation in factories was creating more physical distance, and less collaboration, between fewer numbers of employees. The motor car was dispersing workforces, and workplaces were becoming mixed in gender and ethnicity. The spillover-compensation issue thus died a natural death in the 1980s, and by then the ‘leisure society’ (which had failed to appear) was ceasing to act even as a point of reference in leisure studies (Veal 2012).

2.4 Unemployment

It was not work itself, but rather its absence and replacement by unemployment that kept the work-leisure relationship as a major issue for leisure studies throughout the 1980s. A series of studies investigated the leisure effects of unemployment, and whether leisure activities could replace the role of paid work in people’s lives (Glyptis 1989; Kilpatrick and Trew 1985; Roberts 1989; Roberts et al. 1982, 1987, 1991; Stokes 1983). The results were unanimous. Unemployment was damaging for leisure, and leisure activities could not be adequate substitutes for paid work. This was not just because leisure is normally unpaid. Leisure activities, which are inherently optional, cannot *impose* time structures on days and weeks, and can rarely offer equivalent respected social statuses and identities. Investigators found that leisure activities could mitigate, but were far from full socio-psychological compensation for the loss of work roles, though Walter (1985) noted the existence of exceptional cases such as himself who had used a spell of unemployment productively to complete a PhD thesis. This stream of research has continued in the UK and America (Collins and Kay 2003; Havitz et al. 2004), but has dwindled to a trickle as the findings have become predictable.

It is a fair criticism that the entire work-leisure literature was really about just one type of work, employment, and neglected other forms of paid and unpaid work. However, as argued below, employment has specific, distinctive and especially powerful implications for leisure, and to avoid confusion this paper follows customary practice and uses the term ‘work’ for what would more accurately be described as ‘employment’.

3 Work, Leisure, and Leisure Studies Since the 1980s

What follows is not arguing for a return to the work-leisure issues of the 1960s–80s. Work, leisure and leisure studies have all changed. In the process the work-leisure relationship has lost its once pivotal position in leisure studies. The argument is that subsequent changes in work and leisure need new work-leisure issues to be addressed. In practice this relationship has become neglected, thereby weakening the coherence of the leisure studies field.

3.1 The Leisure Studies Context

Britain’s Leisure Studies Association (LSA) was founded in 1976 and launched the journal *Leisure Studies* in 1982. By then departments and courses with ‘leisure’ in their titles were spreading throughout UK higher education. In North America this had happened 20 years earlier. Australasia soon followed the UK. Since its formation the LSA has held at least one conference per year. In the 1980s three of these conferences were designated international events. Since then all the annual conferences have been de facto international, but not genuinely global, because after the 1980s leisure studies failed to continue its global spread. In the rest of the world it is still represented only by the occasional centre and sometimes by the occasional scholar whose primary networks are international via the World Leisure Organisation, the International Sociological Association or the LSA’s own annual conferences.

During its 1980s’ growth, UK leisure studies diversified its agenda and the work-leisure relationship ceased to be *the* pivot. A programme of research funded by a Sports Council and Social Science/Economic and Social Research Council Joint Panel encouraged this diversification (Executive Panel on Leisure and Recreation Research 1985; Social Science Research Council/Sports Council 1978). As well as work and leisure, there were projects on leisure and gender, leisure and the home and the family. Age and ethnic divisions were added to the research agenda. Growth was also accompanied by specialisation within leisure studies. There was less attention to Big Leisure and more studies of the little leisures. Researchers and courses increasingly focused on types of leisure, mainly tourism or sport, which then splintered into sub-specialisms such as eco-tourism and youth sports. Events, originally a sub-specialty, has threatened to swallow both its parents and grandparent. Thus the ‘L’ word began to disappear from department and programme titles.

During its growth leisure studies became more distant from other academic fields and disciplines. The initial cohorts of leisure scholars necessarily had backgrounds elsewhere – in sociology, psychology, history, geography or economics. By the 1980s leisure studies departments were producing their own BAs, MAs, PhDs and staff. A

consequence has been that the influx of scholars from elsewhere has diminished along with the theories and issues that they transported into leisure studies, which simultaneously has lost channels through which its voice can be projected into other fields and disciplines. The consequence of concern here is that the voice of leisure studies in debates about the social significance of economic changes has shrunk to a whisper. Thus whereas work remains a huge issue and problem in society and most social sciences, the work-leisure relationship has lost its role as a stable pivot in leisure studies.

