



Leisure Studies in America and the Quandary of the “Experience Economy”

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Abstract

This study set out to explore the origins of leisure studies in the United States largely from the perspectives of eighteen veteran scholars in the field. Leisure studies, much like other fields of inquiry, is one that was born from parent disciplines in a somewhat haphazard manner when considered retrospectively. It is generally assumed that fields of study come into being to serve some specific problem or issue and do so in a multior interdisciplinary fashion. Because of the multiple, intertwining roots in parent disciplines, including anthropology, geography, history, political science, and sociology, coupled with the marriage of those schools of thought, issues of identity and purpose for fields of study remain in flux and contentious. Our primary purpose in undertaking this research was to better understand the original intents of a field that studied leisure. We sought to add clarity to an otherwise tumultuous and ambiguous understanding of the purpose of leisure studies from an historical context resulting in a stronger foundation for the future of the study of leisure. This is a strictly North American investigation. As each author and participant’s education and professional experience in leisure studies has taken place in the United States, we thought it best to keep our focus close to home. Secondly, we understand that much history exists in regard to the study of leisure; parent disciplines like sociology and anthropology had been studying the phenomena for decades before the field of leisure studies came into being. This is an investigation into origins and original intents, and from that starting point we hope to add some substance to the current state of the field and its items of inquiry, service, and education. To dismiss the history of the field or to evaluate it too critically would be a disservice to the future of the field and not allow for the potential to make greater impacts in the present and in the future. By showcasing how the idealized, values-laden visions of the classic texts served as guidelines for action in the field for early leisure scholars, we establish that the American field’s current drift towards the experience industry model not only adds to the issues of fragmentation in the field, but moves further away from its goals as a service industry intended to affect issues of civil, social,

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and environmental justice, to one that emphasizes bottom lines and ephemeral experiences. This paper serves as a “red flag” waving to those either aloof, apathetic, or encouraging of the sea change of the field in the United States.

Keywords Leisure · Origins · Experience economy · History · Leisure studies

1 Prelude

In the fall of 2014, an American leisure studies scholar forwarded a story from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to the members of The Academy of Leisure Sciences (TALS) listserv. The article was a follow-up to a piece that Benjamin Hunnicutt (2014a) wrote for *Politico* that heralded the potential for a decrease in total work hours due to implications of the Affordable Care Act. *Politico* had given the original article the title, “Why do republicans want us to work all the time?”

While that title was not of Hunnicutt’s choosing, he was to bear the burden of its chastising from right-wing pundits. The gist of the *Chronicle* (2014b) feature was to give Hunnicutt the opportunity to clarify what had been misinterpreted and to show the way forward for the quixotic and overburdened field of leisure studies. In his follow-up, Hunnicutt touted the potential of the “experience economy,” which he said was the act of designing experiences for which people would pay. This is a capitalistic idea that might hold the conservative wolves at bay while simultaneously aiding the field of leisure studies as it seeks to reclaim some of incipient promise. While the “experience economy” (or experience industry as it is often called) has many critics, it may also, in the very least, be an attempt by those looking to buttress the field to provide some structure and prop up the ambiguous *leisure studies* and argue for its relevance and necessity.

The *Chronicle* article got us thinking: just what do we know about the origins of the study of leisure in the United States? We discussed whether or not anyone had written about the original intentions of the field, and to the best of our knowledge, we could not find anyone who had really investigated the topic systematically. Many scholars had written about leisure philosophy, leisure ideals, and values, and the historical definitions and current understandings of leisure, but the topic of what necessitated the field had not been examined in any great detail. This intrigued us, and we hoped to one day pursue this topic in order to find out more about the collective history of the field in the United States.

Fast-forward six months to the spring of 2015 and the release of the then latest TALS newsletter. In it, Karla Henderson wrote about “the death of leisure in academia,” asking if we would be better off as a field by dissolving our many sub-foci into “parent” disciplines which had clearer missions and cohesion. These events signaled to us that there was no better time to take on this project. The obvious place to find these answers was in the minds and mouths of the veteran American scholars in our field. Those who had dedicated their careers to studying and teaching leisure would surely have some insights into what brought this field into being, and how it could be beneficial to society today. These events and questions sparked a summer of travel by the first author to find out what necessitated a field of leisure studies in the first place and, perhaps more importantly, what necessitated its continued existence.

2 Introduction¹

Starting with Burdige's (1985) 'Coming Separation' article and extending to Henderson's (March 2015) essay in *TALS* newsletter and beyond (see also: Burton and Jackson 1989; Glover 2015; Godbey 1985; Henderson 2010; Kleiber 2011; Samdahl 2016; Stebbins 1997; Sylvester 2008), the topic of relevance, fragmentation and future direction resurfaces frequently in the broad field of leisure studies in the United States. It does not appear, however, that these questions and consternations have been resolved. Part of the reason may be due to multiple understandings of the purpose of the field since its inception in the 1960s. Leisure studies, much like other fields of inquiry, is one that was born from parent disciplines in a somewhat haphazard manner when considered retrospectively. Because there is some ambiguity about when the field of leisure studies actually started in America (though some loosely claim the 1940s: see Godbey et al. 2005), and what events might have signaled that birth, we are adopting the stance of one of our participants who said, "I guess my recollection is that it's a bit of an artificial construct to say that leisure studies started and it's this thing. It has more to do with looking back." That is what we have attempted to do: establish a clearer understanding of why a need arose for the field of leisure studies, as well as if there continues to be a need for a field that studies leisure; we are looking back. This study sought to explore the ambiguity surrounding the field of leisure studies in the United States.