The following passages describe how work has changed. Economic change has been the driver, not the public's leisure preferences. The leisure society as envisaged in the 1960s and 70s was a mirage. We now live amid complaints about overwork, time pressure and acceleration, and work-life balance. The shift work issue has been absorbed by a wider diversification of work schedules. These are the new 'time' issues. The occupational communities which shared characteristic uses of leisure have been swept away by flexible firms and labour markets, job and occupational insecurity, all amid wider inequalities of wealth, income, access to housing, and the commercialisation of leisure services. There are important implications for people's uses of leisure and therefore for leisure studies. These implications are seriously under-researched.

3.2 Time

At the beginning of the 1990s there were claims that the working hours of full-time employees had lengthened in the USA (Schor 1991), and suspicions that this trend could be occurring throughout economically advanced capitalist countries where people were complaining of being 'pressed for time' and that the pace of life had accelerated (see, for example, Brosch and Binnesweis 2018; Garhammer 1998). Greedy employers were accused of demanding more time from their workforces, and succeeding in countries where job insecurity was spreading (see below), and in any case a work-and-spend consumer culture had shifted employee preferences from more time to more money (Cross 1993; Hunnicutt 1988). Checks against time budget data found no country in which average hours of work had lengthened (Robinson and Godbey 1999; Zuzanek et al. 1998; Zuzanek and Mannell 1998). However, there were major differences between countries. People were working longer in Asia than in North America, and longer in North America than in Europe where Britain's workers had the longest schedules (Robinson and Godbey 1999). However, this proved true only when just officially full-time employees (at least 30 h a week) were included in the calculations. Britain has one of Europe's highest percentages of part-time workers, and when they are included the UK average sinks to the European norm (Bonney 2005).

This does not mean that people who feel that they are working longer and suffering increasing time pressure are mistaken. There are more households with more than one earner, so their gross paid working time will be greater than in their parents' households. This trend has created hotspots in weekday schedules, typically in the early mornings and late afternoons in child-rearing families. These trends have created the issue, and demands for, a better work-life balance (see Roberts 2007). Mainly (though not only) women researchers have noted that many part-time employees, who are mostly females, wish to work longer, while employees who work more than 40 h a

week, who are mainly men, often say that they would prefer shorter hours (Fagan 2002; Viasanen and Natti 2002). Work-life balance campaigners want gender convergence and family friendly employment practices which allow men and women to combine paid work with parenting (Hewitt 1993; Warren 2003). Domestic technology has not reduced time spent on housework (see Gershuny 2004), and despite greater use being made of early years child care, paid for by parents or governments, on average parents are spending more time with their children. In middle class families their parenting style has been described as ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau 1987).

Work at ‘odd hours’ has become increasingly common. Consumer services continue to create more short part-time hours, longer part-time hours, evening and weekend work. Shifts have been assimilated into this more complex present-day world of work. The generic problem that this poses is synchronisation. The more varied their hours of work, the lesser the likelihood that any group of people will be able to do the same thing together. This applies to family meal times, couples sleeping together, and members of any club being able to meet regularly at a set time (Jenkins and Osberg 2003).

New technologies and gadgets, specifically the internet, tablet and smartphone, are often blamed for cluttering time, but Wajcman (2015) insists that, if so, this is only on account of the ways in which we choose to use these devices. It is certainly the case that in Britain time spent online is now exceeded only by time spent watching television (live and catch-up) (Ofcom 2015). However, unlike when we relied on landlines, we do not need to ring back or text back immediately. Calls, texts and emails can be allowed to pile-up and tackled as a block in a regular or moveable time slot. We can, if we wish, use these technologies to free up time.

The point of relevance here is the scarcity of interventions from leisure scholars on the implications of all the above for how people use their non-working time. There is only so much that we can learn from statistics on the number of hours people work, and exactly when. We need case studies of employees in specific occupations, at different life stages and in different kinds of households. This has yet to be tested, but it is possible that leisure is unscathed by the above changes in work time. People seem to retain plenty of literally spare time that now, as in the recent past, is spent mainly using the media, old and new.

3.3 Security: Jobs and Money

Since the 1950s an assumption in all future gazing has been that machines will progressively replace existing forms of human labour. In the 1960s and 70s some leisure scholars assumed that this would free-up time which could become leisure. Thus a leisure society was to be born. By the 1980s it was apparent that the normal effects of introducing labour saving technology were to reduce workforces while retained staff became more productive and could be rewarded with higher pay. New jobs needed to be created to accommodate displaced workers. This has always depended on the formation of markets for new goods and services for which there is a demand. By the 1990s there were suspicions that this was becoming increasingly difficult which led to forecasts of jobless futures for increasing numbers (Aronowitz and DiFazio 1994; Gorz 1999; Forrester 1999). A radical response would be a citizen’s wage, an effect of which would be to reduce labour supply. Such a response is now seen (by some) as

urgent at a time when a new generation of ‘robots’ with in-built artificial intelligence seems set to make thousands redundant.

Britain has faced this situation, the advent of new technologies, throughout decades when labour supply has been growing due to increasing labour market participation by women and immigration, and more recently by delayed retirement. The growth of labour supply has been restrained by retaining young people for longer in education and training. The spread of mass unemployment has also been averted by a combination of weak labour market regulation and ‘active’ (or punitive) policies towards benefit claimants, permitting the creation of swaths of low skilled, low paid precarious jobs including those with the infamous zero hours contracts. There has also been a huge increase in the numbers engaged in ‘survival self-employment’ as gardeners, cleaners, delivery personnel and suchlike (Inman 2014). They belong to the ‘precarariat’, identified and labelled by Standing (2011).

Since the 1970s income inequalities have grown progressively wider. At first real incomes rose more slowly at the bottom than in the middle where incomes grew more slowly than at the top. In the twenty-first century real incomes at the bottom have stagnated. The poor have felt most of the economic pain during the recession that followed the financial crisis of 2007–09 (Clark and Heath 2014; Jenkins 2015). Meanwhile, job insecurity has been spreading upwards from unskilled to skilled and office workers, then among junior and even middle managers and professionals. Beginning workers’ difficulties in establishing themselves in the workforce affected unqualified 16–18 year olds in the 1970s. Subsequently these difficulties spread to those with intermediate qualifications and the 18–25 age group, and university graduates are now affected. They compete for unpaid internships. That said, insecurity is most severe and persistent, and incomes are most depressed, at the bottom. Inequalities in housing chances are superimposed on labour market and income inequalities. The rising costs of housing (to buy and to rent) in a context where demand outstrips supply creates a divide between young adults who can benefit from inherited housing wealth and those locked long-term in the rented sector.

Very few leisure scholars (Rojek 2000, is an isolated example) have addressed the leisure of seriously rich, but we know a great deal about the leisure of the upper middle/service class that has prospered since the 1980s. This is because, following Bourdieu (1984), sociologists have been investigating the role of cultural tastes and practices in distinguishing this class. It is found to be distinguished by its voracious omnivorousness (Bennett et al. 2009; Erikson 1996; Peterson 1992; Peterson and Kern 1996; Roux et al. 2008; Savage et al. 2013; Sintas and Alvarez 2002). We also know that some members of this middle class experience their work as leisure (Lewis 2003) and regard long hours as an acceptable part of ‘the package’ (Sturges 2013). There are divisions of taste within this class (Wynne 1990, 1998), but collectively they have been dominant in consumer culture since the 1980s (Thrift 1989). Lower class tastes and uses of leisure are marginalised or even stigmatised (Jones 2011).

We know embarrassingly little about the leisure of Britain’s new working and lower classes of which the precariat and long-term unemployed are disadvantaged fringes. In 1988 Seabrook wrote presciently and sardonically about the leisure society in which leisure workers serviced the leisure of the better-off while sacrificing their own. Dart (2006) has explored the lives of home-based workers in Leeds. Blackshaw (2003), Blackshaw 2013) has written about how the leisure of working class communities in

West Yorkshire have been affected by economic and occupational change in the region (see also Long and Blackshaw 2000). Even the sum of these admirable studies is thin gruel compared with the numerous studies of architects, rail workers, weavers, pitmen and so on that sought evidence of the long arm of the job from the 1950s–70s. In leisure publications the new disadvantaged are most likely to be glimpsed when they become part of projects which target under-represented groups.