We do not claim for this to be a conclusive account. Firstly, this is a strictly an American investigation. As each author and participant's education and professional experience in leisure studies has taken place in the United States, we thought it best to keep our focus close to home (scholars in other countries have addressed the issue as well: e.g., Spracklen 2014). Secondly, we understand that much history exists in regard to the study of leisure; parent disciplines like sociology and anthropology had been studying the phenomena for decades before the field of leisure studies came into being (e.g., Veblen's (1899) classic work). We consider the contemporary the study of leisure to have started in the 1960s, and we chose this as the unofficial foundational point for several reasons. While major programs such as the University of North Carolina, Pennsylvania State University, Indiana University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign had recreation programs before the 1960s, the establishment of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) which operated from 1958 to 1962 put forth significant investment into studying facilities, resource inventories, and users of federal lands (Siehl 2008).

Simultaneously, leisure studies lacked a significant professional presence as an academic field until 1965 when smaller associations came to form the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) (Sessoms and Henderson 2009). Related, a research outlet devoted specifically to the study of leisure was not in place until the *Journal of Leisure Research* in 1969 (published by NRPA). And it was during the 1960s that several other major American programs came into the fold (such as those at Texas A&M University and Clemson University) thus giving more credence to the idea of a field with the establishment of more programs at top research universities.

¹ Only leisure literature from the United States was drawn upon for this essay.

Our purpose was to craft a better understanding of the field of leisure studies through the perspectives of veteran leisure scholars. This is beneficial to the field and its scholars today because we face issues of relevance within the academy in general; our departments have become disparate entities with fewer unifying core components; and issues of divisiveness and social upheaval are rampant which signals the importance of unification when it comes to emboldening the field with the intention of benefitting society. It is by paying respect to living² scholars in the field that we *may* glean insights into forging a united front for a field that seeks to impact issues of quality of life, health, and social justice. While this must be done in tandem with the contemporary environment of our society, to do so in the absence of an historical record would be shortsighted. “Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it” (George Santayana 1905).

3 Review of Literature

While sitting down with a retired scholar in the field of leisure studies, he pulled out a hard copy of the 2009 Journal of Leisure Research 40th anniversary issue and flipped to the “past editors” page. He asked me³ to look at it and tell him who was missing. Even though I had no idea, I stared at it blankly for a few moments to make it look like I might venture an intelligent guess. Then I looked up at him expressionlessly and he said, “Ask the rest of your participants if they can figure it out. If not, I’ll tell you when you’re done with your project.” He was number eight of eighteen, so I figured someone would know. I was wrong. After I had concluded the interviews, I sent him an email and he said:

Rolf Meyersohn of Hunter College in New York City was editor for one issue in 1975. He wrote the first social science book on leisure—*Mass Leisure* with Eric Larrabee. Unfortunately, the NRPA leadership could not accept an intellectual like Rolf as editor, so the editorship was sent off to Arlin Epperson at Clemson University.

He then told me this is what signaled the birth of the second major American leisure journal, Leisure Sciences. It perhaps should be noted that this scholar was integral in starting both of the two major American leisure journals and was in tune with the seismic rift that was coming (already taking place?) within the field in regard to its stability and sense of direction. Some scholars felt that NRPA had overplayed its hand (and not the last time, by some accounts) and the academy wanted something of its own that investigated leisure for leisure’s sake, not because of some debt to a field of practice that viewed leisure in an economic sense or as a functional service for recharging the masses for work. – From first author’s field journal.

3.1 The “Coming Together” Era

Before a field of “leisure studies” ever existed, a call for leisure education was made—a broad subject that was largely *not* covered in parent disciplines (Cardinal Principles 1918).

² Dr. Ed Heath (Texas A&M University and Oregon State University) passed away after the writing of this essay. The manuscript is dedicated to his memory.

³ The pronouns ‘I’ and ‘me’ refer to the first author.

But it would not be until the late 1950s and early 60s when foundational texts were written that the field of leisure studies was born. Its precursor, the Health, Physical Education and Recreation model (HPER), however, laid a foundation for what was to come in terms of leisure and recreation education and scholarship (Sessoms and Henderson 2009).