We need more studies of the leisure of the successor to the industrial working class, viewed from within rather than from outside, usually from above, which results in lower class deficits being stressed. It is possible that we will be surprised by the ingenuity of the disadvantaged in maintaining normal working class uses of leisure. Participation rates in sport and other leisure activities have not dipped during any recession in Britain since the 1970s (Roberts 2015). Most leisure activities can be practised with different levels of expenditure. Consumer debt has become a common lifeline in hard times. It is possible that maintaining normal leisure lives is now a priority for hard pressed households. The final report of the Joint Panel on Leisure and Recreation Research envisaged a future in which leisure became a stable thread in life courses during which little else could be relied on to last (Executive Panel on Leisure and Recreation Research 1985). Maybe in this sense we are now experiencing the leisure society. A study of female cleaners in Denmark, mostly migrants from rural parts of Turkey, found that their physically arduous jobs combined with the ‘second shift’ of housework, left the women too tired to contemplate any physically active leisure. However, those who had practised sports and similar activities in the past were somehow managing to remain involved (Lenneis and Pfister 2017).

4 Back to Work

In a special issue of *Leisure Studies* devoted to the subject’s pasts, presents and possible futures, the editors noted that the field is ‘perpetually in a state of flux and becoming’ (Silk et al. 2017, p153). This applies in all sciences that study changing societies, but it is not a problem for disciplines with one or more secure pivots which define the questions that are to be addressed and answered. In leisure studies these pivotal questions can only be about the work-leisure relationship, and the preceding passages have shown that there are multiple new work issues with which leisure scholars can engage. Moreover, these are the only issues that can make leisure studies a coherent field.

4.1 Social Times

Some social times have endured since antiquity. The day, the year and the seasons are constructed by nature. The division of the day into 24 h, each divided into 60 min, and the organisation of weeks in seven-day cycles are social constructs. They defeated Napoleon’s attempt to introduce a new, rational, scientific republican calendar in France (see Zerubavel 1977, 1981).

However, little else from earlier social times survived the upheaval known as the industrial revolution which occurred in Britain from the 1750s. The population shifted from countryside into industrial and commercial towns and cities. Work was wrenched

from families and neighbourhoods and relocated in mines, shipyards, offices and factories. Industrial work was governed by clock time, not natural rhythms. Workers sold their time by the hour and minute. Daily work schedules were lengthened, when there was work to be done. The weekend was reduced to just one day of rest. Most public holidays were eliminated (see Bailey 1978; Cunningham 1980). Workers fought back. They demanded (and won) shorter hours, higher pay per hour, and the restoration of some traditional holidays, but in doing so they accepted the industrial time-for-money regime, and this was part of their domestication to industrial capitalism's terms and conditions of employment (see Jones 1986; Rosenweig 1983). During these changes the term 'leisure' acquired its modern meaning and was used increasingly in preference to pastimes, recreations and free time (Snape and Pussard 2013).

All institutions, organisations and groups have their own social time schedules, and work schedules take precedence to an ever greater extent. There was been no historical inversion, but rather a strengthening of the social time hierarchy that Lewis and Weigert observed in 1981. Among public holidays in Britain, just Christmas still 'has' to be observed by everyone, with exceptions only for people whose occupations are essentially 24/365. New Year, Easter and other public holidays no longer 'have' to be spent differently. The same applies to the weekend, and Sunday has ceased to be special. Work intrudes where it was once barred, for more and more people. Work takes precedence over family time schedules. When there is a clash, families are expected to adjust. Family friendly employment practices are special exemptions for which beneficiaries are expected to be grateful. Work time and family schedules take precedence over private time where leisure activities with their own time schedules are located. This hierarchy of social times has not been inverted, nor has it collapsed. It was been consolidated. Among all socially constructed times it is work, specifically employment, that takes precedence. This work just 'has' to be done on schedule. Limited work time sovereignty is a middle class perk. The normal order of precedence cannot change, though it may weaken or strengthen, and the latter has been the more common during the brief history of leisure studies. Hegel argued that their ability to think made humans different. Marx's rejoinder was that the first priority for their thoughts had to be how to procure their livelihoods (Marx, 1858/Marx 1989). Instinct is insufficient for humans. Leisure studies flounders when it loses its only secure anchorage in the social times hierarchy.

4.2 Other Divisions

Work is not just one among several sources of divisions that affect leisure. Leisure is not the obverse of gender, age, ethnicity or anything else in the way that it depends on the absence of work. Leisure is shaped by work, temporally and financially. Snape et al. (2017) are correct: both work and leisure today are different than in the 1960s and 70s. Nevertheless, work and leisure continue to define one another.