George D. Butler (1940/2007) wrote one of the earliest books on recreation and highlighted the role of government to offer opportunities for the public, stating that recreation was just as important to a progressive society as health and education. Butler stated that "recreation is activity for its own sake" (p. 4), an idea that in later years would come to be adulterated from the outside influences of programming, marketing, and prescriptive activities (Harmon 2018a). Citing Joseph Lee (1910), Butler (2007) said that recreation's purpose was "to liberate the power of expression of people and communities" (p. 8). And while today this idea might be looked down upon by pundits in both the academy and the political realm, in the mid-twentieth century it was taken as a call for action.

In 1962, the field of leisure studies was given a major boost with the publication of *Outdoor Recreation for America, A Report to the President and to the Congress by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission* (ORRRC). The 1950s had witnessed a huge increase in outdoor recreation participation in the United States and Congress established the ORRRC (in June of 1958) in order to determine both the outdoor recreation wants and needs of the American people at that time and what they would be in the years of 1976 and 2000, as well as the available resources. Importantly, ORRRC (1962) sought to determine what policies and programs should be recommended to ensure that the needs of the present and future were adequately and efficiently met.

ORRRC, and its accompanying 27 supporting study reports, was massive in scope and recommendations. Amongst the recommendations were the development of a Land and Water Conservation Fund and Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, both of which were implemented. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is still in effect and requires states to submit State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORP) in order to receive funding.

Another important recommendation was a call for "a systematic and continuing program of research" that would inform "wise decisions and sound management" (p. 183). The report called for a variety of research, including issues related to past and present trends; inventories of outdoor recreation resources; carrying capacity; recreation values and substitutes for outdoor recreation; the effects of urbanization on the demand and supply of outdoor recreation resources; the benefits that individuals accrue from outdoor recreation; and the demand of outdoor recreation based on the associated and varying costs of travel to recreation areas. It is not an understatement to say that the ORRRC resulted in an avalanche of outdoor recreation research in the ensuing decades.

Clawson and Knetsch (1966) observed that this growth of professional interest in outdoor recreation cut across many disciplines, including economics, geography, landscape architecture, law, and sociology. They also observed that for many scholars, "outdoor recreation has not yet become and perhaps never will become, a professional field in and of itself" (p. v). Yet ORRRC did create a demand for outdoor recreation scholars trained in universities to conduct this research and many of the degrees that these scholars earned in the decades following ORRRC were in departments where

leisure and recreation were a primary focus. Simultaneously, the upsurge in scholarly interest in outdoor recreation following ORRRC contributed to a demand for publication outlets, including scholarly journals. It should not be surprising then that the first editorial boards of *Journal of Leisure Research* and *Leisure Sciences* were dominated by scholars who studied outdoor recreation.

While ORRRC clearly played a significant role in giving birth to a field that studied recreation and leisure, there were two other key factors that also led to its inception: the continued growing concern of leisure as a social problem, and another factor that was perhaps more optimistic, leisure as a distinct area of life (Brightbill 1960; Godbey 2000). Put simply, these two ideas should be seen as different sides of the same coin. Prognostications of dwindling work hours and the penchant chance of idleness with the expectant results of civil unrest, apathy, and moral stagnation led to concerns about the need to educate the public about the potential of leisure to make life more meaningful for individuals and communities alike (Godbey 2000). In step with this concern was the recognition that preemptive strategies introduced through education and community organizations had the potential to “script” a different future. Charles K. Brightbill (1960) wrote in *The Challenge of Leisure* that, “We should look at [leisure] as educational. An opportunity to sharpen our interests, skills and learning powers and to help us understand and appreciate the world and the life that is in it” (p. 11). Building on Josef Pieper’s (1952) work, Brightbill *challenged* the leisure academy, and society at large, to embrace leisure as more than just a restorative activity whose sole purpose was to recharge the worker for productivity as the main purpose in life. One year later in his *Man and Leisure*, Brightbill (1961) elaborated on this point:

If leisure is a threat to society, and it is, not because there is so much of it (with more to come), but because we lack the know-how of using it constructively and creatively. Too many of us are using it to escape life and not enough of us are using it to enrich lives. (p. 22)

It was clear to Brightbill that leisure education, and thus the study of leisure, should be focused on helping the masses, as both individuals and communities, to live rewarding lives that are not stagnant or isolated, but filled with growth and wonder that lead to cultivation with the resultant implications of building a better society.

While Brightbill was consistently referred to by our participants as perhaps the pivotal figure *inside* the field in its earliest inceptions, Sebastian de Grazia was frequently mentioned as the key contributor *outside* the field with his seminal book, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*. De Grazia (1962) was an advocate for leisure’s potential to aid in self-definition, and that through leisure, individuals and society could grow together. De Grazia stated that, “If a man is at leisure when he is free, the good state must exist to give him leisure” (p. 21). Other scholars rallied around this idea and they believed the academy should be a forum for articulating the needs of individuals and a better society. It would appear that leisure education, at least from the vantage point of the classic writings (e.g., Craven 1960; Pieper 1952; Riesman 1960), sought to build a foundation for the field to grow through its offerings of theoretical musings and considerations of the problems that affected societies everywhere.

Adding to these seemingly future-driven perspectives from the classic catalog, we also find recommendations for how society could grow through leisure. Brightbill

(1961) said that society, and implicitly the field of leisure studies, had three goals: to help people understand the importance of leisure to their lives; to increase the opportunities for the use of leisure; and to generate leadership capable of creatively dealing with the dilemmas that are posed from leisure in society. To embrace this three-pronged mission was to accept both the right for everyone to have access to meaningful leisure and to recognize that an underlying system of values was embedded in leisure education and the study of leisure.

To be clear, Brightbill (1960) saw leisure as something greater than just another market to be exploited by profiteers and consumerism. He said, "Leisure is a permanently fertile ground for self-realization. It is a perpetual fountain for discovering new interests and for uncovering hidden talents, for developing of new skills and for reviving old interests" (p. 76). Burdge (1985) echoed this perspective with the basic premise of his "Coming Separation" article when he said that *leisure* was broader than the restorative or economic aspects of recreation, and the study of leisure had the potential for bigger implications than solely being relegated to park and recreation management analysis. These bigger picture ideas and possibilities that scholars wrote about in the earliest days of the field slowly started to erode as the field became larger and more complex (Henderson 2011). Its complexities lay in the lack of a clear and unified direction of research, service, and education, as well as the diversification of the field that came from sub-foci areas whose scope was either more applied in nature, or less rooted in theory, depending on whom you ask. The potential and direction for the field was sidelined in an attempt to attain "relevance" amidst its academic peers, a subject referred to as the "inferiority complex" of leisure studies by the majority of participants whom we interviewed. The ideas/ideals of the classic texts were relegated to the fringes of the field as economic growth became the *sine qua non* of societal progress. The apparent end result was that the turn away from the classic conceptualization of the field escalated the fragmentation that was to come in the following decades.

3.2 The "Coming Separation" Era

Burdge (1985) triggered a debate that has endured in some form or another now for 30-plus years: whether or not *leisure studies* should be housed in departments focused on park and recreation management. And judging by the literature that continues to develop, either directly or indirectly related to his position, the issues surrounding the purpose and unifying aspects of the field of leisure studies appear to remain unanswered. In that same issue of the *Journal of Leisure Research*, Godbey (1985) provided a rejoinder to Burdge's claims, stating that leisure and park and recreation education *were* indeed intimately related and must be understood in tandem if the field was to make any meaningful contributions to society. At the time, Godbey's position must have been embraced as a rallying call and point of reorientation; looking back, it may be more appropriate to describe his position as a finger in the dike. The dam of leisure's place and relevance were challenged again and again by the waters of academia, thereby calling into question the role of leisure research, the economic and consumptive aspects of recreation, and whether or not society would ever embrace the idealized vision of *leisure* in people's lives.

And as we look at the most recent literature in the field in regard to this topic, Godbey's (1985) ideas have been sacrificed to the waters that have long left the reservoir. Samdahl (2016), pulling no punches, claimed forthrightly, "The great experiment of the 1970s was a failure: like water and oil, recreation practitioner training and the scholarly study of leisure were thrown together but did not mix" (p. 8). This statement dismisses Godbey's earlier practical claims. It was perhaps the forced marriage, or long-overdue divorce, of leisure studies with park and recreation education that led to the recurring reassessments of the field's purpose. Samdahl said bluntly, "leisure studies *never* did belong in academic departments committed to practitioner preparation" (p. 11; emphasis original. See also Henderson 2011). From the start, it would appear, leisure studies took on too much, too quickly.

Later, Godbey (2000) claimed that the field of leisure studies emerged with "the social problem of the use of free time" (p. 38) that was a result of the ever-growing working population and a reduction in total work hours, as well as a more-educated populace that was in need of worthwhile leisure activities for fulfillment in their non-work hours. Instead, it would seem, that those work hours have indeed not tapered off, but increased, and the general population does not necessarily seek fulfillment or growth through leisure, but instead seeks the ephemeral gratification that is offered through materialistic consumption (Scott 2010).

So it seems there is a bifurcated tail of the fragmentation issue affecting stability in the field of leisure studies: for one, leisure studies may not have been the most logical fit for a practice-based field seeking to train park and recreation personnel, however much the two potentially disparate factions were forced to stay together and try to make it work (Burdge 1985); and two, now that leisure studies has morphed into a multi-focused, largely applied field, many of the values that were inherent to the early conceptualization of the field and its scholarship have gone by the wayside (Henderson 2011). Thus, some of our sample hold that leisure is no longer examined for its own sake or seen as a state of being; leisure is now measured by its economic impacts and the ephemeral and indulgent qualities that are inherent to a market economy (Harmon 2018a, b; Sylvester 2008).