When the work-leisure relationship was its central issue, leisure studies was about history – how past changes in the economy and work had led to the present, which was (misleadingly as it turned out) projected to predict a leisure society in the near future. Nevertheless, what has happened to leisure in the interim has remained intimately associated with changes in the world of work. Re-connecting will restore leisure studies' historical dimension. It is the only sturdy stem around

which studies of other divisions and the leisure specialisms (sport, tourism and so on) can cluster. Otherwise leisure studies becomes fragments in which the whole is no greater than the sum of the parts.

4.3 Well-Being

This is a perilous investment for leisure studies. We now have a mountain of evidence showing that participation in almost any leisure, provided it is active (incompatible with an armchair) and social, is associated with self-assessed physical and mental health, life satisfaction and happiness. Indeed, in predicting these outcomes leisure often performs better than any other independent variables (for a review see Iso-Ahola and Mannell 2004). Even so, there are three problems in relying on this evidence to define leisure studies' mission.

First, and crucially, leisure per se is neutral as regards well-being consequences. The effects depend on how leisure is used, and the expansion of (relatively) free time and spending on non-essentials over the last 70 years has not led to enhanced life satisfaction or happiness. The replication in 2014 of a 1938 Mass Observation survey in Bolton found levels of happiness unchanged (McHugh 2018; McHugh and Carson 2018). This was despite the intervening occupational changes (de-industrialisation) and equally major changes in uses of leisure. By 2014 Bolton had far fewer pubs, places of worship and cinemas, and much more time was being spent with a small screen (Snape 2018a, b). Throughout Britain, and in many other countries, any additional relatively free time gained in recent decades has been accounted for mainly by increased screen time. Additional spending on non-essentials has boosted tourism, purchases of media hardware, software and content, and out-of-home dining. None of the well-being literature makes a case for these uses of leisure. These uses of our additional leisure are one plausible explanation for the mountain of evidence showing that increases in GDP in Western countries are no longer boosting life satisfaction (see Layard 2005).

Second, there is no objective yardstick against which people's assessments of their happiness and life satisfaction can be validated. People may know that they are more or less satisfied and happy than at some point in the past, but they cannot know whether they feel the same about themselves as other people with similar self-assessments (Ben-Shahar 2008).

Third, for as long as this kind of research has been undertaken, most people have said that their life satisfaction depends most on remaining in sound health, and then on having families, friends and work in which they feel secure and enjoy harmonious relationships (Andrews and Withey 1976; Hall and Perry 1974). It will be difficult to convince anyone with recent or current experience of a serious or chronic health condition that their well-being depends primarily on their uses of leisure. The same applies to anyone with recent experience of family break-up and/or the loss of a secure home. Active leisure outperforms other predictors in enhancing measurements of well-being because it nudges scores upwards in all socio-demographic groups, but it never compensates fully for chronic ill-health, family mal-functioning, or loss of employment. This is why medics and economists will continue to be regarded as the well-being experts. The evidence at our disposal fails to persuade the public to treat leisure experts as their lifestyle counsellors and gurus. Despite the evidence that further

increases in GDP fail to boost well-being, alternative measures of social progress continue to lack credibility. People continue to want more GDP, and greater shares for themselves, and access to health care in times of need. People know that they feel better, if only temporarily, when they recover from illnesses and when their real incomes rise, especially if their incomes outpace those in comparison groups. Here people can compare themselves with others who they consider equally, less or more entitled. *The Spirit Level* authors (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010) are able to show that more equal societies score better on most desirables, which include participation in leisure activities (see Veal 2016), but there would be losers as well as winners if governments acted accordingly, and people continue to believe that there are more efficacious ways in which they can protect and enhance their welfare than relying on state action to reduce economic inequalities.

5 Conclusions

Narratives about the leisure of ‘types of people’ are among leisure studies’ best stories (Roberts 2018), and the stories with the greatest explanatory power are about similar types of people doing similar types of jobs in similar work situations and relationships. There are many reasons why such stories have become sparse in leisure studies’ books, journals and conferences. Proposals to study the leisure of types of people are unlikely to attract research funding. The solution that has worked in the past has been for leisure research to piggyback on projects which address other issues concerning the types of people. Youth and unemployment, separately or together, have worked well for leisure research in the past. The ageing, poverty and health may work in the future. Narratives about the leisure of ‘types of people’ may not make the kinds of ‘impact’ that research assessors seek, but the narratives can command interest and attention beyond the community of leisure scholars. They answered calls for ‘relevance and representation’ (see Fletcher et al. 2017) in the past, during the formation of leisure studies, and they will do so again.

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