This topic of leisure values and their intersection with society has been an inherent fixture since the earliest writings of the field (Brightbill 1960; Kaplan 1960), and while certainly still embraced by contemporary leisure scholars (Dustin and Goodale 1999; Hunnicutt 2000), the topic is deserving of being properly situated in our attempt to understand the original intents of the field. The values that are still addressed in contemporary leisure research, largely in the arenas of health and social justice, need to be heralded and built upon, but the "state of the union" now mostly speaks to practical applications. Brightbill (1961) said long ago that a liberal education was an education for leisure, for living life well. This involved a focus on intrinsic wellbeing, not on extrinsic ends. He then compared the vocational training of other fields to that of servitude, and warned against the potential for leisure studies to turn into what it appears to have become a pragmatic, ends-justify-the-means field which caters first and foremost to market demands, transitory indulgences, and a throwaway "economy" that seeks only an improved bottom line (Sylvester 2008). Some see this as further evidence of fragmentation in the field, others as progress (Burton and Jackson 1989; Lundberg 2018).

3.2.1 The "Experience Economy"

Henderson (2011) said that the move towards purely applied practical training in leisure studies has left the field without a clear direction forward, suggesting that the theory-driven research component of leisure studies might be better off being absorbed back into parent disciplines. As we will show, proponents of the experience industry model, however, see this consternation as an opportunity. The experience economy (or "experience industry") was first envisioned by Pine II and Gilmore (1999) and conceptualized from a *recreation* perspective (not *leisure*) in Rossman's (2007) Butler address at that year's NRPA Congress (Rossman prophesied these ideas in his 1995 work, too). Ellis and Rossman (2008) proceeded to further build upon this concept with the hopes of mending the field of leisure studies (which would likely *not* be their preferred name for the field) saying that, "The experience industry concept offers much-needed coalescence to the fragmentation problem; it establishes a shared purpose and common social calling" for the field (p. 16). Representing a divergent perspective, Sylvester (2008) saw the experience industry model in a different light:

The fundamental principle of consumer capitalism has always been to persuade people they cannot live without purchasing a product or service. The goal of the experience-complex is to maintain a population of experience hungry consumers who desire gratification through a new experience before falling into a state of dissatisfaction as the feeling fades and the cycle repeats. (p. 25)

Seemingly prophesying the experience industry model, Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) stated that "the notion of 'experience' engineering smacks of manipulation and the creation of 'inauthentic' or staged experiences" (p. 317) and should be a concern for leisure scholars. Stebbins (1997) said, "We eventually rely less and less on exploration and more and more on prediction and confirmation" (p. 284) in leisure studies in the attempt to predict and control the outcomes. If the experience industry model is suggestive at least, if not prescriptive, then we risk further narrowing leisure opportunities which may lead to homogenization of participation and the creation of silos of interaction, potentially affecting issues of growth through leisure and even social justice, something that should be of major concern to those in the field (Glover 2015).

3.2.2 Structure and Identity

It seems that the fragmentation and coalescence of the field long preceded Burdge's (1985) on-the-record account. As indicated in the opening vignette, the consternation and disagreement about intents and purposes was first openly brought to the surface with the birth of the journal *Leisure Sciences* in the mid-70s. The retired scholar who told us this story felt that this was due to the meddling and conflicting interests of NRPA at the time, largely due to their allegiance with practitioners, that it was wholly essential to start a new American journal that embraced leisure scholarship and was not reliant on predicting user outcomes or how to make recreation agencies more financially sound.

It appears that there was not unanimity for what the field was to be from its inception, and because of this, competing conceptualizations of what leisure studies

should embody and should be led to the fragmentation issues brought to the surface by Burdge (1985). Sessoms (1991) concurred, stating that without a well-defined focus and identity, fragmentation was inevitable within the field and would result in disunited professional offshoots. Even though values, growth, and education appear to be the roots of the early leisure thinkers, the structural integrity of these core elements of the field were further challenged with time and as more sub-foci were introduced. While some subfields had a clearer connection to leisure, such as outdoor recreation and youth development, other additions were further removed from the leisure as “a state of being” philosophy and more applied and business oriented such as foci in tourism, event management, and sport management.

This brings us back to the purpose of leisure studies: is it to embrace the concept of leisure as an opportunity for making progress in its quality and availability for the masses? Perhaps for scholars in leisure studies to understand their role for the future we need to have a better assessment of the past before we embrace any new concept as our champion or savior. To do this would involve an investigation of competing value systems and rationales for research, service, teaching, and the collective implications for society at large. To reach this critical understanding, we relied on the histories, experiences, and insights of veteran scholars in the field of leisure studies to help develop a clearer understanding of the field, its intentions, its current state, and what, if anything, necessitates its continued existence as a field of study.

4 Methods

4.1 Project Design

The crux of this project was 18 in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with established American scholars in leisure studies. The interviews occurred between April, 2015 and November, 2015. Not every notable (based on publication record and recognition by TALS as a Fellow) living leisure studies scholar was interviewed (14 of 18 interviewees were TALS Fellows). Due to the first author’s decision to conduct interviews onsite, time and expense played a factor in terms of how many people could be interviewed. Seven others were contacted for interviews and either declined to participate or did not respond to invitations to participate.

4.2 Interviews

Most interviews lasted ninety minutes, though some lasted for nearly three hours. Purposeful sampling was adopted (Patton 1990). Initial interviewees were chosen based on their written or verbal expressions of issues facing the field such as fragmentation, future directions, and the necessity of leisure studies. Others were interviewed based on recommendations of the initial interviewees, thus invoking a snowball sampling technique (Tracy 2013). The 18 participants were from 11 academic institutions (10 active faculty members, all with a minimum of 20 years in academia, and eight retired). All participants worked in American universities during their careers. There were 14 male and four female participants. All participants were Caucasian, though three of the scholars who either declined to participate, or did not return correspondence, were

people of color. There were 11 scholars that finished with a terminal degree in "recreation" (including leisure studies and recreation therapy); three who finished with sociology (including rural and cultural); two in natural resources (including forestry and environmental science); and two in political science. All interviews were conducted onsite in the interviewees' place of residence, office, or a public space of their choosing. Some of the questions asked, include: What necessitates the field of leisure studies? How should the field be viewed or defined? And, what are some of the field's successes and failures?

4.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred through a back-and-forth examination of data using both an inductive and deductive process (Crotty 2010). Participants' passages were used to substantiate, challenge, or extend content from classic and contemporary leisure writings. Interview content was favored when drawing conclusions for the future of the field and the implications of leisure scholarship in general. The analysis process continued through the use of primary and secondary coding techniques that started with thorough readings of the transcripts. Information deemed important based on its relevance to the research questions was highlighted through the use of a multi-color highlighting technique to differentiate the coding of each statement (Tracy 2013).

Next, we grouped primary codes into further concentrated categories through focused coding. The data was managed with a physical organization system that included establishing a hierarchy of each quote or observation as it pertained to the category or focused codes (Saldaña 2012). This system of data management best suited our manner of interpretation, understanding, and explanation as it allowed for a visual and linear dialog amongst the authors. This method also allowed us to look for in/consistencies in responses, as well as to assess how we would incorporate the data into our writing. These data provided the foundation of our paper exploring the origins and purpose of the field of leisure studies in the United States.

5 Results and Discussion

The first and third author of this paper were in one of the last cohorts to graduate from the University of Illinois when the program was still called "Leisure Studies." I remember at the time how foolish I thought that name was. We were both in the natural resource management emphasis (which was being phased out, too), and for years that is what I told people my major was; it just sounded more practical, more professional. Even though it was in error to do so, every job I submitted a resume for after college, until going back for my master's degree, said "natural resource management" under the degree awarded section. I don't think I ever gave any thought to what "leisure" was, let alone what "leisure studies" was intended to do. For me, the fragmentation in the field was present before I ever knew that it had been the subject of discussion. It wasn't until I started to think about applying for doctoral programs that I began to look more critically at society and the role leisure could play in making improvements in people's quality of life. Just before the time

Doug Kleiber (2011) wrote his “Taking Leisure Seriously” piece, *I started taking leisure seriously, too.* – From the first author’s field journal.

5.1 What Is Leisure Studies’ Role in the Academy?

While it was believed that leisure studies came into being because of clear societal needs, for most participants, it was acknowledged that there was still work that needed to be done in the field. However, how, or perhaps more pointedly, *if* it would be done was the resounding question for a number of participants. While the ORRRC reports and the recognition of leisure as both a social problem and a distinct area of life in the 1950s and 60s provided a loose framework to direction the field, many participants conceded that there were no clear measures established to assess progress or provide explicit insight into the future of leisure education and scholarship. Accompanying this lack of clear direction were issues related to an “inferiority complex” amongst those in the field as they grappled with trying to find their place in the academy and earn a seat at the table with parent disciplines when it came to affecting society. And with the proliferation of new sub-foci in what were once simply leisure and recreation programs, this further dissolution of the field led many to question what the field’s role was to be, and if it really were still relevant and viable. In fact, one retired faculty member said, “Sometimes I really feel like a dinosaur beating the drum for a cause that is no longer embraced.” So what was the cause? What was essential to a field that studies leisure?

5.2 The Heart of Leisure Studies

The question driving this investigation was, “What necessitated the field of leisure studies?” We wanted to know what scholars in the field’s original intentions were; who they hoped to serve; and what implications would be the result of leisure education and research. And because of this, that question is where we started our interviews. It generated wise smiles, the settling of old bodies into well-worn chairs, thoughtful glances off into space, and slow pulls off of cold beers. One participant responded to that prompt, “Isn’t that the million-dollar question?” What this question morphed into, due to several informants’ musings, was often a discussion of a “mission” for the field. While speaking with one participant, we went back and forth about socials concern associated with leisure and society and if there was any clear direction for the field going into the future. She stated,

I think we missed out by not having a mission that would make us be proactive collectively in taking on social issues... A mission statement has to be something specific so that when people read it they know what you’re doing.

And while there never was a mission statement for the field, and to be fair, these rarely occur in academia, this discussion caused the participants to try to envision what *might have been* the guiding principles for the field had there been that level of foresight over half a century ago. Ubiquitous to all responses was the subject of “values” as inherent to leisure studies.

During one of our interviews we asked a participant whether or not educators in leisure studies had a role in teaching values. He responded,

Yea, I would say the answer would be clearly "yea." Charles Brightbill basically said at some point said that if you're going to deal with leisure you have to expose people to opportunities. You have to develop appreciation. We have to give people not just what they want, but what they can learn to want.

Another informant said,

We are blind and foolish if we think we're not teaching values. The reason we entered this field in the first place is because of our values. We don't escape our values. I think it's important to admit to those values. I think we as a field need to establish values and promote them.

While others concurred with this idea, they felt the need to expand on how those values should be understood on a larger scale:

We have to first acknowledge that it is not possible to *not* have values in our stance, but that we need to go about it in a way that is committed to the diversity of open ideas, even if they offend us, to respect diversity, thinking, [developing new] ideas, exploring, being challenged.

Even as the participants pondered the need to promote values, and what those should be, as indicated, many were quick to state that one person's values are not always another's, let alone always right. Simply by putting forth a system of values, especially when embedded in an academic field of study, suggests the prioritization of one way of thinking over another. It risks the potential for *devaluing* others' upbringings, preferences, and cultural understandings. When values give way to algorithms to predict outcomes, then we usurp the agency of the individual to find meaning in their leisure endeavors.

5.3 Fragmentation and the Experience Industry

When we started this project we assumed that there would likely be two camps of leisure studies' scholars: those embracing the need to stand strong and firmly rooted in the theoretical elements of leisure scholarship and leisure as a state of being, and those that sought more applied scholarship and wanted to move the field away from "armchair philosophizing" and "navel gazing." We did find, however, people that straddled both camps. We spoke with one leisure historian and asked him about what some of the core pillars of leisure studies were, as he had already talked about the value of identity and community to leisure, and he asked us if we were familiar with the "experience economy" concept. He said this about it:

There's an opening where leisure studies can contribute through the marketplace by *delivering* experience products. Enter the fray of all these things that are being sold to folks that aren't as satisfying as connecting people together. If you can *design* these experiences and sell them, there's an escape hatch through the marketplace... The marketplace may be able to rekindle the demand for leisure. (Emphasis added)

Having read accounts from scholars who spoke against the woes of the experience industry model, we asked him to elaborate on his use of the word “design” as we were concerned about the paternalistic elements of how the concept has been defined. He said,

It’s a double-edged sword. It can go either way. It can be a way of creating helplessness and increased dependency on someone for the experience. That’s a possibility. I think it’s a very real possibility. Just as easily it might go the other way... The experience economy will be local. The possibility of mass-producing experiences is not possible. It has to be a local economy.

Here we see an emphasis, so it would seem, on the role of the individual in social interactions and the aspect of consumption through the lens of the experience economy model. As an earlier informant was critical of this epistemological stance as not looking at the bigger picture of leisure’s potential for society, the experience economy (as it is envisioned here) seeks to add benefit from a bottom-up perspective: cater to the individual, not society at large.

Here we must address an inconsistency with proponents’ conceptualization of the experience industry model. As indicated by the preceding participant’s comment, the concept would only work at a local level. He said, “The possibility of mass-producing experiences is not possible.” This was *not* the feeling of other advocates of the experience industry. While speaking with one scholar about the consternation surrounding the experience industry model we asked her about the language of orchestration and design of experiences *for* people. We again were interested if the intrinsic value of leisure is sapped by those who control the outcome. She responded:

Understanding the black box of research, what are the inputs to get the desired outputs? I think it’s rife for experimental research. It’s not programmed, canned experiences. It’s not. Its specialization and customization. But how do you do mass-personalization?

How leisure providers might develop a “mass-personalization” campaign without pre-determined formulas for programming, thus challenging the agency of leisure participants, was not addressed by this scholar, and it is an area that has not been fully investigated in the related literature. Seemingly responding to this participant’s thoughts on the mass-personalization campaign of the experience industry, however, an opponent said,

Mass-produced personal experiences are an oxymoron. If leisure studies is an industry, it is only in that we are a human service industry, not a profit industry. I saw the service component being lost. As with so many things, [the experience industry] was exaggerated beyond its capability. As far as it goes with creating valued experiences, right on. That’s what we should be doing (and many argue this is what we *have* been doing). But this next step to the social engineering of leisure is an illusion.

And while the vision of the experience industry model appears to differ in terms of whether it would be individual and local, or mass-produced and global, for the majority of informants, the experience industry was viewed with much acrimony. While speaking with an opponent of the experience industry model, he said that the orchestrating elements of the experience industry are a way to "formulate an experience and produce it more effectively" with the resulting benefit being for the producer, not the consumer. He went on to say that this leads to a:

Total gestalt experience. These days [when you go to participate in an experience] everything is all set up. If experience marketing is designed simply to enhance the sale, then I have some problems with it. I don't see how it is any different than marketing. Marketing creates wants, transforms wants into needs. It then links a satisfactory leisure experience with the ability to spend. That's something that has happened in our society.

Here it is implied that the experience industry model's goal is the bottom line. Even proponents displayed woes about the very real possibility of the experience industry being money driven. One of the informants said of the experience industry, "People will have to pay more for experiences that they previously got for free. We'll have to see that as the concept progresses, that is the downside. We will pay more and more".

A move towards the experience industry model in the academic community *may* steer students (future practitioners in the broad industry of leisure and recreation) to focus on end results where the experience is measured in ability to pay by the consumer. The ability to alter the experience methodically by producers will render leisure as fleeting and disconnected from the educational and growth aspects that are often attributed to its classic understanding (Harmon 2018a, b). This leads us to question whether "values" will all but evaporate from leisure experiences. A move to the experience industry model without fully considering every aspect of its embrace, simply put, will not congeal a believed-to-be fragmented field; it may only dilute it further by creating further rifts and chasms and initiate a complete severing of any connection to a system of values which are integral to the health, well-being, and social justice efforts that drive much of the scholarship in the field today (Harmon 2018b). Fragmentation may beget fracturing.

5.4 Looking Forward

As contentious as the debate over the direction of the field may be, its strengths are rooted in some important cornerstones. Our participants elucidated three major takeaways for us during the interviews we conducted. Firstly, the multi- and interdisciplinary approaches that birthed the field allow for multiple lenses to evaluate and improve leisure education, research, service, and offerings. While this causes some to view, or perhaps assume, the field is lacking direction, it is actually more representative of a diverse and progressive society by the simple fact that its unintended and ambiguous beginnings have led to a more open and inclusive consideration of diverse

phenomena, interactions, relationships, and implications by embracing so many perspectives and being held back by none.

Secondly, regardless of participants' preferred vision for the future of leisure studies, each emphasized that values matter. For most, it was believed that the "classic" texts were still valuable to contemporary leisure scholarship. In fact, some thought they were more valuable now than ever. It was widely held that leisure was something that everyone had a right to, though how leisure was conceptualized and those experiences realized, was up for debate. While it is true that many in society have limited means due to less free time or money, more responsibilities, or less cultural capital of the edifying properties of leisure, that does not discount the scholars in the field who are active in addressing the issues of social justice that plague all aspects of our society (Glover 2015). It also does not discount the agency of the individual to find leisure, even if it requires the aid of society, and especially the field.

And finally, we must accept that there may never be a unified front when it comes to leisure education and scholarship, but that does not imply that we are doomed to walk in the wastelands of inferiority, indirection, or insignificance. For the majority of participants of this study, the novelty of the experience industry may simply not be in alignment with their idealistic understandings. But if anything, acknowledging the differing, if not competing, viewpoints on how our programs should teach its students, how our scholars should conduct their research, or how we should seek to improve society is a democratic and civil necessity for embracing the multiple understandings and truths that we all must navigate as individuals in our own right. Burdge (1985) may have been on the right track, as seconded by Samdahl (2016) more recently, that the study of leisure never belonged in an applied field that studied park and recreation management. But that does not change the history of that marriage and the divorce that is being held at bay, perhaps for the well-being of its offspring. The maintenance of the field whose charge is to stimulate growth and issues of quality of life should be viewed through the lens of service, not of consumer capitalism (Harmon 2018a; Sylvester 2008). The collective history of the field suggests that if nothing else (e.g., Brightbill 1960).

6 Conclusion

What we know about how the field came into being – as a pointed effort to combat complacency, excess free time (that never surfaced) and a desire to have an educated and ever-growing populace (Godbey 2000) – and what we know about how American scholars in the field have felt at times as if the field were being pulled apart at the seams, seemingly always struggling with growing pains and conflicting endgames (Henderson 2011) – should be evidence enough for guidance going forward. The values that we seek to promote are sought through an exploration of society and an evolution of the field of knowledge we all add to and draw from.

While we accept that there have been missteps, discrepancies, and disagreements along the way as the field has aged, these developments may best be seen as

growing pains towards formulating a stronger field. Growth is central to *leisure*, and thus central to the field of leisure studies. The purpose of knowing your history is to learn from it; to avoid making familiar mistakes and to build on past successes. As has been evidenced by the participants in this study, there are still some competing preferences when it comes to directions forward. These differences, however, signal reactions from our collective past. We must acknowledge that proponents of the experience industry are acting out of their perception of the best interests of the field. It *appears* that the experience industry model is a move to having the field be a purely applied consumer science, and if so, that is antithetical to a field whose origins were rooted in cultural values, freedom, and personal development (e.g., Kaplan 1960). If we take ownership of our history as integral to our current state, and as we continue to build on that accumulated knowledge-base and literature going forward, while we will still face growing pains and issues of contention assuredly, the potential for addressing those early idealized visions are not out of reach.

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